

## B. Historical Figures

### Jesse Foster Bone (1878-1968)

Jesse Bone was born in the farming community of Little Elm in Denton County. His parents, John W. Bone and Laura C. Watkins, came from east Texas, settling near Denton for several years before moving to McKinney around 1893.

Jesse's father was a farmer. His mother Laura came from a prominent family in Douglas, Texas (east of Tyler) with a storied past tracing back to the Revolutionary War and the Republic of Texas. Laura's grandfather was Jesse J. Watkins who played a key role in helping Sam Houston negotiate peace treaties with the Indians for the Republic of Texas. A 1924 newspaper article that appeared in the *Daily Courier-Gazette* described a 25-year-old penciled manuscript authored by Mr. Watkins' son (Jesse Bone's grandfather) detailing the historic, yet tragic, fate of Jesse J. Watkins.

In 1836 and 1837 my father (*Jesse J. Watkins*) was justice of the peace at Nacogdoches. In 1838, the Indians from the border, as the West was called, were very troublesome, and Houston, knowing my father had been among the Indians a great deal, asked my father to get an interpreter and visit, if possible, all the northern and northwestern tribes and make treaties of peace. My father accepted the appointment and selected Louis Sanchez, a Mexican, as his interpreter... My father started on his mission with Sanchez and 28 Kickapoo Indians as guides, successfully made the trip and saw all the principal head chiefs, making treaties with them, inducing them to return to Nacogdoches with him in order that one general treaty might be concluded.

On the hill just above the old Fowler House, General Rusk, General McCloud and General Felix Houston met the Indians and had long parleys with them, entering into a preliminary treaty, which was to be made permanent at another meeting to be held on the headwaters of the Brazos River at a certain time of the moon, at which time the Indians in conference at Nacogdoches were to obtain the presence of all the wild Tribes and made one general treaty. But a short time before my father was to start for the great pow-wow, a company of unauthorized white men went into the Indian country, came upon a large number of Indians, and massacred them. This so angered the Indians that they become blood-thirsty, went on the warpath and swore vengeance.

Sanchez, the interpreter, begged my father not to make the trip as it meant certain death. But my father would not turn back, and somewhere on the headwaters of the Brazos, he, the Interpreter and the 28 faithful Kickapoo guides were attacked and killed to a man, not a single one of the party being left to tell the tale.

The hand-written manuscript also describes how Sam Houston and Jesse Watkins were “as intimate as bothers” having been friends back in Tennessee. Their exploits are said to be documented in at least two books, including “Jesse and the General” and “Advance to the Prairie.” Jesse Bone is the namesake of his great-grandfather Jesse J. Watkins who was killed by Indians near what is now Canton, Texas.

The Watkins family could also boast one other historical connection. Jesse J. Watkins’ father was William E. Watkins who participated in the Virginia militia during the Revolutionary War.

Jesse Bone was the eldest of five children and worked on the family farm near McKinney until he landed a clerking position for T.J. Melton in 1898. Mr. Melton operated a grocery store on the McKinney Square. Around 1902, Jesse took a new job with the dry-goods store T.A. Rowe in Howe, Texas, a few miles south of Sherman.

In 1907, Jesse married 20-year-old Ola Grace Bradshaw whose family homestead was in Howe. The couple remained in Howe for several years but eventually settled in McKinney after Jesse was hired by dry-good owner William H. Matthews whose store and building occupied the lot where the Ritz Theater building now stands at the corner of Kentucky and Virginia Streets.

The Matthews Brothers Store (also known as the Big Daylight Store) was one of McKinney’s largest. The store was well-known for its customer service, even offering home delivery with their horse-drawn wagon. The company motto was, “Give one and all a square deal, from the least to the greatest.” In 1910, the brothers re-newed their lease and negotiated more floor space which doubled the size of their store. The second and third floors of the store were accesses by an electric elevator which could hold up to eight people. The elevator is cited as the first of its kind in McKinney. The business was best known for selling clothing and dry-goods but after the store’s expansion, other wares were added to its inventory including automobile products. Jesse was hired as part of the store expansion.

In 1913, at the age of 35 with over a decade experience selling dry-goods, Jesse left the Matthews store to teamed up with his uncle who purchased the long-established W.P. Suttle Shoe Store on the west side of the Square (now the site of Rick’s Chophouse). Jesse’s business partner was Robert L. Ray, his uncle by marriage. Mr Ray was the husband of Jesse’s aunt Lula. When Jesse and is uncle became partners, Mr. Ray had been a successful agent for the Southwestern Life Company of Dallas for over twenty

years.

It is possible that the death of Jesse's father in January of 1913 had something to do with his uncle bank-rolling this new business that went by the name of Bone & Ray. Jesse was the business manager while Mr. Ray had no day-to-day duties in the business but instead ran his insurance office out of the rear of the store.

Ads from the time indicate that the shoe store experienced great success from the beginning. In 1917, Joe Connor was hired and became the firm's best salesman. The success of the business gave Jesse the money to travel and purchase several rent homes in town. However, in November of 1927, either despite the store's success or because of it, Jesse sold his interest in the business to his "Uncle Bob," who later brought in his 29-year-old son and long-time employee Joe Connor as partners. The new business went by Ray, Connor & Ray and continued its operations in the same location.

In February of 1928, Jesse opened a new store on the North Side of the Square thus becoming his uncle's biggest competitor. The new store was located in the Estes Building (now the site of the Little Red Hen) which was next door to the old Matthews Dry-Goods Store where he once worked. In 1928, Matthews business had new owners and was known as the Harris-Price Store.

Jesse went to great effort and expense to turn what had once been a bank lobby into an attractively appointed and well-stocked shoe store. He laid new hardwood floors, installed a plate-glass store-front, lighted display cases and other fixtures. The *Courier-Gazette* published an article announcing the grand opening of the store on February 14. Tragically, only hours after the close of the opening-day activities, the Harris-Price Store caught fire destroying the building and all its contents. Quite miraculously, the Bone Shoe Store experience no serious damage and was able to reopen in a couple of days. Jesse Bone owned and operated the store in the Estes Building for 40 years. The Ray, Conner & Ray store did not fare as well and closed its doors in the early 1930s.

Jesse's wife Ola was engaged in the operations of business enough for the *Courier-Gazette* to refer to the couple as business partners. In the 1940 Census, she list her occupation as "saleslady." However, other Censuses indicate no occupation. Her participation in the business would have been natural since the store also carried hosiery. Nevertheless, her participation seems to be on an as-needed basis.

Jesse and Ola had no children. That fact, along with their financial success, gave them the ability to travel frequently. They often went on long road trips to distant locales such as the Pacific Northwest, Yosemite, Washington, D.C. and Monterey, Mexico. Some closer locations included Arkansas, Oklahoma and Colorado. The annual Texas Shoe Retailers Association convention gave them an excuse, if they need one, to travel around the state.

Jesse Bone died of congestive heart failure in 1968 at the age of 90. At the time of his death he still owned and managed the store. He is entombed in the Resthaven Mausoleum in the Pecan Grove Cemetery. Following his death, the store was closed and a couple of years later Ola sold their house on North Church Street.

Ola died in 1975 while a resident of the Wysong Nursing Home. She is entombed along side her husband.