

Pastor of Talcott Street Church Charges Hartford Displays More Race Discrimination Than Atlanta

Rev. James A. Wright Declares Negro Seeks Only Right to Live

By DORIS CUREAU

"There is more racial discrimination to the square inch in Hartford than in Atlanta, Ga.," the Rev. James A. Wright, D. D., declares when he discusses the gain, or perhaps lack of gain, made by the Negro in Hartford since the establishment of his church, the Talcott Street Congregational Church, 115 years ago next Tuesday.

Dr. Wright, pastor of the 115-year-old church for 25 years, a graduate of Howard University and Harvard Divinity School, can be very eloquent on the subject of discrimination against Negroes. "The Negro cries for the opportunity to live. The blood and tears of his forebears have watered the soil of this country. He has never betrayed this country," Dr. Wright can tell you as he demands with fervor.

"Give the Negro a job and he won't strike out of loyalty to his country!"

Sees Whites Unfair

He deplores the unfairness that prompts white men to pick up the Negro derelicts on the poorest streets and say, "This is the black man!"

"Why don't they come to our churches or visit our doctors and dentists and say 'This is the black man?'" he will cry.

But his is a voice crying in the wilderness of Hartford it would seem and Dr. Wright has the more immediate needs of his people at heart. He must see that the needy are fed and clothed and that the traditional work of the church started more than a century ago, towards higher standards of living and education for colored people in Hartford, goes on.

The church, formed in 1819 under the protecting wing of Central Congregational Church, in its infancy helped to maintain a district school, the only place then where colored children could learn to read and write.

Fought Slavery

Many anti-slavery meetings were held in the church and were addressed by noted abolitionists, among them William Lloyd Garrison. Offerings were taken the last Sunday in each month for the Anti-Slavery Society and finally, when the Civil War broke, 32 men went from the Talcott Street Church to fight for the Union. One member of the church today, Fred W. Seymour, is a member of the Sons of the American Revolution on the score of his ancestor who went away to fight in that war.

From its small but significant beginnings, the Talcott Street Church has developed into a strong and independent institution. It has 209 members drawn from 175 families, a church school of 165 pupils and a young people's organization numbering 50.

East Side Work

It carries an active Sunday program throughout the year and a week-day school and vacation church school designed to meet the needs of what the church workers, themselves, call their "East Side Work." The East Side work is "not exactly missionary work," but rather "a labor of love" among people of their own race living in less favored circumstances on the "east side of Main Street."

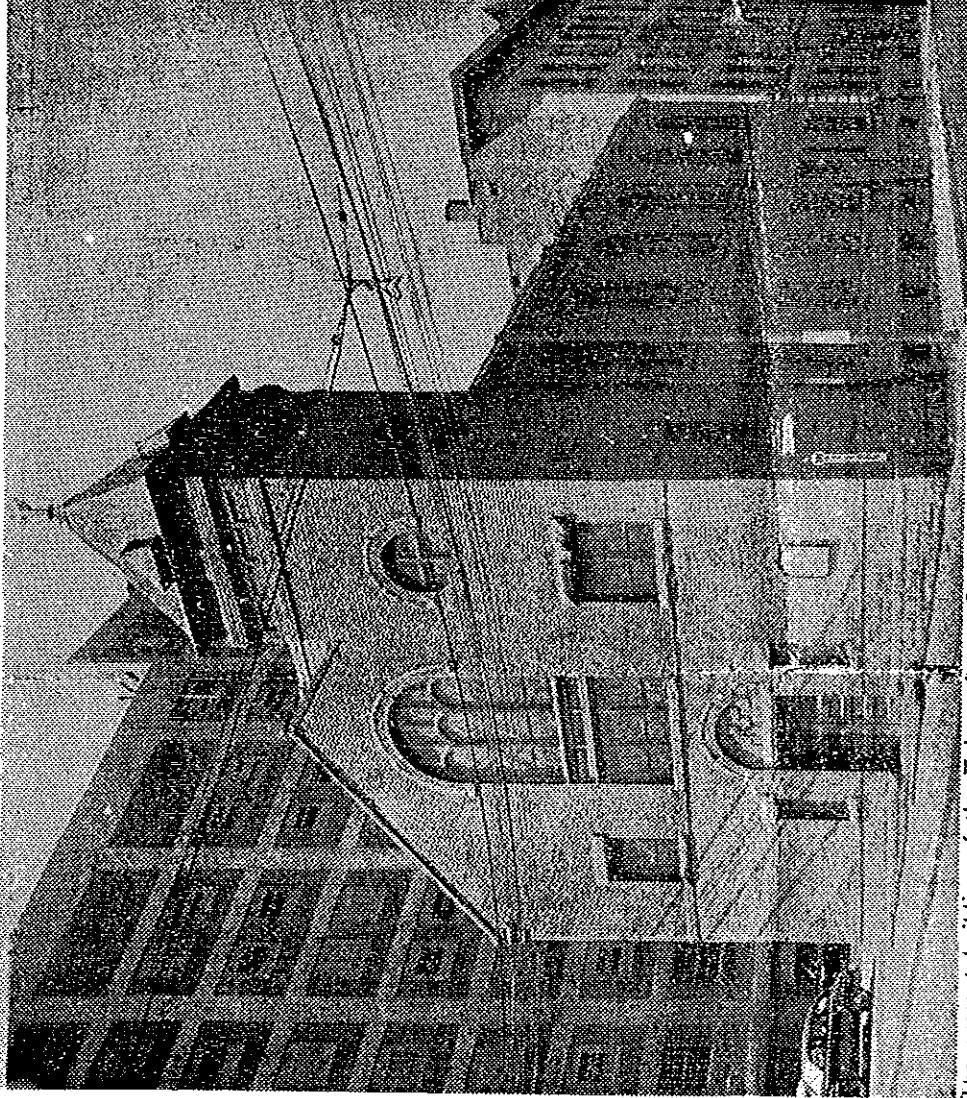
The success of its program and the position the church has won in the community is indicated by the place that Dr. Wright during his 25 years' pastorate has filled in community life. He is the only colored preacher to serve as moderator of the Hartford Association of Congregational - Christian Churches, an office he held in 1924, and was at one time vice-president of the Ministers' and Rabbis' Association. He is now vice-president of the Congregational Club of Connecticut, and a member of the State Prison Teachers Association.

To Teach at Rosemary

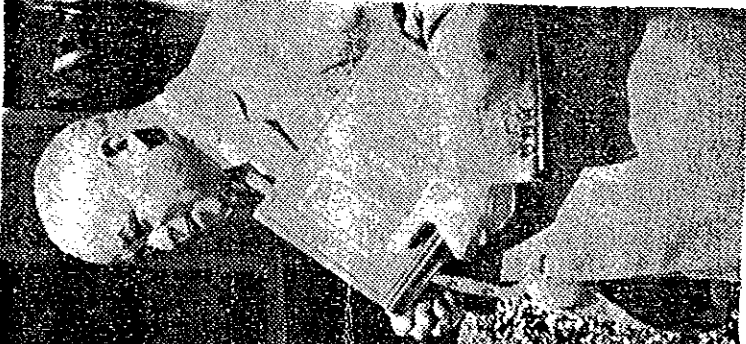
June 24 he will leave to teach a course in World Friendship at the Youth Conference to be held at Rosemary Hall in Greenwich and will be the first Negro to teach in the faculty of that conference. He has taken a leading part in the organization of his own people. For nine years he was president of the Ministerial Alliance of colored preachers in Hartford, and is now treasurer of the informal conference of Colored Congregational Ministers in New England and vicinity.

Story of Pennington

The church's commitment to the cause of its people probably



The present building of the Talcott Street Congregational Church was dedicated in December, 1906. The site at the corner of Market and Talcott Sts., however, dates back to 1826 when it was bought by the congregation and paid for by subscription.



DR. JAMES A. WRIGHT

The Rev. James A. Wright, D. D., has served the Talcott Street Church as pastor for 25 years. A graduate of Howard University and the Harvard Divinity School, he is a life member of the Harvard Club and perpetuates his college sports activities in the tennis he still plays in Kenev Park. He also was a member of the Seminary baseball team.

lost him forever when he ran away.

"He was poorly and insufficiently clad. All he had for provision was a half pound of Indian corn bread. He knew nothing of routes or roads. Stupefied by day in hiding, he walked during the night and his only guide, the pole star, was often shrouded in clouds. Storms beat upon him and cold chilled and cramped him in sleep. For food he found a few acid apples and a few grains of corn, unhusked and unground, slowly and painfully masticated.

Caught by Negro

"In his weakness and weariness he wondered if he would ever secure freedom, but chose death rather than return to bondage. Twice was he pursued but escaped capture. Finally he was arrested by a Negro detective looking for rewards.

"This perhaps saved his life for he was on the verge of starvation and collapse from exhaustion and exposure.

"James claimed he was a free-man formerly owned by a Georgia trader. Smallpox broke out, he said, his owner died and several of his gang. The survivors dispersed and no one wanted to claim him."

"The detective and his cohorts moved off to a respectful distance. He was detained during the day in isolation but had his first full meal in four days.

"Early on the sixth day he was on the road again and came to a log' pile and, the tender being an elderly unprotected female, he ventured to inquire where he was, and learned with joy that he was within the borders of Pennsylvania.

Saved by Quaker

"He asked where he might find employment and was directed to a home about three miles away owned by a Quaker who would

chanced to be the son of his former master.

Freedom Purchased

Technically and legally the redeemed minister was still the chattel of his southern master and consequently he always lived in the shadow of doubt of his own security. It was to remove this cause for uneasiness that John Hooker negotiated with his owner for his purchase and subsequent freedom.

Dr. Pennington's deep-seated interest in other slaves caused him to call a meeting May 1841 in his own church out which sprang the first mission work to Africa and church aid "Negroes in America. Dr. Soule also gives the Negro pastor's pioneer mission work partial credit for initiating a part of the work now carried on by the well known Congregational American Board of Missions.

Three times while serving the local church Dr. Pennington went to Europe, Dr. Soule recounts. It was on his second trip, after he had earned a name for able and eloquent preaching in the call for human rights, that the University of Heidelberg conferred upon him the honorary degree, Doctor of Divinity, the first time in that ancient university's history that such an honor was conferred upon one of the Negro race. He served the Negro church and community long and well beyond one time. Dr. Soule states, Dr. Pennington signed the license of a ministerial candidate, who of 61.

Story of Pennington

The church's commitment to the cause of its people probably had its earliest beginnings in the life and works of its most distinguished pastor, the Rev. James W. C. Pennington, D. D., who rose from the status of runaway slave to a man of fame not only on this continent but in Europe.

Dr. Sherrod Soule, former superintendent of the Congregational-Christian Church of Connecticut and now their historian, has ably reviewed the life of this man. Let him tell you the story of the slave, James Pembroke, born