

Spring 2014



AAMHC *Journal*

African American Methodist Heritage Center

Dear Reader,

The African American Methodist Heritage Center (AAMHC) is a ministry of the United Methodist Church and Methodism at large. It views the church and its ministry in retrospect and prospect, not out of a desire to revel in some nostalgic past. Rather, the Center seeks to learn and appropriate the past as informant and bridge to a more faithful and effective future. The AAMHC envisions its work as gatherer and conservator of the vital history and heritage of Black people in the successive Methodist bodies from the Methodist Episcopal Church, to being racially segregated in the Central Jurisdiction all the way to the United Methodist Church in American society and the globe. Both the struggle and the contributions of Black people are huge. Inclusion of African Americans as full participants has ebbed and flowed in different ways over the past 275 years. We believe that accurate representation of that story needs to be examined and preserved.

For over a decade the African American Methodist Heritage Center has been garnering strength and the necessary resources to collect, preserve, produce and expand the historical narrative including the people and artifacts that proclaim the broad sweep and minute intricacies of the Black Methodist story. The initial vision and leadership of Bishop Forrest C. Stith and others who joined him has led to the formation of the AAMHC to guide what has become a multifaceted ministry encompassing history and heritage. The Board of Directors meets regularly to plan, fund, implement, and evaluate the initiatives of the AAMHC. Workshops have been offered for local churches to enhance their efforts at collecting and preserving their histories. Partnerships have been initiated with schools and entities to develop projects to recover their histories. Research initiatives and dissemination of information are underway. The AAMHC is working with the General Commission on Archives and History to break new ground and fill in the gaps that pertain to African Americans and Methodism. We believe we have established a solid ministry process. As we continue in our ministry we need your prayers, your donations of archival materials, your insights and suggestions and your financial support. We invite you to tell us how we can be of service to you in your local church or other place of ministry.

- *Dr. James M. Shopshire, Sr., Board of Directors (jshopshire@aol.com)*

ALL AAMHC Board Members: Rev. Dr. Gilbert Caldwell, Ms. Angella Current Felder, Ms. Pamela Crosby, Rev. Dr. James Ferree, Rev. Dr. John Heyward, Ms. Ruth Lawson, Ms. Cecelia Long, Dr. Cynthia Bond Hopson, Mr. Donald Lusk, Rev. Dr. Walter McKelvey, Dr. Arnold Parks, Mr. Archie Moore, Rev. Dr. Cornish Rogers, Rev. Dr. James Shopshire, Bishop Forrest Stith, Ms. Barbara Ricks Thompson, Ms. Carol Travis, Ms. Cheryl Walker, Rev. Dr. Robert Williams, Dr. John Wright, Rev. Dr. Joseph Wilson.

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200th ANNIVERSARY OF THE DEATH OF THOMAS COKE

Staunch Opponent of Slavery



General and History is

Mission: Remembering the 200th Anniversary of the Death of Thomas Coke." Thomas Coke was a staunch opponent of slavery. He was a forceful voice for the emancipation of slaves. While in Virginia, he recorded in his *Journal*, Friday, April 1 (1785), - "I preached in a chapel belonging to *Isaac Johnson*. I now began to venture to exhort our Societies to emancipate their slaves." Another entry for April 5:

"I rode to sister Bedford's. Here I dared for the first time to bear a public testimony against slavery, and I do not find that more than one was offended. On Wednesday 6, I preached the late Colonel Bedford's funeral sermon. But I said nothing good of him, for he was a violent friend of slavery, and his interest being great among the Methodists in these parts, he would have been a dreadful thorn in our sides, if the Lord had not in mercy taken him away."

Asbury and Coke visited General George Washington at Mt. Vernon in May 1785 also revealing their opposition to slavery. Coke wrote in his *Journal*:

"Mr. Asbury and I set off for General Washington's... The general's seat is very elegant, built upon the great river Potomawk... After dinner we desired a private interview, and opened to him the grand business on which we came, presenting to him our petition for the emancipation of the negroes, and entreating his signature, if the eminence of his station did not render it inexpedient for him to sign any petition. He informed us that he was of our sentiments, and had signified his thoughts on the subject to most of the great men of the State: that he did not see it proper to sign the petition, but if the Assembly took it into consideration, would signify his sentiments to the Assembly by a letter."

Coke faced hostility in a number of places because of his witness against the evil of slavery. It should also be noted that the Methodist societies at the time of Coke and Asbury were more racially inclusive and more anti-slavery than in the middle years of the 19th century.

The theme for Heritage Sunday in 2014 as set by the Commission on Archives and History is "The Church's Heritage in

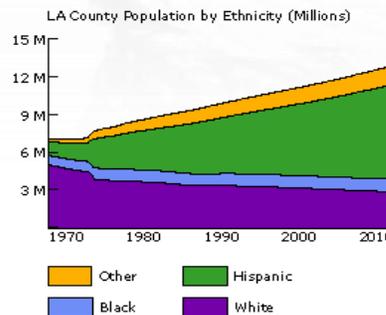
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Thomas Coke is best remembered by American Methodists as the one who brought Wesley's plan for the Methodists to America, ordained Francis Asbury as deacon, elder, and general superintendent (later called bishop), and participated in the formation of the church until his last visit in 1804. He is remembered by British Methodists for encouraging the world wide mission of the church having made visits to the West Indies and he died on May 3, 1814 as he was going to Southeast Asia for the sake of evangelizing the people there.

The date for Heritage Sunday is set by action of the General Conference and noted in *The Book of Discipline* as being Aldersgate Day or the Sunday preceding that day. Certainly a local church is free to observe it on another date that better fits the local context or interests of the congregation. The *Discipline* states, "Heritage Sunday calls the Church to remember the past by committing itself to the continuing call of God" (par. 264.1). Other resources can be found at <http://www.gcah.org/resources/heritage-sunday-2014>.

- Dr. Robert J. Williams, General Commission on Archives and History (rwilliams@gcah.org)

HISTORY IN THE MAKING



Demographic Changes Bring New Challenges

More than earthquakes are shaking up the Los Angeles area African American United

Methodist churches this Spring. Amid a sea-change in the population of south Los Angeles, from African American to Hispanic, our churches are trying to respond by seeking ways to serve their new neighbors, and remain alive at the same time. Caught in the maelstrom are several historic United Methodist churches, including Wesley, Hamilton, Faith and Bowen Memorial congregations. Last year, Bishop Carcano made Wesley and Bowen a two-point charge pastored by a Hispanic Minister, Rev. Ivan Sevillano. Also, she appointed Gary Williams to serve Hamilton and Faith churches. According to Rev. Kathy Wilborn, District Superintendent of the West District, these appointments were made for missional as well as economic purposes. Historic Wesley United Methodist Church, the oldest African American United Methodist church on the west coast, which once boasted 1500 members, recently reported only 140 souls, and the other charges lost heavily also. Some of these

congregations may be merged in the near future, Rev. Wilborn said. More stable African American churches, e.g. Holman, Crenshaw and Grace, are still continuing to serve in predominantly African American middle class communities which have spread further westward into Ladera Heights, Westchester and Culver City. Consequently, the Conference's Strengthening the Black Church Committee, chaired by Rev. Paul Hill, has recommended that a new church be planted in that area. Outside Los Angeles, African American churches in Pasadena and the San Fernando Valley continue to serve African American & interracial congregants, but no predominantly African American congregations have yet been established in Pomona Valley or the Inland Empire, which includes San Bernardino and Riverside.

- Dr. Cornish Rogers, Board Member
(crogers@cst.edu)

WHY BOTHER WITH LOCAL CHURCH HISTORIES?



*Gone but
Not
Forgotten*

It is important to keep a record of the heritage and history of local churches. It is incumbent upon African American churches to remember and recognize their very rich history and the contributions those churches have made to the community and the persons they serve.

In 2012, a colleague Dr. John A. Wright, Sr. and I decided to document a brief profile of the thirty-five (35) African American United Methodist Churches which were, and still are, viable congregations in the Missouri Conference. The end product was a book entitled "African American United Methodist Churches in Missouri: A Pictorial History." In our research it was interesting to note that beginning in 1846 and through the early decades of the twentieth century - 1920's, 1930's and 1940's - the names of more than 186 African American Methodist Episcopal churches at some point were recorded in Missouri archival history although some of those ventures had no formal congregation or were churches existing only in name. Most were not established on firm foundations either in terms of leadership or size of membership, thereby in time they ceased to exist. Equally important, some of those churches lost membership when families relocated for employment opportunities or through the death of older

members. A concluding chapter in our book entitled "Gone but Not Forgotten" discusses several of the aforementioned churches and the path of their decline.

In light of such information, it is paramount that we as clergy and laity remain diligent in recording the history of African American United Methodist churches still in existence in order that this legacy will not be lost. This fact is underscored when one relates the local church to the African proverb that cautions: "when an elder dies a library is lost."

- Dr. Arnold G. Parks, Board of Directors
(agparks@embargmail.com)

AAMHC ENDOWMENT FUND

*Insuring a Future of
Growth*



It was with much excitement, enthusiasm and pure joy that in its Winter 2014 meeting the Board of Directors of the African American Methodist Heritage Center (AAMHC) agreed to create an Endowment Fund with the United Methodist Foundation (UMF) as a way of insuring long-range funding support for the Heritage Center. The UMF provides opportunities for planned giving for long term support of ministries of the United Methodist Church through prudent investment of funds. Historically, those investments have generated excellent to superb returns. AAMHC is fortunate to have this affiliation which will not only provide investment expertise but also the expertise to help develop a base of supporters for the endowment that will allow the ministry to continue into the future. History has no ending time; the legacy must continue into the future.

The creation of the Endowment Fund provides for the future. At the same time, AAMHC must continue to generate funding for the ongoing operation of the Center. The Center is fortunate that the General Conference has provided funding for the past two quadrennial, but it has been on a decreasing basis. Contributions from friends and supporters have supplemented the General Conference funding. It is hoped that such support will continue and increase as people become more aware of the importance of collecting, preserving and promoting the history of African Americans in Methodism. Contact us for more information.

- Donald Lusk, AAMHC Development Committee (dandblusk@prodigy.net)

IS YOUR CONGREGATION IN OUR COLLECTION?



Join History!

When the African American Methodist Heritage Center (AAMHC) was conceived over thirteen years ago, one of its first goals was to

collect and preserve documents, letters, pictures, etc. of our rich history as African Americans, who were a part of Methodism from its beginning. A secondary goal was that the materials would be available for observation, but more importantly, for research and to inform additional writings.

We made great progress toward the goal when we were welcomed as partners of the General Commission on Archives and History of the United Methodist Church to be housed in its state-of-the-art building at Drew University in Madison, New Jersey. Already existing in this facility are Journals and Central Jurisdiction Daily Christian Advocates of every Mission and Central Conference. Also, there are other materials related to African Americans in the denomination. The Archives building has two floors of materials and memorabilia of Methodism, all in secure and climate controlled circumstances.

Over the years AAMHC has collected historical artifacts and documents. Nevertheless, we are aware that there are many papers, artifacts, memorabilia & pictures that are tucked away in attics and basements and trunks and boxes that need to be collected if our great history is to be preserved. Beyond research, it is our hope to develop a traveling exhibit and link with one or more of our black institutions to display such materials so that our youth will know "how they got over." Here is a sample of what we have already collected:

- **Several documents and pictures** from the Boylen Mather Academy, one of the first high schools for black children in South Carolina, created by the Methodist church following the Civil War
- **A pictorial exhibit of our black colleges** with pictures, graphic timelines and stories of all 11 institutions.
- **Pictures from the earliest annual Negro conferences** and institutions, before & after the Central Jurisdiction
- **Dennis Fletcher papers** (noted staff person who worked with the Central Jurisdiction & Board of Global Ministries of the new United Methodist Church)
- **William Jason papers** (a patriarch of the former Delaware Conference) and collection

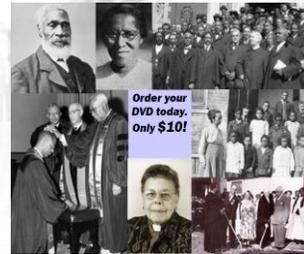
- **Letters and souvenir booklets** from local congregations, pastors, and District Superintendents of the former Central Jurisdiction.

One of our goals is to have in our depository a copy of the history of every local African American Methodist congregation. Don't worry about what is appropriate. Let us make that decision with you. Together, we can protect, preserve and promote our great history. Send a copy of your local church history to:

*African American Methodist Heritage Center
36 Madison Avenue, P.O. Box 127
Madison NJ, 07940*

- Bishop Forrest C. Stith, Member, Board of Directors (fcpreach@aol.com)

WE'VE COME THIS FAR BY FAITH



Own a Piece of Your History

Do you know that one of the first actions taken by the newly organized Methodist Church during the Christmas Conference of 1784 was that

no clergy could own slaves?

Do you know that as the nation spread westward, so did African American Methodists, establishing churches and organizing annual conferences as they went?

These are but a few of the facts you will learn from viewing the historical video series "We've Come This Far By Faith", produced by John Coleman for the African American Methodist Heritage Center. There are five full color videos, each customized to one of the five jurisdictions of the United Methodist Church. Each features clergy and laity, institutions and churches from the respective jurisdictions as well as material about African Americans in the total church. Every church library should have a set.

The set of five (5) videos is available for \$40; \$10 individually. Also available at a reduced price of \$5 are the 2014 calendars "Banners of Promise" which feature banners of historical significance from various Black Methodist Churches around the nation. Beyond its chronological value, the calendar provides information about dates of important events in the lives and existence of African American Methodist people, institutions and churches. All of these resources may be ordered from AAMHC by calling us at 973-408-3862 or writing AAMHC, Madison Avenue, P.O. Box 127, Madison, NJ 07940.