

David Jones, quiet symbol of Hilton Head's greatest protest, dies at 85

David Jones was once the busiest man on Hilton Head Island, known as "a walking, talking conglomerate."

He died Wednesday at his home on Spanish Wells Road, a few hundred yards from where he was born 85 years ago on the banks of Old House Creek.

He was called "David Jones No. 1" — even in the newspaper — so he wouldn't be confused with a younger colleague, "David Jones the Second." His Gullah "basket name" was "Come



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See" because two older siblings died young and his cousins told each other to "come see" the big, new baby.

Jones grew into a tall, imposing figure who would advise many, but always choose his words carefully.

He was the first black from Hilton Head elected to Beaufort County Council and the third ever, following Leroy E. Browne of St. Helena Island and Booker T. Washington of the Seabrook/Dale area. He served from 1967 to 1977.

He was proprietor of Jones' Garage beside his home, president of the B&J

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Submitted photo

Secretary of the Interior Walter J. Hickel examines petitions protesting a proposed chemical plant in Bluffton in April 1970. They were delivered to Washington by the shrimp trawler Capt. Dave, owned by David Jones of Hilton Head Island, right. At center is crewman Jacob Driessen of Hilton Head.

JONES

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Fuel Oil Co., owner of three shrimp trawlers, president of the Hilton Head Fishing Cooperative, and captain of the area volunteer fire department.

His garage had the area's first heavy-duty wrecker, which could pull cement trucks and lumber trucks from the Lowcountry muck as Hilton Head development took off. He bought buses to expand his transportation business, a sideline that evolved into today's Carolina Transit, operated by his nephew.

Jones learned to stay busy from his parents, Benjamin "Ben" Jones and Mary Jane

Hamilton Jones. Ben had been chef at the "big house" at Palmetto Bluff, and he and Mary then managed the kitchen at Honey Horn. His father planted crops, and had a transportation business to haul local produce by boat, barge and truck to the City Market in Savannah.

"'Come See' grew up learning to handle an oar the way other children learn to handle a tricycle," Fran Heyward Marscher Bollin wrote in an Island Packet column that is part of her book, "Remembering The Way It Was, Volume Two."

Jones attended one-room school houses on the island, where he would sheepishly admit later that he learned to crochet and knit. He then

studied at the Penn School on St. Helena, working on the school farm for 15 cents an hour to pay tuition. He served in the U.S. Navy in Korea, and learned auto mechanics at N.C. A&T University.

Jones trained many others in car and boat engine maintenance. He taught people how to crank a car by jacking it up and spinning a wheel. He was known as a mentor and role model.

"He was a colorful man, but very quiet," said Thomas C. Barnwell Jr. "He was a quiet giant."

Jones' most famous moment came in April 1970. He was the symbolic center of his community's successful protest against a proposed BASF chemical plant on the

Colleton River in Bluffton. He felt it would ruin the fishing industry. Others said it would ruin the fledgling resort and real estate industries.

Jones rode aboard his Capt. Dave shrimp trawler on its widely-publicized trip from Hilton Head to Washington, D.C. He and a small group of islanders hand-delivered more than 40,000 petition signatures, and a nice mess of shrimp, to Secretary of the Interior Walter J. Hickel, whose challenge of the chemical plant turned the tide against it.

"Come See" showed how a busy life can cast long-lasting ripples.

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