

# Growth Of PSU Amazes School's First Acting President

By Gene Warren

**PEMBROKE**—The man who was the first acting president of what was then Pembroke State College for Indians in the 1941-42 academic year couldn't believe his eyes.

"This campus has exploded," he exulted, touring Pembroke State University on a recent visit. "I've never seen such amazing growth."

Dr. Owens H. Browne, age 76, who has retired in Raleigh, then reflected on the way it was.

"In 1941-42, our total student body at Pembroke numbered only 96. It was then strictly an Indian school." (Note: Today the enrollment of PSU is 2,000 and the university is open to all races.)

He said that 1941-42 was the first year it was decided that only college classes should be held on campus. The previous year, he said there were approximately 314 students on campus, but about 250 of them were high school students.

"In those days both high school and college students went to classes in Old Main. Most of the college classes were held upstairs," he said. The next year when the high school students left, he said college officials had to go out and "beat the bushes" to obtain a large enough student body to justify the school's existence.

Among the high school students then was a young Lumbee Indian named English E. Jones. He is now Dr. English E. Jones, the university chancellor and the man under whom Pembroke State University has made its fantastic progress.

Helping Dr. Browne to recruit college students in those lean days was a member of the faculty, Ira Pate

Lowry of Pembroke. "Ira Pate and I went around to the different high schools and encouraged their graduates to come here. In fact, we had a Senior Day on campus," said Dr. Browne.

From what Dr. Browne related, those were challenging days.

"In order for our students to have meals on campus, we set up a cooperative program with Albert Hunt (then a sophomore) as a business manager. Students, most of whom lived on farms around here, would bring in all kinds of food for which we credited on their meal account. Students who couldn't provide any food would be put to work doing other things to earn their meals. (Hunt, now assistant superintendent of Robeson County Schools, said, however, "we ate 'good'")

"As for facilities, Old Main was about all we had," said Dr. Browne. "The old gymnasium was built while I was here. We had small men's and women's dormitories plus small buildings for home economics and agriculture."

The year before Dr. Browne became acting superintendent he said the first college bachelor degree was presented. "The summer after I became superintendent, we awarded seven." In those days Dr. Browne had to consult James Hillman, state superintendent of public instruction on all major decisions pertaining to the college.

Pembroke State University's present staff numbers 123, but in Dr. Browne's days the total staff was four. "Clifton Oxendine was the dean, James Arnold Jacobs was the

registrar and my secretary was Miss Fossie Maynor, who now lives in California and still corresponds with me. Those were the days before the school had a dean of women. All the girls had to go and talk to Mr. Oxendine about their problems. My office was in a small room on the right of Old Main as you entered," said Dr. Browne. "The total faculty numbered 12 or 14." (Note: Today it is 117.)

"Where you now have high-rise buildings, we had woods," said Dr. Browne.

He chuckled when the new Performing Arts Center was mentioned with its sophisticated lighting system.

"Ira Pate Lowry (our music professor) staged an operatta called 'The Golden Trail' when I was here.

Because I was a chemistry professor, he asked me to help him with some makeshift lighting in Old Main auditorium," said Dr. Browne, who proved a magician at making something out of nothing.

Lowry, also retired after serving for years as head of the music Department of PSU, had Dr. and Mrs. Browne as overnight house guests during their visit here. He and Mrs. Browne took them to see the new Indian Drama, "Strike at the Wind."

Mrs. Lowry, who has been extremely ill, was seeing the drama for the second time. She has used a folding chair to watch the performances.

Another Pembroke man whom Dr. Brown praised was D. F. Lowry. "A marvelous man," said the former

PSU acting president. "Fuller carried the mail and farmed—he had the best corn I've ever seen—and pastored at the Methodist Church. Once in a while when he had to be out of town, he asked me to take charge of the worship service. Ira Pate arranged the music, so it was no problem."

Dr. Browne started teaching science here in '37, became acting superintendent in the 1940-41 school year and then was appointed acting president in the 1941-42 academic year.

The next year Dr. Ralph D. Wellons assumed the presidency. Dr. Browne went to Lenoir Rhyne College where he initially taught physics and chemistry and continued as a science

professor for eight years. He went next to St. Mary's College in Raleigh where he taught chemistry for 18 years before retiring.

Although a native of Illinois, Dr. Browne calls Raleigh home. His wife, the former Mary Martin Johnson, 75, is a Raleigh native.

"I have a daughter living in Florida, and we try to stop by Pembroke whenever we go down there. This is our second visit this year, but there was a five-year gap before that.

"No, when I was a teacher and administrator here with three children, I never dreamed that some day this school would grow to such proportions. There has simply been an explosion here!"



Chancellor ENGLISH E. JONES (left) of Pembroke State University greets Dr. Owens H. Browne, first acting president of the institution in the 1941-42 academic year, and Mrs. Browne. Now

retired in Raleigh, Dr. Browne headed the school when it was called Pembroke State College for Indians and had an enrollment of 96.

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