

Teacher leaves enduring legacy

Jesse Turner Barfield Jr., teacher and motivator, brought high standards and dedication to his pioneering work as registrar and administrator in the old Aiken House at the corner of Palafox and Cervantes streets when Pensacola Junior College was little more than a post-World War II dream in 1948.

And in 1986 — 36 years later — PJC honored him by naming the administration building for him. He died Monday of a stroke at age 75.

Soft-spoken and beloved by students at Pensacola High School, where he taught biology and was dean of men, the Charleston-born Mr. Barfield came to Escambia County in 1936, first teaching at Molino school.

In 1948, Mr. Barfield and Margaret Andrus Whitney were given the task of organizing a new junior college by PHS Principal James L. McCord. They had the program going in six weeks. He taught biology and was registrar as PJC moved from the old boarding house into the old PHS building fronting Lee Square and then shared in the development of the campus near Pensacola Regional Airport.

Mr. Barfield, who retired in 1971, fondly recalled PJC origins when he

sometimes found himself teaching from inside a closet since the rooms were jammed with students. He shared many interests, among them being president of the Camellia Society and being a charter member of the Pensacola Little Theatre and Actor of the Year in 1939.

Retired PJC President T. Felton Harrison shared in the many tributes to Jesse Barfield through the years, remembering him as “a driving force that started the institution and determined its academic direction and trend which still holds today. Educators who followed him to the institution believed in his philosophy and continued it.”

Always calling himself a teacher, Mr. Barfield counted the swift accreditation PJC earned as his biggest accomplishment.

“It was the most important thing, he thought, in his whole life,” said his wife, Mary Anna (Johansen) Barfield.

The contributions toward ever-growing PJC will remain the enduring legacy of Jesse Turner Barfield, a teacher whose pride of accomplishment — the expanding enrollment at three PJC campuses and a downtown center — will continue to benefit new generations of students in Escambia and Santa Rosa counties.