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Whatever Happened to ... Earl Rayeford Sheppard

By Barbara Braveboy-Locklear
SPECIAL TO THE CAROLINA INDIAN VOICE

His family and neighbors call him Earl. Thousands of his former high school students call him "Mr. Shep." His birth certificate shows him to be Earl Rayeford Sheppard. Those who know him agree he's one kind fellowman.

One of three children of Duell Sheppard and Hattie Mae Branch Sheppard, he was born in McDonald. He was three years old when his father died and says he was blessed with another father five years later when his widowed mother married Willoughby Jones. He later gained a third sister with his mother's marriage to Mr. Jones.

"Really he was the only father I ever knew," Mr. Sheppard says of the late Mr. Jones. "I dearly loved him."

Reared by loving parents in the Hopewell community, Mr. Sheppard says his early childhood years were spent growing up on a 103-acre farm his father bought as woodland and later cleared into new ground.



Earl Rayeford Sheppard

He attended Hopewell School where among his elementary teachers were Auzout "Ozo"; Edmond; Loshia and Lula, all members of a Lowry family in the community. After completing the seventh grade at the all-Indian school, he entered the Indian Normal High School in Pembroke. A year later he was among the first-ever class to enter Pembroke High School, a newly built facility near what today is Pembroke State University.

And in 1940 his was the first graduating class of the which offered an eleven grades program. Mr. Sheppard says the following year a twelfth grade was added at the school where J.R. Lowry served as principal.

In 1941 the young Lumbee Indian was drafted into military service with the U.S. Army. After 13 weeks of basic training at Ft. Bragg, NC he says he, along with others in his unit, was loaded up and transported to a spot in South Carolina.

"It was night and our unit was on maneuvers. We were literally dropped off in a cotton patch, then driven to a nearby woods where we spent the night," he laughs.

He was to serve at Camp Blanding in Florida and Camp Shelby in Mississippi before leaving overseas for World War II duty.

"I hadn't been back home to Robeson County since leaving for the Army and had received my first two-weeks furlough."

According to the veteran on his second day back in his boyhood community a telegram arrived from his

commanding officer to report to camp immediately. With bags packed he returned; boarded a ship and was deployed to the war zone.

He left behind a childhood sweetheart whom he'd courted since he was 14. For 35 months the soldier courted her by letters he sent from islands in the SW Pacific.

In the fall of 1945 the war veteran came home to Robeson County. The following spring he and his 28-year-old childhood sweetheart, Sarah Ransom were married in Dillon, SC.

A few weeks later the couple moved to Bolling Green, Kentucky where Mr. Sheppard enrolled in Western Kentucky University. There he studied alongside his brother-in-law, English E. Jones, former chancellor of Pembroke State University.

He says the first of his three sons was born while he was a student at the university.

In February of 1950, from the university, Mr. Sheppard earned a bachelor degree in vocational agriculture.

He returned to Robeson County and immediately took a position at Pembroke High School where he taught agricultural courses. He remained in the same position at the same school for 31 years.

It was during his teaching career that he was affectionately called "Mr. Shep" by his students. They still call him that today, he says.

"I was lucky to remain at the same school throughout my teaching years," he comments.

But his many students say the luck was theirs to have such a kind and caring teacher and friend.

Mr. Sheppard gave himself a special birthday present when on June 26, 1981, he retired.

He says though he enjoyed teaching, he does not miss it in retirement. Shortly after retiring, he says he was contacted twice to substitute. He declined both times and adds that it pleases him that no more calls followed.

Today he is very happy in retirement which has afforded him time to establish a vineyard boasting 16 grapevines and an orchard producing fruit from peach and apple trees. An annual vegetable garden yields enough food to share with neighbors and his sons and their families. His oldest son is deceased.

The grandfather of six no longer quail hunts but does enjoy fishing on the Lumbee River with former colleagues, Fred Lowry and Abner N. Locklear.

"I'd rather be fishing on the Lumbee River than any place I know," he adds.

He likes pier fishing at the ocean because it enables him to meet people from around the state.

"I've always loved people," he smiles.

He says there are few idle hours in his retirement. While he does not tend his farm which he rents to a local farmer, he does keep physically fit by working in his spacious grounds which surround his home in the Hopewell community.

He owns no livestock.

"I don't want anything outside the house I have to feed."

A busy schedule leaves little time for much involvement in civic clubs and organizations. But attending his beloved Harper's Ferry Baptist Church remains a part of Mr. Sheppard's weekly schedule.

Two years ago, he worked with a bookstore which operated under the auspices of Lumbee Regional Development Association in Pembroke.

"We offered top-notch reading books to the general public at a giveaway price of a quarter or fifty cents each. The dissemination of books benefitted families and students and it was a good idea," he comments.

Mr. Sheppard says there is no secret to his longevity.

"I eat sensibly, have something to do everyday, love life and people. There's no secret to that."

SECOND ANNUAL PSU GOSPEL MUSIC FESTIVAL SCHEDULED

BY GENE WARREN

They have performed at the White House for former President Jimmy Carter and made numerous appearances at the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville, Tenn.

They are The Kingsmen, who are booked out of Nashville, Tenn., and will be among the groups performing at Pembroke State University's second annual "Gospel Music Festival" April 25.

Current members include founder Eldridge Fox, lead singer Jim Hammill, tenor Gary Sheppard, bass singer Ray Dean Reese--and the band composed of Anthony Burger on the piano, Tim Surratt on the bass, Greg Fox on the drums, and Gary Dillard, who plays the steeler guitar, banjo, dobro, harmonica, bass guitar and rhythm guitar.

Under the guidance of Fox and Hammill, The Kingsmen have won nearly every accolade in Southern gospel music. They have won numerous Dove Awards from the Gospel Music Association and have received honors from "The Singing News" for awards in every category except for "Top Female Vocalist" and "Top Mixed Group."

The Kingsmen have recorded over 100 albums that contain songs that have become Southern gospel classics, including "Stand Up," "The Ole Ship of Zion," and "Excuses." They have also released a number of videos, including "Mississippi Live" and "Stand Up At Opryland."

Founder Fox describes their music as Southern Gospel and says they are proud of it.

"We started with a Southern gospel sound, and we've never deviated from it in any way," Fox says. "We do what we do, and we don't have any desire to be anything other than exactly what we are."

Fox feels The Kingsmen's longevity stems from two facts: "(1) Trying our best to do the Lord's will, and (2) doing what people want us to do--not what the industry

wants or expects."

For Fox, the dream of performing in a gospel quartet began in childhood. He says after attending a concert featuring The Rangers, The Sunshine Boys and The Homeland Harmony Quartet, he knew he wanted to spend his life glorifying the Lord through music. In 1953, he formed a group called The Silvertones, but was called into the Armed Forces. When his military stint was completed, he organized a group called The Kingsmen. The pressures of balancing their jobs and families and performing on weekends proved too great and this group disbanded.

However, Fox bought out the other members, retained The Kingsmen name and began developing what has become an institution in Southern gospel music.

Each member of the group has been with The Kingsmen for several years. Reese, of Asheville, has 20 years with the group; Hammill, of Memphis, Tenn., 18 years; Dillard, of Birmingham, Ala., 13 years; Greg Fox, son of founder Eldridge Fox, 13 years; Burger, of Cleveland, Tenn., 11 years; Sheppard, of Oates, Mo., 6 years; and Surratt, of Canton, N.C., the newcomer of the group.

Eldridge Fox sees The Kingsmen as an on-going institution. "We're going to continue doing what has made us successful--singing for the Lord and our fans. If we do those things, everything else will take care of itself," he says.

Tickets are \$5 for the "Gospel Music Festival." Ticket outlets are: Lumberton-Christian Book Store, Dee's Hallmark Shop, McNeill's Jewelers, Merrimac Music, Robeson Baptist Assn., The Comic Book Shop, Pembroke-Burnt Swamp Baptist Assn.; Lumburg-Quick Copy; Fayetteville--The Dancer at Cross Pointe; and Red Springs-McNeill's Jewelers. For more information, telephone (919)521-0778.



The Kingsmen of Nashville, Tenn., will be among the groups performing at Pembroke State University's second annual "Gospel Music Festival" April 25.

[This is the first in a series of articles on groups State University "Gospel Music Festival" Thursday, who will be performing in the second annual Pembroke April 25, at 7 p.m. in PSU's Performing Arts Center.]

HORSE SHOW TO BE HELD AT N.C. INDIAN CULTURAL CENTER

A racking and game horse show featuring some of the best show horses in the region will be held Saturday, March 30, 1991 beginning at 1 p.m. at the North Carolina Indian Cultural Center which is located off Highway 74 near Pembroke.

According to Bruce Swett, chairman of the horse show committee, a large number of horses from North Carolina and adjoining states are expected to be shown in 30 events and classes. "Owners of horses who have won national and world class shows have said they would be here. Over \$2,500 in prize money will be awarded in the show," said Mr. Swett.

"You can see the best in beauty, style, performance, and speed at the show," said Mr. Swett. "This is

exciting entertainment that will be fun for the whole family."

Mr. Swett noted that horse riding and showing is very popular in the area. He explained that the show is an annual event held in Pembroke and has been rated one of the best shows in southeastern North Carolina.

Mr. Swett said the show will begin at 1 p.m. with children's competition, and will end with the major competition for game horses, and racking horses. Admission is \$2.00.

"The Cultural Center site is an excellent location for the show," said Mr. Swett. "We have a beautiful setting that has picnic and playground facilities. Boating, fishing, and camping are also available at the site."

Mr. Swett explained that while

much of the competition categories require special equipment, some categories are open to novice riders. He said the Indian regalia and children's lead-in competitions are unusual and exciting events.

The show is sponsored by the North Carolina Indian Cultural Center and proceeds from the event will be used to help develop the Cultural Center as a tourist attraction.

The announcer for the show is R.W. Sharley. The racing and game horse judge is Mike Hancock. Other members of the show committee are Willie Collins and interested community residents.

For additional information about the show, contact the Indian Cultural Center at (919)521-2433.

Easter Sunrise Service to be held

An Easter Sunrise Service will be held Sunday, March 31, 1991 from 7:00 to 8:00 a.m. at the amphitheater at the North Carolina Indian Cultural Center.

Reverend Michael Cummings, Director of Missions for the Burnt Swamp Baptist Association will deliver the message. "The Spiritual Miracles" a gospel singing group of Elrod Baptist Church of Rowland will provide special music. The Pembroke VFW Club will present a special

tribute to members of the military, veterans, and their families.

According to Bruce Swett, Site Manager for the Indian Cultural Center, the site of the event has much scenic and natural beauty. "We hope to see a beautiful sunrise over the lake at the site," he said. The public is cordially invited to attend. Admission is free.

For more information, contact Bruce Swett at the Indian Cultural Center at (919)521-2433.

Acquires Indian Pottery



Rev. Julius Bryant is shown with his recently acquired piece of pottery. He refers to it as an "Indian relic" and states that it was unearthed at a local residence in Farkton, N.C. Rev. Bryant believes the bowl to be "many many moons old."



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The Carolina Indian Voice