

**MEMOIRS OF WILLIAM H. JONES**, Industrialist and Entrepreneur, of MANCHESTER, CONN., Born September 25, 1814, died May 17, 1903 and buried in Buckland Cemetery, Manchester, Ct. Transcribed exactly from the original, handwritten 15 page manuscript by Mark S. Sutcliffe of Manchester, Conn. in March of 1994. Original was obtained from Austin C. Cleaves of East Montpelior, Vermont, a relative of Vena C. Jones, of Manchester, Conn., widow of William H. Jones's grandson, William Wallace Jones, in March of 1994. Original manuscript now in collections of the Connecticut Historical Society.

Copies of this transcription in the collections of the Manchester Historical Society, the Mary Cheney Library (Manchester, CT), the Connecticut Historical Society, the Connecticut State Library, Mark S. Sutcliffe, and Austin C. Cleaves. Excerpts in the collections of the Tolland Historical Society and Old Newgate Prison (Granby, Ct.).

The memoirs were condensed and published in the Manchester Herald of May 10, 1912 and were quoted extensively in A New England Pattern, a history of Manchester, Ct. written by William E. Buckley and published by Pequot Press, Chester, CT in 1973.

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I, Wm H Jones, was born Sept. 25 1814, in East Hartford Ct., now a part of Manchester.

I just remember, when but three years old, the School Marm calling me to her to learn my letters. I also remember when about nine years old of going with my father and brother to Tolland to see a negro hung who had killed his wife when he was drunk. He was taken from the Tolland jail to nearly the top of a high hill north of Tolland Street where the gallows was standing and where was an open grave with a coffin by the side of it. As soon as he dropped, I tried to get close up to where he was hanging and got within about ten feet, but could not see there being some ahead of me. A stranger noticed me and took me up on his shoulders, and then I very plainly saw him hanging and can remember just how he looked with his head over on one side. My brother had told me, a short time before, that father wanted me to come to the place where the horse was left before we came to Tolland Street. We had left the horse outside, there being such a crowd; so we did not go into the street but crossed the fields, and never having been in the place before, I was completely turned around when I came down into the street, and did not know which way to go to find the horse. I had no way of finding out, which I had been trying to do for a long time. I was finally seen by one of my old school teachers and when he found I had lost my way he took my hand and led me to the hotel where I saw my uncle John Buckland with a horse and chaise. He with another gentleman was ready to drive away and they took me in. My father and brother were on the way home. We overtook them after going about five miles. I don't know what would have become of me if I had not seen my teacher, who said I was going toward New London. I was without a cent of money.

When not far from nine years old, my grandfather Buckland sent a load of us boys, our cousins, Fred and James Goodwin of Hartford, my brother and myself, and I believe one or two more, to see Newgate where the state prisoners were kept before they were moved to Wethersfield.

It was an old copper mine in Simsbury about a hundred feet or more deep. All the prisoners were put

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down into this mine through iron trap-doors every night and days they worked in shops above ground surrounded by a high wall with guards stationed about it. Their work was making wrought nails. There was also a long tread-mill grinding corn. Prisoners were standing on one side of it close together the whole length of the wheel with their hands over head holding on to a bar running the whole length. There were prisoners sitting on a bench back of those on the wheel and every time a bell struck one would step off and another step on.

We all went down on an iron ladder straight up and down, and then walked quite a long distance in the mines.

I remember when my grandfather was one of the largest land holders and farmers in Connecticut, owning most of the property in that part of Manchester now called Buckland, the North West corner of Manchester, named after him. He owned a woolen factory in the southern part of his estate, where the Hilliard & Co's factory now stands. At that time there were no power looms in operation in this country. All cloth was woven on looms by hand, and the wool was carded into rolls, and the rolls were pieced, or lapped together, on the back side of the spinning machines by boys as it was spun. Sometimes my grandmother would send me to the factory with the men's dinners, about a mile south. In the war of 1812, grandfather and my father made blankets for the army, having a government contract. My father at that time was captain of the East Hartford artillery, and he with his company were drafted to go to New London, but on account of the contract he was obliged to send a substitute.

I remember when the town of Manchester was set off from East Hartford, and that grandfather at that time gave a great entertainment in front of his brick tavern, having a long table set in the shade of the maples; and a large cannon, owned in the place and kept for use on all great

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occasions, was fired during the whole time.

I well remember when the main stage route between New York and Boston was through Manchester at a time that there were no railroads, and all the stages stopped and changed horses there; every stage was drawn by four horses. The hotel was of brick that grandfather made expressly for it. A great many people traveling by stage and otherwise put up there for the night. Flip was a great drink in those days and flip irons were daily kept in the fire ready for use.

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In the year 1824, Gen. Lafayette was at the laying of the corner stone of the Bunker Hill Monument in Boston, and the day he was expected the Governor's Horse Guards came from Hartford to Buckland to escort him in. He stopped a short time at grandfather's in front of the hotel but did not leave the carriage. A little incident occurred at the time: A man under the influence of strong drink, who was in the habit of making himself conspicuous on public occasions, stepped up to the carriage and presented Lafayette with a pair of brass spectacles. The General took them and looked at them. At the same time grandfather noticed it and immediately stepped up to the carriage and told Lafayette the condition the man was in, and the General presented the glasses to grandfather. I saw Lafayette the next day in the Court House yard in Hartford. He was escorted by two gentlemen around the yard on a walk just inside the fence. I stood close up to the rail within ten feet of him.

I think it was in the year 1826 that I went to school at the stone school house on Market Street in Hartford. It was the principal school in the city at that time. Mr. Olney, the author of Olney's Geography,

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was principal and he was my teacher. I lived with my uncle E. W. Bull, druggist, called "the Good Samaritan", and did chores for my board. Evenings I tended the ale pump in the rear room of the store near the soda-fountain. It was well patronised, a drink just coming into use. I slept in the rear room of the store on a turnup bed with Theodore Metcalf, one of the clerks, who became a celebrated druggist for years in the city of Boston.

I afterward attended school for a short time, a select school kept by George Griswold, a lawyer, a half mile south of Buckland the place where I lived.

In 1829, I was in J.B. Pitkin's department store in Tolland, Ct. We had all of Rockville trade and trade from the adjoining towns. I slept in the office with William W. Eaton, one of the clerks who afterward became the Democratic leader of Connecticut, and United States senator for several years. I was in the store about a year, until Mr. Pitkin removed his business to New York State. I then attended school at the Tolland Academy one and a half terms before going home.

In 1831, I went to Bristol, Ct. to learn the trade of joiner and carpenter of Seth Foster, one of the best builders in the state. I served about four years as an apprentice. As soon as my time was up I took a contract off Mr. Foster's hands to finish a house that he had commenced on, it being agreeable to the party that the house was being built for, as Mr. Foster wanted to go South. I staid and finished the house before going home to Manchester.

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Before 1833, there was only one post office in the town of Manchester, and that was at the east part of the town called

"The Green", which was three miles east of Buckland. One was finally located here and called Buckland, named after my grandfather. My father was appointed postmaster. Andrew Jackson was elected president of the United States about this time and turned out every post master of the opposite party, and as my father was one he expected to be, but both parties opposed it and he was kept in and held the office a great many years, until he resigned.

In 1833, when a post office was located at Buckland, there were no railroads. The mails were carried by stage from New York to Boston. The mails were all made up at Hartford for all offices between there and Boston and put into one mail bag. Father had all the mails in the bag to look over to find his while the stage was allowed only five minutes time to wait. I have helped father sometimes when it was all three of us could do in that time. All the through mails from Hartford to Boston were put into one large bag and not opened on the way.

In 1835, I hired room with water power in South Windsor, Ct. to make window sash, blinds, doors, and cigar boxes. It was about three miles from home. I invented and made my own machines. I took orders for all I made, and within a year contracted to build a two story school house in Manchester, and to build all the seats and desks on an improved plan. When all was completed I was told by all three of the building committee that I had built it better than the contract.

When only twenty-three years old, I was appointed by the Center Church and Society in Manchester as one of the committee to decide what alterations it was needed to make in remodeling the church. The building

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committee, when appointed, came to me to figure on the job, which I did; but there was a party of two that was below me, I lost it. The party that got it lost money and tried to make up for their loss by charging for extras which I think had to be settled by arbitration. However I got some orders for window-sash, doors, and door frames.

I gave up building in about three years, there being so much competition that none of the builders were getting rich.

I have always had the desire to engage in the manufacture of something and to get up machinery. I learned a trade to get acquainted with good work, architecture and drawing, which has been a very great help to me.

About 1840 there was a great excitement in regard to the culture of the *Morus Multicaulis* Mulberry trees for raising silk. The trees were selling for very great prices. I thought I would see if there was any money in it. I built a hot-house 60 feet long and through the winter had upwards of 25000 trees growing from cuttings, one bud to a cutting; had trees from two feet to three feet high. As there was no sale for them in the spring, I set out a lot of them for leaves to feed worms. I converted the hot house into a cocoonery by putting up shelves to feed worms on, and made it a success. I had full fifty bushels

of cocoons.

In 1840 I invented and patented an improved silk reel that could be used on any table. It dispensed with rereeling, winding the silk on large spools instead of into large skeins. I had all my cocoons reeled on my reel and bought from others also, and worked them on shares. I invented and built all my silk machinery that I used which was different from any other in use, saving two and three processes in manufacturing. In 1840 I commenced manufacturing silk in a cotton factory formerly owned by Richard L. Jones, a little south of Buckland.

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The raising of silk not paying, I worked foreign reeled silk and made sewing silk of all colors and shades; purse, embroidery, fringe, twist etc. I invented the first automatic Silk Spooler ever made.

In 1840, I sent one of my silk reels to China through the large importing house of S. Goodrich and Co. N.Y. to their agent in China, hoping to have it introduced there and have them used there instead of reeling in the way they were doing into skeins, but the Chinamen would stick to their old way and we could not get them out of it.

In 1844 I bought a water privilege at North Manchester and about nine acres of land on both sides of the street. I laid out a great deal of expense on the land and buildings, also on the water privilege to make use of it. I invented a Rubber Belt water wheel which had never been used before. It was a 36 in. Rubber Belt running over two three ft. drums, one at the top the other at the bottom, with buckets five feet long bolted to the belt, which I used. I put one in for a company in a paper mill and it was used for several years, until the belts were made of poor material, cotton ply instead of linen. About the year 1845, I moved all my silk works to my new mill at North Manchester.

In 1841 & 1842, I was awarded the first premium, two years in succession, for the best specimens of sewing silk at the great fair of the American Institute, New York, also on reeled silk and silk reel, six silver medals for all. I had the reputation of making the best silk made in the U.S.

I made silk for fifteen years, at which time the business was overdone. I then put in cotton and woolen machinery for making yarn and knit goods. In 1855, I invented my knitting machines, which would knit faster than any machines ever before known. A stocking

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machine would knit twenty-five dozen pair in ten hours and my shirt machine six thousand stiches a second. I made the first machine used for winding yarn on large size bobbins, which are in general use now.

I was vice president and director for several years of the first savings bank in Manchester. It was called the

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Manchester Savings Bank and Building Association. It was doing a fine business until the other banks influenced the legislature to take a vote to have all such banks throughout the state wound up; then we got a charter for a regular savings bank and the business was transferred to that after a given time.

About these days I took an interest with Frank Lewis, by his earnest request, to start a mill in Glastonbury, Ct., which we made a success of. It was a joint stock company called the Glastonbury Knitting Co. I owned one half of the stock and was Secretary and Treasurer of the company for several years from the first starting until we sold out. The goods had a great reputation and were known to all dealers.

Dr. William Scott and myself were appointed building committee to build the first Congregational church at North Manchester, Ct., and we contributed to the expense of the same and with some others agreed to pay fifty dollars a year toward its expenses until it was self-supporting. Rev. George E. Hill of Boston, the first settled minister of the church, took quite an interest to have the grounds around the church laid out in good shape, which the Ladies Social Society agreed to see to the expense of, but had no idea how to do it. So Mr. Hill came to me to ask me to think of a good way and to draw a plan which he would show to the ladies at their next social gathering. This I did, and they were all very much

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pleased with it and wished me to have it done under my supervision.

My plan was to have stone posts with a chain running from one post to another in front and on each side of the church to the back end, and the posts to be pyramid shape, chiseled corners and rough surface between. These I contracted for at a very low price. The walks were of Bolton flagstone: a broad walk leading from the front of the church down to the street curving into the walks leading off each side to the drive way. At the driveway on[~~crossed out~~] each side was placed a platform with steps leading up on to it to make it convenient for ladies getting in and out of carriages. The sheds being back of the church, all carriages were driven down each side of the church to the platform. Mr. Hill, having a brother in a hardware store in Boston, ordered the chains from there.

I set out two trees in front of the church, myself; both of which grew well at first, but for some cause unknown to me the east one died and had to be replaced, the west one lived and must be quite a large tree if standing now.

In a few years the church needed enlarging and Dr. Scott and myself were again chosen building committee to build an addition on the north end. In 1859 the society decided to remodel the church: to raise it up, and have a basement, put on a new front also, a new steeple and other alterations, and as they could not decide just how to have it done after holding several meetings, they chose a building committee of four, myself

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chairman, and left it all entirely with us to have it done as we thought best and at the least expense without being restricted as to price, and as I was the only one of the committee that had been a

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practicable builder, they depended on me to do about all the business, of course to their approval; as we could not decide upon anything by talking, I went to Boston to see one of the best architects, who had been recommended to me. Having taken the dimensions of our church, I told him just what alterations and additions were wanted. I had the idea in my head just how to do it, so he went to work with a young man that was learning architecture. I spent two days in the city calling several times each day to have it done just to my mind. In a few days the drawings were sent to me all completed ready to work from. All the committee were pleased with them without any alteration. I then let out the contract to the man that first built our church, a long time before, he being the lowest bidder. The church and society were very much pleased with the church when it was done and gave us a vote of thanks.

In 1860, by the War of the Rebellion, I lost all my property saving nothing. In the settling of my estate, I was allowed \$400.-- I then went to New York City hoping to find a small paying business in which I would be able to make a living. The best and only business I could find at that time was the hoop-skirt, which was in its prime. In posting myself about it, I heard of a party that made the very best there was in the market and I went to see him. As soon as he found out who I was and what I wanted to do, he wanted me to take hold with him and take an interest in the business; but as I found that he visited saloons and was very free with his money I was fearful and thought it not best. After considering the matter I made a proposal, saying that I would open a store in some good location if he would stock it with a full assortment of sizes and number of hoops of all kinds and keep it so, that I would pay him every Saturday night for all that were sold, but I must have them at the lowest wholesale price, which he agreed to. I then had my former bookkeeper, a young lady, come to New York to sell the skirts and take charge

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of the business. We found a large front room on Broadway above the St. Nicholas Hotel, one flight up and made it pay for awhile. Customers were all first class but there was no trade evenings. In looking the city over I found that Eighth Avenue was the very best business avenue in the city. I found a nice store on street floor, two rooms deep and moved there and had a great trade evenings as well as days and made a pretty good thing out of it.

My brother had bid off my property in Manchester at a very low price but could neither sell nor rent it. It was very much



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injured by standing: The belts and machines were getting to be in a very bad condition which troubled him very much. He was anxious to have me in some way start up works but I could not for want of money, and I had none to spare. I could think of only one way, so I told him that if he would give me an accommodation note of four months for \$600 payable to my order that I would take it to the Exchange Bank, Hartford and see if I could get it discounted, provided that we could agree as to the terms etc. which were as follows: I was to pay him \$1800 a year rent semiannually, and all insurance and taxes, also to make good all wear and tear on the property, which I agreed with him to do.

The year 1861, the first year, was up hill work, but I succeeded in making all of the payments. I made shirts and drawers and had ready sales and also in 1862. Dec. 27, 1862 I had a contract with the United States Government to furnish 10000 dozen pair of Army Socks amounting to \$40,000. I gave a bond of \$25000. In 1864 another contract with the Government to furnish 300000 pair @ 50¢ = \$150000. Bond \$50000. In 1864 another contract with Government to furnish 25000 shirts @ \$2 6/100 = \$51500.00 Bond \$30000. In 1864 another contract for 240000 pair socks @ 33¢ = \$79200. Bond \$40000.

I finished my contracts and delivered the last goods in Cincinnati, O. just at the time Gen. Lee surrendered.

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In 1865 at the close of the war, I gave up my manufacturing business in Manchester and moved my family and furniture to New York into a three story and basement brown stone house I had bought on Fifty-fourth St. next to Lexington Ave. I bought within a year five brown stone houses, viz:

A three story and basement on Fifty-fourth St. at \$10,000. sold for \$15000.

A four story and basement on Fiftieth St. at 12000 sold for 18000

A three story and basement on Fifty-first St. at 12000 sold for 15000

A three story and basement on Lexington Ave. at 12000 sold for 15000.

A three story and basement on Lexington Ave. at 20000 sold for 20000.

After I had lived in the Fifty-fourth Street house two years I sold it and moved into the Fiftieth Street house and lived there two years. While living there I was induced by my brother to go to Manchester and start the mill again, also to buy it, which was, I think, in 1868. Before moving I went up there every other week to look after the business. In 1869 I moved my family there. This year there was a great freshet. Two dams gave away on the stream above me which washed away my dam, dye shop, blacksmith shop, and store house with the contents. The loss was nearly \$2000 and no insurance on any of it.

In 1873 there was a panic in business, prostrating business



for about five years which was a great loss to me together with the paying of taxes, insurance, repairs and a mortgage on the property I had bought of my brother. Between the years of 1873 and 1879 I managed to make just enough to pay my living expenses by making tooth-picks, wood splints for ornamental work, cigar lighters, strawberry baskets, and cigar boxes. All the machines I invented and made for making the above. Mr. Tower of the firm Cutter, Tower & Co. Boston, hearing that I was making wood toothpicks first sent their agent and then came himself to my factory to see me, saying that they owned a patent on all machine made wood tooth-picks and had stopped every maker in the United States. He liked my picks and said he thought they looked better than those they were making. He said as I had treated him well, which was different from the way some others had done that they were having a law suit with, and that as I had been very frank to tell him what I was doing and had done he would offer to take what picks the timber I had on hand

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would make, 50 cases, and allow me my price \$12 a case, \$600 in all, also \$150 the cost of a machine I had for the purpose that I could not use on other work and wanted me to use their labels on the picks, which they would furnish. I finally accepted the offer thinking it would be better than to fight. There was about \$250 due me when Cutter, Tower and Co. failed which was settled by receiving one-third the amount.

In 1879 I felt that being nearly out of business I should not be able to pay the taxes, insurance, interest on mortgage, and other expenses. I offered to give my brother a quit claim deed of all the mill property provided he would give me one a receipt in full of all claims to date. This he seemed willing and glad to do. I thought that it would make him good and that he would not lose anything by doing it. He told me to send him the deed, and I had the deed made and signed it and gave it to Geo. W. Williams who was acting as power of attorney on account of his ill health. The receipt in full never came, but after a little I was surprised to learn that he had attached one half of father's property that he had willed to my children. My brother had searched the town records and found the property was in my mother's name. As I had no means at that time to fight it, he had it all his own way. It is thought by some that if my mother owned it that my children should have had the benefit of it.

In 1879 I moved to New York and lived on Lexington Ave. near 80th St. I was a dealer in pianos, organs and music and had a wareroom, bought and sold several. As most of the instruments were selling on installments, also rented, it needed a very large capital to do a good business. So I sold out. Having an offer to go to Boston I went there and my family went to Connecticut on a visit.

In 1880 I went to Boston and was given a position in the office of the New England Paper Barrel Company on Merchants Row for some months. In 1881 I moved into the Foster Block

Atlantic Ave. in the office of the Pussiline Co. I then had charge of both offices. I had the whole charge of the Pussiline business, the making and selling, also had charge of the books. I also attended to the business of the Paper Barrel Co. In 1881 I hired an eight room apartment furnished in the Hoffman House for six months, while a family was away to the beach. Afterward I moved to house 85 Appleton St.

In 1885 I moved to Hartford hired a three story brick house all furnished on Spring St. for six months. I came to Hartford to originate and build a machine for the New England Silk Machine Co., newly organized with a capital of \$50,000. The machine was for working perforated cocoons, to prepare it for coming in a way to preserve the staple and save waste. The process is entirely new and has taken me a long time to perfect. It was a great success and a saving of waste of over 10% and preserved a longer staple. I had all the improvements patented. It having been seen by a large manufacturing company, they got some new ideas from it and improved their machines so much they said it would not pay to throw theirs out and put mine in. I had another machine still more valuable that I had spent more time on, which was to finish the silk after leaving the other machine by combing it and drawing it out into a roving ready to spin. This machine I did not let the stockholders know about, for the reason that they did not furnish the money sufficient for the one patented, having lost \$200 of my salary that was due, by their keeping back the money due that they should have paid in. I therefore abandoned the last machine and it has probably been broken up before this.

Sept 23, 1891 I moved my family to Newton, Mass. with some furniture to board on Waverly Ave. Aug. 1st 1894 I moved to Everett, Mass. Nov. 20 1901 I moved to Newton, Mass.

I went to Manchester, Ct., to attend the funeral of my brother, A.B. Jones, March 28, 1892.

Aug 8, 1892 I went to Manchester to make arrangements to collect a balance due father when post-master in 1833. I was not able to arrange it.

May 12, 1894 I went to Manchester to look for a rent but did not succeed.

I voted for Wm H Harrison in 1840 to be president of the United States. In 1885 I belonged to the Harrison Veteran Association in Hartford, Conn.

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