

Seth Rogers Brooks

St. Lawrence '22

Oxford Cup Roll N° 001

When the Oxford Cup was established as a recognition for living Betas of Achievement, there was simply no question that the first to be so recognized would be Dr. Seth R. Brooks. "Beta's living legend," he also ranked as one of the foremost spokesman for the entire American fraternity system.

He was executive officer of Beta Theta Pi as General Secretary 1950-60, a decade when the Administrative Secretaries reporting to him from the Oxford office were Ralph Fey and Fred Brower. He was the Fraternity's President for two terms, 1960-66.

Since 1951, each issue of *The Beta Theta Pi* magazine had carried an essay by Dr. Brooks under the heading "Inter Fratres." These had been reprinted often in the magazines of other Greek societies. many of these essays as well as some of his sermons and other addresses had been assembled in a 1967 volume, *In Beta's Broad Domain*, published by the Fraternity.

Dr. Brooks received the honorary degree Doctor of Divinity from Miami (Ohio) University at its 1955 Commencement — the morning after delivering a baccalaureate address in an outdoor Miami Field setting made memorable by his race with ominous approaching rain clouds. He also had given Greek Week and other addresses at Miami.

He was pastor of the Universalist National Memorial Church in Washington from 1939 until retirement in 1979. He continued to make his home in Washington. His wife Corinne, a leader in Washington community affairs for many years, died in 1983.

He had been a perennially exciting speaker at Beta Conventions for many years, as recently as the previous August, attending his 50th Convention. This was more than any other living Beta had attended. Four of these had been at Miami, the Centenary in 1939 and other anniversary Conventions in 1954, 1964 and 1979.

At the 1979 Convention, a new dimension had been added to the Beta student aid program with establishment of the Seth R. Brooks and Corinne H. Brooks Scholarship Fund. In contrast to other scholarships offering assistance to Beta undergraduates or Beta graduate students, this fund provides for sons *or* daughters of Betas, wherever they might attend college; membership in Beta Theta Pi is not a requisite. First donor to this new fund was the outgoing president of the Fraternity, Dr. James G. Martin, former Davidson College chemistry professor, later a Congressman and by this time Governor of North Carolina.

Dr. Brooks' achievements had not been limited to Beta Theta Pi or any other aspect of collegiate life. One of his "Inter Fratres" essays titled "Freedom Within" had gained him a Freedoms Foundation Award in 1967. His alma mater, St. Lawrence University, which had awarded him an honorary degree in 1936, named him in 1979 recipient of its Sol Feinstone Award for "significant contributions to advance the

freedom of man to pursue his individual religious beliefs.” He also had received the 1966 National Interfraternity Conference Gold Medal Award and the 1969 Lambda Chi Alpha Interfraternity Service Award.

Recollections and Reflections of Seth R. Brooks and Corinne H. Brooks, prepared as an oral history edited by William Lloyd Fox, *St. Lawrence '75*, was published by the board of trustees of his church in 1977.

Dr. Brooks was born in New York City in 1901. He was graduated from St. Lawrence University in 1922, began preaching in churches near Canton before finishing theology school, and received St. Lawrence’s Bachelor of Divinity in 1924. He attended his first Beta convention as a sophomore in 1919, served the Fraternity as a district chief and as alumni affairs commissioner for much of the next 20 years and went to Washington from a pastorate at Malden, Mass.

He was a member of the budget committee of the District of Columbia Community Chest 1942-45, member of the General Commission of the Army and Navy Chaplains 1940-46, chairman of the Committee on Religious Life in Washington longer than any other person, president of the 500-member Washington Ministerial Union 1954-55 and first minister to be a member of Planned Parenthood.

When Congress established an Alcoholism Clinic for the District of Columbia in 1946, he was named on its first advisory board. He participated in the 1960 White House Conference on Children and Youth.

Seth passed away at age 86 on October 7, 1987. He would have protested any description of that passing as “unexpected,” for he had lived like a man ready for anything. The rest of us would never have been ready to lose him.

Robert T. Howard, DePauw '37, Historian