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## A Remarkable Century of Progress

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THIS year, 1971, marks the 100th anniversary of the beginning of SDA work among Negroes. Note that it is SDA work among Negroes and not Negro work among SDA's. Negroes had been active even in the Millerite Movement, precursor of the church of today. Charles, reverently called Father Bowles, son of an African woman and a Revolutionary War officer, had preached to congregations of thousands and died just before the "passing of the time" in 1843. John W. Lewis likewise preached with fervor the Millerite message.

It was William E. Foy who no doubt could have made the greatest contribution. Foy, a mulatto, who at that period could have influenced either white or black, under spiritual duress, recounted visions in 1842 that God later gave to Ellen G. White. It takes but a cursory reading of the writings to see this, and Mrs. White admitted their relationship. He, however, "let his color become his crossing" and stopped giving the messages.

With no particular work done for them, Negroes, free and in the North, did join the Adventist Church. They mingled with the white membership and because of this it is hard to trace them. We do know that the first Sabbathkeeping Adventist church, 1844, in Washington, New Hampshire, did have Negroes in attendance.

No organized work therefore had been done for Negroes in the North or South before the Civil War, for the General Conference was not organized until May 21, 1863. Eight years later in 1871, the first call came from the South that eventually led to the establishment of the first Negro SDA church. It was from R. K. McCune and a few other whites who had accepted the message through some tracts and then sent a request to Battle Creek for a minister to come and instruct them.

In March of 1871, E. B. Lane responded and decided to hold a series of

meetings. He was given use of the small railroad station. When Negroes showed up he placed them in the telegraph room and by standing near the door could speak to both the white and black groups at the same time. When the meetings were over the few Negroes who accepted sat, as the custom was, in the rear of the group and remained thus for more than a dozen years. In 1883 they and a few others were organized into a company at Edgefield Junction, Tennessee, about eight miles from Nashville, Tennessee, under Elder Harry Lowe. Lowe had been convicted by Lane's original railroad station meetings, but had become a Baptist minister. A tract on the Sabbath helped convert him and now as a licentiate minister, *The SDA Encyclopedia*, page 724, says "probably the first Negro American SDA minister," he was given charge of the company.

We must not confuse the commentary statement, for it further states that no date for his ordination has been found. C. M. Kinney, therefore, is called the first ordained Negro SDA minister on page 665 of the same commentary, so there is no confusion.

On November 9, 1886, this group was organized as the first SDA church composed entirely of Negroes. Its first offering of fifty cents was given in its entirety to missions. Participating as charter members were the Jonathan Allison's whose two sons became ministers—Thomas H. Allison, known for his musicianship and preaching in the South and Midwest, and Jonathan W. Allison, Sr., who worked in the South and West. J. W. Allison, Jr., pastored in the Midwest and at the University Boulevard church in Los Angeles.

This little church attained another first—host to the first all-Negro SDA camp meeting in 1901. As a matter of fact, if the oft-quoted statistic of about fifty members in North America in 1894 is correct, then there were only a few hundred to invite.

This initial work of ten members and one licentiate minister has grown, after one hundred years, to a membership in North America of 73,759, with 315 ministers. That first offering of faith, fifty cents, the wage of a day laborer in those days, has grown to a yearly 1970 tithe offering of \$9,516,428.68 and \$1,813,215.46 to missions. The one church has multiplied to 452.

Strange as it seems, in 1871 two separate movements began in the neighboring States of Kentucky and Tennessee. Silas Osborne, lay missionary, was a Kentuckian who had moved to Iowa in 1851 and became a Seventh-day Adventist there. With the well-known fervor of a new convert, he began to write concerning prophecies to his brother. Much to his surprise when he visited him in 1871, he found himself billed as a Bible lecturer. After he had preached for a while, some Negroes as well as whites accepted the faith. Among them there seems to have been Edmond Killen, an ex-slave of a Georgia plantation owner by that name. Killen began preaching but there is no denominational record of him or of his particular work.

Four of the first five Negro churches were established in the territory of the South Central Conference. In the words of the favorite hymn of one of the sons of that territory, T. M. Fountain, we of 1971 might implore:

"Remember, Lord, the ancient days,  
Renew Thy work, Thy grace restore.  
And while to Thee our hearts we raise,  
On us Thy Holy Spirit pour."

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Only with personal discipline, applied self-control, and careful choice of daily habits can anyone in everyday life "serve with the best." It takes the best to become the best.

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