

# The Historic Huntsville Quarterly

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Volume 25  
Number 1 *Harvie P. Jones, FAIA, Retrospective*

Article 3

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3-20-1999

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### Recommended Citation

Bowman, David (1999) "Harvie P. Jones' Contributions to Preservation," *The Historic Huntsville Quarterly*. Vol. 25: No. 1, Article 3.

Available at: <https://louis.uah.edu/historic-huntsville-quarterly/vol25/iss1/3>

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## Harvie P. Jones' Contributions to Preservation

*David Bowman*

Memory fails as to exactly when I first encountered Harvie P. Jones. It may have been about 1986, when I went to the north Alabama railroaders group, out of frankest curiosity about what they were up to, as a just-hired reporter for the *Huntsville News*. Harvie turned up to give a riveting slide show on the state's notable railway station architecture. It was a project he had done some years before, for the Alabama contingent of the American Institute of Architects, but it had the secondary benefit of introducing me to exotic places like Dothan, Brewton, Lanett, Opelika, Gadsden, and Alexander City.

A year later I was in the early and messy stages of restoring an old farmhouse near Pulaski, Tennessee. I had stripped off the wallpaper from the 1820s log portion and discovered notching around the fireplace that indicated a much larger mantel had been there originally. Harvie rooted through his research files and found a set of photos and measured drawings of such a mantel that had been part of an 1820s farmhouse in the vicinity of Hazel Green.

Gradually, in subsequent years, I became aware of the contribution Harvie P. Jones had made all over Huntsville and Madison County: new works like the Huntsville/Madison County Public Library, lovingly known as Fort Book, a browse, borrow from, and grow-a-bit wiser library; the new/old Constitution Village, a faithful re-creation of Huntsville's townscape, circa 1819; the successful adaptive re-use of an old brick commercial building on Jefferson Street into the Jones & Herrin Architecture/Interior Design offices; major site-restoration projects like the Huntsville Depot, and an indeterminate but large number of old-house renovations in the Twickenham and Old Town areas of Huntsville and all over the counties of north Alabama; and what seemed like an indefatigable round of consultations, done pro bono, contributions freely offered for the good of the community.

Harvie's approach was a modest, low-key, solid presentation of the facts, usually followed by a thoughtful recommendation of the alternatives for action. By education and inclination, he was a thoroughgoing profes-

sional, both as an architect and architectural historian, but he was also the *complete* amateur, doing something literally for the love of it. One small example, out of hundreds others could cite, involved the house at 510 East Holmes that I worked on from July 1, 1995, to December 1996. (The full story of this experience is in my memoir, *A Live-In Deconstructionist*, published in the Historic Huntsville *Quarterly's* Fall 1998 issue.)

On or about April 1, 1995, Harvie had studied the house at the request of its owner, Effie Cummings, and had come up with a conjectural sketch of what the front elevation may have looked like, before its front porch was enclosed with brick veneer and plywood for its use as a chiropractic clinic beginning in 1968. Sometimes, of course, such a sketch could be a small investment that would yield a major renovation project commission for the architect. Undoubtedly many people became his firm's clients that way. But I would bet Harvie did so many freebies for people, over the past 30 years or so, that if everyone who benefited from his sage counsel donated the value of such professional services as checks to the Historic Huntsville Foundation, the cost of renovating its new headquarters would probably be in the bank right now.

Anyway, for my "before renovation" party at 510 East Holmes, I had removed the green wall-to-wall carpet from the oldest two rooms, enabling Harvie and others to see the six-inch-wide flooring. From this and a few other clues, accompanied by Linda Allen's public records documentation on the site, he was able to determine that the original Greek *T* portion dated back to circa 1859, despite Craftsman Style remodeling (larger windows on the front, a double-wide front porch, with exposed rafters and knee-braces under the eaves) that was done to make it a thoroughly modern residence circa 1915. Towards the end of the "before renovation" party, Harvie and I ceremonially removed the Astroturf carpeting from the front porch steps, to wild and raucous applause.

Another ceremonial moment I cherish with equal pleasure was the "mortgage-burning" party out on the back porch of my Tennessee farmhouse in the spring of 1993 with Lynn and Harvie Jones among the honored guests. A snapshot survives somewhere showing the moment of sheer panic in my face as the flames of the document are licking my fingertips.

I need to wrap up this contribution to Historic Huntsville *Quarterly's Festschrift* issue with a darker sentiment that concerns the old Memphis & Charleston Railroad freight depot, a building Harvie was still agonizing over, in the final years of his life. As a preservationist who co-founded Memphis Heritage, in 1975, I have compiled a track record with lots of losses and only a few wins. Our group formed up in the mid-1970s when Memphis' downtown was dying and its old buildings were being abandoned.

The Memphis Housing Authority, charged with implementing the city's urban renewal program, had already created and claimed acres of architectural roadkill. One of the most tragic losses was the Memphis & Charleston Depot; built circa 1857 and demolished in 1967, while the City Council was fiddling with the issue. This loss galvanized the Association for the Preservation of Tennessee Antiquities chapter there to save a fine group of Gilded Age mansions along Adams Avenue for what is now called Victorian Village.

Anyway, what Memphis lost Huntsville won, thanks to Harvie P. Jones and others' efforts, renovating the circa 1860 Huntsville Depot, at roughly the same time many of us all over America began understanding historic preservation as a categorical imperative for the future. The missing part of that important project has been the Memphis & Charleston Railroad freight depot, whose roof was recently stripped off, opening the structural members underneath to certain ruination. I can recall Harvie Jones trying to reassure me that the Historic Huntsville Foundation, the City of Huntsville, and the Norfolk Southern owners would do the right thing, to save the oldest continuously operated freight depot in the United States.

The point is that for every win by preservationists—every Harrison Brothers Hardware, every Huntsville Depot, every George Steele Federal Period house restoration, and so on—there would be for Harvie P. Jones and idealists like him the battles that would be won instead by civic neglect and the natural forces of bio-entropic decay. It may be that the freight depot is already lost. If it's not too late, this is one we should win for the Gipper, or rather for that mild-mannered hero, that exceedingly civilized man, who gave so much to us all, Harvie P. Jones.

*David Bowman was editorial page editor of the Huntsville News, 1986-1996; he continues to write commentary columns for several Arkansas newspapers, including the Baxter Bulletin (Mountain Home) and the Morning News of Northwest Arkansas (Springdale). Fall of 1999, he will be teaching a course, Writing About Architecture, at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville. His preservation interests in the Ozarks include stone houses crafted from the 1880s to the 1930s, the 1930 rainbow arch bridge over the White River at Cotter, and some aging masterworks of Arkansas' two greatest architects, Fay Jones and Edward Durrell Stone.*



## Remembering Harvie

Evidence of a great legacy is everywhere you look in our community. Harvie's absence will be felt as strongly as his presence. The man made a difference!

Christine Richard, Huntsville

Walking. That's how I remember Harvie. Always walking. Walking to work, head down, as if he were looking for something.

Walking the streets of downtown Huntsville with his trusty camera, no detail unimportant. Walking the grounds of General Wheeler's plantation or walking the campus of Judson College. Walking with Lynn and Palladio in Rome, with Christopher Wren in London, with Louis Sullivan in Chicago, and with William Jay in Savannah.

When not walking, Harvie would allow himself a stroll, whether in Maple Hill Cemetery (as concerned with monuments as with mansions) or in his beloved New Market (preserving whole communities in his spare time).

Walking. That's how I remember Harvie. Always walking. Walking to work, head down, as if he were looking for something; not looking back, knowing that he has done well preserving that which is worthy of preservation; not looking forward, entrusting the future to friends and colleagues; but looking down, assuring himself that he would leave a legacy of healthy roots and firm foundations.

John Shaver, Huntsville

# Federal Period

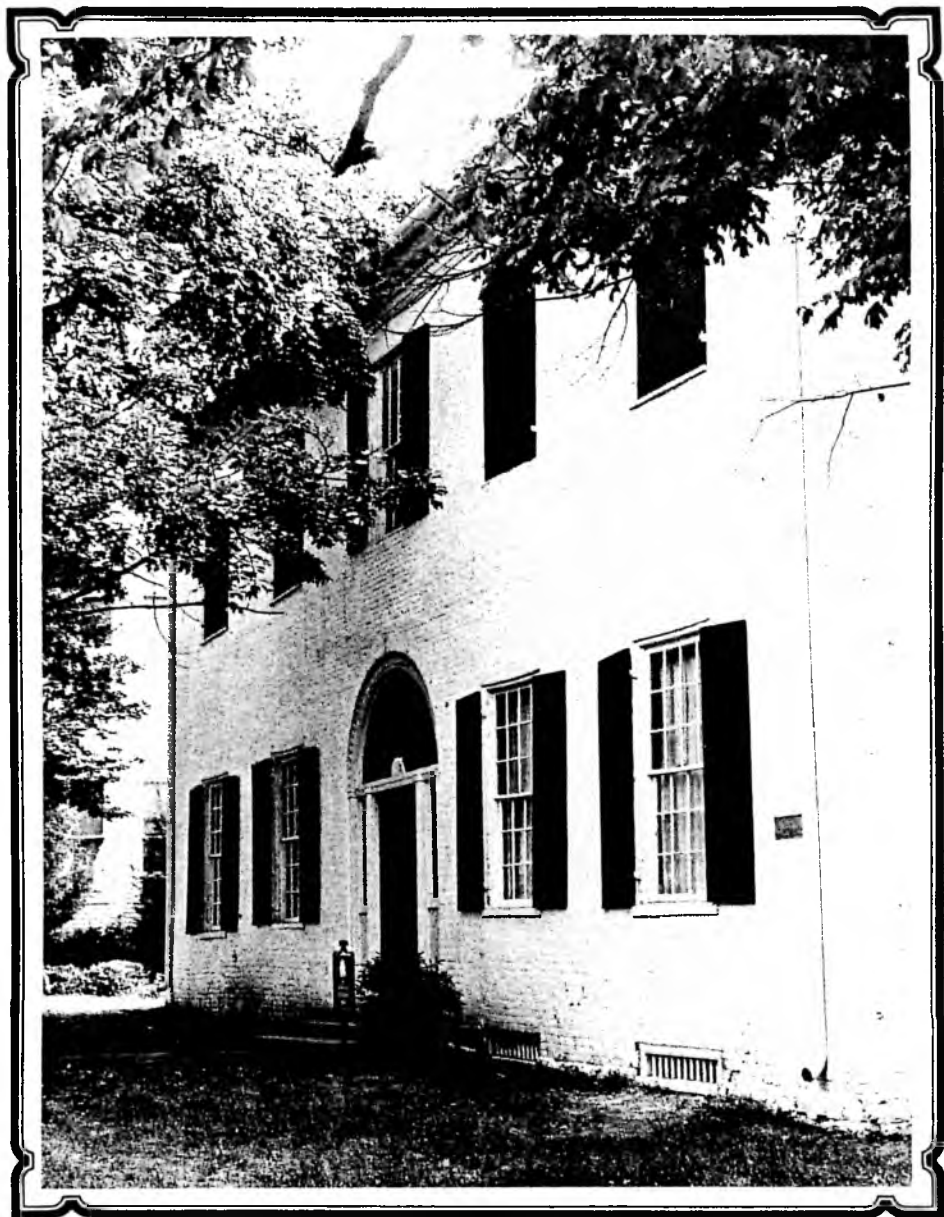
## Introduction

Huntsville's connection to the major architectural styles of Western Europe begins with the Federal style, a complex blend of Roman and Greek influences filtered through the sensibility of English architects and patrons. Harvie P. Jones' essay on Federal Period residential architecture in Huntsville and Madison County carefully reviews the features of that style as found in local buildings (*Historic Huntsville Quarterly*, Vol. VII, No. 1, Fall, 1980).

Today's readers can attain a better understanding of the historical context of the Federal style and the discoveries at Pompeii and Herculaneum that enriched it. In Harvie's article they will find an exceptionally knowledgeable guide to the location of details and stylistic features in buildings that are still standing, waiting for a sympathetic eye.

This first study of our region's Federal architectural heritage comes complete with a list of cited buildings and a brief bibliography. It is carefully organized by categories: porches, floors, windows, wood components, etc., but it is also full of precise and sometimes very personal observations. Harvie enlivens his analysis of Federal-style plans with comments on the multiple functions of 19th century rooms: the parlor might be used for dining and sleeping, and several children might sleep in a single room. He explains how two-story brick houses acted as passive thermal systems, helping occupants cool off in summertime.

Harvie points out that in the 19th century, a knowledge of architecture was considered to be an integral part of a good education. We who produce *Huntsville Huntsville Quarterly* heartily agree, and hope that this reprint will refresh some memories and help others begin an interesting exploration of preservation basics.



*WEEDEN House, 300 Gates Street; entry featured on COVER.*