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Introduction to the Man: Harvie P. Jones

Diane Ellis, executive director

“If you would see the man’s monument, look around.”
inscription in St. Paul’s Cathedral honoring Christopher Wren

Harvie P. Jones was born in Huntsville, Alabama, on June 9, 1930, a son of Howard Criner and Kathleen (Paul) Jones. He grew up in New Market, graduated from New Market High School, and then earned a BS Degree (1952) and a BArch Degree (1953) from Georgia Institute of Technology. After serving in France and the United States (1953-1955) as a second lieutenant in the army, Harvie returned to Huntsville in 1955 to begin his career, working as an architectural designer at G.W. Jones & Sons, Engineers.

In 1957, Harvie joined W.R. Dickson, Architect. He became a partner in Dickson, Jones & Davis, Architects, in 1964. In 1967, he and Billy Herrin formed Jones & Herrin Architects/Interior Design. Harvie retired from the firm in 1998.

Elected to the American Institute of Architects’ College of Fellows in 1981, Harvie’s contributions to the profession and to historic preservation extended beyond local and state boundaries. He worked on more than 600 preservation projects in the Southeast. He authored numerous articles on historic architecture and preservation, served on many professional and civic boards and organizations, and, in turn, was recognized for his achievements and influence with dozens of awards.

Harvie served on the editorial board of *Alabama Heritage* magazine and contributed articles to the National Trust’s Preservation News and to the international *Bulletin* of the Association for Preservation Technology. A 1979 issue of the *Bulletin* featured a cover article written by Harvie about the technique he had developed for using computers to enhance historic photographs in order to glean lost details of historic structures.

Harvie was a member of the Huntsville Historic Preservation Commission from its establishment in 1972 until his death. He served on the Huntsville Beautification Board, and he chaired or was a member of many civic groups and boards, including the Central City Association, the Beautification

Board, the Twickenham Historic Preservation District Association, the Arts Council, the Huntsville Art League and Museum Association, the Wheeler Plantation board, and Burritt Museum & Park boards.

Harvie contributed to scores of restoration projects outside Huntsville, including the Carnegie Library at Judson College, the Donnell House in Athens, Belle Mont in Tuscumbia, and Albertville's railroad depot, as well as many projects in Savannah.

His awards include many honors from the American Institute of Architects, the North Alabama Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, Historic Savannah Foundation, The Beehive Press, the City of Huntsville, the Alabama Historical Commission, the Alabama Preservation Alliance, and the State of Alabama. He received Huntsville's Virginia Hammill Simms Award in 1972 for his comprehensive work in the arts.

Harvie has been Historic Huntsville Foundation's guiding spirit since the organization was formed in 1974 with Harvie serving as its founding chairman. Not a day has passed since then without his influence being felt in every area of the Foundation's operations. He was the Foundation's teacher and best friend, a resource of inestimable value.

Harvie possessed more knowledge and understanding of historic buildings and communities than one would imagine could be contained in the head and heart of one human being. He showed us the cultural and economic virtues of restoring and preserving and taught us to see the treasures in our own backyard and to respect them. And, perhaps more than any other person, he influenced the look of the city where we live. Without Harvie there might have been no historic downtown business district. No Twickenham Historic District. No Old Town Historic District. No beautifully restored Weeden House. No Alabama Constitution Village. No historic Huntsville passenger depot. These gifts are a sampling of the architectural legacy Harvie left to the community.

Harvie's passion for preservation and his legendary generosity led him to donate plans and give freely of his time and talent to hundreds of projects. Over and over again, he donated plans for projects large and small in the name of Historic Huntsville Foundation, thereby strengthening our presence in the community and keeping us focused on our mission. More than once he stepped in at the 11th hour to save a building scheduled for the

wrecking ball. No rescue is more emblematic of Harvie's genius and generosity in this regard than that of Oak Place, the circa 1840 George Steele house on Maysville Road. Nancy Van Valkenburgh was chairman of the Foundation at the time of this intervention. She learned that East Huntsville Baptist Church, owners of the Steele house, had concluded that the building could not meet the church's needs and would have to be torn down and replaced by a new structure. She asked the church's three-member building committee to postpone the demolition until she and Harvie could meet with them. When they met, the building committee listed everything the church needed and explained why the current building wouldn't work. "Well, could you give me a little time to come up with some plans?" Harvie asked. The committee said he could have the weekend. It happened to be Thanksgiving.

Harvie worked on the project over the holiday weekend; a few days later he met with the church committee members and unveiled his drawings. His plans for the building were, in Nancy's words, "breathtaking." All the church's needs had been met exactly in his designs. When he talked about the experience of working on the plans, Harvie said: "It was like a hand was guiding me." The building committee presented Harvie's plans to the congregation; the congregation approved them, and Oak Place was saved.

Harvie died December 5, 1998. He was a man of integrity, free of pretense, a good citizen. The next-to-the-last time I saw him was at a meeting in the Historic Huntsville Foundation office downtown. When the meeting was over, he left the building by the side door. I watched him go, then saw him stop in the middle of Franklin Street, bend down, and—in a gesture familiar to so many of us in Huntsville—pick up some discarded litter to toss into the nearest trash can. Sometimes the simple lessons of great teachers are the most powerful.



*"A building of any period, old and recent,
deserves to keep its own character."*

Harvie P. Jones, FAIA
Building Progress, 1977