

## The Poorbaugh Legacy in Jasper, Minnesota

Trava Olivier, November 2022

In 1887, five Rae brothers located quartzite deposits on what is now the townsite of Jasper, MN. These brothers were interested in quarrying the stone but were not interested in developing a town. By the following year, there was someone interested in establishing a town at the site and that someone was John Milton Poorbaugh. When John, who had been living in Pipestone since 1880 and worked for several railroads, learned the area would get rail service, he purchased 1400 acres of land from the Rae brothers that included the stone quarry. He had it surveyed and platted into homesites for anyone who wished to build homes and businesses in this new community. Stone from the quarry was also sold for building purposes across the United States. The village of Jasper grew rapidly, and John became a rich man. By 1891, he owned four quarries including the Jasper quarry, quarries in Pipestone, Minnesota and Garretson, South Dakota as well as Bayfield, Wisconsin. These quarries were incorporated under the Sioux Valley Stone Company name.<sup>1</sup> One of the marks he left on the community of Jasper remains standing in 2022, the Poorbaugh building. Built in 1888, it has served as the home of the Jasper Journal newspaper, the Senior Citizens Center, and the Jasper Area Historical Society over the years.<sup>2,3,4</sup> When the depression of 1893 struck the country, John's wealth was gone. He moved his family to Indiana, where he had been born, and started over.<sup>5</sup>

John Poorbaugh was born March 17, 1852, in Elkhart County, Indiana. When the Civil War broke out, John's father joined the Union army and John's mother took her young family to live with relatives. By 1866, just 14 years of age, John was living alone and supporting himself in Iowa. At the age of 16 he signed a contract to clear 20 acres of timber in a 3-month time span in Davis County, Missouri. To complete the task, he hired 25 men to help. He completed the project on time, paid his workers and still turned a profit. He married Hattie Drinkwater in Iowa on September 5, 1871.<sup>6</sup> They came to Pipestone County in 1880 from Mitchell County, Iowa, where John has been employed as a stone mason. Upon his arrival in the county, John started the Pipestone Nursery. By 1884, he was contracting for culvert work with the Burlington Railroad and by 1887 he was under contract with three railroad companies laying rail in the county. When the opportunity to acquire the quarry at what was to become the community of Jasper presented itself, the Jasper Improvement Company was formed. It is reported he became a millionaire during his years in Pipestone County but when the economic depression of 1893 occurred, he lost all his money.<sup>7</sup> He started over and did extensive work around the country as a building contractor in places



*John Milton Poorbaugh*

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<sup>1</sup> "Sioux Valley Stone Company Incorporated in 1891," from the binder entitled J.M. Poorbaugh Jasper's Founding Father, held by the Jasper Area Historical Society, November 2022.

<sup>2</sup> 75<sup>th</sup> Diamond Jubilee, 1888-1963 Jasper, Minnesota, no page numbers.

<sup>3</sup> 75<sup>th</sup> Diamond Jubilee, 1888-1963 Jasper, Minnesota, no page numbers.

<sup>4</sup> Jasper, Minnesota Celebrates the Bicentennial; 1776-1976, page 72.

<sup>5,7</sup> "Jasper's Founding Father John Milton Poorbaugh," from binder entitled J.M. Poorbaugh Jasper's Founding Father, held by the Jasper Area Historical Society, Jasper, Minnesota, October 2022.

<sup>6</sup> Iowa Marriage Index, accessed on [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com) 18 October 2022.

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that included Webb City, Missouri; Allegheny City, Pennsylvania; Cleveland, Ohio; Detroit, Michigan; Benton, Indiana; Sioux City, Iowa; and Lake Wood, Florida.<sup>8</sup>

The above information seems likely to be correct when census records are considered. In 1900 he was living in Jasper, Missouri working as a stone contractor.<sup>9</sup> In 1910 he was living and working as the president of a building company in Allegheny, Pennsylvania.<sup>10</sup> The 1920 census placed him in Ashtabula County, Ohio where he worked as a building contractor.<sup>11</sup> In 1930 he had returned to his birthplace where he operated an orchard farm in Elkhart County, Indiana. He was 78 years old.<sup>12</sup> John Poorbaugh died July 11, 1931, from heart problems. He was survived by his wife Hattie and five of his nine children. His remains were interred at the Jackson Cemetery, Elkhart County, Indiana.<sup>13</sup>

Though his time in the Jasper area was short, his capital investment to build the community around the quarry he acquired, to create and promote the community through the Jasper Improvement Company, and to become the founding father of Jasper is worthy of credit. There is some information missing from the above facts when looking into Jasper's history. This one man did not start the community alone. In fact, he was one of several Pipestone businessmen who formed the Jasper Improvement Company. The company began with \$100,000 invested by not only John Poorbaugh, who served as president, but also money from T.A. Black, E.W. Davies, J.W. Spicer, E.A Sherman, and his brother Phillip Franklin Poorbaugh.<sup>14</sup> In seeking to learn more about John Poorbaugh and his influence in early Jasper, it became apparent that Phillip Franklin Poorbaugh also shaped the community. When looking at the earliest editions of the *Jasper Journal* for information on John, what was discovered instead were articles about Phillip Franklin, often referred to as P.F. or simply Frank Poorbaugh.

Some of the various roles Frank held in the Jasper community include getting men into the quarries at Jasper to remove and cut stone for a livery stable he was building, as well as erecting and operating the Hotel Jasper.<sup>15,16</sup> This hotel, which his family also lived in, advertised having the best water works system in the state.<sup>17</sup> He is also responsible for the first blacksmith shop in Jasper and was a general promoter for

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<sup>8</sup> Biographical information located on [www.findagrave.com](http://www.findagrave.com), search for John Milton Poorbaugh memorial in the Jackson Township Cemetery at Elkhart County, Indiana.

<sup>9</sup> 1900 United States Federal Census, search for John Milton Poorbaugh accessed on [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com) 25 October 2022.

<sup>10</sup> 1910 United States Federal Census, search for John Milton Poorbaugh accessed on [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com) 25 October 2022.

<sup>11</sup> 1920 United States Federal Census, search for John Milton Poorbaugh, accessed on [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com) 25 October 2022.

<sup>12</sup> 1930 United States Federal Census, search for John Milton Poorbaugh, accessed on [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com) 25 October 2022.

<sup>13</sup> Indiana Death Certificate for John Milton Poorbaugh, viewed on [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com) accessed 18 October 2022.

<sup>14</sup> "Capitalists purchased the townsite of Jasper and the stone deposits in 1888, and they formed the Jasper Improvement Company," from binder entitled J.M Poorbaugh Jasper's Founding Father, held by the Jasper Area Historical Society, Jasper, Minnesota, October 2022.

<sup>15</sup> Untitled article, *Jasper Journal*, (Jasper, Minnesota), 27 July 1888, page 1.

<sup>16</sup> "Letter recalls early history," *Pipestone County Star*, (Pipestone, Minnesota), 4 October 1935, Page 1, Column 2, Paragraph 1.

<sup>17</sup> Advertisement for the Hotel Jasper, *Jasper Journal*, (Jasper, Minnesota), multiple issues between 27 July 1888 and 21 December 1888.

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the quarry, securing contracts for the building stone across the country.<sup>18,19</sup> He, too, can be credited with the erection of one of the stone buildings on Jasper's Main Street, the 'Our Own Hardware Block.' The building was built by A.P. Smith and Frank Poorbaugh in 1889. Smith's half of the double store building was used for a hardware store. While the other side of the building once housed Anderson Tailoring and the Bank of Jasper.<sup>20</sup> The newspaper reported in December 1888 that Poorbaugh intended to use it for general merchandise.<sup>21</sup> It is unclear if his plan ever came to fruition for by late February 1889 the newspaper also reported that Frank Poorbaugh would be filling a need to open a real estate office in Jasper where he would sell town lots as well as improved and unimproved farm property.<sup>22</sup> The article does not mention where Frank conducted this business.

It is unclear exactly when Frank left the Jasper community. By 1890, he was living in Sioux Falls, South Dakota where he was the president of the Sioux Falls Quarry Company.<sup>23</sup> Like his brother, John, Frank's time in Jasper was short lived. He returned to Pennsylvania where he worked in the coal mining industry. He was the manager of the Pittsburg Mineral Screen Company.<sup>24</sup> While employed there, he invented and patented three pieces of equipment that improved coal mining operations; the Mineral Screen, the Coke-Breaker, and the Steel-Car Construction.<sup>25</sup> He sold these patents to the Pittsburgh Coal Mine Supply Company in 1900 for a total of \$45,000 [comparable to just over \$1.5 million in 2022].<sup>26</sup>



*Phillip Franklin Poorbaugh*

In 1908 Frank moved to Rock Island, Texas and returned to work as a real estate broker. He developed the southern part of Colorado County, Texas and heavily promoted the colonization of Vera Cruz, Mexico. When the Mexican Revolution began in 1901, Frank "lost heavily."<sup>27</sup> Records reveal he continued to work in the real estate industry for a time, then turned to investments.<sup>28,29</sup> Frank Poorbaugh died at a daughter's home in San Antonio, Texas on February 1, 1938. He was 81 years old.<sup>30</sup> Two days later, his wife Annie died, both were victims of influenza.<sup>31</sup> According to his obituary Frank chose the name Jasper for the new town due

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<sup>18</sup> Untitled article, *Jasper Journal*, (Jasper, Minnesota), 21 September 1888.

<sup>19</sup> Untitled article, *Jasper Journal*, (Jasper, Minnesota), 4 January 1889.

<sup>20</sup> Wall Street and Beyond; A Look at Jasper Businesses Through the Years, page 21.

<sup>21</sup> Untitled article, *Jasper Journal*, (Jasper, Minnesota), December 7, 1888.

<sup>22</sup> Untitled article, *Jasper Journal*, (Jasper, Minnesota), 29 February 1889

<sup>23</sup> 1890 Sioux Falls, South Dakota City Directory accessed on [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com) 4 October 2022.

<sup>24</sup> 1897 Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania City Directory accessed on [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com) 4 October 2022.

<sup>25</sup> United States Patent Office, July 31, 1900

<sup>26</sup> "H.C. Evert & Co. Patents Advertisement," *Pittsburgh Daily Post*, (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania) 8 July 1900, page 10, accessed 28 September 2022.

<sup>27</sup> Biographical information on the memorial for Phillip Franklin Poorbaugh, [www.finadgrave.com](http://www.finadgrave.com), accessed 27 September 2022.

<sup>28</sup> 1917 San Antonio, Texas City Directory accessed on [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com) 4 October 2022.

<sup>29</sup> 1921 San Antonio, Texas City Directory accessed on [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com) 4 October 2022.

<sup>30</sup> Texas Certificate of Death search for Phillip Franklin Poorbaugh, viewed on [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com) 4 October 2022.

<sup>31</sup> "Aged Couple Die in San Antonio," *Pipestone County Star*, (Pipestone, Minnesota), 11 February 1938, Page 1, Column 5, Paragraph 1.

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to the “inexhaustible quantity” of the stone he felt the quarry held.<sup>32</sup> Like his brother, Frank’s time spent in Jasper was short, though he certainly left a legacy that indicates he was instrumental in building and shaping the community. Perhaps the community also left a mark on Frank and Annie. The couple had nine children, the youngest, born in Pennsylvania in 1900, was named Jasper Stone Poorbaugh.<sup>33</sup>

Regardless of which brother is credited, there is enough evidence available to conclude that the community of Jasper came into existence because of the work of both John and Frank Poorbaugh. After their departure, the quarry would operate under the name, Jasper Stone Company, for many years. It continues in operation in 2022 and is owned by the L.G. Everist Company.

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<sup>32</sup> “Pioneer Couple Dies in Texas,” *Jasper Journal*, (Jasper, Minnesota), 17 February 1939, Page 1-Column 4-Paragraph 1.

<sup>33</sup> “Letter recalls early history,” *Pipestone County Star*, (Pipestone, Minnesota), 4 October 1935, Page 1, Column 2, Paragraph 1.

