AFRO-AMERICAN LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY
101 East Union Street
Jacksonville, Florida 32202

A HISTORY
OF
AFRO-AMERICAN LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY
Seven Samaritans . . .

On the 15th day of January, in the year 1901, seven members of Jacksonville's black community effected the organization of what would become the Afro-American Life Insurance Company. The names of these men, forever engraved upon the memory of those to follow in their footsteps, were Reverend E. J. Gregg, Mr. E. W. Latson, Mr. A. L. Lewis, Mr. A. W. Price, Dr. A. W. Smith, Mr. J. W. Valentine, and Reverend J. Milton Waldron.

These men each invested $100 of their hard-earned income in the simple premise that a group of people, impoverished in spirit and living in a subsistence existence because of the circumstance of their color, badly needed help. Two obvious truths motivated the action of the seven founders: the sick and injured required ministration and medication; the dead rightfully deserved to be given a dignified burial.

A Beginning . . .

On the 1st day of March, in the year 1901, the State of Florida granted a charter to this fledgling enterprise, then-named the Afro-American Industrial and Benefit Association. The following men were installed as the Company's first executive officers: Reverend E. J. Gregg, President; Dr. A. W. Smith, Vice President; Mr. A. L. Lewis, Treasurer; and Reverend J. Milton Waldron, Secretary. The first home office was quartered in a modest dwelling at 14 Ocean Street, Jacksonville, Florida. It was staffed by Mr. G. W. Holloway, District Supervisor; Mr. Louis D. Ervin, First Agent, and Miss Eartha M. M. White, Clerk.

Disaster Strikes . . .

Hardly had the order of business gotten under way when disaster struck the young organization, in the form of the terrible Jacksonville fire of 1901. Everything but a few records was destroyed by the flames that gutted most of the city's business area. However, undaunted and possessed of indomitable willpower and tenacity, the organizers set out to rebuild the Company—like a Phoenix arising from the still-smoldering ashes. One individual—Miss Eartha M. M. White—was mainly responsible for the rebirth of the Company. As best she could, she salvaged what remained of invaluable books and records, making it possible for the Company to stay in business and to continue its growth.

It should be especially noted here that Miss White later became active in civic and social work; and during the following years she became nationally-recognized as an outstanding humanitarian. In 1970, sponsored by Congressman Charles E. Bennett of Florida, Miss White was awarded, in New York City, the "National Lane Bryant Award," plus a $5,000 honorarium, in competition with over 300 candidates from all over the United States.

A New Start . . .

Pulling itself together after the fire, the Company occupied space volunteered by Mr. A. L. Lewis, then Business Manager-Treasurer, in his home. Not long thereafter, increased business activity forced the Company to rent considerably larger office space at 609 Main Street in Jacksonville. In the year 1908, the Company's capital stock had increased to $10,000. Mr. John P. Spearing had joined the executive staff as Vice President, and the Company negotiated the purchase of the Mutual Benefit Association of Jacksonville, adding its assets to that of the Company.

Confounding The Skeptics . . .

While the Company and its people were devoting their time and efforts in the direction of strong and steady growth, there were, in the city's business community, those who had their doubts as to the eventual success of a "black-owned, black-operated" insurance firm. The doubters were completely confounded when, in the year 1910, the Company built its own Home Office—a two-story brick and stone structure located at 101 E. Union Street in Jacksonville. During that year, the Company changed its name to the Afro-American Industrial Insurance Company and, in 1911,
purchased the thriving Miami Mutual Insurance Company of Miami, Florida.

When, in 1918, Company President Mr. A. E. Price died, his place was taken by Mr. A. L. Lewis, with Mr. Washington Hampton as Secretary and Mr. Louis D. Ervin as General Manager. Capital stock of the Company was increased to $20,000 and, during the following seven years, growth continued to the point at which capital stock was listed at $100,000 and the weekly collectible debit rose from $5,000 to nearly $10,000. So much for the Doubting Thomases!

The Years March On . . .

And the Company's growth becomes stronger and more evident. It wrote its first ordinary policy in 1922 and in 1926 entered the State of Georgia through the purchase of the Chatham Life and Health Insurance Company of Savannah. During the period of 1931 through 1935, the Company purchased three insurance companies operating in Florida, and listed its own capital stock at $200,000. In 1947, death took the only remaining one of the original seven founders, Dr. A. L. Lewis, then Chairman-Treasurer. The spirit of his strong religious beliefs, business integrity and blessed benevolence lives today within the workings of the Company he helped build.

In 1949, the Company extended its operations into Alabama, opening offices in Birmingham and Mobile. Ten years later the Company entered the State of Texas with the purchase of the Watchtower Life Insurance Company, and increased Company assets to over ten and a half million dollars, with more than sixty million dollars of insurance and capital stock listed at one half million dollars.

The new, modern home office building was constructed in 1956 on the same historical site as the original. Dr. James H. Lewis served as President from 1936-1967 and as Chairman of the Board from 1947 to the present day. Mr. I. H. Burney II was elected President in 1967. In 1969 the Company was listed among the first three in the National Insurance Association to write "Major" group insurance.

Great Oaks From Little Acorns . . .

Founded by seven dedicated black men—in an obscure, back-street church—the Company has, through the years, tinctured its business philosophies with the religious and humanitarian influences instilled by its originators. Witness the caliber of some of the men and women responsible for the Company's position to-

day: eight Bishops of the church; five College Presidents; numerous other successful business and professional individuals. To cite an outstanding example: Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune, illustrious founder of Bethune-Cookman College, worked for the Company as an Agent; later served an inspiring twenty-four years on its Board of Directors.

It is with justifiable pride that the Company asserts its distinction of being the oldest life insurance company organized in the State of Florida, still in operation—and still growing!

We Also Contribute . . .

To be successful—and respected—a company must contribute to the community in which it does business. We are no exception to that rule. The Company is known for its "equal opportunity" employment policies, offering job opportunities in a multitude of fields, to a large number of qualified applicants, without regard to race, color or religious beliefs. The granting of mortgage loans has assisted many of our clients in their business and domestic endeavors. And the living benefits provided to our policyholders include endowments, cash values, loan benefits, hospitalization benefits, income protection—to name a few.

Our Company-wide payroll contributes, too, in the many communities in which our people are employed. Well over a million and a half dollars are paid annually to Company employees who, in turn, distribute the money in their community in everyday living ex-
penditure. We realize that our first responsibility is to the people whose welfare we insure. Our second is to the communities in which they live and in which we work.

And We Give More . . .

There is more than money, employment and assistance involved in the Company's contribution to the communities it serves. Personal involvement can carry no price tag, but its effects can be recognized in its many facets. Company personnel get involved with community-oriented projects such as the Boy Scouts, United Funds, Chambers of Commerce, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, valid Civil Rights movements, Safety Councils, and others. And the Company contributes financially as an entity, to worthy civic organizations, churches and educational institutions.

This Is Our "Stock In Trade" . . .

From its small beginning, back in 1901, the Company has constantly added to the insurance coverages available to its clients. It presently offers the following protection, in three different categories:

I. Weekly Premium: Life and Endowment, Sickness and Accident, Hospitalization

II. Ordinary Life: Life Endowment and Term Plans, Mortgage Protection, Income Protection

III. Group: Life, Hospitalization, Major Medical, Weekly Income Benefits

With Whom Do We Work?

As stated earlier, our founders organized the Company to give much-needed assistance to a minority whose only distinction, so-considered at the time, was the color of their skin. Times and attitudes have changed since 1901. And, by the Grace of God, will continue to change even more.

There are countless people, the color of whose skin is other-than-black, who recognize in the Company an opportunity to help their fellow man better his position and his way of life. The Company has a deep appreciation for this sentiment; it openly solicits business and development of relationships with other-than-black persons who, like the originating "Seven Samaritans," wish to join with us to our mutual benefit.