

“Mrs. Tauy Jones Recalled 1856 Saga’
From Franklin’s Past...”

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Perhaps no event in Franklin County history has been as dramatic as that which took place early in the morning of Aug. 30, 1856.

In the dark of night, torch-carrying pro-slavery men from Missouri ransacked and burned the original Tauy Jones house while in search of the infamous John Brown.

The most descriptive account of that pre-Civil War drama was given by one of the few eyewitnesses, Mrs. Tauy Jones.

Born in Maine in 1809, Jane Kelley Jones came to Kansas as a young woman to serve as a missionary to the Indians. While teaching at the Pottawatomie Baptist Mission, where the town of Lane is today, she married John T. Jones, a widower of Chippewa descent.

Five years later, in 1850, they built a large two-story double log house where the Ft. Leavenworth-Ft. Scott military road forded Ottawa Creek. The new house served as the only hotel on that major road, and joined an already existing trading post that Jones operated.

It was this home, located four miles northeast of Ottawa, which was looted and burned by “Missouri Ruffians” in 1856. The present Tauy Jones house was built on the ashes of the original one.

Forty years later, Mrs. Jones was still able to tell her story of that night with graphic intensity to a Kansas City Star reporter. He interviewed her at the brick cottage at 823 S. Cedar in Ottawa where she had lived several years, and found her to be “cheerful and witty.” With “handsome white hair coquettishly covered by a black lace mantilla,” she was the very personification “of New England primness and neatness.”

Mrs. Jones related how late that night she and her husband were aroused by the yells of men. Sensing at once that they were Missourians after her anti-slavery husband, she urged him to flee. With bullets whizzing around him, Jones escaped in a dark cornfield, clad only in his nightshirt.

The “ruffians,” about 40 in all, battered down the door and began searching the house, “uttering the vilest oaths,” according to Mrs. Jones. They pumped buckshot in the Jones’ bed, and went about the house firing into dark corners and under beds.

An ill neighbor man, whom the Joneses had been nursing, was dragged from bed and outside the house where they slit his throat and rolled him down the bank into Ottawa Creek.

The men demanded to know where John Brown was hiding, certain that he was in the house, but Mrs. Jones simply told them to search it. After another look, they called her downstairs.

“I came down the stairs with two bags of money, one of gold under my right arm, and one of silver under my left arm,” both partly hidden by her shawl.

“The hall was very wide and the depth of the house. It was full of men. They had set the house afire and the only light came from the slow-burning floor of walnut.”

“They stood in two rows down either side of the hall, with their old hat brims flapped down in their faces and the light glittering on their weapons. They let me pass almost through when they began to close in on me. When I realized what they were up to, I turned and threw the bags of money on the floor behind me. They rushed upon them and fought over them like hungry wolves over a bone.”

The men then looted the house, carrying off furniture, silk dresses, chests of linens, and throwing other articles out of the house.

Tearfully, Mrs. Jones recalled, "I sat on a stump in the yard and watched them and wondered where my husband was and prayed for him."

"The house was blazing and crackling and the flames went high in the air. Suddenly from across the creek came the hoof beats of horses."

Mrs. Jones described how the Missourians quickly jumped into their wagons and whipped their horses into a mad run and were soon out of sight.

The "rescuers" turned out to simply be the Joneses' horses, attracted by the light of the blazing house.

"How I blessed and praised those eager, curious horses," she recalled.

When dawn finally arrived, Mrs. Jones was still seated on the stump, dazed by the destruction of her home. Her husband, however, was safe and soon arrived at the head of a band of rescuers. Even more miraculous, the sick neighbor survived. He had managed to crawl up the creek bank, but had passed out due to the loss of blood.

Mrs. Jones added an interesting footnote to her story by commenting how narrowly John Brown escaped death that night, "For he always stopped at our house when in the neighborhood and we had been expecting him."

Jane Kelley Jones died in her native state of Maine in 1901 at the age of 92, never forgetting the vivid scenes of that frightful night.