T. Catesby Jones 1899, lawyer and art collector

C. Wayne Tucker

When the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA) re-opened in the spring of 2010 after a period during which it was closed for the construction of an addition, the principal exhibition on Tiffany glass was joined by a show of selected works collected by Hampden-Sydney College alumnus T. Catesby Jones, Class of 1899, “Matisse, Picasso, and Modern Art in Paris.” In 1947 by bequest his collection of modern French paintings, sculpture, drawings, illustrated books, and other works on paper went to the University of Virginia and VMFA. The show appeared first at the University of Virginia, then at other sites in Virginia before coming to VMFA.

Thomas Catesby Jones was born on December 6, 1880, in Petersburg, the son of Walter Nelson and Ada Vaughan Jones. He was descended from Thomas Jones, who was born in London and in Virginia was a vestryman of Bruton Parish, a member of the House of Burgesses for the College of William and Mary (1720-22), and a member of the first Board of Aldermen of Williamsburg. Catesby Jones’s other English ancestor, Mark Catesby, was a naturalist who immigrated to Virginia in 1712 and was the first to describe the common birds of the Colonies in a book. Original copies of the two volumes of that work were presented by T. Catesby Jones to the Williamsburg Restoration Committee. In 1929 Jones presented a marble tablet commemorating his ancestors to Old Bruton Parish Church.

After attending McCabe’s University School in Petersburg, he enrolled at the age of fourteen in Hampden-Sydney College in 1895. Not an outstanding student, he nonetheless possessed innate intellectual gifts, which enabled him to master his subjects and receive his bachelor’s degree in 1899. At the College, he was a member of Beta Theta Pi, served as president of the freshman class and vice president of the Athletic Association, and was on the staffs of both the yearbook and the magazine. As a member of the Union Literary Society, he won the Junior Debater’s Medal in 1898.

He spent a year at Princeton University, receiving a master’s degree, before entering the University of Virginia School of Law, from which he received his law degree in 1903.

For nine years he practiced admiralty law in Norfolk, before moving in 1912 to New York to join the firm of Harrington, Bigham & Englar. In the following year he was admitted to the New York Bar and became a partner in the firm, which was renamed Bigham, Englar & Jones with offices at 64 Wall St., and still later, Bigham, Englar, Jones & Houston, where he remained until his death. He had homes on the upper East Side and in Far Rockaway, Long Island.

He appeared before the U.S. Supreme Court and was a member of the American Bar Association and the bars of many of the United States Circuit Courts of Appeal and District Courts. He served a term as chairman of the ABA’s Committee on admiralty and maritime law, and represented the Maritime Law Association as a delegate to the 1927 Comité Maritime International in Amsterdam and the 1930 Antwerp Conference.

In 1944 he was appointed Prize Commissioner in the United States District Court for the Southern District of New York, which was given jurisdiction of the entire Atlantic Ocean and tributary waters, dealing, among other matters, with the question of the American seizure of the German liner Europa as a prize of war.

He served as a trustee of a number of institutions and societies, including Hampden-Sydney College and the Jamestowne Society. At the time of his death he was a life trustee of institutions and societies, including Hampden-Sydney College and the Jamestowne Society.

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that first trip he bought eight paintings, and in subsequent trips with his wife he bought other works and continued collecting in New York, where among his dealers was Pierre Matisse, the son of Henri Matisse. He purchased works by artists who later became famous, including Matisse, Braque, Ernst, and Picasso, as well as others who are not as well known even today.

Jones is quoted in an article in the 1936 Record, “My hobby has been collecting modern paintings, those horrible things so frequently greeted with
“The Harpist” by Jacques Lipchitz, placed on Catesby Jones’s gravestone at historic Blandford Church in Petersburg. PHOTO BY C. WAYNE TUCKER

Catesby Jones 1899, continued from page 1
dertion. Some persons have
iminted that this hobby indicates
an idiosyncrasy so marked as to
amount to disease.”

And in a volume compiled
for the thirtieth anniversary of his
law school class, he wrote,”I have resorted to pictures
as an antidote to too deep
reflection on the origin of
law and have managed to
gather together some
modern French pictures
which most of you would
consider rubbish.”

Jones was a supporter
of the Museum of Modern
Art and lent works from
his collection for special
exhibitions. He gave an
historical collection of
Chinese ceramics to Vassar
College in memory of
his first wife, who was an
alumna of the Class of
1905.

Jones died on
December 21, 1946, at
his home in New York
City. On his tombstone
in Blandford Cemetery
in Petersburg is a sculpture
by Jacques Lipchitz,
whom Jones had earlier
commissioned to do a bronze portrait head. The
sculpture was first entitled Harp, but because
American customs rules of the time stated that
all imported works of sculpture be named for
something living, Jones and the customs agent
called it Harp for the bird-like creatures
that befouled the food of Aeneas and his men
in Vergili’s Aenid, and finally Harpist. The artist, who
supervised the installation, intended the work to
be a “visual metamorphosis of a harp player
and her instrument into bird form.” Also in the Jones
square are buried Louisa, who died at eighty-four,
and Jones’s son Catesby, who died at fifty-five.

Matthew Affron, curator of modern art and academic
curator of the University of
Virginia Art Museum—and
organizer of the Jones
show—is quoted as saying
that “Jones collected with an awareness
of history, building a good
foundation in the great
masters of modern art . . .

Affron continued, “He
saw art as a spiritual force.
He believed that great art
touches the soul.”

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Thank you to our donors in Fiscal Year 2011-2012

Student Museum Board Events
Alex Alexander
Chairman, Student Museum Board

On Tuesday, March 27, the Atkinson Museum
Student Museum Board held the first ever
Hampden-Sydney Pub Quiz in the Tig. Fourteen
students participated in the event to compete for
three Tig Inn gift certificates.

Students competed against one another over
three rounds of questioning in which they
were asked a series of questions pertaining to
Hampden-Sydney history and culture. These
questions ranged from fairly easy questions like
“Begining in 1899, classes were not scheduled at
what hour of the day?” to harder ones like,
“What type of club was Ye Anti-Calico Club?”

After surviving two qualifying rounds and a
final of round-robin questioning, Nick Arakaky
won the grand prize of 25 Tiger Dollars. The
competition was tough, but everyone seemed
to have a good time. And in the end everyone
walked away with something—either a surplus
of Tiger Dollars or a few facts about H-SC.

Continuing into the fall semester is an opportunity
for several Hampden-Sydney students to
participate in the hands-on conservation
treatment of a large oil painting. The portrait
depicts James McConnell, the first president of
Radford College, now Radford University.
The project is carried out at the Atkinson Museum
by Sharon Koehler, long time Obje-
jects Conservator and Associate Member of
the American Institute for Conservation. The
project involves the careful consolidation
of lifting/flaking paint as well as thorough clean-
ing of the painting’s overall surface.

Eight students assisted Conservator Koehler during the spring semester and a similar number is
expected in the fall.
Vintage buckles reproduced
C. Wayne Tucker

The Atkinson Museum has spearheaded the effort to produce replicas of vintage Hampden-Sydney buckles in the Museum’s collection. The replicas are now on sale at the Bookstore.

Museum Board Member Conley Edwards ’67 investigated several foundries and recommended Hanover Brass, which had presented a favorable estimate. The sale of the buckles will benefit the Museum and will also be used as an incentive for giving to the Museum.

The replicas are based on buckles from the 1920s and 1930s given to the Museum for its collection of College memorabilia. One buckle was donated by Dorothy W. Elliott and had belonged to Emmett R. Elliott ’28. The silver buckle is inscribed H and S with a tiger head between the letters. After graduating from the College, Elliott received his M.A. from Duke University in 1929. In 1934 he joined the Hampden-Sydney faculty, teaching mathematics before taking a leave of absence to serve in the United States Navy. Elliott returned to Hampden-Sydney in 1948 as associate professor of mathematics and continued to teach until 1964.

Dr. Gilman Z. Simms ’30 donated a silver buckle inscribed with HSC and a tiger head under the S. After studying at the medical school of the University of Louisville, Dr. Simms practiced dentistry in Charleston, West Virginia, for forty years. After his retirement, he moved with his wife Julia and son Walter to Hampden-Sydney, where he served for many years as a volunteer trainer to the athletic teams. He was named an honorary member of the Hampden-Sydney Athletic Hall of Fame in 1989. His son J. Scott Simms graduated from the College in the Class of 1961.

Another buckle, donated by Joseph T. Trotter ’35, is silver with the inscription Hampden-Sydney across the top, the College seal in the middle, and a tiger below. Following his graduation from the College, Trotter studied at the Harvard Graduate School of Business Administration. After a career in business, in 1960 he was named director of alumni affairs at Hampden-Sydney, coordinating alumni work and engaging with parents, foundations, corporations, and friends of the College.

Two of the three belt buckles which have been precisely reproduced and are now available from the Hampden-Sydney College Bookstore.

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Personalized Bricks
A Lasting Tribute
REMEMBER! You can purchase inscribed memorial bricks to be placed in the Museum’s front walk. They are an ideal way to recognize graduates, loved ones, beloved teachers, or classmates—even (as one of our students did) to propose.

To request a brick order form, call the Museum at (434) 223-6134, or download one from www.hsc.edu/Museum/Personalized-Brick.html.

Supporting the Museum
The Museum’s operating budget comes principally from gifts from its friends, augmented by income from its small endowment.

As a result, individual gifts of annual support are extremely important to the continued health and progress of the Museum, both as a guardian of Hampden-Sydney’s heritage and as a memorial to Mrs. P. T. Atkinson, who founded it.

Gifts may be mailed in the enclosed envelope or submitted online at www.hsc.edu/Making-A-Gift.html. You may specify that your gift be used by the Museum. All gifts to the College are tax-deductible.
The chapel of the reformed faith

Angie Way

Hampden-Sydney College has had an often-close tie to the Presbyterian Church. Even from the earliest days, the College was influenced by other Presbyterian institutions and Colleges like Princeton. In the mid-1900s one of these Churches recognized this association in a unique way.

In the Brick Presbyterian Church in New York City is the Chapel of the Reformed Faith, dedicated in 1952. Its interior was designed by the firm of Adams and Woodbridge, inspired by the Wren Chapel at the College of William and Mary. Some of the features of the room include Italian mosaics decorating the floor, an organ at one end installed in 1996, and three stained glass windows. Along the exterior wall in the Chapel are the three windows. One panel represents the hospitals in the United States founded under Presbyterian auspices; the second panel represents Presbyterian seminaries; and the third contains the seals of colleges and universities. The seal of Hampden-Sydney is one of those displayed.

The windows were executed by Reynolds, Francis, and Rohanstock of Boston, Joseph G. Reynolds founded Reynolds, Francis, and Rohanstock in 1923. The company designed windows in the spirit of Gothic Revival and created some of the finest pieces of that period. 

Hampden-Sydney’s part of the window is in the College and University panels. Our seal, in shades of maroon and blue, is fully depicted with painted details in the leaded glass. According to the Record, “Hampden-Sydney was one of seventeen colleges to be honored by inclusion in a stained glass memorial window in the Chapel of the Reformed Faith at Brick Presbyterian Church in New York City.” President Edgar Gammon attended the unveiling ceremony on November 22, 1953, on behalf of Hampden-Sydney.

A very nice publication showing the windows and the architecture of the church is downloadable by going to www.brickchurch.org and selecting News and Downloads under the News and Resources tab. The pdf is titled Brick Church Architecture.

The Hampden-Sydney seal at the Brick Church in New York City is set into a stained glass window in the Chapel of the Reformed Faith (inset, right).