

Newly ordained deacon's faith rooted in Lowcountry

Thanks to Vernie Singleton of Hilton Head Island for sharing the story with deep island roots.

"A MISSION OF FAITH, FAMILY AND COMMUNITY"

By Vernie Singleton

Congratulations to the Rev. Afrika Latrice Campbell, daughter of Solomon "Sol" and Della



Campbell of Spanish Wells on Hilton Head Island. Latrice, a second-grade teacher at Hilton Head Island International Elementary School, was ordained as a deacon at the African Methodist Episcopal Church's Seventh Epis-



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copal District annual conference at the historical Emanuel A.M.E. Church in Charleston on Sept. 23. She hopes to seek full pastorship by receiving a master's of divinity degree.

This dual mission of ministry and education is anchored in history and tradition.

Latrice now mirrors the walk

of her great-grandfather, the Rev. Solomon C. Campbell Sr., born on Hilton Head Island in 1874. He pastored at Beach City Road's First African Baptist Church, established in 1862.

And like his great-granddaughter, the Rev. Solomon Campbell was in the early 1900s also a school teacher on Hilton Head. He attended the present day South Carolina State University in Orangeburg and is recognized as one of the island's most dedicated black educators. According to his grandson, Solomon, he routinely rowed a bateau from Brams Point across Broad Creek to reach his students at Braddock Point, now Harbour Town.

The Rev. Solomon Campbell's students included the late trans-

portation and community-service icon, Charlie Simmons Sr., who at age 99 died in 2005. He also taught in the Chaplin community. It was there that Henry Driessen, a business owner, board member of the Palmetto Electric Cooperative and member of the first Town of Hilton Head Island Town Council, benefited from his instruction. So did my father, the late Diogenese Singleton, an entrepreneur and school teacher.

EDUCATION

Teaching and the ministry were among the most accessible and respected professions open to blacks in the segregated United States during the 20th century. Opportunities were

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especially limited on isolated Hilton Head, but the island community of farmers, fishermen and skilled artisans survived by living off the land after having spent generations as slaves creating wealth for others with their labor and ingenuity.

But although the native black community was historically crippled by a lack of economic resources and social opportunities, some managed to climb the education ladder.

Dr. Thomas Robinson is recognized as the first native island African American to receive a Ph.D. In 1954, he graduated with a degree in education administration from Pennsylvania State University, then called Pennsylvania State College.

Latrice Campbell is a 1996 graduate of Georgia Southern University. As a member of an extended family of community servants, including her well recognized cousin Emory Campbell, Latrice comes from a lineage of educators.

Early members include Julia Campbell, wife of the Rev. Solomon Campbell, and their son and daughter, Reginald Campbell and Earlene Frazier. Earlene was the wife of the late island entrepreneur, Arthur Frazier. Other family members have pursued this noble profession as well.

An education was not easy to attain on Hilton Head since the school year for blacks was limited to only three months and Beaufort County did not build schools for black native islanders until 1933 when the Cherry Hill School (now the St. James Baptist Church annex) was built.

It was common for islanders and mainland blacks who aspired to go beyond the eighth grade to relocate to Savannah or to attend either Mather, Shanklin or the Penn School, all private boarding institutions in northern Beaufort County.

Those who sought college degrees often had to "catch rides" to Savannah to attend

Savannah State College, now Savannah State University.

CHURCH

Although of a more recent and privileged generation, Latrice has encountered her share of sacrifices as well. For the past three years, while a full-time teacher, she commuted on weekends to Charleston to attend classes sponsored by the South Carolina Conference Board of Examiners of the African Methodist Episcopal Seventh District.

As a member of Queen Chapel A.M.E. Church, which in September celebrated its 146th anniversary, Latrice, with a bold and articulate voice, often gives the invocation for Sunday worship service, teaches Sunday School and frequently delivers the monthly Youth Sermon at the sanctuary on Beach City Road.

"She's found her calling in teaching, and she's found her calling in preaching," and in working with young people, says her mother, Della. She recalls when, as a teenager, her daughter deterred a young boy from shoplifting.

There may be an inner pulse that stimulates a follower to the ministry, but Della and Solomon believe that their daughter was spiritually motivated early in life by her two grandmothers, Margaret Campbell and Minerva Hunter. Both helped raise her.

Minerva made sure Latrice attended church and Sunday School and participated in church programs, even playing the piano.

Margaret often spoke favorably of her pastor and father-in-law, who was her teacher at Braddock Point and actually hand-picked her to marry his son. She was a member of the Church of Christ on Spanish Wells Road and involved her granddaughter in daily prayers in her home.

Many share in lighting Latrice's path to the ministry, but her parents recall the definite influence of the Rev. Oliver Thomas, deceased husband of native islander and educator, Julia Grant Thomas. He

encouraged and coached her nearer to the cross. She also sought the leadership of her pastor, the Rev. Edward Alston, who serves as a devout mentor at Queen Chapel.

ANSWERING THE CALL

With a host of influences and her own conviction, Latrice has stepped out on faith. The ministry provides a chance for one to teach as well as to preach. Latrice's parents — known for operating a vegetable stand on Spanish Wells Road — say she has embraced this opportunity.

Della says her daughter "realized her calling" to teach when she was a teacher's assistant at the Hilton Head Island Elementary School earlier in her career. Because she recognized she loved working with children, she pursued her master's degree in education from Wheelock College of Boston. Prior to entering the education field, she worked in accounting for Xerox in Rochester, N.Y., and while there, became a licentiate in Baber A.M.E. Church under the Rev. Norvel Goff.

Many run from "the calling" to the ministry, including Latrice, say her parents. But she eventually heeded the voice that only she could hear and answer. Now she is the first female to be a deacon at Queen Chapel A.M.E.

Aunts, cousins and uncles were present at the A.M.E. Annual Conference in Charleston to witness church and family history in the making. Latrice now tends the fire started by her great-grandfather who ignited the spark of community service four generations ago. The light still burns brightly in the camp of the Campbell family, which continues to supply a source of community leaders.

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