Nothing in her upbringing or education prepared Nancy Johnson for the summer of 1914. Quite the opposite. During her first twenty-four years, the world was Nancy’s satin oyster, and she, the pearl, nestled comfortably within it. Born on “one cold and frosty morning,” November 2, 1888, Nancy saw her first light of day through the downstairs bedroom window of her parents’ antebellum mansion a mile north of Bardstown, Kentucky.

The Johnson home was built in 1856 by Nancy’s paternal grandfather, William Johnson V.¹ The house, a one-and-a-half-story Greek Revival design, was set back from the Louisville Road, now modern-day State Route 31, amid nearly one hundred acres of farmland. There were the usual number of dependencies for an antebellum farm of this size, including a detached kitchen, smokehouse, stable, barn, several slave quarters, and a pump well that still gushes fresh water. Most of these buildings stand today and were added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1980. The Johnson farm was known to raise the meanest but tastiest hogs in Kentucky as well as fine horses, guinea fowl, and peacocks. Nancy’s father, Ben Johnson, decreed that “no chickens or children” were allowed to play on the velvety green front lawn. Several generations of children and chickens have generally ignored this rule.

A month after her birth, Nancy was baptized into the Roman Catholic Church at Saint Joseph’s Proto-Cathedral in Bardstown. Her given name was Nannie Crow Johnson, in honor of her father’s mother. Nannie Crow² of Boyle County, Kentucky, was the wife of William Johnson V. Family oral history relates that the first Nannie was “quiet” and much in the shadow of her flamboyant politician husband. However, Nannie Crow made her mark in history during the Civil War.

The members of the Johnson family were staunch Confederates, and Nannie was a member of the committee to select the design for the Confederacy’s
first national flag. When the final design was chosen, Nannie sewed a large flag that was raised on the front lawn of the Johnsons’ home in early 1861. This Confederate flag raising reputedly attracted between three thousand and five thousand people. Also, in 1863, William and Nannie Johnson hid Confederate general John Hunt Morgan in their home for two days and a night following his successful escape from the Federal penitentiary in Ohio.3

Nancy’s grandfather, William Johnson V, had died only a few months before she was born. William had studied the law under the legendary Ben Hardin, and he opened his practice in Bardstown before the Civil War. William had also served in the Kentucky legislature, where he became Speaker of the House. During the Civil War, William closed his practice and kept close to home, though he did see action briefly in the Confederate army, despite his advanced age of forty-five years. In December 1862, he accompanied a younger cousin, who had gone absent without leave to visit his family for Christmas, back to the Sixth Kentucky Infantry regiment in Tennessee. According to an account published in 1950, “William Johnson ran into the battle of Stone’s River (December 31, 1862), in Middle Tennessee. Though he was unarmed, he picked up a rifle and some ammunition from a dead Union soldier. Then he aided the rear guard of the Confederate retreat. He shot at Union soldiers swimming across Stone’s River until a shell fragment broke his leg at the knee. Thus he was mustered out, but never mustered in.”4

After the war, William Johnson returned to his law practice. Among his clients were the infamous James brothers. Frank and Jesse James had been members of William Clarke Quantrill’s irregular raiders during the Civil War, along with the Kentuckian brothers Donnie and Bud Pence. After the war, Frank and Jesse began their notorious bank-robbing careers, accompanied by Bud Pence. Donnie, on the other hand, returned to his family’s farm near Bardstown and became a law-abiding citizen. By the 1870s, Donnie Pence was the sheriff of Nelson County, and William Johnson was his attorney. Whenever the James brothers needed to seek a safe haven, they fled to Bardstown, where they behaved themselves as much as possible. When they needed legal advice, they visited Johnson at his home outside of town. Family oral history relates that Nannie Crow Johnson would not allow such infamous men in her house, so William conducted his business with the James brothers under the black walnut tree by the pump house, where they quenched their thirsts with fresh spring water—and usually something stronger.5

William Johnson’s brief Confederate service did not affect his return to politics. In 1868, he was elected Kentucky’s lieutenant governor. The following year, Johnson served as acting governor for a short period, and today his name
is listed among the governors of Kentucky. William and Nannie Johnson had four sons and a daughter who were born and reared in the family’s home. Their eldest surviving boy was named Ben after William’s mentor, Ben Hardin.

Ben Johnson, never “Benjamin,” was a giant of a man both in physical stature and in Kentucky politics. Standing six-foot three-inches tall with piercing blue eyes, he was proud to call Nelson County his home. Following in his father’s footsteps, Ben studied the law and graduated from the University of Louisville Law School in 1882 at the age of twenty-four. By that time, the ambitious young man had already amassed a personal fortune of $1 million from selling potatoes and orchard-grass seed, and particularly from shrewd real estate investments. Though Ben was a rich man in Kentucky, his wealth was considered insignificant by New York society’s rarefied standards. Ward McAllister, a social majordomo who dined with the Astors and supped with the Vanderbilts, once observed that “a fortune of only a million is respectable poverty.” Despite McAllister’s snobbish opinion, Ben thought that his financial future was secure. Blessed with a happy marriage and four children, Ben turned his brilliant intellectual powers and his driving ambition to politics.
In 1885, young Ben Johnson was elected to the Kentucky state legislature on the Democratic ticket. A contemporary newspaper article hailed him as a man “destined to steady and merited promotion at the hands of his party and friends.” This assessment was prophetic. Johnson won reelection in 1887 and was chosen as Speaker of the Kentucky House, again following in his father’s footsteps. On July 10, 1893, he was appointed collector of internal revenue for the Fifth Kentucky District by President Grover Cleveland—a position that netted Johnson a widening circle of political influence not only in his native Nelson County but also throughout the entire state.

Ben Johnson had to be the first in every area he touched, and that included owning the latest gadgets and inventions of the time. In May 1892, he bought the first automobile in Nelson County as a thirty-fourth birthday present to himself. Since driver’s licenses were not required at the time, Ben taught all his children how to drive the car as soon as they were big enough to reach the pedals and work the complicated gear shifts. In the early 1880s, he had also owned the county’s first bicycle, a high-wheeled “boneshaker,” with which he won several bicycle races. In 1889, the first telephone in Bardstown was installed in the Johnson family home, much to the delight of Nancy and her siblings.

Johnson’s political star continued to rise. When his term as the Fifth District tax collector ended in 1897, Ben returned to the state capital in Frankfort, this time as a state senator. In 1906, at the urging of the Kentucky Democratic Party, he ran for a seat in the U.S. Congress.

Kentucky politics in the early 1900s was a rough-and-tumble affair. Though a teetotaler himself, Johnson set out kegs of Nelson County’s finest bourbon at the entrances of the polling places on election day. Large barrels of branch water, sweetened with brown sugar and fresh mint leaves, stood next to the kegs. A number of tin cups dangled nearby from handy nails. The none-too-subtle “Vote for Johnson” was painted on the kegs, cups, and barrels. The voter, before casting his ballot, was encouraged to quench his thirst with the compliments of Mr. Ben Johnson. If, upon exiting, the gentleman had voted the “right way,” he was liberally rewarded with more of the ad hoc mint juleps. Ben Johnson won his seat in the U.S. House of Representatives by a landslide.

This “frontier” attitude was found not only in Nelson County politics but also in its citizens’ ways of life. “It was still the pernicious fashion in Kentucky to tote hardware, and young bucks in particular took pains not to be out of fashion,” notes historian Alan Harlow. Ben Johnson did not consider himself properly “dressed” for the day until he had pocketed his pistol. He even carried his gun with him while serving in the U.S. House of Representatives. He once drew his pistol in the House chambers when an infamous World War I “draft
dodger,” Grover Cleveland Bergdoll, was testifying before a House committee in 1920. During the proceedings, Bergdoll made the mistake of calling Ben Johnson a liar to his face. Johnson, who made honesty his religion, held his personal honor above all else. He also possessed a fiery temper. That day, Ben drew his pistol from his pocket. A fellow committee member restrained him from shooting Bergdoll on the spot.

Ben’s wife, Annie Kouwenbergh Johnson, concealed her own double-shot, ivory-handled derringer in her muff whenever she drove her carriage down the country mile into Bardstown. In addition to carrying personal weapons, the Johnsons also kept a loaded shotgun by the front door as late as 1933. Since the family home at that time was still situated in the open countryside, the gun was Ben Johnson’s nocturnal “pest control” against intruders or, in earlier times, his daughters’ suitors who used to come by the house at night.
The four children of Ben and Annie Johnson (clockwise): Hendy (b. 1890), Nancy (b. 1888), Ben (b. 1891), and Rebecca (b. 1887), December 31, 1896. Nancy is eight years old.

to serenade the three Johnson girls. Nancy claimed that her mother, as well as Nancy and her siblings, were all good shots.

Nancy, her two sisters, Rebecca and Hendy, and frail younger brother, Ben Junior, grew up in the shelter of their well-appointed home with its velvet sofas, gilt-framed oil paintings, and antique French china. Pampered by an indulgent father and taught etiquette by their dignified mother, the children, except for little Ben, flourished in the clean country air, surrounded by beloved dogs, fine horses, and a flock of noisy peacocks. Nancy loved to ride horseback. By the time she was ten years old, she was a proficient horsewoman and enjoyed cantering across the fields of the family’s plantation. Occasionally, however, she encountered difficulties.

In a letter to her maternal grandmother, Rebecca Cox Kouwenbergh, she wrote:

Bardstown, KY
Oct. 29, 1900
Dear mamma:

Sister Umberlin: [a nun at Bethlehem Academy, Bardstown] my teacher, told us to write a letter, so I am going to write to you. When are you and Uncle Joe\textsuperscript{19} coming out? I hope cousin Beck\textsuperscript{sic} be well enough for you to come. Laura Johnson was staying at Mrs. Henry Whelan’s, so, now she is staying with us. Rebecca is still saying that she is home-sick and coming home. But I think she is putting on and acts silly. It makes me mad for her to do it.\textsuperscript{20} Saturday we put the side saddle on Charlie, and went to look at the snares. I was in front and Ben was behind me. Coming back Charlie buck jumped; and threw us off. My foot was hung in the stirrup with my head nearly touching the ground, and there I was hanging with Charlie buck jumping. I couldn’t see what had become of Ben. So when we got up Ben’s nose was bleeding, and he was crying. The skin is off of his nose, and it is two or three times as large as ordinary. My head was hurt on top. I think I will not go on Charlie any more. How are you all? Much love to you all.

Your grand-child,

Nannie\textsuperscript{21}

Even at the tender age of eleven Nancy demonstrated her fearlessness in danger, her strong will power, and her prudence. It was no wonder that she was her formidable father’s favorite child. Nancy was so much like him.

A scant seven months after this incident, young Ben, not yet ten years old, died of complications from pneumonia, despite all the efforts of the family’s doctors. The grieving family buried their youngest child in Saint Joseph’s Cemetery less than half a mile from their home.

Little Ben’s passing had a profound effect on Nannie. Always a sensitive and high-strung child, she was shocked by the suddenness of her brother’s death and horrified by its utter finality. At the same time, the melodramatic Victorian rituals and trappings of mourning fascinated her. In her later life, Nancy tended to dramatize death to the extent that she thought it was important for the whole family to gather around the bedside of the dying member in order to hear the loved one’s last words. She believed that the dying must speak to the living and say something either profound or sentimental. It greatly upset Nancy if this scenario failed to happen.

This first rent in the fabric of her family’s protective cocoon rudely shook Nancy’s sense of security. From then on, the young girl believed that death was an insatiable predator that lurked around every corner. This exaggerated fear and horror of mortality haunted her throughout the rest of her life.
Despite this family tragedy, the daily routines of school and play continued for Rebecca, Nannie, and Hendy. The three sisters received their primary education at Bethlehem Academy, a Catholic girls’ school in Bardstown, and their secondary schooling at Loretto Academy. Founded in 1812 by the Loretto Religious Sisters, the Loretto Academy’s original mission was to provide an education for the daughters of Kentucky’s frontier families. While a teenager, Annie Kouwenbergh Johnson had studied there for four years, and she cherished the experience. She always believed that her academic and religious training had given her the well-rounded education that had molded her into the perfect helpmate for her ambitious husband. She wanted no less for her daughters.

Dreadfully homesick, Rebecca had attended the boarding school for less than three months before she persuaded her parents to allow her to return to her “own dear little home.” The youngest daughter, Hendy, also spent an abbreviated time at Loretto before her abundance of high spirits and mischievous pranks sent her back to Bardstown. Rebecca and Hendy completed their formal education as day students at nearby Nazareth Academy.

Nannie Crow Johnson, age twelve, enrolled at Loretto in the autumn of 1901. She, too, experienced a rocky start during her first month living away from home.

Loretto Academy,
Sept. 5, 1901
Dear mother and father:

Father Riley gave me the basket you sent; and I was so glad to get it. I have not been very home-sick. I cried some the first day; but the next morning I was feeling fine, until late that evening I cried; I have not cried since. Annie Bowling is coming Monday. Father Riley said he thought you were coming over here next week; I hope you are. Do not expect a letter from me on Thursday any more, because we are going to write on Sunday.

What teachers are at Bethlehem school now?

Tell Rebecca that Wilfrid [sic] came yesterday. There are so many new scholars this year. We are going to study Latin this year. There was a girl in my class that had been crying and wanting to go home, who turned up in the infirmary this morning sick. When y [sic] send my slumber slippers please send me a wash-rag too. I have not cried in bed since I’ve been here. Netty O’Brien sleeps next to me, and she has to wake me up every morning. Father, if mother comes next week, you try to come to [crossed out] with her. How is Hendy getting along at school? I guess Rebecca will start
to school Monday. We have have [sic] been having a fine time. Sr. Rosine let us off from scool [crossed out] school two evenings and we went after grapes. When is Lizzie going home? Much love to you all. I have not heard from Stewart yet.

Your loving daughter,

Nannie.

This letter marks one of the last times that Nancy signed her name as Nannie. When she turned thirteen in November, she decided to reinvent herself. She had always considered both the names “Nannie” and “Crow” to be undignified, but up until now she had lacked the courage or the confidence to change her identity. Now that she was away from parental influence, in new surroundings and making new friends, Nancy believed it was time to assume a more mature personality. For the next few years, she was known as merely “Nan.” However, by the time she graduated in 1906, she was “Nancy Johnson.” She had entirely dropped her middle name, Crow. Once she had shed her birth names, she never looked back. Though her name change was never formalized in a court of law, she would be known forever afterward as Nancy.

Nancy attended Loretto for the next five school years. Like her mother before her, she thrived under the strict discipline of the nuns and excelled in her studies. Every June on Commencement Day, she was awarded the coveted First Prize pin for scholarship. Dressed in her navy blue middy-style uniform and black high-button shoes, Nancy pursued a scholastic regime that emphasized literature, grammar, history, spelling, science, and mathematics; mathematics was her particular forte. The more “feminine” pursuits of drawing, music, and sewing held little attraction for her.

As Nancy matured into a young woman, more of her father’s personality traits emerged. Strong-willed and stubborn in the mold of Ben Johnson, Nancy believed that she could accomplish anything by sheer will power if she set her mind to it. In addition to her keen intellect, Nancy inherited her father’s quick temper. Though she did not carry a pistol in her pocket as did her parents, Nancy learned to use her words with razor-sharp effectiveness. If her eloquence, wit, and will power did not achieve what she wanted, Nancy made use of another one of Ben’s many tactics. Both father and daughter could cry real tears instantly and on cue. Since childhood, Nancy had become accustomed to getting her own way.

Nancy’s positive traits included a deep devotion to her family and fierce loyalty to all those she loved. Once she formed a friendship, it was for life as far as Nancy was concerned. She saw no need to surround herself with crowds
of casual acquaintances; she placed her wholehearted trust in a select few people. As a friend, she was witty, charming, and full of gaiety.

On the other hand, Nancy did not mind having a few enemies. “It shows that you’ve got some character,” she explained to her grandchildren, echoing Ben Johnson’s own sentiments. Her father reveled in his political foes.

Seventeen-year-old Nancy Johnson graduated from Loretto on June 12, 1906, as her class’s valedictorian. Her parents, particularly her father, were extremely proud of their most talented and now very attractive daughter.
During her last year at school, Nancy had blossomed into a dark-haired, gray-eyed beauty, resembling the models made famous by the artist Charles Dana Gibson.

The completion of Nancy’s formal schooling came just in time. In November 1906, Ben Johnson was elected to serve as the representative of Kentucky’s Fourth District in the U.S. House of Representatives. Following Christmas at their home in Bardstown, Annie Johnson and her daughters packed their bags and trunks with a plethora of new finery, and the family embarked for Washington, D.C. This phase of the Johnson family’s life would continue for the next twenty years.

Washington, D.C., in the early 1900s was more like a small, sleepy southern town than the capital city of a growing world power. The social elite of New York, Boston, and Philadelphia looked down their collective noses at the brash politicians who strolled Washington’s dusty streets and patronized the city’s numerous bars and brothels. The aristocrats of New York’s Fifth Avenue considered the Federal City to be a social backwater. “America was the only country in the world where having been born in a log cabin could be construed as a political advantage,” but to the Johnson family of tiny Bardstown, Washington seemed like this side of paradise.

Once settled in their rooms at the Cochran Hotel on the corner of K and Fourteenth streets, Annie, with her daughters Rebecca and Nancy, dove into Washington’s social whirl. Hendy, who was still a schoolgirl in 1907, was enrolled at Georgetown Visitation Academy, a prominent Catholic girls’ school west of the city. The Johnsons soon discovered that the Washington upper crust divided itself into two distinct social groups: the congressional set that changed every two years, and the old, established families who had seen every presidential administration since Abigail Adams first hung up her wet laundry in the East Room of the newly completed White House.

Washington’s native residents, known informally as “the cave dwellers,” preferred that their little city’s social scene be sedate. These Washingtonians considered anyone employed by the federal government, including the president of the United States, to be “too gauche for words.” However, Nancy Johnson, who was fresh from a country boarding school and hungry for excitement, found Washington to be a delightful round of theater box parties, afternoon teas, smart luncheons, card parties, White House receptions, charity balls, and, most especially, the wonderful “hops” at the U.S. Naval Academy in nearby Annapolis, Maryland. Closer to home, the Washington Barracks provided many handsome young army officers to squire the young women to picnics, baseball games, and dances.
One of Nancy’s favorite pastimes was dancing, and she was quite proud of her skill, even seventy years later. Her graceful footwork was not only admired by her lucky partners but also reaped glowing compliments in the society columns of the Washington newspapers. “Miss Nancy Johnson won laurels by the beauty and the intricacy of her execution of the fashionable ‘barn dance.’ Her prowess is pre-eminent.”

Washington may have been a small town in the eyes of the world, but it did boast of several playhouses. Other than student theatricals of her Loretto days, Nancy had never seen a real play. Once in Washington, she became a devotee of the theater. Her favorite form of entertainment was the “musical plays,” especially those written by the talented team of Henry Blossom and Victor Herbert. During her first three years in the nation’s capital city, Nancy attended the “New National Theatre” at least once a month. Based on the programs that she saved, The Red Mill was her favorite production. Starring the famous comedy duo of David Montgomery and Fred A. Stone, the play was a hilarious farce.

Nancy not only enjoyed seeing the plays but also the whole theater-going experience. Once settled in her box seat, she savored the scent of her little nosegays of “superb violets” fresh from Blackstone’s florist shop on Fourteenth and H streets that her thoughtful escorts always provided for her. Everyone knew that Nancy adored flowers as much as she loved candy. While she waited for the curtain to rise on the evening’s performance, she would nibble on the delicious caramels made by Velati’s Confectioners located nearby at 620 Ninth Street. There were always boxes of Velati’s caramels or Guth’s chocolate-covered cherries on hand in her room at the Cochran Hotel.  

Nancy never spoke directly to the press, as her elegant mother had taught her, but she adored the attention given to her by members of the fourth estate. She had the habit of clipping snippets about herself from the newspapers and pasting them in the scrapbook that she had started when she moved to Washington in 1907. Early in her society years, Nancy identified neither the newspapers nor the dates of the clippings.

Rebecca and Hendy each enjoyed a social season in Washington before they retreated into the comforts of wedlock. Rebecca married her father’s protégé, Dan Talbott, on October 12, 1909. Hendy followed her sister to the altar exactly two years later when she married Charles Lee Hamilton, a graduate of Princeton and a Louisville lawyer, in September 1911. By the spring of 1912, when both of her sisters were settled back in Kentucky, Nancy reigned in Washington as the sole “Johnson Girl,” a distinction she enjoyed.

Despite the number of beaux who escorted her about the city, the pretty Kentuckian was in no hurry to join her sisters in the role of wife and mother. Nancy knew that once a woman was married, her carefree days were over. Young society matrons were expected to behave responsibly and to maintain a rigid respectability, while all the young belles danced until dawn. “I was having too much fun,” Nancy explained a half-century later. “I wanted to kick up my heels.”

As his seniority grew in the House, Ben Johnson made increasing use of his access to the press, ensuring that his publicity was always favorable. He recognized the political asset of his pretty daughter, and Johnson shamelessly fed tidbits of Nancy’s activities to the ever-hungry newspaper reporters, thus keeping his own name and position before the eyes of the general public, particularly those of his constituents in Nelson County. Now that Nancy was the sole unmarried Johnson daughter, her newspaper coverage more than doubled. Ben
Johnson made sure that no item about Nancy was considered too trivial for the newspapers.

**Stricken with Appendicitis**—Miss Nancy Johnson, Daughter of Congressman, Must Undergo Operation. Washington, April 13—Miss Nancy Johnson, daughter of Representative Ben Johnson, was stricken with appendicitis Saturday night. Her condition yesterday was serious, but is improved to-day.

The physicians say an operation will be necessary.32

There was no operation or appendicitis. A few days later, Nancy’s illness cleared itself up. The Washington stringer for the *Louisville Courier-Journal* informed a presumably relieved public that

**Honor for Miss Johnson**—For two consecutive congresses33 Kentucky has been gracefully represented on the staff of the D.A.R. Pages.34 Miss Nancy Johnson, the pretty brunette daughter of Hon. and Mrs. Ben Johnson, enjoyed the distinction this season, an attractive figure flitting about the hall35 on official errands, generally in a girlish white frock and a big black Merry Widow hat. Last year, her sister, Miss Rebecca Johnson, was a page. Miss Johnson has entirely recovered from threatened appendicitis. The popularity of the chic little Kentuckian was attested by the burdens of flowers emptied into her rooms at the Hotel Cochran during her illness.36

A year later, Daisy Fitzhugh Ayres,37 the Washington society columnist for the *Louisville Courier Journal*, continued to compliment Nancy in Ayres’s characteristic high-blown style: “Miss Nancy Johnson, [Mrs. Ben Johnson’s] debutante daughter . . . is attracting much attention, for she is a beauty and had been a belle in Washington society last winter.”38

Thanks to some backstage maneuvering, Ben Johnson arranged for his daughter to be selected as the sponsor of the SS *Kentuckian*, a steamship of the American-Hawaiian line that was to be launched at Sparrows Point, Maryland, on March 19, 1910. Elated by this publicity coup, Johnson pulled out all the stops. Nancy got a smart new outfit with an eye-catching hat. Her proud parents had commissioned her prelaunch portrait to be taken by Clinedinst Studios—a photograph that quickly made its way onto the pages of the *Baltimore Sun, Baltimore Star, Baltimore American, Washington Times, Washington Star, Louisville Times, Louisville Courier-Journal*, and *Bardstown Kentucky Standard*. Even the lofty *New York World*, the premiere newspaper for the elite social circles of the day, featured Nancy’s photo and accomplishment, noting that invitations to the launching ceremony had been sent to many friends, both political as well as personal.
Nancy Johnson, sponsor of the SS Kentuckian, Baltimore, March 19, 1910

The most florid—as well as the most detailed—account of Nancy’s moment in the spotlight flowed from the breathless pen of the adoring Daisy Fitzhugh Ayres for the Louisville Courier Journal.

CHRISTENING—MISS NANCY JOHNSON SENDS KENTUCKIAN TO WATER—Washington, March 25—It’s a good deal like being a bride, only more so, when you are a pretty girl in the smartest of togs and you are christening a great monster of a ship with all kinds of dimensions in all kinds of directions.
The congressional girl, of all others, who has most brilliantly been bask-
ing in the limelight within the last few days, has been Miss Nancy Johnson, the handsome young daughter of Hon. Ben Johnson, Representative from Bardstown, Ky.

Through Congressman Talbott of Maryland, the Maryland Steel Com-
pany and the American-Hawaiian Steamship Line invited the pretty lassie “who was bred in old Kentucky where the meadow grass is blue” to be sponsor for their new Pacific liner, the “Kentuckian,” launched with great eclat [sic] at the steel works where it is being built, at Sparrow’s Point, just twelve miles the other side of Baltimore. Everybody who was invited by the fair young heroine of the occasion and her parents, to make the triumphal progress on the special train put at her disposal by the ship’s company, were on hand exuberantly in all their Easter rigging.

The great “Kentuckian,” yet in embryo, painted orange, lay on the edge of the Chesapeake Bay, her nose projecting upon the land into a platform built for the special guests. Miss Johnson was a picture of girlish brunette beauty in a natty little white serge tailored suit, with short kilted skirt, short coat, high white kid boots, a large sailor hat with rose colored braid with wide black velvet band and huge corsage bouquet of violets and gardenias. One arm was burdened with a sheaf of American Beauties [roses] as tall as herself. She held the bottle of christening fluid in a braiding of red, white and blue ribbons. By a sentimental departure from tradition, the momentous flagon contained instead of the time honored champagne, a blend of two historic waters from the little sponsor’s own home state, water from the spring on the Larue County farm where Abraham Lincoln was born, water from the place in Todd County where Jefferson Davis was born—a happy and auspicious union. The sponsor, burdened with her tro-
phies, was escorted to the place of honor by Mr. Steadman Bent, represent-
ing the President of the American-Hawaiian Line. Mr. Steadman gallantly had his shirt to match in tint the rose color of Miss Johnson’s smart hat. A pink carnation of the exact psychological tint bloomed upon the young gentle-
man’s gray lapel.

At the witching hour of twelve [noon], the fair Kentuckian smote her sister Kentuckian a blow of fellowship upon her graceful bow. “I name thee the Kentuckian!” cried Miss Johnson as the beribboned bottle shivered in her grasp. Instantly a paean of triumph went up from a thousand whistles far and near, as the craft slid rhythmically from the ways into the broad water. People yelled themselves hoarse. There were wavings [sic], con-
gratulations and applause and the thing was done. “Don’t you feel like Mrs.
Taft, Nancy?” a young chum asked the star of the affair, as a dozen cameras were leveled ruthlessly toward her.

In the “joiners’ shop” amidst many interesting appurtenances of ship building a hundred and fifty guests sat down to a superb banquet. Miss Johnson was presented by Capt. Burnham, President of the shipping company, with a very elegant silver jewel casket appropriately inscribed. At the “bride’s table” facetiously dubbed, the heroine of the hour was surrounded by a few especial friends, among them Mr. Wood, President of the Maryland Steel Company. A “flat car,” very crude and unconventional, but all the jollier for that, conveyed the company later on a regular joy ride to the great steel works, where all sorts of fiery diabolical stunts were in progress, and everybody separately said perfectly originally, as they were being conducted personally through burning plowshares and cataracts of sparks: “Isn’t it exactly like Dante’s Inferno!”

Ben Johnson basked in the glow of his daughter’s limelight. Nancy, thrilled by the length and breadth of her press coverage, clipped out all her newspaper stories and pasted them into the souvenir album that the American-Hawaiian Steamship Company had presented her. Twenty-one-year-old Nancy Johnson felt that she had reached her pinnacle of social success. Christening a huge steamship had been the most exciting experience of her life. She was sure that nothing else would ever equal it.