



Sabretache

THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF
THE CALGARY MILITARY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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February Extra # 1 2023

Canada's Black Gunsmith

Charles Jones arrived in North Carolina on a slave ship. A hard worker, he passed on his strong work ethic to his son, Allan. Their master was a blacksmith and gunsmith who taught his trade to his slaves. Allan became a skilled gunsmith, who eventually married another slave. They had several children.

Allen worked hard all day for his master, and then worked equally hard at night at his forge in order to make enough money to buy his family's freedom. The agreed-upon price was \$2,000, a vast sum for a slave to acquire. When he did finally acquire the money and attempted to pay for his families freedom, he was told that the price was now \$3000. He did finally raise it and bought his families freedom.

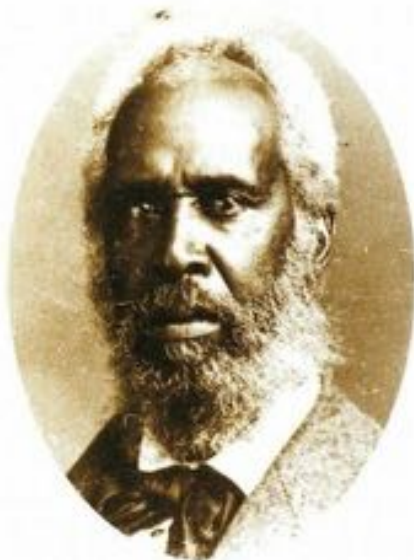
The family lived as free blacks in Raleigh, N.C. area and Allen a strong advocate for education, helped build a school. After mob violence and the burning of a school that he had helped build, the family moved to the free state of Ohio. In Oberlin, Ohio he helped build a community church and sent his sons to Oberlin College.

TO BE SOLD on board the
Ship *Bance-Island*, on tuesday the 6th
of May next, at *Ashley-Ferry*; a choice
cargo of about 250 fine healthy
NEGROES,
just arrived from the
Windward & Rice Coast.
—The utmost care has
already been taken, and
shall be continued, to keep them free from
the least danger of being infected with the
SMALL-POX, no boat having been on
board, and all other communication with
people from *Charles-Town* prevented.
Aubin, Laurens, & Appleby.
N. B. Full one Half of the above Negroes have had the
SMALL-POX in their own Country.

Oberlin College was one of the first such institutions to accept black students. Allan Jones's eldest son, **James Monroe Jones** was a remarkable student. In 1849 James graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree, the fourth African America to achieve this honour. As well as speaking several languages, he also became a very accomplished gunsmith and engraver, following in his fathers footsteps.

After graduating in 1849, he moved to Chatham, Canada West (Upper Canada) now Chatham Ontario where he married Emily Francis of Howard County in 1852. He pursued a career as a gunsmith. Chatham had a burgeoning black population By 1860 as a significant Underground Railway terminal. The region's black population approached 33 percent.

Establishing a gunsmithing business, James became known as Gunsmith Jones, proving his skill in making rifles and pocket-sized derringers. In those times, settlers depended on their guns for hunting food and protection against attackers, both animal and human.



James Monroe Jones

SECRET MEETING'S IN CHATHAM

For some former Black slaves, Canada was considered the “promised land” and , **Chatham, Ontario**, in particular, seen as a “Black Mecca.” It is estimated that the population of Chatham in the 1850's was over 30% black. The little town of Chatham, Ontario was the terminus of a very important railroad – one without tracks or engines. The Underground Railroad brought escaping slaves to Canada, and many found refuge in Chatham.

John Brown was a radical American abolitionist. In 1850 he lead the Bloody Kansas conflict which was a prolonged series of guerrilla engagements to determine whether Kansas, upon gaining statehood, would prohibit slavery. However, John Brown's abolitionist activity expanded beyond the borders of the United States.

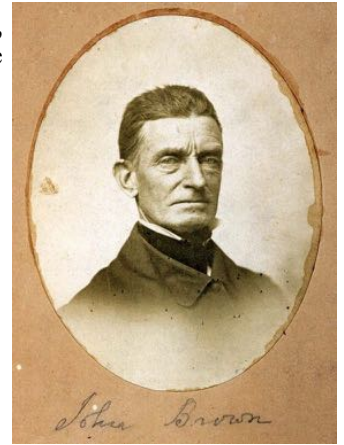
On May 8th, 1858, Brown held a secret meeting in Chatham (Provisional Constitutional Convention) to discuss his plans to establish a revolutionary nation of freed slaves in the Appalachian Mountains, all of whom would have complete freedom and equality. Brown unveiled a provisional constitution for this republic, which he had written three months earlier. Brown's constitution comprised articles outlining the governance of this proposed nation. At the convention, Brown also shared his plan to raid the United States' federal armoury in Harpers Ferry, Virginia. Brown wanted to steal guns to arm a revolt against the South, thereby destroying the institution of slavery and establishing his new nation.

Two goals of Brown's tour through the Northern states and Canada were recruiting free Black men to serve as soldiers in his raid and raising funds. Brown's plan was shrouded in secrecy since it was highly treasonous. Attendees at his Chatham meeting all swore an oath not to share any information.

One attendee of the meeting in Chatham was **James Monroe Jones**, a local businessman and expert gunsmith. Jones signed Brown's provisional constitution but, like the vast majority of signatories, did not join Brown on his mission to Virginia over fear of leaving his life in Canada and confronting the United States military. Jones did loan Brown \$75 and Brown surrendered his Burnside Marine Carbine rifle as collateral. A used gun that was probably worth \$30. As an expert gunsmith, James Monroe Jones would have understood the gun's value. This could easily be considered a

donation by Gunsmith Jones to aid Brown's political activities

Surprisingly few people joined Brown on his raid. On October 16, 1859, when Brown seized the federal armoury, his party consisted of only twenty-two men, of whom only five were Black. Brown's failure to recruit more men suggests that many regarded Brown's raid as a suicide mission. Several other members of the party, including John Brown himself, were tried and hanged following the unsuccessful raid of Harpers Ferry. As a result, John Brown's loan was never repaid, and his gun never retrieved from Jones.



The Gift... A pair of pistols for the Prince

In 1860, Queen Victoria sent her eighteen-year-old son, Albert Edward, Prince of Wales, on a goodwill mission to Canada and the United States. This was considered the first Royal Tour. The young heir-apparent (later King Edward VII) had not yet gained his reputation as a fashion setter and rake, but he nevertheless attracted enormous crowds both in Canada, where it was the first royal visit, and in the United States. Civic leaders hosted the visitor in princely style, decorating their towns with triumphal arches and organizing royal entries, public processions, openings, and grand balls.

In September of 1860, the Prince's entourage was persuaded to divert his first extensive official Canadian tour to Chatham, Ontario, in order to accept a finely crafted pair of derringer pistols made by a local gunsmith.

The prince arrived on schedule in his royal coach at the Chatham rail station where he unexpectedly found himself standing and waiting for ten minutes while local officials earnestly huddled to solve a last-minute difficulty.

The local newspaper, the *Chatham Tri-weekly Planet* reported the problem. Apparently, a prominent citizen named Mr. McKellar had been informed, much too late, that a Black businessman and manufacturer named James Monroe “Gunsmith” Jones had made the gift of derringer pistols.

Confronted with this dilemma, the local officials had precious little time to find a way out of their predicament. It was said that the derringers had been made by contaminated hands and as such could not be presented to a member of the Royal Family.



To continue in the words of the article, "All this seems most unaccountably strange." But why did this happen? "The fact that the pistols were made by Mr. Jones, a coloured man, is also said to have had something to do with preventing Mr. McKellar making the presentation." The prince and his train were compelled to leave without the presentation of the pistols.

"Gunsmith" Jones had won a medal at the California State Agricultural Society for his pistols in 1859, and the same guns won first prize at the Grand Provincial Exhibition in Montreal, so this gift would have been deemed worthy of a prince.

In 2018 , this derringer was offered and sold by COWEN'S AUCTION in Cincinnati Ohio



Their description

Engraved Percussion Derringer By African-American Gunsmith J.M. Jones

.38 caliber, 3" wedge retained, tapered octagonal barrel with gold bands at breech, no S/N. 6.5" in overall length.

Browned barrel, case hardened breech, lock and hammer, German silver mounts, platinum blow out in bolster, checkered walnut stock. Backs action lock engraved with delicate, tight foliate scrolls, breech and trigger guard engraved *en suite*. Top of barrel marked *J.M. JONES*. Gold shield-shaped wrist escutcheon, gold front sight blade. Although the quality of the fit, finish and engraving suggest the work of a top London gun maker of the mid-19th century, the gun was in fact made in North America.

James Monroe Jones was one of the very few African-American gunsmiths working in 19th America. Born as a slave in North Carolina, Jones' father eventually purchased freedom for himself and his family and moved them to the free state of Ohio. Jones eventually graduated from Oberlin University in Ohio, and worked as a gunmaker in London, OH and later in Chatam, Ontario (Canada). He was renowned as the only African-American gunmaker in Canada during the period and even produced a pair of extraordinary gilt derringer pistols for the Prince of Wales (later King Edward the VII). This is a really stunning small sized derringer type pistol in wonderful condition, a real gem, produced by one of finest gunsmiths of the era, who had started his life as a slave.

Condition: Very fine. Retains most of the striped brown finish, all markings and engraving remain crisp. Lock with traces of case color, hammer with more. Some minor scattered surface oxidation is present on the barrel. **Mechanically functional**, good bore with strong rifling and some scattered areas of light to moderate pitting. **Stock** with light handling marks, retaining much of the varnish.

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Derringer offered at auction from Gowan's Auctions in Cincinnati, Ohio



Estimate: \$5000—\$8,000.... Price realized Including Buyer's Premium \$11,163

Last year the Millar and Millar Auction House in New Hamburg, Ontario, sold a rifle made by James Monroe Jones. This is their description.



DESCRIPTION; Canadian. Circa 1857-1892. Jones was Ontario's only black gunmaker. Barrel stamped, "J. M. Jones Chatham CW Cast Steel". 30 1/2", .40 calibre barrel. Barrel shows minimal wear. Steel butt plate and engraved steel trigger guard. Walnut stock shows contact marks, light scratches. Lock functions properly. Hole for tang sight. Don and Joyce Blyth collection.



JAMES JONES, CHATHAM, C.W. RIFLE Estimate: \$3000 to \$4000 Sold \$2500

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The SOCIETY

Was a non-profit registered society which fostered the study of the military and the police, and the heritage of Canada, the British Empire, and the world as well as the preservation of military artifacts and records.

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