



Bishop Peter Spencer
1782 - 1843

XXIV. METHODIST PROTESTANT

The Methodist Protestant church differs from the Methodist Episcopal in organization rather than in doctrine, having neither bishops nor presiding elders.

There are both white and colored conferences in Delaware. The two are unrelated, having separate National organizations and being of separate origin.

The colored Methodist Protestants were the first to withdraw from the Methodist Episcopal Church, forming their own organization in 1813. This is now the African Union Methodist Protestant Church (entry 423) with headquarters in Wilmington.

Fifteen years later a number of independent white Methodist churches, composed largely of individuals who had withdrawn from the Methodist Episcopal Church, created a provisional organization under the name of the Associated Methodist Churches. Two years later this became the Methodist Protestant Church.

Both groups withdrew for substantially the same reason, dissatisfaction with ecclesiastical rule and lack of lay representation in the conferences of the church.

African Union Methodist Protestant

This denomination originated in one of the local churches and for many years the church and the denomination bore the same name. As their early records have not been found it has been difficult to determine when other churches became associated with it or which records in the County Recorder's office pertain to the church and which to the denomination. All such doubtful records have been listed under the individual church since it was the first organize.

423. AFRICAN UNION FIRST COLORED METHODIST PROTWSTANT CHURCH, 1813--., 702 Poplar St., Wilmington.

Organized 1813 under the leadership of Rev. Peter Spencer and William Anderson. It is one of the oldest associations of colored churches in this country. In December o 1812, desiring a church completely independent of the white race, a group of members withdrew from the Ezion Methodist Episcopal Church (entry 348), and organized the Union Church of African Members, which was incorporated July 21, 1813 (entry 424). Other nearby colored congregations for similar reasons joined with them and in 1814 the first annual conference was held.

A total of thirty-one churches were members of the conference by 1850, but after the death of Peter Spencer in 1843, there was some dispute as to his successor and legal controversy with respect to the church property. This culminated in the withdrawal of thirty members in 1851. These formed the Union American Methodist Episcopal denomination (see entries 406-14 and the Reformed Union American Methodist Episcopal Church, entries 415-17. However other congregations united with the mother church and by 1866 there were eight members of the conference.

In the meantime the First Colored Methodist Protestant Church had been organized in Baltimore (see forthcoming Inventory of the Church Archives of Maryland), withdrawing from the African Methodist Episcopal conference in June 1850. Within fifteen years a total of fourteen congregations were members of the conference organized by this church.

In November 1865 arrangements were made to unite the two organizations and on August 25th of the following year the first general conference assembled. Regional conferences were held until 1933, since which time they have been consolidated into a single annual conference. A general conference is held quadrennially. See: Discipline of the African Union Church in the United States of America and elsewhere (Wilmington, Porter and Eckel, 1852, 120 pp.); Doctrine and Discipline of the African Union First Colored Methodist Protestant Church (Wilmington, Eckel, 1867 132 pp.; later edition, Charles H. Gray, 1927, 175 pp.); Mrs. A. D. Nelson, "Big Quarterly in Wilmington", 1932, 9 pp., manuscript in possession of Wilmington Institute Free Library. Minutes of Annual Sessions (including Financial), 1872--, 22 printed vols. (series incomplete), in possession of statistician, Rev. C. N. Walker, 413 Jefferson Ave., Towson, Md.

424. MOTHER AFRICAN UNION FIRST COLORED METHODIST PROTESTANT CHURCH, 1813--,
819 French St., Wilmington.

Organized and incorporated July 21, 1813 as the Union Church of African Members. Congregation consisted of those who had separated from Asbury Methodist Episcopal Church (entry 200) in 1805 but who did not want their church governed by the mother church in whose councils they had no voice. They were led by Peter Spencer, a preacher of their own race and a man of unusual ability. A small frame building called "Pigeon House" was bought and moved to the present site. This served until 1827 when it was replaced by a larger frame building. The churchyard was used as a cemetery until becoming overcrowded the General Assembly passed a law, February 12, 1861, prohibited further interments (Del. Laws, vol. 12; chap. 28). Adjoining property was purchased August 30, 1837 for a parsonage. The church was enlarged in 1842 and in 1877 was replaced by the present church, a two story brick building with gallery and stained glass memorial windows. Quarterly conferences were held alternately in different nearby churches. The conference in this church held on the last Sunday of August of each year came to be known as "Big Quarterly". Being held at a season when weather and harvesting schedules were propitious, it not only survived the other quarterly conferences but grew until it is now an important element in the religious life of the colored people of this entire section. Colored churches and their congregations of all denominations celebrate "Big Quarterly" and thousands of colored people, some from great distances, congregate in Wilmington on that day. First settled clergyman, Rev. Peter Spencer, 1813-43. He lies buried behind the pulpit of the church he founded. See: Jonathan Chippey, Historical Sketch on the One Hundred Twenty-third Anniversary (Wilmington, News-Journal Co., 1928). Minutes, 1862--, 2 vols.; Register, 1927--, 1 vol.; Sunday School, 1927--, 2 vols.; in possession of Rev. John H. Bell, 817 French St. Financial, 1927--, 2 vols.; in possession of Willard Russell, 1031 Lombard St. Deed, 1813, in vault of Delaware Trust Co., in custody of Layman J. Redden. Copy of tombstone inscriptions in churchyard, prepared by the Historical Records Survey 1938, in State Archives. Records of incorporation and deeds: New Castle Co. Recorder's office, Deeds Record; vol. L3, p. 531; vol. M3, p. 470; vol. N3, p. 8; vol. C5, p.276; vol. Q7, p. 262; vol. O9, p. 263; vol. Z10, p. 269; vol. Q13, p. 469; vol. H16, p. 231; vol. H18, p. 287; vol. Q18, p. 95; vol. F20, p. 503; vol. O20, p. 271; vol. P21, p. 529; vol. B25, pp. 466 and 471; vol. G25, p. 439; Del. Laws, vol. 12; chap. 28.

for the use aforesaid shall and will Warrant and forever Defend
by these presents In Witness whereof the said Joshua Wollaston
and Cathrine his Wife have hereunto set their hands and Seals
the day and year first above Written.


Signed, Sealed & Delivered Joshua Wollaston 

In the presence of Catharine Wollaston 

Caleb Kendall Isaac Stevenson

Received on the day of the date of the above written Indenture of
the Trustees above named full satisfaction for the consideration
money above mentioned.


Witness present \$200, J. Joshua Wollaston
Caleb Kendall Isaac Stevenson

Newcastle County Js. The Execution of the within was
 proved by Isaac Stevenson one of the Subscribing witnesses
thereto in open Court of Common Pleas held at Newcastle for
the county of Newcastle of the may term A. D. 1805 In Testi-
mony whereof I have hereunto set my hand affixed the Seal
of said court.

Hugh W. Ritchie proth J

Recorded June 28th 1805. Examd.
Evan Thomas Recorder

226
Received on the day of the Date of the above written Indenture of the
above named Jeremiah Shad the Consideration money above mentioned
in full

Witness Present § 69 Joshua Wollaston
New Castle County ss. The Execution of the within was
 proved by Martha Stevenson one of the Subscribing
witnesses thereto in open Court of Common Pleas held at
Newcastle for the County of Newcastle, of the May Term A.D. 1805
In Testimony whereof I have hereto set my hand and
affixed the seal of said Court. Hugh W. Ritchie protho

Recorded June 25th 1805 ^{Exam?} Evan Thomas Recorder

This Indenture Made the twenty fifth day of May in
the year of our Lord one thousand Eight Hundred and five Between
Joshua Wollaston of the Borough of Wilmington and County of
New Castle in the State of Delaware, Bricklayer and Catherine his
wife of the one part, and Peter Spencer, Joseph Nicholson, Francis
Bailey, Jacob Morgan, Scottans Hill, Stephen Harris and Thomas Brown
Trustees of the African Methodist Episcopal Church at Wilmington afore-
said of the other part Whereas the said Joshua Wollaston by virtue of a
certain Deed Poll duly executed under the hand and Seal of Elisabeth
Garasche administratrix of John Garasche Du Rocher, deceased, for the
consideration therein mentioned became lawfully seized in fee of and
in a certain lot or piece of land situated in the Borough of Wilmington
aforesaid bounded by Wood Street by a line of land formerly of John
Stalcup and by other Lands containing three Acres be the same more
or less as in and by the said Deed Poll bearing date the twenty second
day of March Ann Dom. 1802 and Recorded in the Records Office at
Newcastle in Book Y Vol. 2^d Folio 91^d may more fully and at large appear
and Whereas the said Joshua Wollaston by virtue of an Indenture
of bargain and sale bearing even date herewith duly executed under
the hands and Seals of Jeremiah Shad and Amelia his wife for the
consideration therein mentioned became lawfully seized in fee of and
in a certain other lot or piece of land adjoining the lot above mentioned
Beginning at a stake on the East side of French Street being a
corner of William Temple's lot, thence by the same South fifty eight
degrees East one hundred and ninety six feet to a post in the line
of the lot above mentioned, thence with the same Northeasterly seventy
one

fifty eight degrees West & parallel with Wood street two hundred and thirty two feet and six inches to a stake at the East side of French Street thence with the same North thirty two degrees East seventy one feet to ~~the~~ the place of beginning containing by computation sixty square perches of Land be the same more or less Together with all and singular the fences, ways, alleys, water, water courses, rights, liberties, privileges, hereditaments, improvements, and appurtenances whatsoever there unto belonging or in any wise appertaining, and the reversions, remainders, rents, Issues and profits thereof And all ~~To have~~ ~~and to hold~~ the Estate Right, Title, Interest, Property claim and demand of the said Joshua Wallaston and Catherine his wife and his heirs of in and to the said granted lot, and of in and to every part thereof

To have and to hold all the said granted lot or piece of land and premises with the appurtenances unto the said Trustees of the Church above mentioned, and to their Successors in the Trust and assigns forever In trust for the Religious use of the Minister and preachers of the Methodist Episcopal Church who are in connexion with the General Conference of the said Church and for the people of Colour who are thereunto ordained and appointed from time to time by the Bishop or Bishops of the said Church forever, and for the performance of Divine Worship and other Religious Exercises agreeably to the form of discipline of the said Methodist Episcopal Church.

And it is hereby further provided that the members of the aforesaid African Methodist Episcopal Churches shall be received into membership in the same manner as the members of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the borough of Wilmington aforesaid are received, shall be entitled to the same privileges and be considered as in connexion with them, and are to be subject in all things to the form of discipline in the same manner as the members of the said Methodist Episcopal Church.

And it is hereby further provided that none but persons of colour shall be chosen as Trustees of the said African Methodist Episcopal Church or ~~for~~ any other office therein nor shall any person be eligible to the office of a Trustee of the said Church but such as are received and acknowledged to be members thereof by the resident Elders or Trustees of the aforesaid Church in Wilmington, and in case of the death resignation or ~~expulsion~~ expulsion from the society of any of the aforesaid Trustees or their successors, then the Members of the said African Methodist Episcopal Church shall convene together within three Months from the ~~time~~ death, resignati

one foot to a post on the south side of Wood Street at two perches broad thence
 by the same North fifty Eight degrees West two hundred and one feet to a post
 at the east side of French Street at fifty seven feet and six inches broad,
 and thence by the same seventy one feet to the place of Beginning, contain-
 ing by computation fourteen Thousand and ninety three feet of land
 It being the same lot which William Stidham Esq, late High Sheriff
 of the County aforesaid sold as the property of Doctor Bancroft and conveyed
 the same to Jesse Harrijs by Deed Poll bearing date the fifth day of October
 Anno Dom 1797 and Recorded in the afore said Office in Book R vol 2
 Folio 286 V, and which same lot Jesse Harrijs and Hannah his
 wife by their Indenture bearing date the eleventh day of July Anno
 Dom 1804 sold and conveyed to the above named Jeremiah Shadin
 Now this Indenture Witnesseth that the said Joshua
 Wollaston and Cathrine his wife for and in consideration of the sum of
 Two Hundred Dollars lawful money of the United States of America
 to him in hand well and truly paid by the said Peter Spencer Joseph
 Nicholson, Francis Bailey Jacob Morgan, Scotland Hill, Stephen Harrijs
 and Thomas Brown the trustees aforesaid, at or before the sealing
 and Delivery of these presents the receipt whereof they the said Joshua
 Wollaston and Cathrine his wife do hereby acknowledge, and confess
 themselves therewith fully satisfied and paid, and thereof and of and
 from every part thereof do release acquit and forever discharge the
 said Trustees and every of them their Successors and assigns HAVE
 granted, bargained, sold, aliened, enfeoffed released and confirmed
 by these presents do grant, bargain, sell, alien enfeoff, release and
 confirm unto the said Peter Spencer, Joseph Nicholson, Francis Bai-
 ley Jacob Morgan, Scotland Hill, Stephen Harrijs & Thomas Brown the
 Trustees of the African Methodists Episcopal Church at
 Wilmington aforesaid and to their Successors and assigns a certain
 lot, piece or part of the lot first above mentioned and All the lot last above
 described and both joined together are bounded and described as fol-
 lows to wit Beginning as a stake at the south side of Wood Street
 at two perches broad and at the East side of French Street as seventy
 three feet broad thence with the side of Wood Street South fifty eight
 degrees East two hundred and thirty two feet six Inches to a stake
 thence by a line dividing this from the Remainder of the said
 Joshua Wollaston's lot South thirty two degrees West and parallel
 with French Street seventy one feet to a stake thence North
 fifty

on or expulsion and shall chuse from among themselves by a plurality
 of votes a person or persons to fill up such vacancy, AND the resident Elder of
 the Methodist Episcopal Church of the Borough aforesaid shall attend the
 said Church himself to administer the Ordanances of Babbtism and the
 Lords Supper, as often as he can make it convenient, and the resident or
 presiding Elder for the time being shall licence to exhort or preach in the
 said Church any of the members thereof who shall appear to have gifts
 and Grace proper to appear in publick, and who shall be recommended
 to him by the official Members, and if any of the said coloured brethren
 shall graduate into Holy orders it shall be as the General Conference
 directs, and the aforesaid Trustee and their successors forever are hereby impow-
 ered to have the entire direction and disposal of the Temporal revenues
 of the said African Methodist Episcopal Church and to apply the same
 for the benefit of the said Church as a majority of the said Trustees shall
 from time to ~~me~~ ^{time} direct And as the said Trustees and their successors for-
 ever are to have the entire disposal and management of the temporal
 concerns of the said Church, so the resident Elder of the Methodist Episco-
 pal Church of the Borough of Wilmington for the time being is to have
 the directions and management of the spiritual concerns of the same,
 agreeably to the form of the discipline of the said Methodist, Episcopal
 Church. Provided that all appeals be made to the official members
 of the aforesaid African Methodist Episcopal Church, and that the
 aforesaid Resident Elder shall receive no person into the said African
 Methodist Episcopal society but such as are previously recommended
 by a Trustee or Trustees thereof and upon complaints being made
 to the said African Church of any of the members having walked
 disorderly the said Elder shall call the trustees of the same as a com-
 mittee to hear the case and try the disorderly member or members
 and the said Joshua Wollaston for him self his heirs Executors and
 Administrators doth hereby ~~and~~ ~~sole~~ Covenant to and with
 the said Trustees of the said African Methodist Episcopal Church at
 Wilmington that they and every of them all and Singular the said
 lot or piece of land and premises hereby bargained and sold or mentioned
 or intended so to be against him the said Joshua Wollaston and Catharine
 his wife and his heirs and against all and every other person and
 persons whomsoever lawfully claiming or that shall or may at any time
 hereafter lawfully claim the same or any part thereof by from or under
 him, her, them or any of them unto the said Trustees of the African
 Methodist Episcopal Church their successors and assigns in trust
 for

The legacy
of 'a very
worthy man'



Peter Spencer's influence on ideas and struggles still can be felt on Wilmington and Delaware to this day

The name of Peter Spencer is commonly identified with one of the darkest and most bitter periods in the history of Wilmington and Delaware. **Lewis V. Baldwin** Born a slave in 1782, Spencer experienced the torment and sorrow of bondage in both Delaware and Maryland. But the hardships he faced did not extinguish his desire to walk in pride as a "Free African," and to be independent and self-sufficient.

Inspired by the lingering spirit of the American Revolution, Spencer echoed the Enlightenment principles of freedom, reason, social progress and the natural rights of men. The fires of liberty burned in his soul, and he secured his own emancipation and moved to Wilmington in the 1790s. Although his own freedom was something to be cherished, Spencer's dream ultimately involved the liberation of all people in his city, state and the nation, and especially those who had failed to come to terms with the true meaning of democracy.

After settling in Wilmington, Spencer was educated in a school for "Free Africans" believed to have been financed by Quakers. He also joined the predominantly white Asbury Methodist Episcopal Church, and began a path toward productive citizenship. He became a lay preacher at Asbury, and the 1814 Wilmington City Directory

listed him as "a labourer" residing at the corner of French and Chestnut Streets.

Other 19th-century Delaware sources referred to him as "a very worthy man" who "was also a mechanic." Spencer was equally known as a family man. According to his Will Record, drawn up in 1841, two years before his death, he was married to Anne Spencer, and there were several stepchildren. Family and church always figured prominently in his consciousness, their values and traditions reinforcing each other in his life and work.

Spencer lamented the economic condition of his people. Always mindful of the extent to which all people of African descent were exploited economically, he sought to teach the so-called "Free Africans" the importance of business ownership, the practice of wise economics, and the values of cooperation. He also became an abolitionist and labored for the emancipation of the enslaved, mainly by opposing colonization schemes and supporting the Underground Railroad.

Spencer embodied the ethic of self-help that was widely cherished in black communities in the 19th century.

But economic self-help and sufficiency was only part of what Spencer exemplified. Through his prophetic social witness and protest activities, he challenged racial discrimination in the church and the larger society. In 1805, he led a number of fellow

Africans out of the Asbury M.E. Church in protest against segregated seating arrangements, and subsequently started a separate and independent African church movement that extended throughout Delaware into Maryland, Virginia, Pennsylvania, New Jersey and New York.

After establishing the original Mother Union (Methodist) Church of Africans at Ninth and French streets in Wilmington, Spencer went on to oversee the organization of some 30 other congregations that became associated with his church. A school was formed along with each congregation.

Like Richard Allen, the celebrated A.M.E. founder in Philadelphia, Spencer lifted the vision of religious freedom for a people determined to own institutions and exercise some control over their lives and destiny.

Those values were the driving force behind Spencer's inauguration of the Big August Quarterly in Wilmington in 1813. Impressed with the annual "Big Meetings" of the Quakers, he conceived of an annual social and religious festival that would bring together thousands of "Free Africans" and slaves in a spectacular expression of tradition and culture.

Occurring each year on the last Sunday in August, after most crops had been harvested, August Quarterly shaped a vital worship tradition, even as it served as a social outlet and a place for Africans to discuss politics and plan escape routes for

runaway slaves.

Although widely viewed as "a race leader" and as the father of the independent African church movement in Delaware, Spencer refused to be restricted by the categories of race and ethnicity. He associated with both blacks and whites. At the time of his death in July 1843, some white Wilmingtonians referred to him as "a practically good man" and "an example of wisdom, rectitude, and righteousness."

An issue of the Delaware State Journal, dated Aug. 1, 1843, reported: "We have had business transactions with him for a long time and to a considerable amount, and we have always found him faithful to all his obligations, and upright and prompt in all his dealings."

Spencer should never be reduced to some figure from the distant past who merely left a mark on Wilmington and Delaware. The monument in his memory at Ninth and French streets might seem to suggest this, but there is a much greater story to be told. His message of freedom and human dignity had important implications for the entire nation. Thus, his legacy of ideas and struggle should endure the test of time.

Dr. Lewis V. Baldwin is a professor of religious studies at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tenn. His books include "Invisible Strands in African Methodism: A History of the African Union Methodist Protestant and Union American Methodist Episcopal Churches, 1805-1980" and "The Mark of a Man: Peter Spencer and the African Union Methodist Tradition."

Spencer believed faith should bring change, not only in men, but in society

Society has changed considerably since 1813, when Peter Spencer

Lawrence M. Livingston ignited the fires of religious freedom for

African Americans with the start of the Union Church of African Members and the August Quarterly a year later. However, the principles upon which he founded the church and served the community in those early years of the 19th century are just as significant in the 21st century.

First of all, Peter Spencer believed that faith in Jesus Christ and His church was the platform for social transformation in a world that was strongly separated on the basis of race among other issues.

Belief in God, the Bible and the church, for Spencer was an inclusive endeavor, though at the time society's practices were not inclusive at all.

What the church offered and the Bible proclaimed was particularly affirming to a people who were in bondage to the institution of slavery.

Today, the particular issues have changed but there is still a need for social transformation.

The platform for substantive social change is still the same as it was in Spencer's day - faith in God, the Bible and the social teachings of Jesus Christ through the church. If

society's ills are to be transformed, the church today must seek and be given a role that changes people and the world in which we live.

Spencer was not partial to religious practice that did not affect the everyday lives of people, as some are still prone to advocate.

He believed that faith should bring about a change not only in the lives of believers but society in general.

Imagine a man of African descent, in 1813, preaching and teaching about community solidarity, liberation and self-determination in conjunction with salvation and hope.

Others had talked about hope and salvation, but without combining them with the other three principles. When Spencer combined them, he made them action terms. It was revolutionary, even if they were only implicit in the ministry. In any case, these principles made him a man ahead of his time.

These principles still provide a framework for ministry in the African American context. Though not a nationalist, Peter Spencer lives on in the mission of the church to respect the worth and dignity of all human beings.

The Rev. Lawrence M. Livingston is pastor of Mother African Union Church in Wilmington.



Staff photo by Leo S. Matkins

*Black religious leader
founded three churches
and August Quarterly*

Peter Spencer: hero of struggle

By GARY SOULSMAN
Staff reporter

THE RELIGIOUS movement founded by Peter Spencer, one of Wilmington's Christian heroes, is not large by present standards.

Three churches — the African Union Methodist Protestant Church, the Union American Methodist Episcopal Church and the Ezion United Methodist Church (now Ezion-Mount Carmel) — developed out of his efforts to win Wilmington blacks religious freedom, and they spread to other Eastern states.

But this movement, begun in Wilmington in 1813, represented the first time black Methodists were able to win independence from white Methodists. Spencer, who's been called "an architect of the black struggle," is credited with starting the nation's first all-black independent church.

As a result, the life of the religious leader and former slave "represented, and continues to represent, an ethnic minority and its historic struggle for freedom, justice, equality of opportunity and self-determination," writes Vanderbilt University history professor Lewis V. Baldwin in the first full-length biography of Spencer.

He hopes to have the 93-page manuscript published next year. It's called "Beyond One Man: Peter Spencer and the African Union Methodist Tradition."

Baldwin, who's been researching Spencer for seven years, wrote an earlier book about Spencer and the religious celebration he founded called August Quarterly. It's been described as Wilmington's oldest folk festival, and Baldwin says it's "the oldest continuously celebrated Afro-American street festival in America."

It will be held next week.

Additionally, Spencer is important to the community because he was a strong, intelligent voice when blacks needed one. As Baldwin writes, Spencer "was prophet as well as priest, a realist and an idealist, a politician as well as a theologian, and a reformer and an evangelist."

He taught the importance of "education, economic security, self-pride and respect, and a unity of will and purpose," Baldwin writes. "He also insisted on the necessity for blacks to show pride in and love

for family, to properly train their children and to avoid doing violence to one another. At a time when drugs, juvenile delinquency, black-on-black crime and a general atmosphere of apathy and more decadence pervade our communities, there is much that we can learn from these values as espoused by Spencer."

Baldwin calls his biography the most complete account of Spencer's life to date. In the book, he gives the following account:

See NOTED — D6

August Quarterly begins next week

The religious folk festival August Quarterly gets under way Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday at Mother AUMP Church, Ninth and Franklin streets, with a series of talks each night at 8 by the Rev. William L. Banks.

Banks is pastor of Union Baptist Church in Philadelphia. He has written six books, as well as numerous religious articles.

Friday, there will be a freedom vigil starting at Spencer Plaza on French Street at dusk.

Sunday worship services will start Aug. 25 at 10 a.m., at the Radisson Hotel Wilmington. The Rev. Lewis V. Baldwin of Nashville, Tenn., and Bishop Robert Walters of Norristown, Pa., will be among the speakers.

At 12:15 p.m. that day, street festivities will begin at Spencer Plaza and on French Street, which will be closed between Eighth and 10th

streets until 7 p.m.

At 1 p.m., Freedom Theater of Philadelphia will perform a series of African folk tales. These will be followed at 2 p.m. by the Zodiac Steel Band from St. Croix.

At 3 p.m., there will be more open-air music. The main attraction is to be the Harlem Boys Choir, which performs around the world.

Also scheduled to perform during the afternoon are: The A Cappella Singers of Baltimore, five young men who specialize in music of the '50s and '60s; The August Quarterly Choir conducted by Wilmington's Daniel Ridout, which will sing music of the early black tradition; a choir directed by Clair Brown of the Greater Bethel Church in Wilmington, which will sing music from the '60s, '70s and '80s; and a showcase of local talent including saxophonist Earl Brown and soloist Terry Brown, who will perform throughout the day.

*Black
History*

Spencer: August Quarterly is still held annually



Arrrione Comegys (left) and Marshay Price, along with August Quarterly Administrator Lawrence Roane, place a wreath near the grave site of Peter Spencer in Wilmington during the 2008 August Quarterly. NEWS JOURNAL

FILE/GINGER WALL

Continued from Page B1

Kent County, Md., in the late 1700s.

After being freed when his master died, he came to Wilmington in the early 1800s. He worked as a mechanic, had other jobs and got an education that was extraordinary for a black person of his time. He studied law, helped black residents with legal issues, taught many to read and write, and taught others to teach those skills.

In 1805, he led a group of black members out of Asbury Methodist Episcopal Church to form Mt. Ezion Church, still tied to mainly white Asbury.

In 1813, he and another member began a church with no ties to a white church, no white supervision or permission.

It was the Union Church of Africans (or African Members) called the Mother Church, now the African Union Methodist Protestant Church or Mother AUMP, led by the Rev. Lawrence M. Livingston.

Ultimately, Spencer began 31 churches, nearly all with schools, and was known as the “father of the independent black church movement.”

Wilmington Quaker, abolitionist and Underground Railroad “conductor” Thomas Garrett helped him buy land for the Mother Church on French Street.

Spencer was buried with his wife, Annes, and other church members in its graveyard, now part of his namesake plaza. The church stood from 1813 to 1970. It was razed and the congregation

moved in “urban renewal” for construction of nearby government buildings.

The statue by the late sculptor Charles Parks later added to the plaza is not Spencer. Called “Father and Son,” it shows a black man in jeans and a T-shirt, holding a sleeping child, to show hope for the future Spencer inspired.

A wreath is put there each year, in connection with a tradition for which Spencer is best known, the August Quarterly or Big Quarterly.

The year after founding the Mother Church, Spencer began its quarterly meetings, with the biggest in August. Owners let slaves go because it was after harvest, historians say, and many walked for days to get there. For some families

separated by slavery, it was the one time they gathered every year. It was full of preaching, worship, fellowship, singing and dancing.

The Quarterly, called an “independence day for black people,” first was held at the church. After it was razed, the event was held on French Street. Some years ago, it moved to Tubman-Garrett Park.

Now known as August Quarterly Festival, a full schedule is to be posted within days at www.augustquarterly.org.

Do you have an idea for Delaware Backstory? Comments? Contact robin brown at 324-2856, rbrown@delawareonline.com or at The News Journal, Box 15505, Wilmington, DE 19850.

Legacy of ex-slave, pastor lives on through August Quarterly

Blacks broke the law in Wilmington in a bold step that made national and civil rights history.

It was 1813 and it was illegal for people of color to meet without white supervision. A man named Peter Spencer led a quiet revolution against that law. Born a slave in Maryland, Spencer was legally freed when his owner died. He made his way to Wilmington, where he became a community leader, educator and pastor of a black congregation. It met under the auspices of a white church – until he led the flock out to start its own. Theirs was the nation's first independent black church and denomination, according to state historians.

DELAWARE BACKSTORY

robin brown

“That’s a little known black history fact,” said the Rev. Lawrence M. Livingston, current pastor.

Like no earlier blacks, “mother church” members exercised not only freedom of religion, but also freedom of assembly and free speech.

Helped by Underground Railroad leader Thomas Garrett and Quakers who helped slaves to freedom, they bought land on French Street and built a church. It was

called Union Church of African Members, then African Union Methodist Protestant Church, now Mother African Union First Colored Methodist Protestant Church or Mother AUFMCP or AU Church.

In his day, Spencer was called reverend, father, bishop. Historians now call him the father of the independent black church movement. He began more than 30 churches. Ezion (Mount Carmel) Church predated the mother church, but kept ties to a white one.

Spencer also is credited with starting the nation's longest-running black heritage festival. Since 1814, the mother church's August Quarterly or Big Quarterly has celebrated religious freedom. The gathering drew thousands of free, freed and enslaved blacks as it grew into an “Independence Day” for people of color all over the Delmarva Peninsula, said Chairman Lawrence “Moon” Roane.

The event also honors Spencer, buried

by his wife Annes in the yard of the mother church. The church was razed in 1970, but the site, where the graves remain, became Peter Spencer Plaza, with a statue by Charles Parks and a state historic marker.

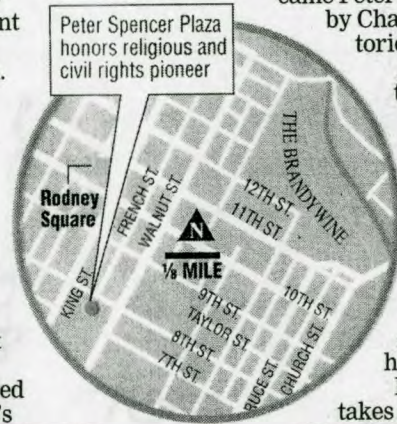
Some August Quarterly activities are held there.

The final weekend has worship, a parade and activities at the city's Tubman-Garrett Park. Gospel-filled air carries scents from incense to barbecue over lawn chairs and blankets brought by people who gather for reunions and homecomings.

Hosting the monthlong fest takes scores of volunteers and a year of planning, Roane said: “It ends and we start the next one.”

Livingston says time has not erased August Quarterly's serious significance, given modern inequalities such as blacks' disproportionate incarceration and economic disparities.

“Slavery may be gone, and Jim Crow may be gone, and segregation may be gone,” he says, “but the struggle continues.”



This is the only known historic image of Peter Spencer of Wilmington, who founded the nation's first independent black church and August Quarterly, called the nation's oldest continuous African-American celebration, this year set for Aug. 2-26.

ONLINE EXTRAS

Visit www.delawareonline.com/backstory to:

- Read more about the life of Peter Spencer.
- Check August Quarterly 2007 events, Aug. 2-26.
- Find links to learn more.
- Visit the reporter's blog about August Quarterly's recognition as a national revival.

August Quarterly honors Peter Spencer



**DELAWARE
BACKSTORY**
ROBIN BROWN

Occupy Delaware's presence in Wilmington's Peter Spencer Plaza – and Mayor James M. Baker's concern about desecration of Spencer's grave there – recently focused attention on the historic civil rights pioneer.

Information about him "is amazingly scarce ... despite his tremendous importance," author Lewis V. Baldwin wrote.

He is honored yearly in the August Quarterly, a celebration of religious freedom called the oldest African-American heritage festival. "We want the nation to know about this great man," said longtime chair Law-

rence "Moon" Roane.

And well it should.

He risked prison or death by defying laws that required churches to have white supervision and white permission for black people's gatherings.

He began the first independent African-American church. In doing so, he pioneered freedom of religion, speech and assembly. "When we think of civil rights, we think of the 1960s," Roane said. "But Peter Spencer was way ahead of his time."

He was born into slavery in

See SPENCER, Page B2



REV. PETER SPENCER

The only known image of Peter Spencer has served as a reference for modern artists. COURTESY OF AUGUST QUARTERLY

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PROTESTANT
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The Rt. Rev. Dr.
Delbert L. Jackson
Presiding Bishop

August Quarterly Still Needed!

We of the Afro-American Historical Society of Delaware strongly believe that there continues to be a need for Black people to unite under the banner of August Quarterly. It is one of the most important ethnic festivals in the state and in the nation. Now in its 176th year, it is by far the oldest folk festival in Delaware and it is probably the oldest African American Festival in America. To put things in perspective, consider the fact that when the City of Wilmington was incorporated in 1823, August Quarterly had already been operating for almost a decade.

Peter Spencer and the members of the Mother African Union Protestant Church who founded this festival had as their primary concern the freedom of Black people in America. Freedom from slavery — freedom from white religious domination and control. Through an independent Black church, they envisioned a time when Black people would cast off the shackles of slavery and rise up as equals to participate in all aspects of society.

In Delaware, and many other states across the country, 176 years after

August Quarterly began, Black people are still not free. While most of the oppressive written laws have been removed from the books, hate and prejudice still linger in the hearts of many white people — some who are public leaders, some who are corporate executives, some who are simply everyday people — people who work and even live along side of Blacks. These vestiges of bigotry are evident at many levels including a resurgence of hate groups such as the Ku Klux Klan and in recent ruling of the United States Supreme Court — taking away

Civil Rights Victories.

In closing, we recognize that there has been progress — that in Delaware we have much to celebrate in terms of our achievements and heritage. However, we must realize that there are still obstacles to racial equality to be overcome. We feel privileged to join the members of the African Union Methodist Protestant Church in helping to maintain the proud tradition of August Quarterly and we are hopeful that all Delawareans will try to attend some of the activities planned as part of this historic celebration.

Harmon R. Carey, President Board of Directors, Afro-American Historical Society of Delaware