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## Charles H. Jones: Florida's Gilded Age Editor-Politician

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## CHARLES H. JONES: FLORIDA'S GILDED AGE EDITOR-POLITICIAN

by THOMAS GRAHAM \*

FOR MUCH of the nineteenth century American newspapermen played important roles in political parties. Most papers were affiliated with or were supported by a particular party, and the editor of the party newspaper was usually treated as one of the ranking officers in the organization. Sometimes editors held public office, but more often they served as advisors, ideologues, and mouthpieces of the party line. Nineteenth-century Florida had several newspapermen of this type. Preeminent among these was Charles Dyke of the Tallahassee *Floridian*, who guided the Democratic party's chief journal from early statehood days through the tumultuous era of Reconstruction. Dyke's retirement in 1882 ended a long and illustrious career, but by then another journalist, Charles Henry Jones, had arrived on the scene to claim the title of newspaper spokesman for Florida Democrats.<sup>1</sup>

Jones had come to Florida by a circuitous route which led him from his native home in Talbotton, Georgia, to New York City, and then to Jacksonville. Born March 7, 1848, the son of George W. and Susan Jones, he was recognized as an accomplished childhood scholar. Just old enough to join the Confederate army during the closing months of the war, he fought with Georgia home defense forces, and then, believing that the defeated South held few opportunities for him, he left for the North and began his rise in the publishing world. By the age of twenty-one he was editor of the *Eclectic* magazine. Soon he was co-editor of *Appleton's Journal*, an editor for Henry Holt Company, and a writer of tourist guide books for Appleton Company. It was his role

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1. Thomas S. Graham, "Charles H. Jones, 1848-1913: Editor and Progressive Democrat" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Florida, 1973). The best published account of Jones's career in Jacksonville is Richard A. Martin, *The City Makers* (Jacksonville, 1972), 132-37, passim.

as ghost writer for George M. Barbour's *Florida for Tourists, Invalids and Settlers* that turned Jones's attention to Florida and led to his decision to move to Jacksonville.<sup>2</sup>

In June 1881, Jones visited Jacksonville and, in partnership with Barbour, negotiated with Hugh B. McCallum for the purchase of the *Daily Florida Union*. This paper had been established by Republicans during the war, but it now became the local Democratic organ. Although McCallum was suffering from a long bout with tuberculosis, he refused the offer to purchase the Union even in the face of Jones's threat to launch a rival newspaper.<sup>3</sup> Determined to follow through with their plans, Jones and Barbour brought out the first edition of the *Florida Daily Times* on November 29, 1881. Within a few years this little four-page sheet would absorb the *Union* and grow to become the most successful newspaper in the state. However, Jones aspired to political power as well as business success.

Florida politics were in a fluid, transitional stage between the two more clearly defined periods of Reconstruction and the Populist-Progressive era. Even though Reconstruction had ended, Republicans still held offices in state and local government, and blacks continued to vote in relatively large numbers. Some questions which seemed to pit "the people" against "the interests" had arisen, but the issues of the Populist period had not been clearly drawn. In the absence of a popular direct primary, the nominating process was controlled by the various "court house gangs" in each county. This, along with the support which certain strong politicians attracted, led to frequent complaints of "ring rule." Both political parties were in shambles. The Democrats were divided, both by personalities and by the first stirrings of populist discontent. The blacks, who constituted the bulk of the Republican party, were unhappy with the shoddy treatment they were receiving at the hands of the white office-holding leadership, while a few Republicans hoped to wrest control of the party away from the "ring bosses."<sup>4</sup>

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2. Thomas Graham, "Who Wrote 'Barbour's Florida'?", *Florida Historical Quarterly*, LI (April 1973), 431-35.

3. Jacksonville *Florida Daily Times*, October 20, 1882.

4. The best general treatment of Florida politics in this period is Edward C. Williamson, "The Era of the Democratic County Leader: Florida Politics, 1877-1893" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsyl-

When Jones first arrived in Florida he proceeded cautiously in this confused political arena. The *Union* was the recognized organ of the Democrats, and Jones knew that he would gain little by declaring that his own paper was also straightout Democratic in its sympathies. A Republican sheet was unthinkable; Jones was a Democrat by conviction. Also, during the course of an interview with former Republican Governor Harrison Reed, he had perceived that the disharmonious Republicans had little future in Florida. Therefore the *Times* was born as an "independent" newspaper, beholden to neither party.<sup>5</sup> As such it was not exactly a novelty. Independent journalism had been growing since the Civil War, but the newspaper without a declared political affiliation was still rare, especially in the South.

Whether an independent course could be negotiated successfully was problematical, especially since Jones fully intended to influence the course of political affairs. Looking toward his first campaign, the congressional election of 1882, Jones privately described his task as "an extremely difficult and delicate one. We shall probably decide the election, but, on the other hand, any blundering would wreck our enterprise, which has now become too valuable to imperil."<sup>6</sup>

During the campaign, which matched incumbent Republican Horatio Bisbee against ex-Confederate General Jesse J. Finley, the *Times's* news columns favored Bisbee, and his paid advertisements were run on the editorial page where they might be mistaken as an endorsement. This favoritism led to charges by the Democrats that the *Times* was secretly a Republican paper or that a large sum of money (usually described as "one thousand dollars, lump amount") had been paid Jones to boost the Republican candidate.<sup>7</sup> Jones gave two obvious-perhaps

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vania, 1954); Edward C. Williamson, *Florida Politics in the Gilded Age, 1877-1893* (Gainesville, 1976).

5. Jacksonville *Florida Daily Times*, November 29, 1881; Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, August 2, 1884.
6. Charles H. Jones to Julian Abernethy, July 23, 1882, Charles H. Jones Papers. The Jones Papers are in the possession of his granddaughter Mrs. Carl G. Freeman of Bat Cave, North Carolina. Copies of most of the papers are in the P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History, University of Florida, Gainesville.
7. Jacksonville *Florida Daily Times*, August 18, 24, September 24, October 17, 1882; Gainesville *Weekly Bee*, June 30, 1882; Pensacola *Semi-Weekly Commercial*, October 17, 1882; Jacksonville *Morning News*, July 14, 1886.

adequate-answers to the critics: the Republicans patronized the *Times* because they had no newspaper of their own, and the Democrats shied away from the *Times* because of suspicion.<sup>8</sup> Yet Jones may well have allowed the paper to lean to the Republican side simply to demonstrate that the *Times* could decide election results. Perhaps it could, for Bisbee won the race. Commenting on his course during the election, Jones remarked to a friend, "I am shooting the rapids all the time."<sup>9</sup>

When Jones purchased the *Union* and merged it with the *Times*, he announced that the *Times-Union* would remain independent, but would ordinarily support the Democratic party since that was the party of respectable citizens in the South. He added, however, that party leaders would not dictate editorial policy, although he invited them to work with him.<sup>10</sup> In a larger sense, though, the *Times-Union* was not independent, for it served Jones's own political ambitions. It was not a party paper, but the personal organ of its editor.

Jones's first open attempt to direct Democratic party affairs was a failure, but it was an enlightening experience for him. He had remained neutral in the city election of 1882, but in the spring of the following year he labored for the candidacy of John Q. Burbridge, a prominent grocer and real estate broker, who was representative of the progressive element in Jacksonville. During the winter tourist season the way for Burbridge's campaign was prepared through a free-wheeling crusade against the incumbent administration's failure to enforce the laws against gambling and Sunday liquor sales.<sup>11</sup> Jones followed this up with an attempt to organize support for Burbridge at the ward primaries and convention, but the nomination went to party regular William L. Dancy, a man who believed that a resort town needed sundry distractions to entertain its winter guests. Refusing to accept Dancy, Jones put together his own "Citizens" ticket, selected from the nominees of both parties, but the Democratic

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8. Jacksonville *Florida Daily Times*, July 9, October 25, 1882.

9. *Ibid.*, November 28, 1882; Jones to Abernethy, December 31, 1882, Jones Papers.

10. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, February 4, 1883.

11. *Ibid.*, March 3, 6, 1883.

slate swept the election, in part through the purchase of Negro votes.<sup>12</sup>

When Dancy ran for re-election the following year against a supposed "reform" ticket, Jones endorsed him and the regular Democratic ticket with scarcely a grumble. Jones justified this course by declaring that the opposition did not represent a step toward good government, and-more importantly-it was vital that the Democrats avoid internal disputes during the 1884 state and national elections.<sup>13</sup> His concern was warranted, for the party was threatened with a factional split between two party leaders, Governor William D. Bloxham and former Governor George F. Drew, as well as by a major defection to "Independence."

The Independent movements in the South during the 1870s and 1880s can be interpreted as the first rumblings of the coming Populist movement. In Florida they denounced the sale of state lands at low prices to large developers such as Hamilton Disston, special favors given to railroads and corporations, and the failure to enact a railroad regulatory commission. The Independents also opposed what they called "ring rule" and demanded that the state constitution of 1868 be revised to restore popular election of local officials. Under the constitution, drafted by moderate Republicans during Reconstruction, the governor was given the power to appoint county officers. Originally intended to keep Democrats and blacks out of office, it now served as the chief means by which the so-called "Tallahassee ring" dominated the party and the state government.<sup>14</sup>

Jones recognized that this desire to return to normal local elections was behind much of the Independent movement, and he sympathized with those who felt they had been unfairly shut out of the democratic process. Nevertheless, he turned adamantly against the movement when Independent leaders negotiated an alliance with the Republicans in the hope of carrying the 1884 election. Without the votes of black Republicans the Independents could not hope to win, but fusion with them raised

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12. Ibid., March 9, 11, 14, 16, 17, 18, 20, April 1, 2, 1883; Martin, *City Makers*, 185.

13. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, March 19, 28, April 3, 6, 8, 1884.

14. Ibid., November 1, 1883, June 24, 1884; Jerrell H. Shofner, "The Constitution of 1868," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, XLI (April 1963), 356-74.

the threat of "Negro rule" which was anathema both to Bourbon Democrats and to "good government" advocates such as Jones.<sup>15</sup>

For Florida's blacks the Independent movement was almost their last hope of political survival. Abandoned by the national Republican party, they turned to the Independents for support. The union was consummated in June 1884, when the Independent convention meeting at Live Oak nominated Independent Frank Pope for governor and Republican Jonathan C. Greeley for lieutenant governor.<sup>16</sup>

One group in the Republican party which did not favor the Independent-Republican alliance were the white office holders who received their appointments from Washington and had no desire to see the Negro rank and file assert their will. Jones played upon this division in Republican lines by publishing interviews with white Republican functionaries denouncing Independentism, followed by interviews with Negro Republicans denouncing the office-holding clique. He also pointed out that there was little in the past histories of white men in the Independent movement which would indicate that they held any sincere regard for the rights and welfare of black people.<sup>17</sup>

While spreading confusion in the ranks of the enemy, Jones was at the same time struggling to forestall a second major split in the Democratic party between the friends of Governor Bloxham and the supporters of his predecessor, Governor Drew. Each man was determined to prevent the other from receiving the nomination. Drew had been proposed for governor by the Democrats in 1876, the final year of Reconstruction, because he had been a Whig before the war and seemed more likely to attract moderate Republican votes than a staunch Democrat. Drew had hoped to succeed himself in 1880, but the Democrats no longer needed a compromise candidate, and the nomination went to Bloxham, the hero of Democratic "Redemption." Since that

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15. Jacksonville *Florida Daily Times*, August 17, November 11, 1882; Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, March 30, November 1, 1883, June 24, July 29, 1884.

16. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, June 19, 1884; see also Edward C. Williamson, "Independentism: A Challenge to the Florida Democracy of 1884," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, XXVII (October 1948), 131-56.

17. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, October 10, November 2, 1883, July 18, September 4, 1884.

time Drew had harbored a grudge against Bloxham for denying him renomination.

Bloxham would ordinarily have been the clear choice for governor again in 1884, except that he had negotiated the giant Disston land sale and had vigorously supported railroad growth and government handouts to the developers. Since the Independents had turned these controversial actions into campaign issues, many Democrats felt Bloxham's nomination would play into the opposition's hands.<sup>18</sup>

In April Jones traveled to Tallahassee to discuss the situation with Governor Bloxham. Jones had already suggested in the columns of his newspaper that Bloxham should step aside in favor of a man who could bring party harmony, and Bloxham now assured him that he was willing to do so. It is likely that they considered who the nominee should be, for shortly after Jones's interview with Bloxham the *Times-Union* endorsed Pensacola as the site of the state convention.<sup>19</sup> Pensacola, as it happened, was the hometown of Edward A. Perry, who would eventually receive the nomination and the support both of Bloxham and Jones.

Although Bloxham had announced that he would not seek renomination, he did not quite close the door to a possible draft. He even encouraged some friends to think that he might wish to be drafted.<sup>20</sup> It is fairly certain that he maintained this stance in order to prevent support from building for Drew.<sup>21</sup> Thus, as the convention approached, both Bloxham and Drew remained as possible nominees, and the threat of a rending battle within the party grew more imminent.

Two weeks before the convention the path was cleared for the nomination of Perry when Jones dropped a bombshell which eliminated Drew and Bloxham as candidates. On June 11 the *Times-Union* published a long interview with Drew in which

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18. Ibid., November 22, 1883; Charlton W. Tebeau, *A History of Florida* (Coral Gables, 1971), 253.

19. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, November 22, 23, 1883, February 22, April 29, 1884; William D. Bloxham to Jones, June 11, 1884, Letterbook 2, William D. Bloxham Papers, Florida State Library, Tallahassee.

20. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, April 15, 1884; Bloxham to W. H. Sebring, May 20, 1884; Bloxham to Philip Thompson, May 29, 1884, Letterbook 2, Bloxham Papers.

21. Bloxham to Jones, June 16, 17, 1884, Bloxham Papers.

he released his pent-up hostility toward Bloxham. He detailed how Bloxham had allegedly duped him out of the nomination in 1880, and expressed the opinion that he was playing the same false game again of announcing noncandidacy while covertly maneuvering for the nomination. Bloxham was obliged to reply to Drew's charges, making it clear that the nomination of either man would split the party and insure an Independent-Republican victory in November.

Bloxham, probably chagrined by the role he had been forced to play in the episode, wrote Jones that he feared the interview had "created some very bitter feelings and may damage the Democratic party."<sup>22</sup> However, on the contrary, many Democrats were relieved that the impasse had been resolved, and newspapers across the state followed the *Times-Union* in calling for party unity around a new man.<sup>23</sup> Perry's nomination was assured.

A week after the state convention, Jones and other east Florida Democrats traveled to Fry's Opera House in Palatka to nominate a candidate for Congress from the second district. The convention was marred by an incident when Charles Fildes, brother-in-law of Independent nominee Frank Pope, threatened to shoot Jones for challenging his right to sit in the convention. Fildes was forced out of the hall by convention marshals, and the subsequent nomination of Volusia County citrus farmer Charles Dougherty was anti-climactic.<sup>24</sup>

Two days later Jones was off by train for Chicago and the Democratic party national convention, for his political ambitions exceeded the parochial bounds of Florida. He had wanted to attend as a delegate, but some members from middle Florida on the selection committee at Pensacola had objected, and his name was dropped from the delegation.<sup>25</sup> In Chicago Jones spent much of his time attending meetings of the platform committee, gaining an education for the role of platform draftsman which he would fill in three later national conventions.

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22. *Ibid.*, June 14, 1884.

23. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, June 12, 15, 1884; Tallahassee *Land of Flowers*, June 21, 1884; Palatka *Daily News*, June 13, 19, 1884.

24. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, July 1, 2, 3, 1884; Palatka *Daily News*, July 2, 3, 1884.

25. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, August 26, 27, 1884.

Grover Cleveland's nomination pleased Jones, for like most Southerners he sensed that the Democrats had an opportunity to capture the White House for the first time in more than a quarter of a century. The day after Cleveland's election as governor of New York two years earlier, Jones had printed a prediction that he would be the next president. He liked to boast that he had been the first editor in the South to back Cleveland, although, in fact, in 1884 Jones had started out supporting Samuel Tilden until a stroke eliminated him from consideration.<sup>26</sup> While in Chicago Jones established contact with Cleveland's managers, and a few weeks later received a note from Cleveland inviting him to act as his representative in Florida. In September Jones was invited to Albany to consult with campaign director Arthur P. Gorman and Cleveland's secretary Daniel Lamont, as well as pay a brief call on Cleveland.<sup>27</sup>

Cleveland was concerned about the Florida campaign. Recalling how the Republicans had "stolen" Florida's crucial electoral votes in the disputed Hayes-Tilden election of 1876, Cleveland had already written Jones, "I hope that the work will be so well done, and the result so decisive, that there will be no temptation to our opponents to attempt to steal the State."<sup>28</sup>

Jones turned the Florida campaign into a crusade to preserve the state for "civilization" from the supposed horrors of Negro domination and to save the nation from the "nefarious gang of political freebooters" commanded by Republican nominee James G. Blaine. This was not entirely crass newspaper sensationalism, for Jones had a remarkable ability to convince himself that what he published in his paper was true. Each morning he was up at dawn and off to the *Times-Union* building on Bay Street. At midnight he would still be writing at his desk, his clothes saturated with perspiration from the humidity and heat which the gas lights of the editorial rooms intensified. In the days prior to the election Jones ran a daily tabulation of white and black voters in Jacksonville to encourage white registration,

26. Jacksonville *Florida Daily Times*, November 9, 1882; Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, May 9, 1884.

27. Jones to Abernethy, August 10, 1884, Jones Papers; Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, July 12, September 27, 1884; *New York Times*, September 24, 1884.

28. Grover Cleveland to Jones, quoted in Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, August 9, 1884.

and he warned Democratic poll watchers that “thousands” of Georgia Negroes would be brought in by train in an attempt to swing the state to the Republicans.<sup>29</sup>

There was a wild scene on Bay Street election night as a crowd watched the returns projected on a large screen in front of the *Times-Union* building. Democrats vied with Republicans, white with black, cheering for their favorites as pictures of the candidates were flashed on the screen (along with advertisements for local merchants). As the returns came in by wire it was evident that Perry had been elected governor, but the narrowness of his margin of victory demonstrated the depth of Independent disaffection from the party. Surprisingly, Dougherty unseated Bisbee in the race for Congress. Cleveland’s election remained uncertain for three days because the Associated Press in New York was suppressing the returns. When word finally arrived at the *Times-Union* late Friday night, Jacksonville learned the news through the boom of a cannon.<sup>30</sup>

For Jones, victory had been so complete and satisfying that he could indulge in that curious self-flattery which shaped his perception of himself and his place in the world at large. In a long thoughtful letter to his northern confidant Julian Abernethy he wrote: “For myself personally the campaign has wrought results that would open up large possibilities if I were an ambitious man. I am now recognized both inside and outside the State as the head of the Democratic party in the state, and as having contributed most to the brilliant victory we have won all along the line. The homage and gratulation offered me is somewhat overpowering, but it does not elate me in the least. I accept it as vindication of my past course, but it does not tempt me to reach out for more. I have no taste for politics.”<sup>31</sup>

The disclaimer of political interest was typical of the times, and it cannot be taken seriously; Jones was in his element when emersed in politics. Although 1885 was not an election year, there was much to engage the attention of public men in Florida since the Democrats had promised during the campaign to overthrow the Constitution of 1868. This pledge had helped to defeat

29. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, October 23, 24, 25, November 2, 1884.

30. *Ibid.*, November 5, 6, 7, 1884; William T. Cash, *History of the Democratic Party in Florida* (Tallahassee, 1936), 78.

31. Jones to Abernethy, November 16, 1884, Jones Papers.

Independentism and would have to be honored or the Independent movement would surge to greater strength. The major obstacle to revision was that it would return local offices to popular election, and that was unacceptable in middle Florida and to Jones's own Duval County where blacks outnumbered whites two to one. Some means had to be found to satisfy those disaffected Democrats who wanted to break the governor's appointment power, yet at the same time afford "protection" to whites in black-belt counties.<sup>32</sup>

A poll tax which would effectively eliminate Negro voting was the most commonly discussed device for resolving this dilemma, but Jones was not sure at first that this was the solution. However, as the time for convening the constitutional convention in Tallahassee neared, Jones announced the *Times-Union's* program: election of all state and local officers except for judges, combined with enactment of a poll tax.<sup>33</sup>

During the convention some Democrats who wanted to "elect everybody" and who opposed the poll tax because it would disfranchise poor whites along with blacks combined on a few votes with the Republicans. Jones denounced these Democrats and traveled to Tallahassee to find out if the party regulars were in danger of losing control of the convention to the Republicans and insurgent Democrats. A resolution condemning the *Times-Union* for denouncing those Democrats who had voted with the Republicans was quashed by Austin S. Mann, a leader of the "elect everybody" Democrats but also a friend of Jones. Jones returned to Jacksonville satisfied that an acceptable constitution would be drafted.<sup>34</sup>

The finished constitution of 1885 made more offices elective to placate the Democratic malcontents, while many remained appointive to insure white government in counties with black majorities. Jones approved of its provisions for increased support

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32. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, July 15, 1885; Eldridge R. Collins, "The Florida Constitution of 1885" (M.A. thesis, University of Florida, 1939), 15, 26.

33. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, May 30, June 18, 19, 23, July 19, 1885.

34. Ibid., July 17, 18, 21, 22, 1885; Edward C. Williamson, "The Constitutional Convention of 1885," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, XLI (October 1962), 121; *Journal of the Proceedings of the Constitutional Convention of the State of Florida* (Tallahassee, 1885), 375-77.

of public education, a reorganization of the court system, and the greater freedom given to municipalities. He also approved the poll tax provision which placed Florida in the vanguard of southern states that used legal devices to exclude blacks from the political system.<sup>35</sup>

Yet Jones was no Negrophobe. Like many men of wealth and social position in the South, he would not have the black man as a voter, but he wanted him treated fairly and hoped that future developments would improve his status in society. The *Times-Union* consistently opposed federal "force bills" and anti-lynching laws, while at the same time vigorously denouncing lynchings in the South. Back in 1882 Jones had been condemned across the state for publishing an account by a black witness of the lynching of Charles Savage and Howard James in the town of Madison. Many Southerners opposed the Blair education bill because it would serve to promote Negro education. Jones supported it for that very reason. He protested the maltreatment of Negro contract laborers who were typically employed in railroad building. When J. Willis Menard organized a protest movement among Jacksonville's vocal and still politically potent blacks to bring pressure on the railroads for forcing blacks into the second class smoking car, Jones endorsed their demand for separate and equal treatment. If that was not feasible, Jones urged discrimination on the basis of neatness and orderliness instead of color.<sup>36</sup>

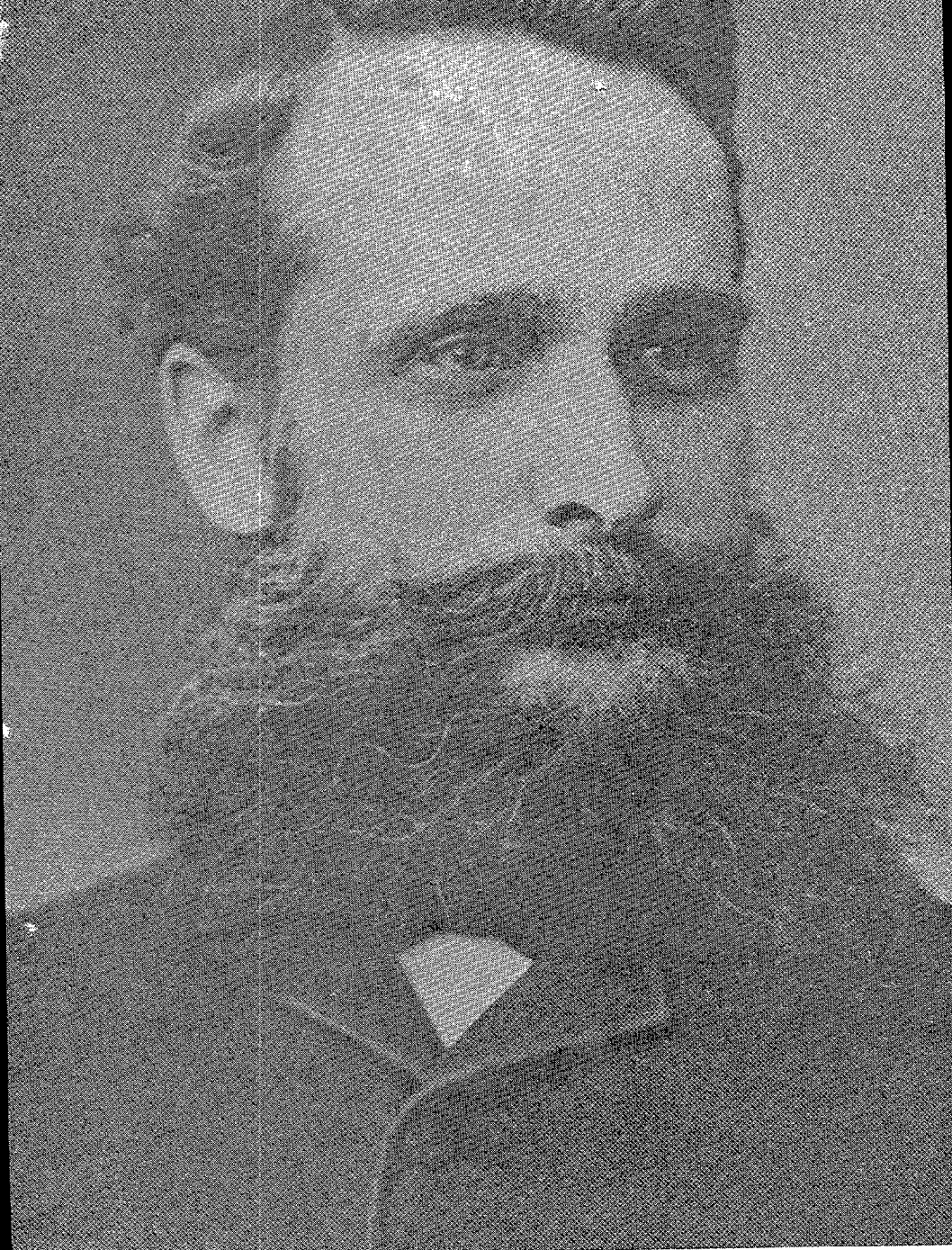
One young Jacksonville Negro who worked for Jones at the *Times-Union*, and later remembered him favorably, was James Weldon Johnson, the noted author and civil rights leader. When the newspaper hired Jim and several other Negroes to work as carriers for \$2.50 a week, he was proud to be a part of the "greatest newspaper in Florida," knowing that by faithfully rising at four each morning he was exhibiting the *esprit de corps* expected of the newspaper's employees. He later moved inside to work in the mail room and to hold copy for the proofreaders,

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35. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, May 10, August 4, 1885.

36. *Ibid.*, February 21, 1884, January 22, 1885, February 24, March 2, 6, June 25, December 5, 1886, April 18, May 23, 1887; Jacksonville *Florida Daily Times*, August 26, 27, 28, September 8, 13, October 13, 14, 1882; Edward C. Williamson, "Black Belt Political Crisis: The Savage-James Lynching, 1882," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, XLV (April 1967), 402-09.

Graham: Charles H. Jones: Florida's Gilded Age Editor-Politician



Charles H. Jones. Photograph courtesy of the author.



The Florida Times-Union building, southwest corner of Laura and West Bay streets. Photograph from the 1902 report of the *Jacksonville Board of Trade*, prepared by Charles H. Smith.

and he sometimes acted as office boy for "C. H." himself. Fascinated by newspaper work, Johnson established one of the first Negro dailies in the United States, the Jacksonville *Daily American*, in 1895.<sup>37</sup>

In 1885 Jones became involved in a personal vendetta with Senator Wilkinson Call over a relatively insignificant issue. Call was the son of territorial Governor Richard Keith Call and seemed to be the heir to the Bourbon tradition in Florida, but during the 1880s he was emerging as a leader of the popular reform wing of the Democratic party.<sup>38</sup> Jones would soon embark on the same path, yet the two men remained implacable foes as long as Jones remained in Florida. The wrangle began over patronage. Call was an open enemy of civil service reform, having voted against the Pendleton Act in 1881. Jones believed that the spoils system led to inefficient government and spawned corrupt political machines.

Although Jones had vowed to refrain from interfering with federal appointments, he felt obliged to concern himself directly when Call and members of the party machine in Jacksonville put forward Noble A. Hull for postmaster. Jones did not want one of "the boys" from the city faction with which he had so frequently clashed to occupy the most important patronage position in the state.

Jones prevailed upon his friend Austin Mann to send a letter to President Cleveland reminding him of the prominent role Jones had taken in the recent campaign and warning the President that the reactionary "office holding clique" represented in the state congressional delegation did not reflect the true feelings of the progressive majority in Florida whose aspirations were voiced by the *Times-Union*.<sup>39</sup> Having used Mann's letter to prepare the way, Jones himself wrote to Cleveland: "Under date of August 4th last I received a letter from you expressing your friendly appreciation of the work I was doing in the campaign. That letter is my excuse for writing now. I have not written before, nor sought a personal interview, because I knew that

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37. James Weldon Johnson, *Along This Way, The Autobiography of James Weldon Johnson* (New York, 1933), 55-56.

38. Williamson, "Era of the Democratic County Leader," 4, 88, 210-14.

39. A. S. Mann to Cleveland, April 24, 1885, Grover Cleveland Papers (Library of Congress, 1958), microfilm series 2, reel 11.

during the opening weeks of the Administration your attention would necessarily be fully occupied by large questions of State. I will reassure you by saying at once that I am not after any office either for myself, or for any relative, friend, or henchman. I am a Civil Service Reformer in the most literal sense of the term, and not only *profess* it but conform my *practice* to it. I write simply to ask that when you reach Florida appointments you will consider one or two points which I will now briefly submit. In Florida as in other Southern States-but more markedly in Florida than in the rest, because of the large infusion of Northern immigration-there is a division and a struggle between the 'old timers' and the 'new comers.' This division is not political; nearly all the whites are Democrats, no matter where they came from. It is the last retreat of sectional feeling. The 'old timers' consider themselves lords of the soil, and as having a divine right to rule, and are arrogant, proscriptive, reactionary, and unprogressive. They are willing to share the prosperity caused by the infusion of new blood and outside capital, but there is a tacit understanding among them that that no 'new comer' shall have any political place or preferment, and on this they stand together as one man."<sup>40</sup>

Jones's letter continued, explaining that the "old timers" had opposed Cleveland's nomination; yet now claimed the rewards of victory. He warned that Florida's congressional delegation would recommend unfit men for office, and he asked that he be consulted when the Jacksonville postmaster was taken up. The letter was, of course, aimed primarily at Call, whom Jones considered a chief "old timer."

Cleveland received Mann's note, but Jones's letter was lost among a stack of patronage requests handled by an assistant secretary and was sent to the Post Office Department.<sup>41</sup> Later when Call realized that an objection had been raised to Hull's appointment, he examined the post office files and discovered Jones's letter. Call copied the letter and had it circulated in Florida to discredit Jones with the conservative wing of the

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40. Jones to Cleveland, April 27, 1885, quoted in clipping from Tallahassee *Weekly Floridian* enclosed in Jones to Daniel Lamont, July 18, 1886, Cleveland Papers, ser. 2, reel 37.

41. Octavius L. Pruden to Jones, May 2, 1885, Cleveland Papers, ser. 4, reel 146.

Democratic party. Eventually President Cleveland accepted Call's second nominee for the postmaster's position, Harrison Clark, a solid Call supporter. It was a defeat for Jones and for Congressman Dougherty who had backed Jones.<sup>42</sup>

However, the *Times-Union* maintained a relentless fire upon Call, publishing article after article critical of the senator. It was said that the President held Call in low esteem because of his opposition to civil service reform and because he had abused his senatorial privileges in obtaining the "old timer's" letter. Privately Jones boasted that he had "prepared public opinion" against Call.<sup>43</sup>

Provoked by such treatment and desiring to protect himself from Jones's charges of misusing power, Call sent a letter to President Cleveland's private secretary Daniel Lamont. Call declared that Jones was claiming to have "more influence with President Cleveland than any ten men in Florida," and that Jones had quoted the President as asking: "Jones, who is this man Call, anyway? Has he got any friends in Florida, or standing? Has he got any home? If so, why don't he go there and stay, for he is not doing himself, or the people any good up here?" Call wanted the President to disavow the alleged statement so that Jones's false character might be revealed to the public. He then turned to the letter Jones had written regarding the Jacksonville post office, explaining that he felt he had done nothing improper in making copies of what he considered "a gross libel upon the people of Florida, and the Democratic party of the State."<sup>44</sup>

Lamont returned a formal response, committing himself to nothing more than a denial of the conversation attributed to Cleveland and declaring that the President had never knowingly slighted Call. Lamont was silent on the "old timer's" letter.<sup>45</sup> In Florida, the 1886 congressional election was approaching and copies of the notorious, but still unpublished "old timer's" letter began to circulate more broadly among people who could make capital use of it against Jones.

42. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, July 4, August 14, October 7, 1885.

43. *Ibid.*, December 24, 1885, February 2, 5, 6, 11, 1886; Jones to Charles Dougherty, February 8, 1887, Jones Papers.

44. Wilkinson Call to Lamont, March 22, 1886, Cleveland Papers, ser. 2, reel 31.

45. Lamont to Call, March 23, 1886, Cleveland Papers, ser. 4, reel 148.

Perceiving the damage that had been done to his relations with a large part of the party in the state, Jones tried to divert attention to the question of how Call had obtained his letter. He published an editorial on the "stolen letter," and at the same time wrote Cleveland demanding to know who had violated his private correspondence: "I understand, of course, that a private citizen, comparatively a stranger, can have no private correspondence with the President of the United States in the strict sense of the term. Yet if it be true that a letter written and addressed to you, marked 'personal and private' is liable to turn up in the shape of 'sworn copies' in the hands of the writer's political opponents or personal enemies, it is time that fact was clearly and generally understood."<sup>46</sup>

When Cleveland did not reply, Jones sent a letter to Lamont, saying that Florida newspapers were claiming that the President had refused to accept a communication from him and that Lamont had amused himself by showing it to Call and others. Jones avowed that he did not believe these stories, but "no citizen of a free Republic is so low that he is not entitled to an explanation of such an outrage as the use made of this letter involves."<sup>47</sup>

President Cleveland decided to reply to this second letter, and after searching through his files found Jones's "old timer's" letter which the Postmaster General has sent back to the White House the previous year. Never a tactful man, Cleveland penned a blunt letter to Jones, saying in part: "I confess to some surprise at the tenor of your last letter to me and a later one to Colonel Lamont. There are several millions of people in the United States who have much more time to write letters to the President than he can possibly find to reply. . . . I am surprised that newspaper talk should be so annoying to you, who ought so well to understand the utter and complete recklessness and falsification in which they so generally indulge."<sup>48</sup>

Cleveland's message was a rebuke to Jones, but he published it in full in the *Times-Union* to refute the stories that the President had refused to accept his letter. Privately he wrote Cleve-

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46. Jones to Cleveland, July 6, 1886, Cleveland Papers, ser. 2, reel 36; Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, July 7, 1886.

47. Jones to Lamont, July 18, 1886, Cleveland Papers, ser. 2, reel 37.

48. Cleveland to Jones, July 25, 1886, quoted in Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, August 1, 1886.

land a humble note of thanks, expressing his "warm admiration" for the President.<sup>49</sup>

Meanwhile the "old timer's" letter had finally found its way into print, and it set the entire state press into a furor. The *Palatka Daily News* expressed a common sentiment in declaring that the letter had "dug the editor's political grave in Florida."<sup>50</sup> This was precisely the hope of Jones's enemies, for he had become the leader of the effort to re-elect Congressman Dougherty. Jones and Dougherty were strange allies. Dougherty's cowboy affections—he wore his Stetson cocked to one side and tucked his pants into his boot-tops—contrasted markedly with Jones's impeccable dress. Dougherty had no sympathy for civil service reformers; yet he agreed with Jones on the need for federal internal improvement projects in Florida. While Dougherty remained in Washington, Jones set about organizing support in the district for his renomination.

The Duval County ward primaries were warmly contested, with Jacksonville's favorite son, Albert W. Owens, drawing fully as much support as Dougherty.<sup>51</sup> Prior to the county convention, Jones caucused with the Dougherty delegates, and the Owens supporters came prepared to expect some sort of trickery from the "budding new ring of politicians" headed by Jones. Because both sides were almost evenly divided, the convention turned into a fight over credentials and then into a shouting match when a Dougherty delegation from a rural ward was denied seats. In the confusion, Jones picked up the convention's papers and walked out with Dougherty's delegates to a nearby hotel where they proceeded to nominate their candidate. The rump of the convention meanwhile remained behind and nominated Owens. Both factions would send delegations to the district convention in Ocala.<sup>52</sup>

In August, east Florida's Democrats assembled at the Ocala House in Marion County. Dougherty had a majority of the delegates, but not the two-thirds necessary for renomination.

49. Jones to Cleveland, August 1, 1886, Cleveland Papers, ser. 2, reel 37.

50. Tallahassee *Weekly Tallahassee and Land of Flowers*, July 14, 1886; *Palatka Daily News*, July 15, 1886.

51. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, June 17, July 15, August 15, 1886; *Ocala Banner*, August 13, 1886.

52. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, July 1, 4, 11, 1886; Jacksonville *Morning News*, July 7, 17, 1886.

While the credentials committee struggled over the seating of Duval's two rival delegations, the other members listened to speeches throughout the day. Frank Harris, editor of the *Ocala Banner*, observed that, "Charles H. Jones, editor of the *Times-Union*, was, of course, one of the leading spirits of the occasion, and the individual on whom all eyes rested as he marched among the throng."<sup>53</sup>

Little real business could be accomplished until the deadlock over the Duval delegation was broken. Finally, late at night, the committee reported that by a vote of nine to eight it was recommending the exclusion of both delegations from Duval. The minority had wanted to seat Owens's supporters. When the convention accepted this recommendation, Owens announced that he was willing to withdraw in favor of Dougherty. The nomination was then made by acclamation, the band struck up "Dixie," and Jones had gained what his fellow journalist Harris proclaimed was "the most remarkable [result] ever achieved in a political contest in Florida." Harris noted that Jones had surmounted the difficulties raised by the "old timer's" letter, that he had stolen the Duval delegation from Owens, and he had overcome the opposition of Senator Call, much of the party leadership, and most of the region's newspapers including Harris's own *Ocala Banner*.<sup>54</sup>

Jones treated the fall general election contest with sedate, bewhiskered Republican Jonathan Greeley as a joke. Greeley toured the district leisurely, reading speeches from a typed script and attempting to attract Democratic votes by quoting the "old timer's" letter. One *Times-Union* account of a Greeley speech began: "The first thing I want to talk to you about is the Tariff ('hurrah for Mr. TARIFF'). In dealing with this subject I ought to inform you that Tariff is not a man ('hurrah for Mrs. TARIFF')." When Greeley brought suit against Jones for this satire, Jones changed his tone and printed insinuations that the Republican candidate was a selfish banker who cohabited with a Negro woman. Greeley sued again, but on election day he was overwhelmed at the polls.<sup>55</sup>

53. *Ocala Banner*, August 6, 1886; Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, August 5, 6, 7, 1886.

54. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, August 8, 15, 1886.

55. *Ibid.*, September 25, October 6, 8, 11, 23, 24, 1886; Jacksonville *Morning News*, September 24, 1886.

In the city election the following spring Jones finally saw an opportunity to overthrow the domination of municipal government by the local Democratic ring. In the two previous annual elections Jones had helped to organize support for anti-ring candidates, but the party regulars had successfully outmaneuvered the reformers. The situation changed when the Young Men's Burbridge Club was organized in February 1887, to support veteran reform candidate John Q. Burbridge and clean up abuses in party operations which permitted ring dictation. The president of the new club was lawyer Duncan U. Fletcher, a fresh face in local politics who was destined to become a four-term United States Senator.

When the local Democratic executive committee rejected the reform club's proposals for open and fair ward primaries, Burbridge's supporters bolted the party and drafted their own slate of candidates, drawing upon Republicans, labor union representatives, and assorted Democrats. It was a heterogeneous ticket, one whose membership did not inspire complete confidence in the hearts of reform idealists, but the *Times-Union* turned its support behind the "Citizens" slate regardless.<sup>56</sup>

The election was one of the most corrupt in a long history of sordid municipal campaigns. Deciding to "fight the Devil with fire," the Burbridge reformers openly purchased the votes of indigent blacks, deliberately bidding up the price of a bought vote to exhaust the ring's funds set aside for this purpose. When victory was finally in their grasp, the Burbridge Democrats paraded in the streets, stopping outside the *Times-Union* building to hear Jones speak from a balcony in praise of what he deemed a triumph of respectable citizens and "genuine young Democracy."<sup>57</sup>

Burbridge's administration was cut short when the city was granted a revised city charter and a new election was mandated for the fall. Since the new charter expanded the city limits to include the predominantly Negro suburbs, Republicans won most of the city offices. Jones was content to abide by this de-

56. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, February 5, March 24, 25, 26, 30, 31, 1887; Wayne Flynt, *Duncan Upshaw Fletcher, Dixie's Reluctant Progressive* (Tallahassee, 1971), 10-11.

57. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, April 5, 6, 1887; Martin, *City Makers*, 185-87.

cision, for the alternative was government under a special commission appointed by the governor which would be dominated by the Democratic regulars. Nevertheless, the following year the commission device was resorted to so that Jacksonville would be spared from "Negro rule."<sup>58</sup> The end result of a half-decade of reform agitation was the abolition of home rule and the imposition of the most powerful "ring" government yet.

Simultaneously with the Jacksonville spring election of 1887, Jones had become enmeshed in the most remarkable senatorial election in Florida history. The chain of circumstances leading up to the election began in the summer of 1885 when incumbent United States Senator Charles W. Jones left Washington for Detroit without explaining his departure. His failure to return after many months was a mystery. A hint of the explanation for his actions is found in a cryptic note which he sent to President Cleveland from Detroit: "It may seem strange to you that a Southern Senator should write to you in this way from hiding," he informed the President.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, there was something strange about his behavior. Charles H. Jones of the *Times-Union* wrote to an editorial friend in Detroit asking him to look into the matter, and he learned that Senator Jones was engaged in a hopeless courtship of one Miss Clotilde Palms. In fact, Senator Jones, it soon became apparent, had lost his sanity. He would spend the rest of his life in the Dearborn asylum.<sup>60</sup>

Although Senator Jones's misfortune was unknown at the time, there was no chance for his re-election. In Florida, Governor Perry and former Governor Bloxham had emerged as the two leading contenders for Jones's vacant seat. On February 13 the *Times-Union* published an editorial endorsing Bloxham as the most popular candidate and suggesting that Perry should not enter the race since he was the incumbent governor. This stand

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58. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, December 14, 15, 25, 1887; Jacksonville *News-Herald*, December 14, 1887; Martin, *City Makers*, 188-90; Samuel Proctor, *Napoleon Bonaparte Broward, Florida's Fighting Democrat* (Gainesville, 1950), 48.

59. Charles W. Jones to Cleveland, July 16, 1885, Cleveland Papers, ser. 2, reel 16.

60. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, April 24, 1886, November 27, 1887, October 13, 1897; Williamson, "Era of the Democratic County Leader," 253; Judy Nicholas Etemadi, "'A Love-Mad Man': Senator Charles W. Jones of Florida," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, LVI (October 1977), 123-37.

surprised many, for since the publication of the "old timer's" letter Jones had been gravitating toward the progressive wing of the party which held Bloxham to be the very incarnation of Bourbonism. In fact, at the time of the senatorial contest, the *Times-Union* was the most vocal advocate of a Florida railroad regulatory commission, placing Jones alongside Senator Call as a chief enemy of the conservative "interests" in the state.

In March an explanation of the *Times-Union's* endorsement of Bloxham appeared in the form of a rumor circulating in south Florida to the effect that Jones and Bloxham had made a deal. The gist of the supposed compact was that Jones would back Bloxham in the present contest in exchange for Bloxham's patronage influence and support for Jones's candidate when Call's Senate term expired in 1891.<sup>61</sup> Jones denied the story of a "corrupt bargain," and when nothing more developed, dismissed it as a "three days' sensation." Then, late in April, the *Tampa Journal* picked up the issue and forced a confrontation by naming former Governor Drew and Austin Mann as the persons who had originated the charges of a deal.<sup>62</sup> Drew and Mann, who were in Tallahassee for the convening of the legislature, issued nearly identical sworn affidavits saying that Jones told them personally that Bloxham would agree to support the progressive wing of the party because the "old timers" had coalesced around Perry and that Jones claimed to have an agreement with Bloxham "in black and white."<sup>63</sup>

Jones and Bloxham both issued denials, and Drew and Mann's testimony is suspect since they were involved in the Senate race, yet it is clear that Jones and Bloxham had come to an understanding between themselves. The evidence is found in a letter from Jones to Congressman Dougherty written in early February 1887, reporting, "The combination we discussed when I saw you is about perfected. I shall come out for Bloxham this week, after seeing Henderson who is to see me next Friday." Who was Henderson? A search of the hotel registers published in the newspapers reveals that on the Friday mentioned in Jones's letter, just three days before the *Times-*

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61. *Palatka Daily News*, March 17, 1887.

62. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, March 27, 1887; *Tampa Weekly Journal*, March 31, April 7, 1887.

63. *Tampa Weekly Journal*, April 14, 1887.

Union's endorsement, one John A. Henderson of Tallahassee was registered at the Everett Hotel in Jacksonville. Henderson was a railroad lawyer and Bloxham's confidential agent in political matters.<sup>64</sup> Presumably he kept his appointment with Jones.

Almost a decade later Jones would claim privately: "When I left Florida I had the U. S. Senatorship in my grasp as completely as is the pen with which I now write."<sup>65</sup> While this statement is an admission by Jones that he had made a deal regarding the Senate race, it could hardly be true. No one controlled the nomination. The Democrats in 1887 were more divided than ever. Drew was in Tallahassee to stir up trouble and to insure that Bloxham was not elected. For nearly 100 ballots the Democratic caucus was unable to decide on the election of Perry, Bloxham, or even a dark horse. Finally after five weeks of effort, Samuel Pasco, a Harvard-educated lawyer from Jefferson County with little personal following, won the election.<sup>66</sup> Jones had not succeeded in controlling the party's selection of a senator; he had only further disorganized the Democrats.

Jones's influence in Florida politics came to an abrupt end in March 1888, when he sold the *Times-Union* to J. J. Daniels's Florida Publishing Company and departed for St. Louis to assume editorial control of the *Republic*, one of the leading Democratic newspapers in the Midwest. Jones would continue his own personal style of politics while in Missouri, trying to manipulate elections and politicians and becoming fully as controversial as he had ever been in Florida. He was the chief writer of Cleveland's national platform in the 1892 election, and, after breaking with Cleveland, helped draft William Jennings Bryan's 1896 and 1900 platforms. For a time he edited Joseph Pulitzer's New York *World* and *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, but he was too strong-willed to work with Pulitzer.<sup>67</sup> By the late 1890s, Jones had literally worn himself out, and poor health forced his retirement. He lived

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64. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, February 10, 1887; *Tampa Weekly Journal*, April 14, 1887; Jones to Dougherty, February 8, 1887, Jones Papers.

65. Jones, "Sketch of Life-1895," Jones Papers, 4.

66. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, April 14, May 18, 19, 22, 1887; S. S. Harvey to Call, January 2, 1888, Cleveland Papers, ser. 2, reel 118.

67. *Ibid.*, May 2, 1888; Thomas Graham, "Charles H. Jones of the *Post-Dispatch*: Pulitzer's Prize Headache," *Journalism Quarterly*, LVI (Winter 1979), 788-93.

most of the remainder of his life in Europe, where he died in 1913.

Jones's career in Florida had been like an erratic streak of lightning in an afternoon thunderstorm. He would be remembered in the state as an editor, "the like of which was seldom seen," although his presence in Florida was too brief to give him a large place in Florida history. As a promoter of Florida development and a practitioner of the politics of factionalism he was typical of the times, and his activities had touched almost every important event of the decade. Many of the state's editors were glad to see him depart, but some gave him credit for contributing to the good of society. Frank Harris, whose instinctive dislike of Jones had been changed to grudging admiration, wrote in his *Ocala Banner*: "If Mr. Jones ever returns to Florida he will be held in much higher esteem as his great service to the state was only realized when his removal to St. Louis was announced."<sup>68</sup>

John Temple Graves, one of Jones's most persistent antagonists and later a noted columnist for the Hearst newspapers, wrote an exaggerated testimonial to Jones's prowess, but it was the sort of exaggeration that seemed to befit the man. Graves recalled his first meeting in 1881 with Jones: "a dapper little fellow, with a pale, scholarly face, resolute mouth, quick energetic movements, and plenty of confidence in himself." Graves continued: "From that day to this, he has been the most marked man in Florida, more talked of, more criticized, better hated, and by a few better followed than any one man in the State. . . . Lacking in physical courage, he was simply unconquerable in spirit, and inexhaustible in resources, and although paper after paper was started to down him, and combination after combination formed to crush him, he managed somehow to come out of every encounter smiling, confident, and stronger than ever."<sup>69</sup>

68. John Pendleton Gaines, Jr., "A Century in Florida Journalism" (M.A. thesis, University of Florida, 1949), 69; *Ocala Banner*, June 22, 1888.

69. *Ocala Banner*, May 18, 1888.