

Henry D. Jones, Industrial Missioner: An Oral History Interview

Henry Jones, a pioneer twentieth-century missioner, recognized the need for industrial missions in the developing countries of Asia. He connected the U.S. industrial experience with worldwide urban-industrial change.

Interviewer: Richard P. Poethig

HENRY DAVID JONES WAS BORN IN A Welsh working class community in Chicago in 1900. After graduation from Ripon College in Wisconsin, he sought an appointment under the Board of Foreign Missions, Presbyterian Church U.S.A. After being turned down, Henry Jones entered McCormick Theological Seminary in 1923, and worked with boys at Howell Neighborhood House in Chicago until 1926. Upon graduating from McCormick Seminary in May 1926 he was ordained by Chicago Presbytery and installed as the director of Gary Neighborhood House in the U.S. Steel community of Gary, Indiana. He met and married Maurine Fink, a YWCA secretary from Gary, in January 1929.

In 1930 Henry and Maurine moved to New York where he served as Research Director in the Office of City, Immigrant and Industrial Work under the leadership of Dr. William Shriver in the Board of National Missions. In 1932 he became Director of the Dodge Community House during the union organizing campaigns in Detroit's automotive industry. His early ministries in both the steel community of Gary and the automotive capital of Detroit prepared him for his life's work developing the church's industrial mission.

In 1947 Henry was invited by the Church of Christ in China to help organize the Indus-

trial Evangelism Committee of the National Christian Council. The victory of the People's Army in 1949 cut short his work in Shanghai. On his return to the United States in 1951 he served a yoked parish in Dubuque Presbytery, Iowa. In 1953 he was invited to serve the United Church of Japan in the field of "occupational evangelism." His work in Japan and throughout Asia was instrumental in bringing together Asian churches from sixteen countries at the First Asian Conference on Industrial Evangelism, held in Manila in June 1958. Before retirement in 1965, Henry Jones traveled to Latin America on behalf of industrial mission. He returned to Tokyo from 1962 to 1965, responding to invitations from Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, Indonesia, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, India, and Pakistan.

Henry Jones's success in reaching out to industrial workers encouraged the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. to recognize the timeliness of industrial mission in the rapidly industrializing countries of Asia. His pioneering efforts raised industrial mission as a major task for the churches in Asia and had helped in its global recognition. Mr. Jones died in 1987 in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

The following conversation took place on July 10, 1982 at the Joneses' home in Grand Rapids.

Mr. Poethig, a retired Presbyterian minister, served as an industrial missionary in the Philippines (1957-72) and as director of the Institute on the Church in Urban-Industrial Society, Chicago (1972-82)

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Early Influences on Henry D. Jones

R.P.: As you reflect on your ministry, who would you say were the forerunners in the history of industrial mission?

H.J.: In my recollections I think of three people who influenced me in my thinking about the church and working people. One of them was Jane Addams of Hull House in Chicago.¹ She had grown up as a Presbyterian in Illinois and after Rockford College, chose to work in the inner city of Chicago where she established Hull House. Jane Addams gathered around her a group of people who were to play a major role in relating to immigrant working people. The Jane Addams group had an influence on legislation which was crucial for bringing social change. A second person I found important to my own ministry was Norman Thomas.² After graduation from Princeton Seminary, Norman Thomas worked on the Upper East Side of New York in Harlem among Italian immigrant working peoples. His ministry among working class people ultimately led him to become a major figure politically. The conditions in which working people lived drew him into the socialist movement. His influence on improving the situation of working peoples was magnified through his leadership within the Socialist party. The third person was a contemporary of Norman Thomas, William P. Shriver, a graduate of Union Theological Seminary.³ Shriver worked in Harlem alongside Norman Thomas, but they followed different streams. Shriver remained within the church's ministry and became an important figure in work among immigrants carried out by the Presbyterian Church.

Shriver, like Thomas, came out of a wealthy family. Shriver's people were leaders in the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad Company. From his work with Thomas in Harlem, Shriver went to the Board of Home Missions to head the new Department of Immigration in 1910. Through Shriver's department, local presbyteries were encouraged to develop community centers and settlement houses for immigrants.

R.P.: Wasn't the Labor Temple established around this time?

H.J.: Yes, the Labor Temple was begun under Charles Stelzle on the East Side of New York.⁴ It had a settlement house approach, but it majored in developing educational programs. You know that the famous philosopher-author Will Durant got his start at the Labor Temple.⁵ I never met Stelzle. It was Shriver who I got to know in my own ministry.

Growing Up Working Class in Chicago

R.P.: Where did your interest in industrial ministry begin?

H.J.: My involvement came through my church background in Chicago. I was born in a Welsh community on Madison Street. The church was the Hebron Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Church at Albany and Madison Streets. Both my mother and my father were members of the congregation as young people. My mother was born in a log cabin in Wisconsin and came down to Chicago to work as a young girl. My father came as an immigrant from Wales, England. They both landed in that church where they met and began a family. My father was a tailor. His father before him was a tailor in a small community in Wales. My father went with his older brother to London to become a tailor. From London he came to this country. In our church there were tailors, plasterers, carpenters, and bricklayers. I grew up in the church in the midst of a working people's atmosphere.

In this congregation there was an immigrant drive for education—to move beyond that level of work. My mother and father encouraged me to go to Ripon College in Wisconsin. My mother was from Wild Rose, Wisconsin in central Wisconsin. Ripon College was nearby.

R.P.: So you came to your concern for working people naturally.

H.J.: I was rooted in the working people's world. I had a real concern about the gospel, and about the church being a part of working people's lives. The church meant a great deal to the people. First, they believed in



Major Influence: Rev. Dr. William P. Shriver (1872–1957) as secretary of the Department of City, Immigrant, and Industrial Work, Board of National Missions, PCUSA, recruited Jones for urban missions in the New York City metropolitan area in 1931. Photo: PHS, Philadelphia.

Sunday school training. The Sunday school was a powerful group in the church. We had regular examinations. There were report cards which told how you were doing in Sunday school. I have a vivid memory at twelve years of a missionary returning from India visiting the congregation. She was part of a Welsh church in Oshkosh, Wisconsin. She had been trained as a doctor and was sent to India under the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Church of America.

She was at one of our examination sessions on Wednesday night. I remember her laying her hand on my shoulder and saying, "Henry, I want you to prepare to take my place in India." From that time on I was dedicated, first, to become a doctor, and second, to go to India as a missionary. College was just preparation for this. When I did graduate from college, two offers came my way: One was to head up a department of biology in a college in the Dakotas, and the

other was an acceptance at Rush Medical College in Chicago to become a doctor. This is the kind of influence the church had in our lives. It was directing me toward foreign missions, to become a professional physician.

The second influence of the church was in the field of music. The Welsh love to sing, to sing in concert together. They are great group singers. But more than that, they have creativity in composing new hymns. They take their religious experience and express it in poetry and in new hymn tunes. Some of the great occasions of church life were the three or four meetings a year when one of the famous conductors of music in the Chicago area would come and lead in the singing of the new hymns. The new hymns had been written by some member of the church; new words to old tunes were constantly being created. It was an inspiration to express your religious faith in ways that came out of the church's life.

R.P.: What did you decide about your vocational goals?

H.J.: After graduating from Ripon College and returning to Chicago, I turned down the opportunity to head the department of biology in a college. I didn't feel qualified, nor did I want to do that work. Instead I came to Chicago and met with a representative of the Board of Foreign Missions—the candidate secretary, to be exact. Fortunately, I do not remember his name! I met with him after I had graduated from Ripon. He told me: "We don't need any more doctors in India. We have the situation covered. No more doctors." He just closed the door for me. I wasn't interested in being a doctor in this country. I had set my goals in the other direction.

My father saw my disappointment. He told me: "If you're planning to work overseas and you want to work with people of other nationalities and other backgrounds, then you better learn to work with them here in this country. Why don't you go down to one of our neighborhood houses and begin working there? Find out how you get along with people of other backgrounds and nationalities."



Training Ground: Jones worked with Czech immigrants at the Howell Neighborhood House, Chicago, in 1923. Photo of unidentified group in *Home Mission Monthly* 37:5 (March 1923): 107.

The World of the Neighborhood House

R.P.: This was a turning point for you?

H.J.: I went down to the Howell Neighborhood House on Racine Street in Chicago and began as a boys' worker in 1923.⁶ One other thing the candidate secretary from the Mission Board said to me was that no missionary doctor or educator could enter the foreign field unless they had one year of seminary. So I decided to go to McCormick Seminary for one year while I was making up my mind. Dr. Barr had just come from the Jefferson Avenue Presbyterian Church in Detroit to become the professor of homiletics at McCormick.⁷ As a first-year student I was assigned to Dr. Barr's class.

The class was large, so Dr. Barr divided it into smaller seminar groups that met at his home. Our first assignment was to write a paper on why we wanted to become preachers. My first seminar session, I told the group I was not interested in being a preacher. In fact, I said preaching is an outmoded means of communication. With all the newspapers, magazines, and the radio, to function as a preacher, as we knew it from colonial days in America, was no longer effective. The preacher is not the newsman of the community, he is not the informer, nor the educator of the community. Preaching as we've known it is an outmoded mode of education. But I stuck with the class through the year. I liked Dr. Barr, who was a very empathetic person.

During that year, I continued to work at Howell Neighborhood House with the Hungarian and the Bohemian people in the southwest side of Chicago. I continued to work at Howell House on into the summer and the next winter, the following summer, until my senior year at McCormick. Then I was assigned to work at a church on the south side. At graduation time, it turned out that I was the only person in the class who had trained at a neighborhood house. I was asked if I would take over as the director of the Gary Neighborhood House in Gary, Indiana. I was ordained by the local presbytery and installed as director in May 1926.

R.P.: How long did you work in Gary?

H.J.: I was director for some four or five years. It was in Gary that I met a young lady who was at the YWCA as a gym teacher and the director of physical education. Maurine Fink was a member of First Presbyterian Church of Gary. She was of German background. We were married in 1929.

Our work in Gary was with the working people. We were in the midst of the Depression. I belonged to the Kiwanis Club in Gary and I remember when the Crash hit, that week five or six men committed suicide by jumping out of high-storied buildings in Gary. The story of Wall Street suicides were also in our papers. I remember one of the men at the club telling me one noontime that he had been for an airplane ride. "No wonder God said that everything looked good. If He saw everything from up there, then everything would look good. Up there, there were none of the problems that we see down here."

We lived in Gary during the Depression and opened our building to all kinds of groups. We had an employment bureau, programs for nursery school children, we had boys and girls clubs. We opened our facilities up for speakers. We met on Sunday afternoons. One Sunday afternoon we had a group of Russian immigrants. A speaker was invited who presented a point of view they didn't believe in. They began to pick up chairs. I stood at the door so the speaker could make a quick exit.

I held the rest of them back while they were swinging chairs at me.

R.P.: Those were volatile times. There were all kinds of prescriptions for the problems of the Depression.

H.J.: Yes, there were men burning with zeal to offer new solutions for our society. There were, of course, the Communists. The Communist revolution had already taken place in Russia. They were invited to participate in the discussions. We said: "Express yourselves; this is a free country. Tell us what you think is a solution." Then one day I got a call to come in to Chicago. They wanted me at the LaSalle Street office of the U.S. Steel Corporation. U.S. Steel had mills in Gary. The president of U.S. Steel had called me to his office. When I went in to see him, he had on his desk a lot of pictures—photographs of churches. The president showed me the pictures: "These are pictures of churches in Russia." "That's fine," I said, "What church do you belong to?" "I don't belong to any church. My wife keeps that end up for me," he told me. "What are these pictures for?" I asked. "The Communists are closing them all in Russia. We're going to see to it that gets a lot of publicity." Then he added sharply, "What do you mean by having Communists at the Gary Neighborhood House?" I didn't hesitate: "They're just people who need to express themselves. Let them say what they want. It's an opportunity for them to get it off their chests."

The next thing I knew, he had written a letter to the pastor of the First Presbyterian

Church in Gary. He told him that as long as I was director of the center, U.S. Steel would provide no more support. They were only giving \$2,000 a year. They never gave it anyhow, even after the board allowed me to be fired.

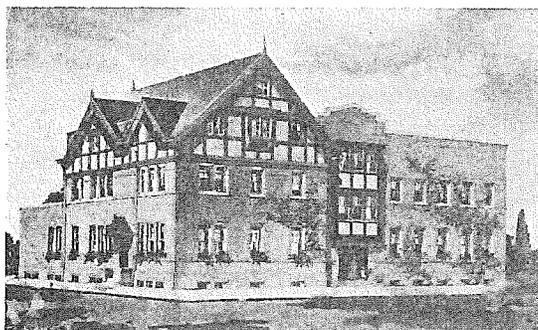
It was interesting. The pastor of the First Presbyterian Church had been the synod executive of the Indiana Synod. He had been Maurine's pastor. He had married us. As chairman of the board of the Gary Neighborhood House he listened to this man from the Gary works of U.S. Steel. He listened to him and then laid me off from my first job. This was 1930 and I had just gotten married. They did not give us even one month's pay. We went to my mother's house in Chicago. We had a room there. During that summer I went to the University of Chicago Divinity School. Maurine went to the University of Chicago physical education program.

Then a letter arrived from Dr. William Shriver in New York. "I'd like you to come to New York to become my associate in research for the Department of City, Immigrant and Industrial Work."⁸ We moved to New York and lived in Madison, New Jersey. Dr. Kenneth Dexter Miller was the pastor of the church there.⁹ He was a great guy. He had been part of the early group of trainees under the Board of Home Missions who had taken special training to work with Central European immigrants coming to this country.

Ministry to Immigrant Peoples

R.P.: That was a major mission program of the Presbyterian Church in the early part of the century.

H.J.: Yes and if you remember there was a whole series of books that the church published. The publisher Fleming Revell turned them out on the Bohemians, the Poles, the Slovaks, the Russians, the Italians—all those groups immigrating to America. Kenneth Dexter Miller wrote the book on the Bohemians. This was the prelude to the Department of City, Immigrant and Industrial Work. The training to work with immigrants was a tremendous mission



First Mission: Jones was installed as Director of the Gary Neighborhood House, Gary, Indiana, May 1926. Illustration from *The Assembly Herald* 23 (1917):23.

vision for the church. Under Shriver's leadership young theological students were sent across Europe to get to know the language and the culture of the people coming to America. Ken Miller was one of those young men. He went to Bohemia. He not only went there but he also got into Russia during one of the revolutions. A Bohemian contingent had been sent there with the United States Army to fight the Red Russians. So Ken Miller knew the language and the culture of the Bohemian people. He was a partner and a great pastor—with a lot of imagination. Ken Miller baptized our first child. We worked under Dr. Shriver, living first in Madison and then in Brookside, New Jersey. I became the pastor of the Brookside Presbyterian Church in 1932 while working in New York.

R.P.: Henry, let's step back a moment. The Calvinist Methodist Church to which you belonged, did they have Presbyterian connections?

H.J.: No, not when I belonged. They were a separate denomination for a hundred years. They later joined the Presbyterian Church. You'll find many Welsh hymns in our Presbyterian Hymnal.

R.P.: We still have a Hebron Presbyterian Church in Chicago.

H.J.: That's the church I grew up in. It's not the same building, but that's the congregation. Our function in the department was to help the foreign language church become a part of the Presbyterian Church, not as foreign language churches but as American churches with American names but serving the foreign people as well as helping their young people as they were growing up. Because I had grown up with this Welsh Calvinist background, in a foreign language church, I had a close sympathy and empathy for these immigrant people.

As I continued my ministry and met with the Italian churches and the Hungarian churches in Detroit, I saw these churches grow from being foreign language churches to becoming a part of the presbytery. It was a natural thing for me to work with these pastors. I did statistical surveys, wrote some

of the history of the Italian churches who were becoming Presbyterian. You'll still find some of these histories in the department reports in the 1930s.

Life at Dodge Community Center, Detroit

R.P.: How did you get to Detroit?

H.J.: There's a little history to that. Dr. Joseph A. Vance, who had become moderator of the General Assembly, was president of the Board of National Missions.¹⁰ He was also president and founder of the Dodge Community Center in Detroit. John Dodge was a member of his church.¹¹ He had talked John Dodge into making a gift of land, the building, and an endowment to help keep the community house growing. Ralph Cummins had been the director of the Dodge Community House from its beginning.¹² He had also been director of the Gary Neighborhood House before I went there. Ralph Cummins had been invited to become the synod executive of Illinois. So the Dodge Community House was vacant. They asked Maurine and me if we would like to become directors of the Dodge Community Center, primarily because Mrs. Jones was a gym teacher. Dr. Vance thought that would be a great advantage to have a physical education background.

R.P.: People use "neighborhood house" and "settlement house" interchangeably. Is there a difference between the two?

H.J.: No, except that "neighborhood house" was a name used by the church, primarily the Presbyterian Church. "Settlement house" was the generic name for all kinds of neighborhood work. There were Baptist neighborhood houses and Presbyterian neighborhood houses, but settlement house was really the approach used.

So we went to Detroit in the midst of the Depression. Half of the workers in Detroit were out of work. Many of the people in our community—the Polish and the Slovak and the Negro people—were out of work. We became active in building a program which made use of the free time of both young people and older people. The house was open twenty-four hours a day. We lived in