

The Vinegar Jones Cabin



A Jewel in the Crown of Gibson Park

Built in the Spring of 1884, the Vinegar Jones Cabin is the city's only building remaining from the first year of the original townsite. Located in Great Falls' premier park, inside you will see 1880s era furnishing and interpretive displays honoring the founding of Great Falls.

What is the History of the Cabin?

- The Cabin was built on the Southside of the Original Great Falls Townsite in the Spring of 1884 by Fort Benton carpenter, Josiah Peeper.
- We believe the Cabin was the first permanent home built in the Townsite, and that it is the only remaining building from 1884.
- In 1890 W. G. Jones bought a lot across Fifth Avenue South and moved the Cabin to the new site. Jones built an addition on the back of the Cabin, and the Jones family lived there until 1912, when Jones moved a two-story frame house to the same lot.
- Until his death in 1931, and the death of his wife, Rosa, in 1938, the Cabin was preserved, protected, and rented.
- The Cabin survived fires, demolition permits, and in 2001 was bought by Mark Blom and Dale Nelson.
- In June 2001, Mark approached the City/County Historic Preservation Officer, offering the Cabin to the City. A committee, under the City/County Historic Preservation Advisory Commission, began planning how to save and restore the Cabin. The plan was approved by the City's Parks and Recreation Department, and the City took ownership.
- In December 2002, the Cabin was moved to the City's premier park, Gibson Park. With the support of a broad coalition of Great Falls businesses, labor unions, and individuals, restoration is underway.
- The "Little Cabin That Could" has survived time, the elements, fire, and demolition permits to take its place of honor in Gibson Park.

What will I See in the Cabin

Interpretive Displays:

1. Founding of Great Falls Townsite
 1. 1883 Rolfe First Survey Map
 2. 1884 Great Falls Townsite Map
 3. 1891 Great Falls Perspective Map
2. Cabin
 1. 1884 Josiah Peeper--Gibson/Hill Cabin Lot "Deed"

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2. Cabin Locations & Dates
3. Cabin Photos: Earliest known; Before, During, and After Restoration
3. Vinegar Jones Family
 1. Jones' path from Maine to Montana
 2. Builder Jones highlights: Fort Assiniboine, Grand Union Hotel, early Great Falls Buildings
 3. Portraits of Vinegar and Rosa Jones

Note: Displays and furnishings will change periodically.

Who was Vinegar Jones?

- Whitman Gibson [W. G.] Jones, commonly called "Vinegar" Jones, a colorful, common man hero, owned and preserved the Cabin from 1890 until his death in 1931.
- He was a master carpenter, builder, house mover, and early preservationist.
- W. G. Jones, a first cousin of Great Falls founder Paris Gibson, was born in 1859 in Brewer, Maine. Jones was named "Whitman" after the pioneer missionary Marcus Whitman, a friend of W. G.'s mother and "Gibson" for his mother's maiden name.
- He came to the Upper Missouri on the steamer Helena in August 1880 to help the Army build the new military post at Fort Assiniboine.
- In the Fall of 1880, Vinegar traveled by freight wagon to Fort Benton. Highlighting his four years in Fort Benton, Vinegar married young Rosa Zahner and built much of the woodwork at the majestic Grand Union Hotel. His master carpentry work can be admired today in the classic lobby counter desk and the front porch of the Grand Union.
- In the Fall of 1884, Jones began work in the new townsite of Great Falls. During the next three years, he built Great Falls' first store on Central Avenue, the first flour mill, the Townsite Office, and many other early buildings.
- In 1890 Vinegar bought Josiah Peeper's Cabin and moved it across Fifth Avenue South. Until his death in 1931, Vinegar Jones preserved and protected the Cabin.
- Vinegar homesteaded on the outskirts of Great Falls. He evolved from building houses to moving them.
- He built and operated a vinegar factory. Some say his nickname "Vinegar" came from the vinegar plant; others insist the name really captured his acerbic personality.
- He crusaded to preserve and mark the early Mullan Road leading from Fort Benton to Washington territory.

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