

Samuel Milton Jones Biography

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Biography

Samuel Milton Jones (1846-1904), American manufacturer and political reformer, was noted for his enlightened labor policies and progressive political crusades.

Samuel Jones was born Aug. 8, 1846, near Beddgelert, Caernarvonshire, Wales. His parents immigrated to an upstate New York farm when he was three. After only a few years of school he started working at the age of 10. He left home four years later, worked at various manual jobs, and was employed finally in the oil fields in Titusville, Pa. By 1870 he had begun to acquire wells of his own, and in 1885 he moved to Lima, Ohio, where he struck even richer wells. He invented several improved oil-drilling devices and in 1894 established the Acme Sucker Rod Company of Toledo to manufacture oil-well machinery.

Jones's business success did not harden him to the lot of underprivileged men. Instead, he earned the nickname "Golden Rule" Jones for running his factory on Christian and humanitarian precepts. Although he opened it in a depression year, he raised his men's pay. He also instituted an eight-hour day, a 48-hour week, a week's vacation with pay, a five percent bonus at Christmas, lunches at cost in the Golden Rule Dining Room, and cooperative health insurance--all of which were progressive workmen's benefits in the 1890s. Jones felt responsible for his employees' social awakening and brought in guest lecturers at his own expense. Even paychecks were accompanied by homilies on applied Christianity written by Jones.

In 1897 Jones, a Republican, was elected mayor of Toledo, Ohio. He tried to make Toledo a model city. He established an eight-hour day in the police and water departments; expanded municipal services to include playgrounds, golf links, kindergartens, and free concerts; and attacked the police courts for what he believed was their unfairness to social outcasts and poorer citizens. These ideas seemed radical and dangerously eccentric to many Toledo residents, but Jones was reelected in 1899, 1901, and 1903.

A dispute with the state Republican leadership in 1899 prompted Jones to run without party affiliation in every election thereafter. This was a fitting departure for a man whose personal style was more educational and evangelical than political in a partisan sense. Jones died in office on July 12, 1904, one of the most widely respected civic leaders of his time.