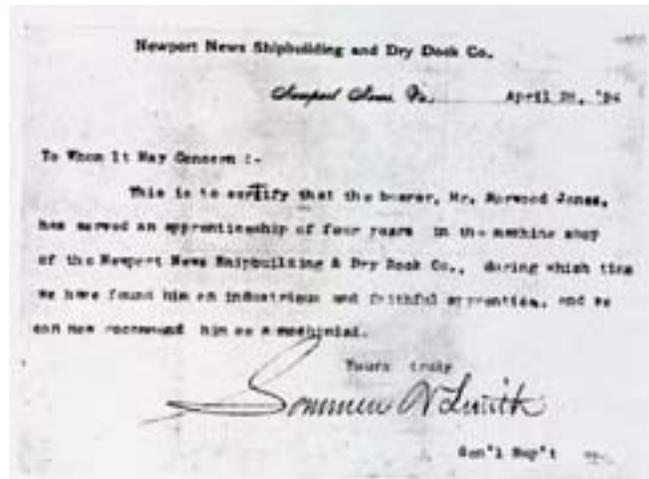


## NORWOOD JONES - Remarkable Man of Firsts

Norwood Jones was, indeed, a remarkable man of firsts: the *first* graduate of the NNS apprentice program, the *first* paid fireman in the Hampton Fire Department, and the *first* graduate apprentice to have a *Binnacle* dedicated to him.

Born on a farm in a part of Hampton that was then Elizabeth City County on January 23, 1873, Norwood Jones was educated in Hampton public schools and enrolled in the shipyard's embryonic apprentice program on April 4, 1890. Although he was only 17 years old at the time, the shipyard itself was even younger. Originally incorporated as the Chesapeake Dry Dock and Construction Company on January 28, 1886, the name of this fledging industrial enterprise had been changed to the Newport News Shipbuilding & Dry Dock Company just a few weeks before young Norwood started his apprenticeship.

Norwood Jones, became the first apprentice alumnus on April 4, 1894 – exactly four years after enrolling. His 'diploma', attesting to his proficiency as a machinist, was just this brief letter from the yard's General Superintendent. This certificate also indicates that shipyard officials recognized from the start the value of an effective apprentice training program as a means of helping supply skilled mechanics to the waterfront; long before the Apprentice School was formally established in 1919.



However, Norwood Jones was not the first person to be enrolled in that decidedly informal, but time-honored, over-the-shoulder method of training at NNS. Norwood's Registration Number was the third one ever issued. Whoever was registered first is unrecorded...and thus lost to history. One can only assume that individual dropped out of the program. But the second person to be registered – John Dominic Nicholas – did complete his time, also as a machinist, in April of 1896, becoming Graduate #13. As all aspiring apprentices quickly learn, the elapsed calendar time between entering and completing can vary, depending on how long it takes to satisfy the basic 8,000 hours first class mechanic time-in-training requirements.

1894 was certainly an important year in Norwood Jones' life. After completing his time in early April, he married Emily Browne on September 25<sup>th</sup> of that same year. Perhaps yet another unrecorded 'apprentice first' for him. For he may have, unwittingly, established the often-practiced tradition – in later years – of graduate apprentices marrying shortly after completing their time. Or at least of waiting until the prohibited period ended before announcing same...

The union of Norwood and Emily produced three sons, William Burnet, Lucien Norwood and Jesse Carter. Of these three, only Jesse Carter Jones ever worked at the shipyard. A quiet and unassuming man, Jesse Carter Jones apparently never made it widely known that his Father was the first man to complete an apprenticeship at NNS. He didn't have to...Jesse Carter Jones made quite a name there for himself by virtue of a career that spanned 42 years, including 25 years as the yard's Chief Metallurgist before retiring in 1966. He passed away in December of 1975, at age 74.

But long before those events came to pass, his Father apparently worked in the yard's main machine shop for a few years as a first class mechanic, leaving for some unrecorded reason on some equally unrecorded date to become a machinist at a power plant in Hampton. Demolished in 1950, that facility was owned by the now long-defunct (and now unfamiliar) Newport-News-Hampton Railway, Light and Power Company. Norwood Jones worked there during the days, but he also became a volunteer fireman in October of 1889 and put in a full shift in the evenings as an unpaid engineer with the Hampton Fire Department (which, at that time was all-volunteer).



In 1890, Norwood Jones became the first paid member of the Hampton Fire Department – and a short time later its first chief engineer. It was here that he acquired a ‘middle name’ of sorts. For decades, he was known as Norwood ‘Casey’ Jones – after his HFD contemporaries bestowed the first name of a slightly more famous engineer (of railroad fame) on him.

One can only assume they did that in jest, since the original Casey Jones drove an ‘iron horse’ recklessly - to his death – and a very serious and capable Norwood Casey Jones guided horse-drawn fire engines (and later drove motorized fire apparatus) safely through the streets of Hampton for decades.

In 1934, Hampton's Fire Chief noted: “The fine condition of the Hampton Fire Department Headquarters and every piece of fire fighting equipment is due to our Chief Engineer, Mr. Norwood Jones and his able assistants. Chief Jones was made Engineer when the department was equipped with horse drawn apparatus and the department is now rated among the best in the state.” Chief Engineer Jones had obviously retained the knowledge for maintaining (and an appreciation of) complex mechanical equipment which he originally acquired at NNS.

During a part of his fire service, Norwood Jones, a widower at the time, lived in an apartment above the original Hampton fire station in what is now called Olde Hampton. His grand daughter, Virginia Jones Miller of Newport News, fondly recalls going there after church with her parents and younger sister for traditional family Sunday dinners prepared by “Bam-Bam” (her nickname for her Gra’Pa Jones).

Mrs. Miller also vividly remembers walking the few blocks from Newport News High after school, and - in those relatively relaxed security times - right through the 37<sup>th</sup> Street gate and into her Father's office in the Testing Lab adjacent to the Apprentice School's Educational Building. While waiting to ride home with him, she sometimes made self-conducted tours of both floors of her Father's domain where many an apprentice discovered the mysteries of stress and strain, both before and since her visits.

An interesting aside: While Jesse Carter Jones was never an apprentice, he did have some slight connection with the school – apart from being located nearby and enduring the visits of countless classes of aspiring apprentices. In the 1930's, he put his UVA Bachelor of Science degree in Chemical Engineering to good use on behalf of his Father's school, providing classroom instruction in chemistry and metallurgy to the yard's apprentices of that era.

When he retired, Norwood Jones had served in the City of Hampton's Fire Service as Chief Engineer for over fifty years; finally leaving active service in that demanding occupation in July of 1951. After a few months' transition, he fully retired in 1952 – at the age of 79! On that occasion, the Mayor of Hampton presented him with a solid gold watch in recognition of his many faithful years with the city and upon the occasion of the first city employee to retire. Yet another first for him, because the old City of Hampton and Elizabeth City County had recently consolidated, and he therefore became the first employee of the then-new and expanded City of Hampton to retire.

Normally, other than recording his passing, that would be the end of the story about a 'remarkable man of firsts'. But there was to be one more... In the very late 1950's, as several apprentices were spending their evenings working on the development of what was to become the fifteenth edition of *The Binnacle*, the Apprentice School's annual, the subject of dedication came up. Like most institutions, the honoree in past editions of *The Binnacle* had been shipyard (or school) officials, or influential instructors, or respected staff members. Perhaps inspired by the 1947 annual dedication to the 28 apprentices who made the ultimate sacrifice in military service during World War II (and are further memorialized by the T.C. Skinner mural that still dominates the back wall of the apprentice school auditorium), they turned to one of their own.

And who better than the very first – and then-still living - apprentice graduate? It undoubtedly came as a delightful surprise to Norwood Jones when he learned that the students of 'his' school not only still remembered him, but also had dedicated the 1959 edition of *The Binnacle* to him. Following long-standing tradition, whenever the person to whom the apprentice annual is dedicated is still living, the first copy of that yearbook was presented to Norwood Jones in his Richmond home by the president of the school's student body in early August of 1960. In his declining years, Norwood 'Casey' Jones had moved to Richmond where one of his three sons could better attend to his needs.



Just eleven days short of his 89<sup>th</sup> birthday, and less than seventeen months after getting what was probably his final first – the treasured dedication of an apprentice school yearbook – the first NNS graduate apprentice quietly passed away on January 11, 1962. Long a member of St. John's Episcopal Church in Hampton, he is buried in its historic cemetery.

By the time the #1 Apprentice had completed his time here on earth, almost 3,000 additional apprentices had followed in Norwood Jones' footsteps and completed apprenticeships in the world's foremost shipbuilding training program. And, collectively, they added numerous more 'firsts' to the annals of Newport News Shipbuilding.

*Bill Lee*

An Admiring Apprentice  
From the Class of 1959

February, 2004

