

Jones honored for his contributions to the City of Millbrook

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Photo: Gene Jones was honored with a wooden bust likeness of himself by Dr. John Van Valkenberg. The bust was carved from red cedar.

Photo: Brian Hodge

[By BRIAN HODGE](#)

Dr. John Van Valkenberg, like a great many residents of Millbrook, is not from the area originally speaking. But while learning about the city's history, Van Valkenberg, a woodcarving hobbyist, was moved to carve a red cedar bust of Millbrook's "first Mayor" Gene Jones. Jones is mentioned as Millbrook's first mayor parenthetically, because technically the city of which he was mayor no longer exists, even though it has the same name and is geographically located in the same place as the current Millbrook. The first two attempts at incorporation were overturned as a result of court challenges on technical matters.

"While carving the red cedar bust of Gene Jones I reflected on the early stages of Millbrook's development and how men like Jones were a part of building a greater Millbrook," Van Valkenberg said.

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Jones himself explained that before there was an incorporated City of Millbrook, The Millbrook Men's Club served as a quasi-government body.

"In the mid 1940's, the Millbrook Men's Club was formed; and because there was not a governing body for Millbrook, they were the decision makers for anything major such as natural gas, telephone, and electricity coming to the community. At this time the community was largely rural, and those who were not farmers worked in Montgomery. The main mode of transportation to and from work was the L&N railroad. Slowly as the area became more populated, small businesses began to appear," Jones said.

By 1961 there had been significant community growth and the leadership fell in the hands of the Men's Club of Millbrook. They wrestled with the outstanding problems facing Millbrook during these growing years. The affairs of the Millbrook area, because of its growth, needed many changes that required a larger city government.

"Word was put out to the people that there would be a mass meeting to get a feeling about how the community felt about incorporation. Mr. Boyd Leyburn, the Sear's store manager and a real gentleman, was the presiding president of the Men's Club. There was a crowd that gathered for the first meeting, and as one would expect some were for incorporation and some were against it. As Mr. Leyburn opened the meeting, he had two or three drunken men "bleed him out" in front of the crowd of people. After that meeting, he gave up on incorporation stating that it was too "politically hot for the Men's Club." Jones explained.

A new incorporation effort was then started, which meant partitioning a portion of the area. This partitioning required sixty percent of the signatures in anyone partition. The balloting required a three week notice in the newspaper, however in the hurried effort the announcement was advertised in 3 different papers, but only for one week.

Seventy percent of the people voted for incorporation, also indicating that Gene Jones was to be the new mayor. The one week instead of three week period for the advertising of partitions was taken by the opposition all the way to the Supreme Court and the election was nullified.

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"Some ten years later, in 1971, our community had grown even more; and unfortunately with, that growth came crime. Our businesses and homes were being robbed, and we only had one deputy for our half of the county. People had to stay up at night to protect their properties. I knew that in order for our community to grow even more and have the protection that was needed for that growth, we would once again have to approach the topic of incorporation. And once again the Men's Club wanted no part of it. It was then that I chaired a committee of men and women who were willing to work on the incorporation of Millbrook," Jones said.

The effort to incorporate was renewed and after going door-to-door collecting signatures. The effort paid off and the city has incorporated, though little did the proponents for incorporation realize that more trouble was on the horizon.

The next order of business was to hold an election for mayor and city council. Jones said he never intended to run for mayor, but when four other men decided to run for office and most of them were against incorporation, Jones was pressed by many who had worked hard for the incorporation to enter the race.

"I entered the race and won with a majority vote and no run-off election was needed. On January 3, 1973, I was sworn in as the first Mayor of Millbrook," Jones said.

But this second incorporation was doomed as well. Opponents to incorporation argued that one house presumed to part of a 40-acre section involved in the incorporation was actually outside that boundry.

"Once again, we had to go through all the procedures and again, we lost," Jones said.

As they say the third time was the charm. The incorporation process was started again and this time the incorporation surpassed its challenges. In 1977 the current City of Millbrook was incorporated making it the largest city in Elmore County, which it has remained since. But Jones would not be the mayor.

"Even though I was once again approach by many, I did not run for mayor at that time. My life

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had moved in another direction, and I had taken a job as a factory representative, traveling throughout Alabama, Tennessee and Mississippi," Jones said.

Van Valkenberg said he felt Jones had played a major role in the development of the government of Millbrook and should be recognized for his efforts.