

JONES, PETER (KAHKEWAQUONABY, DESAGONDENSTA) (1802 - 1856), Methodist minister, political leader and author

Name: Peter (Kahkewaquonaby, Desagondensta) Jones

Date of birth: 1802

Date of death: 1856

Spouse: Eliza Jones (née Field)

Child: Kahkewaquonaby Peter Edmund Jones

Parent: Tuhbenahneequay

Parent: Augustus Jones

Gender: Male

Occupation: Methodist minister, political leader and author

Area of activity: Religion; Politics, Government and Political Movements; Literature and Writing

Author: Brian Gettler

Kahkewaquonaby Peter Jones was born on 1 January 1802 at Burlington Heights (Hamilton), Upper Canada, the younger of two sons of Augustus Jones (1757 or 1758-1836), a Welsh-American crown surveyor, land speculator, and farmer, and Tuhbenahneequay (Sarah Henry), the daughter of Wahbanosay, a Mississauga chief.

Peter Jones spent most of his youth with his mother and her people, only visiting his father in the summer. In the decade preceding Jones's birth, roughly forty percent of the Mississaugas of the Credit died from contagious diseases like smallpox and measles. From the end of the American Revolution, waves of settlers from Europe and the United States undercut hunting, fishing, and gathering, the Mississaugas' primary means of material support, while also flooding the community with alcohol. In the mid-1810s, Augustus decided to remove Peter and his brother John from this environment, sending Peter to school and bringing the two boys to live at the farm he had established on Haudenosaunee lands at Grand River with the boys' stepmother, Sarah Tekarihogen, daughter of a Kanien'kehá:ka chief. Peter spent the next seven years there, where he was adopted by the Kanien'kehá:ka and given the name Desagondensta.

In 1823, Kahkewaquonaby converted to Methodism. His work with the church would dominate the rest of his life. Rapidly he became the Methodists' bilingual Mississauga spokesman. Jones also translated English hymns into accessible Anishinaabemowin, making clear the resonance between Christianity and the culture in which he had grown up. In 1826, Peter and John led the Mississaugas who had converted to Methodism to the Credit River where the Crown had promised to plough fields and build houses for them. Establishing the village fundamentally altered longstanding practice in very short order: the Mississaugas moved from communal to single-family dwellings, adopted agriculture as their primary economic activity, and instituted strict European gender norms. Officials, religious leaders, and philanthropists in Britain and the colonies touted this rapid change, celebrating the Credit River Mission as proof of the 'progress' Indigenous communities could make through sedentarization, Christianity, and European education. In 1830, Kahkewaquonaby drafted a legal code for the village that, while borrowing heavily from the common law, also included significant Anishinaabe influence.

Throughout his adult life, Jones travelled regularly, whether for missionary work or to maintain connections between Anishinaabe communities in Upper Canada or abroad as part of Methodist fundraising tours or to press the Credit River Mississaugas' claims to land. In 1828 and again in 1829 he spent significant time in the northeastern United States to raise desperately needed funds for Wesleyan missions. In 1831, with a letter of introduction from the lieutenant governor of Upper Canada, Kahkewaquonaby undertook a year-long missionary tour of Britain, giving more than 150 speeches and sermons, most often dressed in formal Mississauga attire. He raised significant funds to support his translation of the Gospels, the Credit school, and Wesleyan missionary work. Peter Jones also pressed the colonial office to protect Indigenous lands, even managing to arrange a private audience with William IV. While in England, he also met Eliza Field. After marrying in New York City in September 1833, the couple had five sons, one of whom, Dr. Kahkewaquonaby Peter Edmund Jones (1843-1909), would both carry his father's Mississauga name and be the first status Indian to graduate from a medical school in Canada.

After a decade of work in service of the faith on both sides of the Atlantic, Jones was ordained in October 1833, becoming the first Indigenous man appointed a Methodist minister in Canada. He would not be the last. His tireless proselytizing inspired numerous other Anishinaabe to convert or to redouble their devotion to Methodism, including fellow ministers Shawundais John Sunday, Pahtahquahong Henry Chase, Allen Salt, Jones's maternal uncle Nawahjegezhegwabe Joseph Sawyer, and the well-known performer and lay worker Maungwudaus George Henry. Along with these men, Jones made Methodism more prevalent among Anishinaabe in Southern Ontario than either Anglicanism or Catholicism while connecting reserves to each other, despite their increasing isolation in a sea of settler communities, and to wider continental and imperial networks. From the late 1820s, these men used their religious ties to develop an Anishinaabe response to colonial land policy. Jones proved particularly proficient at doing so, using his oratory skills, tireless travel, and transatlantic Methodist networks, involving notably the UK-based Aborigines Protection Society, to successfully resist the removal policy Upper Canadian Lieutenant Governor Francis Bond Head had improvised in 1836. Along with the continued need to fund Wesleyan missions, this resistance explains Jones's return to Britain in 1837-38. After meeting Colonial Secretary Glenelg in London to protest Bond Head's plan, Kahkewaquonaby travelled through England, Ireland, and Scotland and spent a week in Wales in August 1838. Wherever he went, he worked to raise money for the Wesleyan missions, most often through public lectures. Just prior to returning to Canada in September 1838, Jones visited Windsor Castle where he met with Glenelg, Prime Minister Melbourne, and Queen Victoria to reiterate his opposition to colonial land policy and to request that the Credit River Mississaugas' right to their lands be reaffirmed.

In the 1840s, Jones's activism shifted from its earlier focus on land to include a greater emphasis on education. Upper Canada's European population doubled every ten years in the first half of the nineteenth century, reaching nearly one million by 1850. In this environment, Kahkewaquonaby increasingly believed that only formal European schooling could guarantee a prosperous future for Indigenous nations. In 1845, Jones travelled one final time to Britain, this time to raise funds for what would become the Mount Elgin Industrial School. After his return, he superintended the initial stages of the school's planning and construction, hoping to create under the auspices of the Wesleyan Methodist Society an institution for the education of Indigenous students run by Indigenous converts. In the summer of 1849, with his health failing, Jones

resigned from the project and retired from most of his ecclesiastical work. In 1851, Mount Elgin, firmly under settler direction, accepted its first students. It would remain open until 1946, operating as part of the brutal network of state- and church-run residential schools that removed children from their homes with the stated goal of interrupting cultural transmission and assimilating them into settler society.

Peter Jones died in his home just outside of Brantford, Upper Canada on 29 June 1856. After his death, the well-educated Eliza Field Jones, who was not only married to Peter, but served as his secretary and English tutor, collected his journals, publishing them in 1860 as *The Life and Journals of Kah-Ke-Wa-Quo-Nā-By: (Rev. Peter Jones), Wesleyan Missionary*. The following year, she edited and published *History of the Ojebway Indians with Especial Reference to their Conversion to Christianity*, a book on which her husband spent much of his life only stopping when illness and death made it impossible to finish.

Author

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Further reading

'Peter Jones (Kahkewaquonaby) (1802-1856)', Y Bywgraffiadur Cymreig / Dictionary of Welsh Biography, People's Collection Wales

Wikipedia Article: [Peter Jones \(missionary\)](#)

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