

John B. “Texas Jack: Omohundro

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According to the [Texas Jack Association](#), Texas Jack is John Baker Omohundro—soldier, Texas cowboy, frontier scout for the Army, actor, and star.

Childhood

According to *Handbook of Texas*, Omohundro was the fourth child (of twelve) of John Burwell and Catherine S. Baker Omohundro, born July 27, 1846 at Palmyra, Fluvanna County, Virginia.

He received some formal elementary education and left home when he was in his early teens.

At 17, he enlisted in Robert E. Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia as a scout. After the war, he went to Texas for three years to learn to become a cowboy.

“Texas Jack”

Omohundro participated in several early cattle drives, including a drive across Arkansas to meat-short Tennessee. Grateful citizens of Tennessee nicknamed him "Texas Jack." On one of his drives he rescued a small boy whose parents had been killed in an Indian raid. The boy took the name Texas Jack, Jr., and went on to lead Texas Jack's Wild West Show and Circus in 1903.

Fame

Between 1868 and 1869, Jack met first James B. "Wild Bill" Hickok in Hays City, Kansas, and then William F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody at Fort McPherson, near North Platte, Nebraska. Omohundro and Cody became first hunting partners and later scouting partners. In 1872 they joined dime novelist Ned Buntline in Chicago for what scholars consider one of the very first western plays. Their costar was Italian ballerina Giuseppina Morlacchi, a La Scala trained dancer and one of the biggest stage stars in the world.

Omohundro appeared in the stage show, "Scouts of The Prairie," which featured well known frontier scouts as live actors. By late 1873, Wild Bill joined as one of the new primary leads in the renamed production "Scouts of The Plains" during the show's second season. Throughout the remainder of the late 1870s, Texas Jack would continue to perform in the theater. He became a newspaper correspondent for the Times and the New York Herald, and wrote accounts of his exciting days as a young "cowboy," one of

which was used by Buffalo Bill in the brochures of his great outdoor Wild West show during the late 1880s.

Texas Jack introduced the world to the cowboy, both through his demonstration of lasso skills on stage and by his writings about his life featured in the popular Spirit of the Times magazine. He quickly married Mademoiselle Morlacchi, his beautiful costar, and the couple was endlessly devoted to one another. Jack left his wife only long enough to lead aristocrats on yearly jaunts across the Wind River, Sweetwater, and Big Horn Mountain ranges and into the depths of the uncharted wilderness of the newly established Yellowstone Park.

Jack's Death

Jack died one month short of his 34th birthday, Omohundro unexpectedly contracted pneumonia and died on June 28, 1880 in Leadville, Colorado. He was accompanying his wife, the beautiful actress and ballerina, Josephine Morlacchi, on a stage show tour. He was buried in the local Evergreen Cemetery. Buffalo Bill paid tribute to his old friend in September of 1908, when he commissioned a new headstone be erected on Jack's gravesite.

On his death, the Brooklyn Daily Eagle, at that time the most widely read paper in the world, said that "More refined than Wild Bill, more modest in asserting himself than Buffalo Bill, he stood on a plane above both." Jack's death at such a young age robbed

him of the lasting fame that his friends and costars Wild Bill Hickok and Buffalo Bill Cody achieved.

Legacy

Texas Jack remained a popular figure with the American public for many years after his death, in part due to the many dime novels that were published about his exploits, including such titles from the Beadles Pocket Library as “Texas Jack, The Mustang King,” and “Texas Jack, The Lasso King,” both published in 1891. In 1994, over 114 years after his tragic death, John Burwell “Texas Jack” Omohundro was posthumously elected to the National Cowboy Hall of Fame in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, where he received the Wrangler Award in the Hall of Great Western Performers for his skills as an original working cowboy and stage actor.

Because of the efforts of the Texas Jack Association and some of its members, John B. Omohundro was inducted into the Hall of Great Western Performers at the National Cowboy Hall of Fame in Oklahoma City on March 18, 1994. In the company of men like John Wayne, James Stewart, Ronald Reagan, and Clint Eastwood, Texas Jack Omohundro remains the earliest born man and first stage actor to receive this honor.

Additional References

[The Tragedy of Texas Jack Texas Jack Omohundro and Giuseppina Morlacchi's doomed romance](#)

[The Cowboy; Or, The Man Called Texas Jack](#)

[Fans Seek Immortality for Cowboy : Texas Jack Takes Shot at Fame](#)