

# J. Logan Jones

Founder, The Jones Store  
1859-1945

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by Daniel Coleman

J. Logan Jones once recalled in an interview how he raised \$400 to start his first retail operation. As a teen in southern Illinois, Jones purchased calves at a low price from several farmers in the area whose poor circumstances that year allowed them to winter only their hardiest stock. Jones fattened and resold the animals at a profit, hitting upon the strategy of “underbuying and underselling” to which he later attributed the great success of his dry goods and department stores in Illinois, Kansas, and Kansas City, Missouri.

John Logan Jones, son of Andrew and Mary Dillon Jones, was born on August 12, 1859, when Jones’s mother unexpectedly delivered during a trek via covered wagon from their home in Franklin County, Illinois, to the Territory of Kansas. His parents sought and found emergency assistance in a Native American village near the present site of Ottawa, Kansas, before settling in the Lawrence area. The family’s momentous sense of timing saved them again several years later when they returned to Illinois just three months before William Quantrill’s devastating 1863 massacre of Lawrence civilians.

Jones grew to manhood back in Franklin County, attending country schools and helping his grandfather in his work as postmaster of Parrish, Illinois. Jones was fascinated by the wondrous retail advertisements he saw in big city newspapers arriving at the post office, and by age 20 he had scraped together enough savings to open a small general store in Parrish in partnership with his older brother, Lawrence. Progressively larger stores in several nearby towns followed. In 1883, Jones married Miss Jennie Charlton, and the couple returned to Kansas, nearly 30 years after Jones’s first arrival there in “the wigwam of the Chief of the Ottawa Indians” (as he would later describe his own birth in a poem). He opened a store in the town of Stafford in 1885 and a larger operation in Kansas City, Kansas, in 1890.

In 1895, Jones’s leapfrogging to ever-larger markets ended in Kansas City, Missouri. The seven-story Jones Dry Goods Company

store he established there at 6th and Main—complete with novelties such as elevators, a bakery, and a nursery for shoppers' children—placed Jones among Kansas City's premier merchants. His customers appreciated the bargains he was able to offer on a wide range of household items, often the result of his knack for acquiring and reselling the merchandise of struggling or bankrupt stores. When an 1899 fire destroyed the 6th Street store, Jones rebuilt at 12th and Main. The success of this enormous store rivaled its square footage, and Jones added mail order trade. A 1907 economic downturn, however, took its toll on sales, and several years later Jones sold out his share and resigned from the company he had founded.

He turned to his lifelong passion for writing during the second half of his career, compiling colorful tales of his life and business accomplishments into an autobiography entitled *The Individualist*. One year he wrote a poem per week, but jokingly pledged to quit writing verse for fear he was becoming better known as a poet than he was as a merchant. His philosophical musings filled frequent newspaper advertisements for the last retail venture of his life, the Logan Jones Dry Goods Company, which he operated independently of his earlier Kansas City store for 20 years until his retirement in 1939. In his later years, Jones also led pushes for transportation improvements he felt would be beneficial to downtown merchants, including the Inter-City and 12th Street viaducts and toll free bridges.

J. Logan Jones died October 21, 1945, at age 86. In addition to leaving his three children, Jones was survived by a store bearing his name: The Jones Store Company, which operated department stores throughout the Kansas City area into the final years of the twentieth century. Its legendary 12th and Main location closed in 1998 and was razed in 2005 but remains vivid in the minds of those who shopped there.

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