

The Connectional Lay Organization Online
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BISHOP EDWARD WATERS

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Bishop Edward Waters was born, a slave, on March 15, 1780 at West River, MD. At an early age, he came to Baltimore and joined the A. M. E. Church. He was subsequently ordained Deacon and Elder after which he served in the Baltimore area. Waters was elected and consecrated as the Third Bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church on May 8, 1836 during the Fifth Quadrennial Session of the General Conference--not including the Organizing Convention of 1816, which was also held in Philadelphia, PA.

However, among the unusual historical biographic annals and documents, we find a most unusual entry concerning Bishop Edward Waters, the Third, elected and consecrated Bishop of African Methodist Episcopal Church. Although our school of higher education in Florida bears his name, Bishop Water's legacy and history following his election and consecration to the bishopric, as reported by Bishop Daniel Alexander Payne (6th Bishop), bears this note:

"The same year of his election, Bishop Brown took him with him, to all the Conferences except the Western Conference, thus giving him some idea of the field of labor. After this tour, he never left the regions of Baltimore, only to attend the Philadelphia and New York Conferences, which was once a year. He never presided in an Annual Conference, only as a silent looker-on, assistant of Bishop Brown, and though he sat in the Episcopal chair from 1836 to 1844, he never ordained a single minister, not even a deacon. The second year after his election, he requested the Baltimore Annual Conference to locate him. Indeed, ever after his ordination he held the charge of Ellicott Mills Circuit, and sometimes of Bethel, in Baltimore. In the eighth year of his episcopate he resigned his episcopal authority, although he was able to travel as a Bishop, and returned to the ranks of the effective elders until his death." (Payne: Chapter XIII, page 112, History of the A. M. E. Church).

While historians usually find it most beneficial to use primary sources of history for the proof of what they record, these sources sometime prove to be somewhat ineffective because of the information which they failed to note. A prime example of this is what we are told concerning Organizing Convention of the African Methodist Episcopal Church and the election of Bishops during this Convention, which was held in

Philadelphia on April 9-11, 1816. Based on words of Rev. David Smith of Baltimore, we are told that on the morning of April 9, the Reverend Daniel Coker, who led the delegation to this convention from Baltimore, was the first elected Bishop of the AME Church. But due to the objections of the people over his complexion, he was never consecrated to the office of the bishopric. So a new election was held with Richard Allen replacing him. (Payne: Chapter VII, page 33-34, *Biography of Rev. David Smith*).

194 years later, many of us have believed this report and repeated it as true. However, a much closer look at the facts would perhaps shed new light on this belief. Considering that no written record of the proceeding of this Convention has ever been found, we might consider that what we have heard or believed about the election might not be completely true or accurate, since the only facts we can truly claim to know are these:

- The Convention was initiated by Richard Allen and held in Philadelphia from April 9-11, 1816.

- The Sixteen Delegates who attended this Convention were the following:

FROM BALTIMORE:--Rev. Daniel Coker, Rev. Richard Williams, Rev. Henry Harden, Mr. Edward Williamson, Mr. Stephen Hill and Mr. Nicholas Gilliard.

FROM PHILADELPHIA:--Rev. Richard Allen, Rev. Clayton Durham, Rev. Jacob Tapsico, Rev. James Champion, and Mr. Thomas Webster.

FROM WILMINGTON, DEL.:--Rev. Peter Spencer.

FROM ATTLEBOROUGH, PA.:--Rev. Jacob Marsh, Rev. William Anderson, and Rev. Edward Jackson.

FROM SALEM, N. J.:--Reuben Cuff.

- Two other known attendees, who witnessed this Convention, but who were not delegates were:

Brother Jonathan Tudas and the young William Paul Quinn, who later became Bishop Morris Brown's Assistant and the Fourth elected and consecrated Bishop of the A.M.E. Church.

It is largely due to the recollections of Bishop Quinn, Jonathan Tudas and the fathers of the Church who were still alive in 1850 that we have any record of this Convention or the list of those attending it, since no written record of the proceeding of this convention to date have ever been found. (Payne Chapter II, page 7; Chapter IV, Page 13, History of the A. M. E. Church).

Since Bishop Payne recorded David Smith's Biography and agreed with Smith's account of the election, one might be persuaded that what Smith said was true were it not for the fact that Smith, by his own confession, was not a delegate to this Convention nor did he witness it, that Rev. David Smith simply repeated what he was told or heard, and like Allen's biography, in which Allen could sometimes not recall dates or names, Smith's biography might have in some places shown signs of memory loss, as is apparent in this statement from his biography, "I do not know the date or how old I was when I married my first wife." (Payne: Page 133, *Biography of Rev. David Smith*).

Although many historians site Payne's *Biography of David Smith*, once we have considered these facts, along with what we have heard or have been told, there is some latitude for a version of this election which is slightly different. Therefore, a few researchers and historians look to Bishop Quinn to fill in the gaps, since Bishop Quinn, who was a youth at the time, outlived many of the participants and no written record has been found.

Dr. Charles H. Wesley recorded two reports concerning the election of bishops based on different recollections concerning it. The first was what we have said above, that Coker alone was elected on April 9 and declared the Bishop Elect, but later resigned and a new election was held in which Allen became the Bishop Elect, as stated in the *Biography of David Smith*. Wesley states that although Bishop Payne repeats this assertion in his *Recollections of Seventy Years*, Smith's Biography has several well known errors and that this, along with the assertion that Coker's resignation was precipitated by his complexion, might well be one of them. Thus, Wesley also sought another source to discover a different version of this story, which might be closer to the truth. Wesley found his new source in Bishop Jabez P. Campbell's article entitled, *Our Episcopacy*, which was published in Volume 6, no.1, pages 2-3, July 1833 Edition of *A.M.E. Review* and also published in Bishop Benjamin William Arnett's (17th Bishop) *Centennial Budget*, 1887, pages 290-291).

Bishop Jabez Pitts Campbell (8th Bishop) was born February 5, 1815 and according to Wesley he was considered, in the late Nineteenth Century, to be the best link between the Founding Father and the present day. Thus, Wesley recorded that Bishop Campbell stated in *Our Episcopacy*, that while Richard Allen was away on business on April 9, both he (Allen) and Daniel Coker were elected to the bishopric. When the minutes were read the next morning, Allen thanked the body for the honor, but stated that he was of the opinion that the newly Organized Church only needed one bishop and therefore he would resign. Wesley further stated that Campbell said this caused some consternation among the group, some of whom favored both Allen and Payne. So the election was reconsidered and a new one of held in which Allen became the new and only Bishop Elect. However, no minutes or confirmation of either report has ever been found. (Wesley. Chapter 7, pages 152-153, *Richard Allen, Apostle of Freedom*). Based on the writing of Bishop B. W. Arnett, this later version of the Convention's proceedings and the election of two bishops was also written in the *Autobiography of Bishop Isaac Lane* of the C.M.E. Church. (Lane: Chapter VI, pages 44-45, *Autobiography of Bishop Isaac Lane*).

Thus, considering that no written document or eye-witness of these reports have ever been found and that Bishop Campbell's account of what happened is probably more accurate than that of David Smith, yet Campbell's did not say which of the two was first elected on April 9, the best answer to the question of who was the first elected Bishop of the A.M.E. Church is that, when we consider all the evidence we have been given, we simply DO NOT KNOW. We simply know the final outcome of it.

This then brings us back to Bishop Edward Waters and his unusual position as a Junior/Assistant Bishop of the then Senior Bishop, Morris Brown. While the facts which Bishop Payne reported above in this article are accurate, as we have pointed out concerning what we know of the General Convention of 1816, the weight of this matter lies more heavily on the side of what Bishop Payne did not report, rather than on the side of what he did report. Therefore, we must look to another source for additional information and clarity.

A review of the literature brings us to the writings of Bishop James Anderson Handy (22nd Bishop), who also realized that there was more to of this story than what he had read in the *History of the A.M. E. Church* by Bishop Daniel Alexander Payne. So, in *Scraps of African Methodist Episcopal History*, after discovering a more appropriate ending to Bishop Water's story, Bishop Handy wrote the following:

"It is true that Bishop Waters was elected Bishop and never presided over a Conference and there was a reason for it. It will be remembered that a Bishop was paid \$25.00 for every Annual Conference he held; hence Bishop Brown made it convenient to open and preside over all the Annual Conferences meeting during the life of Bishop Waters. As he was present, and presided and drew the pay, there was nothing for Bishop Waters to do, but as described by Bishop Payne. The same would be true today, if there were only three or four Conferences and the Bishop's salary depended on the Conferences he held, there would be a few Bishops who would be like Edward Waters, be elected to the office and only be figure-heads." (Handy: Chapter XII, page 121, *Scraps of African Methodist Episcopal History*).

So we find as Bishop Richard Allen had stated in 1816, the work of the church was much too small to support more than one bishop even at the time that Bishop Edward Waters became its Third Bishop during the General Conference in 1836. The number of Annual Conferences, the frequency with which they were held, and the pay derived from holding them made a second person elected to the office of the bishopric a mere figure-head. Thus, Bishop Edward Waters found it more productive and more profitable to serve in the office of Elder rather than in the office of the bishopric.

In the spring of 1847, as Bishop Waters was on his way to an appointment, some “*wicked, rude, reckless white men*” (Payne/Handy) overran him with their horse and carriage as he stepped from the curb, knocking him to the ground and severely injuring him. Although he survived this incident, he never fully recovered from these injuries and died from them on June 5, 1847 at the home of his daughter, Mrs. Margaret Steward.

The purpose of the Lay Organization is to organize and train the lay members of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, so that each member may utilize to the maximum the abilities and skills granted by God, in assisting with the improvement and extension of God's kingdom, and creating happiness, peace and harmony among its members.

CLO – 2010 Lay Study Guide

Excellent is the word to describe the "Lay Study Guide" 2010. In my opinion, it is the best so far. Kudos to the Director of Lay Activities and the Editor Dr. Paulette Coleman. Especially delightful are the many writers who shared study units.

This publication articulates the forward thrust of the Lay Organization in our global perspective of inclusion, highlights the importance of the Local Lay, emphasizes the development of Lay leadership, and compares our roles beyond the spiritual involvement to a role of advocacy in social actions. Many more exciting topics to motivate and stimulate growth and development are included. I really appreciated the inclusion of our young adults authoring some of the units.

It is my hope that every laypersons will purchase this important Study Guide. The study guides have been distributed to the Episcopal District Presidents and may be purchased through them.

God Bless. President, Dr. Willie Glover