

Eye Witness to History

by Dexter Brooks,
Senior Resident Superior Court Judge

Following is my introduction to the court by my long time friend and former law partner, Arnold Locklear, senior member of the Pembroke law firm, Locklear, Jacobs and Hunt. After his introduction on January 2, 1997, the remarks I gave as I became Senior Resident Superior Court Judge are reprinted:

Arnold Locklear: May it please the Court. With great, great pleasure I say to the Court that Judge Brooks comes to the legal profession the first of his family. His mother is with him today, Ms. Lela Brooks. She is a homemaker and was a public educator for many years. His father was a teacher. He taught public school and was a farmer for many many years, the late John Brooks. And of course he comes from a Christian home. He comes from a family that has a history of scholars and hard working folks.

His background education includes being a graduate of the local schools. He obtained his B.S. degree from North Carolina State in 1965 with honors and earned a double major in Electrical Engineering and Mathematics. After that he served his country in the United States Army, 1966 through 1968. He served in Vietnam in 1967-68 with the First Cavalry Division.

He obtained his masters degree in mathematics and worked on his PhD thereafter. But for some compelling reason he came back to Robeson County and taught school at Southeastern Community College. During this time frame there was an issue on the campus of Pembroke State University, UNCP now, having to do with the restoration of Old Main and Judge Brooks got involved in that.

Perhaps from that experience it led him to the University of North Carolina School of Law at Chapel Hill where he obtained his Juris Doctorate degree in 1976 and returned to Robeson County where he became involved in the legal practice and in basic political and civil rights issues.

At that time, in 1976, the issue of double voting existed in Robeson County, as well as the issues of commissioners redistricting, school merger and judicial redistricting. Judge Brooks was involved in these issues as they developed and his involvement was ongoing and lasted until the conclusion.

In civil litigation he was basically involved in major cases. In Superior Court he has the distinction of not having lost a single case.

At the time of the death of Julian Pierce in the county, the State Legislature created a Superior Court Judgeship. And in January 1989 he was appointed by the Governor to fill that slot which he served in until this day and without opposition in 1996 in the primary general elections. I would like to say to the Court that Judge Brooks has been fair. He has a very good legal background and I present Judge Brooks to the Court.

Following this introduction Judge Burley Mitchell administered the oath of office. Following a standing ovation from the audience, I made the following comments:

Well, first of all I'd like to say that I'm really pleased and appreciative of this crowd here. And I shouldn't use the word crowd, let me use the word assembly of citizens here in this courtroom. Apparently we do not have enough seats for everyone. And that I think is great... It really makes me feel very honored. As you probably know, we had some problems getting notice out about this event. Apparently a lot of folks called their neighbors and this kind of thing and that is responsible for this assembly here today.

Now, I'd like to say to the assembly that you're looking at a person who has been blessed. By that I mean that I was born to loving parents. I grew up in a family where the children and the parents loved each other. And I was instructed from the earliest age in the Christian faith and I was instructed in the Golden Rule. That Golden Rule being do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

I can say that my parents were the most gentle of people. I cannot recall a single time that my father ever laid a hand upon me. He instructed me in other manners as opposed to the use of the rod and I loved him for it. And I can say that I went on to be encouraged by my parents to always excel in academics.

And so during the course of my career, whatever school, whether it be Pembroke Graded School or whether it be Pembroke High School or North Carolina State, I always tried to please my parents. And in particular I remember my father would always want to see my report card. And if I came home with anything less than straight A's, then he would register some concern and tell me that I was capable of better work and that I should apply myself accordingly in order to lift myself up in those categories that I was deficient.

And so I had that kind of a home. And after finishing from Pembroke High School, I went off to receive what I believe is the best education that the state could offer, that being that I have a degree in engineering from North

Carolina State University and I have a degree in law from UNC Chapel Hill. And I'm very grateful to both of those institutions for the instruction I received and of the type of education that I received.

That education prepared me for the trials that I confronted after I finished school. After spending those two years in the Army, and I see a number of veterans in the group. And I'm most proud to say that I am a veteran of the United States Army and I spent 12 months in the Republic of Vietnam. And I'm wearing the colors that as a veteran I'm entitled to wear by reason of the medals that were awarded to me because of that service.

But after my Army career, I came back after receiving my law degree. I came back to Robeson County for one purpose only. And that purpose was that I wanted to address myself to the problems that I perceived in the county. And I wanted to be able to be a part of constructive solutions to those problems. Coming back not with the idea that I was going to be fighting any major battles, but with the idea that I was going to be able to sit down and reason with people with whom I had differences and try to resolve those differences.

So during the course of the 12 years that I practiced law, I'm happy to say that I had a good relationship with all of my brother attorneys. And I can say that prior to coming into the courtroom, I always made a genuine effort to sit down with the other side and to resolve the problems associated with any litigation we were involved in.

So I carried that kind of attitude onto the bench when I was appointed by Governor Martin in 1989 after the untimely death of Julian Pierce.

As a judge I can say that in the eight years that I've been one, I've traveled pretty well all over the state. I've held court in 44 counties. And as I've traveled around the state as a judge I tried to do these things:

Number 1. I tried to be fair. And what I mean by that is regardless of who came before me, regardless of their race, their wealth, their political connections or whatever, I tried as best I could to be objective and to render the best decision under the circumstances.

And Number 2. I tried to be courteous. I believe that serious business is conducted in the courtrooms of the state. And I believe that all public servants and in particular judges should operate their courtrooms in a dignified manner and should be courteous to the citizens who come before them.

And thirdly, and probably in that order of importance, I tried to be a scholar of the law. I tried to always be in a position where as far as the case that I was dealing with that I had done my homework. And I wanted the attorneys to be able to feel as though I knew more about the case and the law than the attorneys.

And in that regard I had a very good school because here in Robeson County we have and are blessed to have one of the greatest Superior Court judges of all time, that being the Honorable Henry McKinnon. And I'm pleased to see Judge McKinnon here today. I can say that he's a man I greatly admire. And Judge McKinnon, I always compared you--if you folks have seen the movie "To Kill a Mockingbird," there was an attorney in that movie from a small town by the name of Atticus Finch. And when I thought of Atticus Finch, the person who is the image of that man came to mind, it was Judge McKinnon. And I can say that I've appeared in his courtroom on numerous occasions and he was fair, courteous and knowledgeable of the law. And I don't mind telling anyone that I used him as a role model for myself as I've gone about the state.

But now, I'm shifting gears. Now, wherein my earlier term of office I was a Resident Superior Court Judge and as I went around the state, I only had to answer for Dexter Brooks. But now I'm shifting gears and my becoming the Senior Resident Superior Court Judge, I not only have to think about the way my own courtroom is conducted, but I am assuming new responsibilities towards the court system as a whole. And I have to think more about the court system as a whole and the way it functions than I do as far as what I will be doing as an individual judge.

And as I see the role that I will play in that new position of responsibility that has been thrust upon me, I see it thusly:

I believe that I have an obligation to the citizens of this community and of this county to assure you that the courts of this county are conducted fairly and efficiently. I know that here in Robeson County in times past perhaps some people didn't feel kindly disposed towards the court systems in the county.

And if I might digress for a moment, I remember when I told my mom that I decided to go to law school and she looked at me seriously and said, "couldn't

I find something better to be other than a lawyer?" So at one time you know a lot of people have had negative perceptions of the court system.

Well, the perception of an individual is that individual's reality. And I think as a part of my job I have to deal with that perception. So, I can assure the citizens of this county that I will do everything in my power to assure that the system does operate fairly and efficiently. And that people when they come into the courts will have confidence in the business that is being transacted here.

And the way--one of the ways I intend to do that it just recently I was talking with Tom Jones, the president of the Robeson County Black Caucus. And I told Tom that I wanted the Black Caucus to meet and to select a suitable portrait of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. And once they selected the portrait if they would present it to myself that I would see that portrait was displayed in a prominent place somewhere in the judicial offices so that when anyone comes in to interface with the superior court judges they would see that portrait. And by seeing that portrait, they would understand that the dream of Dr. King is being carried out in Robeson County.

I also am going to display a portrait of one of my favorite historical personalities, Thomas Jefferson. We all know Thomas Jefferson because he of course, penned the Declaration of Independence. And he put pen to paper and expressed eloquently the basic underpinnings of our system of government and the fairness of that system.

And I want people who come into those judicial offices to see that portrait and be reminded that this country through the sacrifices of Dr. Martin Luther King has improved some. He pricked the conscience of the country. And he caused the country to look back at what had been penned by Thomas Jefferson and the other founders of this republic, and it calls to our country's collective conscience to try to live up to those great principles. It caused the country to get on the road to treating all people the same, regardless of race or economic status. The man that set us on the road in the modern era to me is exemplified by the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

And there's a further portrait that I'm going to have hung in a prominent place, and that is the portrait of Henry Berry Lowrie. And I do it for the following reason:

He is a local person who had a dream. The dream that Henry Berry had was that the justice system would be fair and would treat all people the same. If you are familiar with the story of Henry Berry, you will know that Henry Berry was fighting for the rights of all people and he of course was Native American. But I think you should know that the members of his group or his followers included African Americans and included European Americans. So he was not fighting a cause just for Indian people, but he was fighting a cause for individual rights in Robeson County.

And Henry Berry didn't live to see his dream fulfilled, although he gave it his best shot, so to speak. He was a man of great convictions and he was willing to give the criminal justice system a chance to treat him fairly. On at least two different occasions Henry Berry willingly surrendered himself to the criminal authority of the day and said, "I've been promised that I am going to be treated fairly by this system. You've not been able to capture me and you've not been able to kill me," even though federal troops were brought into the county for that purpose.

Each time he was disappointed and each time he then made spectacular escapes from the custody of supposedly impregnable jails at the time.

But the reason and what set off the bloodiest fury in Robeson County's history was that during the Civil War the Confederate Home Guard came upon the home of Alan Lowrie. Mr. Lowrie was an elder of the Indian community at that time, a well respected man. He was accused of crimes that he denied. But he was denied a trial and he was shot by the Confederate Home Guard. Not only Mr. Lowrie, but also his oldest son, William, without the benefit of ordinary due process or anything. This was why Henry Berry...one of the reasons why we had the bloodiest times in Robeson County as they were described.

Well, Henry Berry was the brother of Sinclair Lowrie and both were the sons, as I said earlier, of Alan Lowrie. My grandfather, Sandy Brooks, was reared by Sinclair Lowrie. I am related and the Brooks are related to the Lowries in that respect. When Alan Lowrie and William Lowrie were killed by the Confederate Home Guard without a trial, the women and children were locked in a smoke house. Included in the people who were locked in the smoke house was a child about the age of eight whose name was Sandy Brooks. And Sandy Brooks was my grandfather. He was the man I said earlier was reared by the brother of Henry Berry.

Well, my grandfather lived to see me born, and I was named after him. I was named Sandy Brooks--really Sandy Dexter Brooks in his honor. So I think it is fitting that I should tell you this story because... what Henry Berry fought for was simply that people of color be treated equally by the criminal justice system... I say that has come to pass in Robeson County. If a person of color can rise to the level of the Chief District Court Judge of this county, that being Honorable Herbert Richardson and if a Native American, such as myself, can rise to the post of the Senior Resident Superior Court Judge, I would say that changes have occurred in Robeson County and those changes have been positive. They've been supported by the majority of the people in the county.

Although I was very active in the voting rights efforts that brought about this change, I can honestly say and believe that I've always had friends of all three races. And I count among the people, my close associates, people I have tried to work with to bring about this change.

For example, the first litigation brought under the Voting Rights Act in Robeson County was filed by myself. It was filed to protect the voting rights of Black people in the town of Maxton. I did so with my good friend, Mr. George Ziegler, who is here today.

Later on I can honestly say that when the issue of the school merger was being hotly debated...and of course the schools have been an issue in this county for a number of years...Fortunately, things now are improving substantially. But there were a number of people, Black, white and Indian who were interested in the improvement of education. It was along about that time that I met a person whom I admire very much and that's Eric Prevatte.

Eric of course is of European descent and we're not related at all. I asked him that question when he appeared in one of my cases. He responded not to his knowledge. I think Eric is a man of his word so I'll assume we're not related to each other.

However, Eric and I became the best of friends and we tackled a problem that a lot of people had tackled before. Through the help of ourselves, Dr. Joy Johnson, and many others, the schools of this county were merged. And I remember telling Eric one time that before I met him I had been told by a number of people that Eric was the worst of rednecks and that he hated Indians and Blacks with a passion. Then Eric had said well you know I was told the same thing about you. He said people told me that you hated every single white person you ever met. So we had a good chuckle out of that. And we proceeded to solve a problem that we felt confronted the county as a whole.

I say all of that and say to everyone here that I pledge that I will use my best efforts to cooperate with all duly constituted authority, the district attorney, the sheriff, the public defender, the clerk of court, the county commissioners, the board of education. Any time the court system interfaces with any of those officials, scrupulously I'll observe and respect the prerogatives of their office and I will try to sit down and try to make the court system of this county a model that the whole state can be proud of. Thank you very much.

Following my remarks, the High Sheriff of Robeson County, Glenn Maynor, closed the court.



Indian Voice.
To subscribe

PUBLIC NOTICE

The Regular Monthly Meeting of the Robeson County Board of Commissioners scheduled for April 7, 1997 has been cancelled.

A special meeting of the Robeson County Board of Commissioners will be held Thursday, April 10, 1997 at 6:00 PM at the O.P. Owens Building (Cooperative Extension Service) located off NC Highway 72-West of Lumberton NC. The purpose of the Special Meeting is the E-911 project for Robeson County and any other matters which may come before the Board.

Linda A. Hedgpeth
Clerk to the Board
Robeson County Board of Commissioners

Maynor-Bowen To Wed



Ena Maynor of Shannon announces the engagement of her daughter, Della Maynor to Ronnie Bowen of Shannon. The groom-elect is the son of Florence Bowen of Shannon. Their wedding is planned for April 5 at South Hoke School (formerly Hoke School).
Hoke County Native Pow-Wow is 11 a.m. until 5 p.m. Traditional Native American Wedding at 5 p.m. Everyone welcome.

CROSSWORD																																										
ACROSS						DOWN						Answer																														
1. Mussolini, for one	5. Scorch	9. Done for (Ger.)	10. Cavities	12. Beetle	13. Conform	14. Misplaced	15. Mr. and	16. Land measure	17. Half an em	18. At a distance	20. Hawk parrot	21. Affected manners	22. Half a quart	23. It was signed at Runnymede	26. Frozen desserts	27. French river	28. River Valley	29. Let it stand (print.)	30. Bone (anat.)	32. Close to	33. Owns	34. Elliptical	36. TV's George	38. Ascended	39. Harden (var.)	40. Crazy (slang)	41. Blunders	42. Malt beverages	19. Friar's title	20. Employ	21. Matured	22. Rural letter	23. Desert phe-nom-enom	24. Any ketone	25. Hasten	29. Auctions	30. Malt kilns	31. Weaver's reed	33. Mister (Ger.)	35. Ballot	37. Rough envelope of chestnut	38. Arab garment

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Notice of Sale of Xerographic Copier Machines

Notice is hereby given that the Robeson County Board of Commissioners at a regular meeting held on March 17, 1997, at the Robeson County Administration Building, 701 North Elm Street, Lumberton, North Carolina, Accepted the Proposal submitted by C.O.M. Inc. of Lumberton, North Carolina, to furnish xerographic copy service and to purchase 57 copy machines for the bid price of \$34,475.00. These machines were offered under sealed proposals and opened on February 12, 1997 at 2:00 PM. And said sale shall be consummated by the Robeson County Manager no sooner than 10 days after publication of this advertisement.