

## The Story of Blackhorse Jones

Poor health and a broken heart led one of Kings County's most colorful pioneers to our area. Kinzy Whitten "Blackhorse" Jones came to California in 1865 and to our Westside in 1871, where he homesteaded on Garzas creek, five miles west of Avenal.

A tragic accident had robbed him of his one-and-only true love, and he chose to seek a secluded spot away from family, friends and society.

Taking a break from running a threshing machine, he enjoyed a drink of water which his sweetheart had brought for him. As she turned to leave, her skirts were caught in the tumbling rod of the machine and she was crushed to death before his eyes.

Once he came to the Garzas Creek area, he gave up his former ventures in

teaming and in the sheep business, and turned his attentions to the



Shortly before his 1909 death, K.W. "Blackhorse" Jones posed with the oar to his sandstone "Ship of Life." The child is his grandnephew, Randolph Rhoads of Lemoore.

breeding of fine black horses, which were sought by mortuaries and other discerning buyers.

This well-respected man was known as The Sage of Garzas Creek" and, though

considered to be eccentric, was apparently liked by all who knew him. He was described in his Lemoore Republican obituary as "a peculiar genius with a colossal mind." Much of his spare time was spent with his various inventions for which he was noted. He left behind rapid-fire guns, plows, harvesters

and other farm equipment which he had adapted and improved.

His interest in animal

husbandry included the breeding and training of a variety of animals - sometimes for very unusual uses. The most famous of these animals

was a giant ox, known as "Big Dick." This animal was born an ordinary range calf, but, at the age of three months, was almost as large as his mother! Seeing possibilities here, Jones removed him to the corral and began to hand feed him. Dick grew to more than forty-two hundred pounds!

Blackhorse claimed, "The more I fed him the more he grew and the more he grew the more I fed him! That is all there was to it." As docile as a gentle horse, Dick was trained to pull an immense cart.

His owner decided to exhibit Dick at the 1893 Midwinter Fair in San Francisco. The trip proved too much for Dick, however, and he died. "Blackhorse" had the beast preserved and mounted and the carcass was exhibited at the Sutro Baths Museum in San Francisco for many years.

"Blackhorse" had a life-sized picture of Dick painted on one of the walls of his large adobe home and proudly showed his former pet off to his visitors, explaining that, yes indeed, Dick *had* been as large as the painting.

Jones is probably best known for his crumbling burial site, which he labored for a third of a century. The theme of the plot is "From the Cradle to the Grave." Going into the hills near his home, he quarried seashell-filled sandstone which he fashioned into a vault to hold his coffin. He also carved a stone cradle and a small rowboat complete with oars. These represented his belief in the life beyond earth. He portrayed his lifeboat anchored to solid rock after crossing the river of

life. The site is decorated with petrified wood.

From the butt of a cottonwood tree which he planted and watched grow for nearly forty years he formed his own coffin, which was placed in the vault. The casket, except for the lid, was carved from a single piece of wood and used no nails. Even the screws which secured the lid were carved from wood. Only the handles on the sides of the casket were made from metal. One oft-told story about this unforgettable character was that a gentleman once visited to select a fine piece of horseflesh and was asked by the host, "Would you like to see me get into my casket and see how I will look when I am dead?"

"Hell no, the prospective buyer reportedly said. "I did not come here to see a dead man; I came here to buy a horse."

Jones' creative means of delivering the components of his burial plot must have been a sight to behold. In fact, it was described by Frank Latta, in his "Black Gold in the San Joaquin" as the "strangest contraption ever to travel the San Joaquin plains."

As his 50-mile trips to the burial site required several days, Jones outfitted a rig which would provide for all his basic needs. Jersey cows, which were turned loose at night to graze, were trained to pull the large converted spring wagon. Chicken coops, placed under the running gears, were outfitted with canvas chutes to gently

deliver the eggs to padded boxes so that they would not be broken. The chickens, also, were released to forage at each stop. Thus, were his needs for meat, milk, eggs, butter and cream met, but that's not all. He also carried boxes of soil and cans of water so that he could raise his own vegetables while on his trips.

At the time he came to California, he suffered from consumption and had been given a year to live. However, he lived a long and rich life and died in October of 1909 at the age of 75, a ripe old age for that time. Jones died as he led a horse across Garzas Creek. He was placed in his hand-hewn casket which was fitted into the massive vault and then covered with its 1800-pound lid.

To gaze at the site, one would think him to be surrounded by loving family members. Apparent graves are marked "Mother," "Father," and "Brother." However, it appears his parents were buried in Missouri, and he never had a brother.

Sadly, sandstone is not the most permanent of stones, and the plot has deteriorated greatly. The chain attaching the boat to the Rock of Ages has disappeared and the oarlocks have crumbled. The single oar once contained in the boat has, likewise, vanished