

The Tragedy of Rose Hill
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[transcribers note: this article was transcribed from a transcription of the newspaper article. It is unknown how accurate the original transcription was. Some minor changes have been made in spelling and punctuation for this transcription transcribed by Ron Henson]

Rose Hill for all its beautiful name takes its place in Oklahoma history with the shadow of tragedy across it.

Seven miles southeast of the present city of Hugo, beautifully located on the uplands above the Red River bottoms, stood Rose Hill, the home of Col. Robert M. Jones, the largest slave owner and probably the wealthiest Choctaw Indian of his day. This mansion, for it was a mansion, was erected a decade or more before the Civil War. It was a large two story house, with spacious rooms and broad halls. Each of the first story rooms was finished in a variety of wood, maple, walnut, mahogany. Great stone fireplaces opened into nearly every room. A colonial stairway led from the main hall to the second story but there was also a secret stairway, known only to those familiar with the place. Most of the lumber for the mansion was shipped from Jefferson, Texas, and some of it all the way from New Orleans, while the handsome furniture came from the States or from Europe.

The house faced the South and a broad veranda with high white posts added dignity to the approach from this quarter. A walk of marble slabs from the foot of the veranda steps through the lawn toward the military road that passed the mansion on west side on its way to the Red River and Paris. This lawn was full of well kept flower beds, roses and shrubs making the surroundings attractive and justifying the name. A deer park with a high fence adjoined the lawn. Farther to the southwest and beyond the road were the slave quarters. Around the entire mansion [unreadable] of several acres. Colonel Jones planted a hedge of cedars and these now grown into great trees remain one of the few landmarks of the historic place.

The builder of Rose Hill mansion was one of the most notable and remarkable men ever produced by the Choctaw Nation. Little is known of his ancestry except that he was a half-breed Indian, born in Mississippi in 1808. When he was small, a white man probably connected with the early missionaries, became interested in him and saw that he received what education the local mission school could give. When 19 years old he was sent to Scott county Kentucky, where he remained three years and received a certificate.

In addition to the certificate, Jones was given a letter signed by two of the teachers and one trustee of the academy. This letter throws so much light on the character and ability of young Jones that it is worth quoting,

especially in view of the fact that the one trustee who signed it, Richard M. Johnson, just six years later became the Vice president of the United States with President Van Buren. It reads as follows:

In addition to the foregoing certificate we should neither do justice to ourselves nor to Robert M. Jones without stating to the public that our long acquaintance with and particular knowledge of Mr. Jones justify us to the full extent in stating that he is a young man of sterling worth, strictly honest and just in all his dealing with mankind; of a fine mind, well cultivated and improved; entertaining a high and dignified sense of honor; well qualified with a good English education for any ordinary business; and in whom the utmost confidence may be placed, as to integrity and ability on his part to discharge faithfully any duty he would undertake.

Theo. Henderson, Teacher; F.C. M'Calla, Asst. Teacher; Rh. M. Johnson, Asst. Teacher

When young Jones returned to his home, his guardian, who had husbanded the annuity payments due his ward, turned over to him \$1800. Instead of squandering it in a few months, Jones invested the money in merchandise and began a career of successful trading that eventually made him wealthy. Upon coming to the territory in 1832, with the tribal migration, he opened stores in a number of strategic points. Doaksville, Lukfata and Skullyville among them.

He was particularly fortunate in the choice of store managers faithful to his interests and honest in handling his money. As may be expected from what is known of his character, Jones was always eminently fair with these men, a number of whom also rose to affluence. Whenever he made a little money he bought a negro or two and began clearing up and farming Red River bottom land. When sufficient land was cleared to justify it, he built a residence, a store, cabins for the negroes, placed an overseer in charge and thus started a plantation.

By the time of the Civil War he had six such plantation along the Red River from Lake West, in what is now Bryan county, all the way to the Arkansas line. These were known as the Lake West, Boggy, Rose Hill, Root Hog, Shawneetown and Walnut Bayou plantations. At one time he also owned a sugar plantation in Louisiana. Colonel Jones at the height of his prosperity is said to have owned 500 slaves and was probably worth \$1,000,000 or more when the war came. He operated two steamboats on the Red River and carried his own produce to the New Orleans markets as well as supplying his stores with goods. The woods of the Red River section were full of his cattle and for many years the "RJ" brand was one of the best known in this section.

As might be expected, Colonel Jones stood high in the confidence of the Choctaw people and was always prominent in their councils. Possibly the highest honor he received was that of representative from the Choctaw

Nation to the Confederate congress at Richmond, Va. he was a man of personal piety as was frequently attested by the old missionaries of the period. Whenever a missionary preacher came to Rose Hill he assembled the negro slaves and had a sermon preached to them if convenient.

Personally [Colonel Jones](#) was large of stature, rather imposing and dignified in appearance but at the same time very democratic and approachable. His great house was always open to the wayfarer and it is said that nearly every day there would be a number of strangers at his hospitable table where abundant meals were served from imported china and cut glass. If the party included humble full-bloods, as well as white men of some note, the former would be served first and always given every attention.

Colonel Jones was married three times. His first wife was Judith Walker, a sister of the famous Col. Tandy Walker of Civil War fame. The three children of this marriage died in infancy. His second wife was Susan Colbert, a member of the well known Chickasaw family of that name. She was wealthy in her own right but like her husband was quite, democratic, presiding with much grace at Rose Hill, and welcoming rich and poor alike. She dressed in the latest New Orleans styles as befitted a woman of her position and much of the beauty of the Rose Hill mansion and grounds were due to her careful attention and good taste. While Colonel Jones rode horseback from plantation to plantation, a coach and team of coal black horses was kept at Rose Hill for his wife and family should they desire to go to Doaksville or perhaps to Paris, Texas where Colonel Jones also owned a fine home. Sarah Colbert bore Jones two children, a daughter Francis, who married a man named Love, and a son who died in infancy. Robert Love, a son of Frances Jones Love latter inherited the Shawneetown estate and died some years latter at Clarksville, Texas.

After the death of his second wife, in 1860, Colonel Jones married Miss Elizabeth Earle, one of the Cumberland Presbyterian missionary teachers at Armstrong Academy. Of the five children of this marriage, only two lived to maturity, Robert Jr., and Mary, who latter married G.G. Randell. However, the old planter did not survive the war, the loss of his slave property and the despoiling of his Choctaw people and on Feb. 22, 1873 he passed away.

After this event, tragedy began to stalk about Rose Hill. About a year after the death of Colonel Jones his widow married Dr. Samuel Bailey, the plantation physician. He became administrator of the estate and while he was from all reports an able and energetic man [he] was not very well liked by the relatives who believed he was enriching himself at their expense. Latter he and his wife made the Boggy plantation their home though he gave personal attention to several of the farms.

The negro slaves have a superstition that cedar trees bring trouble and death, that if you plant one, sorrow will surely arrive when the trees grows

tall enough for its shadow to cover a grave. However this may be, it will be remembered that the entire Rose Hill estate is surrounded by a cedar hedge. They had by this time become stately trees casting their somber shadows over the sunny hillside. Time ran on until the fall of 1882, when according to Choctaw law young Robert Jones became of age. He and other heirs of Colonel Jones began to demand a prompt settlement of the estate. Bailey paid little attention to them except to tell them that he would make a settlement in due time. Not long after this, Bailey was at the Lake West farm loading cotton to sent to Caddo, then one of the most important towns on the Missouri-Kansas & Texas railroad.

Robert Jones and his nephew, Robert Love rode up before the wagons left and repeated their demand for a settlement, which request was again refused. In the quarrel that followed, the boys shot Bailey to death. his body was taken back to the mouth of Boggy and buried there. Sentiment was so largely in favor of the youths that neither of them suffered any penalty for the deed. However the next year when Robert Jones went down to the Boggy farm on some matter of business, Tom Young, who had been Baileys overseer, attempted to arrest him on the old charge but friends interfered and in a general shooting affray, Young was killed. Jones made his escape but a short time afterward the news came of the death of the unfortunate young man at St. Louis. His body was brought to Paris, Texas for burial though some say it was afterward removed to Rose Hill.

After dissension and tragedy cast their blight over the old estate, members of the Jones connection rarely resided there for any length of time and the place soon fell into decay. It was natural that a house with such associations and history should acquire the reputation of being haunted which made it still more difficult to retain tenants. Stories of ghostly sighs, of doors being opened by unseen hands, of shadowy figures moving up and down the stairways were common and were implicitly believed by the negroes, if not by the white occupants of the house in those days.

An ordinary family could not use much more than half of the room space, most of the negroes who once had swarmed about the estate had moved away and except for an occasional country dance that on some winter evening again brought a crowd into the spacious halls the glory and life once pulsing about Rose Hill was gone forever. It is said that the notorious Belle Starr on one of her trips to Paris, Texas, attended a dance at the old house during this period. Many years latter while Rose Hill was in charge of the parents Will W. B___d of Hugo, an "old timer" came up to the house one day and, as was frequently the case, asked the privilege of looking the place over. Coming into the great front room or parlor, he remarked, "The last time I was in this room, I danced with Belle Starr; she was a mighty bad woman, but sure a good dancer." The curtain fell on Rose Hill in 1915 when the mansion and most of the out buildings burned to the ground. Today only

a crumbling heap of stones mark the spot where it stood. Near the ruins a rent house has been erected for the use of the present tenant of the farm. The estate was allotted by Miss Randall, Grand daughter of Colonel Jones who is living at present in California. Few evidences of the former importance of the place remain. it is now isolated and more than a half mile from even a county road.

Near the well may be seen a giant iron pot, more than six feet in diameter, said to have been used in slavery times for the making of salt from the saline waters of a neighboring creek. And a short distance to the east, surrounded by an iron picket fence, is the little cemetery where lie the bodies of Colonel Jones and many members of his family. Most of them have elaborate tombstones. That of Colonel Jones bears the compass and square of the Masonic Fraternity. Scattered about the grounds as on the site of 'Goldsmith's deserted village" are to be seen domestic vines or trees now strangely out of place in their wild surroundings.

All about the place in stately rows, the great cedars stand like melancholy sentinels. Rose Hill is but a memory.