

**THE STAR DAY FOUNDATION
FIRST PIONEERS AND LEADERS
OF THE STATE OF TEXAS
HALL OF HONOR**



**CHARLES JESSE JONES
(1844-1919)**

Charles Jesse Jones, better known as "Buffalo Jones," was born in Illinois on January 31, 1844, the second of twelve children. His father Noah was a farmer. As a child, Jones had a natural affinity for wild animals. One of his earliest catches was a red squirrel he tamed and sold to a man in Bloomington for two dollars.

He attended Wesleyan University when he was 21, studying natural history. After two years, he contracted typhoid fever, and the resulting damage to his eyesight forced him to abandon his formal education. He then headed west to Kansas, where he married Martha Walton and began a family. Later, he joined the Fulton Brothers in founding a new community, Garden City, Kansas. During this time, he made his living by hunting buffalo, sometimes killing as many as sixty in one day. He kept what he needed for his family and sold the rest, primarily to traders from the east. Although he hated killing the mighty animals, he knew that other hunters would continue to profit from the slaughter of the buffalo, whether or not he participated.

In the 1880s, Jones led several expeditions to the Texas Panhandle, near Palo Duro Canyon. His purpose was to capture buffalo calves and take them to his ranch in Garden City and raise a herd of buffalo in captivity. On the hunt of 1886 he captured fourteen calves after struggling against a late winter storm. In 1889, he captured seven calves plus eleven adult buffalo. Carrier pigeons flew news of his progress to Garden City, which was then telegraphed to major newspapers and publicized throughout the world. He bred the buffalo with cattle to create

animals he called "cattalo" that could survive the harsh winters and provide meat for the families on the plains.

Jones became the first game warden of Yellowstone Park in 1902, appointed by his friend President Theodore Roosevelt. During his tenure as park ranger, he established the herd of bison that still inhabits Yellowstone Park. With funding from Congress, he purchased more than two dozen buffalo, including some from his own ranch in Kansas, which he herded across the plains and through the Rocky Mountains to Yellowstone.

Jones started a ranch on the north side of the Grand Canyon in 1906, where he continued his efforts to preserve the buffalo by breeding cattalo. In addition, he hosted Zane Grey on a trip to the area, which helped to launch Grey's career as a famous Western author. In fact, several of Grey's novels introduce characters modeled after Buffalo Jones, including *Raiders of the Spanish Peaks* and *The Last of the Plainsmen*.

While in his sixties, Jones made two expeditions to Africa in search of new quarry: rhinoceros, lions, and gorillas. Much to the astonishment of the traditional hunters, he did not kill the animals; he simply chased them down and lassoed them, with his camera crew filming the entire hunt. Many of the animals he caught were set free; however, he brought home a lioness to the Bronx Zoo. On his second expedition, he became ill with malaria. Over the next three years, he suffered numerous relapses and never recovered his full strength. Buffalo Jones died in Topeka, Kansas, on October 1, 1919, at the home of his daughter.

Charles Jesse Jones was inducted into the National Cowboy Hall of Fame in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, in 1959. Twenty years later, the Finney County Historical Museum in Garden City, Kansas, developed a permanent exhibit dedicated to his memory. Because of his lifelong efforts to save the buffalo from extinction, Buffalo Jones became known as the Preserver of the American Bison.

NOTE: The photograph is used with permission from the Finney County Historical Museum. The text was contributed by Carol A. Winn, author of the book *Buffalo Jones: The Man Who Saved America's Bison*. Ms. Winn is pioneering and leading an effort to organize a Texas Bison Student Study Group in Amarillo, Texas, as an after-school student enrichment program to offer students the opportunity to explore and discover the history of the Texas Plains bison and related topics as well as to conduct an expedition to Caprock Canyons State Park, home of "The Official State Bison Herd of Texas."

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