

*We Call Our Daddy "Mister":
In Defiance of Convention
Life and Times at the Rose Hill Plantation*

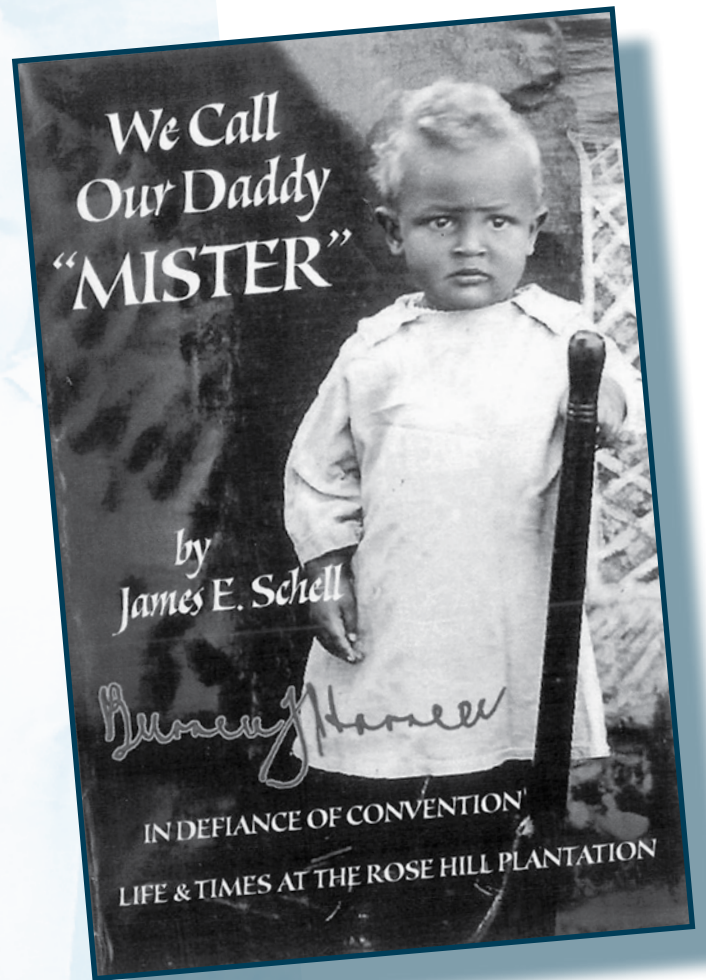
*We Call
Our Daddy
"MISTER"*

By Alpha Pi Boulé Archon James E. Schell II
(HiBisCUn Press, 2006)

Reviewed by Alpha Pi Boulé Archon Marion McCord



Archon Marion McCord



We Call Our Daddy "Mister" is the fascinating true story of a prominent and prosperous early- to mid-twentieth-century Georgia farmer. Burrell Harrell was of a pioneer family whose roots were in England, Virginia and the Carolinas. He controlled some two thousand acres of arable Georgia land and more than five hundred head of cattle. His father fashioned the first successful bale of cotton and passed his entrepreneurial talent on to his fourth son, Burrell. As a young master, Burrell enjoyed his life. He took whatever he wanted, even if by chicanery; he won big at gambling, and he called in his debts – often the sole landholdings of his friends. In 1901, when Burrell was seventeen, his father died, leaving a widow and ten chil-

LIFE & TIMES AT THE ROSE HILL



Archon James E. Schell II

dren. There were three older brothers and two sisters, but Burrell was the strong and responsible one. His father, on his deathbed, made Burrell promise to run the farm and take care of his mother and nine siblings. With this charge, Burrell brought great prosperity to the family – land acquisitions, gristmills, cotton gins, farming equipment and more workers, many of whom were not long out of slavery.

The young southern belles eyed him, for he was considered the most eligible bachelor around. He was expected to go to the cotillions, dance the rounds and serenade the willing. At age twenty-five, when it was time for him to pick a wife, he would have none of it. He had spied the love of his life – a helper in his mother’s kitchen. The eighteen-year-old lass, Rosa, a mulatto, returned his feelings, but the laws of the state of Georgia did not tolerate marriage or romance between whites and Negroes. Defiant, Burrell stood up against all comers, including the local police and the Klan. His maternal family as well as other relatives and friends cajoled and pleaded with him, but he remained adamant.

In defiance of the law, Burrell and his common-law wife, Rosa, had nine children in a house he built with his own hands. Uniquely, Burrell stayed with and raised his family, not generally the case at the time with such liaisons.

These nine children did not appear to be racially mixed, but because their mother was “colored,” this was their label, in accordance with the Race Integrity Law of the South and in white society. Children were always declared to be the race of the mother – except where the unthinkable could have been otherwise. The children had no identity problems, because they were close to their mother’s family. By their own choice, they suffered all the deprivations and indignities imposed on them.

In early-twentieth-century Georgia, wealth was key to one’s standing in the community, and landownership was, by definition, wealth. The last will and testament was the mechanism that enabled landowners to wield power by distributing parcels as they saw fit, but Burrell’s father left no will, so the total estate was his to control, creating deep divisions within the family.

Burrell prepared his own will in 1941, leaving nothing to his children. When Rosa found out about this, she complained bitterly, to no avail. Burrell’s mother – Miss Cordie, as she was affectionately called – railed at him to do “something for his children.” Up to then, she and the rest of her family had denied the existence of the children. Burrell had no defense for this omission. Conflicted, he hadn’t realized that in spite of the fact that they were his seed, he could never bring himself to accept them as his own kind. Yet he loved them and their mother with all his heart.

He agonized for the longest time and supposedly wrote a revised will that left the Rose Hill Plantation to his children. The 282-acre plantation was the key parcel for the entire farm and the breadbasket for all the families – the crown jewel of all of the two thousand acres and other holdings. The revised will did not include Burrell’s female children, a devastating act from which the last two living daughters have not yet recovered. But for some reason, the revised will never saw the light of day.

Today U.S. Interstate Highway 85 runs through Rose Hill Plantation. Burrell waged a “years’ long” battle with the state to prevent the completion of the Highway 85 connector across the Chattahoochee River between Georgia and Alabama, but the all-powerful state, through the right of eminent domain, seized the needed property, paying less than \$150 per acre for it.

The remaining lands belonging to Burrell were willed to the eldest living Harrell male – Roy – who kept it all for himself. At probate he was benevolent enough to allow Rosa to remain in the house that Burrell built for her, but he did not allow her access to the roadway.

In March 2006 the state of Georgia acquired six hundred acres of the Harrell property and leased the land to the Korean government. The KIA Motors Corp. of Korea is now assembling the necessary manufacturing capability for producing more than three hundred thousand automotive units per year.

This book reveals many of the elements that foreshadow the plight of the descendants of the American slave and provides further insight for those who would like to better understand why these descendants have not yet achieved parity in the land of “liberty and justice for all.”

Beta Boulé: A Chronicle of 100 Years Chicago

By Beta Boulé Archon James C. Bruce
(Lulu Publishing, 2008)

Reviewed by Beta Boulé Archon Lerone Bennett, Jr.



Archon Lerone Bennett, Jr.

English professor emeritus Archon James Bruce, the father of Archons James C. Bruce, Jr., and Jason W. Bruce, was inducted into the Boulé on May 17, 1975. He received his A.B. and M.A. degrees from Howard University and his Ph.D. from the University of Chicago in 1963. He was Grammateus of Beta Boulé in 1977–78 and Grapier in 1977. He chronicles the annals of Beta Boulé, Chicago, with a 344-page book that highlights the fraternity’s episodes, the Archons and the local and national offices they have held and other historical highlights. The following is the foreword to that story.

One hundred years after six Philadelphia professional men founded Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity, the organization returned to Philadelphia with a crowd of blue-ribbon witnesses living and dead, a record of ten decades of achievement, and an expanding vision of an international band of brothers committed to service and excellence.

More than 3,000 Archons and Archousai attended the Grand Boulé Centennial Celebration, the largest gather-



ing in the history of the Fraternity – often called the Boulé, meaning, in fraternity parlance, “a council of noblemen.”

The delegates and attendees, meeting in style in the salons and the grand ballroom of the Marriott Hotel, presented a telling contrast with the restricted and largely segregated world of 1904 Philadelphia. There, on May 15 of that year, a pharmacist, a dentist and two physicians—Henry McKee Minton, Dr. Algernon B. Jackson, Dr. Edwin C. Howard and Dr. Richard J. Warrick—met and announced to themselves and others that a new world was coming. Within two weeks two more doctors—Robert J. Abele and Eugene T. Hinson—joined, increasing the membership by 50 percent.

The new world the six men dreamed of in 1904 materialized and renewed itself in 2004 in a week of celebration and rebonding, enlivened by a Boulé-patented round of events, including three black-tie affairs, symposia on black health and black male incarceration, and major addresses from Centennial Grand Sire Archon Calvin O. Pressley, Archon Otis Moss, Jr., former Philadelphia mayor Archon Wilson Goode and financier Archon Vernon Jordan, Jr., among others.

Almost all major speakers stressed what Archon Pressley called “the connectivity” of the celebration, which blended, he said, symbol and substance, and almost all called for a new level of personal and Fraternity involvement in the living problems and challenges of the twenty-first century.

In the keynote address, Archon Vernon Jordan, Jr., presented a twelve-point program for personal and collective renewal, saying, “We must create a new sense of community among our own . . . bridge the growing economic gap within the black community [and] re-Brown Brown to counter the long slide back into de facto segregation.” We must also, he said, “constantly remind the new entrants into the Talented Tenth that their exciting jobs in corporate America, investment banking and law firms are not only the result of their grades and their ability and their school. They did not get there by themselves . . . and they have to know it.”

The delegates and attendees represented 112 member boudés, including a chapter in the Bahamas, and more than 5,000 members. They also represented a virtual Who’s Who of Black America. W.E.B. Du Bois, James Weldon Johnson, Carter G. Woodson, John Hope Franklin, Charles Drew, Hale Woodruff, William Hastie, Walter White, Martin Luther King, Jr., John H. Johnson, Earl Graves, Paul Williams, Arthur Ashe, Benjamin Mays, Maynard Jackson, Kenneth Chenault – call the roll: They were and are members of a bond that is primarily black but includes some nonblack members. One of the best-known white Archons was Jack Greenberg, who was deeply involved in the *Brown v. Board of Education* struggle and who succeeded Thurgood Marshall as executive director of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund.

Originally conceived as an organization that would contain the “best of Skull and Bones of Yale and of Phi Beta Kappa,” the Fraternity stresses, as its founders stressed, family and the need for a social, spiritual and communal gathering space for black professionals. The need, paradoxically, Archon Pressley and others argue, is greater today than it was in 1904. Some of the members are second- and third-generation Archons, but an increasing number come from the ranks of high achievers with no previous Boulé connections. What makes the Boulé’s success all the more interesting is that it did not seek public notice until the 1960’s and 1970’s. Since that time, it has mounted a number of outreach programs, including a mentoring program, a public-policy committee and a \$200,000 scholarship program.

Called by some observers a superfraternity because it includes members from all major black fraternities, Sigma Pi Phi, unlike other fraternities, does not have college chapters and only accepts members with a college degree and “a record of demonstrated excellence” in a chosen field. Members say they have followed the mandate of founder Archon Henry Minton, the pharmacist who later earned a medical degree, who said that new members should be “selected [not] on the basis of brains alone, but in addition to congeniality, culture, and good fellowship, they should have behind them [at initiation] a record of accomplishments, not merely be men of promise and good education.” Archon



Archon James C. Bruce

Minton, who was the first Grand Sire Archon, helped organize the second chapter, Beta Boulé of Chicago, which celebrated its centennial in 2007. The third boulé was organized in Baltimore in 1908. It is worth noting, at least for perspective, that some of the founders of the first chapters, notably Archons Charles E. Bentley and F.L. McGhee of Beta Boulé, were also cofounders of the landmark Niagara Movement, which created the foundation for the NAACP.

Former Grand Sire Archon Pressley said that the Boulé is “the quintessential brotherhood for African American men.” Former Grand Sire Archon Charles Teamer, a New Orleans banker and financier, said that the Boulé “is unique because no other organization brings together so many talented leaders . . . and no other organization provides such an unparalleled opportunity to mentor, change structures and build bridges.” He added that in the next hundred years Sigma Pi Phi will have an opportunity to extend its vision to communities across the world. To meet this challenge, the Fraternity must, he said, replenish its roots, bridge the widening gap between male generations, and reach out to new constituencies who are dreaming in their own day and in their own language the same dream that moved the six founding fathers who sat down in a house on Philadelphia’s South Tenth Street in 1904 and dreamed a dream that changed themselves and history. Ω

Archon Lerone Bennett, Jr., is a historian and author of ten books, including Before The Mayflower: A History of Black America. This article is adapted from an article in Ebony. Copyright © Ebony magazine. To purchase a copy of this chronicle, contact Lulu Publishing at lulu.com/content/1299565.