



## James Henry “Nez Perce” Jones (1844-1926)

*Sole survivor of the 1878 Rock Creek massacre, prospector, Indian fighter, freighter, and pioneer. Hear about this attack and how he managed to make his way back to Philipsburg to safety. His story is told in many local history books.*

- **1844-Birth.** January 31, 1844 in Carthage Missouri.
- **Married.** Wife’s name was Rosa. James and Rosa did not have any children of their own but they did rear eight children, six of them before coming west and two others after arriving here.
- James remained in the mid-west until the lure of gold and the intangible something that makes pioneers of mere men called him and he answered the call. He and Rosa crossed the plains to Colorado by ox team, then north along the Mullan trail to Helena and from there to Philipsburg where he was known as a placer miner.
- **July 11, 1878-“Nez Perce” legend.** James earned a nickname in 1878 that followed him to his grave. A group of renegade Nez Perce Indians broke away from Chief Joseph set on revenge against the White man. This band of Indians were looting lonely cabins and murdering solitary prospectors throughout that section of the country. The band of Indians had followed Willow Creek down to

where it empties into Rock Creek and set up camp on the West Fork of Rock Creek. That evening, the Indians went to John Hays’ cabin, about ¾ of a mile below Jones’ camp in McKay Gulch. The Indians took everything John Hays owned and left him for dead.

- **July 12, 1878.** Jones and three other men were panning the gravel along the Ross Fork of Rock Creek about 35 miles from Philipsburg. The Indian group came upon these men unaware. The Indians began firing shots, killing each of Jones’ companions and slightly wounding him. Upon the realization of what was happening, Jones knew his only survival was to flee the area so he started running through the woods toward Philipsburg, 35 miles away. The Indians took pursuit, reveling in the thrill of a hunt and anxious to add his scalp to the other three bloody scalps hanging from their belts.
- Jones was weaponless and dodged from tree to tree and rock to rock to avoid the rifle shots being fired at him and stopping occasionally to throw rocks at the savages. Jones continued quickly through the woods toward the town and help. The fierceness of his attack, his courage, and his woodsmanship soon convinced the Nez Perce band that they were following a man of unusual character, and they gave up after several miles of fruitless chasing.
- Jones reached the Schuh ranch, outside of Philipsburg, while the family was at dinner and began knocking on the door. After several minutes and many questions, the family realized he was not an Indian and opened the door to allow him inside. He quickly re-told his story and the rancher gave him a horse to ride into town and spread the alarm. At 11:00pm, the old miner rode into Philipsburg tired, dirty, and covered with blood from his wound to sound the Indian alarm.
- A group of townsmen set out to recover the bodies of the slain miners and give them a proper burial. The town was placed on alert. The newly christened ‘Nez Perce Jones’ directed defenses, planning reprisals on the Indians as calm and cool as he had been during his retreat from the savages.

- **1926-Death.** April 5, 1926 in Philipsburg, Montana.

*Visit Philipsburg, MT to see a statue of Jones and historical artifacts in the museum.*

