

CELEBRATING THE LIFE
OF
Leroy Edgar Browne, Sr.

Sunrise
May 30, 1916

Sunset
January 21, 2007



Services

Saturday, January 27, 2007

Twelve Noon

Brick Baptist Church
St. Helena Island, South Carolina

Pastor Abraham Murray, Officiating

Life Profile of Leroy E. Browne, Sr.

Leroy Edgar Browne, Sr. peacefully entered into eternal rest on Sunday, January 21, 2007 at his home on St. Helena Island, South Carolina. The eldest of eight children, he was born on St. Helena Island to the late George and Redell Browne on May 30, 1916.

He accepted Christ as his savior at a young age and was baptized into the fellowship of Brick Baptist Church where he was a member for the past eighty-four years. He faithfully served as the church treasurer, a member of the Board of Trustees and a member of various auxiliaries for most of his life.

Leroy began his education at Penn Normal Industrial and Agricultural School and graduated in the Class of 1934. Like many other Penn alumni, Browne went on to further his education at Hampton Institute (now Hampton University) in Virginia where he studied carpentry and drafting and graduated in 1940. He continued a life-long affiliation with Penn Community Services, where he later became the superintendent of buildings and grounds for twenty-five years. His decision to give up his own cabinetry business and come to work at Penn was influenced by his long-time colleague and close friend, Courtney Siceloff.

Leroy Browne's ties to Penn Center connect back to the historic Penn School, one of the first schools for emancipated slaves, where his grand-uncle, a former slave, and his father, George W. Browne, taught basket making at the school. He loved St. Helena Island, the people and the sense of community it evoked in him, which is one reason he devoted himself to a life of public service.

“History was written on a South Carolina sea island when Leroy E. Browne of St. Helena Island recently became the first Negro to win elective office in South Carolina since Reconstruction (1900).” That was how the African American-owned Norfolk (VA) Journal and Guide on July 16, 1960 carried the story of Mr. Browne’s victory in being elected to the five-member Beaufort County Board of Directors. In 1960, the nation was in the throes of an accelerating push for civil rights that would lead to the passage of the Voting Rights Act and the omnibus Civil Rights legislation of 1964. Penn Center received national attention as a meeting place for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Vernon Jordan, Andrew Young, and other young activists of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. As the Civil Rights revolution unfolded, the election of Leroy Browne was a bell-weather of a new day for African Americans in politics in Beaufort County.

“I helped to open the doors so other Blacks could put their feet in the political arena. Whatever else was accomplished, I give credit to the people who served with me. I never viewed my service as any individual feat,” he once said during an interview. He devot-

ed himself to a political career in Beaufort County government that extended from 1960 to 1980. He saw the Beaufort County Board of Directors expand from a five-member board with only one African American member, namely himself, to a County Council form of government with nine members with an African American majority by the 1970's. Browne's tenure of selfless service benefited not only the residents of St. Helena Island, but also the citizens of Beaufort County at large. The Beaufort County Council honored him and dedicated the Leroy E. Browne Health Services Center in 1980, the first health center to be established for the residents of St. Helena Island.

During Browne's twenty-year tenure on the County Board, he served on a variety of county committees, which included chairman of roads and bridges, public service planning, public buildings, health, budget, capital equipment, and personnel. He also held membership in the NAACP, the Low Country Regional Council, the Board of Directors of the Sea Island Federal Credit Union, the Sea Island Farmers Co-op, and the Executive Committee of the Democratic Party. Upon his retirement from the Beaufort County Council in 1980, Browne received numerous honors, including The Order of the Palmetto, presented by the former Governor Richard Riley as the highest distinction awarded to South Carolinians for their accomplishments and contributions to the state. In 2004, Browne was honored by the South Carolina Voter Education Project and presented with the "Trail Blazer" award for his contributions in encouraging African Americans to become registered voters and to participate in the political process.

Browne once said his bid for election to the County Board was inspired by his sense of community service taught to him at Penn School . He was motivated to become involved in the Civil Rights movement when he first met Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference when they attended retreats at Penn Center in the early 1960's.

Leroy Browne was committed to his faith in God, his family and his community. In 1945, he wedded his help mate and beloved wife, Corinne Jefferson Browne, with whom he shared a blessed marriage for 61 years. He leaves to cherish his memories his loving and devoted children: Leroy E. Browne, Jr. (Lithonia, GA), Carol A. Garner (Suwanee, GA), Rosalyn A. Browne (St. Helena Island, SC), Cynthia B. Husband (Stone Mountain, GA), and Martha Douglas (Beaufort, SC); a beloved daughter-in-law, Mildred K. Browne; four sons-in-law, Curtis Garner, Daniel Husband and Ronald Douglas; three sisters, Mabel Jenkins (Garnett, SC), Carol McArthur (Douglasville, GA) and Elizabeth Armstrong (White Plains, NY); two brothers, George W. Browne, Jr. (St. Helena Island, SC) and William Browne (Haverstraw, NY); a step-brother, Curtis Gillison (Stone Mountain, GA); a sister-in-law, Florence Browne; a brother-in-law, Beckett Jenkins; nine grandchildren; two great-grandchildren; and a host of nieces, nephews and other relatives.