

George W. Jones Letter Transcript

Dubuque Iowa Feby 15th 1892

Gentlemen,

I beg leave to ask each of you to pardon my seeming remissness [sic] in fail-ing to pay my respects to you all when at Des Moines & to express to you, my sincere thanks for admitting me to practice as an Attorney at Law, before your honorable tribunal the Inferior Courts of Iowa.

My chief object in accepting the invitation, to appear before the Early Law makers of Iowa, was to express the exalted regard which I have always entained [sic] for the Supreme Court of my State because of their learning, impartiality and sense of justice. I endeavored to make that annunciation in the short address which I delivered at the last meeting of the Early law makers association just before leaving Des Moines & which I write here before go-ing to that City.

To the Honble. Justices of the Supreme Court of Iowa. Des Moines

Most respectfully, your obt Servt,

Geo. W. Jones.

George W Jones (1804-1896)

George Wallace Jones was born in Indiana.¹ He spent time in many southern states, like Missouri throughout his childhood, and was roommates with Jefferson Davis while he was in college at Transylvania University. He was admitted to the Kentucky Bar Association following his graduation in 1825.² He settled down in Dubuque after college, where, before serving as senator, he served as a territorial delegate for Wisconsin and Michigan from 1835-1839, as well as surveyor of public lands for Wisconsin from 1840-1848.³ During this time, Dubuque's population was largely Irish and German, making Dubuque a Roman Catholic, Democratic leaning area.

Jones was elected as one of Iowa's first senators in 1848. While serving as senator, Jones main success was using land grants to develop railways across Iowa. After his appointment as Senator, he was up for reelection in 1858, but his pro-slavery views failed to align with Iowa's emerging Republican politics, and he lost his bid for re-election.⁴ During the Civil War, he was arrested for communicating with Jefferson Davis, and imprisoned for 64 days. Jones lived the rest of his life out of the public eye, living in Dubuque, and serving as a lawyer, until his death in 1896.⁵

¹ "Gen. George Wallace Jones and Sinsinawa Mound before Father Mazzuchelli." *The Father Mazzuchelli Society*, <http://www.fathermazzuchellisociety.org/general-george-w-jones-tells-of-sinsinawa-mound-before-its-purchase-by-father-mazzuchelli/>.

² Volpe, Vernon L. "The Biographical Dictionary of Iowa." *Details Page - The Biographical Dictionary of Iowa - The University of Iowa Libraries*, Accessed Mar 8, 2022 <http://uipress.lib.uiowa.edu/bdi/DetailsPage.aspx?id=198>.

³ Volpe, Vernon L. "The Biographical Dictionary of Iowa."

⁴ "Jones, George Wallace." *US House of Representatives: History, Art & Archives* [https://history.house.gov/People/Listing/J/JONES,-George-Wallace-\(J000221\)/](https://history.house.gov/People/Listing/J/JONES,-George-Wallace-(J000221)/).

⁵ Volpe, Vernon L. "The Biographical Dictionary of Iowa."

Background Information

George W. Jones wrote this letter at his home in Dubuque, Iowa on February 15, 1892. Addressed to the Justices of the Supreme Court of Iowa, the letter is a thank you from Jones to the Supreme Court of Iowa for admitting him into the bar to practice law in the state of Iowa as an Attorney-at-Law before certain courts.

Jones believes that justice has been done by allowing him to practice as a licensed Attorney at Law in the state, because he had already been admitted to the bar out of college, but Iowa was not a state at that point.⁶ This letter references the Early Lawmakers of Iowa and the Supreme Court of Iowa. Jones references Des Moines, the capital of Iowa, because he is writing his letter from Dubuque, which is in the eastern part of the State while Des Moines is in central Iowa. Jones had just been to Des Moines, probably by train, and wrote his letter when he got back.

The Pioneer Lawmakers Association of Iowa, or as Jones called it, the Early Lawmakers of Iowa, was an organization made up of lawyers and judges in Iowa. The *Waterloo Courier* states that the meeting that Jones attended was only the third meeting of the Pioneer Lawmakers Association of Iowa.

The association counts George Jones as a member, along with members from Des Moines, Nevada, Waterloo, Cedar Rapids and many other cities from around Iowa. Judge G.C. Wright was elected as the first president of the Pioneer Lawmakers Association of Iowa at the third meeting.⁷ At the meeting, George W. Jones led the procession out onto the floor, and was honored as the oldest living legislator in the West at the age of 87. Jones also spoke at the meeting including giving an address to the

⁶ "The Admission of George W Jones to the Bar" in *Iowa Journal of History and Politics* 14 (1916), 153-154. Accessed March 7, 2022

⁷ "Pioneer Lawmakers Association." in *Waterloo Daily Courier*, 11 Feb. 1892, pp. 2.

Iowa Senate and Supreme Court. This news article shows that Jones had still been active in the legal profession, and was still a legislator in Iowa at the time he wrote the letter.⁸

The Supreme Court of Iowa was made up of five justices at the time of Jones' meeting. The first was James H. Rothrock, the Chief Justice at the time, who was originally appointed when the bench expanded from four seats to five. The second, Gifford S. Robinson was appointed to numerous positions, including Director of the Iowa Board of Control, after leaving the bench.⁹ The third, Charles T. Granger was an army captain during the Civil War before becoming a Justice. Josiah Given was an army captain who retired after the Civil War as a brigadier general. Finally, La Vega G. Kinne, who was appointed barely a month before Jones' letter was written.¹⁰

The significance of this document is that one of the first senators in Iowa's History who was an important part of bringing the railroad to Iowa and modernizing the state, wrote a letter towards the end of his life thanking the Supreme Court of Iowa and the Pioneer Lawmakers Association of Iowa for having him in Des Moines, and to praise the Supreme Court for their impartiality and sense of justice.

⁸ "Pioneer Lawmakers Association." in *Waterloo Daily Courier*

⁹ "Senate Proceedings." in *Daily Iowa Capital*, 21 Feb. 1900, p. 3.

¹⁰ "Past Justices." *Iowa Judicial Branch*

<https://www.iowacourts.gov/for-the-public/educational-resources-and-services/iowa-courts-history/past-justices/>.

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