



Sir Harold Bernard St. John

Chancellor, it may surprise those with only a nominal acquaintance with Barbados that a man with the noble name St. John should become an icon of the parish of Christ Church; but for those with a more intimate knowledge of Barbadian heroes and patriots there is no surprise. Sir Harold may have been born in Christ Church, lived and loved and had his being in Christ Church, but his genes are the genes of St. John! For his maternal grandfather was the illustrious blacksmith, inventor, planter and landowner Miller Austin of Malvern in St. John – the first man of colour to infiltrate the bastion of the plantocracy of that parish 100 years ago. This validates the claim of the parish of St. John to a share in the aura of this equally illustrious grandson, both son of the soil and son of the seed of the parish of St. John.

Sir Harold, or “Bree”, as he was known all his life, was born on August 16th 1931. He was educated at Foundation School and then the institution on Crumpton Street; from there he proceeded to University College, London, founded by the liberal philosopher Jeremy Bentham in 1829 and described a year later as “that Godless Institution on Gower Street”. Bree graduated in law in 1953 and was called to the bar in 1954. He wasted no time in setting up his law practice at home that year, and was appointed Queen’s Counsel with astonishing speed in 1969. He gave generously of his time both to the University’s Caribbean Law Institute and to young lawyers in need of advice.

He specialized in corporate and civil law, including international law, international trade and law of the sea, in Barbados, the Eastern Caribbean and the twin republic. Indeed he chaired the Committee to negotiate an agreement on Bajan flying fish in the Bajan waters between Barbados and Barbados Bay, Tobago, former dependency of Barbados in the seventeenth century! But he has been the quintessential Caribbean man. Following in the footsteps of Sir Grantley Adams, his predecessor as leader of

the Barbados Labour Party, he has promoted Federation and regionalism in all its forms, with all his might, and he has passed the baton to his successor, the Right Honorable Owen Arthur, as regional leader on CSME.

But “Bree”’s legendary profile has much more to do with his political life. He came to prominence first as a Senator in 1964, and as leader of the lobby for a “Little Eight” Federation, after the destruction of the West Indies Federation. His service to the nation as a member of Parliament began in 1966 but his early idealism and attention to Parliament lost him his seat twice in a 30 year career as Parliamentarian – a unique record in many ways. He served as Minister of Trade, Tourism, Industry and International Transport and Caribbean Affairs, as Deputy Prime Minister from 1976 to ’85 and Prime Minister from 1985 to ’86. To his many achievements were added Privy Councillor, Knight of St. Andrew and Ambassador Extraordinaire Plenipotentiary.

Chancellor, Sir Harold’s life was lived with faith, hope and charity, but the greatest of these was Hope – Stella Rosita Hope, Lady St. John, who spent nearly 50 years by his side.

And now, in recognition of his enormous contribution to the development of this island, this land, his Rock, I invite you, Chancellor, by the authority vested in you by the Council and Senate of this University, to present to Lady St. John the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Laws *honoris causa* for her late husband, Sir Harold St. John.