

Chapter Six -- Horatio Jones

written by Betty Auten, August 1973

One of the men who added a great deal to the development of the earliest history of this area was Horatio Jones. Although others have gained fame as the founders of the town of Waterloo, village of Geneva and other localities in this area, it was Horatio Jones who was the pathfinder and true pioneer.

He was born February 7, 1763, in Chester County, Pennsylvania, and died in Leicester, Wyoming County, NY, in 1836. His life was filled with adventure, the type that many novels and movies are based upon. He was a soldier, Indian captive, farmer, trader, Indian interpreter, husband and father.

Shortly after Jones was born, his family moved to Bedford County, PA and there his father worked as a blacksmith. As a boy, Horatio helped his father and one of his jobs was testing rifles, which his father repaired. He became an expert marksman.

Many soldiers passed by his home on their way to Indian country and when Horatio was 14, he decided to join them. In 1781, he enlisted in a company of riflemen called the Bedford Rangers, as a piper. Shortly after, while they were scouting along the Juanita River in Pennsylvania, the company found itself surrounded by Indians.

The company was defeated and those who weren't killed were captured by the Indians. Horatio made a good effort to escape but a loose string on his moccasin tripped him and he was captured. He and the other prisoners were taken to what is now Nunda in Livingston County.

The Iroquois were experts in the field of torture but they were also people who had great respect for courage and intelligence. Jones demonstrated that he had both. A day or two after they reached their destination, the prisoners were forced to run the gauntlet. The Indians, both men and women, lined up in two rows armed with hatchets, tomahawks and sticks. Prisoners were forced to run through the lines while every effort was made by the captors to kill them. If the prisoner managed to survive, he was allowed to live and the younger ones were often adopted by the tribe. The first time around, Jones was told to stand on the sidelines and watch the proceedings. The women, ready for action, rushed forward to join in the fun. Jones, standing on the edge of a steep hill, waited for the right moment. After several of the women had passed him, he reached out and pushed hard against one of the women. She stumbled against the next in line and the momentum forced many of them to roll down the hill, head over heels. The Indians found this very amusing.

Now it was Jones' turn to run the gauntlet. He was led to the head of the line and shown the distance he would have to go. The signal was given, Jones kept up tight to one of the rows as he ran and they couldn't hit him because there was not room to take aim and swing. He reached the end of the line with barely a scratch and kept right on running into the cabin of one of the Indian women. The Indian woman was very much impressed by this young strong man and let it be known that she wanted to adopt him.

Several of the young Indians tried to show their superiority over this white man, but Horatio came up the victor each time. One of these, Se-Nun-Ge-Wah, liked to wrestle with the new members of the tribe. Jones let him win several times and then took over and brought the young brave down without any trouble. The Indian insisted on a rebut, which was granted. Jones was again the winner which greatly angered the brave. He told Jones he was going to get his hatchet and kill Horatio. When he returned, Jones stood firm. Jones told his Indian brother that he had won fair and if he wanted to kill Jones, here he was. The Indian threw down his hatchet and the two of them remained friends for the remainder of their lives.

The following winter, along with many of the Indians, Jones contracted small pox. Many were taken away to be buried although they were still alive, but helpless. Jones managed to show signs of life when they came to take him and he was spared. He was given the Indian name To-e-da-qua.

He remained a captive until the treaty between the United States and the Six Nations was signed in 1784. He left and began to search for a life for himself. No mention is made of what he did for the next two years but in 1786, he settled for a time along the Seneca Outlet in what is now the Town of Waterloo. He hunted furs and set up a trading post with the Indians in the area. He remained there for about a year and then moved his cabin farther west and located near the site of the present Geneva Chamber of Commerce office.

He was joined by one of his brothers and together the two men planted the first field of wheat ever grown in this area. He continued as a fur trader and sold his first lot of furs to John Jacob Astor. It has been said that when Astor was in the area, he stayed with Jones in his cabin. In later years, Jones returned the visit at Astor's home in New York City.

Horatio found his bride in Schenectady and they were married there by the Rev. Samuel Kirkland. Their first son, William, was born in the cabin along the Seneca Lake, in December 1786. His first cradle was a hollowed-out log such as used by the Indians. Jones wanted his son to have a real cradle but there was no available lumber or nails. He found an abandoned boat in the lake. He took just enough of the wood to make his cradle, which he fastened together with twine. That cradle was used constantly, for the next 70 or 80 years by both pioneers and Indians. Requests for the cradle were asked for, months in advance.

Horatio and his family remained at Kanadesaga until 1789 when he, his family and several other pioneers guided their cattle and other animals to the new home at the present site of the town of Leicester. He is also credited with being the first settler in that area. He settled near what is known as Beard's Creek. Their only neighbors during their first years were Indians. When they left Kanadesaga, they had three children. The final county was seven sons and seven daughters. Two of the sons were killed in the War of 1812.

He was appointed as Indian interpreter by George Washington and served as such, with the Iroquois Indians for 40 years. He was also often called upon to deliver large sums of money to Niagara Falls for the soldiers. Officers knew he could be trusted.

He was favorite interpreter of Red Jacket. At least once, if not more often, Jones was called to sober up Red Jacket when he was scheduled to make a speech. Red Jacket was inclined to imbibe too heavily, it is reported.

Horatio Jones was a man respected by both the white man and the Indian. Today, many of his descendents still live in Wyoming County.