

LOVE IS PROGRESS  
HATE IS EXPENSIVE



# AAMHC Journal

*A Journal of the African American Methodist Heritage Center*

*AAMHC  
at a Glance*

Volume 3  
2016



## A National Museum *Close to Home for Methodists*

The recent dedication of the National Museum of African American History and Culture on the National Mall in Washington, DC reminds United Methodists of their creative and crucial role in the history of people of color.

Both Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglas received their beginnings from Methodist societies on the Eastern shore of Maryland and proceeded on to be the key abolitionists and leaders of the Underground Railroad. Some of the first slave insurrectionists were black preachers. The father of the transition from Spirituals to Gospel music was the Rev. Charles Albert Tindley, a former slave and the founder of Tindley Temple United Methodist Church, and the composer of over 100 hymns like *Beams of Heaven as I Go*, *Nothing Between*, *We'll Understand It Better By and By*. Athletes like Sugar Ray Robinson and Jackie Robinson honed their skills at black United Methodists churches in New York and Los Angeles.

Honored at the new museum were several individuals who were United Methodists, including Esau and Janie Jenkins, who drove residents of John's Island, South Carolina to Charleston, for schools and jobs. During these journeys they taught adults to read and advocated voter registration. The rear door of their Citizens Committee van with filled with inspirational quotes and is now on display at the new museum (see above). Elaine Jenkins, the daughter of Esau and Janie Jenkins, and formerly a member of the Board of Trustees of the African American Methodist Heritage Center (AAMHC), traveled with many family members and friends to the grand opening.

A photograph taken by Adelle Banks, a member of Asbury United Methodist Church in Washington, DC, and a reporter for Religion News Service, is on display in the museum's "A Century in the Making" exhibition. The photo depicts the deputy director of the museum receiving a family's donation of broken stained glass from the 16<sup>th</sup> Street Baptist Church, which was bombed in Birmingham, Ala., in 1963. The family made the presentation in 2013, 50 years after the bombing. Banks is also the primary videographer for the oral history project of the AAMHC.

The first black colleges organized for Blacks following the civil war were by Methodists from the north, beginning with Rust College, and now with 11 such institutions. Similarly, institutions like Gulfside Assembly in Mississippi were the foundation piece of black Methodists and others. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr's two key allies were Rev. Joseph Lowery, who became the president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the Rev. James Lawson, the architect and primary teacher of the early sit-ins. And, of course, the empowerers in all those struggles were benevolent white Methodists who believed, sacrificed and often risked their own lives, including the Woman's Home Missionary society who sponsored 25 institutions for children and youth following The Civil War. The AAMHC celebrates the new museum because it is our museum too.

*Bishop Forrest C. Stith, Elaine Jenkins and Adelle Banks all contributed to the content of this article.*

The African American Methodist Heritage Center is a ministry related to the United Methodist Church. It views the church and its ministry in retrospect and prospect. It envisions its work as gatherer and conservator of the vital history and heritage of Black people in the successive Methodist bodies of the Methodist Episcopal Church, to being racially segregated in the Central Jurisdiction to the United Methodist Church in the American and global society. The AAMHC ministry is to help ensure that accurate representation of that story is preserved and examined.

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"Methodism and the Negro"

## Additions to the Collection:

Papers from Dr. Charles and Mrs. Marie White Copher. Dr. Copher was one of the first professionally trained African American biblical scholars earning a Ph. D in the Old Testament from Boston University in 1947. He went on to serve as faculty and held other administrative positions at Gammon Theological Seminary and at the Interdenominational Theological Seminary (ITC) in Atlanta, Georgia. Dr. Copher also published *Black Biblical Studies: Biblical and Theological Issues on the Black Presence in the Bible: An Anthology of Charles B. Copher* (1993).

Seven volumes of the *African American Mission Albums* (called Negro in the 1930's) documenting the work of the Freedman's Aid Society which became a part of the Board of Education of the Methodist Episcopal church in the early 1920's, were recently digitized and added to the collection.

Papers from the library of Ms. Charlotte Meade of Fairmont, West Virginia containing historical records about the early years of Black Methodists for Church Renewal (BMCR) and information about local African American Laity and Clergy.

Papers from the library of Thelma Randall of Catonsville, MD containing historical records about BMCR.

# Watch Night / Watch Party

In late summer of this year a group of individuals representing local businesses, organizations and churches met to ensure the visibility of Washington, DC during the opening of the National Museum of African American History and Culture in the fall of 2016. While this was a national celebration, the city formed the DC Host Committee to ensure the visibility of this event through local businesses, organizations and churches.

It was decided that various sites would hold watch parties to allow visitors, members and friends to gather in community to watch this historic event. "Watch Night," according to [bartleby.com](http://bartleby.com), can properly refer either to New Year's Eve or to a religious service held on New Year's Eve. Under either usage, it is likely a term unfamiliar to most, in that the observance of "watch nights" among Christians has devolved into primarily an African-American practice. Watch Night is celebrated among by congregants 'gathering at their churches on the last evening of the year to attend special services that typically commence

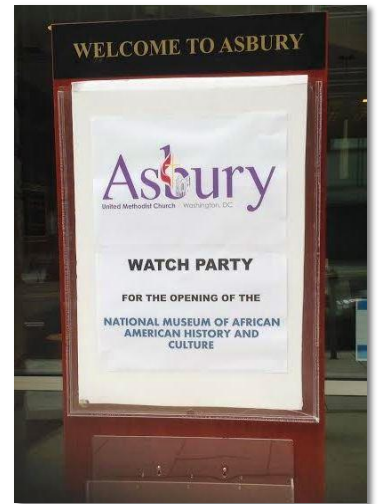


between 7 and 10 pm and continue through midnight into the New Year. These services are regarded by participants as a time to reflect upon and give thanks for the departing year and pray for the future, a spiritual way of celebrating a largely secular holiday. Many churches embrace them as an alternative to the rowdy partying and drinking often associated with New Year's Eve.

Yet as strongly as Watch Night is now linked to the black community, its observance did not originate with that group, nor did it begin on December 31 1862, the night before the Emancipation Proclamation came into effect. Watch Night began with the Moravians, a small Christian denomination whose roots live in what is the present day Czech Republic. The first such service is believed to have been held in 1733 on the estates of Count Nicholas von Zinzendorf in Hernut, Germany.

John Wesley, founder of the Methodist movement, picked it up from the Moravians, incorporating a Watch Night vigil into the practices of his denomination. Methodist Watch Nights were held once a month and on full moons, with the first such service in the United States taking place in 1770 at Old St. George's Church in Philadelphia. Watch Night services survive to the present day as a "Covenant Renewal Service in the *United Methodist Book of Worship*. As to what was being "watched over" in those earlier services, it was one's covenant with God. These gatherings were a time for congregants to meditate on their state of grace — were they spiritually ready to meet their maker if the call were suddenly to come? As Mark 13: 35, says, *the faithful need to be ever vigilant, because the hour of the Lord's coming is not known.*

The end-of-year Watch Night of 1862 took on special significance attaching to the impending January 1, 1863 enactment of the Emancipation Proclamation, and that night has come to be known as "Freedom's Eve." On September 22, 1862, President Lincoln issued his Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, which stated: "On the first day of January ... all persons held as slaves within any State, or designated part of a State, the people whereof shall then be in rebellion against the United States shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free." Lincoln subsequently issued the Emancipation Proclamation itself on January 1, 1863.



As persons gathered in 2016 to “watch the opening of the museum, visitors to Asbury United Methodist Church, which I attend said: “How nice of you to do this, I could not make it down to the mall”; “I was watching at home, but decided that I needed to be in community to see this historical event, this brings tears to my eyes, how fitting we watch this in your church which is 180 years old.” We also conducted guided tours of the sanctuary and workshops were available on how to preserve your church history as well as a book signing and other exhibits.

For further information about John Wesley contact the General Commission on Archives and History of the United Methodist Church at [gcah.org](http://gcah.org) or Carol Travis at [carol6303@aol.com](mailto:carol6303@aol.com).



## Gifts Help Share the Message

With the opening of the National Museum of African American Culture and History on the mall in Washington, DC, The African American Methodist Heritage Center, (AAMHC) now in its fifteenth year, is anticipating that people across Methodism will want to know more about the role of African Americans in Methodism. This ministry continues to seek to provide leadership in recovering, preserving, and promoting the importance of African Americans in the spread and development of Methodism.

One of the exciting initiatives underway is the Oral History Project. It is urgent that this effort continue to move forward expeditiously. Senior clergy and laity who were active in the period leading up to and during the period of the elimination of the segregated Central Jurisdiction are being videotaped as they recall their experiences before, during, and after the transition to the integrated United Methodist Church. They tell heart-breaking as well as heart-warming anecdotes of those times. Bishops' spouses tell of their experiences in new non-segregated settings. Bishops talk about leading annual conferences not accustomed to African American leadership. Laypersons relate their barrier-breaking experiences in conferences, on agencies, and in local settings.

The AAMHC collection of memorabilia, housed in the state-of-the-art archival facilities of the General Commission on Archives and History at Drew University, is growing, although slowly. It is a challenge to encourage people to release for preservation their papers, photos and materials. But, it is a project on which the AAMHC continues to work. It is important for both research and for edification to be able to look back at the reminders of the experiences of African Americans in Methodism. Our history is not the end of the story – it is a stepping stone into the future.

For over a year now, the *AAMHC Journal* has been published and distributed via e-mail. It carries articles about current happenings; historical excerpts; resources; and African American Methodists making the news. The *AAMHC Journal* is one of the ways most people have come to know about the AAMHC. Unfortunately, because of expense, it has not been widely distributed through the mail. This is one of the reasons

for this communication with you. We need your financial gifts to help us continue this vital ministry.

For two quadrennia the General Conference of the United Methodist Church, through the General Commission on Archives and History (GCAH) allocated \$100,000 to support this ministry which is related to the denomination through GCAH. However, beginning in 2017 The General Conference is no longer providing financial support. We will be receiving a significantly declining amount from the General Commission on Archives and History. In the past we have encouraged financial gifts from supporters. However, in order to continue this ministry we must receive much more substantial support to overcome the funding no longer received from The General Conference. That is why we are appealing to you at this time.

Your financial gift will help support the heart and soul of the ministry which includes the various projects such as the oral history project, the *AAMHC Journal*, the collections, the production of resources and the presentation of workshops to help local churches become more effective in their ministries of memory. For example, your gift of \$750 will support an oral history interview. Your gift of \$250 will enable the limited mailing of an issue of the *AAMHC Journal*. As you might expect, your gift also will help undergird the basic operation of the ministry which supports all of the projects.

Most importantly, recognize that a gift of any size will help our ministry to continue. We hope that you will respond to this request. We are recognized by the IRS as a not-for-profit organization and we will provide you with a statement of your contribution that you may use for tax deduction purposes. Donations may be mailed to AAMHC, 36 Madison Ave, P.O. Box 127 Madison, NJ 07940.

Questions may be directed to Carol Travis, Executive Assistant, at 973-408-3862.



*An African American soldier in Union uniform with wife and daughters between 1863 - the year of the Emancipation Proclamation - and 1865.*

# Reparative Justice

*By Elaine Parker Adams*

The Center for the Healing of Racism took a busload of members and friends to visit Whitney Plantation (Wallace, LA) and St. Joseph Plantation (Vacherie, LA) one weekend this spring. Riding down the interstate, Executive Director Cherry Steinwender did not limit the focus of her passengers to the plantations of the Deep South. She shared the film—“Traces of the Trade: a Story from the Deep North,” the story of the De Wolf family, Rhode Islanders that were one of the largest slave-trading families in U. S. history. This film follows current heirs of the DeWolf fortune as they retrace the Triangle Trade from New England to Africa to the Americas. The film presents provocative ideas about the roles of the north and the south in sustaining this American tragedy.

Katrina Browne, the filmmaker, states that she and her colleagues “wanted to ask the question: What is our responsibility?” It was not long before the dialogue on reparations glided to the surface in the film and on the bus. How does one correct the injustices of slavery—the economic exploitation, the horrific physical and mental abuse, and the brutal vindictiveness that lingered long after slavery ended? The idea of reparations for the evils endured by the slaves and their ancestors is not new. The monetary debt is huge when one considers that the unfulfilled promised forty acres and a mule payment to former slaves would have been worth “6.4 trillion in today’s dollars.” (Roots: a History Revealed television series)

Black Methodists have long been involved in the slavery reparation efforts. Henry Louis Gates reports in *The Root* (January 7, 2013) that twenty black ministers met with General W.T. Sherman and Secretary of War Edwin Stanton in 1865 and proposed the allocations of forty acres. The mules were war surplus thrown in by Sherman. The meeting represented a historically significant step on the part of the government to include blacks in negotiating their post-war future. Participating black Methodists included: William Bentley, Charles Bradwell, William Gaines, Jacob Godfrey, John Johnson, Glasgow Taylor, and Robert N. Taylor, all of Andrew’s Chapel, Savannah, GA, and James Lynch their presiding elder. (*New York Daily Tribune*, February 13, 1865, p. 5) Although President Abraham Lincoln approved the field order, it was later overturned by President Andrew Johnson, his successor.

Other types of reparations have also been proposed over the years. Financial demands have been common, such as the \$500 million proposed by James Forman of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee in a 1969 Black Manifesto. In 1989, Detroit City Councilman Ray Jenkins asked for the establishment of a \$40 billion federal education fund supporting black college and trade school students. The National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America (N’COBRA) insists that an apology is required, but insufficient—there must be material forms of reparation. N’COBRA is flexible about the forms—suggesting cash payments, land grants, support for community and economic development, scholarships, educational media and textbooks, historical monuments and museums, refinement of the legal system, and health relief.

U.S. Representative John Conyers, Jr. first introduced legislation in 1989 urging the establishment of a commission to acknowledge “the fundamental injustice, cruelty, brutality and inhumanity of slavery” and recommend appropriate remedies. Conyers resubmits his bill in every session of Congress, hoping for a vote. Meanwhile, Americans need to consider the issue and construct careful responses. What do you believe would achieve reparative justice for the unpaid service and relentless suffering of African Americans in this country? “Never thought about it” is not an acceptable answer for blacks or whites. Be aware that obtaining reparations won’t be easy. Many white Americans feel that their families were not involved in slavery and that they therefore have no obligations to African Americans. (Note: Following the Civil War, Andrew Chapel was transferred by the Southern Methodists to the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church. Today, it is known as Saint Paul CME Church.)

*Elaine Parker Adams (epadams@aol.com) is author of “The Reverend Peter W. Clark: Sweet Preacher and Steadfast Reformer.”*



*An 1868 sketch by A. R. Waud illustrates the difficulties faced by the Freedmen’s Bureau, caught between white planters on one side (left) and emancipated slaves on the other (right). The bureau was established in 1865 after Union general William T. Sherman issued his Field Order No. 15, which called for the resettlement of freedpeople on confiscated lands.*

*Photo Credits: Page 1, All photos, courtesy of the family of Esau and Janie Jenkins. Contact Ms. Elaine Jenkins, [ejenkins@qbhm.org](mailto:ejenkins@qbhm.org), for more information; Page 2, 100 year old book, *Methodism and the Negro* written by Isaac Lemuel Thomas, donated by the family of the late Rev. Irvin C. Lockman.*