

Seaborn Jones (1825-1891)

The City of Rockmart owes its existence to Seaborn Jones. A series of events in his early life set up the circumstances for him to be known as the founder of the community. The cliché “being at the right place at the right time” certainly applies.

Born in 1825, to parents John Anslem Jones and Martha Jenkins Jones of Augusta, Georgia, his family moved first to Milledgeville where his father practiced law. From there they settled in Van Wert, then the county seat of Paulding County. The family’s financial condition improved greatly when John A. Jones accumulated wealth mining gold. The money enabled him and his son, Seaborn, to acquire several hundred acres of land north of Van Wert.

When town officials in Van Wert denied land access to build a railroad through their town, Seaborn Jones offered right-of-way through his northern property and money for a depot. Opening the area to a railroad, the lifeblood for transportation and commerce at the time, gave the visionary Seaborn Jones an idea. Since the railroad would run close to the banks of the Euharlee Creek, why not lay out a town there? People were already beginning to populate the area because of the discovery of slate deposits in the 1840’s and the ensuing mining operations that the discovery brought. And alas, the people of Van Wert even began to move closer to the railroad realizing its benefits. Streets were laid out, land was donated by Mr. Jones for the town square and for a park, and lots were designated for new churches. There was an emergence of a commercial district surrounding the town square. Homes were beginning to be built. A new town was taking shape and became known as Rock Market, a bow certainly to the slate industry. The town was granted a charter by the state legislature in 1872 under the name Rock Mart. That same year, Mr. Jones constructed a large new home for his family that is still standing today on Forrest Avenue. He and his father built the Commercial Hotel near the railroad in the heart of Rockmart to accommodate railroad travelers. The hotel stood until the late 1970’s when it was razed for construction of a bank.

Being thirty-five years old at the onset of the Civil War, the able-bodied Jones joined the Confederate States of America as part of Company D, Phillips’ Legion, “Polk County Rifles”. He served at the rank of Captain and as Lt. Colonel of the Battalion. He was known for the rest of his life as Colonel Seaborn Jones.

There are no direct descendants of Seaborn Jones living today. He was married twice, first to Louise Guyton Jones and after her death he wed Mary Presley who survived him. Sadly, two children born during his first marriage died young. The first Mrs. Jones and the children, Annie and John Jones are buried in Rose Hill.

Although there were burials in the cemetery of Jones family members and their connections prior, Seaborn Jones gifted Rose Hill Cemetery to the City of Rockmart in 1878 to become a community burial ground. He reserved the upmost lot for his burial plot. His grave marker is the tallest in the cemetery. The iron gate and fence were placed around the plot by his second wife, who incidentally remarried after Seaborn Jones’ death and is buried with that second husband in Rome.

Seaborn Jones died in February 1891. A short tidbit in the newspaper announcing the death stated that his worth at that time was \$500,000.00. That amount is equivalent to over \$16 million today.

There are reminders today of Seaborn Jones throughout Rockmart. The downtown park on the west bank of the Euharlee bears his name, Seaborn Jones Park, and is on land donated by him. On the original town square sits the City Hall building erected in 1921. The beautiful slate and brick churches where Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian and Church of Christ congregations gather are placed on lots contributed by Jones and set in places according to his design. The home he built in 1872 still stands today and is occupied and owned by latecomers to Rockmart who lovingly maintain it and appreciate its history. The street, leading out to the home, originates on West Elm Street and is apply named Jones Avenue. His prominent burial spot in the cemetery is the only lot with an iron fence making it stand out to visitors.

A series of coincidences, or was it fate, placed Seaborn Jones “at the right place, at the right time”. The family’s move to Northwest Georgia, the accumulation of wealth enabling the large land purchase, the city of Van Wert’s refusal for the railroad right-of-way, all these events lined up in Seaborn Jones’ favor for sure.

We remember and honor the vision and generosity of Colonel Seaborn Jones as the City of Rockmart celebrates 150 years.

Sources: “Rockmart Centennial Magazine”, 1972

“Polk County, Georgia, The First One Hundred Years”, Larry D. Carter, 2012

“The Heritage of Polk County, Georgia, 1851-2000”, 2000

Georgia Life, “The World’s One and Only Rockmart”, Leonora Ferguson Mintz, 1978

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Rose Hill Cemetery Committee