

Jones, Nellie Rowe (Mrs. William Cecil) ^[1]

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By Irene Hester, 1988

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Nellie Rowe (Mrs. William Cecil) Jones, librarian and author, was born in [Greensboro](#) ^[2], one of two children of Dr. Walter Wheat and Mary Dyson Rowe, both originally from Philadelphia. Dr. Rowe, who moved to [Greensboro](#) ^[2] in 1883, was one of the first resident dentists in the town and a prominent Baptist layman. Their son, Joseph Walter, died at a Navy training base during World War I.

Nellie Rowe was graduated from [Greensboro High School](#) ^[3] and attended [Greensboro College](#) ^[4]. In 1905, at age eighteen, she began to work in the [Greensboro Public Library](#) ^[5]; she remained there until her retirement in 1949 after forty-two years of service, twenty-nine of them as head librarian. In 1915–16 she took a leave of absence to study at the Carnegie Library School in Atlanta, Ga. (now the School of Library Science at [Emory University](#) ^[6]). On 23 Feb. 1938 she married William Cecil Jones, a retired Methodist minister who had served in both the [North Carolina](#) ^[7] and the [Western North Carolina Conferences of the Methodist church](#) ^[8]. At one time he had also been editor and publisher of the [Caswell Messenger](#) ^[9]. Their mutual interest in writing and local history led to collaboration in writing numerous newspaper articles on Greensboro history.

Mrs. Jones's long association with the [Greensboro Public Library](#) ^[5] was marked by significant growth and expansion of library services to [Greensboro](#) ^[2] and [Guilford County](#) ^[10]. During this period the library was moved twice into locations with expanded physical facilities. In 1906 it was moved from third-floor quarters in the old city hall to a home of its own made possible by the philanthropist and library benefactor, Andrew Carnegie. In 1939 it was relocated in the old First Presbyterian Church building. The church, erected during the pastorate of Dr. [Jacob Henry Smith](#) ^[11] with an educational building added later in his memory, was of great sentimental value to Greensboro citizens. After a new Presbyterian church was built, the daughter and granddaughters of Dr. Smith purchased the old church property, remodeled it to become the Richardson Civic Center, and gave it to the city of [Greensboro](#) ^[2] to house the library, the historical museum, and other community agencies.

[Greensboro](#) ^[2] was a pioneer in county library service. On 15 Apr. 1915 it became the first library in North Carolina to open its doors to rural residents. Shortly after this a chain of book stations in community centers in the county was established to bring books directly to rural residents. In 1926, it became the second library in the state to provide bookmobile service to rural residents.

Mrs. Jones emphasized the importance of acquiring a well-rounded collection of books and materials to serve the varied needs of the community, stimulate interest in educational and cultural activities, and preserve the past for future generations. Her particular interest in local and state history led to the building of an outstanding collection of books, pamphlets, and clippings on these subjects. The clippings from newspapers and magazines, which were carefully classified and filed by subject in vertical files, are a significant part of the collection. Another special collection consists of materials on [William Sydney Porter](#) ^[12], a [Guilford County](#) ^[10] native, who wrote as O. Henry. Both the history and the O. Henry collections are widely acclaimed by scholars and are used extensively by writers in these fields. These collections, together with a few others, are now housed in a special room in the fourth home of the library, a new building opened to the public in July 1964. This room was named the Caldwell-Jones Room in honor of Miss Bettie D. Caldwell, the first librarian, and Mrs. Jones for their interest and work in building these outstanding collections.

During Mrs. Jones's association with the library, the citizens of [Greensboro](#) ^[2] and [Guilford County](#) ^[10] took part in two world wars. Significant among the records of these years are her compilations of the war records of the service men and women: [Honor Roll for Guilford County, World War II](#) ^[13], published in five volumes; and [Soldiers, Nurses, Sailors of Guilford County in the World War](#) ^[14].

Mrs. Jones was active in the movement to establish a historical museum for the collection and preservation of relics and materials connected with the history of [Greensboro](#) ^[2] and [Guilford County](#) ^[10]. The museum, organized in 1924, was first housed in the basement of the public library. After its removal to several other temporary homes, it was permanently located in the Richardson Civic Center. In later years, when the library and other community agencies acquired other locations, the museum was expanded and given the whole building.

She was also active in the growth and expansion of library services statewide, lending her support to the [Citizens Library Movement](#) ^[15], professional organizations, and the campaign to secure state aid for public libraries. With Guilford a pioneer in county library work she was interested in providing library services to all citizens of North Carolina, both urban and rural. From 1925 to 1927 she was president of the North Carolina Library Association; and on her retirement in 1949, she was made an honorary member of the association for her contributions to library service at the local and state levels. Mrs.

Jones was also a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution ^[16] and of the Woman's Club, and an honorary member of the Altrusa Club ^[17] and the Reviewers Book Club.

Her interest in children and in state history prompted her to write several books for children: My Magic Story-land (1929) ^[18], Discovering North Carolina (1933) ^[19], and Crystal Locket (1935) ^[20].

Mrs. Jones died and was buried in Greensboro. ^[2]

References:

Greensboro Daily News, 30 June, 6 July 1960

"Mrs. Nellie Jones, Librarian, Is Dead," *Greensboro Daily News*, 30 June 1960

Who's Who in the South and Southwest (1947)

Subjects:

Biographies ^[21]

Public service ^[22]

Women ^[23]

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Authors:

Hester, Irene ^[25]

Origin - location:

Guilford County ^[26]

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