

By Tom Snyder

# Rubin Jameson, Samuel James & Walter Sawyer Early Waukesha, Wisconsin Merchants and Bankers

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The very first \$5 bank note, serial number 1 issued by the National Exchange Bank of Waukesha; signed by Rubin M. Jameson, president and Walter P. Sawyer, cashier

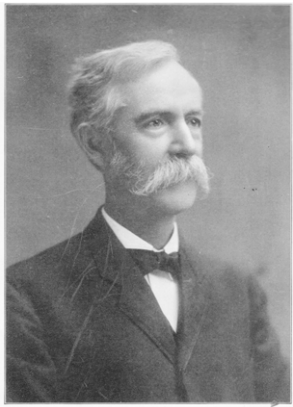
## Rubin M. Jameson and Samuel D. James

**Rubin Jameson** was born in Hamburg, New York, Sept. 3, 1816 living there until he was 18 when he took a job in Buffalo, N.Y. as a clerk in a wholesale grocery house. He remained with the firm for six years, learning the wholesale mercantile trade. He then went to Arcade, N.Y. and engaged in general merchandising for two years. In search of new opportunities in 1843 he moved to Sandusky, N.Y. where he was again engaged in the mercantile business for 15 years then took on a partner, Samuel James where they continued business in Sandusky during the trying and recessionary civil war years. **Samuel James** was born in Cardigan, South Wales, Nov. 23, 1822 and came to New York state in 1847 moving to Sandusky in 1850. Business was poor in New York during the civil war, and in 1863 Samuel James and his wife Elizabeth went to Milwaukee to visit relatives and came to Waukesha to observe their natural mineral springs which had at that time a beginning local reputation. Impressed with the area, in September, 1864 he moved to Waukesha and summoned his partner Rubin Jameson who followed with his wife Emily in spring of 1865. In May of 1865, they commenced business in the mercantile trade in Waukesha under the firm name of Jameson and James, offering general dry goods, groceries and clothing. By 1872 they had developed the largest retail store in Waukesha with the citizens welcoming the goods they brought in from New York and Chicago. Public interest in the mineral springs was growing, and Rubin Jameson was investing in their development. Drain piping had to be laid and natural marsh areas around the springs were filled with beautiful spring houses built atop to make them inviting to the public. Eventually 41 mineral springs were developed. In 1868 Colonel Dunbar began promoting the healing powers of Waukesha mineral water, claiming to be cured of diabetes and proclaiming the area to be the "Saratoga Springs of the West." He retained the services of H. H. Bennett of Kilbourn to photograph the area. Soon people began coming from all directions to take the cure for many chronic conditions. Health spas with mud baths made of Waukesha mineral water and the necessary hotels large and small were soon built. A second railroad station was built to accommodate the travel crowds numbering in the thousands. A bottling plant was built to sell the famous water around the country. So, in 1872 Mr. Jameson retired from the mercantile business, selling out to his partner, Samuel James. Their business partnership was not to be finished. Rubin Jameson's early investments in the springs development flourished for him. In ten more years Rubin Jameson will have made enough profits around Waukesha to start a bank. Samuel James two sons bought out their father's mercantile interest in 1886. Mr. Jameson's civic participation included Village President, one term; Chairman of the Board of Supervisors, two years; Village Trustee, two years; agent of the Etna Fire Insurance Co., and one of the executive committee of the Waukesha Board of Underwriters.





Rubin  
Jameson  
with grand-  
children  
and his  
Waukesha  
Home



**Walter P. Sawyer** was born at Chester, Vt. Sept. 11, 1846. He came as a 7 year old child to Waukesha with his family in 1853. He was educated in the Union public school of Waukesha and Carroll college. He worked in the Waukesha County Bank from 1864 until 1867 when he moved to Chicago becoming a bookkeeper for a wholesale notions company. In 1870 he became a partner with a brother in a merchantile company at Mt. Pulaski, Ill. His mercantile business led to his connection to Jameson and James. In 1872 he married Nellie Williams in Waukesha. Of this union six children were born. Also that year in company with Leonard Scroggin he established the first bank in Mt. Pulaski. In 1879 Walter's home in Mt. Pulaski was entered and three masked men took him to the

bank in Mt. Pulaski in the middle of the night to force him to open the banks safe. A time lock prevented its opening and the would be robbers returned him to his home where they tied up the entire family and left. They were able to free themselves, the only damages being shattered nerves.

In 1882 Walter P. Sawyer left Mt. Pulaski, Ill. and returned to Waukesha where he joined Jameson and James in founding the National Exchange Bank of Waukesha. Rubin M. Jameson was president, Samuel D. James was vice president and Walter P. Sawyer was the cashier. This bank was one of the strong institutions of Waukesha county and passed through the financial panic of 1893 with safety and honor, while so many of the supposed strong financial institutions of the country had been wrecked. Rubin Jameson retired at the end of 1895 with Samuel James taking over as president which was to be a short 11 months, with his passing in December 1896. Rubin Jameson passed away in 1899 and was survived by his two daughters and his wife who lived into the 1920's. Walter Sawyer, then became president in 1897. Through the years the banking partnership remained invested in the springs development and so to provide entertainment to the younger relatives who often accompanied their elders seeking medicinal relief at the springs, Mr. Sawyer along with several other men purchased a plot of land on the southeast shore of Pewaukee lake which they developed into an amusement park, calling it Waukesha Beach. To transport large groups of people out to "The Beach," they built a railroad that started at the Northwestern Depot near downtown Waukesha. The park started with a picnic area, bath house, a pier and swimming beach. Attractions were added each year; a baseball diamond, rides and games. The Milwaukee interurban trolleys ran a route to Waukesha Beach and the crowds came every summer for many years, the decline beginning with America's involvement in World War I. After that war the automobile was becoming more reliable every year for distance travel allowing more people to bypass Waukesha and travel to such places as Kilbourn now known as Wisconsin Dells. Waukesha Beach was eventually dismantled in 1949. The area has been sub-divided into lots with homes.