



New Jersey Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

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New Jersey Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Inc.

JAMES (JIM) ARTHUR GREENE, AND JOYCE ANN (KESLAKE) GREENE

James (Jim) Arthur Greene graduated from Southern Missionary College (now Southern Adventist University) in 1967 with a degree in Accounting. He served the church in various administrative capacities, including treasurer of the East Indonesia Union, vice president of finance at Loma Linda University, Columbia Union College, and the Rocky Mountain Conference, and as executive secretary of the New Jersey Conference. Greene retired in 2014 after over 48 years of service. Jim and co-author Joyce Ann Keslake Greene were married in 1964, a union that was blessed with three children.

Joyce Ann (Keslake) Greene was born in Massachusetts but grew up in Orlando, Florida. After a period of twenty years in which she married co-author Jim, mothered their three children, and studied at four different colleges, she graduated with honors from Loma Linda University – La Sierra Campus in 1982 with a B.S. degree in Accounting. Her professional career included service as director of payroll at Loma Linda University and as associate treasurer of the New Jersey Conference.

The New Jersey Conference is an administrative unit of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Columbia Union Conference.

Territory: New Jersey

Statistics (June 30, 2019): Churches, 91; membership, 17,009; population, 9,111,284.¹

Origins

The evangelistic labors of Nahum Orcutt led to organization of the first Seventh-day Adventist church in New Jersey in 1874. Orcutt reported in January of that year that he had held public meetings in South Vineland in an effort to remove strong prejudice among the two classes of first-day Adventists (Church of Christ and Age to Come) who were numerous in that area. He then organized a group of nine adults and six children who committed to "Systematic Benevolence."² In June, Orcutt "partially organized" the South Vineland group into a church of fourteen that now petitioned the New England Conference to admit them into their fold. The small fellowship of Sabbath-keepers spread their new faith by maintaining reading rooms in Vineland and nearby Millville supplied with *Signs of the Times*.³

On occasional visits by a minister, converts were baptized. In February 1877, W. J. Boynton reported five converts to the seventh-day Sabbath in North Vineland.⁴ The twenty "resident members" appointed an elder and a deacon on April 20, 1877.⁵ In July 1877, Orcutt wrote: "Our members, twenty-five in number, are scattered up and down the West Jersey R.R., a distance of forty miles. What an opportunity to let our light shine!"⁶

In the summer of 1879, Isaac Sanborn visited the Camden area where he "found fourteen Sabbath keepers, in a disunited state." After his labors with the group, Sanborn reported that "harmony and peace" prevailed and a "society" of sixteen had been organized. Five were baptized and more anticipated undergoing the ordinance at an upcoming quarterly meeting in Vineland.⁷ In December 1880, Sanborn returned and, with Orcutt assisting, organized the Camden group into a church that elected officers and "voted to be taken under the watch care of the New England Conference, to which treasury they will send their tithes."⁸

New Jersey was included in the territory of the newly-created Atlantic Conference in 1889, along with New York City and the adjoining counties, Long Island, Delaware, Maryland, and the District of Columbia. The two New Jersey churches—Vineland and Camden—joined those in Brooklyn, New York; Baltimore, Maryland; and Washington, DC; in forming the new conference's constituency of five churches that altogether totaled 175 members. J. E. Robinson was elected the first president of the new conference with H. E. Robinson, secretary, and T. A. Kilgore, treasurer.⁹

Further progress came later that fall in Paulsboro, where D. E. Lindsey held meetings that resulted in ten baptisms. The series closed "with a crowded hall and a great interest," partly as a result of the agitation of the church-state issue by the National Reform interests of the time. A church of seventeen members was organized

the following spring, and a new building was erected later in 1890 and dedicated on January 18, 1891.¹⁰

The first camp meeting of the Atlantic Conference was held in Mount Holly, New Jersey, in 1891. It drew about 225 attendees, most of whom stayed for the entire ten days. The encampment drew considerable interest from the surrounding community and more than 1,500 attended the public Sunday-night service that closed the camp meeting.¹¹

Elmer E. Franke, who had remarkable success as an evangelist for close to a decade in New York City and New Jersey, began a lengthy series of meetings in Jersey City in September 1893, held in a tent pitched across the street from the large St. Patrick's Cathedral.¹² The *Review and Herald* noted a striking experience that Franke had related in a newspaper article:

Brother E. E. Franke notes in the *Union Record*, an interesting case of a young man who recently came to this country from Scotland, and has accepted the views of Seventh-day Adventists. Just before coming to this country, he had a dream in which he appeared to be in a particular street and place of meeting, where truth was being presented. He arrived in New Jersey, Sept. 5, and brother F. opened his meetings in Jersey City, Sept. 11. This young man attended the meeting, and at once recognized the place as the one he had seen in his dream. Rejoicing now in the truth, he desires to return to his native land (although he has a good position here) to make known the light to his people.¹³

Atlantic Conference president H. E. Robinson reported that just five months after Franke's campaign began "there is an organized church of about sixty members" in Jersey City, and that "they have just completed a fine meeting-house worth \$3000, besides purchasing a lot for about \$1500.¹⁴ In addition to Jersey City, three other New Jersey churches were formally added to the Atlantic Conference at its 1896 session: Paterson, Millville, and Salem.¹⁵

C. H. Keslake and J. C. Stevens encountered ugly opposition that bordered on violence in 1897 when they conducted tent meetings in Perth Amboy. Even before the meetings began, Stevens was roused from his bed and warned of serious consequences ahead if the announced meetings proceeded. On the opening night a mob of above 200 surrounded the tent, beating the ropes and pelting the canvas. Keslake described the incident:

At the close of the service . . . the situation became quite threatening. Men stepped into the tent, one especially making use of the vilest language and indulging in the most indecent gestures. . . . When it seemed that the climax had been reached, and physical harm appeared imminent the Lord's restraining power was made manifest. . . . Someone stepped into the tent, laid hold of the ringleader, and led him out. The only damage done to us was the cutting of the ropes of our tent.¹⁶

Although it would be another decade before it happened, a church of a church of a dozen members was eventually formed in Perth Amboy.¹⁷

In the summer of 1901, another major campaign by E. E. Franke led to organization of a church in Trenton with seventy-five members and a Sabbath School of 175 members. The series generated a great deal of public attention, including some determined opposition. Among the numerous press reports, one described Franke baptizing sixty people in the Delaware River, with thousands of onlookers on the banks. The 1,000-seat evangelistic tent was too small to accommodate the crowds, but the interests threatened by Franke's presentation of the Adventist message prevented him from renting a hall that would be large enough.¹⁸

Organizational History

The New Jersey Conference was organized in December 1901 and began functioning as a conference in 1902. The new conference was part of the recently-formed Atlantic Union Conference. It had two ministers and fourteen churches, with a membership of 370. The first president was J. E. Jayne.¹⁹ The conference office was located in Paterson.²⁰

At the second annual conference session held in Trenton in 1904, the conference headquarters were moved from Paterson to Camden, and a Tract Society (Book and Bible House) was organized. The total membership was 402.²¹

Office Moves

During the early years, the conference office moved from location to location throughout the state. After the office moved to Camden in 1904, it was relocated to Swedesboro from 1905 to 1906. A frightening mishap occurred during the move to Swedesboro. The team of horses pulling a sled loaded with the office furniture and supplies stalled on the railroad tracks in Westville. Thankfully, neither the driver nor the horses were hurt, but the destruction of the materials, as described by the conference president, J. E. Jayne, was especially devastating for Mrs. J. W. Rambo, who served as conference secretary and treasurer.

The typewriter, bookcases, standing desk, table, roll-top desk, cabinet files, and Sister Rambo's furniture were utterly destroyed, and with our stock of bound books, tracts, letters, bills, receipts, statements, office utensils, and stationery were scattered for blocks through the village. . . . I am of the opinion that our loss will be about \$400 in addition to the loss upon Sister Rambo's personal property.²²

By 1907, the conference office was in Trenton, where it remained until 2010 when it moved to its current address in Lawrenceville.²³

Later Developments

A period of strong growth and development took place during the two decades following organization of the conference. Through a combination of colporteur activity, lay evangelism, and public preaching, churches were

formed in many areas, among foreign-language groups as well as those speaking English.²⁴ In summarizing progress for the year 1919, conference president W. F. Moffett pointed to the fact that the conference employed eleven foreign language workers as evidence of the “cosmopolitan nature of our field.” Regarding the seven new churches added to the conference that year, Moffett wrote that “one is Czecho-Slovakian, one Swedish, one Polish, one white English and three colored.”²⁵ By the end of 1920, conference membership stood at 1,420 in thirty-six churches.²⁶

In 1907, the conference was transferred to the new Columbia Union Conference. On December 9, 1907, the New Jersey Conference Association of Seventh-day Adventists was officially incorporated in the State of New Jersey.²⁷ A century later, on September 23, 2007, the constituency of the conference and the association voted to merge the two entities into one newly-named corporation—New Jersey Conference of Seventh-day Adventist, Inc.²⁸

In the conference’s first annual report, dated December 31, 1902, tithe amounted to \$4,193.84. After ten years the amount increased to \$14,698.86, and another 10 years brought the figure to \$67,623.70, while in the early 1960s tithe receipts totaled more than \$525,000 annually.²⁹ In 2018, the amount of tithe totaled \$13,342,480.³⁰ The conference generated \$506.12 in mission funds in 1902, its first year of operation. Two decades later, the amount had increased to \$38,251.73, largely the result of the Ingathering program that was initiated in the interim.³¹ In 2018, mission offerings surpassed \$400,000, of which Ingathering amounted to only \$1,237.50.³²

In 2002, one hundred years after the conference was organized, the membership stood at 10,098.³³ Since 2002, the conference’s rate of growth has shown much larger gains and a membership of 16,868 was reported as of year-end 2018. Rapid growth in Hispanic membership has been the most striking demographic trend in the twenty-first century. As of 2018, the membership was spread over the following ethnic/language groups: Spanish 58.9%, English 29.2%, French 6.9%, Korean 1.9%, Filipino 1.2%, Portuguese (Brazilian) 1.0%, and Indonesian 0.9%.³⁴

The total investment in schools, parsonages, church structures, and related buildings exceeded \$65 million at the close of 2018.³⁵

Growth of Educational System

In 1910, the first church school in New Jersey was opened in Bridgeton. Five grades were taught and eleven pupils, including a girl who was blind, finished the year. The school was maintained by pledges and a monthly collection. In 1912, schools were opened in Fairton and Pleasantville; and in 1913 in Trenton, Newark, and Ramah. The number of schools increased to seven elementary and five 10-grade schools by 1919. That number remained substantially the same in 1964, although the total enrollment of 430 had more than doubled since 1919.³⁶

As the school enrollment in the conference continued to grow, it was decided that a twelve-grade academy was needed to provide secondary education. In 1927, Plainfield Academy opened as a day school, operated by the Plainfield church. In the mid-1930s, the academy began to take in some boarding students, placing the students in the homes of members in the area near the school.

By 1941, the school had grown and was relocated to the former Nash home on 622 West Eighth Street in Plainfield. With the move to this 25-room home, which provided both dorm rooms and classrooms, ownership and operation of the school was transferred over to the New Jersey Conference. In 1958, the academy was reorganized as a boarding academy and renamed Garden State Academy and, in 1963, moved to property acquired by the conference near Tranquility in northwestern New Jersey. Eighty-two students enrolled for 1963-1964, served by twelve faculty members.³⁷

This 375-acre (150-hectare) estate also served as the youth camp and camp meeting site for the conference, replacing the 167-acre (70-hectare) farm in Kingston that had been used for those purposes since 1946.³⁸

In 2005, Garden State Academy was closed due to low enrollment. The property was converted into a retreat and conference center and renamed Tranquil Valley Retreat Center.³⁹

As of 2018, educational institutions in the conference included two elementary schools—Tranquility and Vineland, two junior academies—Meadow View and Waldwick, and one day academy—Lake Nelson Adventist Academy (pre-school through 12th grade). Collective enrollment at New Jersey's Adventist schools for the 2018-2019 school year totaled 467.⁴⁰

Conference Vision

The vision for the New Jersey Conference is to expand God's vineyard through preaching, teaching and living the everlasting Gospel before the millions of people who make up the cross-cultural communities of our state.⁴¹

Conference Mission

To share with all peoples the full, unique and compelling message of Jesus Christ.⁴²

Presidents

J. E. Jayne (1902-1908); B. F. Kneeland (1908-1912); A. R. Sanborn (1912-1918); W. H. Heckman (1918-1919); W. C. Moffet (1919-1921); O. O. Bernstein (1921-1925); A. J. Clark, (1925-1928); H. J. Detwiler (1928-1932); W. A. Nelson (1932-1937); W. M. Robbins (1937-1940); M. G. Conger (1940-1947); W. B. Hill (1947-1955); E. F. Koch (1955-1956); J. W. Osborn (1956-1959); M. K. Eckenroth (1959-1963); A. B. Butler (1963-1967); W. B. Quigley (1967-1972); J. O. Tompkins (1972-1978); D. C. Schneider (1978-1982); R.W. Boggess (1982-1995); L. R. Evans (1995-1997); D. W. Chow (1997-2000); L. C. Finck (2000-2007); J. Cortes (2007-2017); J. Aguero (2017-)

Headquarters Address: 2303 Brunswick Avenue, Trenton, New Jersey 08648

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