



# THE HISTORIC ST PAUL

## AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH

### **From that humble beginning...**

In the "History of Franklin County" by William T. Martin, 1858 it's stated "the first Methodist Church or, Class in Columbus was organized early in 1812. That class consisted of four members only including Moses Freeman, a colored man.

From that humble beginning has sprung the first and also the oldest black church in Columbus, St. Paul. In 1814, the first Methodist Church in Columbus was erected which was located on a lot donated by the city (Town Street Methodist Episcopal Church).

In 1823, Moses Freeman separated from the Town Street Church and with only 12 followers he organized an independent society. At the beginning they held their meetings from house to house, then in rented rooms until 1839 when they erected their church on East Long Street.

Finally, in 1824 they were able to worship in a building of their own. It was just a little log cabin located on the east side of Lazelle Street north of Spring Street. This, their first church was named Bethel.

The first pastor's name is unknown; however, these are the good people who constituted the congregation:

Allen and Sarah Brown, George Stanton, Edward Smith, Anthony and Nancy Barrett, Wyatt and Cynthia Johnson, Amos Dandridge, Joseph and Esther Harris, Richard and Mason Butcher, James and Abby Bland, Jacob and Esther Brown, Robert Butcher and family.

Outgrowing the little log cabin, in 1830 another site was selected on Long Street between Third and High Streets

The first Annual Conference – of what was then known as the Western or Ohio Annual Conference of the AME Church – was held in this building August 26, 1837. Bishop Moses Brown, who organized the Conference in 1833, presided. The frame building was too small for the occasion and an attempt was made to extend it. Poles were cut and brought from the nearby woods and placed in position, cross poles were then laid and covered with bushes, thus

a temporary covering was provided for the extension. The members and delegates used rough oak board for seats, with tallow candles for lights.

The members of Bethel AME Church continued to work together to solve their common problems. Having surmounted the sacrifices and struggles which confronted them during their first 21 years, they were now prepared to meet the challenges ahead. The sacrifices and struggles were not in vain for God crowned their efforts with success and the church grew rapidly.

In 1841 a brick church was built replacing the old frame building at the same location it was completed in 1844.

A new site was consent on the north side of Long Street almost directly opposite Bethel Church. William Jones, deacon and member of the church called upon the owner of the property, Mrs. Stanberry, and persuaded her to sell the lot to the church for \$3000 with time payments.

A new church with a new name. Members went to work with a notable spirit of consecration and devotion to build their new church. In 1870 construction began under the administration of Rev. J.P. Underwood, the church was completed in 1871 at a cost of \$14,000. Bishop Daniel A. Payne officiated the dedication of the church July 12, 1872 assisted by Rev. Phillip Tolliver of Chillicothe.

General Conference was held at St. Paul in 1890. From its pulpit went five pastors to highest honor in the AME Church, that being elected Bishop. They are John M. Brown, James A. Shorter, Benjamin W. Arnett, Isaac N. Ross and Joshua H. Jones.

The first school for the education of black youths was established by St. Paul. Rev. John Brown was the first teacher. Mother Ellen Belt, age 92 and oldest member born in Columbus was one of its pupils. The first graduates were Everett Warring and Tom Spencer.

In 1905, under the pastorate of Rev. Robert R. Downs, lots were purchased for \$6,000 at the location where the church now stands, 639 E. Long.

Erection of the edifice began immediately and completed at a cost of \$40,000 under the pastorate of Rev. J.W. Henderson. It was completed in 1906.

The original color of the building was grey, pressed brick with sandstone trim. A pipe organ was installed in March 1920 at a cost of \$7,408. Mrs. Emma Coleman had the distinction of paying the last \$10 due on the organ debit in 1921.

#### **Historical Tidbits:**

The Senior Usher Board (Men's) was organized by Mr. Scippo in 1910 under Rev. R.A. Collins. In 1928 Mr. E.L. Rockhold organized the Women's Board. Rev. Dr. J.D. Howell combined the boards in 1954 to form the Senior Usher Board.

### **Stewardesses**

Early on there were only two Boards (#1 & #2). Communion was served quarterly in the morning and evening services.

### **The Music Department**

The Senior Choir was the first Black Choir in Columbus to perform the Messiah. Mrs. Helen Moses Carter, the organist, invited guest soloists to join the choir. In the early 1920s, St. Paul had a Church Orchestra which performed during Sunday School. It consisted of a clarinetist, trombonist and a bass violinist. The director was Mr. Willard Bailey, Sr.

The Allen Christian Endeavor met Sundays at 6 p.m.

Sunday School attendance recorded in 1922 was 600 with 70 teachers and officers.

Pews were almost assigned. Dollie Whittaker's seat always remained vacant even if she did not attend church. Mrs. Isabelle Ridgeway also had a special seat.

The Women's Chorale was formed in 1949.

St. Paul was a neighborhood church until the city built the freeway. Next door to the church was a funeral home.

In 1933 Trustees filed a petition in the Common Pleas Court of Franklin County, Ohio for the authority to mortgage for securing the payment a promissory note of \$2,000 to procure the installation of a heating system in the church.

### **Parsonages**

The first church-owned parsonage was at 235 St. Clair Ave., purchased for \$2,000 in 1905. It was sold in 1920 and an eight room brick at 171 Lexington Ave., was purchased for \$6,000. The next one was 86 Miami Ave where it remained until 1959. Under Rev. Alvia Shaw a new parsonage (1794 Franklin Ave.) was purchased for \$18,500. It was sold in 2014. The responsibility for the housing of a Pastor is under the Steward Board.

### **Auxiliaries**

Auxiliaries have played a very important part in the life of the church. Historically they have been numerous ones which because of circumstances in the communities and the world their number has as the memberships have decline. Listed are those we know of and current ones.

Stewardess Boards, The Helen M. Paxton Women's Missionary Society (which formed Unit Two in the fall 1998 and is no longer functioning); Allen Christian Endeavor, Young Peoples Division (YPD), Vacation Bible School. Choirs Senior Choir, Cathedral Choir, Male Chorus, Women's Chorale, Youth Choir, Wee Wisdom Choir, Gospel Choir.

### **Ministers since 1905 at its present location:**

Robert R. Downs, James M. Henderson, W.H.H. Butler, J.W. Gazaway, E.A. Clark, J.S. Jackson, J.C. Anderson, J.F. Williams, Harrison Payne, Hubert N. Robinson, A. Sidney King, J.D. Howell, Alvia A. Shaw, A.A. Huey, Dr. Thomas E. Liggins, Dr. Michael R. Bean, Taylor T. Thompson, Kevin Cooper.

Rev. Alvia A. Shaw, assigned in October 1956, guided the purchase and remodeling of an old former laundry building across the street from the church. It became the Annex which housed the offices and multipurpose space, kitchen and rooms upstairs.

Rev. Shaw changed the services time from one at 11 a.m., to 8 a.m. service and 11 a.m.

Rev. Andrew A. Hughey followed Rev. Shaw in 1968. He served for five years. There many improvements to the church. A Young Adult Choir was formed; a Seniors Citizens program was organized. The first coordinator was Delores Mandeville, Nancy Winfrey Thomas and Lucille Chilton followed. Jackie Knight is current coordinator.

Rev. Thomas E. Liggins was appointed to St. Paul in October 1973. He began several improvements to the church: new covering to the exterior to protect the fragile original bricks, new furnace, purchased the old barber shop building located on the lot west of the church and converted it into a Thrift Shop that was managed by Nancy Winfrey Thomas and staffed by church volunteers. The church purchased a house on Jefferson Avenue. The parsonage saw improvements. He introduced the bus ministry, a tape ministry service for shut-ins, delivery of Thanksgiving dinners to shut-ins. He and his officers developed renovation plans for the church called (Phase I); increased staff and purchased its first computer to handle the many programs and activities the office faced.

Rev. Dr. Michael R. Bean was appointed in October 1989 after Rev. Liggins was appointed Presiding Elder for the Ohio Conference. Under Rev. Bean a complete renovation of the undercroft was done between October 1991 and spring 1992. During that time St. Paul

worshipped at the Congregation Tifereth Israel Synagogue on East Broad Street. Steward Margaret Armstrong who worked at the Synagogue request of their facility on Sundays from 8-9 a.m. The original Austin Pipe Organ was rebuilt at a cost of \$100,000 and two church vans purchased. Afterwards, installed a handicap ramp, renovation of the Church Annex facility, procurement of a sound system and several other projects were completed.

Rev. Dr. Taylor T. Thompson was assigned to St. Paul in November 2012. March 29, 2013, he and the Church's Boards worked with financial institutions to resolve the financial crisis which threatened the sale of the church. After six years of much praying and hard word, the church's position was stabilized. The church's office was relocated to the overflow area in 2019. Improvements made were: new roof, gutters, painting the Sanctuary, installation of a cross behind the pulpit and TV monitors.

Rev. Kevin Cooper was assigned to St. Paul October 2019. During his administration virtual church services (Facebook, Streaming, and Conference Call) were introduced because of the corona virus 19 which affected the world. Rev. Cooper held the first of these services on March 22, 2020 in the Sanctuary with a small praise team. The next services were held from his home with only his wife and son. He delivered powerful sermons which were well received. Because of his concern for the senior members he contacted them to check on their well-being and offered prayer.