—Origins of the AME Church

(Continued from Page 1)

Moreover, if the colored movement had been given the opportunity within the Methodist Episcopal Church to exercise their talents, there would not have been separate African churches at this time, although as a result of the racial differences in American life, this division of the churches along racial lines would have been inevitable.

Colored people were later given opportunities within the Methodist Episcopal Church but these opportunities were granted after it was demonstrated that they would organize themselves and develop their own leadership unless they were encouraged to do so inside of the church.

The Zoar Methodist Episcopal Church for colored people was organized in Philadelphia because the Bethel membership and the St. Thomas membership had demonstrated what our people would do if left to themselves. Zoar was organized through the active corporation of the whites, individual persons in Richard Allen's littleband being influenced by them.

It is said that Bishop Asbury finding that Richard Allen was becomnig more useful to his congregation ordained him a deacon in 1799.

In the following year, the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church made it legal to ordain colored men to the work of the ministry.

The lot of the Afro Amerlcans in the Methodist Episcopal Church was made easier because of the positive action by the African Methodists, who were of independent spirit and who were forced more and more into open rebellion by the attitude of the majority of their white brothers in Methodism.

There is no direct evidence for the conclusion that the African Methodist Episcopal Church was founded in 1787 when Richard Allen left St. Georges' Methodist Episcopal Church, any more than there is evidence to prove that the Methodist Episcopal Church was founded in 1739 when John Wesley assembled a group of persons to engage in prayer, Bible reading and testimony concerning personal salvation.

In both of these events, however, there were the origins of later developments, and in tracing movements to their source, it is inevitable that remote beginnings and earliest manifestations should be important. While the African Methodist Episcopal Church traces its origin to 1787, its organization as a church is of a later period.

The Allen Movement which began in Philadelphia was of great importance to the later organization of the African Methodist Episcopal Church and because of the numbers involved in its membership as well as the influence of its leaders, it has been of more historical signifincance than any other type of African Methodism.

Nevertheless, it was not the only movement of this type, as a separation movement from the Methodist Episcopal Church.

Paralleling this movement was the movement in Baltimore under the leadership of Daniel Coker, who shares honors with Richard Allen in the establishment of the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

Maryland was the scene of the organization of the first Methodist Society in America. This society was organized in 1764 at Sam's Creek, Frederick County, Maryland.

In the following year, he came to Baltimore and organized a church which later became the Lovely Lane Methodist Episcopal Church. Another meeting-house was established on Dallas Street, which later developed into the Centennial Methodist Epispal Church. There were colored members of both of these organizations as in the St. George's Church in Philadelphia.

In 1786 and 1787, the same dissatisfaction which had manifested itself in Philadelphia made its appearance in Baltimore. Difficulties arose here concerning the seating of the white and colored tion in the Communion services.

At both churches, the Lovely Lane and the Strawberry Churches, the colored members were ordered to the gallery, and they were also told to wait until the white members had communed. This attitude of the white membership led to the manifestation of an independent spirit on the part of the "Free Africans" of this city.

Separate prayer meetings were held under the leadership of Jacob Fortie in a house near the Belair market. These meetings were held in the same year as the meetings under Richard Allen in Philadelphia. The organization of a separate organization followed.

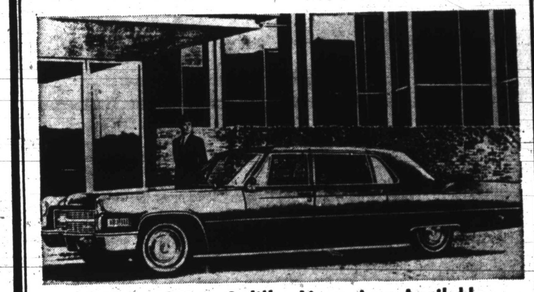
The assembly organized in the boot-black cellar of Caleb Hyland, near the corner of Baltimore and Calvert Streets.

In the immediate years which followed, prayer-meetings were held in the houses of the members. About 1797 a building was purchased on Saratoga Street, where Bethel Church once stood, and the church had its beginnings on its own premises.

It was given the name of Bethel which it has kept through the years. It is asserted that this separation was undertaken before the separation in Philadelphia.

There is no historical proof to this effect. However, its determination would be of significance only in the satisfaction of local pride. The importance of the meeting in Philadelphia is of such consequence that it far outweighs any other similar meeting.

"Let Us Take The Driver's Seat."



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"And their glory will not be blotted out.
"Their bodies are buried in peace,
"But their names live to all generations."

The Apocryplia, Ecclesiasticus, 44th chapter.

DR. JOHN NORRIS

Do any of you remember Dr. John W. Norris, the great preacher?

John Norris always wore rubbers and umbrella, winter and summer, sunshine and rain?

C. H. Stepteau, whose flow of language was golden? Of him it was said he could take an English sentence and snap it like a ship.

DR. CHARLES STEWART

Charley Stewart, the first minister I knew who would leave the pulpit for the piano and have the two instruments accompany the choir? Week days Dr. Stewart was either driving or repairing one of the biggest Pierce Arrow cars in town.

Benevolent Bishop Arnett, who put his hand on my head and said to my father, "John is that your boy? Your tenth child, My, my."

BISHOP HANDY

Bishop Jimmy Handy, venerable giant, slowed in his walk by paralysis? What a power he must have been in his younger days.

Bishop John Hurst, roly poly, 5 foot 3, dignified member of the NAACP's National Board, telling me "I think you ought to revive the Baltimore NAACP Branch." I remember telling him, "I couldn't be its president but I could find someone." I found Lillie Jackson.

BISHOP GAINES

Dr. A. L. Gaines, who ran so many times for the bishopric and suffered so many disappointments, but he made it?

I recall the preachers' meeting in which we discussed the first appearance of automobiles in town and the undignified manner in which the clergy had to dodge traffic when they crossed in the middle of the streets.

Dr. Gaines, said pedestrians have the right of way at all times.

In those days slow autos made only 15-18 miles on city streets and 35 miles on highways — at 40 you were speeding and likely to be arrested.

Dr. Gaines noted me smiling and asked me what ordinance should be suggested to city council to make it possible for the clergy to cross the streets in the middle of the block in safety.

I remember telling him I didn't see how any ordinance could make an auto stop in the middle of a block and the clergy would have to hustle, or wait until the street was clear. He shook his head sadly in protest against the violation of what he considered the rights of the clergy.

Dr. John Holmes (M.E.) an indefatigable fisherman?

BISHOP DAVIS

Monroe Davis, a country boy just out of South Carolina, who came to me as a student at Howard University preparing to get his bachelor's degree in theology.

I'll never forget sitting in the press section at the Chicago general conference that morning after he had been elected bishop, and was called to the platform to sit with fellow prelates. He came to the edge of the platform and showed me a telegram of congratulations from a friend in Baltimore who happened to be a banker.

FATHER BRAGG

Father George Bragg came to Baltimore to deliver many a paper on the history of the church and of the clergy.

I mention him because in my high school days he persuaded my father to allow me to become a choir boy in St. James Church, to wear a robe and cotta and march in behind a cross every Sunday morning service.

And so I was won over to the Philistines. I wish sometimes that there had been a boy's choir and choir robes in our own churches to give the teen aged youths a larger part in the devotional services.

BISHOP JOHNSON

John Albert Johnson — one of the finest preachers I ever heard, a marvellous personality who filled old St. John's on Lexington Street every Sunday morning.

I remember I was in the intermediate class in Sunday School, and hoped our class teacher would be absent so I could sit in with the men's Bible Class taught by Dr. Johnson.

Elected bishop and sent to South Africa, he came back a changed man. He had been my ideal and my hero. I thought I knew him well, and grieved for weeks when he came home after four years or so, and gave me only a perfunctory handshake. He didn't know me.

Since I have grown up, I know how hard it is to recognize children when you don't see them for 10 years.

DR. CHARLES WESLEY

Dr. Charles Wesley, now president-emeritus of Central State College, who could wake up in the middle of the night and preach a sermon from any text.

Dr. Daniel G. Hill, who welcomed me into membership at Trinity Church one Sunday morning when I was a boy of 6 or 7.

I had the urge that day and when the doors of the church were opened, I nudged my Dad and whispered in his ear I'd like to join.

We went up the aisle hand in hand and I remember Dr. Hill reaching down to shake my hand, not looking at me, he was beaming at father and there was mist in Dad's eyes.

BISHOP BROOKS

Sampson Brooks, the greatest evangelist I ever heard, staging a $33,000 rally in Bethel. I was a newspaper reporter drawing $27.50 a week.

Give me $100, Dr. Brooks would say. If you haven't $100, give $50. If you haven't $50 give $25. If you haven't $25, give $15, give $10, give $5, give $1.

If you haven't $1.00, give 50 cents. If you can't give 50 give 25, give 15, give 10.

THE $20 BILL

I remember I had a new $20 bill in my pocketbook. Was keeping it for something the children needed.

Dr. Brooks knew I couldn't afford the $20, but he came to the office next day and said, "Brother Carl, I don't want this money, as badly as I need it.

"You have something else I want. I want a story in your paper every week until this campaign is over."

He got his story, and when he became bishop, I got his pamphlets to edit and his accounts to check. Perhaps the most valuable suggestion I ever gave a bishop, trembling in his boots for fear an Episcopal committee might find a mistake in his quadrennial report, was this:

I remember urging him to turn over his report every four years to a certified public accountant and carry this audited report to the general conference with a light heart.

He was a good and great man.

That's from my heart, not because when he died he left me his library and a check for $1000. After his wife's death, a second $1000. The first went into a memorial library, the second went to scholarships for worthy students.

ST. JOHN AND TRINITY

I remember many things that happened in Bethel church or St. John and at Trinity, for I came every Sunday to church and every Sunday afternoon to Sunday School.

No outings in the parks, no sleeping late Sundays, no baseball or football games Sunday. First family prayers, then church, then Sunday School, then school lessons or reading or sitting on the front steps.

We were poor, but we didn't know it, were not greatly inconvenienced by it, nor did we feel any lack of dignity or suffer any humiliation because of it.

Our lives revolved around our work and our church and the most important persons in our city were our teachers and our pastors.

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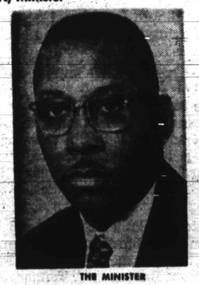

THE MINISTER

Maryland's third largest African Methodist Episcopal Church, a pioneer in East Baltimore, was admitted to the A.M.E. denomination under the direction of Bishop James A. Handy. The first church building, known as "Waters Chapel" and in honor of Bishop Edward Waters, a Marylander, was located on North Spring Street near Jefferson.

The growing influence of the church, its increased membership and large attendance, ficilitated seeking of a larger dwelling. The pastor, Reverend John F. Wagner, and his officers, with the advice of Bishop Benjamin F. Lee, the presiding Bishop, purchased the Aisquith Street Presbyterian Church. In June 1902, the congregation moved into the building presently at 427 Aisquith Street. A spacious educational building and dining hall was erected in 1956 under the leadership of Rev. G. Dewey Robinson.

Ministers elected to the bishopric who had served as ministers of Waters Church were namely: Drs. James A. Handy, John Hurst, A. L. Gaines and M. H. Davis.

As we observe our Sesquicentennial Year, may we be reminded that great problems lie ahead and are pressing for solution. In the spirit of the founders we dedicate ourselves to the task of doing all we can to assist in creating a better world.

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