

# History of Black Churches in Fayette MO

by **Tim Jackman; Leadership Board - St.Paul UMC**

There are 3 historically and predominantly Black churches in Fayette. This is not to say that these churches are totally African American in membership or that Black people are not members of some predominantly white churches. But, a sad fact of history, churches used to be more racially segregated and there are three churches in Fayette that are historically and still predominantly African American congregations.



Some slave owners taught the enslaved people a slanted version of Christianity that emphasized subservience and even excused harsh treatment. But many of the slaves somehow heard and absorbed the whole Christian message in spite of this, and found in Christianity a source of hope and strength. The Black church became a foundational institution in their society. As one official in the United Methodist Church has said, one reason the Black Church grew is that it was in many ways all that people of color had to pull them together and grant them dignity and a place in society and it became a place of faith and truth.

Howard County was organized in 1816. Churches of many kinds followed rather quickly.



Depending on how you calculate, Second Baptist seems to be the oldest historically Black congregation in town. It began as part of First Baptist which was established in 1839; apparently black and white members were worshipping together. That early, slavery was in force so it might have been a matter of masters and slaves. But people of both races were worshipping together there.

In 1869 after slavery was over but other racial barriers were going up, the black members of First Baptist became a separate church, called Second Baptist. It seems to have met at the corner of East Davis and Louisiana for a while. It moved to the present site at 309 E Hackberry St., near the Lincoln School site, in 1883. There were 155 people who formed that initial Second Baptist Church.

Second Baptist is presently affiliated with the Missionary Baptist movement which had its genesis in the 1880s, and included a high number of former slaves. Today Second Baptists is a member of Mt. Zion District of Missionary Baptists.

St. Paul UMC is another church that was formed before the Civil War. But whereas Second Baptist grew out of another Baptist congregation in the Fayette community, the church that is now St Paul was the original Methodist church out of which the Current Linn Memorial UMC grew.

A Methodist congregation has worshiped on the corner of Davis and Mulberry Streets in Fayette, MO, since 1856. The structure was built on land donated by John Ewin and used by the congregations, which are now St. Paul and Linn Memorial. It is estimated that the cost of the wooden frame church was \$2,500. Bishop Pierce of Georgia officially dedicated the building on September 21, 1856.

This church was originally known as Burton's chapel. Both black and white worshippers used the first frame building. It isn't clear whether black and white parishioners were worshipping together or two groups were sharing a building, but indications are that they worshipped together. Again, in 1856 slavery was still legal and it is possible that white members were simply bringing slaves to church but also possible that people of both groups put aside differences to worship together.



After 1869 (some records indicated this may have occurred in 1874), the structure became the property of the present St. Paul congregation. The congregation kept the name "Burton's Chapel" for some time. The white Methodists moved up the hill to the Central Methodist College campus to form Centenary Church, later to be known as Linn Memorial. (Centenary became Linn Memorial in the 1920s.) Classes had begun at Central Methodist in 1857 and this new church seems to have been associated with the college from the beginning. The congregation that stayed at the corner of Davis and Mulberry Streets became all black, or virtually all black, maintaining the name "Burton's Chapel." In 1870, the congregation became affiliated with the Methodist Episcopal Church. Before that time, it had been a part of the Methodist Episcopal – South.

So by 1875 Burton's Chapel had become an essentially a black congregation. In 1870 the congregation had joined the Methodist Episcopal Church, and Burton's chapel kept that affiliation. Despite being a predominantly black congregation, St. Paul opted to remain Methodist Episcopal in spite of some prejudice within that larger denomination.

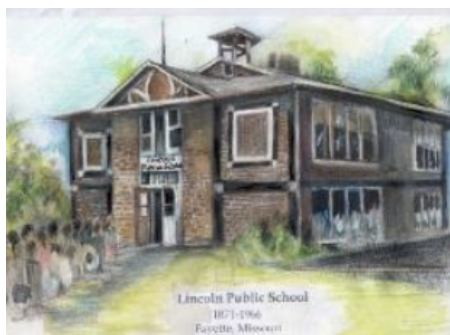
The congregation continued to worship in the wooden frame building until it was totally destroyed by fire the early morning hours of Nov. 1, 1905. According to an article from the Democrat-Leader dated Nov. 2, 1905, the origin of the fire may have been, "The work of an incendiary, while others say it was a Halloween joke." There had been insurance on the building for \$1,500 and contents for \$500.

The members then decided to build a structure that would not burn so easily. They designed and constructed a large rock church on the same site. In order to build the structure, members and friends of the church had to quarry rocks and sand from a nearby creek bed using teams and wagons to haul the materials to the construction site. It was officially opened on September 23, 1906, during the pastoral leadership of Rev. W.J. DeBoe.



According to a newspaper account, "The big two-day celebration by the colored population was pulled off in great style. There were several train loads from neighboring towns." The occasion was noted as a success "from every point of view." The church was described as a "magnificent new stone house" and "one of the handsomest in Central Missouri. Sometime after this, the name changed to St. Paul Methodist Episcopal Church.

The Rock Church was so large that it was the host church numerous times for annual conferences in the old Central West Conference/Central Missouri Conference. The first annual session held at St. Paul was March 20, 1895 (9<sup>th</sup> annual session of Central Missouri Conference). The 23<sup>rd</sup> annual session was held at the church from March 31 through April 5, 1909. Minutes from the April 1909 session contained expressions of gratitude stating that, "Mayor Quinn of this city; President Stout of Howard Payne College; Dr. Tadlock, pastor of Centenary Methodist Episcopal Church-South; Prof. Andrew Cravens of the City school, have so heartily and kindly welcomed us to their city and churches.

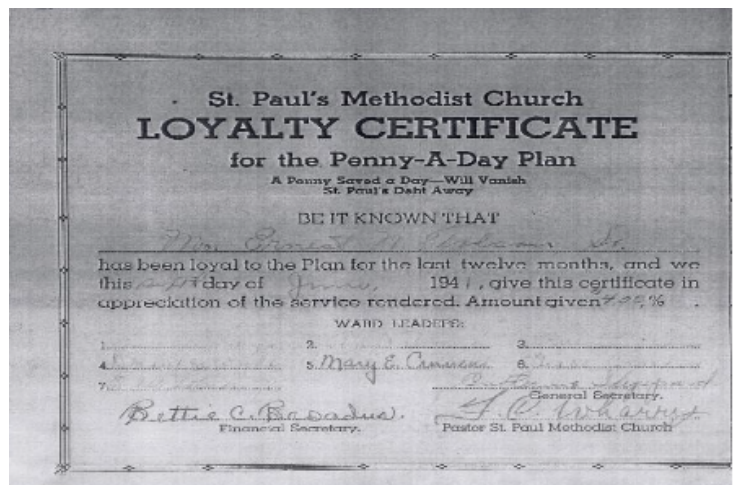


The histories of St. Paul and Second Baptist came together in 1923 when the first Lincoln School burned and students finished the term by meeting in the two churches. The school was rebuilt and used until 1966.

Structural problems in the Old Rock Church began to show up in the 1940s, and finally a large crack on the west side of the structure made the building unsafe. The issue was the foundation was not strong enough to support the weight of the rock walls. According to an article in the Fayette Democrat-Leader dated Friday, May 21, 1948, work began with a wrecking crew tearing down the old church on May 10, 1948.

“Workmen under the direction of Phillip E. Snider of Denver, and with the aid of a wrecker from Deatherage and Moon, have worked daily. For the week ending May 14, Mr. Snider reports that 93 different men worked a total of 1643 hours on the project. At the present time the work has slowed down, but more men will be employed when actual erection begins. A steel beam at the back of the church fell last Saturday, causing a minor setback. The beam left the east wall unsupported and the house behind the church was directly in line with the tottering structure. However, workmen propped up the wall and forced it to fall inward, thus avoiding damage to the neighboring property.” The article goes on to state, “The foundation for the new church is being laid. Timbers are measured for the work of rebuilding as they come down. At the present time the spire is ready to go up. Trusses for the roof are nearly all made and the platforms for the pulpit, altar and choir loft are ready to be slipped in when the cement is poured.”

Prior to the demolition of the structure, the church had been freed of debt during the pastoral leadership of Rev. W.F. Wharry with the “Penny A Day Plan.” Rev. J.O. Murphy was the pastor when the project began and ceased. Records from the 1949 conference indicate the sanctuary officially opened on Sunday, December 12, 1948. Some of the funds raised included \$2,000; plus, work donated and material on hand; and \$4,000 loaned from the Board of Home Missions and Church Extension. Also, professors and students at Central Methodist College were instrumental in assisting the church in the construction efforts.



In 1939 The Methodist Episcopal Church-North, The Methodist Episcopal Church-South and the Methodist Protestant Church merged to form The Methodist Church; in 1965 the denomination became the United Methodist Church after a merger with the United Brethren. So St. Paul is now a United Methodist church.





The current building was erected beginning with the main part of the sanctuary , financed by a penny a day campaign. From 1948 to 1956 additions and improvements were made . The current building took its shape in the 1990s when the fellowship hall, kitchen, and basement were added. So far as can be ascertained, there has never been any other structure on the present site except a church.

During the time the “Old Rock Church” was being demolished and the new church constructed, worship services were held in the auditorium of the Lincoln Public School. In essence, returning the favor of the sharing after the school fire in 1923.

Part of the mission of St. Paul is to connect with people in sensible ways. In more recent years the church membership and worship attendance has become more diverse in terms of race.

Besides being an active church among its members and other churches, St. Paul has also been involved in community outreach. During the late 1930s and early 1940s, the church’s pastors and members spearheaded efforts to purchase Liberty Park in the New Addition of Fayette, as a ball field and recreation place for the town’s black residents.



As the winter days dwindled and spring approached, Rev. Larry Moffet, Earl Turner and the Young Men’s Chorus, along with others, became involved in a community project in August 1981, clearing and mowing part of the Fayette City Cemetery. This part of the cemetery where a number of Blacks were buried had been neglected for years. The project attracted the attention and support of countless interested persons and was not completed until 1982. Through the leadership of Rev. Moffet, and commitment from other supporters including the Second Baptist Missionary Baptist Church, today, the cemetery remains under perpetual care.

St. Paul and its sister church, Lewis Chapel (locate in nearby Glasgow), coordinated a two-day chartered bus trip to Memphis, TN, June 27-28, 2003. Over the years nursing home visits, visits to sick and shut-in, Christmas gift baskets, donations to local Toy-For-Tots, Holiday House, etc., have been a key part of the ministry.

St. Paul's pastors have been continually active in the local Ministerial Alliance group. A great deal of outreach to the community is extended through this effort. In addition, the St. Paul members have assisted in the local food bank, Habitat for Humanity and highway clean-up projects with Linn Memorial. Also, on June 23, 2000, the church started and has continued with the The Outreach newsletter as a way to stay connected to all members, friends and former pastors. In 2014, the newsletter name was changed to The Connection, and remains a key means of communication today with members and friends.

The membership is not only faithful, but steady and strong, but diverse from an ethnic perspective. We just completed a future strategic and visioning session with the district leaders.



The third predominantly black church in Fayette is Holy Ground Christian Tabernacle on Rt. E (the extension of Davis Street). It is also the newest. It is affiliated with the Church of God in Christ and with Henry Page Ministries in San Diego. It represents yet another US religious tradition; while Second Baptist is evangelical, and St. Paul is Protestant, Holy Ground is Holiness Pentecostal. Pentecostalism is a movement that started in 1901 on the west coast and also has ties to the Holiness movement of the late 1800s.

Basically Holy Ground began in the vision of one man, Elder Richard Charles Page who formed the Fayette congregation in May of 1993, making it now almost 25 years old. Before that Elder Page had lived and worked in the state of California where the Pentecostal movement began. The first building, the present fellowship hall, was completed in 1996. The current sanctuary followed.

Holy Ground was predominantly Black from its inception; it began with 7 people and has grown. The first pastor, RC Page, passed in November 2007; his widow is still active in the congregation. Almost a year later the current pastor, Denise Johnson, was installed as pastor and preacher. She is the daughter of the founding pastor, carrying on what her father started.

Today the three churches are integral parts of the Fayette community. They represent a piece of history often overlooked but very much among us. They stand as witness to faith and community and hope. They stand as testimony to a spirit of overcoming and persistence and strength. They stand as beacons to a future of Godly hope and a dream of true community.

Editor's Note: Many thanks to Tim Jackman for this valuable and informative history. JYM