



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

CONNECTICUT HISTORICAL COMMISSION

September 9, 1994

Lang, Durham & Co.
753 Capitol Avenue
Hartford, CT 06106

RE: Faith Congregational Church

I have read the script for the video on Faith Congregational Church and have listed a few comments below and enclosed several items that may be of interest. Likely, you are already aware of these items, but if not they could be of help.

The reference to Holdridge Primus as "a successful grocery store owner" is in error. There is nothing concrete to substantiate this to my knowledge. There was mention in a news item at the time of his death that he may have been a "silent" partner in the Seyms grocery store, but there is no proof of this. Unless you have come across information that I am not aware of it would be historically accurate to only refer to his long tenure as an employee of this store.

There is a reference in the script to the difficult period "for men and women of color" after the Civil War and listed the growth of the Ku Klux Klan as a major reason for this. To my knowledge the Klan had limited impact in New England so far as intimidation goes. Prejudice and discrimination played major roles as you have noted. This led to the exclusion of Blacks from most sources of meaningful employment as European immigrants came into Connecticut and took over manufacturing and other jobs.

There is a reference to fundraising on May 3, 1960 where "a group of 25 two-man teams" raised \$43,000. I am not familiar with this activity, but were the 50 persons all men, or were there some women as well? If there were women involved it might be well to change this wording to "teams of two" or something of this nature.

I am not familiar with the World War I through World War II era for the church. Mark Jones, State Archivist, whose office is at the Connecticut State Library (566-5650) has done some significant research on Hartford's Blacks for this period. Whether he can supply any information regarding the church I cannot say, but he may have photographs of Hartford Blacks enlisting as soldiers.

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AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER

You asked for possible names of individuals for the 1840's-1860's period who were members of the church. James Mars, Primus, and Augustus Washington are already noted. I would also suggest:

Ann Plato

Plato wrote a book of poetry in 1841. Pennington wrote a preface to this volume and noted that she was a member of the church. She was a teacher in one of the two schools for Blacks, but taught at the one at the Methodist Church on Elm Street. Her book of poems was included in the Connecticut display at the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia in 1876. (See some of the items enclosed. I believe that the Connecticut Historical Society has a copy of her book)

Rebecca Primus

Rebecca Primus (later Thomas) was apparently associated with the church from the time she was born (1836) until her death in 1932. She was one of its Sunday School teachers, and her class in the early 1900's was nicknamed "Becky's Boys." This information comes from several senior citizens I interviewed some twenty years ago. They also told me that she was hard of hearing toward the end of life and that the minister gave her copies of his sermons so that she could follow along. She is pictured in the 1922 photograph of the members in front of the church. Rebecca taught in Maryland for 1865-1869. Geer's City Directory for Hartford notes that in 1870 she was the church's assistant superintendent of the Sabbath School. From that year until she died in 1932 her name appears in Geer's as holding some official position in the church. I do not believe anyone else has that record of service up until that time. She spanned the era of Pennington to that of Rev. Wright.

Charles Mitchell

The Mitchell family is listed in Geer's throughout the 1850's-1880's as holding positions in the church. This was mostly a William and a Ralph Mitchell. Charles may have been related to them and Charles' name comes up in some of the letters written by Rebecca Primus and Addie Brown (at the Connecticut Historical Society) that makes me think he was associated with the church. According to several sources I have read he worked for the Hartford Courant and The Liberator. He served with the all-Black 55th Massachusetts Regiment during the Civil War, and in 1866 was elected to the Massachusetts State Legislature.

One person you might want to mention in the script, although of a much later era, is Laura Wheeler Waring, who was the daughter of Rev. Wheeler and I suppose active in the church. She became an artist in her own right and is well known in African-American History. I also found a reference in my notes to an article on the church that was in the Hartford Courant of 3/26/1906.

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A few enclosed are from notes that I have on file. These may be of no interest or help to you, or you may already be aware of them:

Addie Brown's Letters - some references for 1865-1867 of activities at the church.

Information from Records at Congregational House - includes references to men serving in the Civil War and World War I. The Congregational House is located in Hartford and I took these notes some twenty years ago.

Celebration - This small notice was in a scrapbook (p.64) kept by Amos Beman and part of the Johnson Collection at the Beinicki Library at Yale. Also from a Beman scrapbook (p.80) is a reference to **First of August At Hartford** and the role that the church played in this event. Before, during, and for a few years after the Civil War, some northern Black communities refused to celebrate July 4th because of slavery in the South. Instead, August 1 was selected as a holiday because this was the date that England ended slavery in its territories in the 1830's.

I hope that this is of some help to you.

Sincerely,

David O. White
Museum Director