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## JOHN JONES

Whaler, Coloniser, Businessman  
by H. A. GLASSON

To those who have any knowledge of this man, his name smacks of more than these three phases in his life. "Johnny" Jones. It is a name synonymous with adventure. If the truth were known—and only a bare outline is handed down to us—the early decades of his life were crammed with adventure.

It was adventure which called for the utmost resourcefulness in man—and sometimes the worst in him. John Jones was a product of his day and age. In the raw colonial days in the infant settlement of Sydney, there was no room for weaklings. They went to the wall. Jones was not of that breed. Whatever his failings, and no doubt he had many in common with all of us, he early in life realised that if he was to make any headway in a grimly restricted field, he had to rely wholly and solely on his own efforts.

John Jones was not born with a "silver spoon" in his mouth. In the year 1809 he first saw the light. The exact date is not recorded. Some chroniclers have tried to smear his name and memory by asserting he might be the son of convict settlers. There is not a shred of evidence to support such a belief, but even though there were some foundations for it, does that carry any stigma in these enlightened days ? Men were transported in the old days for poaching a trout or a rabbit ; for trying to form unions ; for all manner of trivial things in a land where the wealth of the country, and the land itself, were in the hands of a very small minority, and the rank and file were little better than serfs who doffed their caps to their betters !

It was the grossly unfair and unjust disparity existing between the "haves" and the "have nots" in the latter years of the 18th and early 19th centuries which drove a large percentage of the best types of individuals from the shores of the British Isles, to found prosperous colonies overseas.

John Jones inherited from his forebears an intense individualism and resourcefulness which stood him in good stead throughout the rest of his life. They brought him pre-eminence in his day, and possibly it was this success, achieved from humble beginnings, which rankled with some who lacked his fire and drive.

There are instances recorded where Jones implemented his orders and will with the power of his fists. This, possibly, was a type of persuasion more readily understood by the men with whom he came in contact than soft words would have been.

At a very early age Jones managed to become the possessor of a small boat, and with this he ferried passengers and goods ashore from sailing vessels as they arrived in Sydney Town harbour. Wise beyond his years, he saved his money. He then went to sea on a whaling ship, his pay in chasing the mammals of the deep being greater (given any measure of good hunting) than it would have been had he remained ashore,

So at the age of twenty-one we find Johnny Jones the owner of three whaling ships. At this time shore whaling had become established along the New Zealand coasts and in Cook Strait. Realising the possibilities of operating from shore without the hazards of long deep-sea voyages, we next learn of him as part-owner in the Preservation Inlet whaling station with Edwin Palmer, a station formerly owned by the Sydney firm of Bunn & Co.

In 1835, John Jones bought the "Sydney Packet", an 84-ton vessel for £800 mainly to supply his shore whaling station, but as these stations multiplied rapidly he bought over the ensuing years, the "Micmac", "Magnet" and the "Jessie". Other purchases followed, too.

Jones's first shipment of oil from New Zealand waters—some 45 tuns—arrived in Sydney in July, 1836. At that time he had 39 men employed at his fishery, as he termed it. An extract

from the "Sydney Monitor" of that year is worth recording. Commenting on Jones and his activities it stated that "Mr. Jones has from comparatively small means (having a few years since plied as a waterman on the wharf) realised from persevering industry a very handsome competence ; he is we believe, a native of the Colony, and as such is a credit to his countrymen."

Shore whaling, however, was not all "beer and skittles." In 1837 when Jones was interested in the Moeraki station the "Sydney Packet" while lying in the roadstead there, dragged her anchors in a gale, drifted ashore, and became a total wreck. Undaunted, Jones bought the "Genii" at a cost of £2,000 and sent her down to Preservation Inlet.

The following year brings us into more intimate touch with the whaling activities of Johnny Jones, for it was in 1838 that he became the owner of his most noteworthy fishery station—Waikouaiti. It was at this period, too, it is believed that he first introduced cattle to these shores, principally for breeding purposes and to provide meat for his shore-based crews.

At this period a tragic occurrence took place at Preservation Inlet. A lad in his teens, held responsible for the loss of a boat which broke away from its moorings, was "rope-ended" by Palmer. It was a brutal beating, and the lad, after grievous suffering, died. Palmer was indicted in Sydney on a charge of manslaughter, but witnesses mysteriously disappeared, among whom was John Jones, and Palmer was acquitted. Had the full story been told Edwin Palmer would have been convicted. Jones at this time was the sole owner of the fishery at Preservation, having bought out Palmer for £2,000.

Wright and Long were the original owners of the Waikouaiti station, but their Sydney business failed and Jones took over the New Zealand station at public auction, lock, stock and barrel for £225. It was a fortunate purchase, although Jones had his troubles.

There were innumerable foreign whaling vessels operating in the southern waters. Oil shipped from here to England had been subject to a discriminating duty. To avoid this, it was sent to Sydney, and then transhipped as Australian oil; but later a Customs Bill altered this practice.

New Zealand then not being a British Colony, Jones feared his oil would be treated as foreign. In evidence before an investigating committee he stated at the time that he had seven shore whaling establishments, employing 200 men, His outlay for that year had been £15,000 but if his oil was to be treated as foreign he would be obliged to close his many fisheries. He managed, however, to overcome his difficulties, and his stations for a few years flourished exceedingly. It is estimated that in his best season he shipped over 1,800 tons of oil.

Jones's whaling station at Waikouaiti was on the river mouth at the spot we today call Karitane. To this point the boats towed in their whales where they were stripped of their flesh and the try pots rendered out the oil.

Perhaps the best description of that period is provided by Dr. (later Sir David) Munro, who travelled south with Frederick Tuckett on his exploratory tour of investigation to select a site for the Scottish Free Church Settlement.

"There is a large shed," said Dr. Munro, "where the oil is tried out, greasy in the extreme, and smelling like a thousand filthy lamps. The whole beach was strewn with gigantic fragments of the bones of whales, and flocks of gulls, cormorants and other sea birds, and savage looking pigs prowled about to pick up the refuse."

The men's huts, rickety things, were stuck about in all directions, not one with a garden, but there were plenty of fowls, pigs and dogs. Not the best noticeable, too were the number of dirty native women and half caste children.

Not a very prepossessing picture, one can well imagine. Nor can it be wondered at that under these conditions and circumstances that Jones, the master, brooked no flouting of his orders or instructions. Still a young man, vigorous, forthright and intolerant of delay he used the persuasive powers of his fists in implementing his orders.

It has been said that Jones did his best to, persuade Tuckett to recommend Waikouaiti as the desirable site of the proposed Church settlement. It has the two headlands to promote into a desirable harbour, a good climate, and plenty of good undulating agricultural land as a background. Small wonder, though, seeing it under the disgusting conditions of the early whaling station that Tuckett turned the proposal down, and sought further afield.

Johnny Jones, however, did more than establish a whaling station at Waikouaiti. Here the South Island was first properly colonised.

In March, 1840, Johnny Jones brought over to Waikouaiti in the "Magnet" some 12 married couples and others, a total of 38, including children. Among these were the Careys, Kennards, Trotter and others, names well-known in Otago today. These were the people who first developed the agricultural lands of Cherry Farm and adjacent areas.

Wheat and other crops were grown, sheep and cattle imported, and the food produced in this region during the early days of the Free Church settlement proved a veritable Godsend.

Jones, too, in 1840 brought out the Rev. James Watkin, who remained four years in the district, teaching the natives and their children, and bringing a measure of order and decency into their lives. It has been said that Jones complained to Mr. Watkin that since his arrival his men would not man the boats and go after whales on a Sunday This, apparently is contrary to fact. There is a letter extract which Watkin wrote to the Rev. J. Entwistle, dated August 23, 1850, wherein he stated that "the whalers go out in quest of whales on Sunday as well as on other days, though it is opposed by Mr. Jones...."

The cost of establishing the mission fell entirely on Jones himself. This included the fares of the missionary and his family from Sydney, and the erection of a house and mission at the bay. The Rev. Watkin frequently referred to Jones's generosity. "He is a rich man," once wrote Watkin, "and I think as benevolent as rich. I feel a strong affection for the man ...His kindness I can scarcely overpraise."

That Jones was generous, as well as headstrong, is borne out by his later donations and bequests to churches of all denominations, both in Waikouaiti and Dunedin.

With the decline in whaling, Jones moved from his home at Matanaka, with its picturesque outlook over beach, bay and hills, to Dunedin, where his business activities were steadily mounting.

When the "John Wickliffe" arrived at Dunedin in 1848, Jones set up a store at the corner of Jetty and Bond Streets. Jones's schooners, too, provided more or less the only means of contact with the outside world, and of supply of provisions from Sydney. Small wonder then, that he was something of an autocrat, but a very mild one at that.

Though Jones was successful in establishing a prosperous business, his trading monopoly did not last for many years. Another man, who proved to be a trading giant in the south in later years in the person of James Macandrew, came on the scene in 1851. He entered immediately into competition with Jones.

Macandrew, in the absence of a trading bank, conceived the idea of issuing short-term promissory notes for small amounts, negotiable at his store. Jones suffered the chagrin of seeing a large measure of his business going to his rival.

How he endeavoured to break the bank of his rival is well known. Collecting over a period all the paper currency of Macandrew he could find, he suddenly presented himself at the latter's office.

Macandrew, apparently, had been wide awake to what was going on and had not been idle. While Jones was collecting Macandrew's promissory notes, the latter had been collecting gold coins, and when Jones presented himself with his bundles of papers, Macandrew met them all. How near he came to being "skinned" out, or how near Jones came to breaking the bank was never told.

To offset the paper currency of his rival, Jones issued his own £1 notes, elaborate indeed, one of the originals of which may be seen in the Early Settlers' Museum in Dunedin. It is said that at one time he had as much as £20,000 worth of his notes in circulation.

In 1861, when the Bank of New Zealand opened in Dunedin, John Jones, with W. H. Reynolds, were appointed as consulting directors. In the year 1863, when the Dunedin Savings Bank was instituted, Jones was elected one of the original twenty trustees of that institution.

Dr. Hocken, who knew Jones intimately, had this to say of him : "From his wealth, sagacity and marked qualities, he was one of the most important personages in Dunedin. He could make a corner in grain, determine plenty or scarcity, and disarrange the small money market. A law unto himself, and to other people, he was always ready in time of need to support his will by force of fist. Yet he was generous and every ready to help any scheme to advance the settlement."

Always ready to take a gamble, Jones equipped and financed a party to the goldfields in the early 1860's. Whether this venture paid off, history does not tell us.

From earliest times, John Jones had been buying land from the various Maori chiefs in the Otago District. He had extensive holdings along the coast from Waitati to Palmerston, and stretching far inland. He also had land in the Shag Valley. At a later stage, in partnership with William Charles Wentworth, of Sydney, he purported to purchase all the land in the South Island then not taken up. Indeed, he had but a hazy idea of what his holdings were, but he claimed they were considerably more than the 2,500 acres which were granted him by the Lands Commission. For over 20 years he endeavoured to get satisfaction from successive Governments.

Jones's town residence was Fernhill. Originally a wooden structure, it was later rebuilt in stone. The building still stands.

Mrs. John Jones died in September, 1864. Her loss was a grievous blow, to Jones. Shortly after this he was offered a seat in the Legislative Council, but refused it.

He died on March 16, 1869, a trifle over 92 years ago. In his passing there was removed from the scene one of the most colourful figures of the raw colonial days of New Zealand. In his passing there was removed from the scene one of the most colourful figures of the raw colonial days of New Zealand.

This article is of necessity but a brief sketch of the man and his time, but for a fuller understanding of his work (his shipping activities laid the foundation of the present Union Steam Ship Co.) the reader should turn to "John Jones of Otago" by Alfred Eccles and A. H. Reed. John Jones has two grandsons in Dunedin, and there are also several descendants in Australia