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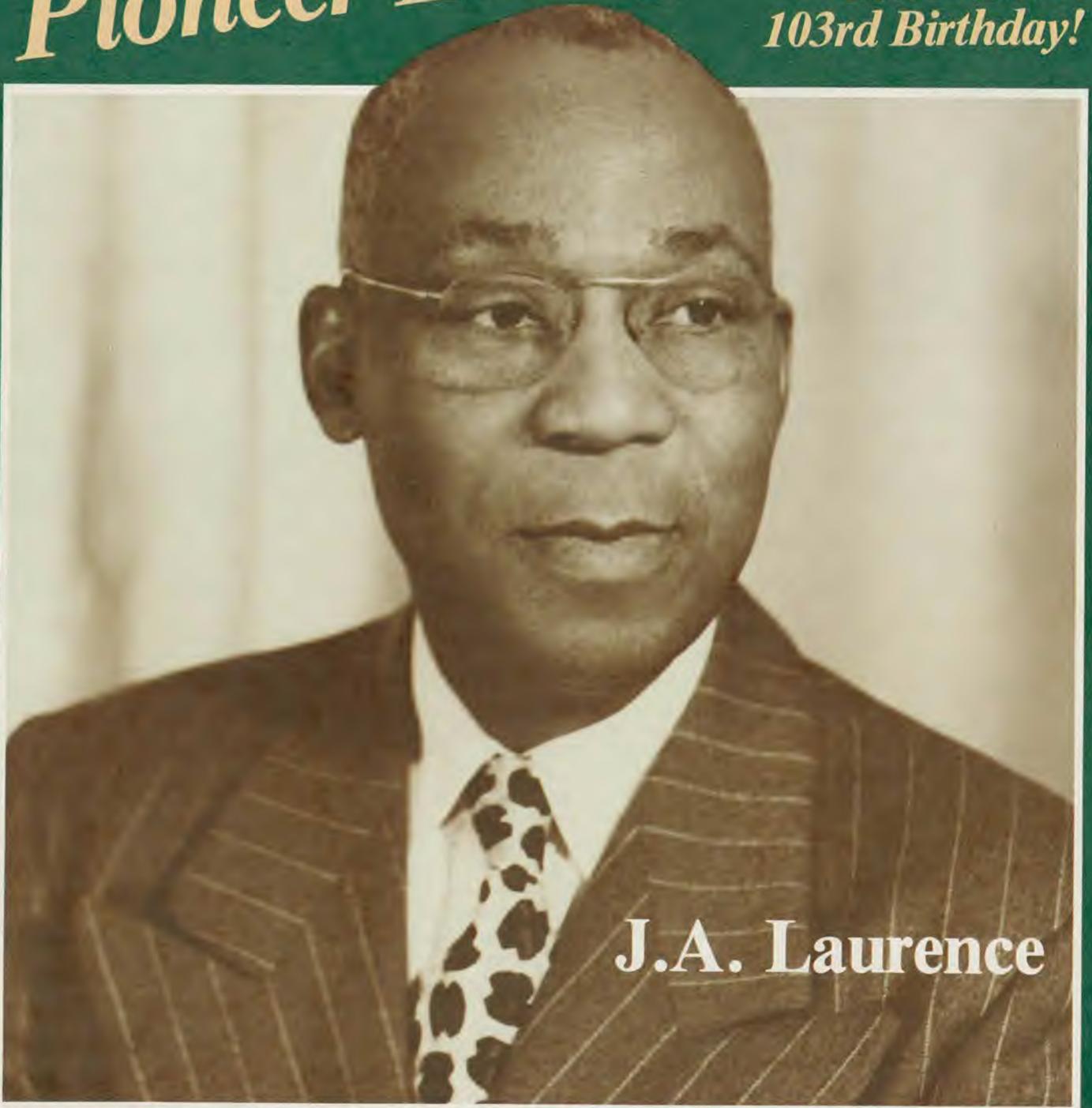
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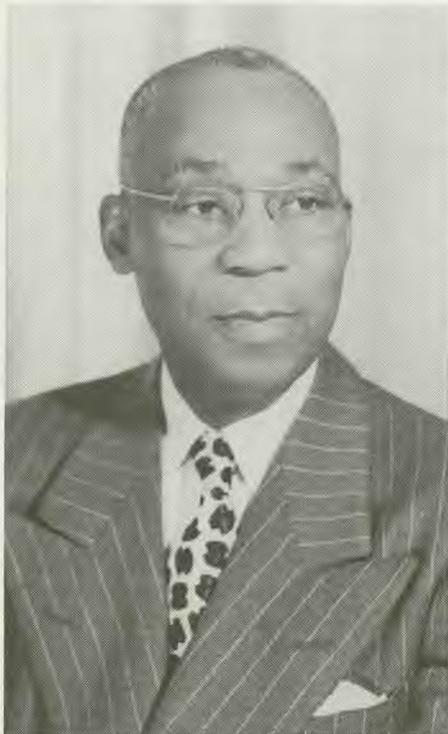
OFFICIAL ORGAN OF THE NORTH AMERICAN REGIONAL CONFERENCE OF
SEVEN DEGREE ADVENTISTS

Pioneer Evangelist . . .

*Celebrates
103rd Birthday!*



J.A. Laurence



J. H. Laurence, pioneer evangelist celebrates 103rd birthday.

J.H. LAURENCE: MAN OF GOD

To give an adequate word-picture of a unique servant of God would exhaust one's vocabulary. Such a person is Joseph Hermanus Laurence. Seven words depict Elder J.H. Laurence most aptly: he is, indeed, a man of God!

At the golden age of 102 years, Elder Laurence is remembered by thousands of senior SDAs and their families as their premier pastor and soul-winning evangelist. They have high regard for J.H. Laurence because he baptized so many of them.

When the contemporaries of John the Baptist asked who he was, John replied, simply, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness. Prepare ye the way of the Lord." No more fitting words can be found to describe the life and work of Elder J.H. Laurence.

On the sun-kissed island of St. Kitts, in the town of Basseterre, Joseph Hermanus Warrington Laurence first saw the light of day on Jan. 8, 1885. Years later he became a naturalized citizen of the United States, but still holds fond memories of his birthplace in the Leeward Islands, which were then part of the British West Indies.

His parents, Joseph Daniel and Mary Magdalene Laurence, were members of the Moravian Christian Church. At an early age, the thoughts and interests of their son turned toward God. After his father died, his mother married a Mr. David Samuel Carlisle. Young Joseph's step-father was principal of the Episcopal Intermediate School, where Joseph later served as an instructor.

When he was eight years of age, young Joseph heard for the first time the everlasting gospel proclaimed by the SDA. He was deeply impressed. His mother, however, was bitterly opposed to his acceptance of the message. But his deep convictions were not easily dismissed.

By age eleven, he had vowed to the Lord to keep all of God's commandments, even though he was vigorously opposed by his mother. At age fifteen, he could no longer be held back. His decision to join the SDA Church was unshakable.

Plans for his baptism were made for Easter weekend, March 1900, but his mother locked up his clothes, so he had to wait until the next baptism. He was baptized by Elder A.J. Haysmer in May of that year.

He was then expelled from the Episcopal Intermediate School and forbidden to teach or talk of the SDA message. He suffered many hardships for his faith but held on firmly.

Elder L.A. Spring, who had come from Grand Junction, Colorado to pastor the St. Kitts Church, learned of Laurence's problems and sought to help him. Elder Spring contacted the Dorcas Society of Grand Junction, and eight dear ladies provided funds for Laurence to come to the Oakwood Training School, Huntsville, Alabama to receive an education. Before he left St. Kitts, Joseph engaged in colporteur work for a while under S.A. Wellman.

Like an unquenchable fire shut up in his bones, young Laurence felt a burning desire to preach the everlasting gospel. On March 17, 1903, he left St. Kitts and arrived in New York City March 25. He spent his first night in the home of Elder S.N. Haskell in Brooklyn, NY. The next day, Mrs. Haskell prepared him a big lunch, gave him \$2.00 and sent him on his journey to Oakwood. After three days of slow travel, he arrived in Huntsville, Alabama at midnight. When he arrived, there was no one to greet him except a party of robbers who promptly relieved him of his two dollars.

J.H. landed at Oakwood, pleased but penniless. He recalls that he was the first

foreign student to apply for entrance at the school, which in time, became Oakwood College. He was able to remain in school because the Dorcas Society of Grand Junction, Colorado sent money monthly to assist him.

In those early days, Oakwood suffered from a teacher shortage, especially in mathematics. There was no one to teach algebra. Since J.H. had the knowledge and skill, he was asked to teach.

His formal training and teaching lasted only briefly, for by August 16, 1904, Elder F.R. Rogers asked him to go to Yazoo City, Mississippi as a teacher and preacher.

Elder Edson White was then in charge of the Southern Missionary Society with F.R. Rogers as secretary. Upon arrival in his field of labor, Frank Warnick, a leading Black minister, welcomed him. Another fellow minister, Elder W.H. Sebastian, served as district advisor to the Black preachers.

As pay for his labors in Yazoo City, J.H. earned the grand sum of \$5.00 a week when he got it. But he was undaunted as he taught school during the week and preached at both Sabbath and Sunday night services.

Laurence remembers that in those trying times even one good meal a week was hard to come by. Lima beans, cornbread and dried apples were among food items sent by northern Adventists, who often supplied foodstuffs and clothing.

Edson White's famous house boat, the "Morning Star", which had been converted into a stationary structure, became for J.H. his school building as well as his church. Thus, began the amazing ministry of J.H. Laurence, one of the most productive pastor-evangelists the SDA church has ever had.

The God-directed exploits of J.H. Laurence in the gospel ministry are too numerous to recount in the limited space at our disposal. The most we can do here is to touch upon certain highlights.

When Laurence left Yazoo City, he returned to Oakwood, where he met and married Miss Bela Brandon, whose brother was a leading builder of the Oakwood school. The night after their marriage the newlyweds left for Jackson, Mississippi, where he preached and taught for a while in a building that was built by Elder Edson White.

Because of his young wife's failing health, he returned to Oakwood, and tried to persuade her to remain with her family while he went back to the field of labor. But she was determined to stay by his side.

"for better or for worse." So the two went next to Birmingham, Alabama. God richly blessed the work there.

Evangelist Laurence erected a giant tent in the city of Mobile, Alabama. He worked with Elder Sidney Scott, who taught him much about tent evangelism. The work was growing rapidly, but working conditions were hard and overtaxing. During the evangelistic series in Mobile, Mrs. Bela Laurence slipped away in death. It was a stunning blow, but Laurence leaned on his Lord for strength. At the close of the meetings, great numbers were baptized in the warm waters of the Gulf of Mexico.

In 1908, he labored in Selma, Alabama. With God's blessing and the assistance of Elder Buckner, a church was raised up there. In 1910, Evangelist J.H. Laurence was ordained to the gospel ministry.

New challenges and rich blessings awaited him as he moved on to Florida. Meanwhile, he met and married the former Geneva Wilson. She gave him great encouragement and support and became an ideal mother for their six children — Hermanus, Genevieve, Jocelyn, Dorothea, Mae and Carty.

During the long years of his fruitful ministry, God used Elder Laurence to raise up a number of churches and to baptize, among hundreds of converts, some who would become prominent leaders in God's church.

Sent to assist Laurence in his Florida crusades was a young man with whom he had worked in the Mobile tent effort. That young man was none other than Elder G.E. Peters, who, for years, was a stalwart leader of God's people.

Among those baptized in Florida was a talented eighteen year old young man and his family. That young man was Frank Loris Peterson, who went on to become a president of Oakwood College and the first Black vice-president of the General Conference of SDA.

During the Florida crusade, O.B. Edwards, former Academic Dean of Oakwood College, heard J.H. Laurence preach and later came into the church.

Leaving the work in Florida in the capable hands of George E. Peters, Elder Laurence went to Louisville, Kentucky, where he housed the congregation in a new church. There he also baptized a Mr. Winston, who became a noted preacher of God's truth and whose son, Elder Joseph Winston, also became a minister and administrator in the church.

Elder Laurence accepted a call to be the Southern Union Evangelist in 1916. During

his crusade in Memphis, Tn., he baptized a young railroad man, Louis Bland. Elder L.H. Bland became first president of the Northeastern Conference. Through Louis, Elder Laurence met Frank, the brother of Louis, whom he also baptized. Frank Bland became an outstanding regional conference president, and later a vice president of the General Conference.

During the course of his ministry in Memphis, Elder Laurence baptized the father of Elder Dunbar Henri, missionary to Africa and subsequently a vice-president of the General Conference.

Returning to Jackson, Mississippi for a series of meetings, Elder Laurence baptized the parents of Elder Calvin E. Moseley. This was the first Adventist preacher young Moseley had heard. Later, C.E. Moseley came into the church and became a powerful preacher and a premier teacher of a generation of preachers.

In Paducah, Ky., Elder Laurence raised up a church with a mixed congregation of Whites and Blacks—a rarity in those days. Always he fought strongly against all forms of racial prejudice and bigotry. Very often his audiences consisted of a "racial rainbow." One of the White elders of a local Presbyterian church joined God's Remnant Church under his ministry.

In 1921, Elder Laurence accepted Elder S.E. Wight's invitation to go to Omaha, Ne. There he baptized Bernice Reynolds, the wife of Louis B. Reynolds, author and first Black editor of Message Magazine.

In 1924, he built a church in Denver, CO., and invited the governor of the state to lay the cornerstone. Moving to Topeka, Ks., in 1927, Elder Laurence built a church, where it was his privilege to baptize the mother of noted Evangelist and Voice of Prophecy crusader, B.R. Spears. In Kansas City, Ks., he built up the work and paid off the church debt.

Laurence moved to South Bend, In. in 1931, where he baptized young Charles E. Dudley, who has been for years the eminent president of the South Central Conference. He baptized also Elder Dudley's wife, sister, brother and mother. He built churches in South Bend and Elkhart and organized churches in Battle Creek and Cassopolis, Mi.

Elder Laurence went to Detroit in 1933 to pastor and enlarge the work there. In 1935, he moved to Indianapolis where he built a new church and baptized over three hundred in one tent effort. On Christmas Day, 1937, he had the unspeakable joy of baptizing his own mother into the truth as it

is in Jesus Christ—the Truth she had once bitterly opposed!

The rigors of travel and constant stresses of the work took their toll on the vitality of the second Mrs. Laurence, and she passed to her rest in March of 1938. By God's grace, Elder Laurence continued to preach and care for his family. During his travels, he met and married his present wife, Mrs. Cordelia Laurence, on Feb. 29, 1940.

In 1941, Elder Laurence went to Gary, Indiana to build up the work. He was assisted by Dunbar Henri and Fred Crowe.

The next year he moved to Cleveland, Oh., erected the "big blue tent," and baptized hundreds. Among those baptized were Elders Frank Jones of the General Conference and T. Marshall Kelly, the "sweet singer."

Elder Theodore Carcich, president of the Washington Conference, invited Laurence to come to Seattle in 1952. He found about twenty-five members in a rundown building. Within a few weeks, he sold the old church and moved the congregation into ample quarters. Then the Holy Spirit used him again to add hundreds to the membership. In one tent effort, he baptized the Bushnell family—thirteen in all. Three sons of the Bushnells have become prominent leaders in the SDA church.

With evangelistic fervor unabated, Elder Laurence continued to carry a full work load, long after the time for his retirement.

In recent years, Elder Laurence has suffered the encroachments of old age. But his dear wife, Mrs. Cordelia Laurence, has faithfully sustained her husband with tender loving care and beautiful home surroundings. Also, Elder Laurence's daughter, Mrs. Genevieve Richards and his son-in-law, Elder C.T. Richards continually care for him. The writer is indebted to them for more data than could be crammed into this portrayal.

We have told only a small part of the story of J.H. Laurence: Man of God. We have named only a few of those that he led to Christ. Only in God's kingdom will we have the thrill of knowing the whole story.

At 102 years, Elder Laurence's eyes still brighten with heavenly light when he hears news of the triumphs of the everlasting gospel. One of his prayers has been that he might live to see Jesus come. With world conditions as they are, who knows but that his earnest prayer will be answered.

—James E. Dykes,
free lance writer,

former editor of Message Magazine
and former professor of communications
at Oakwood College.