

“Algonquian Indians the source of Ottawa’s name”

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“Tauy” (pronounced “toy”) is one of the oldest and most prominent names in Franklin County history, having appeared here long before the county ever was settled. Most people, who are knowledgeable about local history, immediately associate the name with John T. or “Tauy” Jones, who first came to this area about 1840.

Born of French-Canadian and Chippewa descent, Jones became an early leader of the Ottawa Indian tribe in Kansas and is credited with the idea that led to the founding of Ottawa University. He also was one of the founding fathers of the city of Ottawa.

His home, still referred to as the Tauy Jones House, continues to stand northeast of Ottawa on the banks of Tauy Creek. Not far away is the Tauy Baptist Church and also the Ottawa Mission Cemetery which in this century has been misnamed the Tauy Jones Cemetery simply because Jones is among those buried there.

On the Ottawa University campus is Tauy Jones Hall, and the college’s alumni magazine is called TAUY TALK. At one time Ottawa also boasted a Tauy Theatre on Main Street.

Due to the uniqueness of the name it is therefore easy to assume that everything named “Tauy” has been done so in Jones’ honor.

But that is a misnomer.

“Tauy” is merely an abbreviated form of the name “Ottawa.” Consequently, the name’s linguistic roots are actually with the Ottawa Indians, not the tribe’s adopted leader.

As an explanation, “Tauy” was never a part of John T. Jones’ name (the “T” stood for “Tecumseh”) but was simply a nickname given to him. He was known as “Ottawa” or “Tauy” Jones to distinguish him from other Joneses in Kansas Territory. His good friend, the fiery abolitionist John Brown, was one of many who referred to him in this way.

Jones, a well educated man, always signed his name in neat script as “John T. Jones,” never “Tauy.” His wife, who outlived him by 30 years, also was never known to use his nickname.

The question then arises as to how the nickname “Tauy” could be derived from the name “Ottawa,” as their pronunciations are very dissimilar. It appears somewhat akin to “Peggy” being a nickname for “Margaret.”

The answer lies in the fact that we no longer pronounce “Ottawa” the way the Ottawa Indians did.

Originally from the Algonquian Indian word “Adawe” meaning “to trade” or “to buy or sell,” “Ottawa” has been spelled several ways. But those early spellings all point to two pronunciation variations from what we use today.

First of all, the name had a “long A” sound at the end, usually spelled with an ending “y.” “Ottaway” appears on some of the early treaties between the Ottawa Indians and the United States government. Today, old-timers who refer to the city of Ottawa as “Otta-WAY” are actually using a pronunciation which is closer to the original, not just a casual, rural slang.

Second, the emphasis was apparently not on the first syllable (OT-ta-way) but on the second (Ot-TA-way). The second syllable also tended to slip to a “tow” sound (Ot-TOW-ay) which is why the tribal name was sometimes spelled “Ottoway” or “Ottowa.”

To abbreviate it, the first syllable was then dropped—”Taway.”

Say it, and say it again. . .”Ot-TOW-ay. . .’TOW-ay. . .Tauy. . .Tauy. . .Tauy Creek. .
.Tauy Jones.”

The “Tauy” spelling somehow evolved and has been kept.

As Paul Harvey might say, “now you know. . .the rest of the story.”