



Jim Pearson

Judge

On August 22, 1865, a son, Jim, was born to John and Elzilah Pearson in Madison County, Alabama. When Jim was young, his father passed away and Jim became his mother's main support. Early in his life, he demonstrated traits of becoming a successful entrepreneur. He worked as a delivery person for the local grocer and established a regular route of customers who counted on him. When he reached manhood, he traveled southward over the mountains to what was then known as Jones Valley, now Birmingham.

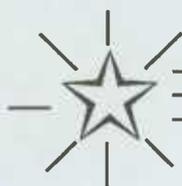
Jim was a deacon in the local Baptist church. White missionaries came to his church to warn the members not to listen to the "devils" who had come to the community teaching people to keep the seventh day holy as the Sabbath. Hoping to show the "devils" their error, Mr. Pearson tried to give them Bible lessons. Jesus promised, "If any man will do His will, he shall know the doctrine." Pearson was convicted of the truth and accepted the Sabbath.

He attended college in Battle Creek, Michigan, and trained under Dr. Kellogg. While there he married Laura Price Hall. The training in physical therapy and Swedish massage enabled "Dr." Pearson to open a treatment center in Birmingham. Among the wealthy White clients were businessmen, governors, lawyers, congressmen, editors, clergy and judges. One of these judges was

the Honorable H. S. Abernathy of the Jefferson County Court of Misdemeanors. Judge Abernathy counseled Dr. Pearson that the best way to help the Black people was to keep them out of the courts. He helped Jim Pearson form the Negro Court of Arbitration. Dr. Jim Pearson was the president (judge), and his wife Laura was secretary-treasurer (clerk). Here disagreements were arbitrated among the parties rather than going to the higher courts.

In 1921, Dr. and Mrs. Pearson purchased 198 acres of property and established the Pine Grove School. Their daughter, Elzilah Mae, served as principal. This school was operated by the Negro Board of Arbitration of Alabama. Judge Abernathy wrote a letter commending Dr. Pearson for organizing an established industrial school in Shelby County, Alabama, called the Pine Grove Industrial School. Abernathy wrote: "He has made a success with the small means at his hands. I hope that White people who are able will help him in his laudable undertaking." Many responded. Three years later, Dr. Pearson gave the following report in a letter: "...We purchased 300 acres of land two miles west of Vandiver, Alabama,...Pine Grove School has between 30 and 40 students. We hope to make this school self-supporting and are offering nine months of thorough training..."

In 1926, a group came from the White Seventh-day Adventist school in Madison,



Tennessee: Josephine Gotzian, Dr. E. A. Sutherland, N. H. Druillard, M. A. Beaumont and Lida F. Scott. They advised that the name be changed to Birmingham Institute (for Colored people) and that a White man should become president. Dr. Pearson, however, proclaimed that "This school will be of the Black race, for the Black race and by the Black race!"

Today, the dream still lives through the work of his son, Dr. J. Price Pearson, a podiatrist who is president of Faith Academy located two miles west of Vandiver, Alabama, for Black Seventh-day Adventist youth for this age. Thus the work of Judge Jim Pearson, an early pioneer of justice for all Black people, has left a legacy for all. ☆

Source:

• Biographical sketch — written by granddaughter, Elizabeth Finley Drake, June, 1989