

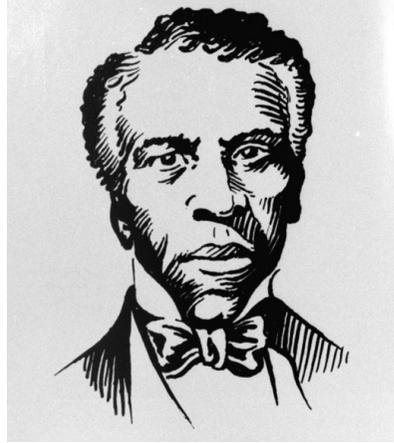
An image of Rev. Isaac Hinson, a founding member of the Delaware Conference. In 1864, Hinson became the first African-American appointed to the office of Presiding Elder (now called District Superintendent) in Philadelphia.

## *Founding Session of the Delaware Conference An Eyewitness Account*

Anonymous (1864)

*Editor's note: this article appeared in the Christian Advocate and Journal (New York) in its issue of Thursday, August 11, 1864, under the heading "Philadelphia Correspondence." The Delaware Conference is one of the predecessor bodies of the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference, and was the first to allow the full ordination and appointment of African-American preachers within the Methodist Episcopal Church. Its creation had been authorized by the 1864 General Conference, held in Philadelphia, which provided for the organization of racially segregated annual conferences. The Delaware Conference continued to function until its final session in 1965, at which point its congregations and preachers were integrated into the local white annual conferences.*

The readers of the *Christian Advocate* are doubtless apprised of the fact that the last session of the General Conference took very decided action in advance of any former session in favor of the colored people of our Church. The Committee on the State of the Work among the People of Color made a report that there is no legal barrier to the reception of colored preachers into any of the annual conferences; but, going a step further, they presented a resolution to the following effect, that the preachers of color residing in certain districts should be formed into annual conferences, with all the powers of other annual conferences, except a representation in the General Conference, a division of the proceeds of the Book Concern, and voting upon any constitutional question; and they provided for the organization of two such conferences of colored members. The first of these is called the Washington Conference, and embraces Western Maryland, the District of Columbia, Virginia, and the Territory South. The Delaware Conference embraces the territory north and east of the Washington Conference.



Two founding members of the Delaware Conference. Left: Rev. Wilmore S. Elzey (or Elsey, 1805-1867) was elected the first secretary of the conference. Right: Rev. Joshua Brinkley (1815-1890), referred to in the text as John, had been ordained a local deacon in 1859.

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#### METHOD OF ORGANIZATION

The bishops were authorized to organize these conferences in the following way. The rule of discipline requiring a probation of two years is so far suspended to allow them to admit such colored elders as have traveled two or more years under a presiding elder, and who shall be recommended by a quarterly conference, and by at least ten elders who are members of an annual conference. Thus do we progress, approximating the Bible and the American idea that all men are created free and equal. The developments of Providence in these latter days are most wonderful, and it becomes us to stand still and see the salvation of God, and be ready to follow where Providence leads.

#### PREPARATION FOR AN ORGANIZATION

On Thursday, 28th July, Bishop Janes met the colored preachers, who have been traveling within the bounds of the Philadelphia and New Jersey Conferences, in the John Wesley Church of this city,<sup>1</sup> which had been put in good order for the purpose. Quite a large number of the distinguished

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<sup>1</sup>The John Wesley ME Church is the predecessor of today's Tindley Temple United Methodist Church.

members of the Philadelphia Conference were present with the bishop either at this or the subsequent sessions. Revs. Dr. Durbin, Dr. Castle, A. Wallace, Dr. Quigley, C. Whitecar of New Jersey, J D. Long, R. H. Pattison, and S. Higgins we noticed, among others. The attendance of colored people and preachers was also very good. We should remark also that Rev. Bishop Simpson was present upon several occasions, so there was no lack of honorable witnesses to these novel proceedings. The first day was occupied in the reception of recommendations according to the plan adopted by the General Conference.

#### ORGANIZATION OF THE DELAWARE CONFERENCE

On Friday morning the preachers reassembled in the John Wesley Church. Bishop Janes announced that he had carefully examined the papers of recommendation and had found the following preachers entitled to membership in the conference, namely : Isaac Hinson, having been employed by a presiding elder sixteen years; James Davis, 15; Harrison Smith, 12; Isaiah Broaden, 10 ; John Manluff, 10; Samuel Dale, 8; W. S. Elzey, 6; John H. Pierce, 5; Nathan Young, 4; John Brinkley, 3.

These ten colored brethren were then declared to constitute the Delaware Conference. The bishop, in a few neat and impressive remarks, congratulated the conference upon this interesting event in the history of the Church, namely, the formation of the first conference for colored preachers, under the rule of the General Conference of the ME Church.

He reminded them of the importance of recognizing in this the hand of a Divine Providence, and requested the conference to arise and sing, "Praise God, from whom all blessings flow," etc., which was done and repeated, after which the Rev. Dr. Durbin, Corresponding Secretary of the Missionary Society, being called upon by the bishop, led in prayer. It was a solemn and delightful season; while the prayer ascended

Heaven came down our souls to meet,  
And glory crowned the mercy-seat.

W. S. Elzey was elected secretary, and thus was constituted this conference, an epoch in regard to which we may truly say,

Prophets and kings desired it long,  
But died without the sight.

The bishop then called for recommendations of local deacons for elders' orders, and the following were recommended, represented by the presiding elder by whom they had been employed, and after the most

searching examination elected, namely: Frost Pollett, Solomon Jackson, and Samuel Elzey. The following local preachers were elected to deacon's orders, namely: Simon Taylor, Charles Pollett, B. Janifer, Peter Hill, D. R. Oney, Henry Morris, John Slater.

#### A TIMELY PRESENT

A large and beautifully bound Book of Records – being labeled handsomely, “The Delaware Conference of the ME Church” – was received from T. W. Price, Esq., of this city, as a present to the conference, which was appropriately acknowledged, and a rising vote of thanks returned to the generous donor. The conference now adjourned, to meet at four o'clock in the afternoon.

#### SECOND DAY – AFTERNOON SESSION

Religious services [were] conducted by J. Hinson. Minutes of [the] morning session [were] read and approved. The first question of the minutes, “Who are admitted on trial?” was taken up. The following were ably represented and received: John Sanders, Simon Taylor, Abraham Brown, Isaiah Broughton, Stephen Johns, Wesley Parker, Charles Pollett, Stephen Whittington, Samuel G. Waters, and Anthony Driver.

Bishop Simpson, being present, then addressed the conference in an eloquent speech, during which preachers and people seemed to catch fire. Many and fervent were responses made, until the house seemed to shake under the great power of the occasion. At the close of the address the conference adjourned, to meet at nine o'clock on Saturday morning.

#### THIRD DAY – SATURDAY

Conference met at 9 o'clock, [with] prayer by Brother Macay, of Boston. Bishop Janes occupied the chair. Minutes were read and approved. Rev. R. H. Pattison, Secretary of the Philadelphia Conference, was requested to edit and prepare for publication the Minutes of the Delaware Conference. Seventy-five dollars and twenty-eight cents was reported as the amount of the conference collection.

#### MISSIONARY SOCIETY FORMED

It was resolved that the Delaware Conference resolve itself into a Conference Missionary Society, auxiliary to the Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church. The Constitution of the New Jersey Conference Missionary Society was adopted as the Constitution of this society, and it was ordered to be published in the conference minutes. The following

were elected to fill its offices: President, Frost Pollett; Vice-President, Jehu H. Pierce; Secretary, W. S. Elzey; Treasurer, Isaac Hinson; Managers, James Davis, Joshua Brinkley, and Harrison Smith.

East Zion ME Church, Wilmington, Delaware, was selected as the seat of the next session. H. Smith was appointed to preach the Missionary sermon at the next conference.

#### PRESENT FROM BISHOP JANES

The presiding bishop manifested his interest in the members of this new conference by presenting to each one a copy of Dr. Kidder's *Treatise on Homiletics*, whereupon the following was adopted by a rising vote:

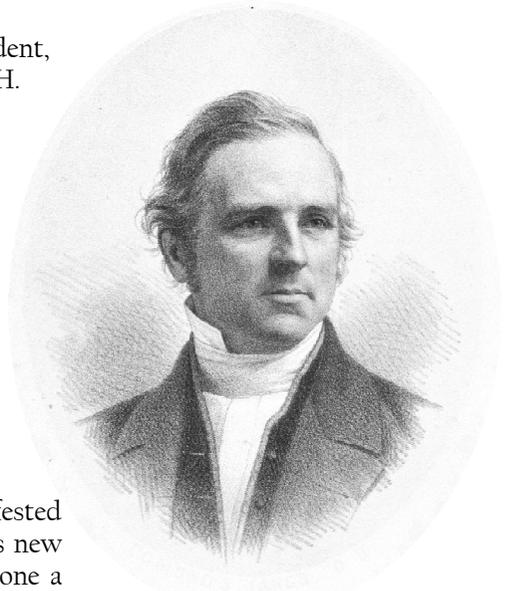
Resolved, That the hearty thanks of this Conference are due and are hereby tendered to the Rev. Bishop Janes for the valuable gift of Dr. Kidder's *Treatise*, made to each member of this conference.

Bishop Janes then addressed the Conference with reference to their work, and gave the preachers most excellent advice, after which he read the appointments for the coming year, and the conference adjourned with the Doxology, prayer by Rev. Dr. Castle, and the benediction from Bishop Janes.

#### ORDINATION

The Sabbath, 31st instant, was a jubilee among the people of color. In the morning Bishop Janes preached a powerful apostolical sermon in the John Wesley church, which was listened to with the most rapt interest and delight, after which he ordained seven preachers to the office of deacon.

In the afternoon at Zoar Church he preached again from I Peter 4:11, "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God," etc. The house was crowded to overflowing, there being, perhaps, an equal number of white and colored people present; but so well-chosen were the words of the Rev. Bishop that all were pleased and profited. After the sermon, two preachers



Bishop Edmund S. Janes

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were ordained to the office of elder. Bishop Simpson then followed in one of his happiest addresses, and succeeded in raising about one hundred and thirty dollars to pay for recent improvements upon Zoar.

Altogether this Conference and the Sabbath following have made an impression upon the colored people which will be seen in great good, yielding much fruit in years to come to the glory of God. May God bless the preachers and members of the Delaware Conference!

#### APPOINTMENTS OF PREACHERS\*

Delaware River District: Isaac Hinson, PE

Philadelphia: John Wesley ..... Abraham Brown  
 Philadelphia: Zoar ..... Isaac Hinson  
 Camden ..... Robert Robinson  
 Salem..... Harrison Smith  
 Bridgeton and Goshen ..... Simon Taylor

Odessa District: James Davis, PE

Wilmington: E. Zion ..... Jehu H. Pierce  
 Newcastle ..... Samuel Dale  
 Dover ..... J. W. Sanders  
 Port Deposit ..... Joshua Brinkley  
 Smyrna ..... James Davis  
 Milford ..... Nathan Young

Choptank District: W. S. Elzey, PE

Waugh Circuit ..... W. S. Elzey, Wesley Parker  
 Washington ..... Stephen Johns  
 Wicomico ..... Charles Pollett  
 Manoken ..... Frost Pollett, S. G. Waters  
 Union ..... Stephen Wittington  
 Pocomoke ..... Isaiah Broughton  
 Bethel ..... Anthony Driver

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\*This list was corrected against the published minutes.