

The Clingman-Jones Family Story

The eleven children of Dr. Alfred Jones and Jane Poindexter Clingman were bonded by family love and strong character forged by their pioneer survival experiences and instilled with a passion for knowledge by their parents.

Malinda Ann Cubage
Fannie Arvanza “Fannie” Highsmith
Mary Ladussa Diffie
Granville Whittington Jones
Isaac Jarratt Jones
Lee Julia Chandler

Alfred Willis Arthur Jones
Martha Ida Jane “Mattie” Chandler
Clauselle Lanier “Claude” Jones
Minnie Grace Palmer
Guilford Lavender Jones

Dr. and Mrs. Jones placed a high value on educating the young to enable them to make the most of whatever opportunities life might offer. Dr. Jones, an Arkansas practicing country physician, first in Mt. Ida and later in Caddo Gap, was raised by a family of physicians. His wife (Jane Poindexter Clingman)’s father was also a physician and her ancestral line embraced education and public service. As a result, they encouraged their children and gave them the support to become as educated as possible. They urged their children to read from their home library, attend school to the highest level possible, and share their knowledge. In fact, Malinda was the first free school teacher at Caddo Gap – and eight of her siblings were also her students! As an example of this unique support, early on Fannie, Mary, and Granville attended the University of Arkansas, in spite of it requiring several days of travel by wagon. Isaac also graduated from the University’s medical school and later joined the faculty there.

A solid foundation of family love, faith, and education, molded in the rugged pioneer period, resulted in the siblings being able to weather the hardships of the times, to live full and successful lives dedicated to their family, and contributing positively manner to society. They became teachers, a professor, a physician, a Chautauqua scholar and lecturer, a state legislator, religious leaders, a historian and genealogist, a business entrepreneur, as well as bringing a lawyer, farmers, and retail merchants into the family through marriage. In addition, they definitely had the right genes – their lives spanned from the pioneer days of the mid 1850s to the late 1960s. Starting in the true pioneer period, this span encompassed the Civil War, Reconstruction, World War I, The Great Depression, World War II, and the Korean War.

Sibling rivalry was virtually unknown to the eleven brothers and sisters. From all accounts, they were said to have had such a respect and love for one another that their unity and family relationship was true harmony. They maintained communication largely through “round robin” letters that they circulated throughout the family, each adding their own news before passing it along to the next. Many years after they had pursued their individual diverse life paths, their great desire to reconnect resulted in the first family reunion at Malinda and Jim Cubage’s farm on Caney Creek near Amity, Arkansas in August, 1921.

Given the condition of the roads in rural Arkansas in 1921, attending the first reunion was a transportation challenge, as well as a logistical one, but even so, 56 relatives attended. States represented at that reunion were Arkansas, Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and California. Malinda recalled that people were sleeping everywhere, and a pallet on the floor was highly sought after. The youngest sibling was 44, the eldest 67. The reunion lasted 10 days, and was such a remarkable event that it was reported in statewide newspapers. Family members visited, renewed their family ties, enjoyed the mountains, visited the family homesite in Caddo Gap, and made the commitment to establish a reunion tradition.

The second reunion was held two years later at the Caddo Gap schoolhouse. At this gathering, the family decided to make the reunion an annual event, to acquire property for this purpose, and to set aside the property as a family retreat. The property was to be held in trust by the family, accessible to all, but owned by no one individual. The family formed an association, elected officers, and formed committees. Soon thereafter, the family acquired 200 acres of a narrow valley, with a beautiful stream and natural springs, and named it “Jones Valley.”

Due to the energy and commitment of the family members, Jones Valley was soon populated with vacation cabins. The family built a dam, along with a family dining hall and a tabernacle for religious services, and later a family cemetery. Reunions flourished, with the meals prepared by the family women being a focal point. Christian educational retreats, many times held in the week after the reunion, were also a major activity in the Valley. In fact, special cabins were built to house retreat attendees. With three of the founding family members being active in the ministry, Christianity was a strong component of early Jones Valley life.

The combination of the reunions, family members living in the Valley, and the beauty of the “Ozarks” being a destination of the day, resulted in many second- and third-generation family members spending significant time in the Valley and building unusually strong bonds with their grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. It was not uncommon for children to spend summers with their grandparents in this remote setting, hiking the mountains, picking berries, fishing and swimming in the Caddo River – building memories, not the least of which were reunion meals. In addition, from the beginning, in-laws were considered family too, and responded by supporting and being integral to this unique endeavor. Great family stories began to be handed down from one generation to another, ranging from the Civil War to the Great Depression, as well as a tradition of music pulling the family together.

The original eleven brothers and sisters’ descendants proudly continue to maintain Jones Valley and carry on the tradition of the annual Reunion as a family destination. As with the founders, the descendants have also strived to be positive contributors to our modern society with careers based on hard work and education. Some things have changed – the Internet has replaced the “round robin” letters – but the commitment to Family and carrying on the founders’ vision for reunions and Jones Valley remains strong.