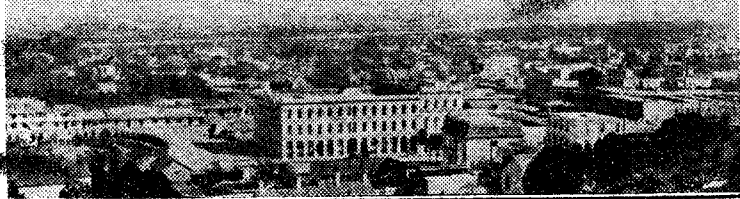


# UNWRITTEN PAGES OF LOS ANGELES HISTORY



Story of the Los Angeles coachman imported from Boston who got rich here and then helped his former master when the latter went broke.

The old melodrama plot of the butler furnishing money to his master when the family goes broke has its counterpart in Los Angeles history. At one time, and long before Los Angeles grew to its present great size, the circumstances were known to almost everybody in town.

Don Abel Stearns was once the wealthiest man here. His expansive home on Main street was known locally as "El Palacio" (the palace). The famous "Baker Block" building at another period was erected on the site.

## ***Didn't Even Know How Rich He Was***

Stearns was so rich he couldn't tell how many acres he owned nor the approximate number of his horses and cattle. To drive the family carriage of a wealthy resident, one John H. Jones, a frugal New Englander, was brought around the Horn from Boston. Not long afterward he was working for Don Abel.

"He was the first honest-to-goodness coachman to crack his whip in Los Angeles," one old newspaper clipping states.

Jones was not only frugal, but he had vision as well. Apparently he saved all his wages and invested them soundly.

## ***'Tided' Him Over During Bad Times***

For many years, following several periods of "hard times," Stearns was in serious financial difficulty. Jones had grown very

wealthy in his property holdings in what is now "the downtown financial district," and often "tided" Stearns over, when the banks shook negative heads.

One of the best esteemed and most substantial of Los Angeles citizens, Jones lived to see lots he bought for a handful of change increase a thousandfold in value. Don Abel also recovered most of his wealth and died a rich man.

Los Angeles Herald

November, 1936

John H. Jones

City Council- 18

John H. Jones, who died February 12, 1903, was a California pioneer of the fifties, and throughout a long and active life his personal resources and character were generously devoted to the upbuilding and enlargement of Los Angeles and much of its surrounding territory. His is one of the most honored names among the older American residents of the city.

He was born at Greenbush, New York, March 31, 1834, son of James and Sarah (Olds) Jones. His parents were natives of England, and had acquired a competence in business before they came to America, and in this country spent their years in leisure and retirement. Their two older children, a son and a daughter, were both born in England and died when past middle age. For many years James Jones lived in Massachusetts, where he died. He was a typical English gentleman and possessed all the sterling traits of that character.

John H. Jones was only a boy when his father died. Most of his early training came from his mother, and to the end of his life he expressed extreme gratitude to the fine influences proceeding from her. He attended the public schools of Massachusetts, but soon after his marriage in the early fifties he determined to seek his fortune in California. Many of the dreams of his boyhood had centered in this land of romance. He came to California on a vessel commanded by a friend, after a long voyage around Cape Horn. His first experience in Los Angeles was as a clerk, but subsequently he removed to Santa Barbara, and was soon in business on an extensive scale. While there he began buying and speculating in lands, and in the course of time acquired some very valuable property in the downtown district of Los Angeles. His first home was at the corner of Fifth and Main streets, where he lived for over twenty-eight years. He also had a home on Broadway between First and Second Streets. The home where he died was at 258 East Adams Street.

Much of his prosperity was due to his unlimited faith in the future of Los Angeles and Southern California. So far as known none of his investments were unfortunate. He was not content to buy property and allow it to accumulate value through the efforts of others, but sought every means of improving it under his personal direction. Among these improvements should be mentioned the Chester Block, a two-flat building on Ottawa Street and another on Twenty-seventh Street, and at the time of his death he

had under construction a large warehouse on Los Angeles and Fifth streets.

While his wealth and influence grew during the nearly fifty years he spent in Los Angeles, his old friends and associates never recognized any change in his democratic manner and his genial good fellowship and public spirit. He was liberal without ostentation, always devoted to the practice of the golden rule, was a republican in politics and a very useful member of the city council for one term.

November 24, 1854, Mr. Jones married Miss Carrie M. Otis. She was a native of Massachusetts and of a prominent Boston family, and was reared in the traditions and the best schools of that New England center of culture. She did not join her husband in California until 1858. She came west by the Isthmus of Panama and from San Pedro to Los Angeles rode in a stage. Despite the obvious contrast between this pioneer southwestern town and her home City of Boston, Mrs. Jones learned to recognize the beauty and charm of California, to like its people, and in turn was greatly beloved by them because of her beauty of character and constant association with charitable enterprises. Though a Unitarian in church affiliations, she assisted in building the first Episcopal Church on Temple Street, and was also the donor of a sum of twenty thousand dollars to assist in building the Young Men's Christian Association home. In later years she relied upon her own judgment in handling her extensive property interests, and her ability was such that she seldom needed advice even in the most complicated problems. Mrs. Jones left ten thousand dollars to Barlow Sanatorium, two thousand dollars to Ladies' Benevolent Society, ten thousand dollars to Protestant Orphans Home, Los Angeles, fifty thousand to Southwestern Museum, and gave one hundred thousand dollars to the University of Southern California, known as the Carrie M. Jones Scholarship Fund. She was survived by a brother and a sister, Mr. William L. Otis, formerly of Chester, Massachusetts, now living in Pasadena, and Mrs. F. J. Hall, of Pasadena, also formerly of Chester, Massachusetts.

Source.

McGroarty, John S., Los Angeles, from the Mountains to the Sea. Chic., American historical Society, 1921. V.3 p. 930-932

It is interesting to note, in passing, that John H. Jones, who was brought from Boston as a coachman by Henry Mellus--while Mrs. Jones came as a seamstress for Mrs. Mellus--and who for years drove for Abel Stearns, left a very large estate when he died, including such properties as the northeast corner of Fifth and Spring streets, the northwest corner of Main and Fifth streets (where, for several years, he resided,) and other sites of great value; and it is my recollection that his wage as coachman was the sole basis of this huge accumulation. Stearns, as I mention elsewhere, suffered for years from financial troubles; and I have always understood that during that crisis Jones rendered his former employer assistance.

Source.

Newmark, Harris. Sixty years in Southern California, 1853-1913. N. Y. Knickerbocker, 1926. p.85-86

FURTHER NOTES ON JOHN H. JONES, CITY COUNCILMAN

John H. Jones

Member of City Council, Los Angeles, 1877-1878 3rd Ward

Council Committees:

Board of Public Works  
Fire and Water

Source: Minutes of City Council, Los Angeles.

Fire Dept.

Have not been able to connect him with the organization of city fire department.

Volunteer fire dept., created by ordinance December 8, 1871.  
Paid fire dept., established December 11, 1885.

Source: Hunter, Burton L. Evolution of the municipal organization and administrative practice in the city of Los Angeles.

Street cars:

No connection found with street car lines. First street car began operation in 1874.

Source: Workman, Boyle. City that grew., p. 117.

Farmers and Merchant National Bank

401 S. Main St.  
Organized in 1871 as State Bank. Nationalized Feb. 7, 1903.

Source: Walker's Manual of Pacific Coast Utilities, 1948.

Supplied by.

Municipal Reference Library  
300 City Hall  
Los Angeles 12, California

## JOHN H. JONES

John H. Jones. One of the most esteemed and helpful citizens of Los Angeles was the late John H. Jones, who as a pioneer of the state of California and an early settler of this city gave liberally of time and means toward its upbuilding and development. Mr. Jones was the son of an Englishman, and was born in Greenbush, N. Y., March 31, 1834; his parents, James and Sarah (Olds) Jones, grew to maturity in England, where they married and acquired a competency which enabled them to retire from active business pursuits on coming to America. Their two other children, a son and daughter, were both born in England, and both died when past middle age. James Jones died in Massachusetts, where he had made his home in retirement, typical of the best in an English gentleman's life; held in high esteem by those who knew him best, for the sterling traits of character which distinguished his citizenship.

John H. Jones was but a lad in years when he lost his father, his early training thus devolving upon the mother, who gave to him by inheritance and precept the unswerving principles which were always his most noticeable characteristics in both public and private life. He received his early education in the public schools of Massachusetts, and in that state spent the first years of his manhood. Shortly after his marriage he decided to seek his fortune in California, the land of his boyhood's dreams, and accordingly took passage on a vessel commanded by a friend of his. This brought to the Pacific coast a cargo of goods via Cape Horn. The journey was made in safety, and soon after his arrival Mr. Jones found employment as a clerk in Los Angeles. Later he went to Santa Barbara and engaged extensively in trading, and at the same time began to speculate in lands. Considerable of the down-town property of Los Angeles was owned by Mr. Jones at one time, his first home being at the corner of Fifth and Main streets, where he lived for more than twenty-eight years, while he also lived for a brief time on Broadway, between First and Second streets. He had the utmost confidence in the future possibilities of the city of Los Angeles and indeed of all Southern California, and the greater part of the property that he purchased was at once improved under his direction, Chester block being erected by him, also two flat buildings on Ottawa street and one on Twenty-seventh street. At the time of his death he had under construction a large warehouse on Los Angeles and Fifth streets. He was

very successful in his business ventures and acquired a large fortune, but despite the affluence and its consequent influence which came to him, he remained ever the same genial, helpful friend to his associates, the same practical and liberal citizen, the simple, kindly, courteous gentleman which was his due through inheritance and training. He was liberal but unostentatious in his giving, the Golden Rule remaining his maxim throughout his entire life. In politics he was a Republican, and as a member of the city council for one term he was a power for the advancement of the city's interests. His death occurred suddenly at his home, No. 258 East Adams street, February 12, 1903, removing a citizen who had won the high position he held in the esteem of his fellow townsmen, and who left behind him a record of quiet, honest and earnest integrity which has placed his name on the roll of honored pioneers of the city.

Mr. Jones' wife was formerly Miss Carrie M. Otis, a native of Massachusetts and a daughter of the Boston family of that name. She was reared in her native state and educated in its schools, after which, November 24, 1854, she was united in marriage with Mr. Jones. She remained in Massachusetts when her husband came to California, joining him in 1858, making the journey by the Isthmus of Panama and the trip from San Pedro to Los Angeles was made by stage. It may be imagined that the little pueblo with its adobe houses and its uncivilized, foreign appearance struck the Boston-bred girl unpleasantly and did not speak eloquently of the pleasures of her future home. In the years that followed she made many trips back to the eastern home, being a passenger on one of the first trains eastward after the completion of the transcontinental railroad. However, she too became imbued with the future greatness of the country and has come to love the sunny skies of Southern California, where she still makes her home. She has developed business ability which has enabled her to look after her own affairs in an efficient manner, and her judicious management has resulted in a material increase of the property left her by her husband. Like her husband, she is liberal and public spirited, and like him also is unostentatious in her giving, although her name cannot but be associated with many charitable enterprises. She assisted in building the first Episcopal Church on Temple street and was associated with the early-day leaders in benevolences. She is a Unitarian in her

church affiliations. Recently she gave to the Young Women's Christian Association the sum of \$20,000 to assist in the erection of their new home building, and in numberless other enterprises of similar character she has been and is likewise interested. She takes a keen interest in the development and upbuilding of Los Angeles, and is always found foremost among the citizens who are seeking to promote the general welfare. Among her holdings mention may be made of the three valuable corner properties located as follows: two on Fifth and Spring and one on Fifth and Main streets, which she has leased for a term of years.

Guinn, J. M.

History of California and an extended  
history of its Southern Coast counties...  
v. 2 p. 699-700.

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In 1854 John H. Jones landed in Los Angeles with the clothes on his back, a \$20 gold piece in his pocket, and little, if anything else, but two strong arms and a willingness to work.

In 1902 he died, leaving an estate worth several millions of dollars. A part of this is the real estate on which stands the Security Bank Building at the southeast corner of Fifth and Spring streets; the site where stands the Title Insurance and Trust Building, at the northeast corner of Fifth and Spring, and the Rosslyn Hotel site at the northwest corner of Fifth and Main streets. All these sites are covered with magnificent skyscrapers, which will revert back to the Jones estate at the expiration of the leases, which have about thirty years yet to run.

These sites located at three of the leading business corners of Los Angeles, cost John H. Jones between \$500 and \$600, somewhere around 1868. What the land alone is worth today is well past the \$3,000,000 figure.

Jones emigrated from Chester, Mass., making the trip to California in a sailing vessel around the Horn. Upon his arrival in Los Angeles he obtained employment from Don Abel Stearns, one of the few wealthy Americans living in Los Angeles at that time.

#### His First Job

Jones's first job was setting up a consignment of furniture which had arrived for the Don in "knocked-down" condition in which furniture is usually shipped. Jones had to "set-up" this furniture.

He did such a good job that Don Abel gave him steady employment. The palatial Stearns mansion--a famous old adobe structure--at that time occupied the site of the present old Baker Block on North Main street. Don Abel Stearns was noted for his hospitality and the sumptuous manner in which he dispensed good cheer and entertainment to his hosts of friends.

John Jones had had but little schooling. For many years he was a familiar figure about the Stearns estate in the capacity of caretaker of the grounds. He attended to the Don's high-stepping steeds and drove the Stearns family about town in their fashionable carriages.

## FIRST REAL ESTATE

Came a time when Jones's wages amounted to between \$500 and \$600, and Don Abel happened to be caught short of the ready cash with which to pay his man. There was one other recourse: The Don had plenty of real estate--and real estate was about the cheapest thing in Los Angeles in those days. Would Jones be willing to accept some land in payment of the wages due him?

Jones considered the matter, and although what Don Abel offered him was away out in the outskirts of the pueblo--Fifth and Spring streets--far from the center of activity, Jones agreed to the proposition, and the Don deeded to his hired man three pieces of property, two at Fifth and Spring and one at Fifth and Main streets.

From California Scrapbook      v. 1      p. 117

(This is a collection of clippings compiled by the History Department,  
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