

file



John B. Jones

Leader of the Texas Rangers and the Masons of Texas

John B. Jones was born on December 22nd, 1834 in the Fairfield District, South Carolina. His family moved to the Republic of Texas in 1838, settling in the area that became Travis County, and then later moving to the part of Texas that became Navarro County. As a young man, Jones made a living by farming and raising livestock.

When the Civil War started, Jones joined the Confederacy as a private in the 8th Texas Cavalry (Terry's Texas Rangers) and rose to the rank of captain.

Within a few months, he was promoted to adjutant of the 15th Texas Infantry of Joseph W. Speight. In 1863, with the rank of captain, he was appointed adjutant general of a brigade, and in 1864, he was recommended for promotion to be major, but the war ended prior to his receiving the higher rank. It was clear, however, that his leadership abilities far exceeded his rank.

At the conclusion of the war, Jones and many other southerners were greatly concerned about what life would be like under reconstruction. He believed there was a future in South America, and he traveled there intending to establish a colony for former Confederates. After two years looking for a suitable place to establish such a colony, Jones lost his enthusiasm for the project and returned to Texas. It was at this time that Jones became very involved with the Masonic fraternity. He was active and popular in both the Blue Lodge and the York Rite, and he was elected Grand High Priest of the Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons in 1872.

Life was good for Jones and he had adjusted to post-Civil War Texas, when in 1874 he was called upon, once again, to serve his State. In 1874, Richard Coke was the new governor, replacing E. J. Davis. Governor Davis had served under reconstruction, and thus had very limited authority, especially when it came to granting authority to a state militia or police force. As a result, the average Texan found the state police force weak, and very unsatisfactory. Texans faced ruthless lawlessness and Indian trouble. Under the Davis regime, such men as John Wesley Hardin, Bill Longley, and many others were very active in Texas; and when the new Governor was elected to office, they attempted to continue their ways. Indian raids showed no indication of ending, either, and the problems had to be resolved.

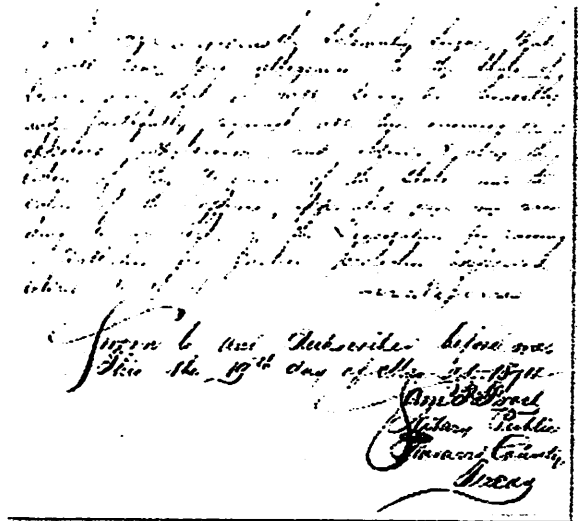
So, with the end of reconstruction and with tacit approval of the Federal Government, Gov. Coke established a new force of Texas Rangers, and called it The Frontier Battalion. Coke called upon Brother Jones to head this force, and gave him the rank of Major.

The Jones Oath

When accepting the job of organizing the Rangers, Jones wrote his own Oath of Office, which has come to be known to Texas Historians as "the Jones Oath":

I Jno B. Jones do Solemnly Swear that I will bear true allegiance to the State of Texas, and that I will serve her honestly and faithfully against all her enemies or opposers whatsoever, and observe & obey the orders of the Governor of the State, and the orders of the officers appointed over me according to an Act of the Legislature for raising a Battalion for frontier protection approved April 10, 1874 Jno B. Jones'

It is very likely that Jones realized that this appointment was a chance for him to influence the direction of his country (State) and to insure that law and order were the rule. He no doubt took this opportunity very seriously.



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This the 10th day of April 1874
Kinney County Texas

In the beginning, the Frontier Battalion was to be composed of six companies consisting of a captain, lieutenants, sergeants, corporals, and privates. When mustered to the utmost, there were seventy-five privates in each company. Under Major Jones, this force proved to be so effective that, in less than a year, the numbers were drastically lowered.

The companies were stationed from near the Red River in the north to the Nueces River in the south. Jones frequently left Austin and joined a company and traveled up and down the frontier. His hands-on method of leadership established the discipline he expected, and he got to know many of men personally. Most importantly, for the morale of the force, he shared in the same dangers his men experienced.

And indeed, their work was often dangerous. It was on July 12 in Jack County that Jones and a group of some three dozen Rangers—mostly young men totally inexperienced in fighting—survived the charges of some 150 Kiowa and Comanche warriors led by Lone Wolf. The Indians were well mounted and armed with breech-loading rifles. How many warriors were killed or wounded by the Rangers is unknown, but the loss suffered by the Rangers was two killed and two wounded.

As the Indian problems started to subside, more energy was spent by the Rangers in ridding the state of bandits and private wars or "family feuds." The busiest year for Major Jones was certainly that of 1877. In April, he engineered the Kimble County Roundup, during which some forty men were arrested when Rangers of several companies rode in and took into custody every man who could not give a good account of himself. This sweep netted all the men for which Jones had warrants, with the exception of only a handful. The good citizens of Texas became safer and safer each day that Jones led the Rangers.

Perhaps the most glorious experience for Major Jones and his Texas Rangers was his breaking up of the Sam Bass gang of train and bank robbers. This group intended to rob the bank at Round Rock, Williamson County, on July 19, 1878. Jones managed to get word of the plan, and although he was in Austin, he and several Rangers hurried to Round Rock. They rode into town just when gunfire erupted on the street. This altercation was caused by two deputies attempting to arrest two "strangers" for wearing pistols within the town's limits. The strangers were Bass and Barnes. Major Jones, along with Rangers Richard C. Ware and George Herold, turned out in the street to fight the outlaws. Ware killed Barnes with a shot in the head, and Bass was severely wounded by a bullet from George Herold. (Jones' bullets certainly added to the smoke, noise, and confusion, but apparently his shots went wide of their mark). Frank Jackson managed to get Bass out of town, where his trail was temporarily lost. The next day, a squad under Sergeant Charles L. Nevill found Bass and brought him back to Round Rock, where he died.

Jones as Grand Master of Texas

During the Masonic year 1879, when Brother Jones was Grand Master, the Grand Lodge of Texas was opened in the usual fashion. Brother Jones then addressed the crowd with an overview of the year's activities. He announced that twenty new Masonic lodges had been chartered in Texas, yet he felt that the growth of the Masonic Fraternity was not as it should be. He discussed issues facing Texas Masons that year, most of which had to do with individual lodges and membership rules. Some of the topics were general in nature, such as "what to do if one of the brothers hosts a party at the lodge, with gentlemen and ladies present, and causes or incites dancing to take place" (why, it must be stopped!); and "should betting on horse races be prohibited by Grand Lodge" (this issue was not resolved, but it was determined that betting on horse races should not be considered gambling).



JOHN B. JONES
Grand Master 1879

It will be interesting to many Texas Masons to note that, at that time, the Master of a Texas Lodge must have received the Past Masters degree before assuming the position of leadership, and that there were 30 Masonic districts in Texas. For more reading on this, please visit the Grand Lodge of Texas Library and ask for the Proceedings of Grand Lodge for 1879.

Last Years of Life

Bro. Jones remained single for most of his life, but on Feb. 25, 1879, he was married to Mrs. Annie Henderson Anderson. The 1880 Travis County census reveals Adjutant General of the State Troops Major Jones was forty-five years old; his wife, forty-one. The nine-member family had four servants to care for the household.

This marriage was short, however. On Tuesday, July 19, 1881, Major John B. Jones "departed this life after a long and painful illness." One obituary stated Jones "was distinguished for his gentlemanly, unassuming address, and he possessed to a marked degree all the attributes that ennoble and ornament the life of a true man."

No other figure of the Frontier Battalion ever managed to attain the high respect and near reverence that Major Jones did. He was indeed the right man in the right place. He is buried at Oakwood Cemetery in Austin, Texas.



Grave of Bro. John B. Jones

Written by Dick Brown, Chairman of the Texas History Committee fbrown@grandlodgeoftexas.org - Data compiled from Wikipedia, Handbook of Texas On-Line, Texas Ranger Dispatch newsletter. Special thanks to Bro. Bruce Mercer and The Grand Lodge of Texas Library and Museum, and Bro. Joe Davis, former Texas Ranger and past president of the Former Texas Rangers Association.