

Jones, Edward ^[1]

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by Lawrence F. London, 1988

10 Mar. 1762–8 Aug. 1841

Edward Jones, legislator and lawyer, was born in Lisburn, Ireland. He was the second son of Dr. Conway and Mary Wray Todd Jones and the brother of William Todd Jones, the Irish patriot. On his mother's side he was descended from Bishop Jeremy Taylor.

Although he received little formal schooling, Jones was brought up in an educated family. In early life he was apprenticed to a linen merchant with the expectation that he would enter that business. On completing his apprenticeship he left Ireland for America in 1783 and settled in Philadelphia, where for a few years he was engaged in the mercantile business. When the enterprise failed, Jones moved to Wilmington ^[2], N.C., in 1786; he again tried the mercantile business and again failed.

Shortly after arriving in Wilmington Jones attracted the attention of Archibald Maclaine ^[3], one of the leading jurists of the state, who encouraged him to study law and assisted him in doing so. By 1788 Jones had received his license to practice. He found the legal profession much more to his liking and made a successful career for himself in the field. After only two years' residence in Wilmington, he was elected the borough's representative in the North Carolina House of Commons. His rapid rise to popularity was due to his attractive personality and to the influence of Archibald Maclaine. Jones was reelected to the house for three additional terms (1789–91).

In 1790 the General Assembly ^[4] created the office of solicitor general to assist the attorney general in prosecuting cases on the overcrowded dockets of the superior courts. The legislature elected John Haywood ^[5] the first solicitor general, but he held the office for only a few months. On his resignation in 1791, Edward Jones was elected to succeed him. Jones remained in the position until 1827. In estimating his ability as a solicitor general, Chief Justice Frederick Nash ^[6], a contemporary, said that he was "a thorough criminal lawyer, and administered that branch of the law with an energy and independence which was felt and acknowledged by the whole community. Very few of his bills of Indictment were ever complained of, and still fewer quashed." Governor Charles Manly ^[7] observed that Jones "discriminated with remarkable success the just rights of the State and those belonging to the prisoner, never urging a conviction with intemperate zeal for the gratification of a petty triumph."

About 1801 Jones moved from Wilmington to Chatham County ^[8], where he lived for the remainder of his life. He built a home about eight miles west of Pittsboro which he named Rock Rest. From 1804 to 1841 he was a member of the board of trustees of The University of North Carolina ^[9]. Jones was one of those who in 1793 had donated funds to the university. He also gave books to the institution's library.

In 1790 Jones married in Wilmington Mary Elizabeth Mallett (1773–1837), the daughter of Peter and Eunice Curtis Mallett. They had ten children, four of whom died in infancy. The others were Du Ponceau, named for a friend in Philadelphia, Peter S. Du Ponceau; Johnston Blakeley ^[10], named for Jones's protégé, Captain Johnston Blakeley; Charlotte (m. William H. Hardin); Frances (m. the Reverend William Hooper); Louise (m. Abraham Rencher); and Elizabeth (m. John Eccles).

A member of the Episcopal church ^[11], Jones was buried in the churchyard of St. Bartholomew's Church, Pittsboro.

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Subjects:

[Biographies](#) [16]

[Governors](#) [17]

[Lawyers](#) [18]

[Political leaders](#) [19]

[Politics and government](#) [20]

Authors:

[London, Lawrence F.](#) [21]

Origin - location:

[Smithfield](#) [22]

[Wilmington](#) [23]

[Chatham County](#) [24]

[Pittsboro](#) [25]

From:

[Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, University of North Carolina Press](#) [26]

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Links

[1] <https://ncpedia.org/biography/jones-edward> [2] <https://ncpedia.org/geography/wilmington> [3] <https://ncpedia.org/biography/macaine-archibald> [4] <https://ncpedia.org/general-assembly> [5] <https://ncpedia.org/biography/haywood-john-1> [6] <https://ncpedia.org/biography/nash-frederick> [7] <https://ncpedia.org/biography/manly-charles> [8] <https://ncpedia.org/geography/chatham> [9] <https://ncpedia.org/university-north-carolina-chapel-hi> [10] <https://ncpedia.org/biography/blakeley-johnston> [11] <https://ncpedia.org/religion/episcopal-church> [12] http://www2.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/e/Eccles_Family.html [13] <https://docsouth.unc.edu/csr/index.html/document/csr21-0002#p21-36> [14] <http://catalog.hathitrust.org/api/volumes/oclc/1849757.html> [15] <https://www.worldcat.org/title/southern-historical-collection-a-guide-to-manuscripts/oclc/125777> [16] <https://ncpedia.org/category/subjects/biography-term> [17] <https://ncpedia.org/category/subjects/governors> [18] <https://ncpedia.org/category/subjects/lawyers> [19] <https://ncpedia.org/category/subjects/political-leaders> [20] <https://ncpedia.org/category/subjects/politics-and-gove> [21] <https://ncpedia.org/category/authors/london-lawrence-f> [22] <https://ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/smithfield> [23] <https://ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/coastal-39> [24] <https://ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/piedmont-9> [25] <https://ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/pittsboro> [26] <https://ncpedia.org/category/entry-source/dictionary-no>