Special History Week Feature

One Man's Family Tree

The article traces the history of a leading Philadelphia family from its patriarch, Bishop Benjamin Tanner, down through the years. His descendants inherited many of his abilities as a leader of his people and man of God.

By RUTH ROLEN

Outstanding or well known in their own right are Philadelphia's Dr. Sadie T. M. Alexander, Aaron Mossell, Lewis T. Moore, Mrs. Louise P. Jerkins, Dr. James H. Tanner, William F., and Vernon Duckrey, and Mrs. Isabelle D. Wallace.

Each having made his or her own way, they are, nevertheless, blessed with a background enriched by their ancestor, Bishop Benjamin T. Tanner, who died 30 years ago this month. They are offspring of a family free generations before the emancipation.

At the time the AFRO-AMERICAN published the death of the 87-year-old prelate, he was described as being one of the best trained ministers in the AME church. This training, coupled with his natural resources, made him a leader in the denomination.

Christmas Babe

Born in Pittsburgh on Christmas Day, 1835, Bishop Tanner was the son of Hugh S. and Isabel Tanner. His grandfather was Herman Tanner and his great grandfather, Richard Tanner.

Faced during his early life with hardships which free colored persons had to encounter in northern cities, the youth who was to become a bishop was barred from higher pursuits by hostile mechanics and artisans. He had to compete in menial positions with German, Scotch and Irish immigrants.

He attended Avery college at Allegheny, Pa., and was converted in 1856 at which time he joined the AME church. Studying theology, the same year, at Western Theological seminary, also in Allegheny, he was licensed to preach and left the seminary in 1859 to enter ministerial work.

Admitted to the conference in 1860, he was ordained a deacon and, later the same year, an elder. During the Civil War, 1861, he founded a school for freedmen at the U.S. Navy Yard. Meanwhile, he was pastor of the Fifteenth Presbyterian church in Washington.

Established Church

Joining the Baltimore conference of the AME Church in 1862, he established a church at Alexandria, Va. After pastorates at Georgetown, D.C., 1863; Frederick, Md., 1864, and Bethel church, Baltimore, 1866, he temporarily abandoned preaching to take charge of a school for freedmen in Frederick.

Serving as editor of the Christian Recorder, the AME organ, from 1868 to 1884, he founded the AME Church Review in 1884 which he edited until 1888 when he was elected to the bishopric.

Outstanding in evangelizing and stimulating the Christian life of emancipated people during the two decades he functioned in the four AME districts, the bishop doubled as adviser and trustee on boards of schools in his connection and at Howard university.

His contribution to the anthropological discussion of the race question was his writing, "The Origin of the Negro" and "Is The Negro Cursed?"

Important Works

Most important of his works were "An Apology for African Methodism," 1867; "An Outline of Our History and Government for African Methodist Churchmen, Ministry and Lay, in Catechetical Form," 1884; "Theological Lectures," a book of sermons, 1894;

"The Negro, African and American," "The Color of Solomon, What?" 1894; "The Dispensation in the History of the Church," 1899; "The Negro in Holy Writ," 1902; "A Hint to Ministers, Especially of the African Methodist Episcopal Church," 1902.

Delegate to the conference on Ecumenical Methodism in London, 1901, he read an original paper, "The Elements of Pulpit Effectiveness." He was a member of the American Negro academy.

Wed in 1858

The churchman married on Aug. 19, 1858, the former Sara E. Miller whose family moved to Pittsburgh after gaining its freedom in 1841, a year before her birth on May 18 in Winchester, Va. One of her pupils in her private school was Miss Hallie Q. Brown of Wilberforce, O.

Of the nine children born of the union, seven lived to maturity. Benjamin and Horace died in infancy. Most widely known was Henry O. Tanner, the religious painter, who died in Paris, 1937. He won international recognition even when few American white painters could claim that honor.

Born in Pittsburgh, 1859, he studied in Philadelphia at the Academy of Fine Arts, taught at Clark university and endeavored to earn a livelihood as a photographer in Atlanta and a small North Carolina town. Bishop Joseph C. Hartzel then invited the artist to Cincinnati to exhibit his works.

Proceeds from the exhibit, it was hoped, would defray expenses for the painter to travel and study abroad. When this was not realized, Bishop Hartzel paid him a lump sum for all the paintings. With this, he started to Rome but stopped in Paris where he stayed.

JAMES DUCKREY

MRS. SADIE ALEXANDER

LEWIS MOORE

Honored By France

Attracting attention with his "Music Lesson" and "Young Sabot Marker" in 1897, the world's most renowned artists acclaimed him one of the greatest of all time when he unveiled "The Raising of Lazarus." The French government awarded him a gold medal and put the masterpiece in Luxembourg museum.

Other of his better works were "Annnunciation," "Judas," "Nicodemus," Daniel in the Lion's Den," "The Wise and Foolish Virgins," "Ruth," "Christ at the Home of Mary and Martha," "Return of the Holy Women;" "The Jews' Wailing Place," "The Flight into Egypt," "He Vanished Out of Their Sight," "Christ Before the Doctor," "Christ Washing the Disciples' Feet," and "Job and His Three Friends."

Preached Through Art

Through his art, rather than the word, he followed the wishes of his father that he preach. A son, Jesse Ossawa, was born to him and his wife, the former Jessie M. Olssen.

One of Bishop Tanner's daughters, Hallie, was born in 1863. Characterized as progressive and determined, she wed Charles E. Dillon and became mother of a daughter, Sadie Fulford.

Studying medicine at Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania and Tuskegee institute, she passed the Alabama board and established a nursing school and hospital. Four sons were born after she later married the Rev. John A. Johnson.

Sweet-Voiced

Sweet - voiced Mary Louise, frail like her mother, was born to Bishop Tanner's wife in 1865 and died in 1935. Wife of Dr. A. A. Mossell in Philadelphia, she gave birth to Sadie, Aaron and Elizabeth.

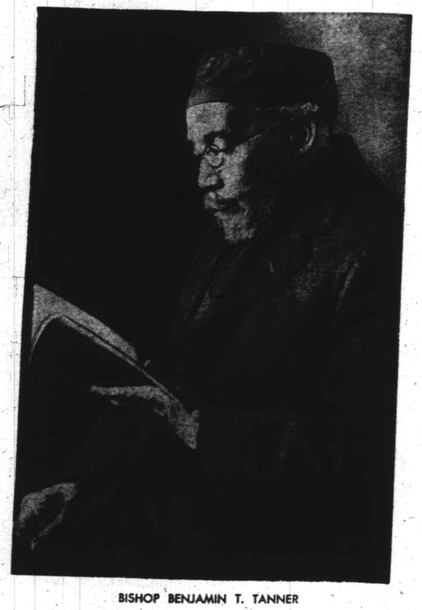
Aaron established a business in Philadelphia after being educated in pharmacy at Howard university. Elizabeth, who became an Anderson, received a B.S. from the University of Pennsylvania and a M.S. from Columbia university. She was dean of women at Va. State college before going to Central State college in the same capacity.

Educated in Washington public schools, Sadie majored in economics at Penn and received a Ph.D. from the graduate school in 1921. Assistant actuary at North Carolina Mutual Insurance company, Durham, N.C., in 1923, she married Raymond F. Alexander, the attorney, who is now a Philadelphia councilman

Returning to Penn where she completed the law course in 1927, she was associate editor of the University of Pennsylvania Law Review. Admitted to the bar in 1928, she was appointed city solicitor.

Returned From India

Member of former President Truman's Civil Rights committee, Dr. Alexander has just returned from India where she was a delegate to the International Conference of Social Work. Her two daughters are Mary Elizabeth Tanner and Rae Pace.



BISHOP BENJAMIN T. TANNER

The Alexanders are stalwarts of Union AME church from where Bishop Tanner was buried.

Another of the bishop's daughters, Isabelle, was born in 1867 and married to the Rev. Noah Temple who died in 1946. There were no children. One of the editors of the Women's Recorder, she chose Pittsburgh for her home.

The ministerial son of the bishop, Carlton M., was born in Philadelphia, 1870, and died in Chicago, 1933. Product of Institute for Colored Youth (now Cheyney State Teachers college), 1891, and Episcopal Divinity school here, he wed the former Frances Stanford, a trained nurse, in Darby.

Principal Pastorates

His pastorates included large cities like Philadelphia, Washington and Chicago. He left his widow with the companionship of a daughter, Sara Elizabeth.

Another, Sara Elizabeth, was a daughter of Bishop Tanner born in Philadelphia, 1873, and dying in Washington, 1900. Graduate of Philadelphia High school for Girls here, she taught at Downingtown before marrying Dr. Lewis B. Moore.

Earning a Ph.D. from Penn's graduate school, Dr. Moore was called to Howard University to organize the teachers college. Their three children were Lewis Tanner, Sara and one who died in infancy.

Lewis was educated in Washington, attended Storer and Bates colleges and Temple university law school. He served several years here as an assistant district attorney.

Sara, whose marriage name was Pride, taught in New York. She died in 1944. Her daughter, Louise, is the wife of an army doctor named Jerkins.

Youngest of the bishop's daughters was Bertha, born in 1878. Educated in local schools, including Drexel institute, she pursued music at Penn, was known for her elocution and scribbled verse like her father. She wed Samuel P. Stafford, member of first four year class in medicine at Penn.

Settling in St. Louis, the couple reared two sons, S. Tanner and George B. The former attended Knox college and University of Michigan. His studies in hospital administration stood him well in the superintendency of Flint-Goodridge hospital, New Orleans. He sired one child, Charles Tanner.

Attending St. Louis schools and the teachers' college at Carbondale, Ill., George was managing editor of the St. Louis edition of a national weekly. He later taught English at Sumner school and, in 1942, married the former Adele K. Rhodes. There were no children.

Mary Tanner, youngest sister of the bishop, married a Rev. Mr. Russell. One of their children, Isabella T., wed John Fairfax out of which union came three children.

William Penn Salutatorian

Among them was Helen Evelyn who was salutatorian of her class at William Penn high school, recipient of a B.A. degree cum laude from Bucknell, 1924, and a student at Columbia, Ohio State and New York universities.

Helen taught at Kentucky State, Talladega and Delaware State colleges. She wed Dr. B. T. Holmes, product of University of Michigan and Meharry Medical school, who taught at Virginia Union. They had no children.

Mrs. Maudelle B. Bousfield, first colored dean and principal in Chicago schools, is the daughter of Arrene I. Tanner, niece of the bishop, and Charles H. Brown, a teacher for 52 years, the last 45 in St. Louis public schools.

She was born in St. Louis, June 1, 18959, attended school there, and was graduated from the University of Illinois, 1906, and Mendelssohn Conservatory

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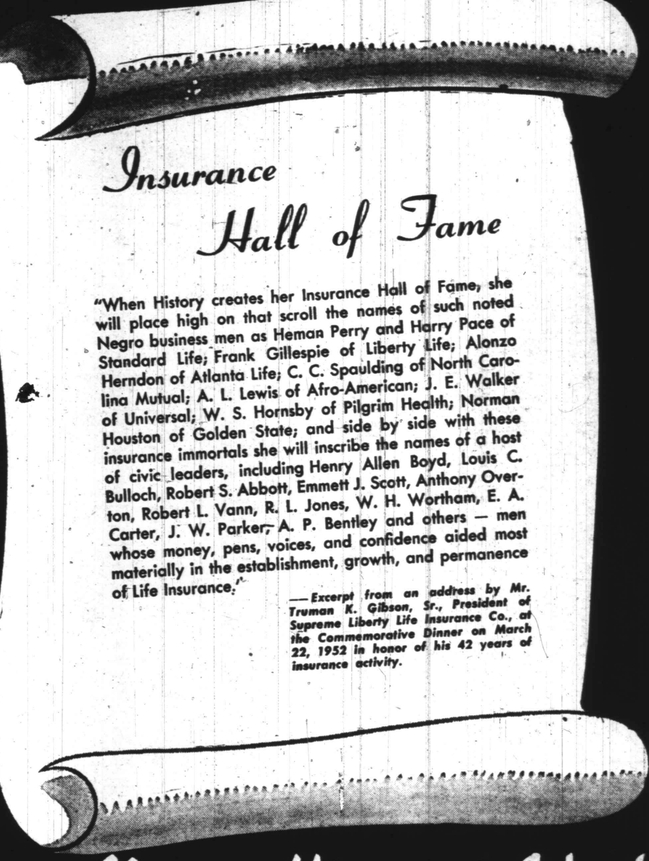
A Salute to



Insurance Hall of Fame

"When History creates her Insurance Hall of Fame, she will place high on that scroll the names of such noted Negro business men as Heman Perry and Harry Pace of Standard Life; Frank Gillespie of Liberty Life; Alonzo Herndon of Atlanta Life; C. C. Spaulding of North Carolina Mutual; A. L. Lewis of Afro-American; J. E. Walker of Universal; W. S. Hornsby of Pilgrim Health; Norman Houston of Golden State; and side by side with these insurance immortals she will inscribe the names of a host of civic leaders, including Henry Allen Boyd, Louis C. Bulloch, Robert S. Abbott, Emmett J. Scott, Anthony Overton, Robert L. Vann, R. L. Jones, W. H. Wortham, E. A. Carter, J. W. Parker, A. P. Bentley and others — men whose money, pens, voices, and confidence aided most materially in the establishment, growth, and permanence of Life Insurance."

— Excerpt from an address by Mr. Truman K. Gibson, Sr., President of Supreme Liberty Life Insurance Co., at the Commemorative Dinner on March 22, 1952 in honor of his 42 years of insurance activity.

Negro History Week

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