

COVER STORY

BLANK PAGES IN SDA HISTORY

Dr. Charles D. Joseph once said, "When our Lord was born in the cattle's stable some two thousand years ago, it was tax-paying and census-taking time. The census bureau never thought to go near the animals' dwellings, thus Jesus' birth was never counted by mankind in those days." Here was the best thing that ever happened to mankind and "we didn't know who You were."

Black citizens in America have made many footprints in the "sands of time." Likewise in the ranks of the SDA church, they have been a blessing and have made memorable contributions and oftentimes the story goes untold.

I asked some young adults who Dorie Miller was, and to my surprise they had never heard of his bravery at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. This black sailor died in defense of his country.

Some names of Seventh-day Adventists that we would do well to become acquainted with are Etta Littlejohn, the Dotsons, J. L. Moran, F. L. Peterson, Pastor Holloway, Arentha Barton, G. E. Peters, J. G. Dasent, O. A. Troy, Sr., Thomas Allison, A. Samuel Rashford, Emma Minnis, Luther Milligan, Rose Fountain, H. W. Kibble, J. K. Humphrey, M. G. Nunez, Dr. Rodriguez, Eleanor Storey, J. H. Wagner, Sr., Louis Bland, Charles Lee, R. F. Warnick, C. S. Myles, A. T. Maycock, W. S. Lee, H. R. Murphy, H. D. Singleton, A. Gaines Thompson and J. H. Laurence.

A history of black Seventh-day Adventists cannot be told briefly, nor momentarily, but let us mention a few momentous events in capsule.

Days of slavery (1843-1863): The first twenty years of the preachings of William Foy and William Miller concerning the second advent of Christ to the earth, some few colored people in the north became members—Sojourner Truth, the abolitionist, Frederick Douglas and later his daughter, Mrs. Spragg. William Foy has been pictured as one refusing a call to preach for the Lord and this is in error. He labored in the ranks of Adventism until his dying day.

Civil and post-Civil War days (1863-1883): The second twenty years of Adventism enjoyed the blessings of heaven. Battle Creek College and Hos-



One highlight of black SDA history was the 1965 tri-conference worker's meeting held in Ardmore, Oklahoma. The conferences involved were South Central, Southwest Region and Central States.

pital (an Adventist citadel) was in its glory and its fame extended far and wide. Some 60 or more blacks attended the school for professional training to serve their people, among them Anna Knight, missionary to India, Dr. Lottie Blake, founder of the Rock Creek Sanitarium, and Judge J. Price Pearson, a freed slave in Alabama who not only gave health treatments to white people but to blacks as well in the Birmingham community. He served as a county judge during the reconstruction.

During this time a church was organized at Edgefield Junction, where the Allison family of Clarksville, Tennessee, held membership. The mother of Edna Lett Williamson was taken from Lebanon, Tennessee, to become the first black student at Battle Creek Academy. All was not rosy for her in those days.

The crisis years (1883-1903): The third twenty years found the work on the upward swing among our people in America. Missionaries had been sent to various parts of the globe to tell the story but very little thought was given for this downtrodden race to join the church. At this time the KKK was on the rise. Time was not good for missionary endeavors among our people, so no missionaries were sent until Ellen G. White had a vision concerning this vast group in the homeland who had never been invited to become a part of this judgment-bound people.

Alonzo Parker preached the message to his people in Mississippi. Later, Edson White chose the South as a place to labor for blacks and poor whites. Oakwood Training School was established and students were trained to carry the

message to their people, especially in the Southland where most of them lived. Membership totaled 50 with the annual tithe at \$50

World War I (1903-1923): The black soldier fought valiantly in defense of this country. The fourth twenty years also saw the dawn of a new day for the church. The growth in membership necessitated a demand for organizational leadership among these people. A colored department was organized at the General Conference. Consequently, churches and schools began springing up in many parts of the country. There were some 40 schools in Mississippi alone. J. H. Laurence, Sydney Scott, George Peters, E. Nunez and G. Dasent went everywhere preaching the gospel. The membership grew to 9,000 with a tithe income of over \$100,000. Pastor Holloway established the Malamulo Mission Station. Dr. Hastings Banda, who later became president of Malawi, attended Meharry Medical School and made his abode with Seventh-day Adventists in Nashville. W. H. Green, an attorney, became the first man of color to be appointed as a departmental leader at the General Conference.

The Depression Years (1923-1943): The next twenty-year period held years of frustration for leaders of the church. Membership growth in black churches brought challenges and cries for this people to be granted leadership from their own ranks to help solve some of the problems that grew out of changing times. Equal opportunity concepts came to the fore. The church had all facilities segregated—schools, churches, hospitals, publishing houses and conference



Black delegates and visitors to the General Conference session held in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in 1926.

offices. Ellen White had told the brethren, "You have no right to exclude the colored people from your houses of worship." They did not heed her words.

Riverside Hospital was established by Naomi Druillard, a wealthy white lady of the church. J. L. Moran was the first of our people to become president of Oakwood College. J. K. Humphrey and others were dismissed from denominational ranks because they strongly urged and moved forward in the establishment of orphan homes, old folk homes, schools and hospitals to serve the needs of our people inside and outside of the church. Cries came for church organization to meet the growing needs. This was crushed forcefully and promptly. But "Israel still continued to multiply." The needs never went away. The membership had grown to 16,000 with tithe of over \$400,000.

Church fathers (1943-1963): Regional conferences came into being, not by the request of our people but by the behest of church fathers. After some embarrassing incidents, the brethren were given a chance by J. L. McElhany to either integrate or segregate. The brethren chose the latter, so regional conferences came into being.

We should pause to salute those who served as conference leaders in those days—J. G. Dasent, L. H. Bland, J. H. Wagner, Sr., founder of Pine Forge Institute, H. D. Singleton, H. R. Murphy, W. W. Fordham and T. M. Rowe. These made brick without straw. Evangelism was the watchword. New jobs were provided for black students. The pennies stretched, much was accomplished and the membership grew.

A. T. Maycock offered the name

"regional" because of the location around the Great Lakes. All others became regional. Mixed emotions existed among the blacks when regional conferences were born. Most of the leaders, who had come to realize that self-improvement was their only hope, welcomed the move. A few who could not accept the concept moved west or left the country.

Blacks returning from World War II brought a wind of change to the community. The church has kept abreast with the community through the years, socially, politically and economically. Real Christian actions have never led the way, it seems, without some outside force. During this change, the poll tax was outlawed by the Supreme Court, as well as school segregation. However, a position of "separate but equal" was maintained outside and within the church. But a crisis was just ahead. . . .

Evangelism continued to be the thrust in regional conferences. J. G. Thomas, F. S. Keitts, B. W. Abney, Sr., J. H. Laurence, C. S. Myles and D. B. Reid were the stalwarts every young minister sought to work with and emulate.

Some of those God brought on the horizon as top evangelists were E. E. Cleveland, E. C. Ward, L. G. Newton, C. R. Graham and J. E. Cox, Jr. Cleveland and Ward, friendly rivals in evangelism, led the way in soul-winning and people were baptized by the hundreds each year. The work, in spite of reprisals, was being blessed of God.

Dr. Martin L. King came to the fore to prick the conscience of the nation and the world in its dealings with Christian race relations. The world was never to be the same again. Likewise, Dr. Frank

W. Hale stirred the minds of our church leaders with demonstrations which embarrassed some of the older ones, but brought excitement and courage to the young. The church was never to be the same again. Then Pastor F. L. Peterson became the first black vice president of the world conference.

(1963-1983): The nation elected a Roman Catholic to be president of the United States—J. F. Kennedy, whose inaugural speech resounded loudly in the ears of many. "Let the word go forth that the torch has been passed to a new generation." This permeated the blacks of the church as youthful C. E. Bradford, C. E. Dudley and G. R. Earl became conference presidents and F. W. Hale became president of Oakwood College. Times were exciting. "Desegregation" and "total integration" were the themes and dreams of the day.

Within the ranks of the church a young, dynamic and aggressive white leader arose with different ideas: L. J. Leiske. His Christian beliefs were quickly silenced.

The young black leader's frustration heightened as he realized that total integration and acceptance would never become a reality. He was told by leading educators to "get your own." He then sought avenues for his talents to be used to the fullest for a finished work. Regional unions was the avenue to travel.

The words of Pastor M. G. Nunez seemed to echo from the past—"What is wrong with it? You have a black church, why not a black conference?" And now the natural step would be a regional union. The work had grown tremendously. More than 22 percent of membership in the United States was black and over 70 percent of world membership outside America was non-white.

The regional union concept was soon to be voted down. The mood of black leaders everywhere was for these unions, as hundreds crowded the galleries at the Takoma Park church in Washington, D.C., to witness the predominantly white policy-making, policy-voting assembly act against the wishes of this people.

Some appeasements were offered as a few blacks became appointed to posts in unions. This was not the answer. At this assemblage, three vice president posts for the North American Division became vacant. The church, nation and

world watched to see which direction leadership would take to fill this vacancy. After much debate, a black was elected to serve as leader of the richest, strongest, home-based division of the world field. Yes, our hearts were made glad, but this still was not the answer.

(1983): Today black membership in the United States numbers almost 145,000 or 25 percent. The latest tithe figures received from the regional churches show over \$40 million.

Before we end this present twenty-year span, may our joys be filled by seeing Jesus, our Lord, return for His church. I like the way my mother, along with others of yesteryear, sang it—

“When the saints go marchin’ in,
Lord, I’m going to be in that number,
When the saints go marchin’ in”

—C. E. Dudley

PUBLISHER’S PAGE

WHY SHOULD IT BE THOUGHT A THING UNCHRISTIAN?

By Maitland G. Nunez

In the departments of a nation forming its economic, political, educational, inventive and religious background, when that which is called “new” is launched—something which differs from the old method—men everywhere rise up against it.

But like the locomotive, the telephone, the republican form of government, the airship, acceptance of the automobile, the seventh-day Sabbath and other ideas, it forces these same men to see light, reason, logic and good sense in the “new idea,” as they call it, and after a few severe tests are given according to their ability to test, they soon fall in line and loudly proclaim that the new thing which has come (to benefit humanity) is all right. So after the big fight against, there comes acceptance of the new idea.

The same thing seems to be true regarding the white brother in the Adventist church and the new idea—The United Sabbath Day Adventist Conference. Of course, it means that Negro believers will be given the common benefit accruing from a conference. It means the non-stultification of Negroes

in the faith of the Advent message found in Rev. 14:6-12, John 14:1-3, Ex. 20:8-11, Isa. 56 and Isa. 58. The message does not say that Negroes religiously must not have any part in operating the gospel message in conference life among their own race. The gospel message of Christ limits no race and has no creed save the Bible.

Because our white brothers have never seen a Negro president among Adventists and a full force of Negroes in office in conference affairs administered by these honest dark-skinned men, because the idea has prevailed (not given by Christ) that Negroes should not be placed in office, the cry is that all in connection with the United Sabbath Day Adventist Conference are lost, have given up the message and left the landmark, are not “in the truth,” and so on ad infinitum. This is simply ridiculous. This is the same spirit that shows itself when new ideas are handed out which differ from the general run of things in a nation. A certain honest class of colored believers, not knowing, of course, joined these white brothers because Negroes have been made to believe that among Adventists Negroes must not be put to lead out. They must not occupy positions of trust. Administrative positions in the affairs of conference life do not belong to Negroes. All of this is contrary to sound judgment, contrary to the spirit of Jesus.

One sad feature is that these colored folk who voice the sentiment of the white brother believe a Negro minister is lost, and members are lost if they own their own church property, preach in a conference directed by Negroes and if Negro members worship in churches connected with the United Sabbath Day Adventist Conference. This religiophobia is so pernicious and acts so fiercely on tissue in church life that some Negroes do not want to be decent and speak to other Negroes who are in a conference with Negro officials and a Negro preacher, and members who are still in a “white” conference think it wicked to worship and preach in a church that is in a conference directed by Negro officials. I wonder if Jesus would get mad with folk because in the common nature of things two congregations have come about, one Negro and the other white; or stop being Christian-hearted toward Negroes because they have a conference of their own. Why should not a group of colored churches which is

hailed with joy by our white Adventist believers presuppose a conference directed by Negro officials?



Missionary workers from the Berean SDA Church in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1929.

The question is asked, “Why did you not begin years ago a conference such as you now have?” The answer is simple: The time was not yet full. But today the fullness of time for such a conference is seen, hence the United Sabbath Day Adventist Conference is functioning in all its departments.

The troubles, unpleasantness, ejection of Negroes by white Adventist presidents and all that inside volcanic condition incident to the impact of Negro ambition and white prejudice have nothing to do with the *necessity* of a United Sabbath Day Adventist Conference directed by Negroes. Conditions demanded such a conference, whether there was continuous tranquillity or constant warring.

The brothers and sisters north and south, homeland and foreign, should cease the unwise cry, “The time is not ripe, we are not ready for such a master move.” Let me ask, “When is the time going to be ripe?” If 1913 to 1931 does not bring a ripened time; if the briny tears of men and women among the Advent Negro believers who have had to groan in public and private does not show a ripened time; if the loss of hundreds of the boys and girls of our Negro preachers and members in the Advent ranks, if the premature death of Negro Adventist preachers suffering under the oppression does not bespeak that the time has come; and if justifiable concern for the future as well as interest in our present condition does not spell the arrival of the time, when will it ever come?

As the United Sabbath Day Adventist Conference moves on in its functionings directed by Negro officials, as churches come in, as the gospel spreads itself among the races of the earth, as be-