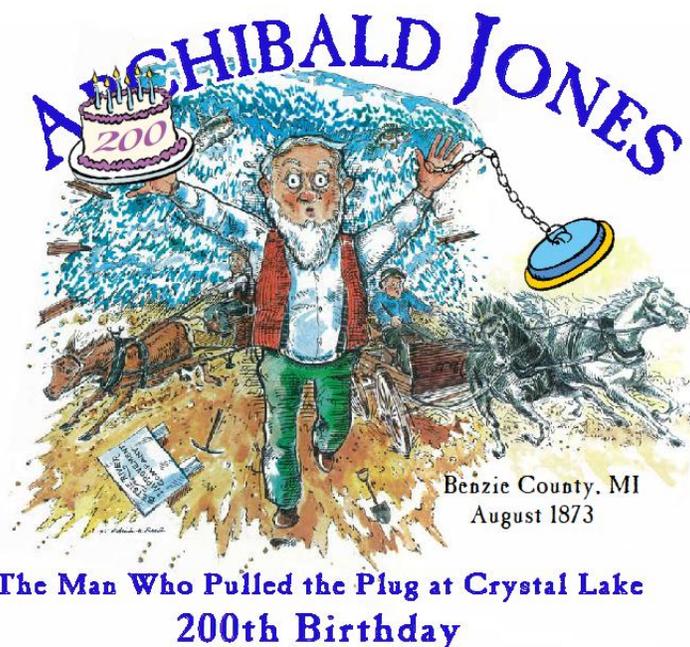


The “Tragedy” and the “Comedy” of Crystal Lake: the Role of Archibald Jones

(Stacy L. Daniels, Crystal Lake & Watershed Association)



"Life is a tragedy when seen in close-up, but a comedy in long-shot." -- *Charlie Chaplin*

The “Tragedy” and the “Comedy”¹

The “Tragedy” of Crystal Lake is a well-known story of the artificial lowering of Crystal Lake in Benzie County, MI. It involved an ill-fated attempt in 1873 to construct a navigable waterway from Crystal Lake by way of the Betsie River to nearby Lake Michigan at Frankfort. The ensuing event, and its unforeseen consequences, was unique in its magnitude among the large inland lakes in northwest Lower Michigan. The role of Archibald Jones, the perpetrator of the event, involved the travels of a typical American family in the 1850's - 1890's, searching for the opportunities, experiencing the adventures, and facing the vicissitudes posed by the opening of the expanses of the Midwest. In ancient Greece, a tragedy was a form of art drama in which the protagonist is overcome by some superior force or circumstance. A comedy, by contrast, was a separate genre, that depicted laughable people involved in some kind of blunder which does not cause pain or disaster. The lowering of Crystal Lake had elements of both.

William L. Case, a local businessman and former state representative, masterfully told what was believed to be the authentic story based upon his recollections made some fifty years after witnessing the event as a 17-year old boy. His account, first serialized in the Benzie Record, was printed as a small pamphlet in 1922 that has undergone numerous reprintings². He described Archibald Jones as “a man of patriarchal appearance with a long white beard and endowed with boundless energy and enthusiasm”, and as, “an enterprising fruit grower and business man of Marengo, Illinois”, (who) “(C)onceived the notion that by opening a channel between Crystal Lake and Betsie River, a channel might be made following the course of the outlet, that would permit the passage of small sized craft from Lake Michigan into Crystal Lake.”

The present author, a Frankfort native and long-time resident of Crystal Lake, read the story of the “Tragedy” as a young boy. After becoming a professional environmental engineer, he came to wonder more about the uniqueness of Crystal Lake: How was it formed in glacial times? When was it first called Crystal Lake? What were the particulars as to the cause and extent of the “Tragedy”? Who was Archibald Jones? Should he be credited, or blamed, for the lowering of Crystal Lake? Was he unfairly cast as a scapegoat for a seemingly disastrous, ill-conceived project, or should he be celebrated as an unsung hero of an event of unforeseen consequences and immense future benefits to the community? Here follows a short rendition of the rest of the story - the “Comedy” of Crystal Lake.

¹ Based upon articles originally published in the Benzie County Record Patriot, Jul 21 and Aug 4, 2010.

² William Case, The Tragedy of Crystal Lake, with Some Sidelights, By a Survivor, sponsored by the Benzie Area Historical Society; reprinted, Platte River Printing, Honor, MI, 2007, 23pp.

River Improvements and Harbors of Refuge

Western migration by settlers from the Eastern United States to the Great Lakes region occurred during much of the 19th century. Many enterprising individuals arrived in Michigan intent on cutting forests, damming rivers, digging canals, and tilling fields to become entrepreneurs sharing in all these ambitious endeavors. By the mid-1800's, this migration was in "full flood", as transportation by river and lake offered advantages over rough-hewed roads through the wilderness, and railroads had not yet been fully developed in the region. The completion of the Erie canal in 1825 proved that the Nation could benefit from a system of inland waterways. As commerce increased with settlement, attention was turned toward the improvements of river mouths and connections by canals to the Great Lakes. Transportation upon the Great Lakes was greatly expanding and there was a dearth of safe "harbors of refuge".

Peculiar to Michigan was an especial need to improve the land-locked entrances of drowned river mouths along the eastern shoreline of Lake Michigan (up-and-down the the West Coast of MI) to create harbors of refuge for shipping and inland waterways for access to the interior of the State. Many natural outlets of these rivers were straightened and new channels dredged that could be maintained at navigable depths. These included: Saugatuck, Holland, Grand Haven, Muskegon, White Lake, Pentwater, Ludington, Manistee, Portage, Frankfort, Charlevoix, and Petoskey.³ A few others were contemplated, but never realized. As a consequence, several of the nearby inland lakes also became connected by "slack-water" canals. Various projects were completed with dams, locks, docks, and/or other appurtenances necessary for also powering sawmills and furnishing water for irrigation of newly cleared fields.

The attempt to connect a canal from Frankfort to Crystal Lake was one of the proposed projects. On or about⁴ August 23-27, 1873, in an ill-fated attempt to create a navigable channel between Crystal Lake and Lake Michigan, the Betsie River Improvement Company caused the level of Crystal Lake to be lowered by 20 feet in a few weeks. This tumultuous event resulted in Crystal Lake losing 25% of its water volume (76,000,000,000 gallons), and reducing its surface area by 25% (3,093 Acres)!⁵ The Company's boat made only one trip downriver backwards. The drawdown was unsuccessful from a navigational standpoint. The "Tragedy" of Crystal Lake is forever preserved in the exposed terrace of sandy beach, the perimeter roads and trails, the deep water sediments, and the outwash plain along the outlet. The "Comedy" of Crystal Lake was the creation of a 21-mile perimeter of sandy beach and prime recreational area around the Lake where ~ 1,100 cottages and the Village of Beulah are now located.

"The event was so epochal in its nature and has such a permanent bearing on the subsequent development of Benzie County, that it is rightly considered as one of the major incidents of the county's early history." – Leonard Case, Benzie County, A Bicentennial Reader, 1976.

Three permanent markers commemorating the "Tragedy" were located near Crystal Lake in downtown Beulah, at Warren Road, and in Bellows Park. They were unveiled in ceremonies on August 27, 1978, a date falling coincidentally near the 105th anniversary of the recently rediscovered date of the actual event.

³ Most differences in elevation were only a few feet. Crystal Lake lay some 38 feet above Lake Michigan.

⁴ The event most probably occurred early on Saturday, August 23, 1873, when the notorious *whitecaps* of Crystal Lake washed out a temporary dam intended to be part of a slack-water canal with locks.

⁵ Crystal Lake is still the 9th largest inland lake in Michigan, with a surface area of 9,854 A, and a volume of 242,000,000,000 gallons of water! [See cover story in The Michigan Riparian 40(1), 5-6 (Feb. 2005).]

The Role of Archibald Jones⁶

The Early Years – New York

Archibald Jones “Jr.” was born near the hamlet of Petersburg, Rensselaer Co., NY, on 14 Sep 1811, the 4th of 8 children of Archibald Jones “Sr.”, a local farmer and land owner, and wife Prudence. This locale, in eastern NY near Troy, was settled about the middle of the 18th Century. It was close to the Hudson River and the eastern terminus of the Erie Canal, which was the first rapid transportation system between the eastern seaboard and the Great Lakes that did not require portage or arduous overland travel through the wilderness on primitive roads. Archibald is reported as having worked on the Canal as a young man. He appears to have come by his interest in water transportation naturally as his great(5) grandfather, Christopher Jones Jr., was owner and captain of the Mayflower.

Marriage and Family – New York

Archibald married Sophia Needham, b. 23 Jan 1817, in Brattleboro, Windham Co., VT, on 15 Apr 1835, with the first five of their eight children, Ai, George W., Anna, Olive C., and Frank A., being born in several small towns in upper-middle New York State straddling the Erie Canal. Archibald was a “carriage maker” in Urbana, Steuben Co., NY, in 1850, before embarking on further adventures to the west.

Migration to the Mid-West – Ohio

The lure of new lands and opportunities on the Mid-western frontier was hard to resist. The growing Jones family followed the wave of immigrants west to Ohio. In 1851, Archibald and his oldest son, Ai, drove teams of horses from Whitesville, Jefferson Co., NY, to Sandusky, Erie Co., OH, a distance of 310 miles through wilderness and along the shores of Lake Erie. The family first lived on a farm east of Sandusky, and then removed to Put-in-Bay Island, the scene of William Hazard Perry’s epic naval victory during the War of 1812. Archibald was the overseer of the estate of Judge Ogden Edwards, and supervised the clearing of the island, while son Ai became its first school teacher. Archibald was the foreman of the property until 1854. Archibald learned about fruit culturing as the island was subdivided, grapes were cultured, and the wine industry commenced.

Opportunity on the Frontier – Michigan

During their time in OH, the Jones’ family grew by the addition of Archibald (III), Charles H., and Sophia. The Jones family moved back to Sandusky City where they registered for the 1860 U.S. Census. Some of the family made a temporary jaunt further west to Michigan’s Thumb, where Archibald also registered in the 1860 U.S. Census, along with six of his eight children, as a “lumberman” in Lexington, Sanilac Co., MI. His oldest son, Ai, registered as a “bookkeeper”, and subsequently married, Sarah Coy, in Sanilac Co., in 1861. Archibald was befriended by Truman Moss, a prominent businessman in timber enterprises in Crosswell, MI and a banker in Sandusky, OH, and may have been a caretaker of Moss’s estate and extensive land holdings during which time he learned much about the lumbering industry in Michigan.

Moving On – Illinois

Sometime in the early 1860’s, Archibald left his position in Sanilac Co., MI and moved with some of his family from OH to Irving Park, IL, north of Chicago. Son George W. married Rosa M. Dewey, and started their family in Irving Park, IL, a future northern suburb of Chicago, where he was a tinsmith in the galvanized iron business with his father-in-law Washington Dewey. Archibald’s daughter, Olive, and son-in-law George C. Barcalow, also followed for a brief time until purchasing a farm back in OH. Archibald, Sophia, and the younger children may have moved on to settle in Marengo, IL. Following the Great Chicago Fire of Oct 10, 1871, Archibald and Sophia, the family of son George W., and other relatives moved to Benzonia, MI, to fulfill their destiny in the “Tragedy” of Crystal Lake.

The “Tragedy” of Crystal Lake – Michigan

With his knowledge of horticulture and lumbering, and his inherited and accrued experiences in water transportation, Archibald arrived at Crystal Lake about 1871. He continued his entrepreneurial adventures by forming the Benzie County River Improvement Company, with the intent of creating a navigable waterway between Crystal Lake and nearby Lake Michigan. His intent was to dredge a channel up the shallow Betsie River to the Lake to transport timber to the sawmills and cordwood to the iron foundry downriver in Frankfort, and other finished goods upriver to Benzonia and points inland. Archibald was 62 years of age at which time he became justly famous as “the man who pulled the plug at Crystal Lake”, on August 23, 1873, thereby initiating the dramatic lowering of Crystal Lake through an impromptu channel unfit for boat

⁶ The story relates the migration of a typical American family in the 1850's - 1890's, searching for opportunities, adventures, and challenges posed by the opening of the expanses of the Midwest.

traffic. Although an engineered slack-water canal (with locks) never materialized, a 21-mile sandy beach was created that is now a prime recreational area containing ~1,100 cottages and the Village of Beulah. It is doubtful whether Archibald, being a shrewd business man with “bootstrap engineering” experience, intentionally and unwittingly “pulled the plug”. An alternate scenario is that the famous whitecaps of Crystal Lake (*ne’er* Cap Lake), seeing the opportunity, burst their bonds, and washed out a temporary dam before spiles (posts) could be driven for the locks.

Archibald Jones - “He Buildded Better Than He Knew.”

The lowering of Crystal Lake was relatively unique in the histories of Michigan inland lakes. Certainly it was one of the most spectacular and long-lasting of river improvement projects anywhere in the U.S. at the time. In 1810, a new outlet was dug for a small lake near Glover, VT, with the intent of providing more water for a local grist mill. Unfortunately, the small flow became a raging torrent and the entire lake went “down the drain”! “Runaway Pond” lost only 2 Bgal of water compared to the 76 Bgal for Crystal Lake.⁷

The event was epochal and significantly affected the future of Benzie County. The following year the Company went bankrupt and the venture failed and no lasting canal materialized.⁸ Following the “Tragedy”, and the failure of the Company, Archibald Jones was sued by John Torrans, the builder of a flat-bottomed paddleboat commissioned to ply the shallows of the Betsie River. In the ensuing court testimony, Archibald, when asked why the boat failed to perform, replied with a famous anecdote, “Well, the real reason was because the bottom of the river was too close to the top of the water.”

Further Adventure – Illinois & Kansas

Perhaps a little more sad than wise, Archibald moved back to Marengo, IL, in late 1877, where he had a part ownership in a livery and became a dealer in horses. He was the President of the Marengo Agricultural & Stock Breeders Association in 1877 and 1878. He and Sophia were listed in the 1880 U.S. Census in Marengo, where he had also become a “miller”. Sometime before 1885, he and Sophia moved onward to establish themselves as “most esteemed citizens” of Emporia, KS, engaging in “raising cattle” on a 900-acre ranch near Ivy, KS. They celebrated 50 years of happily married life at a gala party in 1885. After the death of Sophia in 1887, Archibald moved to Davenport, IA, spending his remaining years with daughter, Olive Barcalow, a widow with two daughters. Archibald Jones departed this life at 12 ½ o’clock midnight on 15 May 1890, at the age of 79 years. His remains were transported by rail to Emporia where he was buried next to his beloved Sophia. He was predeceased by his son, George W., but was survived by his widow and second wife, Julia F. Jones, whom he married in 1889. *Requiescat in pace.*

Descendents

Some of the older Jones children married and settled in Ohio, engaging in farming enterprises, but they, and younger members of the family, on occasion shared in joint ventures. Archibald was ably assisted in the Benzie County River Improvement Company by his son-in-law John Osterhout (Anna Jones’ husband) and other family members. Son Frank, and wife Jennie, also followed Archibald, eventually moving back to Ohio. Some of Archibald’s descendents caught the fever of living in northern Michigan. Son George W. assisted in his father’s Company, and eventually returned to Benzonia to convert the family home into the Park Place Hotel, and the Park Place Livery, Feed, and Sale Stable, which served as a stage stop between Manistee and Traverse City. Archibald’s grandson, Irving Park Jones became the “genial cashier” in the Central State Bank in Benzonia, and resided there for some 70 years. Archibald’s great grandson, Milton Irving Jones, was an osteopathic physician in Chicago before retiring to Benzonia. Archibald’s great granddaughter, Mildred M. (Jones) Huppert was also a long-time resident of Benzonia, living in the “Archibald Jones House (which still exists) until 2001. Many of the Jones family were confirmed in the Benzonia Congregational Church and are buried in Benzonia Township Cemetery.

⁷ Daniels, Stacy L., The "Runaway" and the "Tragedy": A Tale of Two Lakes, Having Disappeared, Being a Short Discourse on Certain Events Involving Two Inland Bodies of Water of Separate Geological Extents, but Sharing Certain Commonalities Leading to Profound Changes Thereby Affecting their Respective Destinies, Bicentennial Celebration of Runaway Pond, Glover, VT, June 10, 2010; "Runaway Pond: The Complete Story", 3rd Edition, Published by Glover Historical Society Inc., Glover, VT, 2010, pp 96-124. <http://www.clwa.us/PDF/CLWATaleOfTwoDispprngLakes.pdf>

⁸ The \$25 for one share of stock at 8% compounded interest for 137 years would be worth ~ \$ 1,000,000 !

Postscript

The following, written by a namesake Jones, is aptly applied to Archibald Jones:

"The smallest bark on life's tumultuous ocean
Will leave a track behind for evermore;
The lightest waves of influence set in motion,
Extend and widen to the eternal shore:
We should be wary, then, who go before

A myriad yet to be ; and we should take
Our bearing carefully, where breakers roar
And fearful tempests gather; one mistake
May wreck unnumbered barks that follow in our wake."

-- "Incidents in the Life and Labors of Burton Rensselaer Jones", 1909.

Past Author's Note - William L. Case (1922): "As far as the writer knows there is no written or printed record of the tragedy of the lowering of Crystal Lake in 1873, and of the enterprise and activity of the Betsie River Improvement Company in connection with it. It is now almost half a century (49 years) after those events occurred and this chronicle is prepared from information furnished by a few old timers that were living here then, and by careful digging into the personal recollections of the narrator."

Current Author's Note – Dr. Stacy L. Daniels (2011): As far as this writer knows there were several newspaper accounts of the comedy of the lowering of Crystal Lake in 1873, describing the enterprise and activity of the Benzie Co. River Improvement Co. Now, 138 years after those events occurred, this chronicle builds upon history unveiled in an extensive search of contemporary accounts, recorded legend, newspapers, court records, genealogical sources, scientific evidence, and the personal interpretations of the narrator, to tell the rest of the story, correct certain errors, construct a timeline of actual events, and assemble a biography of the Jones as they all impact upon the present consequences at Crystal Lake.

The author: Stacy L. Daniels has been involved in water quality studies of Crystal Lake, Benzie Co., MI, since the 1960's. He is currently the Chair of the Education & Communications Committee for the Crystal Lake & Watershed Association (CLWA), www.CLWA.us. He is currently engrossed in writing a book documenting the environmental history of the Crystal Lake Watershed.

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ARCHIBALD JONES DAY⁹

The 2nd annual Archibald Jones Day will be held on Saturday, Aug. 27, 2011, from 10:30 AM to 2 PM, downtown Beulah.

Events will include:

"The Story of Archibald Jones"
Re-enactment of the "*Tragedy*"
200th Birthday Cupcakes
Proclamation
Presentation of Stock Certificates of the Benzie Co. River Improvement Co.
Fun & games from the 1870's
Entertainment, music, and food

(Co-sponsored by the Crystal Lake & Watershed Association, Crystal Lake Community Business Association, Beulah Boosters, & Benzie County Chamber of Commerce)

Related Event: *The "Tragedy" / "Comedy" of Crystal Lake, and the Role of Archibald Jones: A Benzie County Heritage*, A review of the lowering of Crystal Lake and biosketch of Archibald Jones, by Dr. Stacy L. Daniels. Darcy Library, Beulah, Fri. Aug. 26, 2011, 7 PM.

--SLD/071511

⁹ The first annual Archibald Jones Day was held on August 28, 2010, South, Carol, Celebrate Archibald Jones' Magnificent Mistake, Traverse City Record Eagle, Wed., Aug. 18, 2010. <http://record-eagle.com/features/x1047881990/Celebrate-Archibald-Jones-magnificent-mistake>

Archibald Jones (Stacy Daniels, of the Crystal Lake & Watershed Association), **Re-Creates the Pulling of the Plug at Crystal Lake.** (Credit: Carol South, TCRE, 2010)



Stock Certificate of the Benzie Co. River Improvement Co. ca. 1873. (Benzonia Public Library)



Archibald Jones House, Benzonia, MI ca. 1890. (Benzie Area Historical Society)

