It was 1901. The Spanish-American War was winding down halfway across the world, the first great Texas oil well hit paydirt, and, in Potter Place, New Hampshire things were bustling. According to the local newspaper for Friday, March 22, folks had had “150 days of good sleighing, with good prospects for more”, “A deer was seen in Mrs. Weed’s pasture…”, and “A. R. Johnson has taken charge of the grist mill”.

Amos Ralph Johnson rented the grist and saw mills located on the banks of the Blackwater River to fill a local need. He began his business by custom grinding grain for local farmers at five cents per hundred weight. By 1904 he was able to purchase the property and mills, and took on a business partner for a short period of time.

By 1907 The Johnson Mill had become known for their "Cob Meal", which was ground from locally grown corn by the water power of the Blackwater River. The Cob Meal was a staple in the early years, and remained very popular through the early twenties, until more refined grain mixtures came into use.

In 1910, Ralph P. Johnson joined his father and helped run the gristmill. Later that year, on November 13, Amos R. Johnson died at the age of 62, and Ralph took the reins. He was able to keep the company running until disaster struck. On November 18, 1913, the sawmill caught fire, destroying both the saw and grist mill. Undaunted, Ralph decided to rebuild, and early the following year he had a new gristmill built on the same location. A. R. Johnson was once again in the grain business by the spring of 1914.

By 1920, the Johnson business was growing, and Ralph needed more storage space. He purchased the general store across from the railroad station in Potter Place, using it to store grain waiting to be transported by the train the local folks dubbed “the peanut”. By storing the grain right by the tracks, Ralph could ship it fast and fresh to local farms along the Boston & Maine Railroad route.

Ralph was also committed to the community. In 1934 he served on a committee establishing the original Andover High School. Later that same year, his son, Amos E. Johnson, graduated from Proctor Academy and joined his father in the family business. By 1937, Amos had taken over the grinding, and the company name was changed to R. P. Johnson & Son. During Amos' first few years in the business, he recognized the need for a local source of building materials. Together, by seeing and filling a local need, father and son began creating the company we know of today as R. P. Johnson & Son.

On June 6, 1944, as war ravaged the world, and the Normandy invasion began, a fire destroyed the general store and post office buildings in Potter Place, as well as all the inventory of grain and building materials stored there. Not to be deterred, Ralph and his son built new storage buildings on the old mill property.

In 1947, Amos married Lorna (Tibbetts) Johnson. She soon joined the business to help out with bookkeeping. Two years later, Ralph's daughter Leah Johnson Sleeper became the full time bookkeeper, helping build on the R. P. Johnson family tradition.

On December 24,1950, Ralph Johnson passed away at the age of 72. This left Amos to run the business alone. Custom grinding had now increased to twenty-five cents per hundred weight, and building material sales were picking up. By 1960, company sales were fifty percent grain and fifty percent lumber and building supplies. In 1967 the gristmill was converted from hydropower to electric.

By 1969, building material sales had eclipsed the gristmill part of the business, accounting for ninety-three percent of the sales. The future looked bright, but change was in the wind for R. P. Johnson & Son. Amos realized the gristmill was becoming obsolete. The number of farms around Potter Place, and across New Hampshire was declining, and in 1971, the R. P. Johnson Gristmill ground its last grain. From then on, R. P. Johnson would get its feed and grain from Wirthmore Feed, Granite State Feed, and Blue Seal Feeds.

In January of 1971, after twenty-two years of dedicated service to R. P. Johnson, Leah Johnson Sleeper retired as office manager. In 1974, at the age of seventy-eight, she passed away.

In 1975 and 1976 respectively, Steve and Bryan Johnson graduated from college, and joined their father Amos in the family business. Steve worked with lumber and building supplies, while Bryan's focus was on the hardware store. R. P. Johnson & Son incorporated in 1977.

From 1977 on, the company grew at a tremendous rate. The Home Center in Potter Place opened on November 15, 1981 offering an expanded line of home renovation supplies, and new building ideas for the contractor and the growing segment of “do it yourselfers”. The old Boston & Maine railroad line that had helped Amos Johnson serve his customers was giving way to delivery by truck, and the last freight shipment by rail was received in April of 1981.

In 1985, Amos E. Johnson gained recognition for his years of community service, receiving the Andover Citizen of the Year award. Community service was a natural for Amos. He had owned and operated R. P. Johnson & Son since 1934; he was a trustee of Proctor Academy, and a director of the New London Trust Company. Amos was also a past president and longtime secretary-treasurer of the Andover Lions Club; a member of the Lake Sunapee Country Club, and Hoo Hoo the Fraternal Order of Lumbermen.

On November 1, 1989, R. P. Johnson & Son purchased Eastman Building Supply, on Sargent Road in Sunapee. In the spring of 1990, R. P. Johnson opened this second facility. The company' s goal was to offer the same quality products, competitive prices, and high level of service that had become the trademark of R. P. Johnson & Son. On July 9, 1990, an era ended: Amos E. Johnson passed away, leaving his sons to carry on the tradition.

In 1991, R. P. Johnson was one of 200 companies nationwide included in *Strengthening America's Competitiveness,* a book intended to offer insights into good business management. The book was sponsored by Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance Company, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and Nation's Business Magazine. Companies were asked to submit reports on problems they encountered and their strategies for solving them.

During the last recession, Steve Johnson, along with his brother Bryan, implemented an aggressive plan to keep the company profitable. The company laid off approximately one third of its workers, and cut back on employee benefits. In order to stretch their buying power they joined ENAP, a building material coop, and started a rental equipment department. These steps allowed the company to survive the recession ready to take on the next building boom. R. P. Johnson was one of four New Hampshire businesses chosen from the 200 mentioned to receive the Blue Chip Enterprise Initiative Award.

By 1995, the Sunapee location had grown and was faced with a new challenge: the need to add lumber storage. A new storage system was built that allowed customers and yard personnel to pick lumber in a clean and dry facility, while at the same time keeping shrinkage due to weather damage to a minimum. That same year, Master Craftsman Norm Abrams of *This Old House*, honored the Home Center in Andover with an appearance. Mr. Abrams spent a Saturday speaking with customers and fellow craftsmen. Many people came to thank him for showing them how to build his do it yourself projects.

On July 1, 1997, after much thought, Steve and Bryan declared R. P. Johnson & Son to be an Open Book Management Company. Open Book Management allows employees, from yardmen, office workers, and counter people up to management staff to know exactly what they contribute, what they cost the company, and how they depend on one another to be successful. They have access to scorecards, income statements, cash flow statements, and balance sheets. This encourages employees to think as owners, not as traditional employees who are just "doing the job". This kind of thinking isn't just good for the bottom line; it has improved the already high quality of service customers have come to expect from R. P. Johnson & Son.

In 1998, the Home Center in Andover was renovated. A special contractor area was created to better serve contractors, who often have larger and more complicated orders. This left the front counter free for the general public and homeowner trade. The store itself was re-arranged to be more open and customer friendly, with lots of signs and displays making it easier to find the wide array of products.

Even with years of renovations under their belt, R. P. Johnson looks to the future, with plans to consolidate both the lumberyard and home center on the 16-acre site directly across the street from the current home center.

In 1999, Bryan Johnson left the company to start his own business. This left his brother Steve as the sole Johnson to run the company. With people beginning to go to the giant "home center" type of business for building supplies, it became obvious that there was a need to shift gears, and provide the highest quality building materials with a twist: drive-through service!

On June 1, 2000, R. P. Johnson employees gathered at the new Drive-Thru site for an official ground breaking ceremony. On October 9, 2000, R. P. Johnson opened its 30,000 sq. foot state-of-the-art Drive-Through Lumberyard. The concept is smart: the large interior provides clean, dry, well-lit and organized storage, and quick, convenient pickup and loading for the customer.

In the same way that the early Johnson business changed with the times, R. P. Johnson is growing and changing to better serve their customers. As the R. P. Johnson organization turns 100 years old, it seems evident that the business will continue to grow with New Hampshire, one generation at a time.