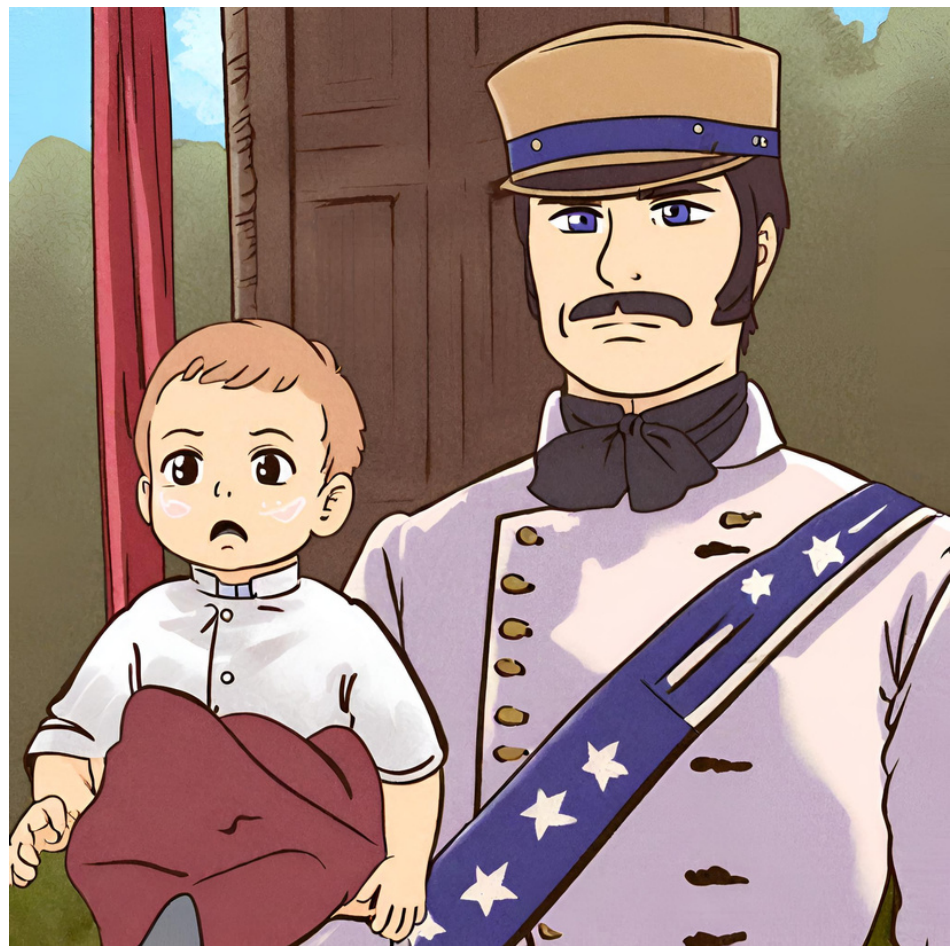


# Paul M. Jones: The First Giant of Biology at Vanderbilt

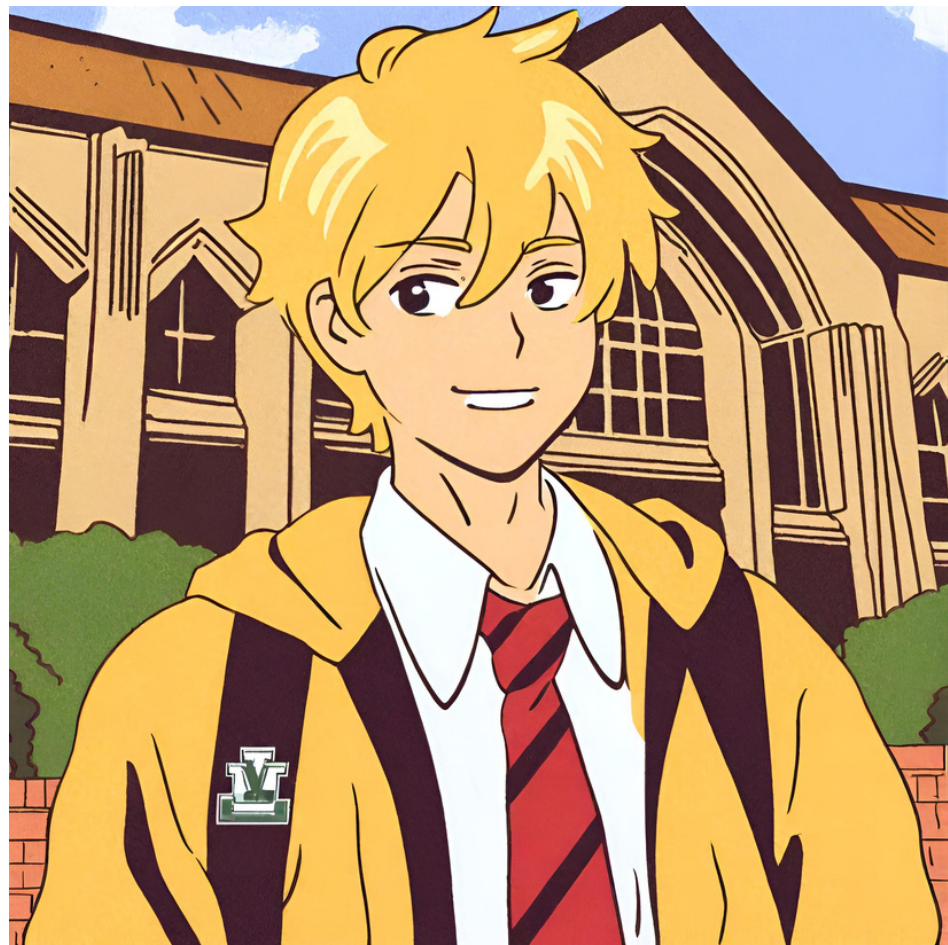


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Paul M. Jones was born on November 8th, 1867, in Alabama. He was the son of Mary and John, a confederate colonel turned superintendent of public instruction. He moved to Nashville at the age of 16 to live with his aunt and uncle.



His uncle, Willam J. Vaughn, was a professor of Mathematics at Vanderbilt and no doubt played a large role in the young Paul's life. At 18, Paul started his academic journey at Vanderbilt University as an undergraduate student.

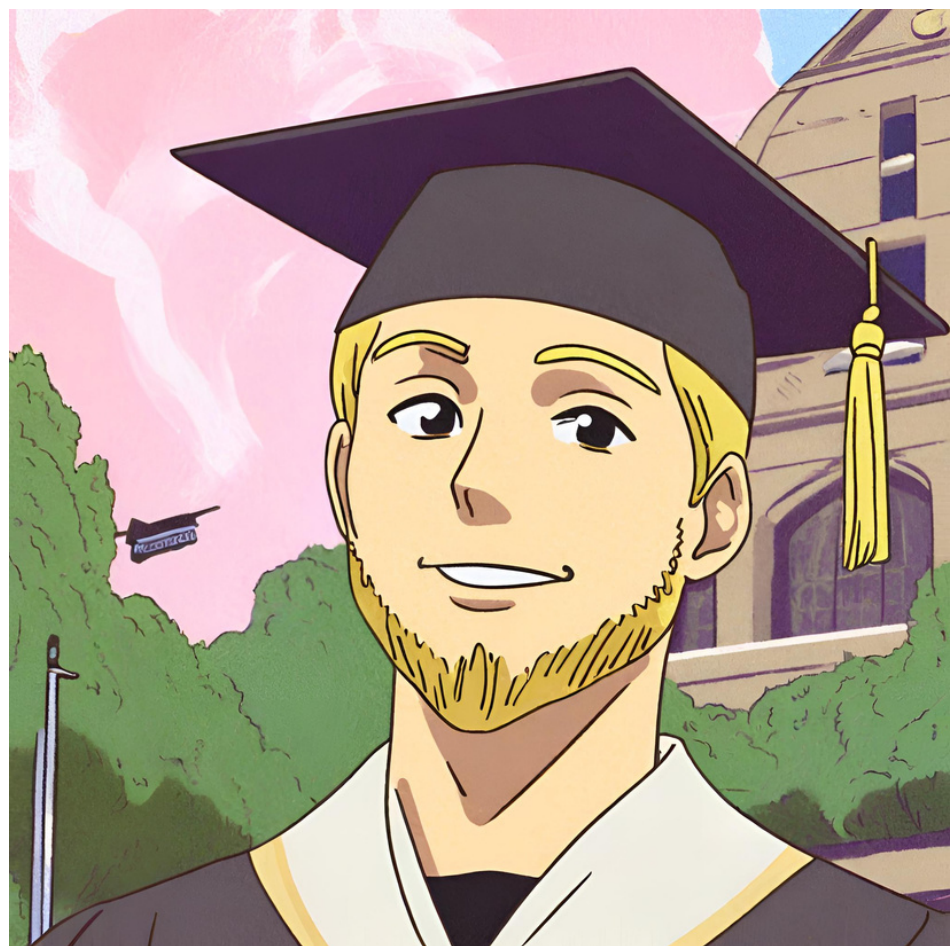


During his time as an undergraduate student, Jones studied English, modern languages, history, political science, math, philosophy, German, chemistry, physics, and natural history and geology. Along with being on the honor role, he was an active athlete.





He set records in field sports like the horizontal bar and rope and ladder climbing. He was a member of the Phi Delta Theta fraternity and earned his Bachelor of Science degree in 1889. He then took one year to help the USGS with a survey of Tennessee geology.



From there, he started working for the university as a teaching assistant for geologist and paleontologist James M. Safford while working toward a Master of Science degree. While a teaching assistant in Natural History and Geology, he graduated with his MS in 1891.



He then continued teaching and earned his Doctor of Science in 1892 publishing his dissertation, *The Geology of Nashville and immediate vicinity with map; a thesis*. He made \$300 per year as a teaching assistant and lived on campus.



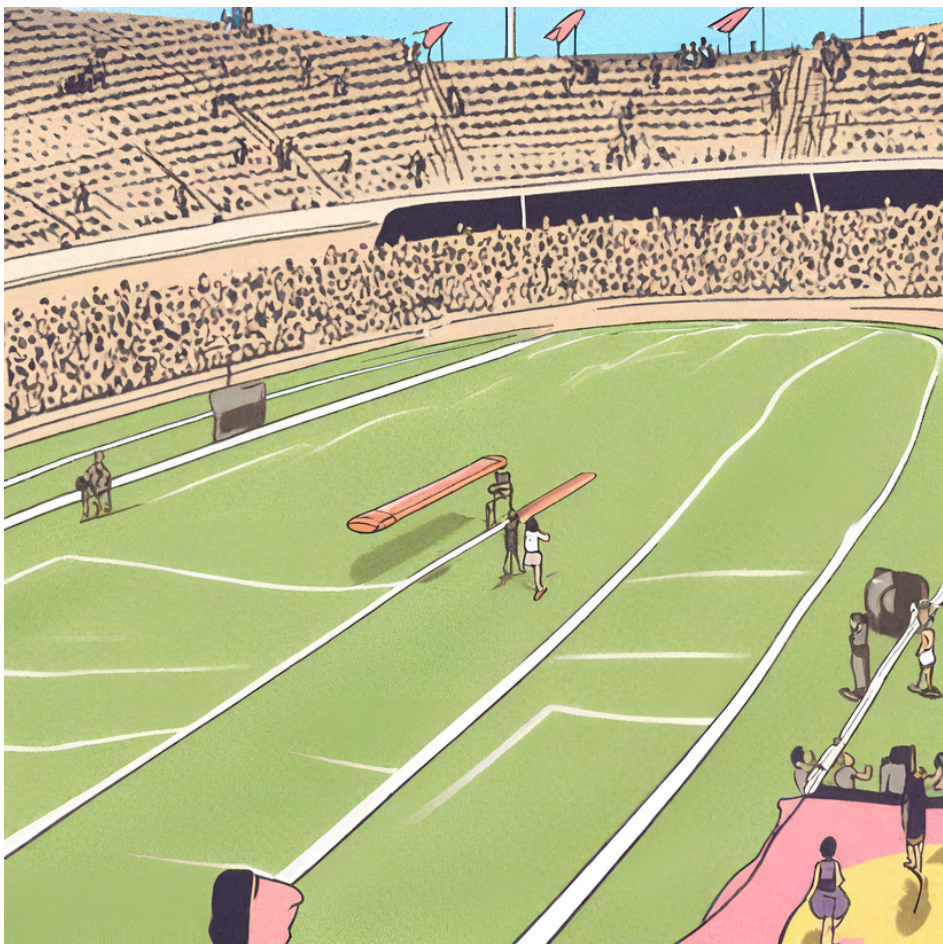


During his time as a graduate student, Jones also began working for the Vanderbilt Alumni Association. He began as treasurer in 1891 and was also a member of the executive committee starting in 1892. Jones represented VU in the Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Association.

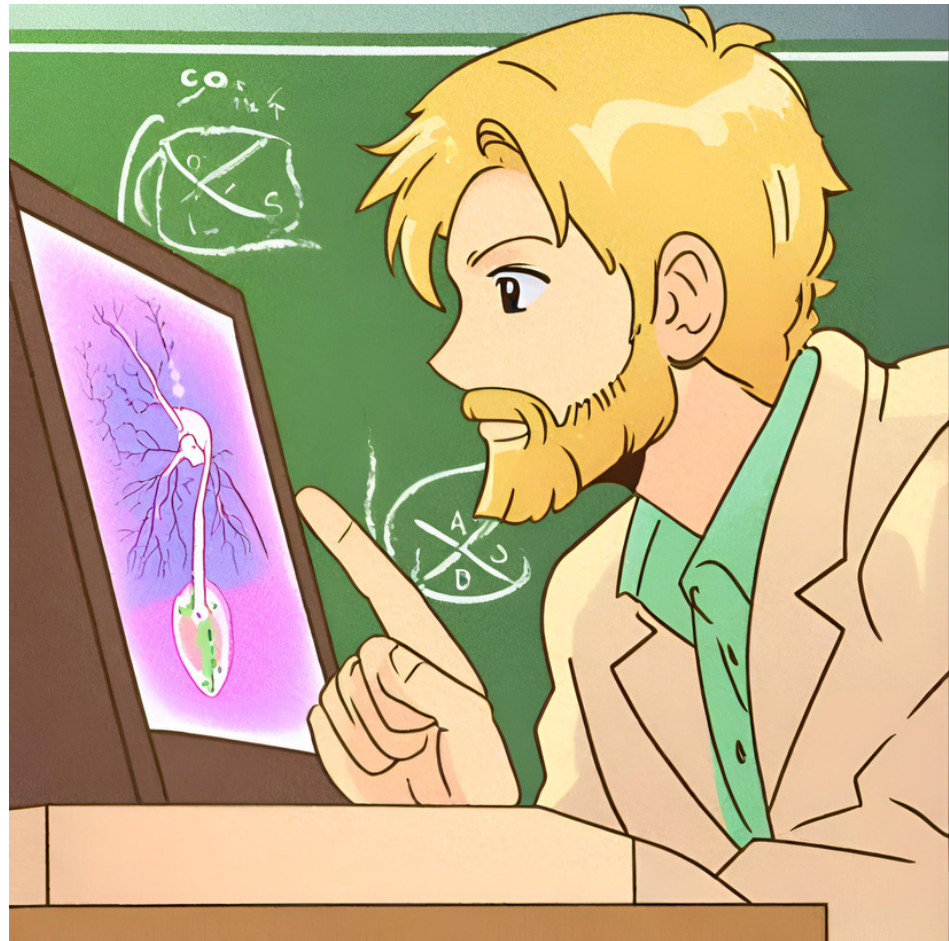




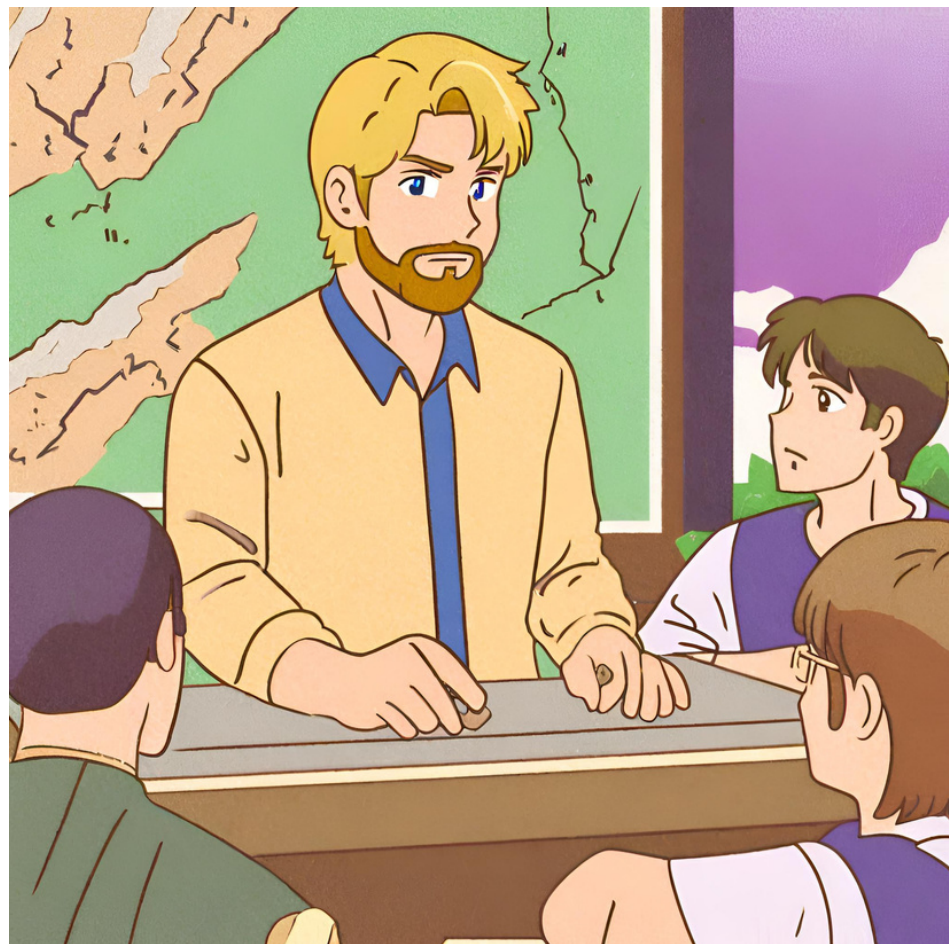
He helped the SIAA hold its first annual field day in 1896 and even refereed an event. He served on the games committee and met with other members in Atlanta. He was the secretary, treasurer, and on the executive committee of the VU Athletic Association.



Jones taught courses like botany, zoology, mineralogy, general geology, and applied geology in the Natural History and Geology program. He was also a lecturer of embryology in the medical department with courses cross-listed in Pharmacy and Engineering.



The textbooks used in his zoology courses had sections on Darwinism and the theories of the origins of life. According to Paul Conkin's *Gone with the Ivy*, "almost alone, as a nominal subordinate of Safford, [Jones] had built what amounted to a new school of biology."

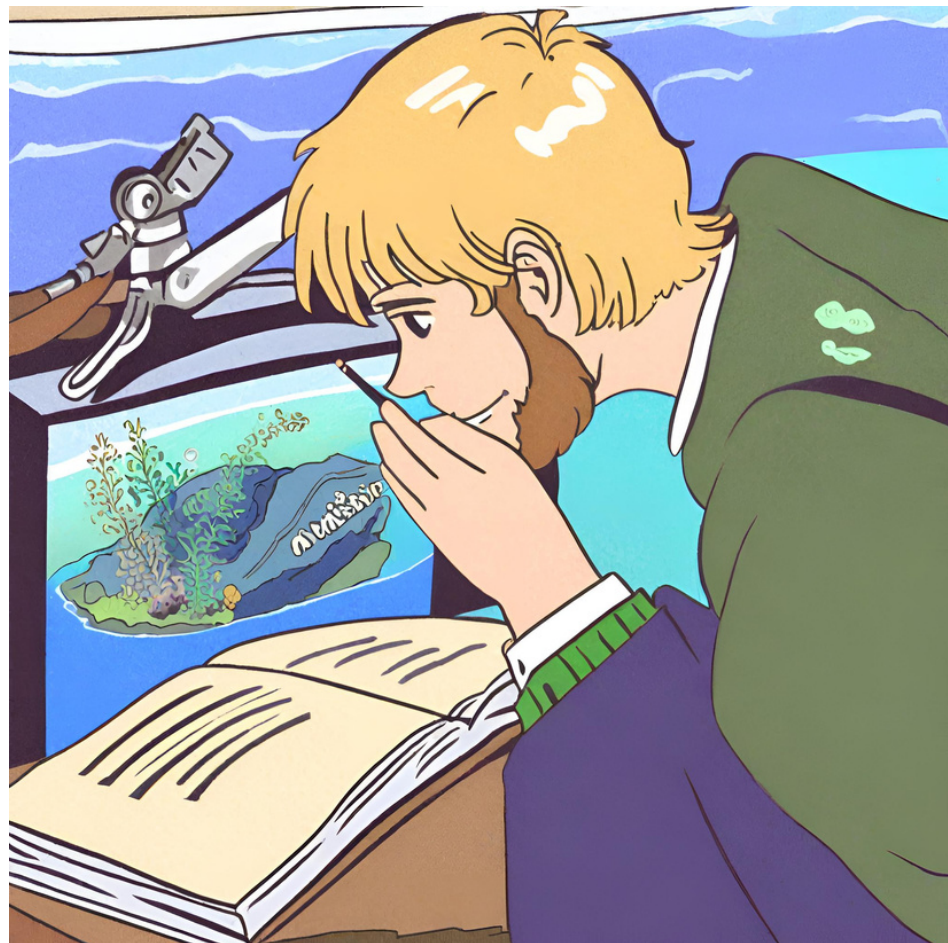




In 1897, Jones helped Safford showcase the minerals and fossils of Tennessee at the Centennial Exposition, a six-month long celebration meant to attract folks from around the country to Nashville. Even then-president McKinley made a trip!



Jones spent many summers assisting the programs at the Marine Biological Lab in Woods Hole, MA. Unfortunately, while exploring the coast in 1899, Jones drowned. The loss was devastating to the Vanderbilt community, though his legacy lives on.



Dr. Paul M. Jones

Born November 8, 1867

Died July 1, 1899

A brilliant scientist; a promoter of Vanderbilt's largest  
interests; a sincere friend of the students





Photos clockwise from top-left:

- Annual yearbook notice
- Home of his uncle, Dr. Vaughn
- Portraits of Paul M. Jones circa 1885
- His on-campus housing

Story written and researched by Dr. Andy Flick. Special thanks to the special collections staff at the Vanderbilt University library. Special thanks to Teresa Gray, Molly Dohrman, and Kathy Smith. This work was funded by a Vanderbilt University Sesquicentennial Grant.

Cover image of Paul Jones from the VU media database colorized in Adobe Photoshop.

Cartoons throughout were created in Magic Media AI through a Canva subscription.

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