

HISTORICAL NOTES

JOHN PETERS UNVEILS PLAQUE COMMEMORATING AUGUSTUS JONES

Participants in the ceremony at the Augustus Jones plaque were, left to right: Mrs. Howard Disber, President, Brant Historical Society; Mrs. J.R. Futcher of the Archaeological and Historic Sites Board; Mr. G.T. Gordon, M.P.P. (Brantford); the Honourable James N. Allan, Provincial Treasurer and Minister of the Department of Economics and Federal and Provincial Relations; Mr. Kenneth Hagerman, Warden of Brant County; Mr. J.T. Peters, Member of Council, Association of Ontario Land Surveyors; Mr. J.E. Brown, Q.C., Vice-President of the Brant County Historical Society; His Worship Mayor R.B. Beckett of Brantford; and the Reverend Canon W.J. Zimmerman.

On Saturday, September 30, 1961, two historical plaques were unveiled in Brantford commemorating respectively, the well-known pioneer land surveyor, Augustus Jones, and his son Peter, noted for his outstanding missionary work among the Indians of this province. The ceremonies commenced at 3:00 p.m., on the grounds of the County Court House on Wellington Street, and following the unveiling of the Augustus Jones plaque there, the participants moved to "Echo Villa" on Colborne Street East, where the Rev. Peter Jones plaque is situated.

These plaques form part of a series being erected throughout the province by the Department of Travel and Publicity, acting on the advice of the Archaeological and Historic Sites Board of Ontario. Saturday's ceremonies were arranged and sponsored by the Brant County Historical Society.

His Worship Mayor R. B. Beckett of Brantford acted as programme chairman at the Augustus Jones site. The speakers there included: the Honourable James N. Allan, Ontario's Provincial Treasurer and Minister of Economics and Federal-Provincial Relations; Mrs. J. R. Futcher of the Archaeological and Historic Sites Board; Mr. George T. Gordon, M.P.P. (Brantford); Mr. Kenneth Hagerman, Warden of Brant County; and Mr. James E. Brown, Q.C., Vice-President of the Brant County Historical Society. The plaque was unveiled by Mr. John T. Peters, Member of Council, Association of Ontario Land Surveyors, and dedicated by Canon W. J. Zimmerman, Chaplain of St. Paul's, Her Majesty's Chapel of the Mohawks.

Though Augustus Jones was one of Upper Canada's earliest, best-known and most active surveyors, his personal history is surprisingly obscure. He was born in the United States about 1763, and evidently learned the surveyor's trade in New York.

As Loyalists, the Jones family found it necessary to emigrate to Canada, though not until after the end of the Revolutionary War. Augustus himself arrived in Niagara about 1786, and sought employment from Major Campbell, the military commandant there. As it happened, the authorities were then anticipating a heavy influx of settlers into the province, in response to the offer of free land grants. Thus it was that Jones was engaged, at first in a minor capacity, by Philip Frey, Deputy Surveyor for the district of Nassau.

Jones began his work in the summer of 1787, and for the succeeding two years was engaged primarily in surveying townships along the south shore of Lake Ontario and up the Niagara River. In January, 1788, he was appointed assistant to Frey, and in November of the following year became acting Deputy Surveyor when Frey left the area. Jones was formally appointed a Deputy Provincial Surveyor in February, 1791, at a salary of 7/6 per day.

He continued to survey the Niagara Peninsula, and also worked on the Indian lands along the Grand River. In 1791-92 he laid out a town plot for Lenox (later called Newark or Niagara). His activities during 1793 included: an extensive survey of the La Tranche (Thames) River; surveying and opening up Dundas Street (the Governor's Road) from Burlington Bay to the Thames; and laying out several townships in what became Wentworth County.

Through 1794 Jones was similarly engaged in the western part of the province. The following year he undertook the survey of townships in the Home District around York. He then delineated a tract of land at Burlington which Joseph Brant wished to obtain from the Mississauga Indians. It may have been at this time that Jones met Tuhbenahneequay, the Mississauga girl who became his wife; for her father, Wabanoseh, was one of the chiefs who signed the document whereby that tract was surrendered in 1797 to the Crown.

During his earlier years in this province, Jones' home had been in Saltfleet Township near the mouth of Stoney Creek. There he became a neighbour and friend of Joseph Brant and played host, on occasion, to Lieutenant-Governor Simcoe and his wife. In 1797 Jones acquired land on the Grand River from Brant under a long-term lease, although he does not appear to have built or settled on it before 1817. This estate near the Grand River at Cold Springs was largely within the present township of Brantford.

Among the highlights of Jones' later activities were a survey of Yonge Street from Lake Ontario to Holland Landing, at which he was employed intermittently from 1795 to 1797; a survey of the town of York in 1798; and assistance rendered from Count de Puisaye in selecting and laying out his settlement in Markham Township, 1798-99.

From 1787 to 1799 no person in Upper Canada surveyed and subdivided as large and important an area of land as Jones. However, he appears to have done little further work for the provincial government after 1799. The reason is unknown, but he may have decided to confine his activities to private surveys and the development of his own extensive holdings.

Augustus Jones died at Cold Springs on November 16, 1836, and was buried there. After the death of his son, the Rev. Peter Jones, twenty years later, his body was removed to Greenwood Cemetery in Brantford, and re-interred beside that of the son.

Unlike many white men, Augustus Jones was trusted by and on friendly terms with the Indians, particularly those living along the Grand River. As one of the early pathfinders of the largely unsettled province, he endured exceptional hardships with fortitude. To the historian interested in the early settlement of Upper Canada, Jones' extensive diaries, field notes, reports and correspondence stored in our Archives, provide vital sources of valuable information.