

RURAL RESOURCES

Stories on the Land

John M. Jones, Sr.
7/6/99 (9:10 a.m.)
Interviewer: Brian Cutshall
Tape #21

Side 1

Mr. Jones, just first off, when and where were you born?

I was born in Sweetwater, Tennessee, December 11, 1914.

And where were you raised?

Sweetwater.

Now when did you move to Greeneville?

After World War II.

And what brought you here?

My wife. At the close of World War II, I was overseas, and my wife's mother, who published the *Greeneville Sun*, wrote me that she had cancer and that she was going to have to sell the paper. Uh, her son, who was a banker in New York, was not interested in coming back to take the paper over. She wanted to know if I would be interested in buying it or in, uh, looking at it. And I s---, I wrote her that I would be glad to come and take a look at it, but I did not know. I had no experience in the newspaper business. I had been with the Gilliam Paint Company which was a family-owned company in Chattanooga, Tennessee, before the war. So I came here, looked at the paper, stayed for a month and just became fascinated with it, and bought half interest in it. And that's where I started. That was 1946.

How did you meet your wife?

My wife's brother was a--a--went to VMI, and--and a friend of my family in Madisonville, Tennessee, Bob Kimbrough, later Dr. Kimbrough, uh was his roommate at VMI. And Bob's family had a house party in Madisonville, Tennessee, uh, one year when--after he had been at VMI, and uh, the--his mother called my mother, and she said, "Bird, there's, uh--Bob's roommate has a sister who's fifteen years old, and I--don't you have a boy that would be alright to entertain her during that time, during this house party?" She said, "Oh yes, I'll take care of that." So she sent me over there and that's how I met her.

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John M. Jones, Sr.

Had you ever dreamed that you would get into the newspaper business? Even thought about it?

Had no idea. No, I never thought about it. My family were in textile manufacturing and paint manufacturing, and, uh, I was in the paint manufacturing end of it, and my brothers were in the textile manufacturing end of it, and they still are.

What did they think when you told them that you were going into the newspaper business?

My father did not approve--did not think that very highly of it. He was very concerned about it because he didn't know anything about it, and, uh, uh, he was very disturbed that I would be leaving the family business. And, uh, I had been in training to--with Gilliam Paint Company. Gilliam Paint Company and Mobile Paint Manufacturing Company are both owned by the same people. And, uh, I was working in advertising in that before. And so I was going back to the advertising end of it. And he thought--my uncle was president of that company, and, uh, he had been very generous to me during the war years. He saw that I got bonuses when they got--when employees of the pape--of the paint company got bonuses during those years, that I got something too, even though I wasn't working there. And, uh, so it was kinda hard for me to leave--not to do it, and he was very disturbed when I told him that I was not coming back, and he said, "But we we're countin' on you!" And I said, "Well, this looks like it's a more interesting life to me than--than what I'm--pr--you're proposing. He had a son who--Bill Gillman, who was, uh, in the business, and I said, "Billy will be your successor." And he said, "Well, Billy's not too well." And he knew--Billy did not last very long after that. And, uh, unfortunately, I didn't know that. And I didn't, uh--I'm glad I didn't know it because it might have changed my mind about it. But, but, uh, anyway, uh, that's--I made the decision to buy--this interest up here, and--and I bought Mrs. O'Keefe's interest in the *Greeneville Sun*.

Have you ever had any regrets that you'd done that?

None whatsoever! That's the best thing I ever did.

What were your hopes for the newspaper when you joined on, and what are your hopes for it now?

I saw the newspaper, uh, as a means of making changes in the life of the region, uh, in a way that I didn't think paint manufacturing or textile manufacturing could do (chuckling). Uh, I was fascinated with that part of it--the public service angle of it. It was one that appealed to me greatly. And I felt that, uh, that--and I think that today. I think a newspaper, if it's worth its salt, is one that's, uh, uh, very conscious of the needs of the community and of, uh, how they can be affected by the newspaper.

The impact of the *Greeneville Sun*, is it greater now than it was when you first came on? Or how has its impact changed?

I think it's--I think it has changed. I think it has improved. Uh, when I came along the paper had a circulation of four thousand. Today it's over sixteen thousand. Uh, it has the highest market penetration of any paper in Tennessee--the eleventh--seventh highest in the United States. Uhhh, that speaks for itself. It tells you that a higher percentage of the potential readers take the paper, uh, here than they do anywhere in Tennessee, and anywhere, as seven--only six other places in the United States have a higher percentage. Uh, that's one indication that I think that the paper has made an impact. I think the paper has been involved, and tried to be involved, in everything that it thought was for the welfare of the community, and one of the concerns that we had very definitely from the very first was that we had a very weak Chamber of Commerce. It was just a kind of shell organization. Uh, we weren't doing as well as we should be doing, and we knew it. We recognized the fact that we weren't doing as well. And the--fortunately, we had a leader in this community by the name Clyde Austin, who was one of the major manufacturers in the area--employers in the area, and he had broad experience, a broad attitude about things, and, uh, he saw the need to try to bring more jobs here. And that's where the Greene County Foundation was started. He--he talked to local business people. Mrs. Susong, Edith Susong, who was the publisher of the paper, was a close friend of his and a close ally in creating the Greene County Foundation. They got out and they solicited and raised about a--something over a hundred-thousand dollars to start the Greene County Foundation which is today worth close to a million dollars. And it has raised--it has built--bought and sold sites for industry and built shell buildings and turned them into jobs, uh, here on--many, many times over. And it's worked out, that was the forerunner of the Partnership, and the Partnership, of course, came about because we saw that we were duplicating our services too many places. Uh, we--we had an economic development committee. We had an industrial committee. Frequently they would have industrial prospects that would be working on--both committees would be working with those industrial prospects, sometimes just duplicating what was being said. Uh, that didn't seem like it made sense. We--we needed to--we felt like we needed to put our economic development and our overall development into better planning than we were able to do just with casual planning. And that's one of the concerns we have today, is that we are not doing enough--we haven't been doing enough long-range planning in this community over the years, and, uh, one of the reasons why I favor a city-manager form of government. I think a city-manager form of government would enable the Board of Mayor and Aldermen to do their job better, because it would bring professionalism into the planning stages. We're talking--we--we have a city planner now, but this nice lady, uh, is overwhelmed by the detail of reports that she has to make or that she does make, and she has very little time for really long-range planning. We--we need a more professional approach to this, and, uh, we will eventually have it. This is the smallest [according to interviewer he intended to say largest] town in Tennessee that I know of that doesn't have a city manager form of government. Even Dandridge is--has a city-manager form of government. And it's not something we're taking away or adding--or gonna to cost us. It's cost us because we didn't have it. That's where it's cost us--millions of dollars. We know just of one thing here that we could have had an enlarged airport if we'd have had planning--for the money was available, and we could have had that, but we didn't know about it.

Was that the problem? Simply not knowing about that particular. . . ?

Well, we didn't know about it. We didn't--it was, uh, a thing that the Board of Mayor and Aldermen had a lot of other things on their mind, and they didn't realize that, that--they didn't have the contact in Nashville that told them that funds were available for expanding this airport. They were available, but they didn't take advantage, and somebody else got the money.

How do you feel about your role as an influencer in the Greene County community? And does that sometimes get overwhelming?

Well, I'm not the major influencer here. I don't think of myself that way at all. Uh, I think of myself as playing a role, but not being--I can only believe what I believe, and if, uh, if others don't share that belief, why, it's their privilege to think what they want to think. Uh, no, that doesn't bother me.

In your time here in Greene County, how have you seen the balance between agriculture and industry change?

Dramatically! We used to be an agricultural community. We're not any more. Uh, but the reason we're not is that they couldn't--most of these people couldn't make a livin' on the farm. In other words, the hill country is not suitable for mechanical farming the way--the way it is out in the midwest where it's much more efficient to put--for mechanical farming to take place. Uh, but what we'd have found is that by bringing jobs to the community we enabled the family to retain that farm and live on the farm and have a limited farming operation and still make a living sufficient to take care of their needs and their children's needs. And without having--if we hadn't gone and created these jobs, the population here would have been [chuckling] very much diminished from what it is.

You mentioned just prior to our interview the number of industries that were here at that point and how that number has grown.

About eighty-five now. We have about eighty-five industries now, and, uh, we had had about three in 1946,--'45, '46--uh, three or four or some'n like that. And they were not growing, not expanding, not anything happening to 'em. Some of 'em are disappeared. The Food City Company, for example, soon disappeared--uh, very inefficient planning on three or four levels and they just couldn't make it, and they had to go--the owners of the buildings--the owners of the company sold it to somebody, and they closed it and moved it to Virginia where they could get on one floor.

How well do you think Greene County is doing now on the industrial and economic basis?

I think they're doing very well. They're doing a--it's a good balance. Uh, I think we have a good balance, and I think we're gonna have a good balance--continue to have a good balance. Uh, I, uh, I think that, uh, uh, Alpine Industries, which has just been located here, is gonna be--already is a major contributor to the community. And look what they've done for Tusculum

College and what they've done in, uh, the restoration of the Capitol Theater and other things like that--major contributions. And they already have seven hundred and fifty, or some'n like that, people working in a temporary building. They're gettin' ready to spend sixty million dollars down at, uh, Mosheim. They would have come--put that plant inside the corporate limits of Greeneville if they could have found the space. They couldn't find a space. The, the, uh--they wanted to. The whole purpose of the company coming here was to locate in Greeneville, in the town of Greeneville. They didn't mind paying city taxes. They wanted the city benefits. And, uh, uh, they, uh--unfortunately our city limits have been so limited by bad planning, and, uh, it's just a lack of planning, and, uh, we have, uh--we didn't have any room to put 'em in, and so they had to go to Mosheim. And that's where they're gonna build a sixty-million-dollar plant.

Is there plenty of room for industrial development in Greene County?

Oh yes! Plenty! Plenty. All you have to do is fly over it, and you'll see that very little of it's covered with--with city and towns, and most of it's farmland and woodland.

Would a lot of industrial development--what kind of impact would that have on the agriculture here in the county would you think?

Well, so far it's maintained [chuckling] the agriculture. If it hadn't been for the industry that had come here, most of the people--families that have farms, could not survive. They can't--it's very difficult to survive on a farm, uh, small farm, uh, with the income that you can generate from that--and meet the needs of your children--family.

Have you or your family members ever been involved in farming or even gardening?

Sure. We--we--I own a farm now. My wife owns a farm. Uh, we're, uh--lease those farms. We've had gardens, grown our own produce and things like that at different times but not in the last year or two. I am, uh, uh, not--I just don't have the physical stamina to do that any more.

Was agriculture important to your ancestors and some of your. . . .

All--practically everybody that lived in Tennessee was involved in agriculture. It was the--that's what we--where we came from, was agriculture. It's changed. And, uh, uh, as the agriculture--agriculture--if it wasn't for the fact that we had these industries to provide jobs for the families that live on farms, believe me, they would--those farms would've been gone. They'd have been sold--bankrupted, many of 'em.

Do you know how far back your ancestors came into Tennessee?

Uh, I know this, that, uh, my grandfather was in the Civil War, a captain--cavalry captain. He was

captured at the Vicks--the Battle of Vicksburg and spent nearly a year in prison on Johnson's Island in lake Erie. Came back after the war. He was exchanged as a prisoner; came back and organized another troop. He did not live in this area. He lived in the Middlesburg, Kentucky, area. And, uh, he--after the war he opened a little general store in the Cumberland Gap. But being a former Confederate officer, that was union territory, he was--his business was shot up several times, and he decided it was not feasible to try to stay there and make a living. So he came to Bristol where he had relatives, and, uh, started a little general store, and then went and opened one in Mor--in Newport and then one in Morristown I believe. And, uh, then he, uh, was successful with those operations. Uh, he had two uncles that lived in Newport also, and, uh, he went to Sweetwater to organize a--and organized a flour mill down there, and then later a bank, and they became, uh, heavily involved in manufacturing hosiery and cloth--a woolen mill. Uh, he died before I was born, but he left a substantial estate to his children, and they continue to operate these businesses today.

When you were growing up were you part of a community?

Yes, Sweetwater.

And what thoughts do you have of Sweetwater as you reflect back.

Tiny little town. Tiny little town, uh, nice town. Uh, and I, uh, I had a little garden. I raised vegetables--and my little red wagon, and I went around town and sold produce out of that wagon, and I remember--I remember that very well. And, uh, uh, I went to TMI to--Tennessee Military Institute--to school and my brothers did too. My father had gone there. And, uh, then I went to Washington and Lee University and graduated there.

When you were in Sweetwater, what are your reflections on your school days, and what part did the school play in the community?

I went to a private school, uh, run by two old-maid New England ladies--Miss Mae Poore and her sister; and, uh, I went there for several years, and then I went to public schools for several years, and, uh, before I went to TMI. I had fun--loved it. I played tennis from the time I was just a youngster. My family had a tennis court, and I'd get up before breakfast and play tennis, and frequently I was so sweaty that my family made me go up and take a shower and change clothes before I would go to school, and, uh-- sure, it was, uh--it was as good life.

Did you have a church that you attended in Sweetwater?

Yes. My family were Southern Presbyterians, and I was very active in that church, and my family were very active in the church. We've always been a very close, church-related family.

And where do you attend church now?

My wife's family were Episcopalians who lived here. When I married her and came to Greeneville that little church just had a handful of people, about six or eight people, and they had no regular pastor. They were just, uh, foundering, and she didn't want to give it up. And it'd, they had--there was no Southern Presbyterian Church here. There was Northern Presbyterian Church, but that didn't appeal to me particularly so I was--decided to go with her church.

Is that St. James Episcopal?

St. James Episcopal Church.

What role or importance do you think that church has in the Greene County community, and also the--your childhood church? What roles do they play?

The Greene County community? Well, I think they have, uh--the physical church has been here since 1840, and there've, uh, they--at the close of the Worl--of the Civil War, it was largely, uh--the members of that church were mostly Southern sympathizers, whereas this community was split about sixty/forty Northern sympathizers--Andrew Johnson's home, home of the vice-president of the United States, uh, and, uh, so that little church foundered after the Civil War, just--just had--the Confederate families didn't have any money. They were wiped out financially. My wife's grandfather was a doctor, and he was--uh, had been a Confederate doctor in the Confederate army, and, uh, he was just, uh, penniless, because he didn't have any money, and the--the patients that he had were usually the children or families of Confederate sympathizers, and they were--had no money to pay--pay him for his services, so he just did what he could. And, uh, he survived by takin' eggs and bacon or anything else he could get in place of money. And they had a very tough time during this era. The reconstruction period was bad for this whole region--whole upper East Tennessee area. We never had a lot of, uh, slaves in this area, and it was not--the country was not suitable for cotton farming which was what most of the slaves were used in. And while there were slaves in this community (there were a few), there were not a lot. Uh, it was, uh--the agricultural background of it was small farms. You lived off your farm. And 'course that was the way it was for many years. It's not that way today.

Do you still feel a part of the Sweetwater community and of your church in Sweetwater?

We have established a park there, a public park, in memory of my grandfather and grandmother, and I still have an interest in that. I have, uh, interest business in two or three businesses there--manufacturing businesses that are still there with my family, and I have a brother living there. Yes, I have some connection.

Would you ever want to move back to Sweetwater?

No, I would not. I wouldn't want to move anywhere but Greeneville--not anywhere but

Greeneville.

How do you and your family feel about what's going on with the land here in Greene County and also in Sweetwater?

I think it's great. Uh, there's nothing wrong with what's going on with the land in my opinion. We're surviving. Uh, people worry about roads and--covering up the land. Well, all you have to do is fly over it, and you'll see that roads don't cover up the land. Very little [chuckling] of the land is covered by roads. Uh, we live in a, uh, uh, uh--an economy that, uh, is not conducive to the type of agriculture that we're capable of in this area, so it's harder to make a livin' on a farm than it ever has been. And, uh, consequently, we--we--if it hadn't been for industry, most of the farms we have in Greene County would not be existent today, because the children of these people are able to survive and live on the industrial jobs and maintain their farms and raise a little tobacco and keep a few milk cows or beef cows or hogs, or whatever they--they're able to do, and--and operate. Oh, I think it's a good balance.

Would you say that also of in Sweetwater?

Probably. It's almost always all over East Tennessee--all over East Tennessee. I think that's pretty well true.

In your younger days, did you have a certain place that you'd go for recreational activities or just to hang out?

Well, uh, my younger days were in Sweetwater, Tennessee, which is a town of less than five-thousand people, and, uh, there were no, uh--was no organized recreation that I know of there. You just made your own recreation. Played baseball, football, basketball--whatever you wanted to do, but you--you did it on your own, and you organized it around the groups that you were in. There was no--I don't recall any, uh, town recreation program.

Do you have any special memories associated with some of those activities you were involved in?

Sure! I loved--loved--I loved all sports, and I played as many sports as I could.

Is there a recognizable home place in Sweetwater for the Jones family.

My--my, uh, uh--father, in 1925 or '26, some'n like that, built a lovely home in Sweetwater. My grandfather's home was there but he--that's where he lived, and he tore that house down and built a new brick house in place of it, and that's where I was raised. Uh, we kept that house until the last few years, and we sold it. The family--my brother--I had two brothers there. One died a few years ago, and we would have kept it for other members of the family, but there was nobody wanted it because they all had their own homes--lovely places, that they didn't need

another big house like this. This was a large house. And, uh, right in the middle of the downtown area--covered a whole block. Uh, we sold the house. It's now in the

hands of some people that I think are lookin' after it very well. I haven't been in it in the last thirty years, but I imagine I would recognize it if I went in.

Did you have a garden there at that home?

We owned the property right behind it, and the garden was in the--was--the house right behind it.

What kinds of things did your raise there?

Oh, tomatoes and potatoes, cucumbers, uh, radishes--all kinds of things like that.

Do you dabble in gardening now?

No, I don't. I'm just--it's past my capabilities right now.

Here in Greene County, what is it about the landscape or the geography that you find appealing.

Well, I think we have a good balance of, uh--of--here. I know that there are some people that don't agree with that. But we have a lot of lovely vistas to enjoy, and we still are having that and we will have it in the future too. It will be there. But we also have to have, uh, roads and schools, and, uh, we have to have places for business to operate, and that's all important also.

Would you consider Greeneville/Greene County a farm community?

No.

How important is the rural aspect of the city/county?

It's important. It's important. We all appreciate and enjoy it, but it's not the dominant thing it used to be.

In what ways do you think Greene County's changing?

Well, I think the whole world is changing. That's--change is the name of the game. It's--that's happening everywhere. And we're changing in our--our life here too. Yes, it's, uh, uh--more and more people are having difficulty making a livin' on a farm, on the small farms in areas like East Tennessee. Uh, we--there's a greater demand for agricultural produce all the time, but it's

comin' off the big mechanical farms. It's not comin' off the small farms. The small farms are ideal for family--raisin' a family and havin' an agricultural atmosphere for children to grow up in which I think is lovely. And I--I see no change in that. That'll happen indefinitely.

Do you believe that, as far as changes, just in general, going on around Greeneville/Greene County, are we going in the right direction?

I think so.

What are some ways to help that along?

Planning. More planning. But we're not doing enough of that, and I think that, uh, uh, our, uh--we need to study our own needs, long-range needs, better. Uh, I think that we're doing a better job of that than we were a few years ago, but it's not adequate for what I think is really required.

What's your prediction for the planning aspect, say, five, ten, fifteen years down the road?

I think we'll have a much more efficient planning operation eventually in Greeneville and Greene County than we have now. Greene County, far as I know, has no planning, long-range planning going on. Uh, the town goes through motions like it's doing long-range planning, but it's really short-range planning. Uh, we do need more long-range planning, and we need more professionalism in the management of our government. Uh, we're [phone rings]; just ignore it; it'll, it'll--maybe my secretary'll take it. Okay, go ahead. I'm sorry.

How do you feel the majority of people view agriculture and farming in the Greene County community.

I think they like it. I think it's good, but it's not something that's, [phone quits ringing] uh, on their minds twenty-four hours a day.

How do you think they view economic and business development?

Same way. It's all part of life. It's just a part of our lives. And it's not, uh, something that we, uh, change--can change overnight. I don't--I think generally people like the idea that, "Sure, we want the farmland and we want the community; we want the town, and we want business, and we want jobs."

As far as your views on agriculture and farming and business and economy, are they similar to the majority of people in Greene County or different do you feel?

I really would hesitate to say that just--to answer that question specifically, because I don't

know. I think that a lot of people feel the way I do about it. A lot of people do. The people I know share my views.

The people who share your views, are they as outspoken as you are, or

Probably not. Probably not. Most of 'em don't--don't--aren't outspoken.

As far as the individuals who maybe would take a view--opposing view, do you feel that they are outspoken?

Yes, I think--they're more outspoken because they're more organized. I think that what we see here on the road situation is a question of a handful of people that have been organized to try to oppose it, and they're doing their best to try to convince people that--that we don't need four-lane roads. And all you have to do is get out on the highways to realize that, uh, you do need four-lane roads, and we need safer roads than we're--than we have. And we need--just like we need more schools. [chuckling] We have more children to educate so we have to have more schools. And we have to have more roads because people are--there are more people out there drivin' on 'em. Drive down the interstate one t--or take the four-lane road between here and Mosheim, and you'll find that your cars--you're loaded with traffic. Can you visualize that on a two-lane road? I couldn't.

Now, as far as your stance on the road which would connect Pigeon Forge with Tri-Cities airport, you said the individuals who share the opposite view are more well organized than the other side. Do you see the pro-road people becoming more organized?

Yes, I think so. They will have to eventually. But they--it'll be a while before they are because roads are such long-range things. It takes twenty--whether we ever see the road between Pigeon Forge and the Tri-Cities Airport, I don't know whether we'll ever see that. But we will see, I believe, a good, much more efficient road covering the Baileyton/Greeneville and Newport/Greeneville area, and that's critically important.

Have you had family members who have left Greene County because of work or educational opportunities?

My wife's brother was, uh--left, went to New York to go into the banking business. He's a lawyer in the trust department of Chemical Bank and became an officer in the bank, and very successful career, but he was--that's just one. Uh, [phone rings] I didn't have any--uh, any, uh, uh, uh--not members of my family that were in Sweetwater. I'm tryin' to think of any of them. My--I have a brother, Newton, who lives in New Jersey [phone stops ringing] now, and, uh, my--he was sales manager of our family textile manufacturing business and is retired now. Plays golf every day, and he's, uh--his wife died a few years ago, and he's still living in his home in New Jersey, and he comes to Tennessee quite often--loves to come.

[chuckling], and the land is important, but it's not everything. It's not--well, our--if we depended on the land for a living here, we'd have a very poor living.

Do you consider that you have a quality life?

Yes, I do.

What do you see happening for yourself and your family in the next ten years?

Well, I just hope I'll be around in ten more years (chuckle)--ten more years. But, uh, I, uh, I think we'll see remarkable growth in this whole country. I think we have a--we, uh, we'll have-- I don't think it will be anything dramatic here. It'll be steady growth. That's the way it oughta be, and the way--it's the best way to handle it. We can survive that way without dramatic--dramatic changes. Nobody's looking for dramatic change that I know of.

Um, do you see anything more as far as things happening even further along than ten years from down the road here in Greeneville and Greene County--as far as real long-range planning?

Well, I just think that we need to--need to think about the future further out all the time, and think about what our wants are and what our--what we'd like to see out there. Uh, I think basically you, have; uh, people that are--that are looking for work, looking for jobs. We want to continue to survive by giving--keeping those people at home rather than educatin' 'em here and sendin' 'em somewhere else, and, uh, I think we're doin' that, and I hope we'll continue to do that. But it will grow. We--I'm just--I'm right now in the process of reading a book by a man named Knight Kiplinger on the "coming world boom" as he calls it, and he thinks that the future of our whole region, whole country, and whole--the world, as far as he's concerned, is just great. He does not, does not see the type of depressions that we had in the thirties as coming up, and--even though there are people that do see those things, he doesn't see that. Uh, he feels like that the remarkable, and really remarkable, changes that have taken place in the last ten years will be further--further enhanced. Who would have believed what a little--a little computer could make billions of judgments of--of--of, uh--moves in just a second or two? Uh, we're--we're growing in many, many ways, and I think that, uh, the future is very bright.

Do you see your children and grandchildren staying here in Greene County?

I hope so. I think--I think a lot of 'em will. I hope they will, and I think they will.

Do you foresee their staying in similar lines of business that the family's in now?

I hope--I hope and think they will. I mean, they should.

What represents the biggest technological or social changes that you've seen in your

And you have a son who has worked here and I believe is in New York now?

Yes, I have one son who is livin' in New York--Alex. And uh, when uh--let's see. I'm fortunate-- my daughter, Sally, and her family live here, and John and Helena, and Gregg and Kitty live here, my children. And, uh, I have a daughter in Atlanta also, married.

Have you had a number of associates or friends or family members who have come to Greene County because you're here and the work and educational opportunities?

You know, I don't know. I don't recall now anybody that just came here because of me. Uh, the, uh--I hoped that my children would--some would come into business with me, because we have got a substantial and growing business. We have seventeen different operations that our family runs here in Greeneville, and uh, from newspapers to radio stations to magazines. We're the largest Internet operator in East Tennessee--all the way from Chattanooga to Bristol. We've got, we've got a business here that needs to keep people occupied and growing, and fortunately we have good people--not just my family, but good people that we've been able to bring in to help us with these businesses.

And we need to switch sides.

SIDE 2 (Tape #21)

John M. Jones, Sr.

Continuing an interview with John M. Jones, Sr. It's approximately 9:50 a.m. on July 6, 1999. Mr. Jones, how would you describe a "good life," and what would a person need to have a "quality life"?

Well, I think that, uh, in the first place you--you want a family, you want a job and family. You want to be able to make a living sufficient to educate and take care of your family, and you want enough of what we call quality things in life--education, um, arts, that kind of thing around you to satisfy you. But I think we get that here in a remarkable way in Greeneville. This is an educational town, Tusculum College, uh, being here, the second--the oldest college, I guess--private college--in the state of Tennessee. Uh, Walters State College does a whale of a business here. They have a facility here now with fifteen hundred, two thousand students in it and will have more. We have--East Tennessee State University has a branch here. Uh, they have, uh--East Tennessee State University has nearly eight-hundred people--local people enrolled, not just in Greeneville but in the Tri-Cities area. And, uh, we have got, uh, we've got great civic theater, uh, operates here. Arts are here very definitely. I think we have a best of both worlds.

What role does the land play in a quality life?

The land's where we basically started from. And the land's fine. But the land's not everything

lifetime?

The computer is a tremendous change. It's changed our whole lives, the whole world. Uh, that's one change that's been most remarkable. Uh, there've been so many changes. Uh, who would have believed that we'd have somebody walking on the moon? Uh, satellite

communications. You're going to be able to take a--have a little hand-held telephone in the middle of the Sahara Desert and call anywhere in the world you want, call on the telephone! Who would've--that's just unbelievable, but that's happened in the last ten years. And the next ten years will be even more explosive.

As far as how work was conducted here at the newspaper when you started and how work is conducted today, how is that

Difference between day and night. It was--we had a hot metal operation. Uh, all the type had to be melted down every day for use the following day. We had Linotypes. Today we don't have any hot metal at all. We use digital photography. Digital photography makes it possible for a reporter to be in--in Charleston, South Carolina, shoot a picture there, and communicate it over the telephone to us within a matter of minutes. And, uh, uh, who would've thought that we possibly could do that. Yet, that's being done every day now. We--we do it all the time. Our, our--I believe that today we have probably as modern and as efficient a newspaper operation as there is in--that I know of, anywhere. We have a lot of visitors come here to see our operation. Uh, it will not--it will change a lot. We're already changing. We're already seeing, uh, uh, plans that we made where more and more we're paginating, uh, pages instead of having to paste up a page and keep it on a computer and do the whole thing on a computer. We do whole pages on the computer now, without ever touching it--pagination without ever touching the type. In a few years' time we'll probably have--we already have presses that will be far, far more efficient than we have today, although our present press, sixty-four-page Goss Urbanite, is probably as efficient as anything that I know of in, in--for our size paper. Ah, but the changes are coming rapidly and we have to be alarmed, be alert to 'em, and we have to be--we have to be a part of 'em. The biggest change that happened in this country in the last twenty-five years is the Internet. The Internet system that we see evolving is gonna absolutely change the marketing program in this country. It already is. It already is changing it. Fortunately, we think we have a role in that. We have--as I say, we've spent millions of dollars developing Internet here--more than I like to think about sometimes. 'Cause I don't know whether we'll ever get it back or not. But, it is growing, and it is, uh, the capacity for what you can do on the Internet is just unbelievable, and, uh, we're gonna see that revolutionize our type of communication.

What issues do you foresee yourself and/or the newspaper tackling in the future that maybe haven't been looked at before--directions that you'll be moving into?

[Sneezes] I hate to tell you, I usually sneeze twenty times every day.

That's okay.

Um, I don't know. Uh, when you ask a question like that it's so broad that I don't know where to start. The--[sneezes again] the changes that are taking place have to be evaluated on a daily basis. We are--are trying to keep up with it. We are urging our people to keep up with it, and they are keeping up with it. Uh, I think that the name of the game is to keep high-quality people in the organization that can respond intelligently to these changes, and, uh, I think we have got those kind of people who do a good job. We have an exceptional group of top leaders in our--our organization. Bruce Morrison, who is general manager of all of our operations, is a very talented man; and John Cash whom you know--probably one of the best marketing men I know. Uh, we're changing our marketing program all the time. We're adapting it to needs--to needs that we have. We recently made a change, and we sold a--a paper that we had in Clinton, primarily because it wasn't fitting in with our--it didn't fit in to our package. We're selling advertising, uh, in packages now, all the way from Chattanooga to Bristol. And, uh, we sell, uh--uh, we're doing more and more of that. Uh, we see that that is a growing trend in our industry, and we're tryin' to--we will probably add another, uh, paper to our list. We're looking at one right now and--that will fit in to our package. But we--that's the reason we didn't keep the Clinton paper, was because it just didn't--it was extraneous out there and was not easy to--to work into our package.

Do you see your role in helping shape the community changing, or would you like it to change?

Well, I won't be around that much longer to--to make changes. Uh, I'm eighty-four years old now and in good health, fortunately, I'm stompin' on wood, and I go--I'm at the office every day. I work six days a week. And, uh, I want to stay at work as long as I can. Uh, we, uh--I don't know what role I'll have, but it's going to be diminishing--diminishing as it goes, because there'll be others comin' along who can do it better'n I can.

We're nearing the end of our discussion session (sure), do you have any additional comments that you'd like to pass along?

No I'm--I think we're fortunate--those of us that live here are fortunate to live in a community like Greeneville and Greene County. And I wouldn't want to live anywhere else. And, uh, this is a happy place for me and for my family, and I think we have the best of both worlds. So I'm--I'm really delighted to be a part of it. I think I was lucky to find this place. I could very easily have ended up in Chattanooga, and I would not be near as happy with the Chattanooga area as I am with the Greeneville area. Uh, and I--I think the people in this community don't realize just how fortunate they are. We have it all.

Thank you sir.

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You're very welcome.

It is right now 10:05.