

**SOME FACTS  
ABOUT  
JOHN PAUL JONES**

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Some Facts about John Paul Jones by Junius Davis

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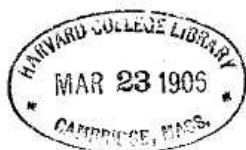
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To the Author.

WILMINGTON, N. C., Feb. 5, 1906.

*Junius Davis, Esq.*

DEAR SIR:—The undersigned, your fellow-citizens, having read with great interest and satisfaction your admirable contribution to North Carolina history, entitled, "Some Facts About John Paul Jones," published in the "South Atlantic Quarterly," and desiring that this unique elucidation of the mystery of Chevalier Jones' adopted name be published in pamphlet form, in order that it may be placed in public libraries and in private collections for future guidance, most cordially felicitate you upon its production and request your permission for its more extended circulation.

Yours faithfully,

(Signed)

A. M. WADDELL,  
JOHN D. TAYLOR,  
O. P. MEARES,  
ROBERT STRANGE,  
E. S. MARTIN,  
W. B. MCKOY,  
G. G. THOMAS,  
CLAYTON GILES,  
C. W. WORTH,  
J. G. DER. HAMILTON,  
JAMES SPRUNT.

(MR. DAVIS' REPLY.)

February 7, 1906.

DEAR SIR:—Your courteous request for permission to republish in pamphlet form my article on Paul Jones, which recently appeared in the "South Atlantic Quarterly," has been received, and, as Mr. Edwin Mims, one of its editors, has cordially approved this proposal on being apprized thereof, I have to add with this permission my grateful thanks for your kind appreciation of my work.

Yours truly,

JUNIUS DAVIS.

## Some Facts About John Paul Jones

BY JUNIUS DAVIS,

Member of the Wilmington, N. C., Bar.

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Thanks to the generous and untiring zeal of our late ambassador to France, the grave of John Paul Jones has recently been discovered in Paris, and his remains have been removed by the government to this country for interment at Annapolis. This discovery has revived the interest which our people have always taken in the career of this illustrious captain of the seas, and has of late provoked much discussion in the magazines and newspapers of the various incidents in his life, and, in particular, of the reason for his change of name. The reason for this change of name has ever been a puzzle to his biographers. Most of them pass it by with the mere statement that "he changed his name for unknown reasons." Some few attempt to account for it upon theories, which, while they may be plausible, yet do not appeal to the intelligent reader. Of these there are three, which perhaps seem most plausible, and which, one or another, are generally accepted as true by most people. I will proceed to give these, and the reasons which occur to me for rejecting them as unsound and without anything but conjecture to support them.

Sherbourne, who was, I believe, the first American biographer of Jones, says, on page 10: "Our adventurer, being at length freed from the trammels of apprenticeship, made several voyages to foreign parts, and in the year 1773 again went to Virginia to arrange the affairs of his brother, who had died there without leaving any family; and about this time in addition to his original surname, he assumed the patronymic of Jones, his father's Christian name having been John. This custom, which is of classical authority, has long been prevalent in Wales, and in various other countries," and having built up his edifice to this point, he immediately pro-



ceeds in the next breath to demolish it with the naive remark, "although it is not practiced in that part of the island in which he was born." This idea was not original with Sherbourne, but was taken by him from an article in the Edinburgh Encyclopedia, which, Sherbourne says in a note on page 11, he "learned from Mr. Lowden, the nephew of Jones, a respectable merchant, now (1825) resident at Charleston, S. C., was written from the lips of Mr. Lowden's mother for that work by Dr. Duncan, of Dumfries, Scotland." Nor did it come from "the lips of Mr. Lowden's mother," as is plainly apparent from the context in Sherbourne and from the account given in the life of Jones commonly ascribed to his niece, Miss Jannette Taylor, but it was developed in the imagination of Dr. Duncan.

Now whoever heard of a Scotchman rummaging among the traditions and customs of the Welsh in a search for a change of his name? And who ever heard of such a custom being prevalent in any part of Scotland? Besides, at this period of his life, Jones was a matured man, twenty-six years of age, had come to settle definitely in America, had turned his back forever on his native land, and was never again to see a single member of his family. In fact, it was in 1771 that he saw his relations in Scotland for the last time.\* No one can read his life and his correspondence, without being impressed by the fact that his interest in his family was prompted more by duty and sentiment than by any real love or affection. He was often in England after 1771, but he never went near his family or evinced the least desire to see any of them. In truth he had risen far above the humble gardener, his father, and while he at times corresponded with his family, he moved in a different world in which they had no part. If it was filial affection which induced the patronymic of Jones, is it not certain that his family would have known it? Would he not out of the same love have hastened to tell it to his mother who was then living, if not to his

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\*Taylor, 23.

sisters? The mere fact that he did not do so, that he studiously concealed it from them, is to my mind the strongest refutation of this surmise of Dr. Duncan. It must be remembered also that when he took upon himself the name of Jones, or shortly afterwards, he dropped the prænomen John and usually called himself Paul Jones.

In the life of Jones by his niece, Jannette Taylor, the only mention of this event is as follows (page 31): "At the time when Paul settled (or, more properly, supposed he meant to settle,) in Virginia, it would seem that he assumed the additional surname of Jones. Previous to this date, his letters are signed John Paul. *We are left to conjecture the reason of this arbitrary change. His relations were never able to assign one; there is no allusion to the circumstance in the manuscripts which he left, and tradition is silent on the subject.*" The italics are mine.

I take it that "tradition," as here used, meant tradition among the family in Scotland, and as so used, I admit the truth of it. But that tradition was silent in North Carolina, I deny, though it had not, at that time, spread beyond her border. We were ever proud of our traditions in this State, but clung to them so tenaciously that we were loath to let them stray abroad and be known to other people.

Another theory, and the wildest of them all, but one which also has its believers, is that John Paul came to America and took the name of Jones to conceal his identity and avoid arrest for the murder of the carpenter Maxwell. Now, when Paul flogged Maxwell for his mutinous conduct, he was in command of the ship John on his second voyage in her. He discharged Maxwell at the Island of Tobago in May, 1770. Maxwell immediately had Paul haled before the Vice-Admiralty Court for assault, but the complaint was dismissed as frivolous. Later on, in England in 1772, he was charged with the murder of Maxwell, and it seems that an indictment, presumably for murder or manslaughter, was found against

him. A complete and perfect contradiction of this calumny is to be found in Brady, pages 9 and 10, and Miss Taylor's book, pages 18 and 20, where she gives the affidavit of the Judge of the Vice-Admiralty Court, who heard the complaint of Maxwell, and of the master of the ship on which Maxwell died.

So that it seems abundantly proven, not merely that Paul did not flee England on this account, but positively that he disdained to fly and met and boldly confronted the charge. In a letter written by Paul to his mother and sisters, speaking of this occurrence, dated London, September 4, 1772, he says: "I staked my honor, life and fortune for six long months on the verdict of a British jury, notwithstanding I was sensible of the general prejudices which ran against me; but, after all, none of my accusers had the courage to confront me."

Another theory is the one first advanced by Buell in his "Life of Jones." This book is one of the latest attempts at an extended history of Jones, and in spite of some errors, is an exceedingly interesting work. Though written more than one hundred years after the death of Jones, and after numerous writers had seemingly exhausted every available source of light and information, he gives many incidents, and interesting ones too, in the career of Jones that were never heard of before. Some of these are highly colored and seemingly very improbable, and some without support in fact. But it is no part of this article to criticise Buell's book, save that part which refers to the reason for Jones's change of name.

Buell says, page 1, that John Paul's older brother William was adopted in 1743 by a relative named William Jones, a well-to-do Virginia planter, while he was on a visit to Kirkbean Parish, and that William then took the name of Jones. On page 6 he says: "Old William Jones<sup>had</sup> died in 1760, and by the terms of his will had made John Paul the residuary legatee of his brother (William) in case the latter should die without issue, provided that John Paul would assume, as his brother had done, the patronymic of Jones. On his visit to