

THOMAS GOODE JONES

Lawyer/Governor/Judge/ethicist/soldier Thomas Goode Jones was born in Georgia in 1844 and was a student at the Virginia Military Institute when in 1862, like all the others eager to support its professor Thomas Jonathon [“Stonewall”] Jackson and the Southern effort, left *en masse* for the Confederate Army. Jones made it to Major, and the legend is that he provided and carried at least one of the white flags of truce at Appomattox, which at breakfast that day had been a linen napkin from the biscuits a local lady brought over to the soldiers. He was elected Captain of the Montgomery Greys in 1876 and was Colonel of a regiment of state troops from 1880 to 1890, commanding State troops in every serious riot from 1874 to 1894.

The year after Appomattox, in 1866 Jones was admitted to the bar and practiced law, among other activities including journalism. As a lawyer Jones wrote the 1887 Code of Ethics of the Alabama Bar, acclaimed as the first ever anywhere, and acknowledged by the American Bar Association as the source of its first code. Lawyers today encounter that regularly whether they know it or not, since that code was the basis of the ethics provision setting how to determine a reasonable attorneys’ fee, which in 1974 was adopted by the old Fifth Circuit in its landmark case Johnson v Georgia Highway Express, which in turn in 1983 became the basis for Alabama’s version of it, Peebles vs Miley. At the height of his law practice Jones was lawyer for the L&N Railroad, maybe the most powerful business force in Alabama through its president Milton Hannibal Smith, ancestor of Chief Judge Virginia Smith [“Ginny”] Granade of the Federal Court in Mobile.

Jones was elected to the legislature and was its speaker in 1886-1888. By the next year Reuben Kolb, Alabama’s best populist politician and a progressive white planter who had bred the “Kolb’s Gem” watermelon, was running as a Democrat for Governor with strong support in the white counties and from black voters, but was considered a radical challenge to the post-Reconstruction Bourbon redemption. The conservative whites coalesced behind Jones, a darkhorse, on the theory that he was the weakest anti-Kolbite who could not guarantee where his delegates would go if he withdrew. Kolb was hurt but supported Jones, who was elected for the then two-year term. But in 1892 Kolb ran again, from his own party, and the close election—populists called it “The Crime of ‘92”-- might be the dirtiest ever in Alabama. But Governor Jones turned out to be what passed then as a strong advocate of racial fairness and general genteel integrity, and a strong anti-lynching governor. In the silver and gold currency controversies he was a gold standard Democrat.

1901 was a big year for Jones as Elder Statesman. In Alabama’s 1901 Constitutional Convention he led an impromptu strong floor fight for serious impeachment tools against Sheriffs whose dereliction led to lynchings. He was elected President of the State Bar and was appointed United States District Judge for the Northern and Middle Districts of Alabama, serving until his death in 1914.

Jones and his wife had thirteen children, the most famous being Judge Walter B. Jones, Circuit Judge in Montgomery who was reversed by the Supreme Court in the landmark cases NAACP v Alabama and N.Y. Times v Sullivan, and after whom Jones Law School was named.

