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**James Hannibal Lewis,
a stalwart in the early SDA church.**

COVER STORY



Mrs. Elizabeth Matlock Proctor Taylor.

MOMENTS IN THE HISTORY OF SDA BLACKS IN THE NORTH AMERICAN DIVISION

When the Adventist work among Blacks took hold in the Edgefield Junction community, just north of Nashville, Tenn., people would travel from miles around to join in the Sabbath worship services. Following these services, most of them would spend the afternoon with their brothers and sisters who lived nearby, because it was too far to return home for their mid-day meal and come back for the evening services.

The Allison family came from Clarksville, Tenn., with their children, Thomas, Jonathan, Florence and a foster son by the name of Samuel Thompson. Thomas became one of the original Fisk Jubilee Singers of Fisk University in Nashville and, in later years, one of the outstanding Black leaders of the church. He served as a pastor until his death in 1941.

Jonathan remained at home with his parents until their passing and then moved to the midwest. He finally received his high school diploma at the age of 80 in Denver, Colo. Florence, the sister, moved to Los Angeles, Calif., and became a teacher in the public school system where she served with distinction for more than 50 years. She was presented many metals of honor by the city of Los Angeles when she retired in the late 1960's.

Samuel, the foster son, became one of the original 16 students to enter the Huntsville School in Alabama in 1896. He and wife, Mary, another of the original 16 students, after completing the work at the school

settled in Knoxville, Tenn., and helped to build up the work there. People throughout the city knew him as the man who collected bucketfuls of money each year to help promote the church's Harvest Ingathering program.



James Hannibal Lewis of Battle Creek.

THE EDNA LETT WILLIAMSON FAMILY—Another family that journeyed to Nashville during the 1880's was Mrs. Elizabeth Matlock Proctor Taylor, along with daughter Jessie Lurena Proctor. Mother and daughter were both youthful and appeared to be sisters. Each week they journeyed from Lebanon, Tenn., to attend the Sabbath services. The afternoons were spent in the home of Mrs. Emma Jordon of Nashville, who was an old stalwart in the faith with an eagerness to help as many as possible to obtain not only a knowledge of the Bible teachings, but also some of the temporal necessities of life.



Benjamin and Jessie Lett of Battle Creek, Mich.

In 1896, a Black missionary, James Hannibal Lewis from Battle Creek, Mich., urged Mrs. Taylor and daughter, Jessie, to relocate in Battle Creek so that the child could enroll in Battle Creek Academy which had been established there by the Seventh-day Adventists. She accepted the invitation, and the two of them became members of the Lewis household. "Grandpa Lewis" and his wife were responsible for enrolling Jessie as the first Black student of the academy. She remained until her schooling was completed. She became an excellent student and a proficient pianist.

Mr. James H. Lewis, although born in Michigan, really had roots which reached back to a southern heritage. He was born Jan. 15, 1865, at Porter Center near Lawton, Mich., to Henry and Keziah Lewis, both of whom were children of white masters and colored slaves. Henry Lewis, who as a child went by the name of Wilkins, was born Dec. 26, 1826 in Franklin County, Ky. His father was the master of the plantation, named Wilkins, and his mother was one of Wilkins slaves--not a Negro, but an Octoroon, half Spanish and half Indian. Keziah was the daughter of an English slave-owner named Lewis, who made her "free" at birth. The parchment which Lewis signed at the time with a goose-quill pen is still existent.

Henry Lewis was not so fortunate, though his father-master eventually gave him a chance to buy his freedom by developing some waste land into a tobacco farm. In the meantime he had married Keziah, the free-born woman, and they had four children, all of whom were slaves under the law of Wilkins. When Henry raised \$650 through his tobacco venture, he went to the county seat at Hopkinsville and told the clerk, "I have come to buy my freedom." He was completely crushed by the clerk's statement, "The \$650 is correct, but don't you know that you have to post \$1,750 as a guarantee not to become a county charge?"

Keziah's white father, Lewis, had followed Henry to court and saw him apparently defeated in his purpose. Thereupon he stepped forward and said, "I will sign Henry's bond."

A freeman at last, Henry had the choice of a name. He chose the name Lewis, his benefactor, and that name was legalized. Later, Lewis, the master, gave to his daughter a span of horses, a yoke of oxen, some sheep, sows, hogs and money with which to buy a farm. The Civil War was brewing, and Henry and Keziah were fearful lest their four children, born in slavery, would be taken down the river to New Orleans and sold. They found the farm they wanted in VanBu-

ren County, Mich., and lost no time moving from Kentucky to the northern state. After they had settled in Michigan, eight additional children were born in to the family. One of them, James Hannibal Lewis, after studying his Bible, was convinced that Saturday was the day of worship for mankind. He went to various white ministers—Methodist, United Brethren and others—to ask why Sunday was observed. He was always given the same answer—that the church had changed the day from Saturday to Sunday.

He later heard of the Seventh-day Adventists and knew that Battle Creek was their headquarters. After considerable correspondence, he came to Battle Creek after working six years for his brother and enrolled at the Adventist College (the old Battle Creek College), of which Professor W. W. Prescott was the head. James was happy to be at the college among eager students of the Bible; several of them were colored men and women—the Cooks, the Harrises, et al. For a long time he lived in the boarding house known as South Hall. He never graduated, but he had between three and four years of good training before he went to Tennessee as a self-supporting Bible worker.

James taught, gave Bible readings, and soon founded a Sunday school for colored children in Nashville. The city had only one Seventh-day Adventist, and he proved to be a backslider. James, now a member of the church, was backed by the Battle Creek headquarters. Incidentally, his Sunday school developed into a church (Hillcrest—the off-spring of Edgefield Junction) which still functions in Nashville. The building for the congregation was erected after Mr. Lewis left the city and was not too far from Fisk University (the old Meharry Boulevard church).



Mrs. Elizabeth Proctor Taylor and daughter, Jessie Lurena Proctor.

In Tennessee, James Lewis met a sympathetic young woman, Lorena Crudup, who came from Lebanon, Tenn., 30 miles to the east of Nashville. She had become a convert at Lebanon and in Jan. 1898 she accompanied Lewis to Battle Creek where they were married. Lorena became an indefatigable worker with a marvelous philanthropic spirit. She solicited clothing, shoes, etc. in Battle Creek and sent them to Tennessee to the families with whom they had become acquainted. At a later time these dear missionaries brought Mrs. Elizabeth Matlock Taylor and her daughter, Jessie, back to Battle Creek with them.

Battle Creek was quite a center for the Seventh-day Adventists. The church leaders, James and Ellen G. White, had established a hospital that could serve hundreds of patients from all parts of the world. The place had become world renowned for its new health treatments which proved to be very successful. There was a church structure which seated 3,000 persons. Among the 10 Blacks who were members of the church was James Lewis and wife, the missionary to Tennessee and the renowned SoJourney Truth, who died in the faith and whose funeral was conducted by Uriah Smith. The name of the church was Dime Tabernacle. Lewis later organized a movement toward erecting a suitable monument for SoJourney Truth, the famous Black woman who was a friend of Abraham Lincoln and an honor to her race. A college and health food factory were also established at Battle Creek.



In the meantime, while Jessie Proctor attended academy, her days became lonely for her family back in Lebanon. Not too many of her people lived in that Michigan community, and it seemed so far from home. This picture changed when Mr. Benjamin Harrison Lett and his mother moved to the Battle Creek area from upper Michigan. He was born only a few miles from Cedar Lake Academy. He and Jessie met at the community well. He attended Mount Zion African Methodist Church where Jessie was pianist. Their relationship matured, and

they exchanged marriage vows and established a home in Battle Creek for 64 years of wedded life.



Benjamin and Jessie Lett and family.

Benjamin worked as an independent, commissioned trucker to support his family. Jessie spent her days rearing and training the children. She also served as pianist and church clerk for the Battle Creek Seventh-day Adventist Church, established for Blacks by Carlyle B. Haynes, president of the Michigan Conference, and J. H. Laurence, a Black evangelist of renown. The Letts had 12 children—seven sons and five daughters, one of whom, Edna, attended Emmanuel Missionary College in Berrien Springs, Mich., and later became one of the most outstanding educators to serve the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. While serving as an instructor at Oakwood College during the 1940's, she met Professor Lester Williamson, an instructor in the sciences, who asked for her hand in marriage.

After leaving Alabama and serving in the New York City Health Department, Lester passed away. Edna became principal of one of the schools there, but left this post to direct the school operations of Northeastern Academy in the Northeastern Conference. She served in this position until retirement.

Edna Lett Williamson still takes a great interest in the cause of Christian education in helping to mold the hearts, minds and souls of today's youth. She serves as a member of the Oakwood College Board of Trustees; is president of A. S. Rashford Chapter of the Oakwood College Alumni Association; is secretary of the National Oakwood Alumni Association; is a member of the United Negro College Fund Inter Alumni Council; is a dedicated member of the N.A.A.C.P. Chapter in New York City.

She is a faithful member of the Ephesus SDA Church in New York and on June 4th, 1988 she was honored by the church for "Decades of Love and Service" to the Adventist Church.

The Regional Voice salutes Grandpa and Grandma Lewis, Grandmother Taylor, Benjamin and Jessie Lett, who await the call of the Life-giver. They, along with Sojourner Truth, James and Ellen White and their family members are all buried in plots near each other in the Oakhill Cemetery in Battle Creek, Mich. We salute the Letts and Williamsons for the role each has played in "Moments in the History of SDA Blacks in the North American Division."

C.E.D.

PUBLISHER'S PAGE

THREE ANGELS OVER KINSHASA, ZAIRE

Kinshasa—city of over five million people! Kinshasa—city that never seems to sleep! Kinshasa—a city that heard the Good News of the Three Angels Messages last summer and as a result, over 800 persons were baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church!

The Real Truth Crusade team, under the direction of Evangelist William C. Scales Jr., Ministerial Association Secretary, North American Division, conducted a three-pronged evangelistic crusade in three areas of Kinshasa—Bandalungwa, Ndjili and Kinsuka.

Dr. Walton Whaley, Ministerial Association Secretary of the Africa-Indian Ocean Division was the project coordinator. Other members of the team included Elder and Mrs. Donald G. King, Mr. and Mrs. Artemus Tucker, Pastor Don McPhaul, Pastor Gerard Latchman, Mrs. Leola Whaley and Mrs. Lois Scales.

The meetings included a wholistic program of gospel, health and family life emphasis which was aimed at introducing a lifestyle change for people awaiting the second coming of our Lord.

Bandalungwa

At Bandalungwa, Elder Scales was the speaker assisted by his wife, Mrs. Lois Scales, as soloist and pianist. Elder King, a graduate of LLU School of Public Health and a pastor in the Southeastern California Conference, presented the health messages each evening while his wife, Mrs. Lois King, led out with the family life emphasis.



Real Truth Crusade balloons for the little ones at Bandalungwa.



The candidates line up to be baptized in the olympic-sized pool at Bandalungwa, Kinshasa, Zaire. Elder Kalume, Zaire Union representative, baptizing to the far left.

Ndjili

At Ndjili, Pastor Don McPhaul of the Central States Conference was the speaker. Pastor Gerard Latchman, an employee of the General Conference Education Department, presented health lectures and assisted in visitation and interpretation.

Kinsuka

At Kinsuka, Brother Artemus Tucker of the Allegheny East Conference was the speaker. His wife, Mrs. Joyce Tucker, served

as music coordinator and soloist. Mrs. Leola Whaley, wife of Dr. Walton Whaley, assisted with health lectures and conducted a Vacation Bible School.

Local pastors, literature evangelists from Ghana and dedicated lay persons gave strong support to the crusade. Between 3,000-4,000 persons completed the Real Truth Bible Courses due to the faithful work of our church members who did visitation and studied and lessons with interested persons.