

"Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ" (II Corinthians 5:20)

In this world, many addresses have been known throughout the years and are so well known that nearly everyone knows what people are talking about when that number is mentioned. There is 10 Downing Street in London, England, and ¹⁶⁰⁰ Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, D.C. Add to these two famous addresses 25 Division Street in New Brunswick, New Jersey—the home of Mt. Zion A.M.E. Church for 160 years! It is one of those places that people automatically knew and came to in its location two long blocks from the Pennsylvania Railroad Station, down the street from Middlesex Hospital, and two blocks from Rutgers—the State University.

Just who were these members who worshiped there, who "came through the wilderness" - who "climbed every mountain" - who are shouting loud and clear "let Mt. Zion rejoice" and now plan to relocate in a new location? These were and some still are the Lord's Ambassadors-instruments through which His attentive caring and love has been and ~~is~~ communicated.

Many many scarred and toil worn hands tell the story of the many souls who have sacrificed their talents in accordance with God's plan, leaving indelible marks on those who were touched by the ones who passed through the portals of 25 Division Street. They started with one solid step, despite tremendous odds, took a second, and then expanded effectively accepting God's challenge to keep moving ahead. We have a past to honor, and a future to mold. We are blending the significant with the small personal details that bring history to life. May you enjoy these "Treasured moments" with us.

Mt. Zion A.M.E. Church, one of the oldest churches in Middlesex County, one of the four established between New York and Philadelphia for Free Africans even before the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation, has been located at 25 Division Street ever since the organization of the church in 1827! Those were the "horse and buggy" days when worshipers worshiped in a wooden frame building. There was a burying ground around it. Prominent among the organizers were "Aunt Jane" Hoagland and her husband, Joseph. They gave a parcel of land that was conveyed to the church December 12, 1829. Mt. Zion A.M.E. Church and St. Peter's Roman Catholic Church were among the first edifices built east of the Pennsylvania Railroad.

During its early days, there were no regular pastors. Circuit riders showed up regularly to conduct services. Morristown, Rahway, Trenton, Pennington, Freehold, Manalapan, and New Brunswick comprised the Trenton Circuit.

The first church, as mentioned before, was a simple wooden structure. The second church was dedicated around 1861, and the third one around 1881. There were numerous phases of renovating during the many pastorates. The present church was remodeled by the late Rev. W.C. Cook after 1948. Ground was broken for our new church in its new location in 1972.

Our first pastor, Rev. Richard Robinson, was assigned in 1832. Over the years, there have been more than 60 pastors, among whom was the Rev. H. Solomon Hill. He served the longest period, 1938 to 1949, prior to our present pastor, the Rev. Henry A. Hildebrand. He came to us in 1964, and is currently leading our congregation, completing 23 years of service in Sept.

Between the Rev. Hill and the Rev. Hildebrand we were pastored by the late Rev. William C. Cook and the late Rev. James Waters.

Several plans were proposed to replace our present building, but none materialized until our church observed its 140th Anniversary Dinner, held on October 27, 1967 when a Fund to start replacing our present building was established. Some 20 years and ^{many} ~~over~~ many projects later, ^{we} ~~was~~ are now about to depart from 25 Division Street to a downtown location.

It is interesting to note that two of the former pastors in the early days of this church were made bishops. They were Willis Nazery, elected ~~by~~ bishop in 1852, and Alexander W. Wayman, elected bishop in 1864.

The overall church program is outlined in the Church Discipline. The Departments make up the operation of the church. We have an Official Board which includes a Board of Stewards, Board of Trustees, and 4 Stewardess Boards. In addition, there is a Sunday School Department, Missionary Society, Laymen's Organization, and Department of Christian Education. Other organizations include (or have included) the Senior Choir, Youth Choir, Mt. Zion Chorale, Men's Chorus, Jubilee Choir, Women's Reserve Auxiliary, Ladies Usher Board, Men's Usher Board, Junior Usher Board, Willing Workers Club, Nurses Unit, Prayer Circle, Bible Class, Hostess Guild, Women's Auxiliary, and Men's Club. Through the years, we have been graced by the Inspirational Chorus, YPD, Youth Bible Group, Flower Club, Entre Nous Club, Golden Leaf Chorus, Ahlen Christian Endeavor, Pastor's Aid, Deaconess Board, Many contributions were made from the Imperial Dramatic Society.

Our story has truly been a living narrative of God's world of people at work at 25 Division Street—each group leaving its marks as those souls showed their worth not only in the church, but throughout the entire community.

Early membership of our church was 63 in 1872. These faithful, blessed members contributed \$42 in dollar money. Today, we have close to 400 in membership contributing \$ 5,700.00 annually in connectional claims

What are some of the warm memories that we cherish as we "roll back the curtain of time" and reflect on the accomplishments of these early church members who helped to make the church and the community a better world for all? How can we ever forget those pioneers who brought bundles of wood to heat the stoves in those early days, or those who furnished the singing without benefit of piano or organ accompaniment? Can we ever show our appreciation for those who had the faith to move forward, and were never satisfied? It takes great faith to wade into deep waters, especially when you don't know where the bottom is. And this is just where we were when Mt. Zion had a series of pastors who were assigned for 2 or 3 years, and then moved. Those early christians didn't know what the future held, but they knew the Captain who holds the future! God gave them the courage to hold ^{on} and wade into deep waters. And good things did happen! Each of the ^{sixty} ~~sixty~~ and over pastors of Mt. Zion left his marks that contributed toward the strength and growth of the local church. In this narrative, we but list the names of many, and can only relate the stories of a few, but their years of service are recorded in God's Book of Life.

1881 - 1934

THE MIDDLE YEARS

During the administration of the Rev. Redmonod Faucett, the church building was condemned by the city officials (1876-1878). Money was borrowed and a mortgage given, to begin construction. This money was paid and the mortgage cancelled in 1892, during the pastorate of the Rev. J.H. Pierce. The main auditorium was completed in 1881, and dedication on October 16th of that year.

In 1894, money was borrowed again to build a parsonage. Final payment on this was made during the pastorate of Rev. W.H. Hicks (1911-1912). Rev. J.W. Morrishow (1914-1917) had the church repainted; the Rev. Samuel Sturges (1918-1921) remodeled the parsonage; the Rev. J.H. Jackson (1923-1924) had the church basement renovated, and purchased our present pipe organ. During his administration, \$4,000 was borrowed, and a mortgage given. The Rev. C.G. Collins (1925-1927) had the church redecorated and painted and the organ installed. He had the organ installed and dedicated in July 1925 with impressive ceremonies. The famous Carl Diton was at the console. It is significant to note at this point that Miss Elva Miller (who later became Mrs. Charles Speights, Sr.) became the church's organist. She was assisted by Miss Julia Jennings who later married Harry Crummidy, the son of one of our pastors. ~~organist~~. There were so many parts on the organ that the young ladies were not familiar with that a Professor Mark Thomas of Memphis, Tennessee, who happened to be in this area at the time, took over the directing of the choir and instructed them on the operation of the organ. Professor Thomas served for one year.

The Rev. R.B. Smith (1931-1932) had the church entrance altered. A new concrete stoop, built by the Imperial Dramatic Club, added much to the appearance of the church. Mrs. Harriet Van Derveer was president of this Club at that time. While the Rev. G.H. Crayton was pastor (1932-1935) improvements were made to the interior of the church.

CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION - 1927

By the time the centennial of Mt. Zion was to be celebrated the church was in beautiful condition, the new organ was brightly polished, the choir was well prepared and the people full of enthusiasm. It was October, 1927. Reverend Issac Horsey was pastor. There is still preserved in the church's archives an account of the anniversary celebration written in the beautiful handwriting of Mrs. Gertrude P. Titus. The committee in charge of the centennial celebration included: Alice Hoagland, Annie Cummings, Annie Jackson, Ada Jennings, Jennie Nixon, Lilian Claggett, and Harriet VanDerveer. The centennial celebration program scheduled a full week of anniversary events highlighted by a banquet on Thursday, October 27th and brought to a successful close with services on Sunday, October 30th. Reverend J.H. Jackson returned for the occasion and delivered the anniversary sermon.

In contrast to the joy of the centennial celebration was the anniversary observance two years later. It took place on October 31, 1929, just two days after the stock market crash hurled the nation into deep depression. Mt. Zion had to begin its second century, much as it had begun its first - in desperate poverty. It was during this period that the Willing Workers Club was organized. The "Great Depression" as it was called tested the faith and the courage of the people of Mt. Zion even while they were being visited by deep sadness and tragedy of another kind - death.

Reverend I.C. Horsey died in July 1930. Reverend J.H. Jackson returned once again to Mt. Zion - this time to complete the term of the late pastor. In May of 1931 Reverend Jackson died as a result of an automobile accident and again the congregation was deprived of an outstanding leader in the most difficult of times. So Reverend R.B. Smith came to finish that term, but he too would not remain at Mt. Zion very long. On June 14, 1932 soon after Bishop W. Heard has been appointed to succeed Bishop J.H. Jones to the First Episcopal District, Reverend Smith was appointed Presiding Elder of the Camden-Trenton District. During his short administration, however, Reverend Smith did have the church entrance altered. A new concrete stoop, built by contributions from the Imperial Dramatic Club, added much to the appearance of the church. Mrs. Harriet Van Derveer was president of the club at that time.

Rev. G.H. Crayton, pastor from 1932 to 1935 improved the church interior. The Rev. Charles H. Crumidy (1935-1938) reduced the mortgage indebtedness. He installed a system of bookkeeping, and a permanent official record was started. Two ministers were ordained during his term—the late Rev. Samuel I. Matchett, and the late Rev. Cyrus E. Grant. The latter became a member of our Pulpit Staff for many years.

The Rev. H. Solomon Hill was assigned to Mt. Zion in 1938, and married shortly after his assignment. Under his able leadership, the organ indebtedness of \$1300 was paid off in 1939, and the church mortgage of \$4,000 was paid in full in 1944. During the 117th Anniversary of the church, held Oct. 25-29, 1944, Members could "heave a sigh of relief" as it marked the first time in over 20 years all church bills were paid off. The Usher Board was organized under the leadership of Rev. Hill, and the late Mrs. Polly Rhim was Advisor for this group of ladies. Bishop David H. Simms, First Episcopal District leader, delivered the Anniversary Sermon, and officiated at the Mortgage Burning Service. The church sanctuary was renovated in 1946 at a cost of \$2,000.

Rev. William C. Cook was assigned in 1949. The late Mrs. Anna Howard was commissioned as a Missionary during his tenure, and later served on the Pulpit Staff. Mt. Zion was renovated again, both inside and outside. The church entrance was beautified, the parsonage improved, the windows were given a stained glass appearance, decorated primarily by his wife. A Junior Stewardess Board, now known as Stewardess Board NO. 4 was organized during Rev. Cook's pastorate. Mrs. Viola Cook organized a Nurses Unit, the "Angels of Mercy." Club Entre Nous was organized through the Willing Workers Club, a number of the member being daughters of the Willing Workers Club members.

Stewardess Board B gave the Communion Table; a new piano was purchased by the Sunday School. The Gold Cross and Candlestick Holders were presented by Oscar Z. Roseberry. On the occasion of their 30th Anniversary, the Willing Workers Club presented the church with Offering Plates. This was in Nov. of 1958. The cross on the organ was given in 1946 in memory of Nathan Jennings, son of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Jennings, Sr. Nathan was a casualty of World War II. Jennings Court in Robeson Village was named in his Honor. Two other casualties from our congregation were similarly honored—Sample Road, named for Thomas L. Sample, son of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Sample, and Bergen Court, named for Harry Bergen, son of Mr. and Mrs. Clarence Bergen, Sr.

The Bible used in the pulpit was given by the Pastor's Aid in December of 1953 under the presidency of Mrs. Essie Jones, and the two pulpit flags were presented by Mrs. Hulda Peterson and Mrs. Claudine Lewis, in memory of thie mother, Mrs. Annie Cummings. During Rev. Cook's pastorate, the Mt. Zion Chorale was organized. He also sponsored a Christmas Club for Senior members 70 years old and over. He served as President of the New Brunswick Council of Churches, the Ministerial Alliance of New Brunswick, and the New Brunswick Urban League. In April of 1959, he was assigned to St. Paul AME Church, Orange. The Rev. James W. Waters was appointed to Mt. Zion. It was during his pastorate at St. Paul that Rev. Cook passed away.

Rev. Waters served as Pastor of Mt. Zion from 1959 until the summer of 1964. At that time, he was transferred to Bethel AME Church in Germantown, Pa. Successful Rally Days were held during his tenure in New Brunswick. Some of our most dynamic Women's Day Programs were presented through the efforts of his wife, Mrs. Anna Waters. Talented women from the New Jersey and Philadelphia areas gave some beautiful, inspiring programs.

Representatives of the Council of United Church Women were usually in attendance, and brought greetings from that group. Mrs. Waters was once Vice President of the local Council, and also had served the State Council as Corresponding Secretary. She was elected to the General Conference, and the General Board of the AME Church while in New Brunswick.

Mrs. Waters was the State Supervisor of the Young Peoples Department (YPD) in the New Jersey Conference, and organized a YPD group in Mt. Zion. Rev. and Mrs. Waters were particularly interested in the youth of Mt. Zion. Three Junior Stewards were appointed by Rev. Waters, Lewis Carman, Robert Adams, and Donald Hankerson. Some of the Officers serving during Rev. Water's pastorate were Lewis Carman, Secretary of YPD, Harry A. Crumidy, Pastor's Steward, Mrs. Lillian Carman, Church Secretary, and Thomas Harris, Sr. the Board of Stewards. The late George P. Way was Sunday School Superintendent. Bishop G. W. Baber ordained Mrs. Anna Howard at the New Jersey Annual Conference held in 1963.

In 1959 during Rev. Waters' administration Mt. Zion celebrated its 132nd Anniversary. Rt. Rev. George W. Baber was the Presiding Bishop, Rev. D. McNeal Owens the Presiding Elder. There were eleven days of celebration with pastors, choirs, and congregations from various churches participating on the various evenings.

In 1964, Rev. Waters with the assistance of the Trustee and Steward Boards planned a "Kick-off Dinner"-the first effort planned to raise funds to build a new church. Rev. Waters later served as one of the Presiding Elders of the New Jersey Conference. On November 24, 1978 he passed away.

It is interesting to note that Rev. Waters assumed a very prominent role in community affairs while serving as Pastor of Mt. Zion. He was an officer of the Ministerial Alliance of New Brunswick, served on the New Brunswick Council of Churches, and on the New Brunswick Urban League Board. He was the first Negro to join the Clergy Club of New Brunswick, and served as its Secretary and Treasurer. He was also a Candidate for the New Brunswick City Commission, the first Negro to run for public office in the history of New Brunswick, as far as we were able to find out. Rev. Waters was the forerunner of Commissioner Aldrage B. Cooper, Jr. the first Negro to be elected to the New Brunswick Board of Education, and to win a seat on the City Commission and later to become mayor of the city.

The Rev. Henry A. Hildebrand was transferred from St. James AME Church in Atlantic City to assume the leadership of our church in September 1964. During the years of his service in New Brunswick, plans were formulated to build a new edifice in a different location. A Building and Expansion Fund, started with a deposit of \$238. 80 on June 29, 1964 was increased many many time over that initial amount! A portion of this fund was acquired through the will of the late Deaconess Worsham who gave the residue of her estate to Mt. Zion. Funds also came from the estate of the late Rogers and Ruby Birt in 1975. Property next to the former parsonage was purchased, and is currently being used as a parking area.

Church financial efforts have reached unprecedented marks of achievement. This tends to indicate that the congregation was aware of the fact that expansion of facilities required a consistent system of financing. And it continued to go higher and higher with each succeeding year.

During the observance of Men's Day in 1967, three of the Hildebrand brothers members of one of the largest AME ministerial families, served

together in the pulpit of Mt. Zion-the Reverends Richard A.(Bishop), Walter L., and Henry A.

The Youth of Mt. Zion held a successful Rally Day on August 20,1967 with Jackie Robinson, former Brooklyn Dodger baseball great and Hall of Fame member as the featured speaker.

Officials of Piscataway Township, impressed by the impact of Mt. Zion upon the community, deeded to the Trustees of Mt. Zion AME Church three acres of land in that Township on which to erect a church building for the large number of "Mount Zioners" residing in that area. The title was taken for this tract of land in November 1966. In its role of "mother church" or "sponsoring church" Mt. Zion through the leadership of Rev. Waters and Rev. Hildebrand provided resources, manpower, and often financial assistance needed to get this new congregation under way. The North Stelton AME Chapel was organized and became a vital factor under the leadership of the late Mrs. Anna Howard and the supervision of Rev. Hildebrand. A new church has been erected, under-written and supervised by the New Jersey Annual Conference. The new edifice, now known as North Stelton AME Church, was dedicated May 7th 1978. It is a fast growing church, under the able leadership of Rev. Edward Adams, one of our former Pulpit Associates. It is a lovely, functional church.

In 1966, the church acquired the first piece of property that it had added to its holdings. Legal title was taken to this property November 1,1966. In October 1967, the year of our 140th Church Anniversay, we acquired the second piece of property purchasing the lot at 29 Division Street(30x90 ft)for off-street parking for the members of the congregation. This property was purchased for the sum of \$5,500 and was paid for in cash. On June 1, 1969, the congregation purchased the present parsonage located at 3 Llewellyn Place in New Brunswick. It is a lovely home, in a desirable residential area, located next door to the home of a former mayor of New Brunswick. This property was acquired at a cost of just under \$40,000. It has been completely paid for, and is currently valued at over \$ 200,000.

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On April 1, 1977, we acquired from the Housing and/Development Authority of New Brunswick the land for our new church site-a one and a quarter acre city block bounded by New, Neilson, Morris, and John Streets. Situated in the heart of the inner city,

Our ministry to others has been evidenced through programs such as monthly support of a Pastor and his family serving in Guyana(1976); contributions toward the construction of the Agnes Brogdon Hildebrand Chapel in South Africa(1977) Transportation is provided for the elderly. Members use their automobiles to transport senior members to and from church services. We have a Tape ministry where weekly and special services are recorded on cassettes, and volunteer take them to nursing homes and to shut-ins.

Church Auxiliaries organized by Reverend Hildebrand include the Inspirational Chorus(1967), Prayer Circle(1969), Youth Choir(1973) Jubilee Choir(1974) and the Laymen's Organization(1974). Efforts were suggested by Mr. Isaac Jordan and later by Mr. Leroy Nash to get more Mt. Zion members to become more involved in participating as members of the church family-spiritually, socially, and financially. A booklet was prepared by Mr. Nash "Mount Zion Today" to generate interest for the future Mt. Zion.

church, was elected bishop

Rev. Vernon Byrd, a frequent preacher at our church, was elected bishop at the General Conference in Kansas City in 1984. Bishop Frank C. Cummings was appointed to serve the First Episcopal District which includes New Jersey, and Bishop Richard Allen Hildebrand was transferred to the Third Episcopal District in Ohio. who had served the First District for eight years,

In 1984, Sunday, October 7th was designated "Kick Off Day for Tithing," as the financial program for our church. This day was also repeated on Sunday, September 6, 1987.

Assisting Rev. Hildebrand as Bible Study Instructors were Rev. Jacqueline T. Reeves, Rev. Renita Weems, Rev. Melvin B. Jackson, Mrs. LaVerne Ball and Rev. Vernard Leak.

Mt. Zion's Annual Mother's Day speaker is Dr. J.W.P. Collier, former Secretary-Treasurer of the Mission Department of the AME Conference. He was elected to this position in 1972, and retired with honor in 1984. He has served and traveled on the overseas work more than any other in the history of the Department.

Hildebrand preached and officiated at a service held for the Consecration of the Cornerstone, and the Dedication of a Commemorative Plaque for the new edifice of our new Church and Community Center.

New hymnals for the new church were suggested by Rev. Hildebrand as Christmas gifts in 1984. Nearly 200 were given. Members and friends were also asked to purchase pews at a cost of \$350 as a gift in honor of someone living or as a memorial gift. Practically all of the 93 pews for the new sanctuary have purchased and donated by members and friends of the church.

Arrangements were made with the pastor, officers, and congregation of our church to allow the members of the Seventh Day Adventist Church to use the building at 25 Division Street for worship on Saturdays and one night during the week. This was for us a small contribution to the ecumenical spirit of unity in Christ Jesus.

During the New Jersey Annual Conference of 1986 / Rev. Hildebrand and church officials invited the presiding bishop and officials of the Conference to visit the church property and see what Mt. Zion was attempting to build. On October 19, 1986, a Bonding Company gave members of the congregation the opportunity to finance our construction. One could take advantage of the opportunity to earn higher interest on their savings. ~~Dec.~~ On Dec 7th, \$50,000 in construction bonds were purchased by members of our congregation.

parsonage "

In 1982, fire severely damaged the "old / on Division Street. Through the assistance of Mr. Leroy Nash, the building was completely repaired. Then the Steward and Trustee Boards decided to use the building for office space, and the rooms for meetings. It is now known as our Parish House.

Yes, we know that 25 DIVISION STREET has left indelible marks in the church and the community. "We know that all things work together for good to those who love God" (Romans 8:28). So-"if God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31). "The God of Israel is He who gives strength and power to His people." (Psalm 68:35)

Opportunities have come to us in unexpected times and places, but, we, like the wise who took oil in their vessels with their lamps (Matthew 25:4,10) were prepared. We did not grow weary and give up, while doing good, knowing that in due time we would reap our reward. There are incredible opportunities before us today if we but "Walk by Faith" Nothing is achieved until somebody has truly believed. Faith steps in and new ideas, thoughts, and energies come to our rescue when we "literally painted ourselves into corners." Resources we never dreamed we had are helping us to get started off on the right foot as we prepare to enter our new church. God be praised! Let

Mt. Zion Rejoice!

CHURCH SCHOOL SECTION

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MARK 10: 14 "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not for such is the Kingdom of God"

The Sunday School has played a vital role in the life of Mt. Zion down through the 160 years of its existence. If we were to recall all of the important events it would require a special volume. We will just point out some of the events of the 20th century to give you some idea of the marks that have been left by our young people-the future church.

The late George P. Way was an extraordinary church school superintendent. He served for many years until failing health and eyesight forced him to retire. During his tenure, the church school grew in staff and membership. He was an excellent leader and innovator. Summer treats were picnics at the local parks, and sometimes they went to lakes in north west New Jersey. Today, there are two former Sunday School students who are still active in church activities, and are serving in responsible positions. Former student and teacher, William Reid is presently a Trustee. Cordia Fleming, the other student, is a Sunday School Teacher for the Nursery Class, and is a member of both the Mt. Zion Chorale and Senior Choir.

Thomas Harris served during the pastorate of Rev. Waters. He was active from 1967 until around 1978. He was instrumental in getting a parents-teachers board, and began the involvement of our church in the Christian Education Program. Cordia Fleming and Ann Bess served as interim heads of the Sunday School until Isaac Jordan assumed those duties. Mr. Jordan, in addition to working with the youth of our congregation chaired the church Building Finance Committee, and proposed a program for church liaison representatives and religious coordinators during the early 1980s. His employment meant moving to Rochester, New York, and this plan never materialized.

Mrs. Lillian T. Holly has been serving as Superintendent of the Church School for the past 5 years. Mr. "Ted" Jackson has been her Assistant. She has promoted Regional Projects such as Teacher Training Seminars-Spring and Fall, Founder's Day Programs, Church School Conventions, the Youth of the Year Contest, as well as other programs.

Our local Church School has hosted the Youth of the Year Contest for the New Brunswick District for three years. Kim Hall was the 2nd runner up in 1987. For the wider area, young people have attended the summer sessions in Dover, Delaware. Fredia Hall, Lolita Jackson, Charles Moore, Kim Hall, and Donna Lane have been contestants.

Local projects have included Annual Holiday Projects as Adopt-a-Grandparent, Food drives for needy families, "A turkey in each basket" drive (cash register tapes were exchanged for 10 lb. turkeys. Our youth collected enough tapes for 12 turkeys. These were given to the Missionary Society for holiday baskets). Fruit baskets were sent to sick and shut-ins.

During the Christmas season, there was caroling, the presentation of Christmas programs and plays, and a candlelight service. At Eastertide, there were recitations and plays. Mothers and Fathers were saluted on their days. A Youth Choir Festival was hosted in 1982. Annual Youth Dinners have been held.

Scholarships have been awarded to high school seniors going on to college.