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Guide to the

Asbury United Methodist Church (Washington, D.C.) records
1836-1986

Processed by Victor Smythe.

Summary

Creator: Asbury United Methodist Church (Washington, D.C.)

Title: Asbury United Methodist Church (Washington, D.C.) records

Date: 1836-1986

Abstract: The records of Asbury United Methodist Church (Washington, D.C.) are divided into four series: Vital, Administrative, Miscellaneous and ChurchPublications Records.

Location of Originals: Originals in Asbury United Methodist Church; 926 Eleventh Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20001-4488

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Language of the Material: English

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Creator History

Asbury United Methodist Church was established by non-white members of Foundry Methodist Episcopal Church in 1836. The latter was organized in 1814 in Washington City and had black worshipers as members of its congregation from its inception. Discriminatory conditions and parent-like control by their white brethren, however, soon became intolerable to blacks. They were denied a voice in policy-making and were hindered in attempts to achieve personal or group recognition. According to the official history of the church, *Asbury-Our Legacy, Our Faith 1836-1993*, it remains questionable whether or not they were afforded the sacraments and it is unlikely that they were permitted to participate in the choir or to serve as ushers. It was not until September 27, 1833 when Eli Nugent became the first of Foundry's black members to be granted an exhorter's license that recognition of individual merit was acknowledged. However, the restriction that generated the greatest displeasure within the black congregation was their confinement to the church gallery section. This, together with the other intolerable conditions, engendered in the members the idea for a separate church. Thus,

rather than continue their restricted relationship with Foundry, the black membership began to meet in each other's homes.

A precursor to separation was the establishment of the Asbury Sunday School (Church School) in 1829 by John F. Cook, a black man, (who later founded The First Colored Presbyterian Church). By 1836 there is evidence that they had achieved their goal of religious freedom. The Asbury Aid Society, established on January 15, 1836, formed the nucleus of the church, and on Oct. 6, 1836, acting on behalf of the black congregation, seven white trustees agreed to purchase property from William Billings for \$300. Later that same year a frame building was erected on the site by black brethren and dedicated as 'Asbury Chapel.'

At the 1836 Quarterly Conference of Foundry ME Church, Asbury Chapel was officially named "Asbury Methodist Episcopal Church" in honor of Bishop Francis Asbury. This was the first edifice of the Asbury congregation and would stand until 1866.

Prior to 1864 all black Methodist churches in the United States were part of the Baltimore Conference. Black preachers, however, were not accepted as members of the Conference and were relegated to being assistant helpers to the white pastors assigned to black churches. Beginning in 1848 several unsuccessful attempts were made to organize a conference for the black Methodists. Finally, in 1864, Rev. Benjamin Brown, pastor of the Sharp Street Church in Baltimore, Maryland, called a meeting of leaders of the sixteen black churches in the Baltimore Conference. They successfully petitioned the 1864 General Conference to organize an Annual Conference of black Methodist churches that would embrace Central, Southern, and Western Maryland, the District of Columbia and Northern Virginia to be called the Washington Annual Conference. Asbury Methodist Episcopal Church was included in this Conference in October 1864 and Rev. James Peck was made the first black pastor in charge at Asbury. Black trustees were also elected to succeed the formerly all-white trustees at Asbury.

In 1865 the Conference stationed Rev. Richard P. Bell at Asbury. During his one year pastorate fund raising began for a new building. Rev. Julius Caesar Johnson, appointed in September 1866, continued the work. Robert H. Robinson succeeded Rev. Johnson in March 1869 and completed the new edifice in 1870.

During the remaining years of the 19th century the Asbury congregation was served by eleven pastors. Rev. William W. Foreman, known as the "Lion of the Forest," was appointed in 1871. He was succeeded by Rev. Benjamin Brown in 1873 who inspired Asbury brethren to build the Asbury Mission house. In 1874, Rev. James J. Thomas was assigned to replace the paralyzed Rev. Brown. The next pastor, Rev. James D.S. Hall, was considered one of the best preachers in the Conference. But after serving only one year Rev. Hall was succeeded in 1878 by Rev. Edward W.S. Peck who renovated the church and installed an organ.

By the time Rev. Peck was replaced by Rev. Nathaniel M. Carroll in 1881, nearly 150 new members had been added to the rolls. Rev. Carroll was the oldest living member of the Washington Annual Conference and had been present at its organization in 1864. Both he and the two subsequent pastors would serve three years each. Rev. Richard A. Reed arrived at Asbury in 1884 followed by Rev. John H. Dailey who took charge in 1887.

In 1886 when the General Conference passed a law that a preacher could remain as long as the congregation desired. Friction arose between those who wished to retain Rev. Dailey and those who did not. Those members desirous of a new pastor won and Rev. John W.E. Bowen was appointed in 1890. This caused a number of brethren to separate from Asbury in 1891; they later organized the People's Congregational Church.

During Rev. Bowen's administration, Ephraim Nash, a white member of Asbury, donated his twenty-room frame home which would become the structural forerunner of Sibley Hospital. In 1890 the Women's Home Missionary Society of the Methodist Church established a training school for Deaconesses and Missionaries at the former Nash residence. Shortly thereafter it became apparent that there was a need to give hospital nurse training to candidates interested in this special field. William J. Sibley, a white trustee at Asbury donated funds for this purpose. The hospital opened on October 19, 1894.

Rev. Daniel W. Hayes was appointed as Asbury's pastor in 1893 and was followed in 1896 by Rev. Isaac L. Thomas. During his administration the church was remodeled and a heating plant installed.

In 1902 Matthew W. Clair, Sr. was appointed pastor of Asbury and served for seventeen years. Rev. Clair initiated numerous religious and missionary societies. In 1914 the old 1866 Asbury edifice was razed and a new place of worship was begun on its foundation. On September 5 and 6 of the following year, cornerstone laying services were held for the new edifice.

Asbury opened the doors of the new church building on October 16, 1916. Pastors following Rev. Clair, were Rev. Julius S. Carroll, Sr. who served three years, 1919 to 1922; Rev. James U. King, who served five years, 1922 to 1927, and Rev. Joseph H. Jenkins, Jr., who served four years, 1927 to 1931.

On Palm Sunday, March 29, 1931, Rev. Robert Moten Williams arrived in Washington, D.C. to deliver his first sermon at Asbury. During his twenty-four year pastorate, by far the longest of any Asbury minister before or since, Rev. Williams introduced or realigned countless programs directed toward self involvement and improvement, church expansion and renovation, and community and national concerns.

Many firsts were realized during Rev. Williams' tenure. The first *Asburian Newsletter* of the church was published on Palm Sunday, March 25, 1945. On August 2, 1945, the Asbury Federal Credit Union was chartered to operate in Washington, D.C., the first of any church in the country. In 1947 the church established the first interracial housing in Washington, the Roydon Apartment Building.

By October 4, 1953, the church was free of debt and, with its furnishings, was valued at \$355,000. When Rev. Williams first arrived in 1931 there were 1,800 Asbury members. By 1953, in slightly over twenty years, he had built the church membership to 4,700 members.

Rev. Robert Moten Williams was succeeded by Rev. James D. Foy in May 1955. During his thirteen year administration the church began a half-million dollar building campaign.

The United Methodist Church was formed in 1968 upon the merger of the Evangelical United Brethren Church and the Methodist Church. Rev. Frank L. Williams, appointed to Asbury in June of that year, became the first minister of the newly designated Asbury United Methodist Church. He would serve sixteen years. During his administration several building projects were completed. The Education Building designed as an attachment to the church was consecrated on December 2, 1973. An abandoned high school building was purchased and converted into an apartment dwelling of 147 units. Completed on June 10, 1982, the apartment complex, governed by a Board of Directors, was the first of its kind for the District of Columbia metropolitan area.

Rev. Joshua Hutchins, Jr. was appointed to pastor Asbury in 1984 and served for seven years. He initiated many new ministries and was keenly aware of the importance of history and of preserving the past. During his pastorate the Historic Preservation Review Board designated the Asbury edifice as an

Individually Designated Landmark in the city's Inventory of Historic Sites on February 29, 1984. The Asbury History Center, the church archives room, opened on October 26, 1986 next to the Church Library room which had been established earlier. One month later the National Park Service added Asbury United Methodist Church to the National Register of Historic Sites.

On August 29, 1991, the church mourned the passing of Senior Pastor Rev. Joshua Hutchins, Jr. He was the first Asbury pastor to succumb during his tenure. Bishop Edward G. Carroll was appointed interim pastor. Rev. Dr. Eugene W. Matthews was appointed pastor of Asbury on February 1, 1992 and is the Senior Pastor at present.

Scope and Content Note

The records of Asbury United Methodist Church, Washington, D.C. were microfilmed by *The Preservation of the Black Religious Heritage Project (PBRHP)* of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture during the month of June 1994. The originals were retained by the church. Four types of record series were filmed for the (PBRHP) project: Vital, Administrative, Miscellaneous and Church Publications Records.

Arrangement: Records organized into four series: I. Vital Records; II. Administrative Records; III. Miscellaneous Records; and IV. Church Publications

Key Terms

Subjects

African American churches -- Washington (D.C.)
African American Methodists
African Americans -- Religion
African Americans -- Washington (D.C.)
Methodists -- Washington (D.C.)

Titles

Preservation of the Black Religious Heritage Project funded by the Lilly Endowment

Names

Asbury United Methodist Church (Washington, D.C.)
Evangelical United Brethren Church

Container List

r. 1 Vital Records 1929-1986

The *VITAL RECORDS, 1929-1986*, series is comprised of ledgers and bound books containing listings of baptisms, preparatory and full membership, marriages and deaths.

- r. 1 Register Of Membership 4/7/1929-10/26/1941
- r. 1 Register Of Church Membership 11/2/1941-3/28/1954
- r. 1 Official Membership & Church Records
- r. 1 Baptism 5/29/1955-2/15/1959
- r. 1 Preparatory Membership 5/29/1955-2/15/1959
- r. 1 Full Membership 6/5/1955-8/22/1960
- r. 1 Marriages 6/2/1955-6/20/1959
- r. 1 Deaths 7/21/1955-11/1/1957
- r. 1 Membership And Church Record
- r. 1 Baptism 6/10/1959-11/16/1986
- r. 1 Preparatory Membership 1960-10/22/1984
- r. 1 Full Membership 8/22/1960-11/7/1986
- r. 1 Record Of Marriages 6/27/1959-11/29/1986
- r. 1 Records Of Deaths Of Members 11/3/1957-12/30/1986
- r. 1 Register Of Membership 4/11/1954-10/27/1957
- r. 1 Confirmation Classes 4/1956-3/26/1972
- r. 1 Marriage Certificates 8/4/1933-12/29/1955
- r. 2 Administrative Records 1941-1986

The *ADMINISTRATIVE RECORDS, 1941-1986*, series includes Board of Trustees minutes, Charge Conference reports and minutes of the Administrative (Official) Board.

- r. 2 Minutes Of Board Of Trustees 1968-1983
- r. 2 Minutes Of Administrative (Official) Board 1941-1951
- r. 3 Minutes Of Administrative (Official) Board 1952-1973
- r. 4 Minutes Of Administrative (Official) Board 1973-1986

(Includes some Charge Conference Reports, 1969-78)

- r. 5 Annual Charge Conference Reports 1980-1986 (Bound)
- r. 5 Miscellaneous Records, (Legal And Historical Documents, Minutes Of Church Committees) 1836-1986

The *MISCELLANEOUS RECORDS, 1836-1986*, series groups together legal and historical documents, proclamations and minutes of various church committees.

- r. 5 Deed Of Trust October 22, 1836
- r. 5 Address Of Welcome By Chas E. Jackson To Rev. Richard Reed Mar. 22, 1886
- r. 5 Minutes Of Methodist Episcopal Ministers Wives Of Washington And Vicinity 1920-1945
- r. 5 Minutes Of Education Committee 1947
- r. 5 Comprehensive Profile Of Asbury United Methodist Church Nov. 30, 1983
- r. 5 Report Of The Task Force On Affiliate Relationships Dec. 3, 1984

Miscellaneous Records, (Legal And Historical Documents, Minutes Of Church Committees) (cont.)

- r. 5 Proclamation Asbury United Methodist Church
- r. 5 Sesquicentennial Year From Mayor Of District Of Columbia Jan. 1, 1986-Dec. 31, 1986
- r. 5 Council Of The District Of Columbia, Resolution Oct. 7, 1986
- r. 5 Historical Sketch 1915?
- r. 5 Laying Of The Corner Stone September 5-6, 1915
- r. 5 Church Publications 1915-1993

The *CHURCH PUBLICATIONS, 1915-1993*, series includes anniversary journals, newsletters, and a recent comprehensive history, *Asbury-Our Legacy, Our Faith 1836-1993*.

- r. 5 Programs 1920-1986
- r. 5 Church Newsletters (Selected) 1932-1986
- r. 5 Anniversary Journals 1936, 1956, 1986
- r. 5 Asbury-Our Legacy, Our Faith 1832-1993