

# THE PALIMPSEST

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A passer-by on the road to Marlborough in Maryland would have been startled on the afternoon of February 24, 1838, by random rifle fire. If such a person had investigated, he would have found a "field of honor". William J. Graves, United States Representative from Kentucky, stood partly sheltered by the woods, facing Representative Jonathan Cilley, ninety-two yards away on higher ground and in an open field. Nearby were seconds and doctors; and in the background were curious spectators among whom was John C. Calhoun. On the third exchange one of the duelists fell, and as soon as his second, George Wallace Jones, could reach him he whispered: "He is dead, sir." As Representative Graves rode away in his hack, the tall grass, shining in the sunlight, seemed to bow with the wind.

The bullet that inflicted Cilley's mortal wound also pierced the nation's conscience. The funeral was attended by high governmental dignitaries,

with the exception of the judges of the Supreme Court who had "resolved not to do so, as an evidence of their reprobation of a practice more characteristic of a barbaric age, than one in which all profess regard for humanity and the laws." On the next day, February 28th, the House of Representatives began to investigate the circumstances surrounding the duel. After a detailed examination, it was recommended on April 25th that Graves, for a breach of privilege, be expelled from the House, and that the seconds, Henry A. Wise and George Wallace Jones be censured for their participation. The session came to an end without the proposal being passed upon, but the action was not without effect. The public was willing to question the propriety of the participants' conduct. Would a moment's indiscretion ruin the promising career of George W. Jones?

Sociable by nature and charming in disposition, Jones early showed his susceptibility to the lure of politics. When the State of Michigan was organized, the government of what remained of the former Territory was left in the hands of citizens west of the lake. Although the State had not yet been admitted into the Union, an election was held in the western part of the Territory on the first Monday in October, 1835, to choose a new Delegate to Congress. As a result of a many-sided

contest, George W. Jones was elected without the aid of a party label. When the Twenty-fourth Congress assembled in December, 1835, Jones took his seat without objection or contest.

Delegate Jones at once directed his efforts toward the early creation of the Territory of Wisconsin with the seat of government at Cassville. Objections to the place designated as the capital were so numerous that Jones finally resolved to leave the location to the people or their representatives after the Territory was organized. A resolution of the Michigan Territorial Council was presented by Delegate Jones on January 7, 1836, and on January 21st John M. Clayton of Delaware introduced in the Senate a bill providing for the creation of Wisconsin Territory. The proposal passed the Senate on March 29, 1836; three weeks later it passed the House, and was signed by the President on April 20th.

The Territorial Delegate could debate but could not vote or propose legislation except by presenting memorials from his constituents. Personal influence was his most effective weapon. This Jones possessed in abundance. To the creation of Wisconsin Territory he devoted much of his political energy, which no doubt had considerable weight. The organic act went into effect on July 4, 1836, while Jones was in Washington.

Upon his recommendation President Jackson appointed Henry Dodge to the office of Governor.

"I drew my own bills and resolutions to secure the action of Congress", wrote Jones years later. "In those days, I was full of energy and tact, never tiring in my efforts to serve my constituents, and I did not ask for any of the eleven or twelve offices which were voluntarily conferred upon me."

As soon as the Territory of Wisconsin was organized the people began to discuss the election of a Territorial Delegate. A meeting of citizens in Belmont nominated George W. Jones, and he was generally accepted as the leading candidate elsewhere in the new Territory. The town of Mineral Point, however, being a rival of Belmont for the seat of government, nominated Moses Meeker. When the election results were tabulated, Jones won by a vote of 3522 to 696. Although he had served as Delegate of the residual Territory of Michigan only half of his two-year term, he took his seat as Delegate from Wisconsin in December, 1836. He claimed to represent Michigan Territory also until January 27, 1837, when the State of Michigan was admitted into the Union.

The session of Congress in the winter of 1836-1837 was not momentous, but the long session of the winter following, Delegate Jones never forgot.

He secured in 1838 an appropriation of \$2000 for John Plumbe's projected railroad between Milwaukee and Dubuque. And of greater importance was his success in bringing about the creation of the Territory of Iowa.

There were in 1838 forty-one thousand people in the Territory of Wisconsin and more than half that number resided on the western side of the Mississippi. These inhabitants made it clear to their Delegate, by memorials and petitions, that they favored a separate Territory. Jones set to work: he maneuvered representatives by calm persuasion; he attracted political leaders by vigorous assertion; and he deceived John C. Calhoun through the charms of his daughter, Anna Calhoun. Whether Jones worked with such vigor because of the possibility of his being appointed Governor is a matter of speculation. Whatever the influences may have been, the Territorial bill did pass on June 12th and Iowa became a Territory on the Fourth of July, 1838.

It was while the Iowa Territorial bill was before Congress that Jones became involved in the Cilley-Graves duel. Previously, he had been a party to seven affairs of honor, but years later he referred to this challenge as the "terrible duel, the most terrible in the world, not excepting that between Burr and Hamilton."

The *Iowa News* of Dubuque on March 31, 1838, commented: "We regret to see our highly esteemed Delegate, the friend of Mr. Cilley, censured for his conduct on that occasion. It was unfortunate enough for him to be selected by a friend to perform the duties, and yet more unfortunate, while maintaining the honor of his friend with a worthy zeal, to be subjected to such as has been cast upon him." Four days later, the *Fort Madison Patriot* was not so kind in its evaluation. "The late duel in Washington has deservedly received the condemnation of all the influential Editors throughout the country without regard to politics. Much censure rests on those who had the management of the affair, and strong recommendations have been published to have them arrested on the charge of being accessories to this cold-blooded murder." A Governor was soon to be selected. Was this "melancholy affair" to dash Jones's hopes?

Wherever the principal candidates were discussed, the name of George W. Jones was prominently mentioned. A meeting of the citizens of Dubuque in April formally recommended him because of "his pre-eminent and peculiar qualifications, without any reference to his past services," and numerous petitions were signed by persons in the Territory. Members of the Senate and his

colleagues in the House presented similar appeals. James Buchanan wrote to President Van Buren for the same purpose and Henry Dodge may have interested himself in repaying his gubernatorial debt to the Delegate from Wisconsin. An opposing sentiment was expressed by the *Patriot* on May 2, 1838: "The President, who knows all about the circumstances of the Cilley duel, must also know that it would be insulting to the high minded people of this Territory to have placed over them such a man as Mr. Jones". The *Wisconsin Territorial Gazette*, however, was willing to wager "a glass of Funk's excellent mond" on Jones.

Whether because of political opposition or because of his interest in the Delegacy, Jones decided in May to announce his candidacy for reelection as Territorial Delegate from Wisconsin. Early in July, Robert Lucas was appointed the first Governor of the Territory of Iowa. As soon as Congress adjourned, Jones returned home and began a vigorous campaign for his seat in Congress.

The eastern portion of the original Territory of Wisconsin was populated by people from New England and the Atlantic States. They had not forgotten the duel. A contest among James D. Doty, Thomas P. Burnett, and George W. Jones resulted in the election of Doty.

Two months later when Congress convened, Jones took his seat, claiming that there was no vacancy for Doty. His argument was based upon the fact he had been elected as Delegate from Wisconsin while he had another year to serve as Delegate from Michigan. And his service for Wisconsin did not begin until he had completed his incumbency for Michigan. Furthermore, he contended that he had been elected for the full period of the Twenty-fifth Congress, ending on March 4, 1839. It was an ingenious argument but the Committee on Elections in the House reported on December 21st in favor of Doty's claim. On January 3, 1839, the House adopted the report by a vote of 165 to 25. Thus, the "field of honor" lay between Jones and two prominent positions, Governor of Iowa Territory and Delegate from Wisconsin.

Friends he had served, however, did not forget him. As Iowa matured into Statehood he held minor political posts such as Surveyor General and Clerk of the Wisconsin Supreme Court. In 1848 he became a candidate for the United States Senate, contesting with his Dubuque townsman, Thomas S. Wilson, for that honor. The Democrats nominated Jones and his friend Augustus C. Dodge and, having at last a decisive majority in both branches of the General Assembly, elected

them on December 7, 1848. In drawing lots for classification, Jones won the longer term.

The first term for Senator Jones was full of debate on land and railroads. He made friends and enemies. It was charged that he was partial to certain sections of the State. He was reëlected in 1852 only after a bitter struggle and personal animosity had left their marks. This term witnessed the growing importance of the slavery issue and the internal strife within the Democratic party. As his party was eclipsed so was Jones: on January 26, 1858, James W. Grimes was chosen to succeed him as Senator from Iowa.

President Buchanan, aware of Jones's talents as a diplomat in Congress, offered him the post of Minister at Bogota, capital of the republic of New Granada — now Colombia. For more than two years he served in this position until the political wind changed and President Lincoln named his successor. On his return home he was suspected of treason and arrested late in 1861. The action was based upon a letter to Jefferson Davis in which he blamed the Abolitionists for precipitating the Civil War. Two months later he was released. His public life was over at fifty-seven.

The southern predilection of Jones becomes clear in the light of his early life. He was born at Vincennes in the Territory of Indiana on April 12,

1804. After preliminary study, he entered Transylvania University at Lexington, Kentucky. There he gained something from books, but more from the contacts he made. Among his fellow students were David R. Atchinson, Stevens T. Mason, and Jefferson Davis. Between the future President of the Confederacy and Jones a close friendship ensued.

In 1825 he took up the study of law in the office of his brother-in-law, John Scott, at Ste. Genevieve, Missouri. He held several minor court positions but the work seems to have undermined his health. Upon the recommendation of his physician he sought an outdoor life. He settled in the spring of 1827 at Sinsinawa Mound, located in the lead region of Wisconsin. During the same year, a friend from Ste. Genevieve, Henry Dodge, also migrated to the lead mines.

In his new surroundings Jones began mining operations. The summer of 1828 was enlivened by frequent visits from Lieutenant Jefferson Davis, then stationed at Fort Crawford. That winter Jones returned to Ste. Genevieve where he married Josephine Grégoire on January 7, 1829. The Grégoire family, long in America, had contributed much to the early culture of Missouri.

For a few years Jones lived quietly and prosperously at Sinsinawa. Then, in the summer of

1832, Black Hawk brought terror into the mineral region. Jones served with Henry Dodge in the campaign that led to the decisive conquest of the Indians. When military duties took Dodge to the Missouri frontier, George W. Jones was appointed to his post of chief justice of the county court of Iowa County. It was at this time that politics beckoned so strongly that Jones followed the siren of public office through some of the most dramatic moments in American history.

After his retirement, he grew gracefully old surrounded by friends who loved him, and enemies who hated him with respect. Through more than thirty years, sound in mind and body, he saw a country come to fruition. He related tales of his youth which had become history. In his last years, having outlived his generation, he became the patriarch of the State.

There seems to be little doubt that George W. Jones was a man of talent. Tall and erect, he made many friends with his charming manners, and his success made many enemies. The Fort Madison *Patriot*, which had condemned his participation in the Cilley duel, later retracted and complimented him. Speaking of Jones's reluctance to take part, the paper continued: "We mention these facts, for such we believe them to be, as due to the character of a man, whose de-

portment in private life has won for him many and lasting friends, and whose services as a public officer have ever been characterized by a sense of high and uncommon promising rectitude."

In 1892, an act passed by Congress gave Jones a pension for his services as a drummer boy in the War of 1812 and as an aid to Dodge in the Black Hawk War. As his ninetieth birthday approached, Governor Frank D. Jackson sent a special message to the General Assembly of Iowa asking that Jones be given recognition for his past activities. On April 4, 1892, the legislature received the venerable statesman. "I am deeply grateful to the people of Iowa for the distinguished honors that they have conferred upon me", said the pioneer of Pioneer Law-makers. "I am proud of the honor of having given the name of Iowa to this State, as I gave the name of Wisconsin to our sister State."

The organizer of the Territories of Wisconsin and Iowa participated in many important public affairs and associated with famous men. His public record is a lasting monument. At the age of ninety-two, on July 22, 1896, George Wallace Jones passed into the eternal void of night while the everlasting stars continued to sparkle upon the State he sponsored.

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