

# Claude Matthews Brewster

## Registry of Honor

### 2003

Claude Brewster was born and raised in Hollywood, Alabama to Ellen Matthews and Michael Sherrod Brewster, one of five children. He was given the nickname, "City Dude" by his grandfather. He was rarely called by his given name, except for family, but rather "Doodie", "Coach", or "C.M."

He and his brother Lent attended Willis Taylor Prep School in Huntsville and Howard College in Birmingham (currently Samford University) on football scholarships from 1923-1927. He was a four year letterman at the school and received some acclaim as stated in his yearbook, "It was Doodies' toe that started the game in every fracas". He was a founding member of the Pi Kappa Phi Fraternity at Howard. He later attended graduate school at Peabody College in Nashville, Tennessee.

Following graduation from Howard in 1927, he accepted a position as football coach and teacher at Sheffield High School. On his arrival for the interview, Claude was met at the train station by a young teacher named Marquerite Johnson. She was sent by Superintendent L.E. Creel as a welcoming committee. Two years later, they were married on July 27, 1929, in Bowling Green, Kentucky. They had two daughters Carol Ann and Martha Ellen and five grandchildren.

During his first ten years in Sheffield he concurrently coached football, basketball, and baseball as well as taught classes. The last seven years he served as principal of the high school. His football teams total record was 58-25-10. The 1929 and 1930 teams won Tennessee Valley and Tri-Cities Championships and in contention 1931. The 1929 team also won the North Alabama Championship. The team mascot was renamed "Bulldogs" in honor of his alma mater.

He was named Superintendent of Sheffield City Schools in 1937, in which capacity he served 33 years until his retirement in 1970. During his tenure the depression (1929-1934), WWII (1941-1945), and intergration (1960's) left their mark on the town and the school system- both changed and grew and ultimately prospered. With the exception of the Alabama Avenue School, every school building in use at the time of his retirement was built during his administration, with the number of schools and enrollment doubling: from 1,500 to 3,000 students, from 4 to 8 school buildings, and a budget of \$49,000 to \$133,000. According to an article in the *Florence Times*, "Brewster is the man who almost literally

built the Sheffield school system. He served three generations of children and two generations of buildings...helping to build the city of Sheffield.”

He was actively involved in civic and community affairs: founding Board of Directors Alabama Public Television Commission, at local, state and national levels; e.g. Alabama Athletic Association; A.E.A.; past president Rotary International Sheffield; past president Tennessee Valley Athletic Association Chapter; founding board member of the Shoals Teacher's Credit Union; founding member of Alabama Chapter of A.A.R.P.; founding board member and chairman (1947-1977) of Muscle Shoals Regional Library System; active Coast Guard Reserve during World War II; Tri-Cities Director, University of Alabama Defense Training Program during World War II and Veteran training post war; and president of the Alabama Athletic Association.

The Board of Education named Village One School after him at the time of his retirement. He enjoyed a close connection with the children and the faculty at “C.M. Brewster Elementary School”. He was quoted as saying, “The greatest and most important change in schools during my time has been the change in individualized instruction. Children have to be able to adjust in order to find and enjoy a good life...the one thing that is gratifying to me about the hundreds of students who have graduated is that for the most part they have turned out to be substantial citizens and are making a contribution. I want to express my sincere appreciation to the people of Sheffield who supported the schools with their taxes and interest and in cooperating in every way. To my knowledge there has never been a school tax measure submitted to the people of Sheffield that has not been approved. This is very rare and an indication of the support we have received. I have had a long and satisfying life.” He would have been very touched and honored to know that flags flew at half-mast at the Sheffield schools at the time of his death.