

WILLIAM ('Bill') RICHARD, JONES (1839 - 1889), industrialist

Name: Jones William ('bill') Richard

Date of birth: 1839

Date of death: 1889

Spouse: Harriet (née Lloyd)

Child: Cora Jones

Child: William Milo Coulter Jones

Parent: Magdalene Jones

Parent: John Jones

Gender: Male

Occupation: industrialist

Area of activity: Business and Industry

Author: Vivienne Sanders

William Jones was born on 23 February 1839 in Luzerne County, Pennsylvania, the fourth of eight children of John Jones (1805-1853), an ironworker and Nonconformist minister born in Brecon, and his wife Magdalene, born in Ystradgynlais in 1809. His parents had emigrated to Pennsylvania around 1832, settling eventually in Catasauqua.

At the age of ten, Jones began work at the Lehigh Crane Iron Works at Catasauqua under **David Thomas**, the Neath-born 'Father of the American anthracite industry', who had known Jones's father in Wales. He was trained as a machinist by Hopkin Thomas. Some time between 1854 and 1856, Jones moved to Philadelphia and worked as a machinist at the I. P. Morris Company, producing two large blast engines for the Lehigh Crane Iron Works, which he then erected at Catasauqua. After a variety of jobs, he gained employment in 1859 as a machinist at the Cambria Iron Work in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. He was then employed to build a blast-furnace at Chattanooga, Tennessee. There he met and married Harriet Lloyd, the daughter of a Presbyterian minister who had owned ironworks in France and emigrated with his family to America in the mid-1850s. Harriet shared Jones's abolitionist views. They had four children, of whom only William and Cora reached adulthood.

In July 1862, Jones joined the Union army for an enlistment period of nine months, during which he fought in two of the bloodiest battles of the American Civil War, at Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville. He then returned to the Cambria Iron Works. Abraham Lincoln's administration discouraged ironworkers from volunteering for the army because the iron that they produced was vital for the weaponry and railroads needed in the war effort, but when in July 1864 Lincoln called for half a million more volunteers, Jones organised a regiment of volunteers and enlisted again. Henceforth he was frequently referred to as 'Capt Jones'.

After the war, Jones rejoined the Cambria Iron Company and assisted in the construction of its Bessemer steel-converting and blooming mill plants. He then helped erect the steelworks and rail-mill of the Edgar Thompson Steel Mill in Braddock near Pittsburgh. The works were owned by Andrew Carnegie, who made Jones general manager there. Under 'Capt Jones', the Edgar Thompson Mill broke all records for steel production in America and also in Britain. Jones asked for a large salary from the notoriously tight-fisted Carnegie, who gave him an unprecedented \$25,000 per annum, along with a percentage of the product of the mill. Jones insisted on good pay for his workers and in 1881 instituted an eight-hour work day for those under him, saying, 'Flesh and blood cannot stand twelve hours of continuous work.' However, in 1887 Carnegie reverted to the twelve-hour day that was common in the U.S. steel industry. Carnegie thought highly of him, but Jones told his family that he had rejected Carnegie's offer of a partnership because, 'I do not trust the man.'

In 1880, Carnegie wanted Jones to go to Wales to gain ideas on how to improve the Bessemer steelmaking process from amateur Welsh chemist **Sidney Gilchrist Thomas**, with whom Jones eventually met up in Birmingham.

Jones invented and patented many improvements in the steelmaking processes, most famously the Jones Hot Metal Mixer, which he patented in 1888. It converted hot iron ore into steel and saved time, fuel and labour, while producing the steel of a greater consistency that was important in the construction of the bridges and skyscrapers that proliferated in late 19th-century America. The Jones Mixer remains in use today.

Jones planned to form his own steelmaking business in Ohio, but died on 28 September 1889 following an industrial accident. Two days after his death, according to his descendants, a representative of Carnegie obtained many of his patents from his bedridden widow who used laudanum to cope with her pain from multiple sclerosis. She was paid \$35,000, but the Jones Mixer earned Carnegie millions.

Had Jones lived, formed his own business in Ohio as planned, and used the Jones Mixer there, it would probably have cost Carnegie a great deal of money. As a result, Jones's descendants were suspicious about the circumstances surrounding his death. He was a meticulous man who carefully registered his many patents, yet apparently left no updated will (his last surviving will was dated 1874). A great deal of his correspondence with Carnegie survived, except for that relating to the last four years, which has puzzled Carnegie biographers. The local doctors were optimistic that Jones would survive the accident, but after Carnegie sent his own doctor, Jones died suddenly and unexpectedly. Amongst his honorary pallbearers was Andrew Carnegie. Jones was survived by his wife Harriet, his 26-year-old son Will, and his 22-year-old daughter Cora.

William Jones was admirably public spirited. In 1889, he organised the relief efforts after a burst dam led to the Johnstown flood, in which it was established that the Welsh community there lost around \$1 million worth of property. He had always maintained the family's Welsh connections. He spoke some Welsh, and was a member of the Pittsburgh St David's Society, a charitable organisation. He toasted 'Our Fatherland' on every St David's Day, although he was wary of employing Welsh workers. In 1877 he recommended that Carnegie employ 'tractable' workers and that the Welsh should only be employed 'in limited numbers'. In 1883, Jones suggested to Carnegie that he, like Jones, should donate to and support the local Eisteddfod because 'the efforts of this class to improve themselves morally and mentally needed encouragement and assistance'. Jones's popularity was attested by the fact that 10,000 attended his funeral procession.

Author

Vivienne Sanders

Sources

Tom Gage, *American Prometheus* (Arcata 2017)

Dale Wint, 'Capt William Richard Jones', The Hopkin Thomas Project, 2010

David G. McCullough, *The Johnstown flood* (London 1968)

Further reading

Wikipedia Article: [Bill Jones \(steelmaking\)](#)

Additional Links

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