

JAMES R. JONES

By

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*Reprinted from the November 5, 1915,
Issue of the "Walker County Messenger"*

JAMES ROWLAND JONES, one of Walker County's pioneers, was born Nov. 7, 1805, in White County, Tennessee, and was of Welsh descent. He was the son of Rowland Jones, one of the early settlers of Tennessee.

After the death of Rowland Jones, his widow and children moved to Coweta County, Georgia, where James R. received such education as the times afforded, learning much in the school of experience as an orphan boy.

He was married Jan. 8, 1828 to Temperance Velvin (born March 18, 1812), daughter of Robert Velvin of Coweta County.

James R. and his wife remained in Coweta County until Sept. 1835 when they removed to Walker County and settled what has since been known as the James R. Jones place, about one mile south of Rock Spring Church on the Chattanooga and LaFayette road.

The trip from Coweta to Walker was made in an oxcart, which carried the wife, their three children, and the few belongings. The journey was a slow one and full of danger. But James R., with the courage which was characteristic of his whole life, pressed onward to his destination. And when he arrived on the scene of his future activities he found not a board, a road, nor anything suggesting civilization.

So, he unloaded his ox cart in the wilderness, and with all the resourcefulness of the pioneer, felled some "saplings," placed them in the forks of trees, fastened others at the sides for rafters, cut down a board tree, rived his boards, and covered his shelters, built his fire out in front, and this was his home, until he had time to build a pine pole cabin, and right glad he was to have such a comfortable abode. And this picturesque home in the wilds

of Walker County was not without its attractions. Giant oaks were on every side, a clear cool spring was invitingly near, an occasional deer bounded past this sylvan retreat, and James R. had only to shoulder his rifle and step a few paces outside to supply his table with dainties that would satisfy the palate of the most exacting epicure of today. Venison and wild turkey and other luxuries of the forest were his at will.

The Cherokee Indians also were natives of this forest and Mr. Jones' adventures with them were many and interesting. After he had planted his crop and had his corn growing nicely, the Indians would lower his fences at night, put their horses into the field and take them out just before day. At last he found what was destroying his crop and caught the horses and chained them near his house.

When the Indians came for them he told them they could take the horses as soon as they paid the damages done by them.

That night the Indians came to whip him, perhaps to kill him. He was asleep when they came and did not hear at first the anathemas they were calling down on him. His wife, fearing he would go outside and be killed, would not tell him what they said. But at last he heard it and, reaching up for his rifle, opened the door and started in pursuit. Two of the Indians ran off at full speed; another ran into the "loom house" back of the dwelling. The moon was shining brightly and the Indian could be plainly seen as he threw up his hands and began yelling: "Cloudy, Cloudy," meaning that the Indian called "Cloudy" was the one intent on mischief. James R. went after him with an attitude commonly used by the courageous pioneer on the offending red man and to such an extent that old truant

"Cloudy" departed in great haste, leaving James R. victor of the field almost without a struggle.

James R.'s nearest white neighbor was James B. Jones, who lived about three miles north on the property now owned by Frank Richard.

There was an Indian family at the Josiah Henry place about three-fourths of a mile east, and others all around, in fact everywhere.

In Dec. 1835 Joshua Brigman arrived from Coweta County and settled where John R. Tyner now lives, about half a mile south of James R. Jones.

In 1836 William Conley, "Uncle Billy," settled on the land now owned by Reese Jones and his son, Lee, father of C. M. Conley, of LaFayette, where, Mrs. Thomas Smith now resides, about three miles southeast of Rock Spring. And thus the community grew in population slowly but surely.

It was in this year (1836) that the two Indians, Pocket Book and Crush, were hanged at LaFayette. A call had been issued to the settlers to be at LaFayette on that day. James R. Jones was one of the number who responded in person. The following story of the affair was told the writer by Mrs. A. E. Rogers, his oldest child, who was an eye-witness of the hanging. The Indians had killed and burned an old man and his wife near LaFayette. A reward had been offered by the white people for the apprehension of the guilty parties, which resulted in the capture of Pocket Book and Crush. The Indians were highly incensed over the affair and there were grave fears of an uprising among them (hence the call of the settlers).

There was no jail or calaboose and during the day the Sheriff kept his prisoners chained on the outside to a log of his house, but at night, fearing they might be

liberated by other Indians, he chained them to the foot-posts of his bed. It was said that every time the chains rattled in the night the Sheriff's wife would find herself up and a considerable distance away before she was entirely awake.

On the day of the hanging the Indians dressed in white sat on their coffins and rode to the gallows. Their funeral was preached by an Indian preacher, Rev. David Lowry standing by to interpret for the white people.

Both Indians told the Sheriff, "Good-Bye, I'll meet you in Arkansas." Pocket Book gave him his hunting hounds, and his son, Crush, gave him his tomahawk. An old squaw, the sister of Pocket Book, took the dead Indians in charge and guarded them until time for the weird Indian rites before burial. At the time of the hanging, the Indians were being collected to be sent away. The Sheriff's wife asked the little Indian, the son of Pocket Book, if he wanted to go. He said that he did, and left with the last company.

It is possible the Indian's association of the idea of "Arkansas" with that of Heaven was occasioned by the wonderful stories he had heard of the lands beyond the Mississippi, the "Happy Hunting Ground" of his dreams.

For a time Mr. Jones had to go to Ross' Landing (Chattanooga) to get corn, and as what is now known as the Chattanooga and LaFayette pike was then a mere Indian trail, it took three or four days to make the trip. In the meantime, his wife and children were at home alone and there was no lock on the door; in fact there was no door until the cabin was built.

Roving Indians were everywhere. An occasional one would raise the quilt hanging over the opening of her shelter, peep in, mutter, "Ugh," and pass on. So let us pause just here and pay a tribute to brave, stout-hearted

Temperance, the pioneer wife. Was she not a heroine? That memorable old grandmother whose life, jewelled with good deeds, has hurried down the years to bless posterity, and whose example has given stamina, courage and character to fit us the better to face every turn life assumes. But for her unflinching and untiring help, advice and energy, possibly many of James R.'s efforts might not have been successful.

As rather an inseparable part of the history of this pioneer of Walker, the writer must be pardoned for interweaving some other data of those weird early days when James R. Jones "pitched his tent" in Walker's unbroken forest.

Less than a mile north of his crude home in the wilderness, was erected in 1839 the first Methodist Church of Rock Spring, one similar, as tradition puts it, to the first churches where the Pilgrims worshipped, and stacked their guns outside. From this old church went forth men and women of the Christian mould and type that always help rear a great nation. From its fold went preachers, teachers, doctors, etc., and notable among its later membership, went a son to far off China, who forged his way through the heathen gates, and is now a power in those mission fields, Hector Park, of "Old Rock Spring Church." It was in this old church, during the continued drouth of 1845, the good people of Rock Spring and vicinity met to pray for rain, and where the supplications of these old saints found such complete and immediate response.

Memorable of this occasion was an expression of the beautiful and unwavering faith of Rev. William Conley, "Uncle Billy," who, as was his custom, was among the first to arrive at the church. He rode up, dismounted and began removing his saddle when someone nearby inquired why he

did so. "To keep it dry, of course, haven't we met here to pray for rain?" he replied. Uncle Billy removed his saddle and carried it into the house, and it is well that he did, for the rain came in torrents, when not a cloud had been visible when the service began.

Uncle Billy lies sleeping near the spot sanctified by his sublime trust, and where it is beautifully recorded of him that "He kept the faith."

The first preacher in this section was probably Rev. David Lowry, a missionary to the Indians. At his grave in Rock Spring cemetery is a "simple headstone rudely writ" reciting the name and age of this venerable man of God.

James R. Jones was not a member of this old church, but attended almost its every service, and kept wide his doors for its every preacher, delighting to entertain its Shepherd.

In 1840, Mr. Jones, with his neighbors, organized a school in a little house just north of his home, and on his property, with Rev. Lavender as teacher.

John R. Conley had settled near in 1838. Other settlers had arrived and the community was considered quite populous. Some time later Rev. Moses Park taught school in a log school house across the branch just north of the present school house at Rock Spring. Among the students of this school were Russel, William, Thomas, Robert and Reese Jones, and many others who claim old Rock Spring as their "Alma Mater." Another teacher of the pioneer days was Rev. Henry Evans.

The Jones school house was also used as a courthouse. Two justices of the Peace who held court here in the early days were Daniel Majors and George Brigman.

James R. Jones, James Bonds, of MeLemore's Cove, and M. Rhodes, of LaFayette, were at one time the

three judges of the Inferior Court of Walker County, under whose courageous administration much good was done, and the law violators were made "take notice." As writer understands, the Inferior Courts which were a decided step forward in the state's progress, had jurisdiction similar to that of our present County Board of Revenues and Ordinary and continued till after the Civil War, when they were abolished by the State Constitution of 1868. This court had five members, the contemporaries of the three above mentioned are not known. The court held monthly sessions.

Major James M. Shields, of the District Militia, was the first citizen of the present town of Rock Spring. Major Shields was a neighbor of James R. and his lifelong friend.

James M. Wellborn, now an aged resident of the town, and William G. Conley were its first merchants.

The first postoffice at Rock Spring was in the home of James R. Jones; he was the first postmaster and gave the place its name.

The office has remained in the Jones family almost continuously since it was first established in 1844.

As to convictions of James R. Jones in the 60's, he never seceded. Though he had five sons in the Confederate Army, he was heart and soul against secession and remained so until the end.

During the reconstruction period, he aided in the upbuilding of his County in every way possible, contributing liberally to every cause which was for the good of his section and remained as he had ever been, an upright, honorable, progressive citizen until his death Feb. 20, 1886. And thus was the story of his life interwoven with that of his section for more than fifty years.

The quality of his truth and honesty is best shown by an act of his during the Civil War. In March of '64, his son, Robert, who was Orderly of the staff of Gen. William T. Wofford, had been sent home on furlough from New Market, Tennessee, by Gen. Wofford to carry some money (\$800.00) to Cartersville, Georgia, to his (Wofford's) wife. On his way back to the front he stopped at Rock Spring to see his father and mother. Not long after he arrived at home, Federal scouts were seen approaching the house. There was no chance of escape it seemed, and Robert ran upstairs. Two or three of the Yankees came into the house and told Mr. Jones they understood he had a son home from the army. "Yes," he replied. "Where is he?" he was asked. "Upstairs. Come 'down, Bob," he said. The son's surprise and consternation at his father's replies can better be imagined than expressed. Robert was captured and sent to Federal Prison at Nashville, Tennessee, where he was kept until the war closed. It is probable that the house would have been searched, but there are few fathers who would not have directed the Yankees' attention elsewhere in the hope that all might be well with the boy; but with this grand old man, his truth and honor were almost his religion, and were to him above boy or his freedom and liberty.

In the history of this old pioneer there is nothing but that which is noble, true and good to record. He was one of the heroes of everyday life. And a man who met the duties of each hour bravely, and performed them duly and well.

The kind of whom song and story alike have remained strangely silent but who are heroes nevertheless.

His history is but the history of all pioneers. It was a continual battle with Indians as long as they were here, wild animals, and the cruel hardships incident to pioneer life, but with it all there was health and happiness. By

energy and perseverance he acquired some property, besides rearing his large family of one daughter and ten sons: Martha (Mrs. A. E. Rogers), Willis, Capt. Russell J., William P., Thomas N., J. Robert, Reese, R. F., R. C., Oran W., and A. J., all of whom lived to mature years and blessed the early experiences which gave them their rugged health.

In every avenue of life, James R. Jones was gentleman-brave-kind-hospitable-courteous and true-hearted, strictly temperate, untiringly industrious.

But his most notable characteristics were his firmness of purpose and his rugged honesty. And richly he merits the inscription placed on his monument in Rock Spring cemetery. "He was an honest man, the noblest work of God."

Temperance, his wife, whose prowess braved with him those early and dangerous days of the 30's, on Dec. 1891 became weary and, leaving behind her a beautiful life spent in doing good, was united with him in celestial reward.