3-20-1999

Billy Herrin Remembers his Friend, Harvie P. Jones

Maureen F. Drost
Introduction
The following two interviews of Harvie’s friends and coworkers are from information first presented January 26, 1999.

**Billy Herrin Remembers his Friend, Harvie P. Jones**

*Interview by Maureen F. Drost*

Architect Billy Herrin remembers his late partner and the historic preservationist Harvie P. Jones as a methodical man. Billy first related some of these stories about Harvie at the first annual Harvie P. Jones Preservation Series at EarlyWorks, a hands-on history learning center that is part of Alabama Constitution Village.

“Yet at first blush Harvie’s office looked like a yard sale of old architectural parts. There would be bricks. There would be pieces of wood and joinery and old nails and hardware, but it all had a particular place. He had like a little nest back there. With a little hammer and a lot of little tacks, he would put his T-square in one place and then he would put an erasure shield in another place and then he would put a little notebook in another.” Billy said that Harvie put these tools of his profession within reach, “kind of like a cockpit in an airplane.”

“Harvie could sit down and visualize a complete set of drawings ahead of time. I’ve never seen anybody else who do this. He would start drawing on the left hand side of the sheet and just draw to the right hand side.” (According to Billy, the usual sequence is to make a series of studies for architectural renderings followed by overlays, more studies, and, of course, erasures.) “Harvie was a talented draftsman, and he used the traditional tools he had tacked up in his office.”

Computers never appealed to Harvie. Billy recalls buying six computers, giving one to his partner. Billy encouraged Harvie to practice on the computer for a few weeks then bring it back to the office so it could be connected to the network. “This was a Friday. On Monday, Harvie brought it back and said, ‘I’m not the least bit interested in that thing. Let somebody else do it.’ He didn’t even break the seal on the box.”

“It was the Constitution Hall Park project about 1970 that really got Harvie into preservation. It was just like he had an awakening at that
point, and after that he knew that was what he wanted to do. He became truly consumed in preservation. And this was not just an eight-hour-a-day job. This was a seven-day-a-week, 365-days-a-year job."

Harvie and Dr. Frances Roberts spent a year of research and many weekends photographing houses of the period—those that best illustrated Huntsville in 1819. Other out buildings on the various grounds such as kitchens and barns were also photographed. Contractors for the original Constitution Hall Park used these photographs as well as architectural drawings and specifications.

Harvie and Billy worked as partners more than thirty years in the firm Jones & Herrin Architecture/Interior Design. "I am sure I am a better architect for having been around Harvie," says Billy. "He was a purist and an extremely honest and fair person who always put the client above everyone and always put the aesthetics above everything."

**Historical Gardening with Harvie P. Jones**

*Interview by Maureen F. Drost*

Harvilee Harbarger is one of fourteen founders of the Huntsville-Madison County Botanical Garden. Harvilee and her daughter, Julie Stephens, own and operate the highly respected horticultural and landscaping company Harbarger Design. As a gift to the people of the area, Harvilee and Julie planned the first thirty-five acres and the initial roads for the garden. For more than thirty years, Harvilee collaborated on projects with Harvie P. Jones.

Q: When did you and Harvie begin working together?
A: Harvie started working with his uncle, Carl T. Jones, at G.W. Jones & Sons (a civil engineering company), and that was my first workplace.
As teenagers, this was before coffee breaks; you went to work in the morning, then you had lunch, and you went back to work. So being a teenager, you naturally liked to kinda goof off just a little bit.

Carl Grote was working with us at that time. He worked out on the survey crew. When he would come into the office, we would goof off. But Harvie never wavered. He sat at his drawing table and worked and worked.

Q: How would you describe Harvie’s talents and personality?
A: He was just born talented as far as the (architectural) drawing part goes. He loved Huntsville. He had a sense of place and family. Harvie and Billy Herrin were both very kind to me. Harvie was dedicated, loyal, and a stickler for perfection.

Q: What major historic preservation projects did you and Harvie work on?
A: Constitution Hall Park was probably the biggest and most in-depth restoration we did. All the plans had to represent the period. Quite a bit of research went into the project. Other restorations included Burritt Museum & Park, the Huntsville Depot Museum, and the Weeden House Museum. We also worked on the beautification of downtown Huntsville in the early 1970s.

Q: How did you learn about details for the gardens of the various historical periods?
A: I would read old letters. I also did some interviews with visitors to the Huntsville area during earlier times. In my research about the Weeden House, for example, I read a letter from a lady who once lived there. She wrote that the seven buds of the Seven Sisters Rose always graced the Christmas table.

Q: What did 19th century Huntsvillians plant around their homes?
A: Garden plants, including the sweetpea and the iris. Flowering and fruit-bearing trees, including the dogwood and apples, pears, peaches, and plums. Medicinal plants like rabbit tobacco, which was used for treating asthma, but people also smoked it, and coriander, parsley and sage to flavor foods, Shrubs like the holly and the boxwood. Homeowners of the 1800s would spread linens across the boxwoods to dry, so the sheets would need less ironing. The original Constitution Hall had a vegetable garden on its grounds.
Q: Does Huntsville have a successor to Harvie P. Jones?
A: We're going to miss him. We'll have someone eventually but not really. He was "Mr. Restoration." What he did will be ageless. He brought houses back from ruin.

Interviewer Maureen F. Drost, a free-lance writer formerly with the Huntsville Times, has won numerous local and state awards for her writing on mental health. Her Associated Press award is for an article about the 1989 tornado featuring a hero who saved children at Jones Valley School. Maureen grew up in Huntsville where she was graduated from Huntsville High School. She has a BS from Auburn University where she majored in English and minored in journalism.

Remembering Harvie

When we were building our walk-in fireplace in our Walker Avenue house, I was horrified to see that the firebrick was white. It ruined the whole appearance of the fireplace; and I thought, "I can't live with that." I made one of many phone calls to Harvie, who said: "I'll tell you what we did at Constitution Hall Park. We stained the firebrick with an oil-based mahogany stain." He actually told me what color to get and where to get it. And then he said: "If you want it to look used, we can mal-adjust a blowtorch and smoke up the brick." I did stain the brick, but we didn't use the blowtorch.

We did the same thing in our gas log insert in the great room, because that firebrick was white too, and Harvie said we could use the same stain.

Dale Rhoades, Huntsville