

African-American vote became important in political competition. This is no doubt due to the activism of many local black citizens like Leo Jones, a frequent attendee at the City Council meetings at that time and a key figure within the Harford County Colored PTA.

The Corner

Stretching out over three decades (early 1920's – early 1950's), Leo Jones served as a loyal confidant to Clayton Stansbury, Sr., the overall leader of Harford County's black community. Stansbury's sons recalled how the two would meet on the corner of Girard and Stokes Streets just about every day after work, and talk politics for hours. Russell Stansbury recalled that once in a while the meeting would stroll over to his father's flower garden. Younger brother Wardell, being a curious kid of about 10 years old, would quietly amble next to the two men and try to listen in on the conversation. But, more than once, his father would shoo him away, saying that the conversation was for adults.

In retrospect, it becomes apparent that in their efforts to promote the

interests of the Black community, Clayton Stansbury, Sr. concentrated on working with the county's educational leaders, while Leo Jones focused on cooperating with the mayor and other political officials. The meetings on the corner provided an opportunity for both activists to update each other, coordinate their efforts, and plan their strategies. Without doubt, major decisions on early Civil Rights issues in Harford County were made at the non-descript intersection of Havre de Grace's Stokes and Girard Streets.



Mr. Leo
August 1959
Courtesy of
Marcus
Stansbury Sr.

The question still remains, how did Mr. Leo achieve his fame as “the unofficial Black Mayor of Havre de Grace”. Stay tune for next week's pamphlet – John Leo Jones – Part 2.

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A Weekly Publication

John Leo Jones

(1893 – 1973)

Part 1

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Bringing Communities Together Through Sharing History

Geraldine Cox (1918-1916)

The most sincerest condolences are offered to the Cox family. Geraldine will always be a part of our history.

The Common Man with Strong Moral Values

Despite the obvious importance of John Leo Jones (1893-1973) to the life of the African-American community of Havre de Grace, relatively little has been written about his life. Known in his lifetime as the “unofficial Black Mayor of Havre de Grace,” people affectionately referred to him as “Mr. Leo.” The subject of Leo Jones came up in the summer of 2015 in a brief interview with a local community historian, Ms. Geraldine Cox (age 96). She was sitting with two of her children, Beverly and Charles, and suffering with symptoms of dementia. Ms. Cox’s speech and thought process seemed to improve greatly when she recollected Jones’ significance to the black community. She was emphatic that people were to go see “Mr. Leo” if there was a problem to be resolved, especially if it involved the community. It was obviously that Leo Jones left a significant memorable impression in the mind of Geraldine Cox.

Mr. Jones’ granddaughter, Elizabeth “Libby” (Jones) Stewart, lived her first 19 years in the Girard Street household of grandfather Leo, grandmother Samantha and mother

Elaine. Ms. Stewart pointed out that the only topics discussed in the home were church and masons. Leo Jones was a family man, a devout member of St. James AME Church on Green Street, and a mason with the Prince Hall - Chesapeake Lodge #48. When prodded, Libby Stewart also noted that her grandfather, a diabetic, once in a while talked about food, and would persuade the young Libby to sneak a piece of cake from the kitchen for him.

The Jones family made their living in the hotel business. The 1910 census reveals that William Jones, Leo’s father, worked as a porter in a hotel. In 1920, 26-year old Leo himself was working as a waiter, and by 1940 had achieved the rank of head waiter at the local up-scale Colonial Hotel, working 75 hours per week. The Colonial Hotel was the site of many elaborate social functions that attracted-business leaders and politicians, such as U.S. Senator Millard Tydings and Mayor George Pennington. In this era of segregation, restaurants, including the Colonial, did not accommodate black patrons. Being in a rare position to interact with the elite white patrons, it is very possible that Leo Jones got his interest, education, mentoring, and political contacts during informal encounters at the hotel. His grand-daughter recalled that “the city’s

black mayor” was always well dressed, an attribute likely picked up from the hotel as well.

Politics

According to Chapter 10 of Peter Jay’s *Havre de Grace: An Informal History*, black people began participating in politics locally, statewide, and nationally in the 1920s. A report, dated July 27, 1962, prepared by the PTA of Havre de Grace Colored High School, states that “About the year 1923, he [Clayton Stansbury, Sr.] along with a few interested men of Havre de Grace and surrounding areas, and the Mayor of Havre de Grace went to Bel Air to find out why the education of our school children ended with a diploma from the seventh grade” (the highest grade of public education for colored children that Harford County would fund). Although not documented, popular belief is that Leo Jones was one of the “interested men” and that the Havre de Grace Mayor was George T. Pennington, possibly filling a campaign promise made while courting the black vote during the May 1923 election that brought him to office. It is interesting to note that the Mayor Pennington years may be the first period in Harford County that the