Decades before L.B. Jones became regarded as one the premier amateur archaeologists in the Southeast, he was toiling away his summers as a pitcher in baseball’s minor leagues.

He rubbed up against greatness in 1935, when he was invited to the New York Yankees’ spring training, where he pitched batting practice to home-run king Babe Ruth.

It’s not known how far into the Florida air Ruth drove those pitches delivered by Jones, but it was one of many interesting footnotes in the life of Jones, known for his generosity, kind spirit and devotion to preserving the Delta’s ancient history.

“Preserving this kind of history is important,” Jones said in an interview less than a year before his death in 1995. “If it is not done, it will disappear.”

[Burkes Jones was born on July 20, 1910, in Morton, but his family moved to Jackson when Jones was young. He was a student athlete at Millsaps College, where he played football, basketball and baseball while majoring in math and science. During the summers before and during his years at Millsaps, he played minor league baseball in a series of different leagues, which led to his crossing paths with Ruth.](http://www.stuckeydmd.com/" \o "Stuckey 450x600" \t "_blank)

[After graduating in 1939 from Millsaps, he taught high school in Minter City until entering the military during World War II. After the war, he returned to Minter City and married Carrie Fisher Avent, a renowned Oriental dancer who had studied in both America and the Far East.](http://www.stuckeydmd.com/" \o "Stuckey 450x600" \t "_blank)

[He would later joke about their unlikely pairing, “If she had seen me dance, she may have not married me.”](http://www.stuckeydmd.com/" \o "Stuckey 450x600" \t "_blank)

Jones stopped teaching and took up farming, working and living with his wife on her family’s plantation. He developed an intense interest in archaeology, and although he was officially labeled an amateur, he studied and learned from the professionals who would come to consider him an esteemed colleague. Travis Clark, who as a child accompanied the Joneses and his parents on many Sunday afternoons looking for artifacts, said that professors from the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology would refer to the farmer as “Dr. Jones.”

Jones and his wife traveled all over the Delta collecting pottery and its sherds or pieces, arrowheads and other projectile points, and stones that the region’s earliest inhabitants used for tools. He conducted or financed dozens of excavations. Some of his Indian artifacts date back 12,000 years.

[He also discovered and acquired an extensive collection of beads that European explorers and settlers would use to trade with the Indians.](https://www.franksflowershop.com/bouquet/telefloras-forever-fall/p_ef_tev03-2a?skuId=EF_TEV03-2A&zipMin=" \o "Frank's Flowers 450x600" \t "_blank)

[He was a co-founder of the foundation that created Cottonlandia Museum, now the Museum of the Mississippi Delta. He made the museum the base of his archaeological collection, drawing researchers from all over to study his finds.](https://www.franksflowershop.com/bouquet/telefloras-forever-fall/p_ef_tev03-2a?skuId=EF_TEV03-2A&zipMin=" \o "Frank's Flowers 450x600" \t "_blank)

[Jones also was a devoted conservationist. He and his wife turned Avent Plantation into a bird sanctuary. The couple took thousands of photographs of nature, specializing in close-ups of birds.](https://www.franksflowershop.com/bouquet/telefloras-forever-fall/p_ef_tev03-2a?skuId=EF_TEV03-2A&zipMin=" \o "Frank's Flowers 450x600" \t "_blank)

[Jones received numerous awards and honorary memberships from archaeological societies. The Mississippi Archaeological Association presents annually an award named after him.](https://www.franksflowershop.com/bouquet/telefloras-forever-fall/p_ef_tev03-2a?skuId=EF_TEV03-2A&zipMin=" \o "Frank's Flowers 450x600" \t "_blank)

[Jones was a Republican long before the party became fashionable in Mississippi. He served on the national GOP’s resolutions committee in 1952, the year Dwight Eisenhower, a decorated World War II general, became the party’s presidential nominee.](https://www.franksflowershop.com/bouquet/telefloras-forever-fall/p_ef_tev03-2a?skuId=EF_TEV03-2A&zipMin=" \o "Frank's Flowers 450x600" \t "_blank)

[He and Carrie Avent had no children. She died in 1987, and Jones married Frances Simpson the following year.](https://www.franksflowershop.com/bouquet/telefloras-forever-fall/p_ef_tev03-2a?skuId=EF_TEV03-2A&zipMin=" \o "Frank's Flowers 450x600" \t "_blank)

[He died from a heart attack on Feb. 13, 1995. He was 84.](https://www.franksflowershop.com/bouquet/telefloras-forever-fall/p_ef_tev03-2a?skuId=EF_TEV03-2A&zipMin=" \o "Frank's Flowers 450x600" \t "_blank)