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The Three Members of Pembroke State College's Class of 1945 Celebrate 50th Class Reunion during PSU Homecoming Activities



Shown left to right are the members of the 1945 graduating class of Pembroke State College. Left to right they are: Ira Lee Lowry; Sadie Rae Blanks; and Mary Bell

by Barbara Braveboy-Locklear
They were perilous times. The early 1940's. Money was scarce. Iron metal was scarce. Men, too. Called to foreign war. Then... It's April 23, 1943. Good Friday—a Christian holiday. The military summons is delivered to all remaining Indian male students as they sit in their classrooms at Pembroke State College. Over the next two years, the 44-year-old Robeson County academic fortress became a battleground for North Carolina legislators who, because of low enrollment, wanted to close the institution.

Then and there, three female sophomore students waged their own war to keep doors to the all-Indian school open. They staved attack after attack. In doing, made history. In 1945, Ira Lee (Thomas) Lowry; Sadie Rae (Locklear) Blanks; Mary (Jacobs) Bell, along with Venus Brooks, a veteran who joined the class his senior year and graduated as a special student, made up the entire graduating class. Prior to P.S.U.'s Alumni Homecoming Awards Banquet held last Saturday night in the university's Chavis Center, Lowry, Blanks and Bell gathered for their official 50-year class reunion. The Reverend Venus Brooks, the only male gradu-

ate of the class of '45, is deceased. The three graduates, all widowed, had weeks earlier extended invitations to seven other classes to join them for the occasion. Chancellor Joseph Oxendine joined the group of 30 alumni and guests. The lively two-hour reminiscence session took the group back a half century to when... Strict campus rules prohibited students from physically touching the opposite sex in a romantic manner. Deans of students prohibited female students from walking unchaperoned to downtown Pembroke and dormitory mothers enforced a sign-in-sign-out policy for boarding students. The enforcement of a strict dress code which ensured no wearing of bluejeans by female students. College

President R.D. Wellons made attendance at Thursday morning chapel, a religious assembly, mandatory. It was a time when \$13 could buy a semester's worth of learning. But few had the monetary means to pay that amount. Ira Lee Thomas and Sadie Rae Locklear were among those. During their freshman year at Pembroke State College, each woman lived with relatives. Ira Lee boarded with her maternal Aunt Jessie Maynor and her husband, Rev. Dawley Maynor in Pembroke. Sadie Rae boarded with her uncle and aunt, Joseph and Maggie Oxendine two miles east of Pembroke. She walked the daily trek to class. Both women worked as campus custodians in order to pay for their first year of college study. During their sophomore and junior years, Ira Lee and Sadie Rae lived on campus where they shared a dormitory room. In order to pay for their room board and tuition the women participated in a student cooperative program initiated during wartime. As participants they earned financial credits by performing duties which required them to arise early mornings and prepare breakfast for student boarders, administrators, faculty and staff, assist Mrs. Pearl Revels Lowry in the serving of lunch; then later, by themselves, prepare supper for campus diners. "The one upside to this arrangement was that Sadie and I didn't have to worry too much about what dishes would make up our menus, or having to go to the market to shop for the food," Ira Lee Lowry says. "We cooked whatever participating students brought from their families' vegetable gardens or stockhouses. These resources determined what each day's menu was," she laughs. "During those lean years, student

learned valuable lessons in bartering. Those who didn't have money to pay for meals on campus were allowed to bring produce from home, have it prepped, and receive their meals in exchange for it." Sadie Rae interjects. Food could not be bartered for tuition. Paying faculty diners helped to defray costs for any supplemental food purchases needed in the preparation of campus meals Ira Lee says. Their senior year both women boarded in the private home of Mrs. Florida Warriax. Both women agree that as World War II continued, so did the risk of the school's having to close. "The State of North Carolina almost closed down the school, but concerned people like Dean Clifton Oxendine, Mr. Ira Pate Lowry and others had such a love for Pembroke State College, they kept the struggle alive. This college, from 1940-1953, was the only four-year college for Indians in the U.S.A. The state had no choice. There was no other place for us to attend college. "Under the leadership of President Wellons and Dr. James E. Hillman, the doors stayed open," Ira Lee continues. "We the class of 1945 and less than 60 other enrolled students stood firm and fought hard. And won. By the time the War had ended, many students who had been called away, including women called to defense jobs, returned. And since that time, Pembroke State University has been on the climb." On Friday night, June 8, 1945 in an 8:30 o'clock estomony held in "Old Main," three Indian women and an Indian man were awarded their four-year college diplomas from

Pembroke State College for Indians. Each steadily ascended ladders. Until his death The Reverend Venus Brooks gave his live in service to God, Country and community. Sadie Rae Locklear, 73, married Barrington Blanks. She has a son and daughter. The grandmother of four taught school for 33 years. She is enjoying her retirement at home in the Union Chapel Community in rural Pembroke. Mary Jacobs Bell, 71, married James D. Bell. She has two sons. The grandmother of three retired after having taught school 30 years primarily in Sampson County, NC where she now resides in rural Clinton. She is a renowned Indian basket weaver. Ira Lee Thomas Lowry, 70, married Harold Lowry. She has three daughters and a son. Ira Lee retired after having taught school for 33 years. Ira Lee, grandmother to six grandsons, resides a mile from P.S.U. and enjoys international travel. In 1945 metal was still scarce. No class rings were wrought that year for the graduating class at P.S.C. These were to come years later. Last Saturday night, on the campus of her beloved alma mater, Ira Lee Thomas Lowry, flanked by her two graduating classmates, Sadie Rae Locklear Blanks and Mary Jacobs Bell, solemnly stood and acknowledged a distinguished audience. She lit a candle in memory of her late fellow classmate, Venus Brooks... "If the doors of this institution had been closed back then in 1943, I don't believe they would have ever been opened again as a college or university at Pembroke. "Pembroke State University, we the class of 1945 thank you for this day..."

Around the County

LRDA Announces New Board Member, and Award Winners for 1995

LRDA (Lumbee Regional Development Association) met at its headquarters on Union Chapel Road Tuesday night and introduced Mrs. Deanna Lowry to her first meeting since being appointed by the agency. Elections have been suspended until further notice. The agency also announced its award winners for 1995—they are: Rev. Isaiah Locklear, Henry Berry Lowry Memorial Award; Dr. Jeff Collins, Businessman of the Year; Dr. Linda Oxendine, Advancement of Education; Dr. Stanley Knick, Hamilton McMillan Award, and students, Lawrence Locklear, Rebekah Revels; and Shelly Strickland as post secondary, high school and middle school winners respectively. No nominations were received for the Elder of the Year Award and the Distinguished Service Award. The LRDA Awards Committee made their selection from 27 nominations submitted. The Committee also recommended that the awards banquet be held April 1 at the Jaycee Hut and then annually in February thereafter. The agency also continued to discuss preliminary plans to build an administrative building with emphasis on a site on Railroad Street in Pembroke. Plans call for a 15,000 square foot building to house all of LRDA's programs at one site.

Evergreen Rehabilitation Center Backed by County Commissioners

Despite a turnaway crowd Monday night, and most of them adamantly opposed to the proposed project, the county commissioners voted 7-0 to allow Parkton businessman David Green to convert his former rest home near St. Pauls into a rehabilitation center for convicted inmates. The only defection from a unanimous vote was Commissioner Bill Herndon who represents the St. Pauls area. He chose not to vote to stop rumors that he was supporting Green's project to make money for himself. Evergreen Rehabilitation Center will house a maximum of 75 inmates convicted of non-violent crimes involving drugs or alcohol. Green, also a member of the Public Schools of Robeson County's board of education, and a member of the state department of transportation, had some supporters present, including the Rev. Joy Johnson, Fairmont minister and political activist. Johnson, the first Black to serve in the N.C. House of Representatives from Robeson, said in part, "...people who give all they have for the betterment of a county ought not to be castigated." The center is part of a new State Department of Corrections program that attempts to help prisoners make the transition between prison and freedom. Participants in the program will participate in drug treatment, work release and education programs. The state will pay Green's company, Green Manor, \$55 per inmate per day to run the center.

Two Buildings Destroyed by Fire in Downtown Pembroke

The only good thing to report about the fire that swept through two downtown Pembroke businesses was the news that no people were in the buildings when the flames erupted sometime early Monday morning. It took some 50 firefighters four hours to put out the blaze that destroyed Pembroke Auto Parts and Pembroke Insurance Company on Third Street in downtown Pembroke. James Deese, a volunteer firefighter for the Pembroke Fire Department, said smoke also damaged Sampson's Fish Market and other nearby businesses. Firefighters, as always, gallantly responded: they came from Evans Crossroads, Pembroke's Scuffletown, Pembroke's City and Prospect. Fire fighters had put out the fire by 1 p.m.

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Jessica Locklear

Local Student Named Kodak Young Leader

Jessica Locklear, a sophomore at Purnell Sweet High School, has been named Kodak Young Leader under a national program sponsored by Eastman Kodak Company. Locklear, who serves as sophomore class president at Swett, was named on the basis of her outstanding leadership qualities and academic achievement. As a Kodak Young Leader, she will receive an award from Kodak and will be eligible to apply to the University of Rochester Young Leaders Scholarship Program. "An investment in bright young leaders like Jessica is an investment in our future," said Kodak's Chairman and Chief Executive Officer George M.C. Fisher. "We want to inspire these students and their peers with a sense of responsibility and a continual thirst for learning and achievement." Kodak, which has invited 2,000 schools nationwide to participate this year, employs over 90,000 people and operates in virtually every corner of the globe. Jessica is the daughter of Marilyn Locklear and Ted Locklear, both of Pembroke.



Renovated PSU Library to be named Sampson-Livermore Library

by Don Gersh
Pembroke State University's Board of Trustees ended speculation concerning renaming the proposed expanded and renovated Mary Livermore Library. The Board voted Friday to rename the library the Sampson-Livermore Library in honor of both Oscar R. Sampson, an early pioneer in Lumbee education who served for 32 years on the University's Board of Trustees, and Mary Livermore, former Dean of Women and a long-time religion professor at PSU. During an earlier Board (Dec. 2, 1994) meeting, Chairman David Weinstein appointed a committee to recommend an appropriate name for the expanded and renovated library. Dr. Adolph Dial, John Nicholson and Sybil Collins were appointed to this committee but did not reach consensus during their deliberations. Rather, they presented options: (1) that both individuals be equally honored as the Sampson-Livermore Library; (2) that the exterior be identified as the Sampson Library and the great reading room be named the Livermore Reading Hall, and (3) no names placed on the building itself but have two

separate external structures identifying the Sampson Library and Livermore Reading Room. Collins voiced opposition to the first recommendation and said Pembroke community leaders would not support this option. Dr. Dial, professor emeritus in PSU's Department of American Indian Studies, knew both Sampson and Livermore. He said he "like" the name Sampson-Livermore for the library and described Livermore as "one of the most benevolent people" he has ever known. Construction on the project is expected to begin during the summer of 1995. In other Board actions, Weinstein announced the resignation of Gloria G. Williams of Raeford, from the Board of Trustees. Williams cited difficulties in attending meetings as the reason for her resignation. Weinstein also asked the Board to pass a resolution of support to have a PSU-related individual on the UNC Board of Governors. The Board of Trustees unanimously passed the resolution that will be sent to UNC President C.D. Spangler and State representatives.

PSU's vice chancellors presented updates in their respective areas since December's meeting. Dr. Oxendine told the Board that he met with elected State officials last month to ask for their continued support of the PSU Regional Center for Economic, Community and Professional Development. He informed them that the UNC budget included \$5.8 million for the center, and that the Federal Government is expected to appropriate \$4 million more (in addition to the \$2 million appropriated during the last session of Congress). The Chancellor also discussed a new partnership program with Pembroke Elementary School. Two PSU education professors are working side by side with elementary school teachers in establishing a model school that will focus on new techniques for the classroom. The successes in Pembroke Elementary School will be shared with other Robeson County schools. The Board also heard updates on campus construction including the proposed widening of North Odum Road (State Road 1340).

Indian Unity Conference Planned for March 16-18 in Fayetteville

United Tribes of North Carolina has announced that the 1995 North Carolina Indian Unity Conference will be held in Fayetteville, NC March 16th-18th, 1995. The site of this year's event will be the Boardaux Convention Center Holiday Inn, near the Cape Fear Valley Medical Center on Owen Drive. The 1995 United Conference theme will be "Our Path Guides Our Future" and will feature seminars and general assemblies on Indian Education, Economic Development Strategies for Indian Communities, Cultural and Health Care issues affecting Indian Communities in North Carolina. Congressional Leaders and State elected officials have been invited to attend and Governor Jim Hunt is expected to speak at one of the general sessions. County and city leaders in Indian communities are expected to attend.

The Conference will also feature an Awards and Scholarship Banquet at which outstanding Indian leaders, statewide, will be recognized in education, business, and special community service. Scholarships will be presented to several outstanding Indian youth in their time of need to help with college expenses. Another major highlight of the conference will be an exposition of American Indian Talent, focusing on traditional Indian art forms. Also, planned is a statewide Miss Indian North Carolina Pageant. The event will feature a Pow Wow, and will make available to the public, through Indian traders, authentic American Indian crafts for sale. The cost to attend the three day event is \$75.00 for registration. Banquet tickets will be on sale to the public, who will be attending the banquet only, for \$30.00 per person.

Separate adult and youth dances, will be held after the banquet Friday night. Admission will be charged at the doors. This 1995 North Carolina Indian Unity Conference is open to the public, but attendees must register to attend the seminars and general assemblies. The \$75 registration to the conference includes cost for the Banquet and Saturday morning breakfast. Senior citizens and youth will be charged \$45 for registration. For more information about the conference contact the nearest local tribal officers or urban Indian Center. Deadline, to avoid late registration fees, is March 1, 1995.

