John Sebastian Jones was born on October 26, 1872 in Smoke Bend (Ascension Parish), Louisiana on the McCall Plantation and was the only child of Mr. & Mrs. Richard and Judea Jones. He was led into his early experiences of education and fundamental of learning by the mistress of the plantation on which he was born. She was impressed by Jones’ aptitude and was prompted to organize a school for colored children. His parents later purchased a homestead in Smokebend, Louisiana, where Jones attended the local “colored school.” Joseph Jones, an uncle, was principal of the school and took a personal interest in John’s development. Upon completing high school, he enrolled at Leland College in New Orleans. There he became a model student, demonstrating a special interest in Latin and the classics. While at Leland he edited the school newspaper and acquiring basic journalistic skills which he put to formal use later in life. Jones was an honor student, graduating valedictorian from the Normal Department at Leland in 1887. After graduating from college, he secured through President Edward C. Mitchell, his “first teaching assignment” in Calcasieu Parish where he served for several years as a teacher. Because of outstanding performance, he became principal of the Lake Charles School.

During his first three years in Calcasieu Parish, Jones was instrumental in securing teacher-salary increases and a lengthened school term. The parish officials were so impressed with the young teacher that each year the police jury and city school board sent him to Tuskegee Institute where he became acquainted with the distinguished Negro Educator Booker T. Washington. While on one of his trips to the Alabama school, Jones met Maria Morrison whom he later married. The couple had seven children. Upon the death of his first wife Jones married Lizzie LeBlanc, had two more children. His children were Amelia, Armstead, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Myrtle, Lenora, Eugenia, Ogarita, Lillie Artesta, and Nan Geraldine. Ralph Waldo Emerson, his third child, was president of Grambling College (Grambling State University), and is credited with building that institution into one of the leading colleges in the state of Louisiana. All of Jones’ children were educated and played leading roles in community and civic life. From 1898-1899 Jones was principal of the Lake Charles Negro school.
Under his leadership there were two males and one female teacher; the grammar and high school totaled 274 pupils and there were 25 library books. Changes were taking place in the state which would soon involve Jones in a different kind of service in the realm of Negro education.

The South’s struggle for public education was both slow and painful. However, the people of Louisiana were interested in education, even though its development had been retarded. Universal education did progress under Thomas H. Harris’ leadership and John Sebastian Jones became one of his followers. In the early 1900's a real breakthrough occurred with the creation of a Negro division in the State Department of Education. The General Education Board agreed to finance the new office which was opened in 1916. Leo Favrot became the division head, and John Sebastian Jones served as his assistant from 1920 to 1932. Prior to the establishment of the Negro division in the State Department, Negro schools had not been supervised by the state authorities, and lacking supervision and support, had reached a chaotic state. The Superintendent of Education suggested that the Negro schools should either be improved or abandoned. The decision was made to improve the public education system for Negroes, and the newly created Negro division of the State Department of Education was one means by which improvement was implemented. Jones and other state agents in the division studied "the needs and gave purpose and direction to the program of Negro education." They represented Negroes in councils, administrative boards and legislative bodies, and in "all places where they [Negroes] cannot or do not go." Invaluable service was given towards the development of universal public education.

Jones became the leader of Negro educators who advocated moving Southern University from New Orleans to Baton Rouge. This goal was realized in 1914. Thomas H. Harris was the State Superintendent of Education in 1908. Upon coming to this office, he recommended some changes affecting Southern University, which had been created in 1880 by the General Assembly. The original act provided that "there shall be established in the city of New Orleans a University for the education of persons of color, to be named and entitled the Southern University." Harris, urged by Jones and other Negro leaders, suggested that Southern University could be more valuable to Negroes if it were relocated in a rural district in the center of the state. Therefore, all of the property belonging to the University in
New Orleans should be sold, and "the proceeds invested in an agricultural industrial training school for Negro teachers. Negro educators favored this change, and a special committee was formed to implement it.

**Jones** served on the committee which presented a special request to Louisiana Governor J. Y. Sanders to move Southern University from New Orleans to Baton Rouge. The committee's efforts were rewarded on **March 9, 1914**, when Southern University was re-located to Baton Rouge, Louisiana on Kernan Place. At the insistence of President Joseph S. Clark [original name Josiah Clark], Jones joined the faculty of Southern University when the school re-opened on Scott’s Bluff as Director of the Academic Department of the Teachers Training Program. It was in this position that he acquired the title of "**Dean Jones**" which he retained for the remainder of his life. Jones brought more than 20 years of teaching experience to this position.

**Jones** also played a role in the establishment of the parish training schools and the Teachers Training Program at Southern University. These schools were created in order "to make provisions for the training of reasonably well equipped teachers for the Negro Schools." Philanthropic foundations which had been founded in the late nineteenth century helped to finance these improvements in Negro education. The Negro educator served as a state representative for several of these foundations.

The oldest philanthropic foundation for Negroes was established by **George Peabody** of Massachusetts in 1867. By 1869 he had given $2,000,000 toward the development of Negro education in the South. **John F. Slater** provided a similar fund in 1882, and in 1907 **Anna T. Jeanes** created a Negro Rural School Fund, which helped to finance the supervision of Negro schools in Louisiana. **John S. Jones** was listed as a Jeanes Supervisor in 1926. The Virginia Randolph Fund was originated in 1937 and the four funds were consolidated into the **Southern Education Foundation**. **Julius Rosenwald**, Chairman of the Board at Sears, Roebuck and Company, was interested in improving rural Negro school buildings which were in deplorable condition. He created the **Rosenwald Fund** which promoted the building of suitable Negro schools. The financing of these schools was shared equally by the Negro community, the
Parish School Board and Rosenwald. The Rosenwald Fund also provided one-half of the salaries of state Negro agents, who were called *Rosenwald Building Agents*. In Louisiana *John Sebastian Jones* was chosen to serve as a *Rosenwald Building Agent*.

*S. L. Smith*, the director of the Julius Rosenwald Fund, stated that the Rosenwald Building Agents were "valuable assistants and did much to improve the education of backwood Negro schools and community life in cooperation with the state agents of their respective states." He also felt that *John S. Jones*, who was assistant State Agent from 1920-1932, along with other Negro agents, did a splendid job and "no similar amount of money ever given by Rosenwald and the fund he created ever produced results so great as that spent on the fine group of Negro agents."

*Jones'* travels throughout the state of Louisiana as a Rosenwald Building Agent would fill an entire book. The Negro educator worked with both white and Negro citizens and traveled by train, bus, and private car from one end of the state to the other visiting the schools and then reporting to the parish school boards and superintendents. There were no hotel facilities and cafes to offer him room and board, but this did not deter Jones from his duties. Because of his experience, *Jones* was given the title "*Builder of Five Hundred Schools and Thousands of Lives.*" It was not an easy task to persuade the impoverished Negro farmers of Louisiana to give one-third of the money necessary for the new school buildings. However, Jones did succeed in this endeavor, and more than a quarter of a million dollars was raised for the construction of these improved school buildings.

In 1934 *John Sebastian Jones* was appointed assistant supervisor of the *Works Progress Administration* (WPA) Educational Program in Louisiana. He served as Assistant Works Progress Administration Education Supervisor for seven years. During these years he adhered closely to the overall philosophy of *WPA*, that the majority of the unemployed were not lazy but unfortunate. The organizers of this federal project felt that the unemployed should have an opportunity to work on jobs suited to their training and skills. *M. S. Robertson*, Superintendent of the *WPA* Education Project, gave Jones credit for the vast amount of progress made in the lives of Negroes under this project. Negroes composed
of 41.2 percent of the people in Louisiana in WPA projects. Improvements were made in the expansion of grammar and high schools, and in the development of institutions of community service, such as music, recreation, art, sewing, housekeeping, and adult education. Jones was also credited with enabling several thousand Negroes to gain reading and writing skills through the WPA Education Project. His association with this project led some people in Louisiana to say that John Sebastian Jones "has truly been the friend of his people in this state and to him goes the laurels of having done more for the advancement of the educational status among rural children and adults than any other individual."

In Jones' next campaign he developed a philosophy on which to build an adult education program. He outlined his ideas in a speech titled: "Health and Literacy Among the Rural Negroes of Louisiana." He stated that "the types of work offered in the various communities wherein the bulk of the population lived did not require [anything] other than physical fitness." An educated labor force was not needed to "maintain the status quo." The communities were concerned entirely with agricultural pursuits, and there was no complicated machinery. Therefore, children of school age were as valuable as adults in maintaining the farms. The "school was not an economic necessity, and, in fact, it was economically unsound from the standpoint of the taxpayers." The adult illiterates who Jones knew had grown up in communities which had no schools; therefore, they were not stigmatized for not having an education.

Jones' later years were spent at the State Industrial School for Negro Youths in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

John Sebastian Jones served as Editor of The Louisiana Colored Teachers Association (LCTA) for a period of 21 years. It is of interest that when he was 70 years of age a special resolution was passed at the Louisiana Colored Teachers Association's Annual Convention on November 22, 1943, to extend his editorship. The May, 1947 issue of the Journal was dedicated to Jones who had announced his plans for retirement. In addition to other honors, the Louisiana Colored Teachers Association in 1946 passed the following resolution:
That we, the L. C. T. A., express its appreciation to J. S. Jones, retiring Editing Secretary of the organization for his active and unselfish devotion to the cause of the Association and education in general in the State of Louisiana. We also wish to register our sincere regrets because of his retirement. We further resolve that the L. C. T. A. will present to the retiring Editing Secretary a meritorious key, a scroll bearing this resolution, and that he be made a Life Member of the Executive Council of the L. C. T. A.

The duties at Southern University and in other positions in Negro education in Louisiana gave “Dean Jones” an enviable place in the history of Negro education. Jones was a consecrated educator with a historic career, which included office holdings in practically every professional organization in the state. His career included services as Editor of the Louisiana Colored Teachers Association, Assistant State Agent for Negro Education, Rosenwald Building Agent, Assistant Supervisor of the WPA Educational Program in Louisiana, and the Parole and Public Relations Officer at the State Industrial School for Colored Youth until his retirement from active public life in 1953.

His educational training consisted of: Leland University, Selma University, special work at Knoxville College and Hampton Institute.

John Sebastian Jones died on December 26, 1959.

The men’s dormitory “Jones Hall” on the campus of Southern University and A&M College, Baton Rouge, Louisiana is named in his honor.


Jones, John Sebastian. Personal Papers. Archives and Manuscripts Department, John B. Cade Library, Southern University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.


Courtesy of: The Archives and Manuscripts Department/John B. Cade Library/Southern University and A&M College/Baton Rouge, LA. 70813-0001.