

Jones, Andrew Jackson ^[1]

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by William D. Titchener, 1988

1826–ca. 1 Apr. 1873

Andrew Jackson Jones, legislator, financier, and railroad president, was probably the son of William Jones of Bladen County ^[2]. In the 1850 census he was recorded as a twenty-four-year-old farmer in that county. Little is known of his early life, but he later lived in Whiteville. Jones was active in state politics, representing Columbus County ^[3] in the House of Commons in 1854–55 and in the North Carolina Senate for the sessions of 1865–66, 1868–69, and 1869–70. During most of the Civil War ^[4] he acted as a purchasing agent for the Confederate government, procuring horses and mules for use by the army, yet he claimed after the war never to have lifted a hand against the Federal government. In January 1866 he declined appointment as U.S. treasury assessor for the Fayetteville District, but as a member of the General Assembly ^[5] in 1869 his chief concerns were railroads, banking, and other corporate legislation, as well as a relentless pursuit of his own personal interests.

Jones came to be best known for his involvement in several sensational scandals between 1865 and 1871. In the former year he and State Treasurer William Sloan defrauded the state by selling state-owned cotton for their own benefit. Jones was later forced to return his share of the proceeds. He was also closely associated with George W. Swepson ^[6] and the state's railroad "ring."

Despite his reputation for dishonesty, Jones was elected president of the Western Railroad in April 1869. During his two years in that position he squandered the greater part of \$1,320,000 in special tax bonds, appropriated by the legislature for improving the Western Railroad. Some of this he lost in a notorious gambling binge in New York during the summer of 1869, but most was lost by his improvident speculation that fall. Jones, Swepson, and others pooled their respective companies' resources to control and drive up the value of their railroad bonds for personal gain. They were holding large amounts of these bonds when the market collapsed in the panic of September 1869.

Reports of this activity soon reached the legislature, and the Bragg Committee ^[7], in 1870, and the Shipp Commission, in 1871, were established to investigate. Jones was completely discredited in these proceedings, and he was replaced as president of the railroad. By November 1871, he was under criminal indictment in Cumberland ^[8] and Moore ^[9] counties for fraud and for failure to account to his successor for his railroad's tax bonds. In 1872 he was convicted in both cases and sentenced to prison. Both verdicts were appealed to the North Carolina Supreme Court ^[10]; one was reversed on a technicality. Jones died in the spring of 1873 before the second case was heard. He apparently was survived by at least one son, Andrew J., Jr.

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