

## **Part IV Maturing in the Faith**

Jesus calls the church to follow his example of ministering to the whole person – physical, mental, spiritual and social. The five chapters in this section describe historic sites that move beyond the walls of church buildings to apply the gospel to these areas.

Wyoming Seminary (1844) in Kingston, Luzerne County, was founded to provide Christian education – both to those seeking to enter the ministry and to those seeking to better prepare themselves for wherever God may lead. For 175 years this institution has educated and equipped young men and women while acquiring an international reputation for academic excellence.

Wyoming Camp Meeting (1871) in Luzerne County and Dimock Camp Meeting (1877) in Susquehanna County have similar, yet distinctive, stories. Each was the culmination of efforts by both the Conference and concerned lay persons to provide a vehicle for evangelization, spiritual growth, and Christian fellowship in a wholesome environment.

The Mechanicsburg Old Peoples Home (1893), the first benevolent institution in the entire United Brethren denomination, lives on as the Quincy Village retirement center in Franklin County. Significant within the United Brethren Church, it takes its place in the list of conference historic sites representative of all the various nursing homes, medical facilities and orphanages begun by each of our predecessor denominations as they began to mature in the faith and follow John Wesley's admonition to minister to the whole person.

The conference historical designation of most recent significance is not a site at all, but a congregation. In 1956 Harrisburg's Mitchell Memorial Methodist congregation became the first church in the entire denomination to transfer from a racially segregated conference and jurisdiction to its natural geographic conference. It's a sad but true fact that the story of this congregation has never before been assembled in print. It so happens that included among the pastors of this historic African-American congregation are persons born in slavery (including a member of a family once owned by the family of Martha Custis Washington), a bishop (the first black bishop in the Methodist Episcopal Church, and the first black bishop to preside over a white conference), and several other persons of special note. *The Chronicle* is honored to be the vehicle that tells in print for the first time the stories and struggles that led that epic moment in 1956 that marked the beginning of the end of segregation within United Methodism.

## Chapter 15

### Wyoming Seminary 1844



Sweetland Hall, 2018  
Market Street and Sprague Avenue, Kingston

Founded in 1844, Wyoming Seminary is the oldest of Methodism’s four educational institutions established within the bounds of the former Wyoming Conference – and the only one still in operation. The only other schools still operating within the present Susquehanna Conference boundaries that have Methodist ties are Dickinson College in Carlisle (which became Methodist in 1833) and Lycoming College in Williamsport (which became Methodist in 1848). But Wyoming Seminary is unique in that it was founded by Methodists and not purchased after having been founded by another entity.

Wyoming Seminary is also distinct in that it has maintained its status as an academy designed to provide a rigorous secondary education, and it has not sought to become an institution of higher learning giving associate or bachelor degrees. There are only two other existing United Methodist high schools in the country that are older than Wyoming Seminary – Kents Hill School (1824) in Maine, and The Pennington School (1838) in New Jersey.

Wyoming Seminary is older than the Wyoming Conference, having been founded when the area was still part of the Oneida Conference. At the 1843 annual conference meeting in Wilkes-Barre, seven men were appointed “trustees of a contemplated seminary of learning to be located either in Wilkes-Barre or Kingston.” The present site was secured and a three-story, 30x70 brick structure was erected and ready for use the following fall. That one building included a

24x29 chapel, a 13x29 recitation room, a 20x29 room for the primary department, and some twenty rooms for students.

The school opened in the fall of 1844 with two teachers and 50 scholars and has been in continuous operation ever since. The following key persons involved in the early history of the school deserve much of the credit for its success.

**Rev. Reuben Nelson** (1818-1879) served as principal of the school 1844-72, except for two years (1862-64) when he served as superintendent of the Wyoming District. Brief biographies of Rev. Nelson are given in Chaffee's 1904 *History of the Wyoming Conference*, page 213, and in the 1974 *Encyclopedia of World Methodism*, page 1715, and in the 2011 volume of *The Chronicle*, page 98 – for which volume he appears on the cover. He is one of the many distinguished early Methodists buried in the Forty Fort Cemetery.

**William Swetland** (1789-1864) was one of the early merchants in the borough of Wyoming. Within six years the patronage of the Seminary had grown to the extent that a second building was necessary. Swetland stepped forward and volunteered to erect the additional building at his own expense. That building is now known as Swetland Hall. Known for his generosity, he was also a primary donor and on the first Board of trustees for the 1862 Home for Friendless Children in the borough of Wilkes-Barre. Among his children are two other generous benefactors of Wyoming Seminary and area Methodism – Caroline M. Swetland (Mrs. Payne) Pettebone and George Washington Swetland. William Swetland is another early distinguished Methodist buried in the Forty Fort Cemetery.

**Ziba Bennett** (1806-1878) contributed \$1000 and many of his own books to establish the Seminary library. Mr. Bennett was a judge, merchant, bank president and businessman. He was another primary founding donor of the Wilkes-Barre Home for Friendless Children and the donor of the Franklin Street property for the First Methodist Episcopal Church of Wilkes-Barre. The Bennetts were known for their Methodist generosity not only within the Wyoming Valley but also across the denomination. In the 2017 volume of *The Chronicle*, his wife Priscilla Lee Bennett appears on the cover and is featured in the article "Two Philanthropic Ladies of Wilkes-Barre's First Methodist Episcopal Church."

In 1853 a fire destroyed most of the Seminary, and plans were made immediately to rebuild. William Swetland undertook, again at his own expense, the task of rebuilding and enlarging Swetland Hall. Other benefactors rose to the occasion and the original building was replaced by Administration Hall, and a third building was erected and named Union Hall. Those benefactors were as follows.

**Payne Pettebone** (1813-1888) was the son-in-law of William Swetland. He is discussed at length in the following article on the Wyoming Camp Meeting site. He is buried in the Forty Fort Cemetery.

**George Washington Swetland** (1829-1860) is the son of William Swetland. He is buried in the Forty Fort Cemetery.

**Amos York Smith** (1817-1881), a generous member and official of the Wyoming church, was the captain of a packet boat that operated between Pittston

and Northumberland. He was also an active promoter of the Lackawanna and Bloomsburg Railroad Company and a land developer in West Pittston. Just before the Civil War he moved to Texas as a railroad contractor, but his devotion to the Union cause compelled him to return north and the Confederates confiscated all his property. He re-settled in West Pittston and is buried in the Forty Fort Cemetery.

**Isaac Countryman Shoemaker** (1810-1875) is the namesake of the 1888 Isaac Shoemaker Memorial Methodist Chapel in West Wyoming, now used as a hub for Mission Central. In 1837 he repurchased, rebuilt and enlarged the family grist mill and established an extensive flour business. Large quantities of various products of the mill were hauled as far as Wayne County. A March 31, 1875, article in the Wilkes-Barre *Daily Record*, page 3, states that “Isaac C. Shoemaker was an ardent friend and patron of Bible circulation and gave the Bible depositor a conspicuous place in his office at Wyoming.”

4 WYOMING SEMINARY,

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from the 1869-70 25<sup>th</sup> annual catalogue  
of Wyoming Seminary

## Chapter 16 Wyoming Camp Meeting Site 1871



cottages on Asbury Avenue 1907

Wyoming Camp Meeting, Exeter Township, Luzerne County

Over the years, there have been many camp meetings within the present boundaries of the Susquehanna Conference. The Wyoming Camp Meeting site merits special historical significance for its status as the first permanent camp meeting grounds<sup>1</sup> of the former Wyoming Conference and its association with two of that conference's more prominent persons: clergy member Rev. George Peck and layman Payne Pettebone.

Chaffee's 1904 *History of the Wyoming Conference* identifies the following as some of the previous locations utilized in the area before the permanent site was obtained.

- 1825 – Jacob Rice farm – Trucksville
- 1847-51-52 – George France farm – 3 miles “back of” Wyoming
- 1849 – near Leach's coal bed – 1.5 miles north of Providence
- 1851 – Knowlton farm – 4 miles west of Wyoming
- 1853-56-58-65-66-67 – Samuel Durland's grove – 1.5 miles from Carvertown
- 1859 – along the Lackawanna – near Pittston
- 1860-62-63 – Everhart's Island – near Pittston

A meeting was held in Kingston in June 1871 to consider the question of securing a permanent camp meeting site. It was decided to proceed at once, and a committee was formed with Rev. George C. Peck as chairman. In July 1871 the

committee decided to purchase 67 acres from the Sutton farm in Exeter township, Luzerne County, for \$4000 and to begin preparing the property for meetings. To finance the venture 1000 shares of stock were offered at \$10 each. This resulted in the sale of 584 shares, and the stockholders met August 14, 1871, to form “The Wyoming Camp Meeting Association” and elect Payne Pettebone, who had been a part of the committee from the beginning, as president of the association. The first camp meeting was held on the grounds that month. The boarding hall was a tent, as were the accommodations for persons attending the meeting.

Although essentially a colony of summer homes for the last few decades, the Wyoming Camp Meeting continued to hold annual religious services into the twenty-first century. A detailed account of the cottages, buildings and ministry of the site is given in Asa N. Casterlin’s 1986 *A History of the Wyoming Campground*. No account of the Wyoming Camp Meeting site would be complete without a brief mention of its two primary advocates, Rev. George Peck and Mr. Payne Pettebone, both of whom are buried in the historic Forty Fort church cemetery.

#### Rev. George Peck, D.D. (1797-1876)

Born in Otsego County NY, George Peck is one of the five noted Peck brothers to serve in the Methodist ministry – his brother Jesse Truesdell Peck rising to the office of bishop. He also had two sons and one son-in-law serve in the Methodist ministry. Biographies of George Peck appear in Chaffee’s 1904 *History of the Wyoming Conference*, page 220, and in the 1974 *Encyclopedia of World Methodism*, page 1872.

Peck was admitted to the Genesee Conference in 1816 and, as early Methodism expanded, became a charter member of the newly-formed Oneida Conference in 1829 and Wyoming Conference in 1852. He served as superintendent of the Wyoming District (3 times), the Susquehanna District (2 times), and the Lackawanna District. He also served as principal of Methodism’s Cazenovia NY Seminary and as editor of the *Methodist Quarterly Review* (1840-48) and the denomination’s *Christian Advocate* (1848-52). He retired in 1873 after 57 years of continuous full-time service, and the 1871 establishment of the Wyoming Camp Meeting site was one of his last achievements.

#### Payne Pettebone Jr. (1813-1888)

When Payne was only eight months old, his father died, and he was left in the care the care of his maternal grandfather. At the conclusion of his basic schooling, Payne became a clerk in the Swetland store at Wyoming PA and at the age of 21 became a partner of the store's owner, William Swetland. Three years later he married William’s daughter Caroline. In addition to remaining in partnership with his father-in-law, Payne Pettebone was prominently involved in other industrial and community pursuits that brought him both financial success and the respect of all who knew him.

He and his son, Robert Treat Pettebone, were sole proprietors of the Wyoming Shovel Works and he had an interest in the Wyoming Terra Cotta Works. He was also a director of the Washington Life Insurance Company of New York, the First National Bank of Pittston, the Wyoming National Bank, and the Miners's Savings Bank of Wilkes-Barre; and he was president and director of the Wilkes-Barre Savings Bank. His denomination’s educational service included membership on the board of trustees of the Wyoming

Seminary, Drew Theological Seminary in Madison NJ and Wesleyan University in Middletown CT.

In connection with his financial and administrative leadership in the drive to refurbish the Wyoming Massacre Monument for its 1878 centennial, he and his wife entertained President Rutherford B. Hayes and his family and his cabinet, Governor Hartranft of Pennsylvania and his wife, and many other prominent men of the state and nation.

Payne Pettebone served on the official board of the Wyoming Methodist Episcopal Church and in many of its departments from the age of thirty-five to the end of his life. The present Wyoming UMC building dedicated in 1883 was the gift of the Pettebone family and Mrs. William Swetland. His daughter Kate Pettebone Dickson continued his generosity toward Methodism and is featured in the 2017 volume of *The Chronicle*, pages 4-9, in the article "Two Philanthropic Ladies." Pettebone Street and Pettebone Park in the borough of Wyoming are so-named in honor of Payne Pettebone, and the Pettebone homestead at 763 Wyoming Avenue is a borough landmark.



George Peck



Payne Pettebone

## Chapter 17 Dimock Camp Meeting 1877



Dimock Camp Meeting cottages and chapel, 2012  
Dimock Township, Susquehanna County

The Dimock Camp Ground was one of the Wyoming Conference's first permanent camp meeting sites, and the last site to offer a full religious summer program.

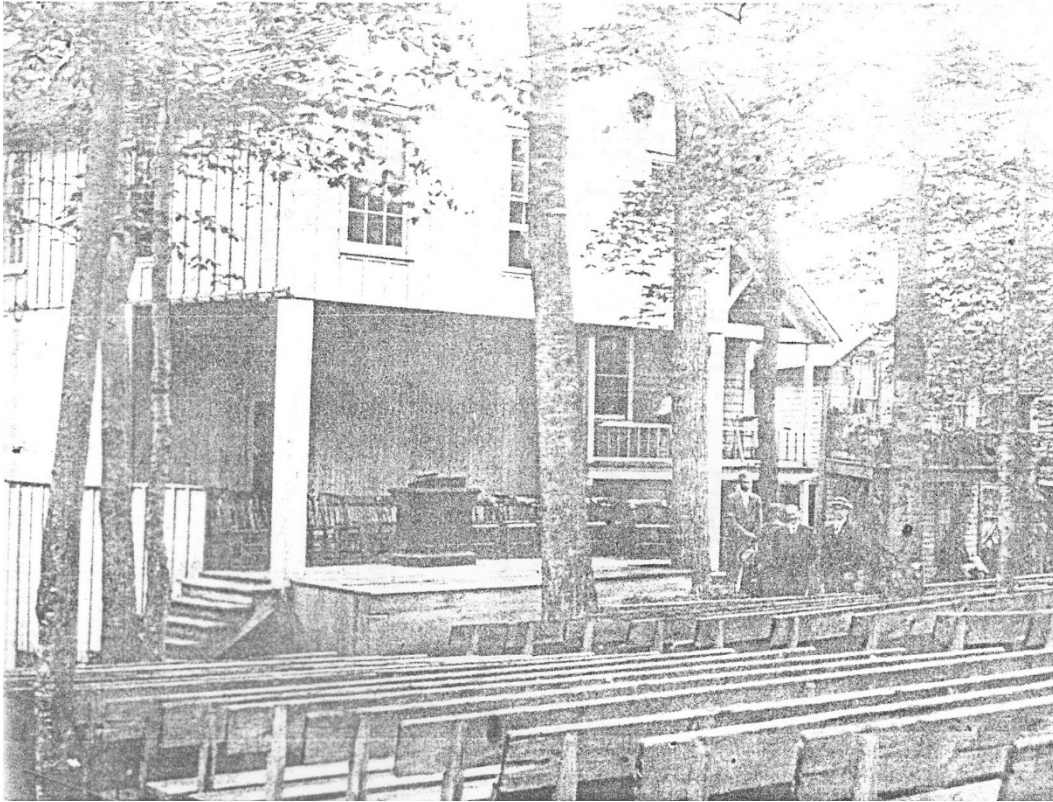
In the early days of the Wyoming Conference, each District held an annual camp meeting at a convenient site selected each year by a committee. In the Wyalusing District that site for several years was near Brooklyn, then near Meshoppen, then at Colonel Olney Bailey's beech grove at Dimock.

In 1875, Ira T. Walker, superintendent of the Wyalusing District, preached at Dimock and formed a committee to find a permanent site for the meetings. Many wanted to establish that site at Lake Carey or at Marcey's Pond near Tunkhannock. But others objected to a "resort" location where boating and swimming would distract from the religious emphases. In the end, the majority favored locating permanently at the present 23 acre site near the Dimock railroad depot.

Following the 1876 camp meetings at the site, the committee decided to purchase the Dimock property for \$1160, and to finance the venture by selling 150 shares of stock at \$10 each. The shares, which entitled the bearer to occupy a 19x16 foot space for a tent or a cottage, sold out immediately. The court granted a charter August 15, 1877, and the following statement was published by the association:

The Wyalusing District Camp Meeting will be held at Dimock, Pa., from Tuesday evening, August 21, to Friday, August 32, 1877. These pleasant grounds, well watered and shaded, situated at Dimock Depot on the Montrose Railroad, have been purchased

and are under control of a chartered Association of Ministers and Laymen. The grounds have been much improved since the last meeting, and all necessary improvements will be made to make this a pleasant and convenient place of worship. Several trains daily connect with the Lehigh Valley R.R. at Tunkhannock. Both of the railroads will grant excursion rates during the meeting.



Dimock Camp Meeting preacher's stand

The above circa 1900 photograph of the building housing the preachers' quarters and the preacher's stand illustrates the open-air seating that prevailed at the early camp meetings. When the present enclosed chapel pictured on the previous page was erected in the 1930's, this building was razed. There is a possibly apocryphal story that that the locked enclosure below this structure was used as a sobering-up station in order that the inebriated (often those who came specifically to disturb the services) would hear the preaching above and be converted.

In addition to the accounts of the Dimock Camp Meeting given in various religious and secular histories, separate historical booklets about the site were prepared by F. B. Jewett in 1925, by Rev. Leon W. Bouton in 1976, and by the 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Committee in 2002.

## Chapter 18 Mechanicsburg Old Peoples Home 1893



Zephaniah Colestock Home  
Mechanicsburg, Cumberland County

The Pennsylvania Conference of the United Brethren Church established the first two benevolent homes in the entire denomination. The first was the Colestock Old People's Home in Mechanicsburg, Cumberland County, and the second was the Orphanage at Quincy, Franklin County. By action of the General Conference, the entire Eastern District – including the Pennsylvania, East Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia, Allegheny, Erie and Florida Conferences – became the operating territory for both the Old People's Home and the Orphanage.

Rev. Zephaniah Augustus Colestock (1824-1924) was born in Littlestown, Adams County PA, and licensed to preach in 1844. He served 34 years, including 12 years as a district superintendent, before retiring to Mechanicsburg in 1878 – where he had purchased a lot and erected a stately brick home. In 1893, he and his wife, the former Priscilla Louisa Cormany (1822-1901), gave that house to the United Brethren Church for an Old People's Home, which opened for guests April 1, 1893. Colestock served as the superintendent of the Home until 1905.

In 1903, Rev. Harvey Jacob Kitzmiller (1867-1936) and his wife, the former Henrietta Middhour (1865-1944), gave their farm in Quincy for the establishment of an Orphanage, which opened when ten children were admitted in April of that year.<sup>ii</sup> In 1913, the Old People's Home in Mechanicsburg and the Orphanage in Quincy were placed under one management. A large building constructed on the orphanage grounds was ready for occupancy March 25, 1915, at which time the eleven residents at Mechanicsburg, including a heartily approving Zephaniah

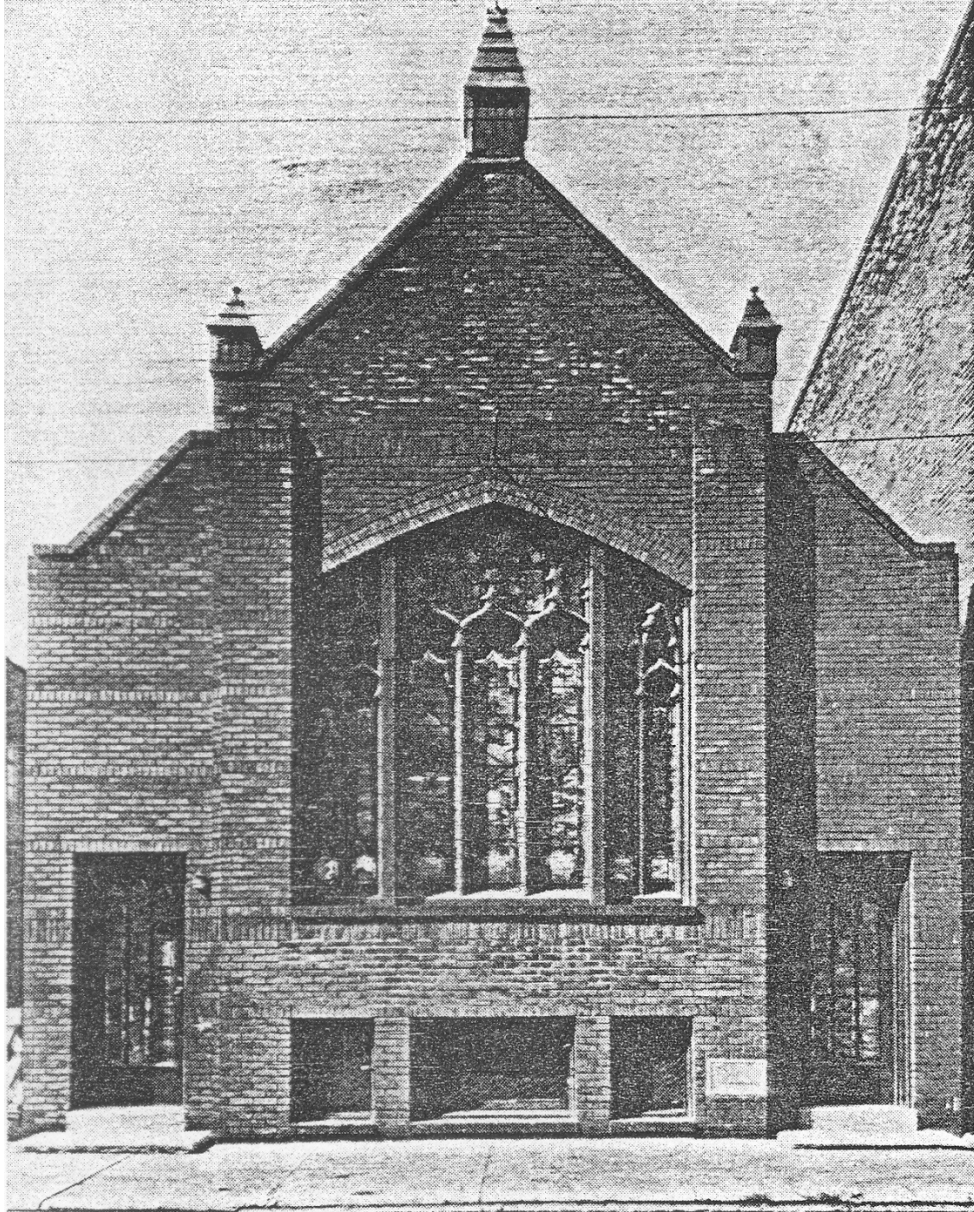
Colestock, were transferred to Quincy. Today the modern Colestock Health Center, a testament to his vision and generosity, is the centerpiece of the Quincy Home.



Zephaniah A. Colestock, circa 1920

The above photograph was taken of Zephaniah Colestock, aged 90+ and suffering from blindness, at the relocated United Brethren Old People's Home in Quincy. His conference obituary states that he died at the age of 99 years, 9 months and 24 days and "though blind for a number of years, his mental faculties served him well until several weeks prior to his death." He is buried in the Mechanicsburg Cemetery, next door to his house that was the first benevolent home of the entire United Brethren denomination.

**Chapter 19**  
**Mitchell Memorial Methodist Congregation 1956**



Mitchell Memorial Methodist Church, 1956  
1322 Marion Street, Harrisburg

On June 15, 1956, the Mitchell Memorial Church in Harrisburg PA became the first church in the entire denomination to transfer out of the racially segregated Central Jurisdiction of the Methodist into its geographically appropriate, regardless of race, conference and jurisdiction – the Central Pennsylvania Conference of the Northeast Jurisdiction.

That event was the climax of a long and tedious journey that began for the denomination in 1864. In that year, the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church created two separate African-American conferences in order to provide structures within which black congregations could be assigned pastors and plan ministries specific to their constituencies. Whether this was done with pure motives or out of prejudice has been a matter of debate, but there had already been separate German conferences since 1845, and separate Swedish Conferences would begin in 1877. The Washington Conference was the African-American conference created in 1864 that included the black congregations in central Pennsylvania.

The journey for the Mitchell Memorial congregation began in 1882, for in March of that year the Washington Conference assigned Rev. T.A. White to the work in Harrisburg and Shippensburg. This is the first mention of Harrisburg in the Washington Conference minutes. T.A. White served the new work for two years. No membership statistics were reported at the end of his first year, but his report for the 1883-84 conference year indicates a closing membership of 31. The work now established by ordained elder T.A. White, the appointment in Harrisburg has continued ever since – although for some years the work was left “to be supplied” and no report was submitted.

Documenting the early years of ethnic congregations, apart from the appointments and statistical reports in the conference journals, is typically quite challenging – and the Washington Conference work in Harrisburg is no exception. While the locations of the earliest meetings have not been preserved, newspaper accounts as early as 1887 identify the congregation as Asbury Methodist Episcopal Church on Herr Street “near Cameron.” It is known that the Asbury Methodist Episcopal Church acquired a frame building<sup>iii</sup> in the 1100 block of Herr Street in 1894 for \$750 – and it could be that they had been worshipping that building prior to purchasing it.

According to a deed dated September 30, 1925, the congregation at that time gained possession of the property at the northeast corner of Briggs and Cowden Streets. In 1938, under the leadership of Rev. Elisha M. Mitchell, the congregation purchased the building pictured above at 1322 Marion Street. Rev. Mitchell,<sup>iv</sup> for whom the congregation was later re-named, served the congregation 1936-40.

In 1939, segregation in American Methodism grew to an even higher level than segregated conferences. In that year the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Methodist Episcopal Church South, and the Methodist Protestant Church united to form the Methodist Church. At that time, for various reasons and mainly at the insistence of the Methodist Church South, the United States was divided into five geographic jurisdiction for the election of bishops and other administrative necessities – but all the black conferences were placed in a separate sixth jurisdiction called the Central Jurisdiction.

This left the Mitchell Memorial Methodist Church in the Washington Conference of the Central Jurisdiction completely surrounded by churches in the

Central Pennsylvania Conference of the Northeast Jurisdiction. Members at Mitchell Memorial had to travel many, many miles – in fact, outside of the boundaries of the Central Pennsylvania Conference – to participate in conference or jurisdictional annual sessions, WSCS or Methodist Men meetings, youth programs, etc.

In 1952, the General Conference established a complicated procedure for the transfer of a church from one jurisdiction to another. Although the Central Jurisdiction was not mentioned by name, the intent of the provision was to finally provide a mechanism for a “black” congregation to leave the Central Jurisdiction and become part of its geographic “white” conference. The procedure required the approval of General Conference, both Jurisdictional Conferences, both annual conferences, and, of course, the congregation.

The 1956 General Conference implemented a much more streamlined procedure for transfer. There were, however, three congregations already prepared to apply under the much more complicated rules. All three were granted permission by the 1956 General Conference. Once all the required annual conferences and jurisdictional conferences met, Mitchell Memorial became the first church in the entire denomination to leave the Central Jurisdiction and enter a “white” conference. The other two congregations applying for transfer (to the Central Kansas and Colorado conferences) decided to do so the following year under the less strict 1956 rules. Fortunately, such racial restrictions no longer exist.<sup>v</sup>

The pastor of Mitchell Memorial at this time, and one of the key players in the transfer, was George Edward Davis (1903-1981), who served the congregation from 1951 until his retirement in 1969. His picture appears on the cover of this issue of *The Chronicle*. In 1956 he became the first black clergy person in the Central Pennsylvania Conference. He is the son of Rev. George A. Davis of the Washington Conference, and he had been a licensed local pastor. He officially entered the ministry in 1945 when his father died while serving in Centerville MD. Rev. Davis subsequently served Centerville 1945-51. The middle link in three generations of ordained ministry, he is also the father of retired pastor Rev. Bernice Davis Stevens<sup>vi</sup> of the Susquehanna Conference.

The history of Mitchell Memorial Church after 1956 is well documented. In 1957, the congregation purchased and moved into the former Pilgrim Holiness Church at 1919 North Fourth Street. In 1989, they merged into the Camp Curtin Memorial Church at 2221 N. Sixth Street to form the Camp Curtin Memorial Mitchell UMC. As of the preparation of this article in the spring of 2019, the congregation is part of IMPACT HARRISBURG, a major restructuring of the United Methodist congregations in the city of Harrisburg.

## Chapter 19a

### Further Comments on the Mitchell Memorial Congregation

Because the Mitchell Memorial congregation has such an important place in United Methodism, and because the histories and struggles of persons of color are typically unreported by mainstream sources, this addendum is dedicated to telling that story as it relates to this volume of *The Chronicle*. First, since such a list has never before appeared in print, we present a list of the pastors of the congregation from its founding in 1882 until its entrance into the Central Pennsylvania Conference in 1956.

<u>years</u>	<u>pastor</u>	<u>birth-death</u>	<u>conference</u>	<u>obituary</u>
1882-84	T.A. White			
1884-85	J.S. Wilson			
1885-87	TBS			
1887-88	James W.T. Wilson	( -1927)	Washington Conference	1927,125
1888-92	Lewis E.S. Nash	(1846-1926)	Washington Conference	1927,126
1892-94	Samuel Summerfield Brown	(1834-1901)	Washington Conference	1902,55
1894-96	Joseph Wheeler	( -1932)	Washington Conference	1932,78
1896-97	DeWitt Lyman Washington	( -1946)	Washington Conference	1947,95
1897-99	John Edward Gunby	(1866-1904)	Delaware Conference	1905,45
1899-00	Edward T. Borgus	(1859-1900)	Washington Conference	1901,44
1900-01	Fenton M. Harris			
1901-02	London Washington Briggs	(1852-1919)	Washington Conference	1920,527
1902-03	Leander A. Carter	(1862-1955)	Washington Conference	1956,162
1903-05	Joseph W. Jackson	(1864-1927)	[none]	
1905-07	Robert Henry Robinson	(1825-1909)	Washington Conference	1910,55
1907-09	Edwin John Ruddock	(1867-1921)	Washington Conference	1922,279
1909-11	Alexander Preston Shaw	(1879-1966)	[none]	
1911-12	James Douglas Brown	(1880-1973)	Baltimore Conference	1973,454
1912-14	Calais A. Leftwich			
1914-15	Irving H. Carpenter	( -1954)	Washington Conference	1955,164
1915-17	William Henry Gaines	(1856-1922)	Washington Conference	1922,276
1917-32	Solomon R. Bedford	( -1936)	Washington Conference	1936,86
1932-36	Charles W. Burnett	( -1956)	Washington Conference	1957,170
1936-40	Elisha M. Mitchell	( -1943)	Washington Conference	1944, 89
1940-42	Stephen W. Fields	(1881-1964)	Washington Conference	1965,134
1942-51	Thomas Novel Hodges	(1908-1959)	Washington Conference	1960,172
1951-69	George Edward Davis	(1903-1981)	Central PA Conference	1981,329

Perhaps the best way to unfold the history and struggles of this congregation would be to go through the list of its pastors in chronological order, giving relevant information about each pastor supplemented with newspaper and other accounts about that pastor and/or the congregation at the time of his pastorate. This is not intended to give a biographical sketch of each pastor, but rather to highlight information that gives insight into the personalities and issues that have informed the Mitchell Memorial congregation.

**T.A. White (1882-84).** Rev. White was admitted to the Washington Conference in 1880. He was assigned to “Harrisburg and Shippensburg” – a new appointment in the Washington Conference – in 1882. Nothing is known about his first year, as he apparently turned in no statistical report – but he was continued for a second year, this time the appointment reading only “Harrisburg.”

After two years at Harrisburg, Rev. White was appointed to New Market and Fairview VA. Apparently that assignment did not fare well, and the 1885 conference journal, page 54, gives the following REPORT ON THE TRIAL OF T.A. WHITE: “After carefully considering the evidence in the case, [we] conclude Rev. T.A. White not guilty of the indictment.” Unfortunately, things did not get any better for Rev. White. His last appointment in the Washington Conference was to Front Royal VA in 1890. The following appeared in the March 19, 1891 *Alexandria Gazette*, page 2.

THAT COLORED METHODIST SUIT. Rev. John Lanahan, of the Methodist (illegible), said yesterday in reference to the suit of Rev. T. A. White, colored, the expelled minister of the Washington Conference, who had charge of a church at Front Royal, that the conference to which he belonged not being an incorporated body, no suit could be entered against it by White for defamation of character. "Moreover," said Lanahan, "he claimed trustees had broken into the parsonage and stolen his money, which was proven to be untrue. This is only one of the many charges brought against White before the conference committee who tried the case."

Rev. H. A. Carroll, presiding elder of the Alexandria district, Washington conference, who was chairman of the special committee appointed by Bishop Fitzgerald to try the case of White, said the charges against White for conduct unbecoming a Christian minister were sustained, and nothing else could be done in his case but to expel him from the conference and from membership in the Methodist Episcopal Church. Rev. Carroll said there would be no reply from the conference or members to White's suit, if any had been entered, and no reply would be made by the conference authorities to any attorney who might have White's suit in hand.

While the use of the term “colored” stands out, there are other more subtle things worth noting. First, the Rev. John Lanahan (1815-1903) was a [white] elder in the Baltimore Conference, then serving as the agent for the Book Depository. He was a very prominent personality elected to every General Conference from 1856 to 1900, and his 64 years of service under appointment included thirteen years as a district superintendent. He appears to be acting as the official media spokesperson for the Church, as a [black] member of the Washington Conference would presumably have lacked the proper credibility. Secondly, the Bishop Oscar Penn Fitzgerald (1829-1911) who presided at the annual conference was white, as were virtually all the bishops in the days before the Jurisdictional system was instituted in 1939. Finally, it is curious that the Washington Conference was not incorporated as were most, if not all, white conferences.

**J.S. Wilson (1884-85).** The 1884 Washington Conference journal lists Harrisburg as “to be supplied by J.S. Wilson.” Rev. Wilson’s name does not appear in the list of local pastors, and his credentials are unknown. Nothing else is known

about this man or the activity of the congregation during his tenure. He was appointed to a charge with 31 members, a Sunday School with 3 officers and 15 pupils, and no reported church property – but he apparently filed no statistical report at the end of his year. The January 5, 1884, *Harrisburg Daily Independent*, page 4, includes the following interesting notice that fits together with other information and may be relevant – but the January date falling before the March change of pastors may be problematic in that J. Wilson was the designated pasor and Augustin Ross is otherwise unknown.

All are welcome, M.E. Mission, hall over Broad Street market, Rev. Augustin Ross, pastor. Preaching at 10.80 and 8.30 by Rev. Traxle, of the Baptist church, and at 1:30 by Rev. J. Wilson.

**TBS (1885-87).** The journals for these two years merely indicate “to be supplied” without giving a name or including a statistical report. The wording in the district superintendent’s reports, however, suggests that J.S. Wilson may have continued to oversee the work there for most, if not all, of that period. The report in the 1886 journal, page 51, for example, reads as follows.

Harrisburg, Pa., to be supplied (J. Wilson, local). I cannot say much about that point, from the fact that sometimes they have had a place to worship and other times none. They have a hall rented now. The preacher reports forty members; they are transient, I think, and hope, with a hard struggle and the favor of the Lord, that it will come out all right.

**James W.T. Wilson (1887-88).** The first known use of the name Asbury in connection with the congregation appears in this sentence in the January 21, 1887, *Harrisburg Daily Independent*, page 4:

The friends of Rev. J. W. Wilson, pastor of the Asbury M.E. church, called at his residence, No. 123 Cherry Avenue last evening and gave him a splendid donation.

Behind every pastor is a wife and family, equally committed to and involved in the ministry despite the constant moves, low salaries and lack of temporal benefits available to nineteenth century itinerants. The memoir of his first wife, from page 64 of the 1908 conference journal, speaks for itself. Although born in Virginia in 1849, she appears to have been a free woman.

Mrs. Aleria Ann Wilson, wife of Rev. J.T.W. Wilson was born in Jefferson County, near Shepherdstown VA [now WV], May 27, 1849, and died at Moorefield WV August 27, 1907, aged 58 years and 3 months. She was married to Rev. J.T.W. Wilson November 15, 1865. To this union was born seventeen children, of which seven children and a husband survive her. Sister Wilson was a great sufferer, having been sick for nearly nine months. She was converted and joined the Methodist Episcopal Church at seventeen years of age. She was an earnest Christian, a faithful wife, and a loving mother. She always welcomed ministers of the Gospel into her home. Her last words were, after asking her children to meet her in heaven: “All is well. I am only waiting on the Lord.”

Rev. Wilson married a second time and continued in the ministry until retiring to Harrisburg in 1920. His obituary in the February 21, 1927, *Harrisburg Telegraph*,<sup>vii</sup> page 19, reads as follows.

THE REV. J. W. T. WILSON. The Rev. James W. T. Wilson, retired Methodist minister, died Saturday night in his home, 632 Verbeke Street. He is survived by his widow, Mrs. Emma Wilson; two sons, Joseph A. Wilson, Pittsburgh, and Percy Wilson, this city; a daughter, Miss Ethel Wilson, and thirteen grandchildren, all of this city. Funeral service will be held Wednesday afternoon at 2 o'clock in the Bethel A.M.E. Church, the Rev. S. R. Bedford, of the Asbury Methodist Episcopal Church, officiating. Burial will be in the Lincoln Cemetery.

**Lewis E.S. Nash (1888-92).** The following July 28, 1888, article in the *Harrisburg Daily Independent*, page 4, suggests that something special was in the works. S.C. Swallow and T.S. Wilcox were ordained pastors in the Central Pennsylvania Conference M.E. R.S. McWilliams was an active local pastor with membership at Ridge Avenue M.E. whose supply preaching included Harris A.M.E. Zion church.

ALL-DAY MEETING AT ASBURY. To-morrow there will be an all-day meeting at the Asbury M.E. church, Herr Street, near Cameron. Rev. S.C. Swallow, Rev. T.S. Wilcox, Rev. R.S. McWilliams and J. \_\_\_\_ (unreadable) will assist the pastor Rev. Nash. All are invited.

The follow-up article in the July 30, 1888, *Harrisburg Telegraph*, page 4, provides more detail.

AN ALL-DAY JUBILEE. An all-day jubilee rally was held yesterday at the Asbury M.E. church, on Herr Street, near Eleventh, of which Rev. L.E.S. Nash is pastor. A number of visiting clergymen were present. In the afternoon a handsome Pulpit Bible, purchased by a gentleman at York, was presented by Rev. T. S. Wilcox.<sup>viii</sup> The services throughout the day were very interesting.

The congregation has always participated in denominational events. In October 1891 the National Local Preachers Association of the Methodist Episcopal Church held their 34<sup>th</sup> annual convention in Harrisburg at the Ridge Avenue Church. As was the custom in those days at annual conferences and other meetings that brought large numbers of preachers together, it was arranged for the visiting pastors to be guest preachers at area churches. While the Association was predominantly, if not totally, Caucasian, as a Methodist Episcopal congregation, Asbury participated in the program and received a white guest preacher from Philadelphia.<sup>ix</sup>

Rev. Nash later returned to Asbury for a denominational event in the reverse roll. In June 1896 the Fourth General Conference District of the Epworth League held its Convention in Harrisburg at Grace Church. Reported on the front page among the guest preachers in the June 27, 1896, *Harrisburg Daily Independent*, was the following.

Asbury Church – 11 a.m., Rev. J.M. Been; 3 p.m., Rev. J. McNailor; 7:30 p.m., Rev. L.E.S. Nash.

**Samuel Summerfield Brown (1892-94).** Fundraising, community outreach and evangelism are concerns of every church, and the congregation addressed those issues as noted by the following 1893 front page items from the March 4, 1893, *Harrisburg Daily Independent* on March 4 and November 10 respectively.

OLD FOLKS ENTERTAINMENT. An "old folks" entertainment was given in Hoffman's Hall,<sup>x</sup> on Derry Street, last evening for the benefit of Asbury M.E. church, on Herr Street. The affair was well attended.

MEETING WITH SUCCESS. The revival at the Herr Street Asbury M.E. church is blessed with much success. Thirty came forward for prayer last evening. The evangelist preached an interesting sermon on the subject, "The Returned Prodigal."

**Joseph Wheeler (1894-96).** Rev. Wheeler is another of Asbury's pastors who went on to a long and successful career. His conference obituary states in part: "He had served as pastor of some of our leading churches, and one term as District Superintendent. He was a forceful preacher with musical ability, kind, sympathetic, and loved as a pastor." He demonstrated that musical ability in Harrisburg by composing a the first prize hymn at the December 13-15, 1895, Congress on Africa sponsored by Gammon Theological Seminary in Atlanta GA. That hymn, sung to the tune WEBB (#514 in the UMC Hymnal, for "Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus") is reproduced below from the published proceedings of that Congress.

## PRIZE HYMNS

237

Awarded First Prize of Hymns from the Churches in 1895

*Original Hymn—(Tune, "Webb")*

## MISSIONARY HYMN FOR AFRICA

BY THE REV. JOSEPH WHEELER, HARRISBURG, PA.

O, Africa, in darkness  
 Thy land shall all be bright ;  
 Thy people shall be favored  
 With hallowed Gospel light.  
 The coming years will bring thee  
 Great blessings yet undreamed ;  
 Thy people shall be numbered  
 Among the earth's redeemed.

The ancient seers have spoken  
 The word at God's command,  
 They told the sacred story  
 Of Ethiop's outstretched hand ;  
 They cry to God in pity,  
 Send, Christians, to their need,  
 O, labor for the Master !  
 Sow now the precious seed !

Arise, O Afric's children,  
 Enter your fatherland,  
 Take ye the Gospel banner,  
 Go forth at God's command ;  
 Remember, Christ is with you,  
 His arm will you defend,  
 Remember Jesus' promise :  
 I'm with you to the end.

O, God of grace and mercy,  
 Look from thy throne above,  
 On Africa whose millions  
 Have never known Thy love ;  
 Grant that the Spirit's power  
 On them may now descend ;  
 Grant Thou our prayer in mercy,  
 As at Thy throne we bend.

**DeWitt Lyman Washington (1896-97).** All-day quarterly meetings and love feasts led by the presiding elder (district superintendent) are distinctive traditions in early Methodism, and the Harrisburg congregation was no exception, as indicated by this May 16, 1896, notice in the *Harrisburg Daily Independent*, page 5.

At the Asbury M.E. church, Herr Street, Rev. D.L. Washington, pastor, quarterly meeting day will be observed. Rev. W. W. Jenkins, P.E., of North Baltimore district, will preach morning and evening. Love Feast at 9 a.m.

**John Edward Gunby (1897-99).** This September 4, 1897, quarterly conference and love feast notice in the *Harrisburg Daily Independent*, page 5, is interesting for several reasons. Notice that the day started with a prayer meeting at 5 a.m. – although one can't help but wonder if that was an error of some sort. The curious choice of guest speakers likely indicates that the district superintendent was not involved because of the distance to Harrisburg. R.H. Potter was the pastor of the [black] St. Paul's Baptist Church on Cameron Street, and Atchinson G. Boyles (1851-1930) was an active local pastor with membership at the [white] Ridge Avenue M.E. Church of the Central Pennsylvania Conference. While ordained pastors of the Central Pennsylvania Conference seldom involved themselves at this time with the Asbury congregation, it appears that the local preachers were quick to take advantage of every opportunity.

The quarterly meeting will be held at Asbury M.E. church, Rev. John Edward Gunby, pastor, to-morrow. A prayer meeting will be held at 5 a.m., love feast at 1:30 p.m., preaching by the pastor at 10:40 a.m., preaching by Rev. R.H. Porter at 3 p.m., and by Rev. A.G. Boyles at 7:45 p.m.

**Edward T. Borgus (1899-00).** The annual sessions of the Washington Conference were held in March of each year. Rev. Borgus joined the Washington Conference in 1894. After five successful years of service, he was appointed to Harrisburg in 1899, and then to Woodlawn and Ash Grove VA in 1900. He died on June 20, 1900, "after an illness of several months." That would suggest that Rev. Borgus was ill during the end of his time in Harrisburg. His conference obituary states the following.

He was a Christian gentleman, an intelligent and energetic preacher, a loving husband, and a kind father. He was resigned to the will of God, and met death like a brave soldier of the cross of Jesus. When nearing the vale of death he said his work was done, and passed into the land of eternal peace and rest. He leaves a wife and three children to mourn their loss.

Nothing else is known about Rev. Borgus, except that he is listed in 1888 as a student at Howard University from Vienna VA. This make him one of the many pastors of the congregation who had their training at that DC institution.

**Fenton M. Harris (1900-01).** Rev. Harris entered the Washington Conference in 1888. When he came to Harrisburg in 1900, he was no stranger to Pennsylvania – having been appointed 1889-91 to Lancaster and Columbia<sup>xi</sup>, and to Gettysburg 1891-92. While in Lancaster, he was elected secretary of a state-

wide group of African-Americans supporting the Republican Party.<sup>xii</sup> This November 5, 1889, article from Carlisle's *The Sentinel*, page 4, indicates some of the thinking Rev. Harris may have brought with him to Harrisburg.

A Carlisle Man Makes a Speech  
from the Lancaster Intelligencer

Rev. Fenton M. Harris' congregation had an entertainment on Saturday evening in Robert's hall, which was largely attended. John Jordan, of Carlisle, was the speaker of the evening. In his address he referred to the privileges the colored people enjoy since the Emancipation Proclamation. He condemned the Republican bosses who use the colored vote for their advancement and as an illustration related that all the colored men of Lancaster ever got in the way of office was when Sam Allen was appointed dog-catcher. Mr. Jordan talked so long that the grand march had to be omitted from the programme. After the address there was a supper. A handsome sum was netted for the benefit of the church.

During his tenure in Harrisburg, Rev. Harris offered a blend of the new [a pre-worship praise service] and the old [regular Wesley-style class meetings to hold the members accountable to each other]. The following September 8, 1900, notice in the *Harrisburg Daily Independent*, page 5, is typical. That same afternoon Rev. Harris was announced as providing "sacrament and preaching" at the Bethel A.M.E. church at 3 p.m. Rev. Harris is listed in 1903 as "withdrawn under complaint or charges," and nothing more is known about him.

Herr Street M.E. church. Rev. F. M. Harris, pastor. Praise meeting, 10:15 a.m.; preaching service, 10:30 a.m.; Sunday School, 2 p.m.; Epworth League, 7 p.m.; preaching service, 7:45 p.m.; class meetings, Tuesday and Thursday at 8 p.m.; prayer meeting, Wednesday at 8 p.m.

**London Washington Briggs (1901-02).** Having entered the Washington Conference in 1877, Rev. Briggs came to Harrisburg with more experience than many of the early pastors assigned here. He only stayed one year, for in 1902 he was appointed superintendent of the Cumberland District. During his tenure here the weekly religious newspaper announcements continue to consistently refer to the congregation as the "Herr Street Methodist Episcopal Church." He is the father of Rev. Charles Samuel Briggs (1877-1968) of the Washington Conference.

**Leander A. Carter (1902-03).** Rev. Carter was a 30-year-old janitor in Baltimore MD when called to the ministry and admitted to the Washington Conference in 1892. At Harrisburg, he appears to have used many guest speakers and spoken himself at special services at other churches – all within the African-American community. The following November 29, 1902, article from the *Harrisburg Daily Independent*, page 2, is typical. Elijah Braxton and W.P. Hopkins served the Bethel A.M.E. and Harris A.M.E. Zion congregations respectively.

Asbury M.E. church, Herr Street, Rev. L. A. Carter, pastor. Morning service at 11 o'clock, Sermon by Rev. Elijah Braxton. Evening service at 7:30 o'clock, Sermon by Rev. W. P. Hopkins. Sunday School at 1:40 o'clock. Revival services all next week. God has blessed us greatly.

**Joseph W. Jackson (1903-05).** Rev. Jackson was admitted on trial and in 1892 and retired in 1915, but he apparently returned to Harrisburg 1922-24 and was a/the regular preacher at the Camphor<sup>xiii</sup> Memorial Mission, 1137 South Ninth Street – nothing more is known about this endeavor. He also appears to have been available for pulpit supply at various churches. For some reason no memoir was never printed in the conference journal. The following obituary appeared in the July 25, 1927, *Harrisburg Telegraph*, page 11.

THE REV. JOSEPH W. JACKSON

The Rev. Joseph W. Jackson, retired, former minister of Harrisburg, died Saturday at his home, 127 Walnut street, Mechanicsburg. He is survived by his widow, Mrs. Emma Jackson; two sons, Frank Jackson and Lloyd Jackson, this city; two daughters, Miss Gertrude Jackson, North Carolina, and Miss Ruth Jackson, this city. Funeral services will be held at 2 o'clock Wednesday afternoon, at Wesley A.M.E. Church, Harrisburg. The Rev. S.T. Hawkins, pastor, will officiate, assisted by the Rev. R. S. Bedford, of Asbury M.E. Church. Burial will be made in Lincoln Cemetery.

**Robert Henry Robinson (1905-07).** Arriving at the age of 80, Rev. Robinson is the oldest pastor to serve the congregation. He appears to have been living in retirement in Alexandria VA and asked for some reason to supply the work at Harrisburg. It also appears that he may not have been able to complete his second year, and that his successor took over the appointment while still a student. The January 14, 2019, *Capital Gazette* quotes “historian Elinore Thompson, one of the founding members of the Broadneck African-American Heritage Project, composed of congregants at the Asbury Broadneck United Methodist Church” as saying “the Rev. Robert H. Robinson served at the church in 1898. He was born into slavery March 14, 1825. Both his grandmother, Caroline Brannum, and mother, Lucy Brannum, were slaves of the nation's First Lady, Martha Custis Washington, and her family.”

Rev. Robinson was also an 1845 charter member of the first African-American lodge in the state of Virginia, Universal Lodge #1 of Alexandria. The February 11, 1903, *Alexandria Gazette*, page 3, carries the following related article.

Invited to Baltimore. Rev. Robert H. Robinson, of this city, said to be the oldest colored Free Mason in Virginia, and who has been grand master for two jurisdictions – District of Columbia and West Virginia – has accepted an invitation to preach a special sermon before the colored Grand Royal Arch Masons of Baltimore on Sunday, February 22.

Finally, Rev. Robinson had a strong interest in education. After being taught to read and write by another slave, he reportedly began teaching others. The May 17, 1990, *Washington Post* carries the following related article.

'39 LIBRARY PROTEST ALEXANDRIA'S PAGE IN HISTORY

On a hot summer day in 1939, five young black men entered the all-white Alexandria Public Library, got one book each and sat down to read at separate tables. When the librarian told them to leave because the library was for whites only, the men just sat silently. They would not speak for fear of being arrested for disorderly conduct. When

the police arrived 20 minutes later they were arrested for trespassing, but the charge was later changed to disorderly conduct.

The bold actions of those men were honored Saturday at a gala banquet celebrating the 50th anniversary of the opening of Alexandria's former library for blacks. The Robert Robinson Library was paid for by the city and opened in 1940 as a direct result of the protest. The city closed Robinson Library in the early 1960s when the public library system was integrated, but the building is now part of the city's Black History Resource Center at 638 N. Alfred St.

**Edwin John Ruddock (1907-09).** Rev. Ruddock was born in Jamaica, came to the United States at the age of 18, worked successfully as a head waiter at various resorts, and was converted at the age of 31. He attended Howard University and graduated from Drew Theological Seminary in 1907. Admitted that year to the Washington Conference, he was sent that year to Harrisburg as his first ministerial appointment – although it appears that he may have already been serving there as a student pastor because of the poor health of his predecessor, the aged R.H. Robinson. E.J. Ruddock was serving his fifth year as a District Superintendent when he died unexpectedly in 1921.

Rev. Ruddock left Harrisburg with more than two years experience, for it was in Harrisburg that he met Miss Harriet Blanche Phillips (1875-1926), the ceremony being performed by the district superintendent. According to her conference obituary, the future Mrs. Ruddock had come to Harrisburg to complete her educations at “the Normal School, Harrisburg, Pa.” and taught “for a number of years” in the area. “As a wife she was devoted, thoughtful” and “was of incalculable help” to her husband.

The January 15, 1904, *Washington Times*, page 4, includes a puzzling article about Rev. Ruddock for which no explanation or follow-up has been discovered.

ASKS PERMISSION PERMISSION TO ADOPT FOUNDLING. Edwin John Ruddock and his wife Ida Glassell Ruddock today filed a petition in the District Supreme Court asking permission to adopt Forrest William Fleming two years old as their own child and heir at law. M. Ruddock says he is a student in in theology at Howard University. The child he says is of unknown parentage, was abandoned in the streets of Washington, and is now under the care of the Board of Children's Guardians.

**Alexander Preston Shaw (1909-11).** In some sense Rev. Shaw may be the most distinguished of the congregation's former pastors, and the one whose career and ministry most closely reflects the congregation's historic importance. He was born in 1879 in northern Mississippi, the eighth of eleven children, his parents being ex-slaves – and he was named Alexander after his father's kind master. His father Rev. Duncan Preston Shaw was also an ordained minister in the Methodist Episcopal Church, as was his older brother Rev. J. Beverly F. Shaw. He had originally planned a career as a public school teacher and graduated from Rust College in 1902, but then went on to graduate from Gammon Theological Seminary in 1906. Both Rust and Gammon are historically black institutions of the Methodist Episcopal Church. He joined the Washington Conference in 1908, and his first assignment was to a church where he had great spiritual success but had to put up

with considerable pettiness on the part of some people. In his biography,<sup>xiv</sup> he describes that incident and his move to Harrisburg, his second assignment, as follows.

I became disgusted about the matter and consented to the judgment of my district superintendent, who felt that I should be assigned to a more difficult charge the next conference year. I was changed at the Conference to the pastorate of Asbury Church, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. My church was located on the edge of one of the worst slum districts in the city. My membership was made up largely of slum people, in quality far below that of the people of my first charge. I stayed by the task, however, for two year, dealing with a type of people with whom I was not acquainted, paid off the indebtedness of long standing on the church and added scores of people to the membership and congregation of my church, whose people I learned to love and serve.

Rev. Shaw used his experience in Harrisburg to help distinguish himself in the ministry and served the prestigious Wesley Chapel Methodist Episcopal Church in Los Angeles, the oldest African-American Methodist church west of the Mississippi, from 1917 to 1931. In 1931 he was elected editor of the *Southwestern Christian Advocate*, and in 1936 he was elected bishop – assigned to oversee black conferences until becoming a member in the Central Jurisdiction at its formation in 1939. He had the distinction of being the first black bishop to preside over a predominantly white conference when he presided of the Southern California – Arizona annual conference of 1950. The opening page of that 1950 journal reads in part as follows.

For the first time in Methodist history, a Negro Bishop presided over a predominantly Caucasian Conference. By the special invitation of the Conference, Bishop Shaw was chosen for this special honor. He is recognized as one of the dynamic leaders of the Central Jurisdiction of the Methodist Church, and for some years has been considered one of its most outstanding preachers. He has a passion to proclaim the unsearchable riches of the Gospel of Christ which is the power of God unto salvation both for the individual and for the societal order.

He represents his Jurisdiction as a member of the Executive Committee of the General Board of Evangelism. Sat the request of the Program Committee, Bishop Shaw conducted the morning meditations as follows:

General Theme: "Some Religious Lessons from Negro Spirituals"

Tuesday: "Songs in the Night"

Wednesday: "Shine on Me"

Thursday: "Eternal Optimism"

Friday: "Cheering the Weary Traveler"

Saturday: "Rest and Heaven"

Sunday morning sermon: "Some Great Christian Objectives"

**James D. Brown (1911-12).** Rev. Brown is one of a number of young pastors sent to Harrisburg as their first or second appointment. He was admitted on trial in 1909, spent two years at his first appointment, and then sent to Harrisburg. As was the case with most of the others, his experiences at Harrisburg prepared him for a long and successful ministry, including five years as the district superintendent from 1935 to 1940 of the South Baltimore district

that included his former Harrisburg appointment. He retired in 1953 and outlived the Washington Conference to become a member of the Baltimore Conference when the Washington Conference was discontinued in 1965. Strangely, from that point on his surname is given as Browne.

**Calais A. Leftwich (1912-14).** A native of Lynchburg VA, Rev. Leftwich graduated from the preparatory (high school) department at Howard University in 1889, from the college department in 1889., and from Gammon Theological Seminary in 1896. He apparently did further graduate work, for he served on the faculty of Lane College, a Jackson TN institution of the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church, and is often noted as Dr. Leftwich. He then entered the Washington Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1909 and was ordained an elder. Less than six months after beginning his appointment, in Harrisburg, Rev. Leftwich took a leadership role in the community as indicated by the following item in August 1, 1912, *Harrisburg Daily Independent*, page 7.

Over sixty negroes of Harrisburg and vicinity met at the Sixth Ward Progressive Club and formed a Progressive League. Marshall Ficklin acted as temporary chairman and after making a few remarks nominated the Rev. Calais Leftwich as president of the league. The following were present and addressed the meeting: Colonel H. C. Demming. Dr. J. A. Kreider, Charles Landis, Samuel Fishman. The following officers were elected: The Rev. Calias Leftwich, president; James Anderson, vice president; Marshall Ficklin, secretary, and James Smith, treasurer.

After Harrisburg, he served one year in Gettysburg<sup>xv</sup> and, as reported in the May 29, 1915, *Adams County News*, page 4, joined the Philadelphia and Baltimore Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal denomination. That transition was apparently not without controversy, as the July 26, 1915, *Harrisburg Telegraph*, page 5, reported as follows.

MUST LET PREACHER IN Efforts to exclude the Rev. Dr. C. A. Leftwich, of Chambersburg, from official participation in the Conococheague campmeeting have been stopped by the Rev. Dr. J. Harvey Anderson, of the A.M.E. Church, of this city, who was recently appointed arbitrator.

**Irving H. Carpenter (1914-15).** This announcement during Rev. Carpenter's tenure from the March 6, 1915, *Harrisburg Telegraph* church section, page 16, illustrates both that the community the African-American churches themselves considered them as a unit, apart from the white churches. In truth there were three distinct denominations: Asbury M.E., Bethel A.M.E. and Wesley A.M.E. Zion. And note that Asbury invited an A.M.E. speaker instead of another M.E. speaker (who would have had to be white) to conduct the special 3 pm service.

#### AFRICAN

Asbury – The Rev. Irving H. Carpenter. “The Lord and His People,” 11:00; “A Fixed Loved,” 8:00; Sunday School, 2:00; the Rev. U.G. Leeper will speak at 3:00.

Bethel – The Rev. U.G. Leeper, “Experimental Religion”, 10:30; “Kept of God,” 7:30; Sunday School, 1:00, Christian Endeavor, 6:30.

Wesley Union – The Rev. W.A. Ray. “Reverence for God's House, 10:45; “The New Covenant, 7:30; Sunday School, 12:30; Junior C.E., 5:30; Senior C.E. 6:30.

**Williams Henry Gaines (1915-17).** Even though the congregation was small and struggling, Rev. Gaines kept up a full schedule of events – as indicated by this announcement in the church section of the January 22, 1916, *Harrisburg Daily Independent*, page 2.

Asbury, Herr Street. The Rev. W. H. Gaines, pastor.  
 11 am, "The Conditions of Acceptable Prayer."  
 8 pm, "Religion's Pleasant Ways."  
 Sunday school at 2 pm.  
 Epworth League at 7 pm.  
 Prayer meeting Wednesday evening

**Solomon R. Bedford (1917-32).** Rev. Bedford served the congregation for 15 years, second only to the 1951-1959 18-year tenure of George Davis. He had been sent to a small, struggling church on Herr Street that had been receiving a different preacher every one or two years – typically supply pastors or persons just starting out in the ministry – and transformed the congregation into a vital force in a larger building on Briggs Street. For some reason during his tenure in Harrisburg, his name is most often given as “R.S. Bedford.” The following article from the March 21, 1919, *Harrisburg Telegraph*, page 4, indicated the dramatic effect he had in just two years.

TO CONDUCT SERVICES IN TECH AUDITORIUM The Rev. R. S. Bedford, pastor of Asbury Methodist Episcopal Church, will conduct his final service before leaving for the annual conference sessions. In the Technical High school building on Sunday evening at eight o'clock. The services are not being held in the church owing to the limited seating capacity. In the evening at 7 o'clock, the Epworth League will present a special program. The principle [sic] speakers will be Dr. Stephen J. Lewis, Dr. Charles H. Crampton and Mrs. Lillian A. Gray, fourth vice president. The Rev. Mr. Bedford will leave on Monday for the annual conference at Staunton, Va.<sup>xvi</sup> His congregation has passed resolutions asking his return for another year.

Rev. Bedford actively cooperated across racial lines with both Methodist and non-Methodist congregations, especially within the Christian Endeavor movement. The June 29, 1927, *Harrisburg Evening News*, page 8, reports the following.

TO LEAD SERVICE The Rev. R.S. Bedford, pastor of the Asbury Methodist Episcopal Church, aided by his choir, will have charge of the mid-week prayer service at the Ridge Avenue Methodist Episcopal Church, Wednesday evening at 7.30 o'clock, in the absence of the Rev. Thomas F. Ripple.

The February 9, 1929, *Harrisburg Evening News*, page 7, carried the following article about the interaction between Asbury and Grace Church of the Central Pennsylvania Conference.

LINCOLN TO BE TOPIC AT GRACE M.E. TOMORROW "Lincoln in the Light of Today" will be the subject of a special patriotic sermon to be delivered at Grace Methodist Episcopal Church tomorrow evening at 7.30 o'clock. In the morning the subject of the sermon will be "The Heroism of Jesus." At the regular devotional service of the Epworth League at 6.30 o'clock an address will be given by the Rev. R.S. Bedford, pastor of the

Asbury A.M.E. [sic] Church. Special musical numbers will also be given by members of Asbury congregation.

That interaction was apparently well-received, for it was repeated the following year – as reported in the February 15, 1930, *Evening News*, page 4.

HONOR LINCOLN AT GRACE M.E. The Asbury Methodist Church of this city will unite with the Epworth League of Grace Methodist Episcopal Church at their Sunday evening devotional service at 6.30 o'clock tomorrow evening. The pastor of Asbury Church, the Rev. Solomon Bedford, will give an address and the members of his congregation will sing several negro spirituals. The topic for the meeting is "An Evening in Negro Spirituals" and is a special observance of Lincoln's Birthday.

That the efforts to interact across old barriers bore fruit and earned Rev. Bedford city-wide respect is shown by the following article from the September 11, 1931, *Harrisburg Telegraph*, page 7.

CONGREGATION WILL MEET TO AVERT SALE OF CHURCH PROPERTY "It is hoped that the Asbury Methodist Episcopal Church, which is scheduled for sheriff's sale next Thursday will be saved," the Rev. Dr. Robert Bagnell<sup>xvii</sup> said today. All efforts will be made by the Methodist churches throughout the city to avert the sale of the church. Tonight members of the congregation of the Asbury Church will hold a mass meeting to plan ways of financing this movement. Some years ago the Rev. R.S. Bedford, came to this city and established the church with only fifteen or twenty members. It has since grown until there are at the present time more than 700 members.

**Charles W. Burnett (1932-36).** Rev. Burnett was the last pastor to end his tenure at the Asbury Methodist Episcopal church building on Briggs Street. That site is now lost within the complex of state buildings surrounding the capitol. The development of that area of Harrisburg displaced many minority families, churches and businesses. An article from the *Harrisburg Telegraph* on July 6, 1934, page 4, indicates the level of segregation at that time.

BIBLE SCHOOL EXERCISES. The Community Vacation Bible School of the Negro churches of Harrisburg will hold its closing exercises tonight at Wesley A.M.E. Zion Church. This school has had an enrollment of over 900. It is composed of nine churches<sup>xviii</sup> of this city, including Asbury M.E., Bethel A.M.E., Capital Street Presbyterian, Harris A.M.E. Zion, Holy Cross Episcopal, Mt. Olivet Baptist, St. Paul Baptist, Second Baptist, and Wesley A.M.E. Zion. The exercises for the children of pre-school age, those five years old and under, were held this morning. The other departments will hold their exercises at 7:30 o'clock. Exhibition of the work done in the various departments will be held in Wesley A.M.E. Church and Second Baptist Church. Sewing, basketry, electricity, canning, flower-making. Woodwork and other handicraft will be exhibited as done in the schools. The literary portion of the program will be based upon the studies in the Bible, and the religious, educational, and ethical instruction given daily in the school.

In April 1935 the congregation hosted the annual session of the Washington Conference for the only time. As the Briggs Street building was not adequate for the occasion, the meetings were held at the Ridge Avenue church of the Central Pennsylvania Conference. Nineteen years later, in 1954, as the demographics in Harrisburg changed, the Ridge Avenue building was sold to the

Bethel African Methodist Episcopal congregation and the funds used to establish Calvary Methodist Church in the suburbs. The following statement appeared in the 1935 journal of the Washington Conference.

STATEMENT OF APPRECIATION FROM THE PASTOR  
OF RIDGE AVENUE M.E. CHURCH, HARRISBURG PA.

I wish I could tell you of the great inspiration that the presence of your Conference brought not only to our church but to our city. A day never goes by but that someone does not stop me and speak of those days when you were in our midst.

You indeed have put a new song in our hearts and you have given us new reason for our faith. We shall long cherish those days and know that we appreciate very much the friendships which we have made. J. Resler Shultz, Minister

**Elisha M. Mitchell (1936-40).** Rev. Mitchell, whose leading the move from Briggs Street to Marion Street eventually resulted in the congregation being named in his memory, was no stranger to congregational moves or racial prejudices. The 2017 book *The Uplift Generation: Cooperation across the Color Line in Early Twentieth-Century Virginia*, carries the following account his struggles in those areas while serving the Richmond VA Leigh Street congregation 1913-17 and purchasing a white Baptist church building into which they planned to move.

In late fall of 1914, after numerous legal appeals and decisions, the sale was permitted, and the white Immanuel Baptist Church minister, William Thomas Hall, congratulated his congregation's generosity in recognizing that "the condition of the Negro in this city is as bad as that of the immigrants in New York, and... they should have a proper place in which to live and grow." Other whites agreed, including Rev. Walter Bowie,<sup>xix</sup> a frequent participant in interracial reforms, who pronounced that "the negro race should be permitted to expand out of its present crowded and, in many instance, unsanitary surroundings.

The black congregation of what then became the Leigh Street Memorial M.E. Church bought the property and changed the entrance at considerable expense from Leigh Street to Fifth Street to comply with segregation ordinances. But upon officially taking possession of the church in the early spring of 1915, Rev. E.M. Mitchell and several trustees were promptly arrested in violation of the Vonderlehr ordinance. Although the courts wavered over whether Reverend Mitchell and others were guilty and liable for the one-hundred-dollar fine, the congregation was barred from using the church that it had purchased for twenty-one thousand dollars, not including the cost of moving the entrance. Three years later, in November 1917, the building remained vacant.<sup>xx</sup>

**Stephen W. Fields (1940-42).** Rev. Fields was part of the tradition of the pastors of the congregation being involved in the community. The April 25, 1942, *Harrisburg Telegraph*, page 7, for example, states that he was a member of the "Church Cooperation" team for the Forster Street YMCA, which was the Negro branch of that organization.

**Thomas Novel Hodges (1942-51).** Rev. Hodges had been admitted on trial in the Delaware Conference in 1934 and transferred to the Washington Conference in 1940. The following lead-in to an article from the March 18, 1941, *York Gazette and Daily*, page 9, illustrates the lingering and unnecessary use of the word

“colored” in standard reporting. The details of the indictment are not relevant in this context, as Rev. Hodges began a successful nine-year ministry at Mitchell Memorial the following spring – during which the mortgage on the Marion Street church building was retired, a new parsonage was purchased at 608 Boas Street, and a children’s choir was organized.

Minister Near White Hall Indicted at Towson. White Hall. March 17. Rev. Thomas N. Hodges, colored minister who preaches at Hereford and Pine Grove churches near here, has been indicted by the Baltimore County grand jury on a charge of...

Newspaper references to his ministry in Harrisburg include references to contacts within and beyond the African-American community. A December 27, 1947, item in *The Evening News*, page 4, describes the appearance of Rev. Hodges and the Mitchell Memorial choir at a service at the Harris AMEZ church. A May 3, 1946, article in *The Evening News*, page 4, lists and pictures Rev. Hodges as part of a “non-partisan civic league organized with the avowed purpose of promoting better understanding between the races.”

**George Edward Davis (1951-1969).** Rev. Davis started his ministerial journey serving as a part-time local pastor while working in a glue factory in Patapsco Park MD. While living in this community he became active in social and civic affairs. As president of the PTA in Anne Arundle County, he was instrumental in obtaining equal bus transportation for the high school children of his race, and for the consolidation of the Negro schools in the county. When his father died unexpectedly in 1945 while serving in Centerville MD, he was appointed there as a supply pastor. He was ordained in 1947 by Bishop Alexander P. Shaw (who had served Harrisburg 1909-11) and continued at Centerville until being appointed to Mitchell Memorial in 1951. Rev. Davis was arguably the person deserving the most credit for the congregation’s move out of the segregated Central Jurisdiction. During his 18-year tenure at Mitchell Memorial, the membership more than doubled – from 119 to 243.



Site of the first Asbury [Mitchell Memorial] church building south side of Herr Street, between Cameron and Twelfth Streets

## Endnotes for Part IV

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<sup>i</sup> The first Wyoming Conference camp meeting site with permanent buildings was built near Spencer, Tioga County NY, in 1865 by enterprising businessman John A. Nichols and leased to a camp meeting association for five years. That lease was extended and the camp meetings there continued until 1881, when most of the buildings were destroyed by a large fire. The historical site in Luzerne County marks the conference's first permanent site owned by a Methodist camp meeting association.

<sup>ii</sup> The backstory to the Quincy property, as reported in Holdcraft's 1939 *History of the Pennsylvania Conference*, page 358, is an interesting piece of history.

"Many years ago a girl who had been left an orphan was taken into the family of a kind-hearted farmer, Mr. Joseph Smetzer, living near Quincy. About the same time a young man came to live in Quincy to learn his trade as a machinist in the Quincy Engine Works. These young people became acquainted and were married. Later they inherited the farm where the girl was reared. [Joseph (1820-1899) and Rebecca (1821-1875) Smetzer had only one biological child, a son named Adam who died a single man who died in 1867 at the age of 21.] The two young people became well known later and Rev. and Mrs. H.J. Kitzmiller. In the late summer of 1901, Rev. Mr. Kitzmiller, then pastor of the Mont Alto – Quincy charge, confided his plans for the establishment of an orphanage with the presiding elder."

A committee was formed and those plans eventually became the famed Quincy Orphanage and Home, of which Rev. Kitzmiller was the superintendent until his death in 1936. The Orphanage closed in 1971 when such facilities were no longer needed, and the Home was transferred from United Methodist to Presbyterian affiliation in 1999.

<sup>iii</sup> This was a mission extension of Boas Street [i.e., First] UB to this black neighborhood – see Gible's 1951 *History of the East Pennsylvania Conference*, pages 199-200: "This congregation opened a new mission in 1873. Adam K. Fahnstock and wife Elizabeth sold a plot of ground for the nominal sum of one dollar to the trustees of Boas Street Church. The lot had a frontage on Herr Street of sixty feet, between Eleven and Eleven-and-a-half Street, and extended about 80 feet in depth toward Boas Street [i.e., to the south]. The deed of sale is dated June 28, 1873. A building was erected in the same year. It bore the name Plymouth Chapel. Annual conference officially recognized the mission and left it to the pastoral care of its organizers. The Chapel was used for mission and Sunday School work until about 1890. Successors of the [original] trustees, in 1894, sold the property to the trustees of Asbury M.E. Church for \$750."

<sup>iv</sup> Elisha M. Mitchell entered the Washington Conference in 1909 and died May 6, 1943, while serving in Town Neck MD. His leadership in the purchase of and extensive repairs to the Marion Street building put the congregation on firm spiritual and financial footing. The congregation was named Mitchell Memorial following his untimely death in 1943.

<sup>v</sup> One condition the Evangelical United Brethren denomination placed on the 1968 EUB-Methodist union to create the United Methodist Church was that the Central Jurisdiction and segregated conferences be eliminated. The Central Jurisdiction was eliminated in 1968, and conferences were placed in the proper geographic jurisdictions.

And within several years action had been taken within the jurisdictions to unite their formerly segregated conferences.

<sup>vi</sup> Bernice Davis Stevens lives in suburban Harrisburg and attends Calvary UMC. Following her eightieth birthday she published the story of her own journey to ordination in *The Bitter Cup: An African-American Clergywoman's Struggle Against Racism in the Clergy*. Despite the title, the book, which is available from Amazon, is not so much a complaint as it is an effort to enlighten and encourage others in the work that is still to be done to eliminate racial and ethnic prejudices.

<sup>vii</sup> The reader may wish to note which quotations come from which newspapers. John Weldon Scott and Eric Ledell Smith, in their 2005 book *African Americans of Harrisburg*, page 67 state, "The *Telegraph* was known to have treated African Americans more justly than the competitor in using language less maligning to the race."

<sup>viii</sup> In 1888, Rev. Thomas Sewell Wilcox (1848-1924) of the Central Pennsylvania Conference was serving as the manager of the denomination's Harrisburg Book Room.

<sup>ix</sup> This event was covered on the front page of the October 3, 1891, *Harrisburg Telegraph*. Often, other denominations participated in this use of guest preachers. In this instance, the only non-Methodist churches involved were Memorial United Brethren on Boas Street and Elder Street Presbyterian. Memorial United Brethren was a white congregation that later relocated to become Otterbein U.B. at Third and Peffer. Elder Street was the old name for Capital Street, and the congregation was the black congregation, later known as Capital Street Presbyterian, that still later relocated to Cumberland Street and is now known as simply Capital Presbyterian.

<sup>x</sup> The building known as Hoffman's Hall, now a neighborhood store is still standing at 1531 Derry Street. It was used for political rallies, WCTU meetings, and a variety of other such events.

<sup>xi</sup> The boundaries of the black conferences usually aligned with those of the white conferences, and so one would expect Lancaster and Columbia to fall within the Delaware Conference, the black conference corresponding to the white Philadelphia Conference. As those towns are historically and presently outside the bounds of the Susquehanna Conference, nothing is known about the work there – except that their appearance in the Washington Conference was relatively brief.

<sup>xii</sup> The following account comes from the September 16, 1890. Philadelphia Inquirer, page 2.

#### COLORED REPUBLICANS MEET

A League Formed In Lancaster to Support the State Ticket

#### SPECIAL TO THE INQUIRER

Lancaster, Sept 15 —" If a man wants quickly to get to Heaven, let him go right down to Georgia and call himself a Republican," exclaimed George W. Jenkins, the eloquent colored orator of Allegheny, in the course of his address here to-night before the colored citizens' convention of Lancaster county. Mr. Jenkins predicted the triumphant election of Delamater. He declared him to be the representative of the party to which the colored voters owed true and steadfast allegiance. He elicited the heartiest applause in his vivid portraiture of the unremitting opposition of the Democratic party to the advancement of the colored man and said that there could be no sufficient reason why any black man should vote the Democratic ticket. The organization of the convention was perfected for the purpose of aiding the Republican cause in the pending campaign. The officers elected are: Joseph M. Stafford, of Marietta, president; Edward Clark, city,

vice president; Squire Allen Wilson, city, secretary; **Rev. Fenton M. Harris**, city, treasurer. The following resolutions were unanimously adopted: Resolved, That we stand by the Republican party in support of her State and county ticket; that we ask the Republican party to give the colored voters such representation that is due us as citizens of the Commonwealth; that we ask the Republican party to do all in their power to pass the federal Election bill; that we ask the Republican party to do whatever and all they can, in giving our people an equal chance in labor and everything that constitutes the rights of an American citizen.

<sup>xiii</sup> Alexander Priestly Camphor (1865-1919) was a missionary bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, elected in 1916 as the fourth African-American elected to the episcopacy. There are several churches and ministries named in his honor across the United States and in Africa. The fact that a mission memorializing him would arise in Harrisburg following his untimely death is not surprising, but no documentation of the mission could be found – other than regular newspaper announcements of Joseph W. Jackson preaching there 1922-23. The 1137 South Ninth Street address no longer exists.

<sup>xiv</sup> His 1948 biography *The Life and Work of Bishop Alexander Preston Shaw* was written by his brother James Beverly Ford Shaw, who served as a teacher of Greek and Hebrew at Rust College in Holly Springs MS, president of Central Alabama College in Birmingham AL, and president of Haven Teachers College in Meridian MS. Rev. J. Beverly F. Shaw was also the author of several other books, including the 1954 authoritative *The Negro in the History of Methodism*.

<sup>xv</sup> The Gettysburg Asbury M.E. congregation of the Washington Conference was formed by members who left the Gettysburg AMEZ congregation. On November 22, 1873, a lot was purchased on what is now South Franklin Street, and a church building was erected in 1874. On April 5, 1889, a lot on S. Washington Street was purchased for a parsonage. Because the congregation never was very strong and could not support a full-time pastor, it had to be part of a circuit. But black congregations in the ME church in Pennsylvania were few and far between. From 1899 to 1910 the Washington Conference had a church in Hanover, and a reasonable two-point charge could be formed. The church was served by the Washington Conference on a regular basis until 1947 — and for the last several of those years it was on a charge with a church in Harper Ferry WV. A 1956 article in the Gettysburg Times stated that "the leading members of the Asbury ME Church were the Penn family, and for a number of years this was the leading Negro Church" — but that its membership "has gradually declined until now only one last member of the Penn family is left" and the church is "supplied for services on an infrequent basis." Finally the church was discontinued completely. The parsonage was sold April 23, 1935, and the church building was sold on May 29, 1959. The cornerstone of the 1874 building is on display at the Adams County Historical Society.

<sup>xvi</sup> Staunton VA was not even the southern extreme of the Washington Conference. The conference stretched from Harrisburg all the way down to Roanoke and Lynchburg and beyond — at one point even including an appointment in North Carolina. No white conference was forced to deal unnecessarily with such extreme distances.

<sup>xvii</sup> Rev. Robert Bagnell (1865-1946) served the Harrisburg Grace Church of the Central Pennsylvania Conference 1917-1933 — in the days when notable orators were brought in to serve prestigious churches. He came to Harrisburg from Philadelphia Park Avenue in the Philadelphia Conference and left for Charleston Christ in the West Virginia

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Conference. As noted in the comments regarding the congregation's first pastor, Rev. T.A. White, it is curious that the authority quoted in the newspaper is a prestigious white pastor. Indeed, most if not all of the articles describing Rev. Bedford's cooperating activities with white congregations appear to have been submitted by and reported in connection with the white congregations.

<sup>xviii</sup> An article on these nine churches, while beyond the scope of *The Chronicle*, would be a worthwhile contribution to the history and development of Harrisburg. Each of these church buildings was in the area of the capital complex and forced to relocate by urban development – except for Second Baptist, which remains on the north side of Forster Street. The other two Baptist congregations [Mt. Olive and St. Paul] continue at new locations. Capital Street Presbyterian (which had been at Forster and Capital streets) continues at a new location. Holy Cross Episcopal (which had been at Forster and Cowden streets) appears to no longer exist as a separate congregation. Wesley A.M.E. Zion (which had been at Forster and Ash) continues at a new location. Harris A.M.E. Zion relocated from Marion Street (near Calder) to occupy the former Trinity Methodist building. Bethel A.M.E. relocated from State and West Streets to occupy the former Ridge Avenue Methodist building, until it burned down in 1995, and now occupies the former Fifth Street Methodist building.

<sup>xix</sup> Episcopal priest Rev. Walter Russell Bowie (1882-1969) was then the rector at St. Paul's Church in Richmond.

<sup>xx</sup> The Vonderlehr ordinance that that defined segregated property/living areas in Richmond VA had been the brainchild of Richmond councilman A.L. Vonderlehr, who was not reelected in 1914. In 1917 the U.S. Supreme Court refused to overturn the 1896 *Plessy vs. Ferguson* decision and declare segregation unconstitutional, but it did strike down a similar Louisiana statute on residential segregation and thereby voided Richmond's Vonderlehr's ordinance. Blacks, and the Leigh Street M.E. Church, were now free to occupy the buildings they had purchased in previously restricted areas. The battle may have been won, but the war was far from over. The struggles which continued in that area of Richmond are detailed in the book referenced in the main text.