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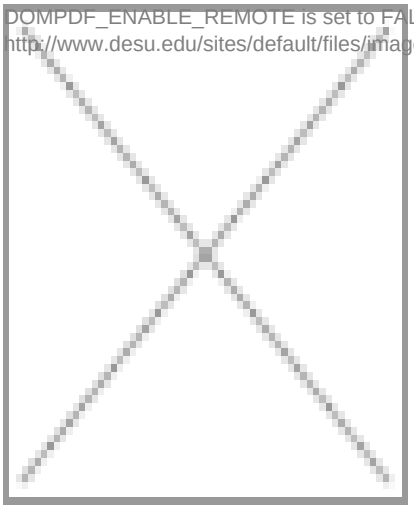
William C. Jason Biography



William Charles Jason was born October 21, 1859, at Trappe, Maryland. His father William Jason who, though, an ordained minister, worked at other things to earn his living. His mother was Mary Wing Jason, the daughter of Charles Wing, a Methodist clergyman, of Wilmington, Delaware, and one of the pioneers of the Delaware Conference.

William and his three younger brothers, Ernest, Alonzo and Howard, spent their early years in Easton and Cambridge, Maryland, where their father found employment as the town's gas maker. While quite young, the boys lost their mother, but remained with their widowed father until each was manumitted at his own request.

William, at, 15 was an apprentice to a printer in Easton. He also learned the barber's trade. At 18, he opened his own shop in Easton. Two years later, desiring to go to school, he sold his shop, and went to Lima, New York, where he attended the Genesee Wesleyan Seminary, a Methodist Episcopal Preparatory School. He earned his tuition by operating a barbershop in the village. He graduated cum laude from that institution in 1884.

That fall, he entered Allegheny College at Meadville, Pennsylvania. From that institution in 1888, he received the Bachelor of Arts degree and the Master of Arts a year later. He then went to Drew Theological Seminary in Madison, New Jersey and acquired the Bachelor of Divinity degree in 1891. The same year he was accepted in the Delaware Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

His first charge was in Orange, New Jersey, where within four years, aided by the operation of a printing press, he was able to erect a church. In that church he was married to Madora Evelyn Bailey, of Exeter, New Hampshire, whom he met in Wilmington, Delaware, where she taught at Howard School. He subsequently served at the Bainbridge Street Church and the Janes Church in Philadelphia. He was granted a release from the pastorate in 1896 to become president of Delaware State College at Dover.

The school at that time consisted of the old mansion-house of the Loockerman plantation and a stable which had formerly been the slave quarters. Two of his early activities at State College were the promotion of the State College Settlement Project along with professor L. S. Conwell, Mr. James W. Aiken and several others, and the raising of funds among Delaware Negroes to build the old slave quarters into a chapel. As he said, "To make over a place of misery and horror into a place of rejoicing."

A few years later, Wiley University, Marshall, Texas, honored W. C. Jason with the degree of Doctor of Divinity.

In 1923, he resigned from the presidency of State College to return to the active ministry in the Delaware Conference. He had seen the little institution of a score of pupils and two buildings grow into one of over two hundred pupils and eleven buildings. One of his last official acts consisted of participating in the dedication of the Demonstration School.

He had in attendance at one time or another some of each of his three brothers' children, and all four of his own: Mary E., William C. Jr., Madora E., and Henry Mainjoy. During all of these years he never turned a boy or girl away who wanted to be taught badly enough "to work his passage."

During his years at State College, he had served the Delaware Conference in the following capacities: as ministerial delegate to the General Conference in 1904; Chairman of the board of Ministerial Training, and Chairman of the Conference Board of Examiners.

On returning to the active ministry, he was assigned successively, charges at Cheswold, Delaware; associate pastor at Dover, Centerville Circuit, Smyrna, Milford, St. Michaels, Oxford, and Delmar. He was inwardly hurt at the unimposing quality of his assignments, but labored his utmost at each saying, "Perhaps he needed to be humbled." He served on the Conference Board of Trustees.

In 1936, he returned to State College as Chaplain and served until failing health forced him to resign in 1941. That same year he was retired from active service in the Conference.

The last years of his life were spent in the house that he had built among the trees that he had planted just across the bridge from the College. A week before the end, he calmly said that he knew that his work was done. He bade his family good-bye and consigned them to God's care. His nightly prayers were an expression of thanks to God for His mercy and kindness.

William Charles Jason's whole life was spent in helping people. Many were the lives that he enriched and ennobled. He knew he had a mission. In a sermon in 1891, he wrote:

"As God heard of old the cry of Israel in the Land of Bondage, so He had witnessed the supplicating hands and heard the entreating cry of Negro bondsmen"... "Thank God the day is coming when the Negro standing upon the high platform of intelligent, Christian piety and useful citizenship-not as an individual one here and another there, but as a race-shall stretch out his hands to God and say "I also am a man."

From the Official Journal Delaware Conference Methodist Church,
Eighty-second Conference 1944

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