

# Kumen Jones

**Born:** May 5, 1856 in Cedar City, Utah

**Died:** 1946 in Bluff, Utah

**Married:** (1) Mary Nielson Jones, 19 December 1878  
(2) Lydia May Lyman, 2 December 1882

**Father:** Thomas Jones, from Llanelly, Carmarthenshire,  
South Wales

**Mother:** Sage Treharne Jones, from Llanelly, Carmarthenshire,  
South Wales



## Childhood

Kumen Jones was the third of seven children born to Thomas and Sage Treharne Jones, both converts to the Church of Jesus Christ of Later-day Saints, from Llanelly, Carmarthenshire, South Wales. The couple eventually settled in Cedar City, Utah, in 1853, and it was there Kumen was born on May 5, 1856. His childhood was marred by the loss of both of his oldest brother, Alma, who died after being kicked by an ox, and the passing of his father, who had suffered painfully from rheumatism for two years prior to his death. Unfortunately, his father's inability to provide for his family during those years left the family quite destitute at his passing. As a result, Kumen, and his older brother Lehi, assumed great responsibility for the well-being of their mother and younger siblings at relatively young ages. Kumen admired his mother greatly for her strength in holding up under such adversity. And he never forgot the kindnesses shown to them by "church officials and members" during those years of especial hardship.<sup>1</sup>

Like his peers, Kumen attended school for approximately three months every winter until he was about fourteen years of age. But at that time, it became financially necessary for him to seek employment due to his family's poverty. After several attempts to become apprenticed to various blacksmiths failed, he did odd jobs around town for a few years. At age sixteen Kumen began delivering mail, along with his brother Lehi, to Bullionville, Nevada, a job he held for three years. Later in life he remembered this experience as "a very lonesome job for a boy," as it would take him six days to travel the 225 mile trip, all the while alone, except at night, when he was housed by various families along the way.

## Cowboy Life

At age nineteen, Kumen became a true "cowboy," employed by the C. C. Company to herd cattle through the rangelands near Zions Canyon. Many times during these years, Kumen recalled being saved from dangerous circumstances, such as being lost in winter storms, facing the threats of cattle rustlers, and miraculously surviving wagon and riding accidents unscathed.<sup>2</sup>

## A Hole-in-the-Rock Pioneer

Kumen Jones is one of the most well-known pioneers that came to Bluff via Hole-in-the-Rock. His contributions to the expedition, both during the journey and afterwards in the form of narratives he wrote about the Hole-in-the-Rock experience, grant him a unique place in the

history of the venture. He was called to be a member of the initial exploring party sent from Paragonah in April, 1879, to determine a feasible site for settlement of the San Juan Mission. Once that place had been decided upon, Kumen returned to Paragonah and joined the main body of pioneers gathering near Forty Mile Spring. This time, he was accompanied by his bride of almost a year, Mary Nielson Jones, the daughter of Jens and Elsie Nielson. They had been married in the St. George Temple on December 19, 1878.<sup>3</sup> The night after they returned to Cedar City following their marriage, Kumen dreamed that he would be called to settle among the Indians.<sup>4</sup> This occurred a little over a week later when his name was read over the pulpit to be a colonizing missionary at the quarterly church conference held by the Parowan Stake, December 28-29, 1878.<sup>5</sup>

As the expedition's leadership debated the possibilities of attempting to pass through the "hole-in-the-rock," Kumen was among a council of young men called to investigate the viability of the proposal. He and three other men in this group ventured out the farthest beyond the river, being gone about a week's time. Based on their findings, they advised the leadership that "it would be out of the question for the company to attempt to get through on this route."<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, when the "unanimous decision" was made by the expedition's leaders "to go to work and make a way through," Kumen did just that.<sup>7</sup> After six weeks of strenuous work, alongside his fellow pioneers, Kumen hitched his "well broken team" to "Benjamin Perkins' wagon" and "drove down through the 'Hole.'"<sup>8</sup>

The courage this first step in the journey took was no less needed for the duration of the journey to Bluff. Yet Kumen wrote optimistically about the grueling trek in his twilight years. "When I look back," he wrote, "upon the large company traveling and blasting and working through a country of that nature, six months in the midst of one of the severest winters, it looks to me that there was something more than human power or wisdom associated with it."<sup>9</sup> And while some who arrived with him in Bluff on April 6, 1879 were "disappointed in the country" and would have moved on from there sooner had the strength of their teams been sufficient to continue, Kumen planted his roots in the desert soil, and saw them bloom.<sup>10</sup>



### **Plural Marriage**

A few years after his arrival in Bluff, Kumen married a second wife, Lydia May Lyman, daughter of Amasa M. and Lydia Partridge Lyman. His marriage to Mary had produced no children up to that point, though Mary was promised that if she accepted Lydia as Kumen's second wife, she would give birth to a son, which she did seven years later.<sup>11</sup> Lydia, in contrast, gave birth to ten children before she died tragically in April of 1906 after removing an oil lamp from the house that had exploded, and which consequently caught her clothing on fire, causing severe burns.<sup>12</sup>



## Life in Bluff

For nearly twenty years after this tragedy, Kumen and “Aunt Mary,” as his first wife became known, ran a co-op store in Bluff, trading groceries and good to both whites and Indians. Often they received payment from the Navajos in the form of sheep. He had many dealings with the local Indian populations, such as resulted from living in such close proximity to them.<sup>13</sup>

In 1910, Kumen was called to the church office of bishop, and the next year also became Justice of the Peace. His son Francis recalled that for a time, “the whole government of the town revolved around my father.”<sup>14</sup> After devoting the majority of his life to the establishment and success of Bluff, Kumen Jones died in 1946.

*Researched and written for the Hole-in-the-Rock Foundation by:  
C.S. M. Jones LLC, Family Heritage Consulting.*

For additional information go to the Kumen I. Jones web site: <http://www.kumenjones.org/>

---

<sup>1</sup> Kumen Jones, *The Writings of Kumen Jones*, ed. by Albert T. Lyman , 156-157; Cornelia Adams Perkins, Marian Gardner Nielsen, and Lenora Butt Jones, *Saga of San Juan* (Monticello, Utah; San Juan County Daughters of Utah Pioneers, 1957), 314.

<sup>2</sup> Kumen Jones, 158-163.

<sup>3</sup> Perkins, 315; Kumen Jones, 150.

<sup>4</sup> Kumen Jones, 140, 150.

<sup>5</sup> Kumen Jones, 2; David E. Miller, *Hole-in-the-Rock: An Epic in the Colonization of the Great American West* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1966), 9-10. In his account, Kumen Jones puts the date as 27 December 1878, but Miller notes the conference took place 28 and 29 December, 1878, as stated in the conference minutes.

<sup>6</sup> Miller, 182.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 184.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 185.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Kumen Jones, 150; Francis W. Jones, *General History of Bluff / Francis W. Jones Interviewed by Pat Whitaker on July 2, 1972* (Fullerton, CA; Utah State Historical Society and California State University, Fullerton, Oral History Program, Southeastern Utah Project, c1978), 2; Perkins, 315.

<sup>12</sup> Kumen Jones, 151; Perkins, 315.

<sup>13</sup> Kumen Jones, 40-42; Francis W. Jones, 14-16.

<sup>14</sup> Francis W. Jones., 3.