

Henry David Jones Koons: Philadelphia to Shakopee, Minnesota

With Notes on Shakopee Pioneers Thomas A. Holmes and Robert Kennedy

Henry David Jones Koons, my second great-grandfather, was born in southeastern Pennsylvania. His mother, Frances B Jones, was born in 1811 in Union Township, Berks County, to David Jones, Esq. and Mary Brower. Mary's father, Abraham Brower, built a commercial empire in Browertown¹, a community built in a narrow space between the Schuylkill Canal, a commercial waterway, and the Schuylkill River, about 40 miles northwest of



Philadelphia. Several buildings in Browertown, today Unionville, still stand, including the David Jones house, a stone structure with distinctive herringbone pattern built by Abraham for his daughter Mary and her husband David Jones.

Frances B Jones married Philip T B Koons in 1830 in St. Gabriel's Episcopal Church in Douglasville, across the Schuylkill River from Browertown. Philip's parents were Henry Koons and Mary Magdalena Trumbauer. Henry

Koons, born in 1778, was from Limerick Twp in Philadelphia (now Montgomery) County, the son of Frederick Koons and Mary Kendall. Mary Magdalena, born in 1782 in Trumbauersville, Bucks County, was the daughter of Philip Trumbauer and Catherine Huber. When Mary was two, however, her father died, and her mother remarried to an older man, Adam Brotzman, who lived in Limerick Twp. So Mary and Henry Koons were brought into proximity and married about 1803. In 1820 Henry Koons bought land in Union Township, Berks County, from his brother-in-law, Nicholas Brower, and moved there with his five sons including Philip.

The period between 1828 and 1832 was eventful for the Koons families. In 1828 Abraham Brower unexpectedly died, and the Browertown empire began to fall apart. Henry Koons still lived in Union Twp in 1830, but by March 1832 Henry, along with his sons, was a resident of Philadelphia and an Innkeeper. In October 1832 Henry bought land in Marion County, Ohio, and shortly thereafter he and four of his sons, including Philip, farmed there on adjacent farms. During that period, on 15 Apr 1831, Henry David Jones Koons was born to Philip and Frances in Philadelphia County; on 1 Oct 1831 Henry D J Koons was baptized in the German Reformed Church in downtown Philadelphia.

While the Koons clan lived in Marion, Ohio, they would have become acquainted with two other families that would play major roles in the history of Henry D J Koons. One was the family of Edward and Susannah Gordon Kennedy. The family moved from Harpers Ferry,

Virginia (now West Virginia) to Marion in 1826, where Edward kept a tavern. Two of his children were Robert and Ursula, of whom more to come. The other family was Judge William and Rachel Day Holmes, originally also from Pennsylvania. Judge Holmes lived in Marion from 1820 to 1833; one of his sons was Thomas Andrew Holmes, who in 1829 in Marion married Ursula Kennedy.



Thomas A. Holmes was an itinerant early pioneer and entrepreneur. He was instrumental in the establishment of Janesville, Wisconsin and Fountain City, Wisconsin (Buffalo County, initially called Holmes Landing). In 1851 he laid out and named Shakopee, Minnesota and then the nearby Chaska. In 1862, he participated in founding Bannack City, which became the first capitol of Montana. He never stayed long enough in any of those towns to profit very greatly, preferring to move on. His Wisconsin endeavors began in 1835, when he built the second house there and became the second permanent settler. He made the first settlement in Janesville, Wisconsin, in 1836. He persuaded the family of his father, Judge Holmes, to participate in the latter adventure, building shanties in what was then unsettled wilderness.

Exactly how the family of Henry D J Koons became involved in the Wisconsin ventures of Holmes is unclear. What is known is that on 6 Dec 1834 Philip T B Koons sold 100 acres of land in Marion Township, Ohio, and on 1 Aug 1837 Frances B Jones Koons married Robert Kennedy in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. We can speculate that Kennedy and the Koons family decided to join Holmes in his Western expeditions. Whether Philip Koons died in Ohio, or on a journey west, or in Wisconsin is unknown.

“In 1839 Thomas Holmes, his wife Ursula, his brother-in-law Robert Kennedy and his wife [Frances B Jones Koons Kennedy], and others in a party of 13 left Milwaukee and were enroute up the Mississippi with St. Anthony Falls (present day St. Paul) as their goal. [That party included two children, the eight-year-old Henry David Jones Koons and Thomas Edward Kennedy, born to Frances and Robert Kennedy in 1838.] However, in the late fall of the year an early freeze caused the Mississippi to freeze just above the mouth of the Waumandee which is just north of present-day Fountain City. With their travels forced to a halt, the group built dugout shelters on the shore of present-day Fountain City and settled in for the winter. During the winter Thomas Holmes, who had an excellent understanding of Indian dialects, established contacts with the Dakota Sioux band of Chief Wapasha whose winter camp was just down the river at what is now Winona. He found what he felt was a great opportunity for fur trading with the Indians.”²

Robert Kennedy was primarily a hotel-keeper. In 1840-41 he kept a hotel at Holmes Landing (now Fountain City), in 1844 in Dakota, Winona County, in 1846 in Stillwater, Washington

County, and in 1850 in St. Paul. He was enumerated in St. Paul in the 1850 census, the first to contain names of family members, which were Frances B, Henry Kennedy (who was Henry D J Koons), teamster, Edward , and two more young Kennedy boys. In 1851-52 he was Town President of St. Paul. In 1853 he re-settled in two-year-old Shakopee, running boarding-houses and hotels, one of them the Kennedy and Reynolds National Hotel, until at least 1860, when he returned to St. Paul.

In 1852 Henry D J Koons, by then twenty-one, filed a claim in the new town of Mankato, Minnesota and for a time for an employee of the claims office there. But the next year he appears in a narrative about Shakopee. After its founding by Holmes in 1851, Shakopee in 1852 had twenty people. The real influx began in 1853 when the Indians were removed to the Upper Sioux Agency. The first officers of the town in July 1853 appointed a judge and an election board that included H.D.J. Koons; he was also appointed a road viewer. Henry D.J. Koons bought his first property in Shakopee, Scott County, on November 10, 1853, paying \$100 to Thomas Kennedy, the brother of his step-father Robert Kennedy. He sold two pieces of land in 1855 for a total of \$795. His dealings began in earnest in 1856. Either by himself or with his wife he bought four properties for a total \$2000, and with Robert Kennedy (his step-father) bought four properties for a total \$7000. He sold 14 properties by himself or with his wife, almost all lots in the city of Shakopee, for a total \$4532. The Shakopee lots came mostly from the public land that he acquired on June 16, 1856, when he purchased 80.65 acres in Township 115 North, Range 22 West, section 6 N 1/2 SW 1/4 in Eagle Creek Township, from the Red Wing land office (v. 1080, p. 111, document 119). The document also appears in the Scott County Deeds for the same date, and that document names him as Henry David Jones Koons. Many settlers bought 80 acres of public lands, but his section lay within the city limits of Shakopee, east of the original patent. In present-day Shakopee, it would lie approximately between 3rd & 7th Avenues and Main to Naumkeag (extended) Sts. In fact, he sold some of the lots before the public land acquisition was finalized. In 1857 he bought one property in Scott County for \$285 and three in the Town of Helena for \$300. That year 8 properties were sold for a total \$9250. In 1858 two properties were bought for \$4000 and one sold for \$100; in 1859 one was sold for \$430. In 1861 two were sold for \$800, including one in T114N R22W to Painted Differently and his wife Third Daughter of the Calhoon Band of the Sioux Tribe.

The History of the Minnesota Valley (1882, p. 300) says that claim jumping was frequent in the early days. "On July 18th, 1854, nine citizens were arrested for pulling down the claim shanty of Dr. Kinney of St. Paul on a disputed claim. Twenty-six or seven were engaged in the affair but fortunately all were not known and the offence could not be treated as a riot, as the injured party would have been glad to have made it, for blood ran high in these claim fights. The nine arrested were from the most substantial citizens and were no less persons than Thomas Kennedy, H.D.J. Koons, Thomas A. Holmes, John C. Somerville, Comfort Barnes, William H. Nobles, J.B. Allen, William Smothers, and D.M. Storer. The arrest was made by Dr. Kinney's

agent, and threatened to be a serious matter. The claim belonged to Henry D.J. Koons in the judgment of the citizens, and Dr. Kinney jumped it."

On 16 April 1854 Henry D J Koons and Henrietta Allen were married in Shakopee by the Rev. Samuel William Pond, one of the two Pond brothers, noted early missionaries to the Sioux Indians. It was the first marriage ceremony in Shakopee. She was the daughter of John Boswell Allen and Jane Dillard, who had migrated from Spencer County, Kentucky to Boone County, Indiana and then to Shakopee.

In addition to his land speculation, Henry D J Koons was also an interpreter for the US Army. He undoubtedly learned the Dakota language from Thomas A. Holmes. In that capacity, working out of the Upper Sioux Agency in Yellow Medicine County on the Minnesota River, he "died of pneumonia in a cold winter with very deep snow" (family narrative of Ada Hewitt). The picture is of the reconstructed Agency. The report of



Thomas J. Galbraith, the Indian agent for the two Sioux reservations in the Northern Superintendency, can be found within the Report of the Secretary of the Interior, specifically the Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs (1861, 37th Congress, 2nd Session, Senate Executive Document 1, p. 624, Serial Set Volume 1117; Galbraith's report is on pp. 699-704). He writes, "Several complaints of Indian depredations on the frontier, in the region of Spirit Lake and Sioux City, have been made at this office. Early in September, under the direction of the Department of Indian Affairs, I sent Mr. H.D.J. Koons, the United States interpreter of this



department, to Sioux City, via Spirit Lake, with instructions to inquire into these depredations and report at the earliest day possible. He has returned, but has been too unwell to prepare his report. As soon as possible his report will be transmitted to the department. He obtained considerable valuable information, from which I am able to state that the Indians of this agency stole some twenty or thirty horses the past summer from citizens of Iowa and Minnesota."

Henry Koons died on 19 Feb 1862. His obituary in the Shakopee Weekly Argus for March 1, 1862 reads: "Death of Henry Koons.--The friends of Henry Koons will regret to hear that he died on Wednesday of last week, of lung fever, at the Sioux Agency. In all the relations of citizen, husband and father he is well spoken of. He leaves a wife and three young children --

besides many warm friends -- to mourn his death." Family history from Ada Hewitt (picture at right) reads: "Abner Riggs used to say that if young Koons had lived, the Minnesota Indian uprising and massacre would not have occurred. He liked the Indians, and they were friendly toward him." Abner Riggs was the husband of Ann Eliza Allen, sister of Henrietta Allen, and also a Shakopee pioneer. His mother was a sister of the missionary Pond brothers. The story is obviously an exaggeration. Hewitt family history also says, however, that the Sioux, out of respect, brought the body of Henry D J Koons down the Minnesota River to Shakopee, a perilous journey in winter.



On March 21, 1862 Henrietta Koons petitioned Probate Court of Scott County, meeting in Shakopee, to appoint her father John B. Allen Administrator of the Estate of her deceased husband. That was approved on April 17. The claims against the estate were finalized on Dec. 30, 1862 and consisted of a \$20 account to James L. Wakefield M.D. for medical services and medicines for the deceased at Yellow Medicine during his last sickness, \$376.31 to the U.S. Government for foods furnished the deceased at the time he was employed by the Government, various notes totaling \$387.82, and two merchant accounts for \$13.90, a total of \$855.78. After subtracting assets, the amount of indebtedness was \$479.47. It would seem, given the amount of real estate dealings that Henry D.J. Koons had been pursuing, that the amount could be satisfied easily. Nevertheless, John B. Allen reported to the Court in November 1863 that to pay the debts and the expenses of the Administrator the whole of the real estate of the deceased would have to be sold. Several public auctions took place in 1864 and two in 1869. These did not bring prices



commensurate with prices Henry paid. Every property was sold under \$100 except for a property in Anoka County that brought \$250. Most notably, many lots in the Town of Helena went at auction for twenty-five cents each. Although the Probate Court record contains no concluding statement, the indebtedness was presumably settled once and for all in 1869.

Henrietta Koons visited Marion County, Ohio in December 1863, possibly to solicit money willed to her husband by his grandfather Henry Koons, but two years later died. The tombstone in Valley Cemetery reads "wife of H.D.J. Koons, died July 5, 1865 aged 27 yrs." Two girls were left orphans, including my great-grandmother Martha Mae Koons. Ten years later Martha Mae (below right) would marry George Hewitt (below left), the uncle of Ada Hewitt cited above. George and Martha Mae also died very young, leaving five orphan children including

my grandmother.

Other families from Browertown pop up in Shakopee. The brother of Frances B Jones Koons



Kennedy, Abraham Brower Jones, appears as a merchant in the 1857 census for Shakopee, and in that same year was one of the partners, including Thomas Holmes, in an unsuccessful venture to develop Spring Lake, south of Shakopee. In 1863 he was an officer in the Shakopee Lodge, A.F. and A.M., but by 1885 was living in St. Paul with his sister. The families of his daughters, Charity M Jones Leopold and Mary Elizabeth Jones Sencerbox, also were early Shakopee residents.



Leopold was a prominent Browertown name.

SOME AFTERMATHS: Henry Koons and his wife Mary Magdalena died in 1859 and 1868 in Defiance County, Ohio. Judge Holmes and his wife died in the 1860s in Janesville, Wisconsin. Ursula Kennedy Holmes died ~1841 in Dubuque, Iowa. After her death, Thomas A Holmes married twice more and died in 1888 in Cullman, Alabama. Robert Kennedy kept several boarding-houses and hotels in St. Paul; in 1864 he journeyed west to gold fields near Helena, Montana, for about a year, accumulating enough wealth to pay his debts. He died in 1889 in St. Paul. His wife Frances B Jones Koons Kennedy died in St. Paul two years later. The Shakopee Courier 3 Dec 1891 wrote: "Mr. and Mrs. Robert Kennedy were of the old settlers of Shakopee, Mr. Kennedy having built the National hotel, afterwards burned down."

David Hewitt Egger, 9 January 2017

¹Susan Speros-Miller, The Town of Brower: A Lost Family Legacy, Historical Review of Berks County, Winter 2006-2007p. 20-29, available online at ancestry.com and at http://www.schuylkillhighlands.org/downloads/news_docs/newsfile_1375472575.pdf (scroll to the bottom)

² Buffalo County Biographical History: Celebrating 150 Years, 1853-2003, Buffalo County Historical Society (Buffalo County, Wisconsin), 2002, p. 7 (available online). For many more details on those years, although this source needs to be read with caution, see Winona (WE-NONAH) and its environs on the Mississippi in ancient and modern days by Lafayette Houghton Bunnell, M. D., written for and under the auspices of the Winona County Old Settlers' Association, Winona, Minnesota, Jones & Krobgek, Printers and Publishers, 1897, chapters X and XII, available online.

