

Jones, James Addison ^[1]

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by Garland R. Stafford, 1988

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James Addison Jones, construction contractor, civic leader, and philanthropist, was born near Lexington in [Davidson County](#) ^[2], the son of Robert J. and Elizabeth Horney Jones. His parents were impoverished by the [Civil War](#) ^[3], and as a youth he was accustomed to hard work and frugal living on a farm. His limited education was gained in a few short terms in a country school. In later years his detailed estimates of involved construction projects were models of accuracy, completeness, and brevity, evidence of a high degree of self-education. Jones's career in construction began in 1887 when he went to [Charlotte](#) ^[4] before age eighteen to help build the city's first cotton mill. The contractor, a man named Cecil of Lexington, recruited several farm boys to work with him. Jones's first job was to help make bricks. For this he was paid twenty-five cents a day plus room and board in the crude construction camp. He next became a mason's tender and was soon on the scaffold as an apprentice mason. Within two years, he was said to have been the best and fastest mason on the job. Jones had great energy and a will to excel in all that he did. These traits, combined with integrity, good business sense, friendliness, loyalty to ideals, and a concern for the welfare of others characterized his career. In working with others he inspired them to do their best as he led the way.

Sometime between 1890 and 1894 Jones established himself as a general contractor, and within ten years he was building most of the large structures in and around Charlotte. Among these were the Cole Manufacturing plant, the first in the area to be constructed with reinforced concrete. The twelve-story Independence Building, completed in 1909, was the area's first skyscraper. In 1913 his son, Edwin L., became an employee in the business. His next son, Raymond A., who had completed studies at Georgia Tech, went on the payroll in 1916.

The company had a number of contracts when [World War I](#) ^[5] began. Despite rising prices, all of these projects were completed, a fact that further enhanced Jones's reputation as a reliable contractor. In 1920 the business was incorporated as the J. A. Jones Construction Company, with Jones as president and principal stockholder and his sons Raymond and Edwin vice-president and secretary-treasurer, respectively. Jones continued as president until 1943, when he became chairman of the board but still remained vitally involved in all the company's affairs.

Under his leadership, the firm weathered the depression of the 1930s and came out of it with solid growth. A big help was the acquisition of a large contract to build a new military air base, Albroom Field, in the Canal Zone just as the depression began. During [World War II](#) ^[6] the company made a notable record in [shipbuilding](#) ^[7] and military construction in the United States and Central America. One of these was the Gaseous Diffusion Plant at Oak Ridge, Tenn., the largest construction project in the world up to that time.

Early in his career Jones accepted civic responsibilities in Charlotte, serving as alderman, a member of the executive committee of the board, and later as a member of the first city council. In 1917, when the Charlotte area suffered a severe drought, he—as a member of the executive board—led the city in moving from dependence on wells to drawing on the [Catawba River](#) ^[8] for an adequate water supply.

In other business interests he was president of the Addison Realty Company, the Skyland Hotel Company, and the Highland Hotel Company; and a director of the Bank of Commerce, the Interstate Milling Company, and the Citizens Hotel Company. He served on the board of trustees of the Charlotte Memorial Hospital, the North Carolina Orthopedic Hospital of Gastonia, and the Hugh Chatham Memorial Hospital of Elkin.

An active churchman, Jones was a charter member of the Trinity Methodist Episcopal Church, South. When this church and Tryon Street Church merged in the mid-1920s to become First Methodist Church, he moved his membership to Dilworth Methodist Church where for many years he was chairman of the Board of Stewards. He had helped found the mission that became the Dilworth church, where the education building, completed in 1941, was named for him. Jones was elected a delegate from the [Western North Carolina Conference to five Methodist General Conferences](#) ^[9], the Uniting Conference, and three Jurisdictional Conferences from 1930 to 1948. For several years he was president of the Western North Carolina Conference Board of Church Extension. One of the founders and a trustee of the Charlotte Methodist Mission Society, he helped establish a number of Methodist churches in the city beginning in 1942.

His philanthropies were numerous and substantial. [Greensboro College](#) ^[10] and [Brevard College](#) ^[11] were given library buildings that bear his name. He contributed liberally to the Hugh Chatham Memorial Hospital in Elkin and to the Methodist Home for the Aged in Charlotte.

Jones was married four times. His first wife, whom he married in 1890, was Mary Jane Hooper of Charlotte, and they were the parents of twelve children: Edwin Lee, Bobbie, Raymond Allen, Hannibal Berryman, Frances Elizabeth, James

Addison, Jr., Johnnie Hooper, Minnie Beatrice, William Franklin, Dorothy May, Paul Stewart, and Helen Estelle. Mrs. Jones died in February 1914, and in September 1915 Jones married Emma Lockhart Renn of Greensboro [12] by whom he had two children, Emma Renn and Robert Joseph. Following the death of his wife in March 1919, he married Maude Boren of Pomona in September 1920, and they were the parents of a son, Charles Boren. She died in April 1941, and in January 1942 Jones married Rose Walsh, of Charlotte, who survived him.

He died at his home in Charlotte and was buried in the city's Elmwood Cemetery.

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Additional Resources:

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