Forging Faith, Building Freedom

African American Faith Experiences in Delaware, 1800-1980

Constance J. Cooper Lewis V. Baldwin



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A book to accompany an exhibition at the Delaware History Museum, September 26, 2013 - June 14, 2014

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Foreword

Community engagement has been a guiding principle for historical agencies for some two decades. Broadly speaking, community engagement seeks to attract diverse audiences to historical organizations by expanding the historical narrative through new scholarship. This new scholarship can be presented through exhibitions, lectures, school-based education programs, and published research, to cite some examples.

Community engagement, however, runs much deeper than simply being on the receiving end of the efforts of historical societies. Truly successful community engagement draws in individuals, organizations, and publics as active participants in the conception, development, and presentation of history exhibitions and programs. Such is the case with *Forging Faith, Building Freedom: African American Faith Experiences in Delaware, 1800 – 1980.* Inspired by the two-hundredth anniversary in 2013 of Peter Spencer's founding of the African Union Church and the Big August Quarterly, this special exhibition sponsored by the Delaware Historical Society presented the history of African American faith in Delaware through objects, images, and books loaned by many churches, individuals, and organizations in the African American community as well as a number of public repositories. Such broad community collaboration led to a comprehensive presentation of the major themes in the exhibition. Early Delaware and early Delawareans of African descent were at the center of developments in African American faith in America, and *Forging Faith, Building Freedom* introduced contemporary America to this significant and compelling history.

This book, a companion publication to the gallery exhibition that ran from September 26, 2013, to June 14, 2014, ensures that the historical research that supported *Forging Faith, Building Freedom* will be available to broader publics today and tomorrow. Both the exhibition and this publication enlarge the historical record and serve as a springboard to further research on the topic.

A project of this scope requires vision, leadership, open participation, and financial support. Several pages could be filled citing all the individuals and entities involved in the *Forging Faith* project. This foreword limits acknowledgments to key persons and organizations. Dr. Constance Cooper, chief curator with the Delaware Historical Society, served as exhibition curator and project manager. She quickly developed a passion to interact with people and their histories and collections to get it right. Dr. Lewis V. Baldwin, professor emeritus of religious studies at Vanderbilt University, the exhibition's consulting historian, provided wise counsel and generous support. His work on Peter Spencer and other African American religious leaders guided much of the historical research.

The exhibition was designed, fabricated, and installed at the Delaware History Museum by staff of the State of Delaware's Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs. The Interdenominational Ministers Action Council and the Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance helped to facilitate meetings with churches and their congregants across Delaware. Endorsements of the exhibition by these two organizations built necessary and unprecedented trust and faith in the project and the Delaware Historical Society. Much of the funding for the exhibition was provided by the Delaware Humanities Forum.

This book ensures a permanency to the ground-breaking *Forging Faith, Building Freedom* project. The First State is fortunate have the Delaware Heritage Commission, whose mission is to publish histories of Delaware. The Delaware Historical Society is forever grateful to the Heritage Commission for fully underwriting the publication of this book. It is a must-read for anyone with an interest in Delaware history. Please enjoy every page of *Forging Faith, Building Freedom*.

> Scott W. Loehr Chief Executive Officer Delaware Historical Society

Acknowledgments

Forging Faith, Building Freedom: African American Faith Experiences in Delaware, 1800-1980 came to life as a gallery exhibition, online exhibition, and book only with the contributions of many churches, individuals, organizations, and institutions in the African American community and beyond. The Delaware Historical Society expresses its thanks and appreciation to all who participated in this collaborative project.

African Union Methodist Protestant Church and Connection Archives of the Episcopal Church Archives, United Library, Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary Dr. Lewis V. Baldwin Regina Barry **Bell Funeral Home** Kevin Benjamin Bethel AME Church, Smyrna Bethel AME Church, Wilmington Steve Boyden Tikiah D. Brown Terry A. Bryan Rev. Vernon M. Bryant and Lucinda A. Jones-Bryant Terence Burns Byrd's AME Church Challenge Program Chippey African Union Methodist Church Barry Corke Dr. Peter T. Dalleo Paul Preston Davis Delaware Art Museum **Delaware Heritage Commission** Delaware Historical Society Staff **Delaware Humanities Forum Delaware Public Archives** Delaware State University Gospel Choir Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs, an agency of the state of Delaware Thomas Doherty Dr. Martin Drew Dena Chasten-Ellis Episcopal Church of Saints Andrew and Matthew Rev. Ruth Evans

Journeys in Forging Faith and Building Freedom Constance J. Cooper

The journey that took *Forging Faith, Building Freedom* from concept to gallery exhibition, online exhibition, and book began with a keen appreciation of the central place of faith in African American life and the key contributions of four late eighteenth and early nineteenth century black church founders from Delaware: Absalom Jones, Richard Allen, Peter Spencer, and Samuel Cornish. As the project developed the Delaware Historical Society became more and more excited by the importance of this story and the need to proclaim it: Delawareans played essential roles in the formation of the independent black church in the United States, and Peter Spencer's creation of the nation's first independent black denomination in Wilmington in 1813 is a milestone in the development of religious liberty in the United States. Early meetings with pastors and historians brought forth major themes that ensured that the exhibition would be much more than interesting histories of individual congregations or denominations that presented the religious life of one group of Delawareans.¹ Delaware's African American faith experience has meanings, traditions, and practices that reflect the needs and spirituality of its members, but its impact extends much farther. Not only has each congregation contributed to the development of its own community, but this story also speaks to the very core of our nation's history and ideals, and its struggles and failures in living up to those ideals. Thus, forging faith--and building freedom. For African Americans, the two are inseparable.

Blacks came to Christianity from a common experience of oppression, slavery, and exclusion from mainstream society. Their faith emphasized the Bible's message of the equality and liberty of all under God and the promise of freedom in heaven, if not on earth. They also wanted to create religious institutions that were their own in every way, with complete control over preaching and preachers, worship, music, administration, and congregational activities. All black congregations share this foundation, but it is equally true that African American faith in Delaware, as elsewhere, is rich and varied in its expression. The denominational range includes several Methodist bodies, Baptists, Roman Catholics, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Pentecostals, nondenominational Christians, and Muslims, among others. Each congregation has its own history, its own style of worship, music and fellowship, and its own role in its community, contributing to the tapestry of religious diversity within Delaware and the nation.

In the conceptualization phase, several themes quickly emerged that shaped the structure of the exhibition. The historical core is the four Delaware founders: Absalom Jones, Richard Allen, Peter Spencer, and Samuel Cornish. And within that core, Peter Spencer's founding in Wilmington of the Union Church of Africans, the first independent African American denomination in the United States, and the August Quarterly is central. As the United States was beginning to develop as a nation, Spencer and his followers had the vision to do something that Africans in America had never done before. This Delaware story needs to be better known as part of the African American and national historical narrative.

Other themes emerged to round out the story of African American faith in Delaware. One is the development of the role of the black preacher as a multi-faceted spiritual and community leader who emerged in a setting that offered few other opportunities for leadership. Another is the range and diversity of African American houses of worship throughout the state. Frank Zebley's *The Churches of Delaware*, published in 1946 and still the basic starting point for research on the topic, included over 200 black congregations. Since then many more have been

women, many of whom were born in slavery, who belonged to early black churches, who followed the leadership of the founders. Lists survive of the black members of Asbury, Wilmington's first Methodist church, many of whom left in 1805 to found Ezion Methodist Episcopal Church. However, at this time it is not known exactly who left Asbury and who remained there. The names of Ezion's original seven trustees are known, as are the names of the thirty-nine people who signed the articles of association of the African Union Church. Other early members of those churches remain anonymous. These are the people who supported and followed Peter Spencer and William Anderson's vision and leadership as it progressed, the people without whom the churches could not have existed. Although they left no written testimonials of why they followed Spencer and Anderson, their actions state loudly and clearly that they wanted to worship God in their own way, in a church over which they had full control. They were forging faith and building freedom.

In the 1930s, members of Bethel AME Church in Wilmington, living in a segregated society, knew all too well what had been at stake in the early days. Bethel's senior choir was formed shortly after the church's founding in 1844, when the simple and innocent act of singing God's praises was an act of assertion and liberation. According to the church's 1934 *Souvenir Booklet*, "A splendid heritage has been left them by the valor of perseverance and patriotism of the men and women of the early Church who, though compassed about by hate, prejudice and the effect of abominable slave-laws yet in 1846, a few months after the Church was organized, these brave men and women joined and duly organized a Church Choir."⁴ By the late 1860s, about 1,150 people belonged to Wilmington's five black churches, over a third of the city's total black population of 3,211.⁵ Each church offered morning, afternoon, and evening services, providing a full day of worship and fellowship that could heal the hurts of the past and provide strength for the days ahead. The practice of three services each Sunday continued well into twentieth century.⁶

Delaware's black church founders set a high standard for the clergy who followed them, expanding the boundaries of black participation in public life and contributing to the creation of the role of the black minister as a leader who wore many hats. Portraits of Absalom Jones by Raphaelle Peale and of Reese Scott, AUMP bishop, by Ed Loper, Sr., painted over a century and a half apart, convey in different ways the strength and power of the black preacher.

In the 1793 yellow fever epidemic in Philadelphia, Absalom Jones, Richard Allen, and the Free African Society that they led provided vital nursing and other assistance to suffering and dying white victims. After Matthew Carey published criticisms of their actions, Allen and Jones wrote their own account of black participation in the fight against the disease.⁷ In doing so, they were asserting their right to defend their actions and to participate in public debate. In addition to the yellow fever epidemic, the authors discussed civil rights issues in addresses to slave owners, to blacks, and to whites who had helped blacks. But Jones and Allen did not just present their story; these two men from Delaware also created the first published work in the United States copyrighted by Africans. This seems a small thing, but it was a bold step, for these men who were not considered citizens, who had no vote or role in government, were using the structures of government to protect their work.

In addition to his church ministry, Samuel Cornish led the way in black journalism, editing *Freedom's Journal*, the nation's first black-owned and black-edited newspaper, with John Russworm in 1829. Cornish later edited *Rights for All* and the *Colored American*. In *Freedom's Journal*, Cornish spoke out to build up blacks' confidence in themselves and their abilities so that they could be truly free. He also fought against the colonization movement.⁸ Peter Spencer similarly expanded the minister's role when he chaired, in his church, an 1831 meeting that expressed Wilmington blacks' disagreement with colonization and their commitment to the United States, which is more fully discussed in Lewis Baldwin's article. These Delawareans who forged faith also built freedom.

Delaware's African American faith journey also contributed some early pioneers in the area of women's ordained ministry who deserve to be remembered as participants in that ongoing struggle. From the beginning, African Union Methodism offered women a larger role than did other churches, either black or white. Thirteen

their own preferences, and that provided a safe and welcoming place to socialize. People made connections within the church family—either their own church or the extended network of all black churches—that could lead to friendship, marriage, organizational connections, or business opportunities.

Many objects displayed in *Forging Faith, Building Freedom* demonstrate the importance of the church in its members' lives and the rich communal life that black churches created for their communities. One early example is a broadside announcing the "Last Grand Excursion of the Season" to Red Bank, New Jersey, sponsored by Bethel AME Church in Wilmington in August 1866, offering a "pleasant and agreeable" day out for "lovers of religion and pleasure." The program for "Great Women of the Bible," a 1933 production that the Rainbow Club of Bethel AME Church in Wilmington offered at Mother AU Church, lists forty-one women as having a role in the pageant, and others undoubtedly helped out behind the scenes. Equally evocative is a photograph of Zoar ME Church in Selbyville in the late 1930s with several people on ladders painting the church while others socialize on the steps, participating in the continual informal round of chores that keep a church going.

A wonderful scrapbook compiled by Thomas Swiggett preserves a century's worth of congregational life at Bethel AME Church in Smyrna through announcements and programs from events dating from the late 1880s to

the late 1980s. The book was lent to the exhibition by Thomas Swiggett's daughter, who is at least the fourth generation of her family to be a member of the church. A trip through the scrapbook reveals both the rich social and cultural life that the church offered its members as well as the constant round of fund-raising activities. Musical groups from Philadelphia gave concerts at the church. A music and literary festival in 1939 featured choirs from nine other black Methodist churches: Centennial ME, Smyrna; Mt. Olive AME, Kenton; St. Paul's UAME, Smyrna; Riley's Neck UAME, Millington, Maryland; Trinity AME, Middletown; Girls Chorus, Bethel AME, Wilmington; Mt. Pisgah AME, Laurel; Bethel AME, Milford; and



CONFERENCE DELEGATES Conference delegates at Mother AUMP Church, Wilmington Ca. late 1800s-early 1900s Courtesy of Mother African Union Church

St. Paul's ME, Millington, Maryland. The Founder's Day observance in February 1941 featured, in addition to the morning service, a black history program in the afternoon with Louis Redding and a performance of "The Life of Richard Allen" in the evening. Creative fund-raising included a birthday social put on by the young members in 1899: the invitation asked each guest to fill the sack provided with a penny for each year of their age—"We promise the number will never be told." Other fund-raisers were more to the point, such as the annual fuel rally and the Thousand Dollar Renovating Rally of 1944, with a recommended contribution of five dollars.

A final example is the program from the funeral of Michael T. Sterling at Bethel AME Church in Wilmington in 1922. This was no ordinary funeral: ten ministers and two bishops from a variety of churches participated in it, paying tribute to his life of extraordinary service as an organist, soloist, and choir director. One of Wilmington's newspapers covered Sterling's life and funeral at great length. Michael Sterling earned his living as a janitor at the public library, but the church gave him the opportunity to develop and use his gifts, allowing him to transcend his modest status in the eyes of the world. That's the power the black church could have in the lives of its members.

The church also provided ways for blacks to participate in the fight for freedom and equality, from Absalom Jones's 1808 sermon in thanksgiving for the end of the international slave trade in the United States to the modern civil rights movement. Wilmington's blacks met at the African Union Church in 1831 to protest the colonization movement. Their support of abolitionist Thomas Garrett blended the sacred and the secular. When he suffered heavy financial losses after his trial in 1848, blacks held daily prayer meetings to support him—and felt that their prayers contributed to his financial recovery. In 1866, they presented him with an engraved silver tray in tribute

the church from which they came or to a local historical society to choose what to keep for their collections. Sometimes even a small item can provide a great deal of historical information and open the way to further research.

The next step is continuing to research and publish the many stories in Delaware's black faith history that need to be explored and told. Lewis Baldwin's work on the Spencer churches sets a high standard for denominational history, but histories of other denominations are needed. To give just one example, a history of the AME church in Delaware could be written using materials held by congregations, information from Delaware newspapers and other sources, and the wonderful information available from the digitized version of the *Christian Recorder* and other African American newspapers available on Accessible Archives.¹³ And denominational histories are easier to write with a foundation of solid histories of individual congregations or groups of congregations. To continue with the AME denomination, a rich history of Bethel Church in Smyrna could be written using Thomas Swiggett's scrapbook, church sources, and the *Christian Recorder*.

While *Forging Faith* introduced a number of clergy, and some clergy have autobiographies or biographies, again much more work remains to be done. Many more African American clergy, past and present, need biographies. One example is Daniel Russell of the AUMP church. He grew up in Delaware City, served in the Civil War, taught school, worked as a shoemaker, and was a doctor—all in addition to being a minister. Russell was also an educator and wrote a history of the AUMP Church. He had an African American bookstore in Philadelphia in the 1880s. A rare early twentieth century biographical pamphlet is only a starting point for research on the life of this remarkable man who deserves much more.¹⁴ Another is Frisby Cooper, who became active in the church as a young layman and went on to become an AME pastor. Once a solid body of individual biographies has been created on a wide range of clergy, it will be possible to analyze Delaware's black clergy as a group to discern patterns and place them in a regional or national context.

Lay men and women deserve similar attention, both individually and collectively. Who were the lay leaders of Delaware's black faith communities? How did they develop into leaders, and what were their roles in the church? Activities like ushering, choirs, Sunday school, and men's and women's day observances deserve further attention, for they provided opportunities for participation and leadership. What has been the meaning of these activities in the lives of participants? Another aspect of this question is how participation in the faith community shaped and strengthened those who became active participants and leaders in other areas of life, both within the black community and more recently in mainstream society.

One topic in Delaware's religious history that deserves further exploration is camp meetings, a vital form of religious experience now fading away that both blacks and whites participated in from the early nineteenth century well into the twentieth. A book on this topic is long overdue.¹⁵ It might include an illustrated guide to all camp meetings throughout the state, description and analysis of what took place at camp meetings, analysis of who participated in camp meetings, discussion of opinions for and against camp meetings, comparison of the camp meeting experience for blacks and whites, the place of blacks in white camp meetings, and putting the Delaware experience into the context of camp meetings nationwide.

Finally, as the history of African Americans in Delaware continues to be studied, the role of the faith community should be considered in a wider context. How have black faith communities related to each other across denominational lines? How have they contributed to the development of other black institutions? How have they participated in the ongoing fight for freedom, equality, and dignity? How have they responded to economic, social, and political issues over the years? What roles have they played in individual communities? How have they related to white society?

These are just a few suggestions for ongoing research and reflection. There is no end to what can be learned about African American faith experiences in Delaware. Those who continue the journey begun by *Forging Faith*, *Building Freedom* will be richly rewarded.

Faith and Strides toward Freedom: Black Churches and the Circle of Culture in Delaware Lewis V. Baldwin

The African American religious experience in Delaware should be considered the basic paradigm for a rewriting of black church history. Although ignored in virtually all of the synoptic histories produced up to this point, Delaware and Delawareans figured prominently in the rise and development of African American religion and of separate and independent black churches in the United States.¹ Thus, the story of black religion and black institutional churches in Delaware is crucial not only to Delaware history, regional history, and African American history, but also to the larger and total tapestry of American history.

This article presents African American religious life and black church history in Delaware within several time frames. The first period extends from 1639, when the first African settled in Delaware, up to 1787, when the very first organized efforts to reach the small population of Africans in Delaware with the Christian gospel ended. The second period covers the years 1787 to 1865, when deeply entrenched patterns of segregation in white churches crystallized and led to increasing calls for black autonomy, the emergence of the first major black religious leaders, the rise of the first separate and independent black churches, and the flowering of a church-based movement for freedom, justice, and equal opportunity that extended through the Civil War.² The third period, 1865 to 1900, brings into focus developments after the Civil War, when African American religious and church life in Delaware became more diversified and the mission priorities of black churches shifted under the weight of changing social, cultural, and political realities.3 The fourth period, 1900 to 1955, highlights both continuing trends toward diversification in black religious life in Delaware and the increasing movement of most of Delaware's black churches toward a program of progressive accommodationism in response to oppression.⁴ The fifth period, 1955 to 1968, takes into account the responses of Delaware's black churches and church leaders to the emerging challenges of the civil rights and black power crusades.5 The sixth and final period, 1968 to the present, begins with the impact of the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., on Delaware's black religious community, and closes with the movement of the state's black churches away from the mass protest phase of the civil rights movement toward programs of political participation and a gospel of personal enrichment and prosperity positivism.

African Origins, Early Missionary Activity, and the Rise of a Biracial Religious Life in Delaware, 1639-1787

The African presence in Delaware began with a servant named "Black Anthony," who, after being captured by the skipper of a ship called the *Fogel Grip*, was delivered to Fort Christina in 1639.⁶ It was generally accepted at that time that Africans were inferior, religiously and culturally, to Europeans, and little or no attention was devoted to their spiritual welfare because of fear that it could undermine the race-caste system and lead to social equality.⁷ From the mid-seventeenth through the early eighteenth centuries, the religious life of the small African population in Delaware developed essentially along two lines. Some worshiped privately and continued to hold on to African religious beliefs, values, and practices, while others worshiped in white church settings in which they combined African and European beliefs, values, and practices.⁸ Delaware's congregational life was to some extent biracial, as was the case in other colonies, but this was only in terms of the racial composition of white churches and was

were converted under the power of Hosier's preaching, and he "was the first Methodist preacher white or black whose preaching was commented on in a New York newspaper, the *Packet*."¹⁵

The century after the American Revolution would prove immensely important in terms of both the institutionalization of black religion and the shaping of black church traditions that stood in stark contrast to those of the white churches of Delaware. Segregated practices had crystallized in white churches in Delaware by 1787, setting up a different scenario for black-white relations within the faith. The era of biracial worship declined in many circles after 1787, and most Delawareans, both black and white, accepted and endorsed a more racially divided religious life.

The Independent African Church Crusade and the Transformation of Religious Life in Delaware, 1787-1865

Liam Riordan rightly contends that the creation of black Christian churches "independent of white control marked the most stunning transformation of religious life in northern Delaware in the early republic."¹⁶ This point applies as well to the independent African church movement as a whole and its impact on the entire new American nation. The state of Delaware mirrored ecclesiastical trends that were unfolding in other parts of the North and also in parts of the urban South. At the forefront of this independent African church crusade were four Delawareans; namely, Absalom Jones, Peter Spencer, Richard Allen, and Samuel Cornish. Jones started the first African Episcopal church in the United States in Philadelphia in 1794, Spencer led in the founding of the Union Church of Africans in Wilmington, Delaware, in 1813, Allen spearheaded the drive that resulted in the organization of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) in Philadelphia in 1816, and Samuel Cornish formed the New Demeter Street Presbyterian Church in New York City in 1822. All of these early African preachers left their own unique marks on the history of black religion in Delaware, but Spencer's movement would have the greatest and most enduring impact on the state. Through the activities of all four of these church founders, the state of Delaware established its significance in both black and American church history.¹⁷

Spencer figured prominently in the origins of two black churches in Delaware. In 1805, he, William Anderson, and a number of other Africans broke with the predominantly white Asbury Methodist Episcopal Church (ME) in Wilmington over segregated seating arrangements and organized Ezion African Methodist Episcopal Church. Ezion was to function as a mission church under the auspices of Asbury and the predominantly white Methodist Episcopal Conference, By 1812, a portion of Ezion's members came to disagree with the conference's method of selecting elders to preach at their church, and the growing conflict, which obviously involved race and attempts to maintain white ecclesiastical dominance, resulted in a court case in Wilmington. Sensing that the court's decision would not be in their favor, and unwilling "to give up all say" in their religious



Zoar ME Church, Selbyville Ca. late 1930s-early 1940s Zebley Collection, Delaware Historical Society

affairs, Spencer and most of Ezion's blacks chose to sever all ties with the ME Conference. They organized the Union Church of Africans and incorporated as a completely separate and independent African body in September 1813.¹⁸ This body "became the mother church of others nearby and in time more distant colored churches formed independently became associated with them." By the time of Spencer's death in 1843, a total of thirty-one congregations had become members of the association, most of which were located in Delaware, Maryland, and

Numerous African churches in Delaware in the pre-Civil War years were the product of splits within or withdrawals from established black denominations, which at times led to reorganizations and the rise of new churches and denominations. Due to the highly competitive situation, black Methodists splintered into many different denominational bodies. Most remained small and regional, and a few faded from the scene in time. In 1837, a group of blacks broke with the African Methodist churches in Wilmington and founded the African Wesleyan Episcopal Church.²⁶ In 1840, black Methodists from Kent and New Castle counties united with fellow African Methodists who had split with the AME churches in Maryland and Pennsylvania, and the group organized the First Colored Methodist Protestant Church in Elkton, Cecil County, Maryland.²⁷ A few congregations connected to this body existed in rural parts of Delaware. In 1855, a court case involving the ministerial authority and privileges of Ellis Saunders caused a schism between the Mother Union Church of Africans in Wilmington and the remaining thirty congregations in the association, and the larger group formed the Union American Methodist Episcopal Church (UAME). The UAME denomination and the Mother Union Church of Africans, both headquartered in Wilmington, would remain rival bodies, with both claiming to be the legitimate heir to the legacy of Peter Spencer.²⁸

Needless to say, Methodism appealed to blacks in antebellum Delaware and was stronger than any other church tradition among them. The research of Donn Devine and others concludes that very few blacks were members of the Catholic church in Delaware, and they, much like the few black Episcopalians and black members of Hanover Presbyterian Church in Wilmington in the 1840s, generally maintained a low profile.²⁹ Blacks within these traditions usually attended white churches. There were a few Baptist churches in Delaware in this period, but they were for whites. The state remained the hotbed of African Methodism in America through the Civil War. Some of the Methodist churches grew out of house-to-house prayer meetings, free African societies, tent services, and camp meetings, all of which related in some way to the Second Great Awakening, the nation's second major groundswell of revivalism. The rise and growth of these churches corresponded to the gradual increase in Delaware's free African population. In the 1790s, when Methodism was beginning to reap a great harvest among blacks, Delaware was only about 15 percent African, and only 30 percent of those were free. By 1820, 78 percent of Delaware's black population was free, and by 1840 the number reached 87 percent.³⁰ Free Africans always had greater opportunities to create institutions, and especially churches, which were "designed to enable them to move from oppression and dependency to liberation and autonomy."³¹

The independent black church crusade transformed religious life for all Delawareans, but the impact was particularly evident in black communities. Aside from the rise of the first major black religious institutions, the most noticeable change involved the emergence of a strong and progressive class of religious leadership. In other words, the black preacher, whose qualities of leadership were epitomized in the person and activities of Peter Spencer, emerged as the most important personality in black life and culture. A mere glance at the conditions under which people of African ancestry lived in the period from 1787 up to the eve of the Civil War triggers thoughts about the depth of conviction and dedication that black Delawareans such as Spencer and William Anderson brought to their leadership role and their practice of ministry. They had to function in a climate in which only qualified white men had full voting rights, and in which state laws discouraged black political assemblies, prevented the meeting of a dozen or more blacks at night, required black preachers to petition a judge or a justice of the peace before speaking before an assembly, and prohibited blacks from owning firearms.³²

Black preachers like Spencer and Anderson became multifaceted personalities, or religious leaders who "wore many hats," so to speak. They were unifying figures, giving their people a sense of solidarity in a culture that sought to divide them and to rob them of every vestige of their humanity. They were prophetic voices against the evils of white supremacy and segregation, a priestly presence that brought comfort in the midst of the black pain predicament, and symbols of hope and possibility for their people. W.E.B. DuBois must have had Spencer, Anderson, Richard Allen, Absalom Jones, and so many others in mind when he spoke of the antebellum black preacher as "the healer of the sick, the interpreter of the Unknown, the comforter of the sorrowing, the supernatural avenger of wrong, and the one who rudely but picturesquely expressed the longing, disappointment, and resentment of a stolen and oppressed people."

All of these ecclesiastical functions and interests converged in Wilmington's Big August Quarterly, which was central to black religious life in antebellum Delaware. Influenced by the Quakers' practice of holding big annual meetings, Peter Spencer started this festival in connection with his Union Church of Africans in 1813, and it, more than any other event, embodied and epitomized the concept of the black church as comprehensive community. Hundreds and sometimes thousands of slaves and free Africans from churches of various denominations in Delaware, Maryland, Pennsylvania, and surrounding areas came to the festival on the last weekend in August of each year to participate in experiences that met cultural, social, educational, political, economic, and recreational needs. The religious side of the festival was always evident as throngs gathered in churches and along French Street in Wilmington for dynamic preaching, the singing of spirituals, lively testimonies and prayers, and ring dancing and shouting. There were also hearty greetings, family reunions and much socializing, pleasant chat and the sharing of stories, feasting, smiles and laughter, streams of perspiration and tears, and rousing discussions and debates about economic and political matters that significantly and adversely impacted the quality of black life.⁴⁰

In this and in other respects, the August Quarterly festival became "a kind of gateway to freedom." Slaves who attended the meetings "did not always return to their masters, but found homes in the free states and in Canada." Mother Union Church of Africans, Bethel AME Church, and other black churches in Wilmington and surrounding areas routinely provided hiding places or sanctuaries for runaway slaves, who were always vigorously pursued by sheriffs, constables, and sometimes U. S. Marshals. One Wilmington newspaper commentator, writing in the late nineteenth century, reported that "The old people now refer to these meetings as big excursions on the Underground Railroad, and smile at the remembrance of the tricks to which they resorted to hide and aid the fugitives."⁴¹ Wilmington became the focal point and the hub of black church activism in Delaware, as representatives of congregations from all over the state converged on the city annually and, along with other black church members from surrounding states, participated in the Underground Railroad, engaged in abolitionist agitation, and gave expression in words and songs to "the long deferred promise of freedom which everyone of them felt was somehow ingrained in the religion of Jesus."⁴² Indeed, the activities of black churches during August Quarterly celebrations complemented the anti-slavery efforts of Quakers such as Thomas Garrett, the Wilmington businessman, and of the inimitable Harriet Tubman, the African Methodist laywoman who was widely known for assisting escaped slaves in Delaware, the Eastern Shore of Maryland, and surrounding areas.⁴³

The August Quarterly solidified black churches in Delaware and surrounding states in a spirit of ecumenism and genuine interchurch and interdenominational fraternity, and in this sense the festival was quite unique in the history of antebellum black religion.⁴⁴ Representatives of various churches and denominations, but mostly African Methodists, participated in the ring shout and the circle prayers, the most important African rituals in black churches in Delaware and throughout the United States in that period. These rituals were the key to understanding the means by which black churches in Delaware and everywhere else in the country achieved oneness despite differences in polity, doctrine, and denominational labels, and they explain how images of August Quarterly resonated far beyond Wilmington and Delaware.45 Not even the Negro Convention Movement, which included black lay and clerical leaders from Methodist, Baptist, Congregationalist, and Presbyterian churches in the North, and which "brought together the leading men and women of the race in state and national conventions on political justice and economic issues" in the period from 1830 up to the Civil War, matched August Quarterly in this regard.46 Although the Negro Convention Movement, in which black Delawareans like Richard Allen, Abraham Shadd, and Samuel Cornish were involved at different times, was clearly ecumenical in character, it was more of "a secular arm" of the black church devoted primarily to concerns of a secular nature.⁴⁷ Be that as it may, both August Quarterly and the Negro Convention Movement spoke to the vitality of black religion and the black church as transformers of culture in Delaware and elsewhere in the pre-Civil War era.

Delaware's black churches met new challenges in the years immediately preceding and during the Civil War, especially as they sought to maintain a proper balance between prophetic social witness and activism and commitments to their own institutional growth and survival. Much of the energy and resources of African Methodists was exhausted in the continuing debates over slavery, which reached fever pitch and led to schisms in the 1840s and 1850s between the northern and southern branches of several major denominations, including the

The strong black Methodist presence and influence in Delaware were sustained through a range of denominations, among which were the AMEs, the AMEZs, the UAMEs, the Colored Methodist Protestants, and even a few congregations that were not affiliated with a denomination. In 1866, a union between the African Union Church and the First Colored Methodist Protestant Church was consummated in Wilmington, and the resulting body assumed the title African Union First Colored Methodist Protestant Church of the United States of America and Elsewhere (AUFCMP), ordinarily called the African Union Methodist Protestant Church (AUMP).54 This body remained essentially in the Methodist tradition, with articles of religion, general rules, and discipline, but its spiritual heads were called



Clarence Street Church of God, Seaford Ca. late 1930s-early 1940s Zebley Collection, Delaware Historical Society

presidents instead of bishops. In a general sense, the AUMP and UAME churches were living proof that the Peter Spencer tradition was still very much alive throughout Delaware, and these institutions, in conjunction with the growing numerical strength and the rising popularity, influence, and visibility of other African Methodist groups in the state, virtually assured the continuing vitality of black religious life.

Although Methodism would continue to be the face of black church culture in Delaware for the next generation or so, the stage was set for the rise of other black denominations. Shiloh Baptist Church, the first of this denomination among blacks in Delaware, was organized in Wilmington in 1876. St. Joseph Church in Wilmington became the first black Catholic congregation in 1890. These churches were representative of the new trends toward denominational diversity that would extend into the next century and beyond.⁵⁵

Delaware's black churches continued to function as comprehensive communities. A mere glance at the periodicals, conference minutes, and books of doctrine and discipline of African Methodist churches reveal that their concerns extended far beyond establishing missions and converting the unsaved at home and in Africa. These churches set the standard for healthy social life by promoting temperance, denouncing sexual promiscuity, and encouraging monogamous and stable families. On the economic front, as had been the case in antebellum times, they encouraged their constituents to be industrious, to avoid lotteries, to be prompt in paying debts, to deal fairly with one another, to be thrifty, to support one another in business ventures, and to pool their meager resources to buy land, homes, churches, and businesses.⁵⁶ These churches also trained their people, who were excluded from most areas of American political life, in the wise use of the ballot and became proving grounds for political leadership. Although they were not known for strong vocal responses to white violence against blacks, as in the case of the lynching in the Smyrna area in 1867, they were nonetheless a refuge for blacks who needed to release pent-up emotions and frustrations, and who, in the midst of their labors and sufferings, needed to be refreshed psychologically and physically.

Much of the time, energies, and resources of the churches were devoted to education, especially since the law establishing public education for blacks, passed by Delaware's legislators in 1875, resulted in segregated schools. Although Reconstruction occurred in Delaware largely through Freedmen's Bureau schools, Quaker philanthropy, and organizations such as the racially mixed Association for the Moral Improvement and Education of the Colored People in Wilmington, which opened schools throughout the state where black children learned the basics of reading and writing, black churches also made significant contributions.⁵⁷ Churches of all denominations operated Sunday schools, where the emphasis, as always, was placed on basic education, religious teachings, and moral training. AME churches, locally and through their annual and general conferences, supported elementary, secondary, and collegiate education in Delaware and other states. In the AUMP denomination, the emphasis was placed largely on education for ministers, who were responsible for providing leadership for the race. In 1894,

Black churches in Delaware experienced limited growth and geographic extension during the period from 1900 to 1955, but the black religious community did become increasingly diverse. A number of Baptist churches were founded, including Union Baptist Church in Dover in 1902 and Pilgrim Baptist Church in Newark in 1913. As had always been the case in Delaware, Methodist churches made the most striking gains. Of particular importance were the trends in growth and expansion among the Spencer Churches, or the AUMP and UAME denominations, which had once briefly dominated the black ecclesial landscape in Delaware. Congregations in both denominations increased but were constantly threatened by internal bickering. Mt. Pisgah AUMP Church and Mt. Zion AUMP Church were founded in Wilmington in 1903 and 1904 respectively, and by 1910 a number of small missions had been started, some of which became churches. Between 1900 and 1930, a few UAME missions were formed, but new congregations tended to organize outside Delaware. In 1935, Daniel B. Ennis, Edward S. Rice, and Orlando S. Watts, after running unsuccessfully for the episcopacy, broke with the UAME Church and started the Reformed UAME Church, a rival body. Throughout the first half of the century, the AUMP and UAME bodies were victimized by a seemingly unending scramble for leadership, power, and authority, and at times congregations easily became the personal fiefs of their pastors or presiding bishops. This highly competitive climate, coupled with the lack of a strong connectional system, resulted in a number of schisms, withdrawals, and reorganizations that reverberated throughout the AUMP and UAME denominational structures.65

Other Methodist churches came into being in Delaware, virtually assuring that Methodism would continue to hold a prominent place in the religious culture of the state. AME congregations were formed in Wilmington in 1902, Columbia in 1903, and Ellendale in 1906. St. John's AME Zion Church started in Wilmington in 1917, and Mt. Carmel ME Church in 1923. Mount Vernon Colored Methodist Episcopal Church (CME), which was part of that denomination formed by ex-slaves in Jackson, Tennessee, in 1870, was established in Wilmington in 1914. This was the beginning of CME presence in the state.⁶⁶

A number of other black religious groups representing Christianity and other faith traditions found a home in Delaware for the very first time in this period. A branch of the Church of God and Saints of Christ, which combined Christian and Jewish beliefs and practices, settled in Wilmington in 1912. The group had begun under William S. Crowdy in Kansas in 1896. Three black Pentecostal churches organized in parts of Delaware in the 1920s and '30s. This branch of Protestant Christianity had grown out of the Azusa Street Revival of William J. Seymour in Los Angeles in 1906, and was known for its emphasis on Christian perfection, the gifts of the spirit, and speaking in tongues. On the Presbyterian side, there were a few important developments. Gilbert Presbyterian Church was formed in Wilmington and was in existence for a while in the 1920s and '30s. In 1955, Maurice J. Moyer started another black Presbyterian congregation, Community Presbyterian Church, just outside Wilmington, and it proved to be more resilient and successful.⁶⁷ By this time, Delaware's black religious life and culture were more diverse than ever before. But questions loomed about what this meant in terms of the types of ministries and missions needed to uplift and empower black Delawareans.

Black religious institutions continued to meet pressing needs in African American communities in Delaware in the first half of the twentieth century, educationally, socially, politically, economically, and otherwise. Education was still regarded as the key to vocational success, and churches supplemented state-funded public education with their own basic and Christian education programs, with a special emphasis on the training of ministers. The AUMPs started Annual Conference Ministerial Programs and Spencer's African Union Methodist Protestant College and Seminary in Viola, Delaware, in 1904; the UAMEs built Union Industrial School and later Boulden Academy and Seminary in Wilmington; and AMEs, AMEZs, CMEs, and blacks in the predominantly white ME churches continued to support black education through their annual and general conferences.⁶⁸ Churches of all denominations still supported Sunday schools as a means of imparting the kind of moral and religious lessons that were not often taught in public school systems.

But the extent to which black churches in Delaware continued to challenge the structures of white supremacy was open to question. Religious leaders such as the Reverend Montrose Thornton of Bethel AME Church in Wilmington, who was a leading voice against the George White lynching in 1903, were more the exception than the rule. The rise of civil rights organizations was greeted with support in some circles. Financial and moral support

King and his Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) intersected with conservative black laypersons and preachers in the civil rights program, and many of those activists came out of churches in Delaware. During the 1960s, for example, the AME layperson Louis L. Redding devoted his expertise and services to the struggle as a civil rights attorney in Wilmington. The Presbyterian pastor Maurice J. Moyer, the former head of the Wilmington branch of the NAACP, and James L. Morgan, the pastor of Eighth Street Baptist Church in Wilmington, became known for their association with King and for their participation in demonstrations and sit-ins in Wilmington.⁷⁴ King spoke at Howard High School in Wilmington in 1960, and he and his wife Coretta



Bibleway Temple COGIC, Dover From Bishop L.T. Blackshear 25th Anniversary Program, 1985 Courtesy of Bishop Thomas Holsey

stayed overnight with Morgan, who had been one of King's classmates at Crozer Theological Seminary in Chester, Pennsylvania. King visited with Morgan on other occasions as well, and it was through Morgan that the civil rights leader established contacts with other ministers in Wilmington and throughout Delaware.

Also active in demonstrations and sit-ins were UAME pastors like David E. Hackett and AUMP pastors such as George F. Brown, John H. Woodlin, Sherman B. Hawkins, L. S. Stewart, and Edward C. Morton. These leaders and many of their parishioners embraced King's nonviolent philosophy and took their crusade for freedom and justice out of the consecrated walls and sanctuaries of their places of worship into the streets in Wilmington. They suffered indignities and were at times arrested for their protest against segregated accommodations and facilities. Of particular significance were the activities of figures like Moyer and Brown, who fought against the Delaware Innkeepers Law which permitted proprietors to refuse service to blacks, and who staged sit-ins in several Delaware, such as Middletown, Newark, Dover, Delaware City, Milford, and Smyrna. Despite numerous arrests and court appearances, their determination never faded, as they, like Spencer, Jones, Allen, Cornish, and others before them, thought in terms of biblical metaphors such as the coming of the Jubilee and marching through the Egypt of slavery, the wilderness of segregation, toward the Promised Land of freedom. Victoria's Luncheonette in Wilmington was forced to close under pressure from these crusaders, and the Brandywine Diner and other restaurants in the city were desegregated.⁷⁵

During the 1960s, Wilmington's August Quarterly festival became a prime example of how the old-fashioned religiosity of black churches in Delaware and surrounding states was put to the service of social and political action. At August Quarterly celebrations in the 1960s, the circle prayers, filled, as in Spencer's time, with the language of deliverance, mixed freely with prophetic preaching and the singing of spirituals, gospel songs, freedom songs, and anthems to reveal the soul of the civil rights movement. Movement supporters united the prayer circle and the picket line in ways that recalled August Quarterlies back in the nineteenth century. Activists gave civil rights speeches, raised funds for the SCLC, the NAACP, and other civil rights organizations, passed out flyers, and made special appeals to the uninvolved and seemingly uncommitted.⁷⁶ From all indications, August Quarterly actually enhanced the black churches' capacity to serve as the de facto platforms for civil rights activism and also as comprehensive communities. Under the August Quarterly spirit, black churches became centers of mass meetings and rallying points and sources of inspiration for those who risked their well-being and even their lives in a movement grounded in the love ethic and in the disciplines of nonviolence and civil disobedience.

This fifth major historical period in the history of black religion and churches in Delaware, which began with the protest phase of the modern civil rights movement in 1955, ended with the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., on April 4, 1968. The civil rights struggle turned the corner as blacks throughout Delaware responded to the

President." "This could bode well for Blacks in Delaware," writes H. Ward Greer, "If history doesn't repeat itself." Greer continues: "Indeed, the challenge is not getting more locally elected people of color; the challenge is to elect those whose interests are more than personal gain and whose mission is to improve the quality of life for ALL DELAWAREANS."⁸²

Pastor Greer, who has ministered in Wilmington for some thirty years, and who has headed a ministerial alliance in the city, feels that "the preponderance of Black Churches and Black pastors are not engaged in making a substantive difference in their surrounding communities." This view is shared by a number of AME, AUMP, and UAME clergy and laypersons. "Their interests," says Greer in relation to black churches and their leadership, "seem to be far more personal and ingrown; i.e., survival and where possible numerical growth."⁸³ Black pastors, who have always led in setting the social and political agenda of black religious bodies, are not taking serious steps to mobilize black communities in an organized protest against the resurgence of raw racism and the continuing disparities in wealth, the cycles of poverty, the epidemic of violence and human destruction, and other social ills that continue to afflict Delaware and the society as a whole. This explains in large measure why black Delawareans from "the 1970s to the present have," in the words of the Delaware historian James E. Newton, "made moderate" but not substantial "progress."⁸⁴

But there are hopeful signs as one glances across the landscape of Delaware's black religious life. Progressive black religious leaders are found in some quarters. The Reverend Dr. Jymmie McClinton of Star of Bethlehem AUMP Church started an Inmate Friends Group in Wilmington in the 1970s to provide and deliver food and counseling to inmates in Delaware prisons, and this has become a model for some churches.⁸⁵ Charity ministries of various types that benefit the homeless, the unemployed, the naked, and the hungry have become rather common in Delaware's black churches since that time. Also, many black churches of all denominations throughout Delaware have developed Christian education and counseling programs and special ministries targeting youth, men, women, and families, and the stress is generally on meeting a multitude of needs of both congregations and the larger communities. A few black congregations have radio and television ministries as part of their mission outreach to black communities. But the programmatic thrust and mission priorities of the churches do not encourage prophetic critique and organized protest against the status quo, which is what Spencer, Jones, Allen, Cornish, and so many others in Delaware's black church history were all about.

The mission outreach of Delaware's black religious bodies is being significantly impacted by the changing face of the black church. Neighborhood churches are declining and new church models, such as the megachurch, the electronic church, and the Full Gospel movement, have been rapidly emerging across the nation over the last four decades, and many of Delaware's black churches have not escaped the influence of these trends. The megachurch phenomenon, in too many instances, is determining how African Americans view and do church. Moreover, too many black churches in Delaware have rejected the prophetic witness and activism of Martin Luther King, Jr., while capitulating in some ways to the conservative, right-wing religious, social, and political agenda encouraged by megachurches and their gurus, an agenda that is excessively wedded to a gospel of materialism, individualism and personal enrichment, and prosperity, and that enables and empowers the privileged while disenabling and disempowering the unwanted, the marginalized, and the outcast.⁸⁶

Delaware's black churches are at a point in their histories where they must redefine themselves and their sense of ministry and mission in light of new and changing realities and challenges. The continuing attacks on affirmative action and voting rights, the relentless assaults on young black males, the epidemic of drug addiction, and the high rates of gun violence and incarceration, are but a few of the problems that beg the question: "What does it mean to really be black communities of faith in Delaware in the 21st century?"

A new identity for Delaware's black churches must embrace the need for more interchurch cooperation and networking in the interest of greater empowerment and self-determination for their constituents and the larger black communities. Black churches throughout the state are now handicapped by what H. Ward Greer calls "ecclesial protectionism," which means a preoccupation with one's own institutional maintenance and survival.⁸⁷ "Few Black politicians, pastors, and churches realize that what made the civil rights campaigns successful was that those

¹ See Lewis V. Baldwin, "Invisible" Strands in African Methodism: A History of the African Union Methodist Protestant and Union American Methodist Episcopal Churches, 1805-1980 (Metuchen, N.J., 1983), pp. xv, 1-5; and Liam Riordan, "Passing as Black/Passing as Christian: African American Religious Autonomy in Early Republican Delaware," Pennsylvania History 69 (1997): 207-29.

² Baldwin, "Invisible" Strands, pp. 37-95; Harry V. Richardson, Dark Salvation: The Story of Methodism as It Developed Among Blacks in America (New York, 1976); and Gayraud S. Wilmore, Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of African Americans (Maryknoll, N.Y., 1998), pp. 99-162.

³ For insights on how developments during this period impacted a certain segment of black churches in Delaware, see Baldwin, "Invisible" Strands, pp. 98-119,

⁴ The approach here is essentially the same as that embraced by Gayraud S. Wilmore, who argues that most black churches in America in this period increasingly became "deradicalized," meaning that these institutions abandoned the radical prophetic posture and activism of the antebellum black churches and "retreated into enclaves of moralistic, revivalistic Christianity by which they tried to fend off the encroaching gloom and pathology of the ghetto," See Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism*, pp.163-95.

5 This is addressed to some degree in Baldwin, "Invisible" Strands, pp. 152-200.

⁶ James E. Newton, "Black Americans in Delaware: An Overview," http://www.udel/BlackHistory/overview.html. (accessed April 21, 2014), p.1. This piece by Newton also appears in Carole C. Marks, ed., A History of African Americans of Delaware and Maryland's Eastern Shore (Dover, Del., 1999), pp. 11-29.

7 Carter G. Woodson notes that many whites in the colonies during this period "never considered the Negro as belonging to the pale of Christianity." Africans were "generally designated as infidels" and there were even questions as to whether they had souls. See Carter G. Woodson, *The History of the Negro Church* (Washington, D.C., 1972; originally published in 1921), pp. 1-19. For other reasons for the feeble missionary outreach to Africans during these early years, see Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South* (New York, 1978), pp. 98-101.

8 Marcus Jernegan reports low incidences of conversion throughout the American colonies, which would support the view that Africans in Delaware tended to sustain African traditions with tenacity, See Marcus Jernegan, "Slavery and Conversion in the American Colonies," *American Historical Review* 21(April, 1916): 504-27.

9 Baldwin, "Invisible" Strands, pp. 9-69; and Wilmore, Black Religion and Black Radicalism, p. 99.

10 Milton C. Sernett, ed., African American Religious History: A Documentary Witness (Durham, N.C., 1999), p. 25.

11 Hugh Neill to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, June 24, 1752, Society for the Propagation of the Gospel: Documents Relating to Delaware, 1702-1782, Delaware Historical Society, Wilmington, Delaware (hereafter DHS); Woodson, *History of the Negro Church*, pp. 5-19,

12 George Whitefield's Journals, new ed. (Guilford and London, 1960), p. 422. This edition includes a map tracing Whitefield's evangelistic travels in Delaware and other American colonies.

13 Richard Allen, The Life, Experience and Gospel Labors of the Rt. Rev. Richard Allen (New York, 1960; originally published in Philadelphia in 1793), p. 29; Baldwin, "Invisible" Strands, pp. 9, 37-69; and Richardson, Dark Salvation, pp. 35-75.

14 Allen, Life, Experience and Gospel Labors, p. 6; and Warren Thomas Smith, Harry Hosier: Circuit Rider (Nashville, 1981), pp. 23, 28, 36.

15 Smith, Harry Hosier, pp. 18-45; and Richardson, Dark Salvation, p. 171.

16 Riordan, "Passing as Black/Passing as Christian," p. 207.

17 Woodson, History of the Negro Church, pp. 62-67, 81, 88; Wilmore, Black Religion and Black Radicalism, pp. 109, 116, 118, 121-23; and Larry G. Murphy, et. al., eds., Encyclopedia of African American Religions (New York, 1993), pp. 33, 211-12, 404, 718-19.

18 Deed to the Property of Ezion Methodist Episcopal Church, June 25, 1805, New Castle County Recorder of Deeds, C3: 226; John D. C. Hanna, ed., *The Centennial Services of Asbury Methodist Episcopal Church, Wilmington, Delaware, October 13-20, 1889* (Wilmington, 1889), pp. 141, 146; *The Colored American* (New York), Oct. 21, 1837, p. 2; and Baldwin, "Invisible" Strands, pp. 41-51.

¹⁹ Daniel J. Russell, Jr., *History of the African Union Methodist Protestant Church* (Philadelphia, 1920), pp. 5-10; Works Progress Administration, Historical Records Survey Division of Women's and Professional Projects, *Inventory of Church Records of Delaware* (Wilmington, 1937), pp, 110-11, 112-13; and Baldwin, "Invisible" Strands, pp. 46-51.

20 Interestingly enough, Spencer drew up the articles of incorporation for his Union Church of Africans on September 17, 1813, exactly thirty-seven years after the U.S. Constitution was adopted. However, the articles were not legally recorded until the next day. But this alone is an indication of how Spencer took advantage of the new constitutional principle of voluntarism, of religious freedom, in his effort to eliminate a disturbing pattern of white ecclesiastical encroachment and control. See Articles of Association of the Union Church of Africans, Wilmington, Delaware, 1813, New Castle County Recorder of Deeds, M3:470; *Inventory of Church Records of_Delaware*, pp. 101, 110; and Baldwin, *"Invisible" Strands*, p. 47.

21 The Methodist scholar Frederick Norwood views the work of Spencer and other black church founders as "an early expression of Black Power or Nationalism." See Frederick A. Norwood, *The Story of American Methodism: A History of the United Methodists and Their Relations* (Nashville, 1974), p. 171. Also see Alain Rogers, "The African Methodist Episcopal Church, a Study in Black Nationalism," *The Black Church* 1(1972): 17-43; and Baldwin, "*Invisible" Strands*, pp. 46-50, 62, 65-68.

22 Baldwin, "Invisible" Strands, pp. 52-61; Lewis V. Baldwin, The Mark of a Man: Peter Spencer and the African Union Methodist Tradition (Lanham, Md., 1987), pp. 11-25; Inventory of Church Records of Delaware, pp. 87-114; Wilmore, Black Religion and Black Radicalism, p.105; Norwood, The Story of American Methodism, pp. 166-74; and Richardson, Dark Salvation, pp. 62-147.

23 Daniel Coker, "Sermon Delivered Extempore in the African Methodist Episcopal Church in the City of Baltimore, on the 21st of January, 1816, to a Numerous Concourse of People, on Account of the Coloured People Gaining their Church (Bethel) in the Supreme Ct. of the State of Pennsylvania" in Herbert Aptheker, ed., A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States (New York, 1951), pp. 67-69; Allen, Life, Experience and Gospel Labors, pp. 34-35; Carol V. R. George, Segregated Sabbaths: Richard Allen and the Rise of Independent Black Churches, 1760-1840 (New York, 1973), pp. 85-86; and Paul E. Johnson, African American Christianity: Essays in History (Berkeley, 1994), pp. 1-15.

24 For rich insights concerning this tradition in American Methodism, see Norwood, Story of American Methodism, pp. 174, 271-74.

25 Inventory of Church Records of Delaware, pp. 87-113 passim; Ezion Church deed; Norwood, Story of American Methodism, pp. 98-99; and William Warren Sweet, Methodism in American History (Nashville, 1961), p. 96.

26 Deed for the Property of the African Wesleyan Episcopal Church, March 21, 1838, New Castle County Recorder of Deeds; and Lewis V. Baldwin, "Schismatic Tendencies and Ecumenical Possibilities: The Struggle of Small African Methodist Bodies," *A.M.E. Church Review* 117(April-June, 2001): 99.

27 J. Beverly F. Shaw, The Negro in the History of Methodism (Nashville, 1954), pp. 89-90; and Baldwin, "Schismatic Tendencies and Ecumenical Possibilities," pp. 99-100. Winthrop Hudson refers to the "numerous schisms, withdrawals, and reorganizations" to illustrate that "In many ways Negro religious life reflected the patterns and trends that prevailed in the general religious life of the nation." See Winthrop S. Hudson, *Religion in America: An Historical Account of the Development of American Religious Life* (New York, 1965), pp. 350-51. 57 Newton, "Black Americans in Delaware," p. 6; and Hoffecker and Woolard, "Black Women in Delaware's History," pp. 3-4.

⁵⁸ Discipline of the Union American Methodist Episcopal Church (1892), p. 116; J. Thomas Scharf, History of Delaware, 1609-1888, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, 1888), 2: 730-32; Jacob F. Ramsey, Father Spencer: Our Founder (Camden, NJ: 1914), pp. 1-11; and Baldwin, "Invisible" Strands, pp. 106-11, 113-19; Doctrine and Discipline of the African Union First Colored Methodist Protestant Church (1871), pp. 26-27, 102-5; Russell, History of the African Union Methodist Protestant Church, p. 31; The Discipline of the Union American Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America and Elsewhere, 6th rev. ed. (Wilmington, 1872), pp. 65-66; and Matthew Simpson, ed., Cyclopedia of Methodism Embracing Sketches of the Rise, Progress, and Present Condition, with Biographical Notices and Numerous Illustrations (Philadelphia, 1878), p. 877._

59 "St. Joseph Church: History"; and Stephen J. Ochs, Desegregating the Altar: The Josephites and the Struggle for Black Priests, 1871-1960 (Baton Rouge, 1990), p. 87.

60 Hoffecker and Woolard, "Black Women in Delaware's History," p. 3.

61 Delaware Gazette, Aug. 29, 1865, p. 2, Aug. 27, 1867, p. 2, and Aug. 29, 1871, p. 2; Delaware State Journal and Statesman (Wilmington), Aug. 28, 1866, p. 2; Every Evening, Aug. 28, 1876, p. 4, and Sept. 1, 1879, p. 1; and Dalleo, "Growth of Delaware's Antebellum Free African American Community," pp. 12-13.

62 Baldwin, "Invisible" Strands, pp.133-41; Morning News, Aug. 26. 1889, pp. 1, 8; Every Evening, Aug. 30, 1897, p. 1; and Dalleo, "Growth of Delaware's Antebellum Free African American Community," pp. 12-13.

63 DuBois, The Souls of Black Folk in Three Negro Classics, p. 221.

64 Newton, "Black Americans in Delaware," p. 6,

65 Baldwin, "Invisible" Strands, pp. 153-68, 185-90; John P. Predow, "A Brief History of the Spencer Movement" (1979), unpublished paper, author's collection, pp. 6-7; and Inventory of Church Records of Delaware, pp. 112-13. Winthrop Hudson convincingly argues that this was a problem across denominational and geographical boundaries in black churches in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and I am indebted to him for this insight. See Hudson, Religion in America, p. 351.

66 Inventory of Church Records of Delaware, pp. 92, 97-98, 102.

67 Ibid., 114; and Beth Miller, "Delaware: The Rev. Maurice Moyer, 'Giant' of Civil Rights Movement, Dies," The News Journal (Wilmington), March 7, 2012.

68 Baldwin, "Invisible" Strands, pp., 173, 191; Russell, History of the African Union Methodist Protestant Church, p. 24; and The First Anniversary Booklet of the Great Charter Day of the New Boulden Academy and Seminary, Inc., of the U.A.M.E. Church, Wilmington, Delaware, February 14, 1960 (Wilmington, 1960).

69 Newton, "Black Americans in Delaware," pp. 6-7; Baldwin, "Invisible" Strand, pp. 152, 180, 196; and Every Evening, May 2, 1925, p. 6.

70 What Gayraud Wilmore has said about black churches in general in this period applies in a special way to the black churches of Delaware. See Wilmore, Black Religion and Black Radicalism, pp. 168-91.

71 Every Evening, Aug. 26, 1935, p. 13; The Evening Journal (Wilmington), Aug. 30, 1897, p. 1; and Baldwin, "Invisible" Strands, p. 231.

72 Wilmore, Black Religion and Black Radicalism, p. 204.

⁷³ The AUMP leader Reese C. Scott emphatically made this point at a celebration of the life of Spencer in Wilmington in August 1966, noting that the march toward freedom "didn't start with Martin Luther King." See *Morning News*, Aug. 29, 1966, p. 9; and Baldwin, *"Invisible" Strands*, p. 216.

74 Miller, "Delaware: The Rev. Maurice Moyer"; and Baldwin, "Invisible" Strands, pp. 184, 233.

⁷⁵ Morning News, May 17, 1963, p. 1; interview with Elizabeth Brown, wife of Bishop George F. Brown, Jan. 20, 1979; interview with Grace Thomas, associate of Bishop George F. Brown in the Delaware sit-in movement, Feb. 20, 1980; Morning News, Aug. 31, 1964, p.3; interview with Bishop Reese C. Scott, Aug. 26, 1979; and Baldwin, "Invisible" Strands, pp. 182-84, 216, 232.

76 Morning News, Aug. 31, 1964, p. 3, and Sept. 1, 1964, p.16; Scott interview; Baldwin, "Invisible" Strands, pp. 180-83, 231-32; Newton, "Black Americans in Delaware," pp. 8-9; interview with Edward R. Bell, May 22, 1978; and interview with Pauline A. Young, Aug. 27, 1979.

77 Newton, "Black Americans in Delaware," p. 9.

78 David E. Hackett, comp., A Book of Inspirational Poems and Wayside Messages, 1943-1977 (Wilmington, 1977), p. 28; interview with Bishop David E. Hackett, May 10, 1979; and Baldwin, "Invisible" Strands, p. 197.

⁷⁹ Interview with the Reverend Dr. H. Ward Greer, Sept. 26, 2013; and H. Ward Greer, "Observations on the Black Church in Delaware: Present and Future," unpublished document (Nov. 2013), p. 1, Rev. Dr. Greer's perspective and insights, which have grown out of years of pastoral experiences at Ezion-Mount Carmel, Mt. Joy, and other black United Methodist churches that claim ties to the Peter Spencer tradition and the larger traditions of black Methodism in Delaware, figure prominently in this last section of this chapter. Also see H. Ward Greer, "Community and Urban Transformation: An Opportunity for Partnership(s)," unpublished document (Nov. 2013), pp. 1-2.

80 Greer, "Observations on the Black Church in Delaware," p. 1.

81 Gayraud Wilmore uses this language when describing the state of black churches across the nation from roughly the end of World War I up to the middle of the century, and I am indebted to him for this insight. See Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism*, p. 204; and Baldwin, "Revisiting the 'All-Comprehending Institution'," p. 33.

82 Greer, "Observations on the Black Church in Delaware," p. 1.

83 Greer interview; and Greer, "Observations on the Black Church in Delaware," p. 1.

84 Newton, "Black Americans in Delaware," p. 10.

85 Hoffecker and Woolard, "Black Women in Delaware's History," p. 8.

- 86 Greer, "Observations on the Black Church in Delaware," p. 1.
- 87 Greer interview.
- 88 Greer, "Observations on the Black Church in Delaware," p. 1.

DELAWARE'S BLACK CHURCH FOUNDERS

Delaware and Delawareans played key roles in the development of independent black churches in the United States. Absalom Jones (1746-1818), Richard Allen (1760-1831), and Peter Spencer (1782-1843), who emerged from slavery, along with Samuel Cornish (1795-1858), born to free parents, preached the Gospel and founded churches where blacks could worship freely. They spearheaded the first protests for black liberation and empowerment. Their activities for racial uplift and black self-determination formed the first link in a chain of struggle that has extended from the early 1800s to Martin Luther King, Jr., and beyond.

A Narrative of the Proceedings of the Black People, during the late Awful Calamity in Philadelphia... A.J. [Absalom Jones] and R.A. [Richard Allen] 1794

Courtesy of the Library Company of Philadelphia

This pamphlet written by two of Delaware's black church founders was the first publication by Africans copyrighted in the United States.



Richard Allen 1760-1831 Founder of Bethel AME Church, Philadelphia Founder of the African Methodist Episcopal denomination

Richard Allen Detail from *Bishops of the A.M.E. Church* Lithograph. Boston : J.H. Daniels, c. 1876 Courtesy of the Library of Congress

Richard Allen was born the slave of Benjamin Chew, who had property in both Pennsylvania and Delaware. He was sold, with his family, to Stokely Sturgis of the Dover area around 1768. Young Richard Allen attended Methodist meetings and became a Christian. After his owner became a Methodist, he allowed Allen to purchase his freedom.

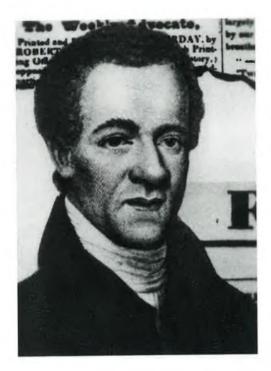
After becoming free in 1780, Allen worked various jobs while preaching to both blacks and whites in Delaware and surrounding areas. He and Harry Hosier were the only black preachers at the Christmas Conference in Baltimore in 1784 where the Methodist Episcopal Church was organized.

By 1786 Allen had arrived in Philadelphia, where he organized a prayer meeting for blacks. In 1787, he, with Absalom Jones and others, founded the Free African Society. Many blacks worshiped at predominantly white St. George's Methodist Church. In time, Allen and others became aware that they were not truly welcome there. In 1792, when ordered to takes seats in the balcony, they walked out of the church.

Allen founded Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1794. In 1816, he and representatives of other black Methodist churches met in Philadelphia to organize the African Methodist Episcopal denomination. Richard Allen served as its first bishop.



Mother Bethel Church Lithograph by W.L. Brenton, 1829 Courtesy of Mother Bethel AME Church, Richard Allen Archives, Philadelphia, Pa.



Samuel Eli Cornish

Founder of the New Demeter Street Presbyterian Church, the first black Presbyterian church in New York City Editor of *Freedom's Journal*, the first black newspaper in the United States

Reverend Samuel Cornish Steel engraving by F. Kearney, 1825 Neg. no. 74637, courtesy of Collection of the New-York Historical Society

The son of free blacks, Samuel Cornish grew up in Sussex County. By 1815, he lived in Philadelphia, where he studied for the Presbyterian ministry. In 1819, he served as a missionary to slaves on the Eastern Shore of Maryland. Cornish moved to New York City in 1821 and founded the New Demeter Street Presbyterian Church, the city's first black church of that denomination. Cornish served the church until 1828.

Cornish began his career in journalism in 1827, when he and John Russworm founded *Freedom's Journal*, the first black newspaper in the United States. Cornish also served as editor of *Rights for All* and *The Colored American*, which he edited until 1839. As an editor, Cornish promoted the achievements of blacks, emphasized the importance of hard work, education, and thrift, and spoke out against colonization.

Cornish also continued his ordained ministry, serving churches in Philadelphia, Newark, New Jersey, and New York City.



Freedom's Journal March 30, 1827 (Vol. 1, No. 3), Cornish and Russworm, Editors and Proprietors Neg. no. 86240d, courtesy of Collection of the New-York Historical Society

PETER SPENCER and AFRICAN UNION METHODISM

Peter Spencer's Union Church of Africans developed as part of an independent black church movement that swept the northern part of the United States in the late 1700s and the 1800s. Inspired by the principle of religious freedom expressed in the U.S. Constitution and by a vision of black self-determination, in 1813 Spencer led the movement that created the first independent black denomination in the United States. It would eventually result in the incorporation of the African Union Methodist Protestant (AUMP) and Union American Methodist Episcopal (UAME) denominations in the mid 1860s, also known as the Spencer Churches and as African Union Methodism. These churches embodied a growing desire on the part of Africans in America to be self governing and to worship God according to the dictates of their consciences. They also stood as the prime expression of resistance to African enslavement and segregation, and as participants in some of the earliest organized protests for civil rights for people of African descent in the United States.

Peter Spencer Courtesy of anonymous lender

Ezion Methodist Episcopal Church

Peter Spencer and the blacks who left Asbury in 1805 due to racial conflict founded Ezion Methodist Episcopal Church. Although the church controlled most of its own affairs, it still had ties to Asbury and the mostly white Methodist Episcopal Conference. Renewed tensions, mainly over the choice of preacher, arose in 1812, leading Peter Spencer, William Anderson, and others to leave and found the Union Church of Africans. Now Ezion-Mt. Carmel United Methodist Church, it still stands as a testimony to the Spencer legacy. In 2005 it celebrated its two hundredth anniversary as a black church within the predominantly white United Methodist denomination.



Ezion ME Church, Wilmington Ca. early 1960s Delaware Historical Society Collection

Ezion stood at 846 French Street from 1805 until urban renewal forced it to move in 1971. Unfortunately, no image exists of the first church building. The structure shown here was erected in 1886 to replace an 1870 church that burned. Ezion merged with Mount Carmel Methodist Church in 1971. Ezion-Mt. Carmel moved into its new home at 800 Walnut Street in 1974.



"Land belonging to the African Church" By Benjamin Ferris, no date Benjamin Ferris Papers, Delaware Historical Society

This sketch shows the two parcels of land on French and Walnut streets that Joshua Wollaston sold to the trustees of Ezion Methodist Church in 1805. Wollaston had purchased the larger tract from black Delawareans Jeremiah and Amelia Shad in 1797 and the other from Elizabeth Garasche in 1802. Wood Street is now Ninth Street.

Honoring the Founding Members of Ezion Methodist Episcopal Church and the Union Church of African Members

The deed for Ezion Methodist Episcopal Church and the articles of association for the Union Church of African Members list the names of founding members of both churches. These brave people forged faith and built freedom by leaving established churches to form new ones that better met their needs. Along with early members of both churches whose names remain unknown, they were pioneers in the development of black churches and community life in Delaware and the nation.

Original Trustees of Ezion Methodist Episcopal Church, 1805

Francis Bailey Thomas Brown Stephen Harris Scotland Hill Jacob Morgan Joseph Nicholson Peter Spencer

Signers of Articles of Association of the African Union Church, 1813

John Alexander Margaret Allen John Agness James Back Luke Bashten William Anderson Jacob Anderson Samuel Byard Moses Chippey Stephen Beardly Philip Closs Jacob Collins Perry Cooper Peter Clayton Maggie Debberty London Govern Lydia Hall **Ezekiel** Coston Susan Hicks Sarah Hall Edmond Haves George Hood Richard Jackson John James Scotland Hill John Kelly Jacob March Joseph Nichols Charles Reed Peter Ripley John Simmons Grace Powell William Touborn David Smith Peter Spencer Abraham Valentine Benjamin Webb Simon Weeks Joshua Young

The Official Program

18th GENERAL CONFERENCE

A. U. M. P. CHURCH will Convene in

ST. PAUL A. U. CHURCH 1201 Apple Street, Wilmington, Delaware Wednesday, September 12th, /

-10-Monday, Sept. 17, 1934

Rev. J. W. Brown, President of Middle District. Rev. S. J. Holland, President of Md. and Va. District. Rev. D. J. Russell, President of Phila, and N. J. Dist. T. E. BOLDEN, Minister.

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Minutes of the Quarterly Conference of the African Union Church November 1, 1885 AUMP Records, Delaware Historical Society Program for 18th General Conference, AUMP Church September 12-17, 1934 Courtesy of the Collection of Paul Preston Davis

> 187th ANNUAL SESSION of the DELAWARE AND PENNSYLVANIA CONFERENCE of the Union American Methodist Episcopal Church will convene at the



St. Paul Union American Methodist Episcopal 408 East 11th Street, Wilmington, Del.

Wednesday Eve. May 3rd to Sunday, May 7, 1950

RT, REV. B. M. FERNANDERS, D. D. RT, REV. J. P. PREDOW, A. B., Ps. D., SI. T. D., and RT, REV. O. W. FORWARD, D. D. REV. JAMES H. HARTLEY Presiding Bishop ... Associate Bishops Host Pastor

137th Annual Session of the Pennsylvania and Delaware Conference of the Union American Methodist Episcopal Church May 3-7, 1950 Courtesy of the Union American Methodist Episcopal Church, Inc.

AUGUST QUARTERLY

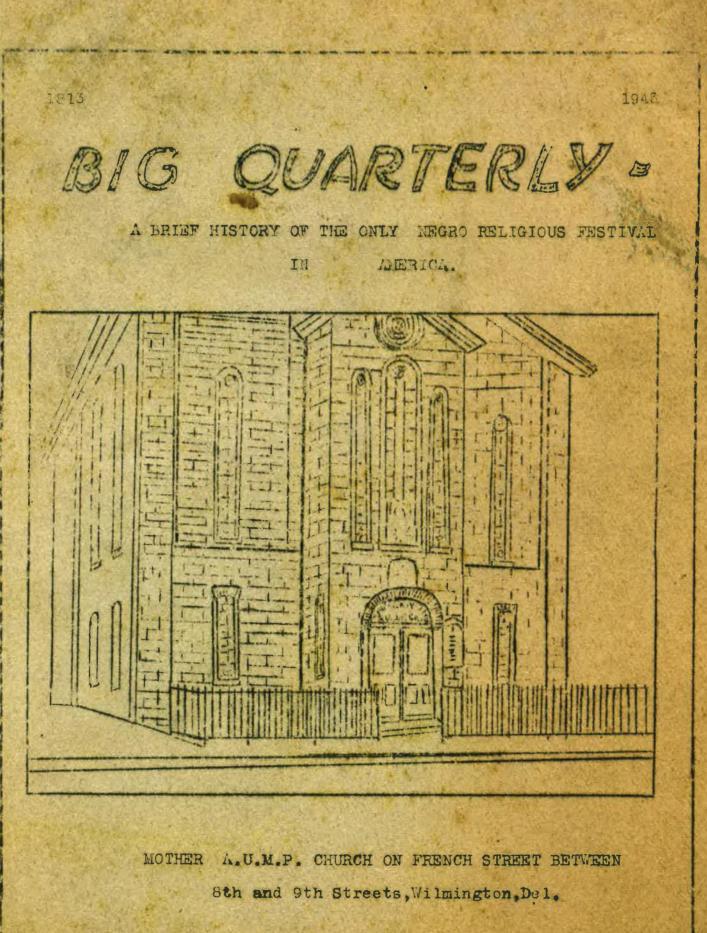
August Quarterly, an African American religious festival that filled Wilmington's French Street with throngs of people for over 150 years, has deep roots in African Union Methodism. Peter Spencer organized the first gathering in Wilmington in August 1813, shortly before the Union Church of Africans was incorporated. The 1814 festival was the first in connection with the Union Church of Africans as an incorporated body.

"A spectacular expression of both worship and culture," August Quarterly offered opportunities for preaching, singing, prayer meetings, love feasts, and other forms of worship. In antebellum times, it was a gateway to freedom for slaves from the upper South. Its social and cultural dimension was expressed through family reunions, feasts, storytelling, and deep and genuine laughter. Its political significance was revealed through protests against slavery, colonization, and segregation. Churches of various denominations participated in the festival, which attracted thousands of people from throughout the region.

The Quarterly became primarily a founder's day celebration after Mother African Union Methodist Protestant Church, its focal point, relocated from French Street to North Franklin Street in 1969. Efforts to revitalize and update the festival continue as it moves into its third century.

August Quarterly August 27, 1939 Szymanski Collection, Delaware Historical Society





Price 35 cents.

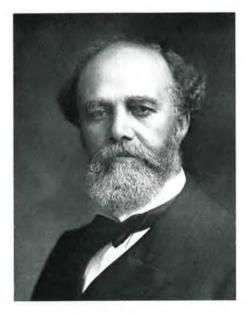
PREACHERS OF THE WORD

The black preacher or minister first emerged on American plantations as the African priest and medicine man. He became a unifying influence as enslaved Africans from many tribes sought to find solidarity as one people in America, speaking the same language and practicing essentially the same religion. Predating the black church in America, he also became a symbol of hope and possibility, a boss, a healer, a prophet, a pastor. He gave voice to the pain, longings, hopes, dreams, and aspirations of an uprooted and oppressed people.

The black preacher or minister came to prominence because the black condition allowed few areas for leadership in the larger society. His caring function among his people extended into his roles as church founder and leader, civil rights activist, and educator. The minister's functions have included not only the preaching, pastoral, and priestly dimensions but also the prophetic aspect. The black preaching tradition has offered, and continues to offer, a critique of American values, tradition, and practices, which often moved from the pulpit into the political and social arenas.

Harry Hosier Courtesy of the United Methodist Publishing House

Harry Hosier was one of the greatest early black preachers. He made several preaching journeys on the Delmarva Peninsula with Francis Asbury and Thomas Coke in the late 1700s and early 1800s.



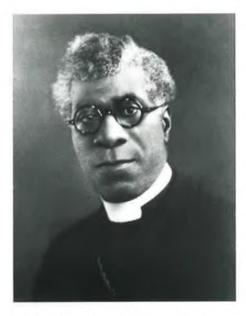
Rev. Theophilus G. Steward From William Steward and Theophilus G. Steward, *Gouldtown: a Very Remarkable Settlement of Ancient Date* (1913) Delaware Historical Society Collections

Rev. Theophilus G. Steward (1843-1924), a native of Gouldtown, New Jersey, began his career as an AME missionary in Reconstruction-era South Carolina and Georgia from 1865 to 1872. In 1872, he became pastor of Bethel AME Church in Wilmington. Steward soon became active in Republican politics, with a special interest in education for blacks. In late 1872, he issued a call for the first black convention in Delaware, which met at Whatcoat Methodist Church in Dover in January 1873. Shortly after this Steward briefly served as a missionary in Haiti, but returned to Sussex County in fall of 1873. He served churches in Milford, Milton, Slaughter Neck, Georgetown, and Lewes for a year. After several other pastorates, he returned to Bethel in Wilmington for a few years in 1881. Continuing his interest in education Steward spoke out in favor of integrated classrooms, a divisive issue among blacks. After leaving Wilmington, he had other pastorates, served as a U.S. Army chaplain from 1891 to 1907, and finished his career teaching at Wilberforce University in Ohio.



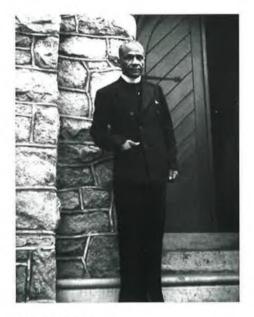
Bishop Levi J. Coppin Courtesy of Mother Bethel AME Church, Richard Allen Archives, Philadelphia, Pa.

Bishop Levi J. Coppin (1848-1924) grew up in Cecil County, Maryland. He lived in Wilmington and Smyrna, Delaware, from 1869 to 1877, working at various jobs while being very active in the AME congregations in both places. He was licensed to preach at Bethel AME in Wilmington in 1877 and began his ordained ministry. Coppin served at various churches, held denominational leadership posts, and was elected bishop in 1900. He spent several years in South Africa in the early 1900s.



The Rt. Rev. Edward Thomas Demby Courtesy of the Archives of the Episcopal Church

Bishop Edward Thomas Demby (1869-1957) grew up in Wilmington, attending Eddy Anderson's private high school for blacks housed at Ezion ME Church. He then left to pursue higher education followed by an early career in education and possibly the AME ministry. Ordained an Episcopal priest in 1899, Demby served black churches in several states. In 1918, he was elected the first African American suffragan (assistant) bishop in the United States "for Colored Work in the Diocese of Arkansas and the Province of the Southwest." Throughout his career he fought discrimination to bring blacks to the Episcopal church.



Rev. A. Chester Clark January 2, 1939 Szymanski Collection, Delaware Historical Society

Rev. Clark served at Bethel AME Church in Wilmington from 1933 to 1939. According to Bethel's 1934 Souvenir Booklet, he was a "Human Dynamo, Excellent service: Doctrinal sermons, keeping pace with the times....Keeps our Church crowded with enthusiastic followers." After the fire that destroyed Bethel on January 1, 1935, Clark provided the courage and leadership that allowed the congregation to rebuild.



Bishop L.T. Blackshear 1985 Courtesy of Bishop Thomas Holsey

Bishop L.T. Blackshear (1916-2008) came to Delaware from the South in the 1940s to serve as a minister in the Church of God in Christ (COGIC). He began as assistant pastor of Gethsemane Church, then became pastor of Mt. Calvary Temple COGIC in Wilmington. When he became superintendent of the Southern district, COGIC began to grow in Delaware. Blackshear was appointed bishop of Delaware in 1960, a post he held until his death. During his career, COGIC in Delaware grew from three to 18 churches. Blackshear was revered in Delaware and nationally for his faith, pastoral care, leadership, principles, and willingness to confront violence and work for peace.



Rev. Maurice Moyer Courtesy of Edythe Pridgen

Rev. Maurice Moyer (1918-2012), a native of Chattanooga, Tennessee, and a graduate of Lincoln University Theological Seminary, came to the Wilmington area in 1952 to start a Presbyterian church for blacks. Focusing his efforts in Dunleith Estates, he recruited the founding members of Community Presbyterian Church, which was chartered in 1955. Moyer played a leading role in the civil rights movement in Delaware, serving as president of the Wilmington Branch of the NAACP during the key years of 1960-1964. In 1963, he served as the first black moderator of the New Castle Presbytery. Moyer also held several positions in the field of education and served on community boards. He retired from Community Presbyterian Church in 1998, revered as the dean of Delaware's black clergy.

CONGREGATIONAL LIFE

Members of black faith communities asserted and expanded their freedom through worship, music, and many other activities. Faith communities were one of the few arenas for leadership and participation open to people of African descent. In the absence of schools, churches offered educational opportunities. Since blacks could not freely visit restaurants, theaters, and other public venues, the church provided a comfortable setting where they could share a meal, enjoy leisure activities and entertainment, and develop friendships.

From their beginnings black faith communities strongly opposed racism, slavery, and segregation. They denounced these practices as contrary to divine principles and the highest standards of human decency. The primary agencies of autonomy and self help, churches and other faith communities became the central force in maintaining group cohesion and fostering self-respect under difficult circumstances. Their work can be viewed as an early expression of black power.

Left: Stained glass window from Mother UAME Church, Wilmington Courtesy of the Union American Methodist Episcopal Church, Inc. Photo by Steve Boyden

This window comes from the second church at 1206 French Street, which was built in the early 1880s. It was given in honor of Rev. E.S. Rice, a pastor of the church, and his family.







Ist. All persons are requested to conduct themselves in a quiet and decorous manner during services, and in entering or departing from the building; and not to assemble on the front pavements, the stairways or in the vestibule, or indulge in loud talking or noise of any kind.

2nd. Passing in or out of the church during services is strictly forbidden except in case of extreme necessity.

3rd. The use of Tobacco is forbidden in any portion of this building.

Any persons defiling or defacing the carpets, floors, furniture, walls or any part of the building will be dealt with according to haw.

BY ORDER OF THE TRUSTEES. July 12th., 1886.

Top left, Communion service used at Star Hill AME Church, Star Hill Courtesy of Star Hill AME Church Photo by Steve Boyden

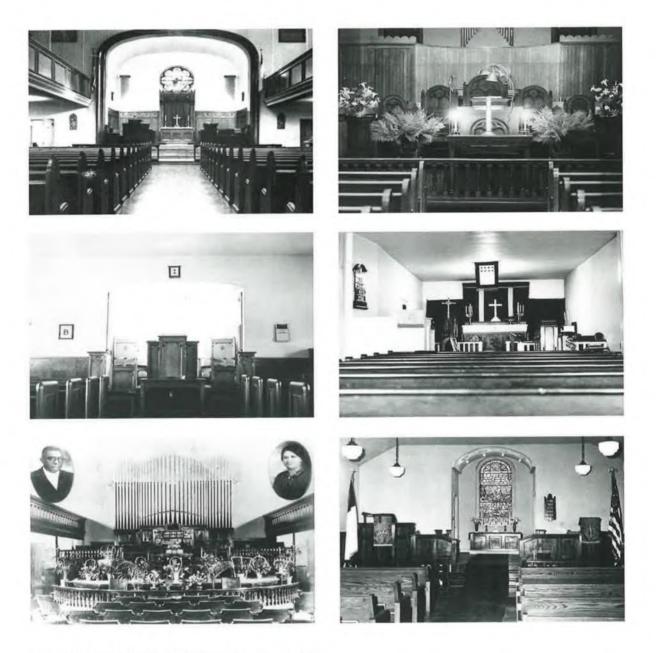
Bottom left, Monstrance, early 1900s Chalice and Paten, 1953 Courtesy of St. Joseph Catholic Church, Wilmington Photo by Steve Boyden

In the Catholic church, the sacrament of Holy Eucharist is "the source and summit of the Christian life." This chalice (cup) and paten (plate) were presented to Father Meldon Elwood, SSJ, by his parents when he was ordained a priest. The monstrance is used in processions or at other times of adoration when the communion host is presented to the faithful.

Ezion M.E. Church Rules 1886 Courtesy of Ezion-Mount Carmel United Methodist Church, Wilmington Photo by Steve Boyden

Ezion ME Church burned in January 1886 and was rebuilt by July of that year. These rules, especially number 3, reflect the church's concern for its new building.

Left, Congregation at Shiloh Baptist Church, Wilmington Ca. late 1940s Courtesy of Shiloh Baptist Church



Top left, Bethel AME Church, Wilmington, ca. early 1900s Courtesy of Bethel AME Church, Wilmington

Top right, Mother African Union Church, Wilmington, ca. late 1950s Courtesy of Mother African Union Church

Middle left, Forrest Grove Seventh Day Adventist Church, Dinah's Corner, ca. late 1930s-early 1940s Zebley Collection, Delaware Historical Society

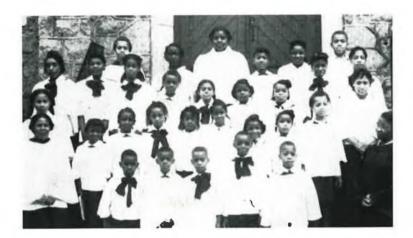
Middle right, St. Matthew's Episcopal Church, Wilmington, 706 French Street, ca. late 1930s-early 1940s Zebley Collection, Delaware Historical Society

Bottom left, Ezion ME Church, Wilmington, ca. early 1900s Courtesy of Ezion-Mount Carmel United Methodist Church

Bottom right, Simpson United Methodist Church, Newport, 1936-1975 Courtesy of Simpson United Methodist Church



Choir, Shiloh Baptist Church, Wilmington Ca. late 1940s-early 1950s Courtesy of Shiloh Baptist Church



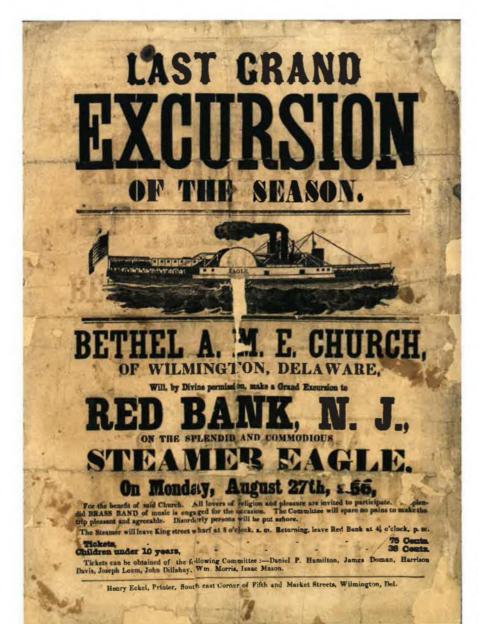
Children's Choir, Bethel AME Church, Wilmington Courtesy of Bethel AME Church



Choir, Mount Carmel Methodist Church, Wilmington Before 1942 Courtesy of Ezion-Mount Carmel United Methodist Church

Fellowship

Fellowship is important for all faith communities, but especially for African Americans, who could not freely visit restaurants, theaters, and other places of amusement until recently. Faith communities provided a basis for organizing social and cultural activities that reflected their culture and values. Women often took the lead in planning and presenting fellowship activities.



Last Grand Excursion of the Season, Bethel AME Church, Wilmington August 27, 1866 Broadside Collection, Delaware Historical Society Right, Program for "Great Women of the Bible" October 10, 1933 AUMP Records, Delaware Historical Society

Below, Rainbow Club, Bethel AME Church, Wilmington November 11, 1934 Sanborn Collection, Delaware Historical Society

Bethel's Rainbow Club, founded in 1928, presented pageants, recitals, socials, sacred concerts, and plays. The club had 71 members in 1934. One of its productions, "Great Women of the Bible," presented at Mother AU Church, provides an example of interchurch cooperation in Wilmington's close-knit African American community.

Dramatic, Historic, Spectacular

GREAT WOMEN of the BIBLE

MOTHER A. U. CHURCH French Street above Eighth

TUESDAY NIGHT, OCT. 10, 1933 Given under the auspices of the Rainbow Club of Bethel A.M.E. Church Mrs. Azalee C. Clark, Directress Rev. A. D. Hammond, Pas CHARACTERS Pasto

Hershi

Miss Frances Bordley Mrs. Celestine Bratcher

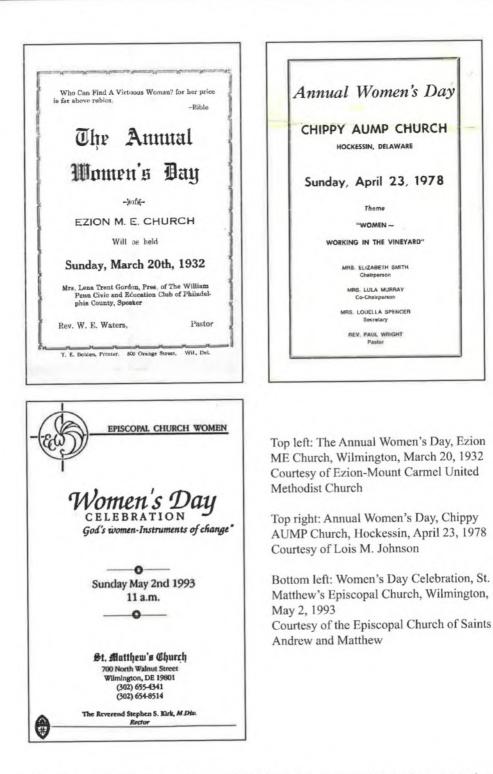
Eve Wife of Coin Sarah Hagar (the bondswoman) Mrs. Marie Prattis Mrs, Eva Jones Shiptah (Egyptian Nurse) Jochebed (Mother of Moses) Miriam (Sister of Moses) Miss Viola Handy Mrs. Jean Anderson Miss Gladys White The Princess (of Pharoah) Attendant The Baby Moses Mrs. Ethel Mason Raheb Angel or the Lord Jael Debomah Naomi Heaven's Wonder Ruth Liano: Jephtnans Daughter Maiden Attendants Maid of Syria Rhoda Hulda (a prophetess) Queen of Sheba Queen Esther Elizabeth Utvao Shulamite Woman Salome (Dancing Daughter) Lydia Doreus Lois Eucleo Parise Priscilla Widow of Zarephata Widow of Two Mites Mary, Mother of Jesus Mary Magdalene Martha Mary, Sister of Luzarus Mary, Mether of James and John Miss W. Handy

Mrs. Jumes-Mrs. Gilcs Miss Magdalene Morris Miss Emma Kay Mrs. Malissa Anderson Mrs. Sadie Naudain Mrs. Blunche Benson Mrs. Beatrice Lewis Mrs. Pauline Dyson Mrs. Lucretia Ringgold Mrs. Ethei McGann Mrs. Luh Comegys Mrs. Marie Johnson Mrs. Annie Grinnage Miss Helen Foster Mrs. Josephine Williams Mrs. Catherine Burris Jona Mrs. E. Anderson Miss Lena Anderson Mrs. Rosa Armstrong

Miss Gertrude Taylor Mra. Ethel Frazier Miss Junita Gadsen Miss Hilda Bishop Mrs. N. Caesar Mrs. Mollie Fleming Mrs. Rosa Bowie Miss Mattie Brown Miss Emma Pritchett Miss Anua Carnay Women of Today Mrs. L. May Brown

T. K. Bolder, Printer, 809 Orange St. Wilmington, De





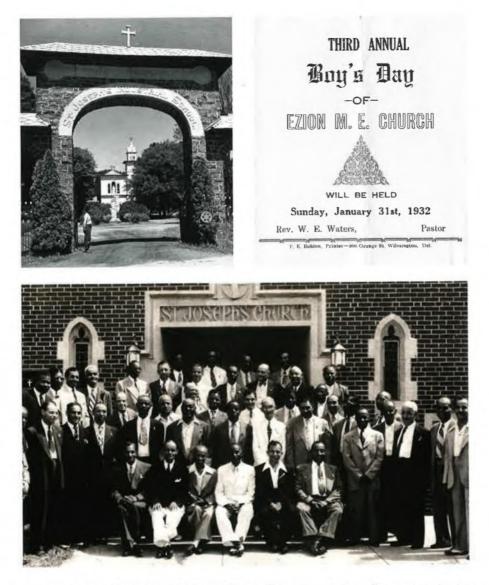
Since the early 1900s, women in many denominations have presented day-long events that feature worship led by women, fellowship, and fund-raising for church causes. Women's day programs continue to be an important part of the annual calendar in many African American churches.





Top, Vacation Bible School, Ezion ME Church, Wilmington Ca. late 1930s-early 1940s Courtesy of Ezion-Mount Carmel United Methodist Church

Bottom, Sunday school program at St. Matthew's Episcopal Church, Wilmington Ca. 1950s Courtesy of the Episcopal Church of Saints Andrew and Matthew



Top left, St. Joseph's Industrial School, Clayton, Delaware, courtesy of anonymous lender In addition to St. Joseph Catholic Church and other facilities in Wilmington, the Josephite order established St. Joseph's Industrial School in Clayton in 1895. The boarding school provided education and vocational training for boys from underprivileged homes. Following Booker T. Washington's philosophy that African Americans should learn practical skills, students learned occupations like farming, printing, carpentry, painting, and plumbing. The average yearly enrollment was 71 students. St. Joseph's closed in 1972.

Top right, Third Annual Boy's Day, Ezion ME Church, Wilmington, January 31, 1932, courtesy of Ezion-Mount Carmel United Methodist Church

Bottom, "DeRuyter Men" in front of St. Joseph Catholic Church, Wilmington, 1950, courtesy of St. Joseph Catholic Church

The "DeRuyter Men," also known as "Home Boys," were former residents of Saint Joseph Orphanage. The alumni group, founded in 1945, honors Father John de Ruyter, SSJ, who founded the church and orphanage. Established in 1892, the orphanage was the first such facility in the United States specifically for African American boys. Located next to the church, it remained open until 1928, when the boys moved to St. Joseph's Industrial School in Clayton.



Above, Wesley Camp Meeting (Wesley Methodist Church), Clarksville Ca. late 1930s-early 1940s Zebley Collection, Delaware Historical Society

Wesley camp meeting, still active today, started in the 1840s. Around 1865, two small frame building were erected on the site. One was used as the Blackwater Colored School for part of the year. This school continued, in various buildings, until 1951. Wesley Methodist Church was erected on the property in 1871, so the camp meeting is older than the church. The camp meeting, school, church, and cemetery, all on the same property, formed the center of the Wesley Community of Baltimore Hundred.

Top right, Annual Camp Meeting, New Zion AME Church, New Discovery September 22-October 6, 1929 Courtesy of anonymous lender

Bottom right, Annual Camp meeting, Bethany UAME Church, New Castle June 25 and July 2, 1922 Courtesy of the Union American Methodist Episcopal Church, Inc.

Camp meetings sometimes took place at churches rather than off site. Some people preferred this because it brought people directly to the church. New Discovery, an African American community, is just south of Townsend. The church was also known as Mt. Zion.

ANNUAL
CAND MEDDING
CAMP MEETING!
AT
NEW ZION A. M. E
ciroken
New Discovery, Delaware
one at d one half miles south of Townsend, Del. beginning
Sunday, Sept. 22d
and ending
Sunday, October 6th, 1929
Ministers will preach as follows:
SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 220
d or p. at Rev. W. H. Operac. paster of Science A. M. E. Church, Meldistown, Bel.
SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 29th
1100 a. H - Rev O. M. Colle Shop 19 - Have E. T. Steel, paths of Pathol A. M. R. Chuch,
1 10 pt un Hen. H. K. Hat-mer, grante of Chapters, Dat.
SUNDAY, OCTOBER 6th
1) 20 年 30 - 第49、5400 - 52 (André) 文化的 p. 48 - Rev. W. H. Grenere 1. Mi p. 41 - May, W. W. W. Miller
ALL SINGING AND PRAYING BANDS ARE INVITED
COOD GREEK WILL BE HAINTANDED THREECOMETT THE MERTING
GENERAL ADMISSION, Ten cents
the works We day Pelinse Longit Bank
Bolangel Ray Wenny Eristen Thiersen Berkburn Barn Ann Harry Stettenharn Barn Land
REV. G. M. PURNELL, Postor
W. June Block, Manual Strate

ANNUAL CAMPMEETING Bethany U. A. M. E. Church New Castle, del. 12

Will commence Sunday, June 25th, 1922 and continue until Sunday, July 2d, 1922

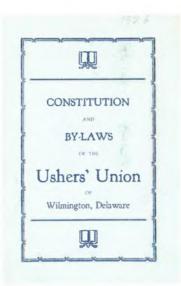
Services as follows:

Sunday, June 25th 1922 Preaching by Rev. Albert Price, of Smyrna, at 10.30 A.M. 3 P. M. Serromo by Rev. Frank Heary of Pine Tree. 7.30 P.M. Serromo by Rev. Henry G. Taylor. His band will sing at this hour.

Sunday, July 2d, 1922 ¹⁴Preaching 10.30 A. M. by the Rev. L. H. Adama. At 3.30 P. M. Rev. E. S. Rice, D. D., will preach at this service. His choir and caloers will act. 7.30 P. M. Rev. Thos. Beardley of Wilmington. Singing bands have been invitted.

MR. JOHN DOVER, President. R. GRAYSON BROWN, Secretary. REV. W. H. CUY, Paster





Ushers, Bethel AME Church, Wilmington, 1934 Delaware Historical Society Collections

Constitution and By-laws of the Ushers' Union, Wilmington 1926

Courtesy of Collection of Paul Preston Davis

Shiloh Baptist, Bethel AME, Ezion ME, and Mother AUMP churches formed the Wilmington's Ushers' Union in 1908, which grew into the Interdenominational Church Ushers Association of DE. By 1926, nine churches belonged. The by-laws defined the traditional ushers' dress code of white dresses and white gloves for women, and dark suits, black bow ties, polished shoes, and white gloves for men.

Left, Usher's Ribbon Badge from St. Paul AME Church, Harrington Courtesy of Terry A. Bryan

Right, Usher's Ribbon Badge from Shiloh Baptist Church, Wilmington Courtesy of Terry A. Bryan

Photos by Steve Boyden





MOTHER A. U. CHURCH

Price List for Mt. Olive Cemetery

Choice Transient Grave	\$32.50
Lowering Device	5.00
Greens	5.00
Two Stones	2.50
	\$45.00
L'OCUI,	\$43.00
Transient Grave	\$25.00
Lowering Device	
Greens	
Stones	
	\$37.50
1 otar,	\$111.00
6 Feet or 8 Feet Grave in Lot for Adults	\$15.00
Still Born (Grave)	\$ 4.00
6 Months to Year and Marker (Grave)	\$ 6.50
1 Year to 12 Years (Grave)	\$ 9.00
Price of Lots	\$65.00
TERMS TO UNDERTAKERS	
One-third of the amount owed is to be paid on or	before
the day of funeral and the balance in 30 day	8
A. H. Jones, Pres. Henry Dunoan, Vic	. Dese
A. H. Jones, Pres. Henry Dunoan, Vic Mrs. Ellenors Chippey, Treas.	e-rres.
Blijab Russ Walter T. Bayar	

Mary Batson Johnson, Sec'y

REV. A. D. HAMMOND. Pastor

Left: Mother A.U. Church, Price List for Mt. Olive Cemetery, Wilmington AUMP Records, Delaware Historical Society

Below: Tombstones of Rev. Henry J. Marshall and Anna G. Marshall 1935, 1939 Courtesy of Charles Marshall, Sr. Photograph by Steve Boyden

Rev. Henry J. Marshall, founding pastor of Union Missionary Baptist Church in Dover, purchased land for Lakeview Cemetery so that blacks could have their own graveyard. He and his wife were buried there in 1935 and 1939, respectively. Unfortunately, their tombstones were vandalized and removed from their proper location. In the winter of 2013, when the Delaware Department of Transportation was doing repair work under a bridge near Kenton, the tombstones were found and recovered. A new marker has been placed in Lakeview Cemetery, while the original tombstones have begun a new life as a means of education and memory.



BUILDING FREEDOM

The African American faith experience has always reached out into the larger world. As with all houses of worship, this comes from the mandate to spread the faith and save souls. But for blacks, the lack of other avenues of involvement and expression made the church a center for advocacy on political and social justice issues as well. From Mother African Union Church hosting a meeting to protest colonization in 1831 to the modern civil rights movement and beyond, the African American faith community has been a focal point in the struggle for freedom and equality for all Americans.

A Thanksgiving Sermon Preached January 1, 1808 ...on account of the Abolition of the African Slave Trade... Absalom Jones 1808 Courtesy of the Library Company of Philadelphia

For his sermon in thanksgiving for the end of the African slave trade in the United States, Absalom Jones took as his text the deliverance of the Israelites from bondage in Egypt, a key scripture for blacks. He also spoke of the equality of all humanity under God, saying "We thank thee, that thou art no respecter of persons, and that thou hast made of one blood all nations of men."

FOR THE DELAWARE FREE PRESS.

PUBLIC MEETNG.

At a large and respectable meeting of the people of color of the Borough of Wilmington, convened in the African Union Church, July 12th 1831, for the purpose of considering the subject of Colonization on the coast of Africa.

On motion the Rev. Peter Spencer was called to the Chair, and Thomas Dorsey was appointed Secretary.

The meeting was addressed by Abraham D. Shad, Junius C. Morell, Benj. Pascal and John P. Thompson, after which the following Resolutions were unanimously adopted.

Resolved, That this meeting view with deep regret the attempt now making to Colonize the free people of color on the western coast of Africa; believing as we do that it is inimical to the best interests of the people of color, and at variance with the principles of civil and religious liberty and wholly incompatible with the spirit of the Constitution and Declaration of Independence, of these United. States.

Resolved. That we disclaim all connexion with Africa, and although the decendants of that much afflicted country, we cannot consent to remove to any tropical climate, and thus aid in a design baving for its object the total extirpation of our race from this country, professions to the contrary notwithstanding.

Resolved, That a committee of three persons be appointed to prepare as soon as practicable an address to the public setting forth more fully our views on the subject of Colonization; the following persons were appointed, Abraham D. Shad, Reverend Peter Spencer and W. S. Thomas. Signed on behalf of the meeting.

PETER SPENCER, Chairman. THOMAS DORSEY, Sec'y.

"Public Meeting" Delaware Free Press August 6, 1831 Newspaper Collection, Delaware Historical Society

Emancipation Celebration. - The colored people of this city and vicinity will hold their third grand celebration of the Emancipation Proclamation of our lamented President, Abraham Lincoln, on Monday, January 1st, 1866. A sermon will be preached in E. Zion M. E. Church, at 10 o'clock, A. M., by Rev. Daniel P. Seaton. At half-past one o'clock, P. M., addresses will be delivered in the African Union Church. In the evening, an oration will be delivered by Prof. William Howard Day, M. A., a colored orator. Tickets of admission to the oration, orator. In view of the fact that the entire 25 cents. freedom of the colored race has been consummated by the adoption of the Constitutional amendment, it is anticipated that this occasion will be celebrated with much spirit.

"Emancipation Celebration" Delaware State Journal and Statesman December 22, 1865 Newspaper Collection, Delaware Historical Society

Black citizens held annual celebrations of the Emancipation Proclamation, often in churches. In Wilmington in 1866, the morning observances took place at Ezion, while the afternoon session was at Mother African Union Church. Emancipation Day events continued for many years, offering a forum to celebrate achievements and continue the fight for full equality.

In the early 1800s, many whites who opposed slavery thought free blacks should return to Africa, a process called colonization. In 1831, Wilmington's blacks held a meeting at the African Union Church where they clearly stated their opposition to colonization. They believed it was not in their best interests and against the principles of the Declaration of Independence and U.S. Constitution. Rev. Peter Spencer chaired the meeting, an example of how the black minister exercised leadership that went beyond the purely spiritual.

Rights Group Still Pickets Victoria's, Which Is Shut

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Left, "Rights Group Still Pickets Victoria's..." *Wilmington Evening Journal*, November 11, 1963 Courtesy of Vivian C. Moyer and Family

On May 17, 1963, five ministers attending the AUMP Church's annual conference in Wilmington staged a sit-in at Victoria's Luncheonette at 12th and King streets. Victoria's was the only restaurant that refused to sign the non-discrimination affidavit required to obtain a city business license.

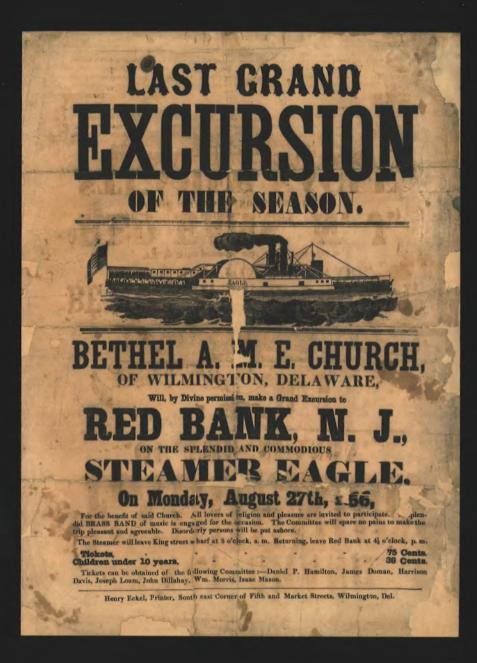
The ministers, including Rev. George Brown, pastor of Mother AUMP Church and chair of the NAACP's public accommodations committee, and Rev. Sherman B. Hawkins of Star of the East Church in Newport, acted after Bishop Reese C. Scott and the entire conference declared their support of the NAACP's campaign to end racial discrimination. They were arrested for trespassing, but the charges were dropped when a judge determined that they had been denied service solely because of race.

In the fall, a group called Concerned Citizens picketed the restaurant in a campaign sponsored by Mother AUMP, Scott AME Zion, and Bethel AME churches. Victoria's closed temporarily as a result of the picketing and reopened as a take-out place serving both blacks and whites.

Right, Announcement for Civil Rights Meeting at Central Baptist Church, Wilmington June 25, 1967 Courtesy of Collection of Paul Preston Davis

This announcement reflects the continuing link between African American faith communities and the ongoing struggle for freedom and equality. Civil rights leader Percy Sutton (1920-2009), a lawyer and entrepreneur from New York, served as Malcolm X's attorney.

A SPECIAL N.A.A.C.P. PUBLIC MEETING HEAR ATTORNEY PERCY E. SUTTON PRESIDENT & POLITICAL LEADER OF THE MANHATTEN BOROUGH (Including Harlem) of New York City, N.Y. AN OUTSTANDING CIVIL RIGHTS LEADER DISCUSS THE TOPIC CIVIL RIGHTS THROUGH POLITICAL ACTION Sunday, June 25th, 1967 3:30 P. M. **CENTRAL BAPTIST CHURCH** 9th & Pine Streets Wilmington, Delaware Sponsored by WILMINGTON BRANCH N.A.A.C.P. PROGRAM COMM **Gospel Singing Admission Free**



Front cover: Rainbow Club, Bethel AME Church, Wilmington, Delaware, 1934, Delaware Historical Society Collections

Back cover: Last Grand Excursion of the Season, Bethel AME Church, Wilmington, August 27, 1866, Delaware Historical Society Collections





