

Bill Clinton visits Jasper



On Friday, July 18, 1997, history was made in Newton County. President Bill Clinton arrived in Jasper to deliver the eulogy at the funeral of a long-time friend, Hilary Ward Jones. Air Force One brought him to Harrison around 9:30 a.m. on July 17. A waiting limousine whisked him away and he reportedly spent that evening visiting with the Jones family.

Preparations for the President's visit were long and tedious. Those of us who live less complicated lives, got a glimpse of what its like not to be able to just jump in your car and go where you want, when you want. Every law enforcement agency was called in to secure the areas of Jasper and Harrison and in between. Game and Fish Personnel patrolled the wooded area behind the church while Secret Service agents crawled into the ceiling, the heating vents, and every other cubbyhole in the church building. All roads leading to Jasper were blocked for several hours during that Friday morning to allow the President's cavalcade to pass without interruption.

If folks needed to be in Jasper, they had to be there early. Once there, they were stuck until after noon. Even city streets were barricaded. Friday morning, the motorcade arrived a little after 9 a.m. The first limo turned into the church as a decoy and the second sailed past news cameramen waiting outside the church and on into Jasper, where the President made a brief stop at the funeral home, then on the Jasper square where he greeted those who had gathered there.

A little after noon, the procession left for Harrison and Newton County quieted back down, but no one will forget the day the President came to town!