

## BUILDING THE NEW MT. ZION

Members of Mt. Zion have been toiling for 12 long years to raise money to finish construction of the new church and community center which they had originally hoped would be completed in 1975. The sum of \$236 was the initial fund raised at a dinner held in the old Roger Smith Hotel, in 1964

Way back during the pastorate of the late Rev. James Waters, in 1964, a first effort was begun to raise money for the new church. The sum acquired is mentioned above. The area where the new edifice is being erected had gradually deteriorated into a very blighted area. When the late Richard V. Mulligan, then Chairman of the New Brunswick Housing and Redevelopment Agency, suggested the things that an institution as Mt. Zion AME Church could do to transform the entire area from the eyesore and problem spot that it had become to one of the better areas of our city, Reverend Hildebrand and his congregation, with God's help, and the faith to believe that they could do it accepted the challenge and did it!

On June 30, 1974, a memorable event took place. Mt. Zion AME Church broke ground for the new church and community center. Bishop Ernest L. Hickman officiated. He was ably assisted by the Rev. John Wesley Johnson, Presiding Elder of the New Brunswick District, and the Rev. Henry Hildebrand, Pastor of the church.

Participants in this "once in a lifetime" occasion included some of the oldest as well as some of the youngest members of the congregation. Mrs. Ruby Birt, Mrs. Rebecca Robinson, Mrs. Alice Sample, Mrs. Luvenia Harris, Mrs. Nettie Zachary, Miss Annie Fletcher, Mrs. Helen Woolsey—all "octogenerians" with more than 50 years of continuous membership represented one end of the age spectrum, while Donna Lane, Duane Moore, and Jock Gregory - four year old- represented "the generations following."

Newly elected Mayor Aldrage B. Cooper, Jr. whose father was a member of the Board of Trustees for many years, and whose grandfather was one of its early pastors, shared in this momentous occasion. So did Patricia Q. Sheehan, Mrs. Richard V. Mulligan, and David L. Williams, Assistant Director of the Housing Authority.

The primary purpose of building the church and community center at New, Neilson, and Morris Streets is not necessarily to expand our own denomination, but rather to minister to the many problems of an economic and social nature as well as spiritual problems that exist primarily in this blighted area,

Beginning in 1977, and during the next 5 years, there were many many improvements made in the city of New Brunswick. "New Brunswick Tomorrow" began the revitalization of downtown New Brunswick. It started with the erection of the large office buildings and parking Project known as Plaza I & II located at the corner of George and New Streets. The first section of Route 18 Project extension was needed to relieve the congestion in the downtown area. Johnson & Johnson built a new complex for its headquarters. A 300 room Hyatt Regency Hotel was built and completed in 1982. All of these developments are within a block or two of the new Mt. Zion, so we too played a large role in the revitalization of downtown New Brunswick.

The years since the celebration of Mt. Zion's 150th Anniversary have been very very busy ones, both for the pastor, and the members of the church. Everyone was diligently striving to gain the necessary funds for the new Mt. Zion. Spirits were high and fund raising efforts were many.



The church acquired Title to the land in March 1977 from the City of New Brunswick, and started construction on the Project in June of 1977. Site preparation took lots more time than anticipated due to poor soil conditions. This required removal and fill in order to provide a suitable base for the building. Work on the Project ceased in December 1977 after the completion of initial site preparation. At that point, construction engineers recommended that the site be allowed to settle and compact itself naturally. Several winters passed by before attempting construction.

The contractor again commenced construction on the project in July of 1982. Work was discontinued on the Project in January 1984 due to lack of funds. In April of 1986, with the support and backing of the New Jersey Conference, Mt. Zion AME Church finalized its plans to complete the new building. Mr. Thomas E. Scruggs was retained by the church to act as Construction Manager of the Project. Mr. Scruggs, and a new architect Diffendale & Kubie of New York worked with our church. The roof structure and other changes in the original plans were made.

The new church building is 26,000 sq.ft. in size. It contains a main sanctuary capable of seating 850 people. There are seven classrooms, a community room, multi-purpose rooms, choir rooms, nurses' room, library, general business offices, pastor's study, plus other standard facilities as ample rest rooms, rooms for equipment, a sound-proof room for babies and small children, etc. The building is of decorative stone masonry. It contains a ventilating cooling system, suspended acoustical system, a tile ceiling, carpeting, vinyl and ceramic flooring. And it has a roof mounted heating, and air conditioning System. The site will be landscaped, and have play areas, and concrete walk ways, which will make it most convenient to enter the church from all four sides.

#### Perseverance

Patience, ~~Perseverance~~, and Faith are being rewarded! Oh Happy Day! "If you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'move...' and nothing will be impossible for you(Matthew 17:20)