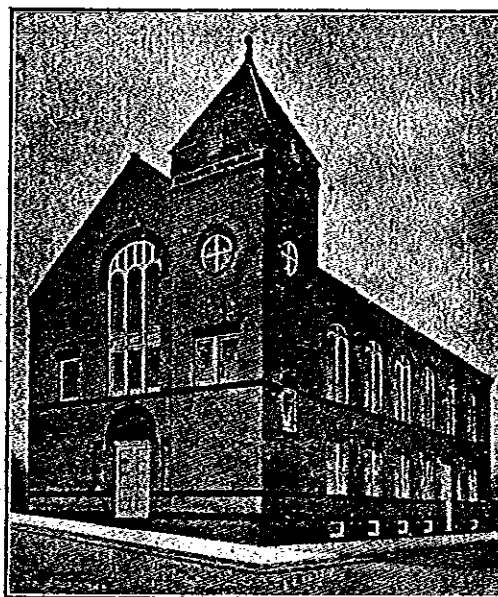


TOP

1826

1944

MORTGAGE BURNING
of the
TALCOTT STREET CONGREGATIONAL
CHURCH



Talcott and Market Streets

Hartford. Conn.

Thursday, October 19, 1944

A BRIEF HISTORICAL SKETCH

Talcott Street Congregational Church has long stood as a beacon light in the city of Hartford. Its history is an epitome of the colored people of Hartford replete with struggle for higher things, sacrifices for homes, education and higher standards of living, standing squarely for the standards of American Democracy and the standards of the Master. From its very beginning it has been closely identified with every movement of uplift and progress.

From its very beginning the work and worship has been carried on "according to the faith and order of Congregational Churches and has never been divorced from education, morality and good character" as helps to pure religion. The property has remained in the hands of the same group and has been used for the same purposes.

This Church had its beginning in November 1819 when the people of colour, tiring of the custom of being assigned seats in the galleries of the white churches, began to worship by themselves. They assembled on the Sabbath in the Conference Room of the First Church of Christ (Center Congregational) with the Rev. Asa Goldsborough, a person of colour and of the Baptist persuasion serving them as Preacher.

In April 1820 a meeting was held by the managers of the Hartford Sunday School Union, being the desire of the coloured people, and it voted to establish a Sunday School exclusively for people of colour. The expense was to be paid from funds of the Sunday School Union. Mr Lyman Coleman, then an instructor in the Grammar School, was appointed Superintendent. A room was secured at the foot of State Street belonging to the estate of the late Samuel Danforth. The following month which was May 1820, the school was established and they began also to hold their Sunday services in this room instead of the room belonging to the First Church of Christ. These good folk possessed the true New England idea—a school house and a Church. The first district school was held in the basement of the old Church in 1829 and continued when teachers could be obtained until 1856 when the children were transferred to the Brown Stone School on Pearl Street.

On May 11, 1826 a meeting was held by the coloured people and at their request several white friends from other societies were present to assist in the organization of the society according to law. The following articles of association were submitted, approved and signed:—

"Whereas it is revealed in the Holy Scriptures, that it is the will of God, that men should worship Him in public assemblies, and especially on the holy Sabbath, we the undersigned, desirous of enjoying this privilege as a distinct people and of enjoying the blessings incident to an ecclesiastical society and of preparing the way for others of our depressed nation

to enjoy like blessings, do hereby associate and form ourselves into a religious association and corporate body for the purpose aforesaid we and our associates to be known and called by the name of the African Religious Society of Hartford."

At a meeting held May 31, 1826 the following resolutions were offered:

"Whereas many coloured people of the city feel a laudable and pious zeal to establish and perpetuate a distinct worshipping congregation and have for a number of years past maintained the public worship of God, stately among themselves, and have procured by the aid of their friends a suitable room for that purpose, and have also for a number of years past in the same room have been favored by the Sabbath School instruction, and whereas they are now liable to be deprived of the room of which they have heretofore occupied as a place of worship and instruction and whereas they in common with their friends who have interested themselves most in their welfare are of the opinion if they possessed a suitable house for worship and schools more would be induced to come under the care of the gospel and the instruction imparted at the Sabbath and District Schools;—with these views and from these considerations they have been induced to make an appeal first to those of their coloured residents in this town and secondly, to the benevolent citizens of Hartford, generally for aid in erecting a suitable house of worship to include accommodations for a District and Sabbath School, to be owned and occupied by the African Religious Society of Hartford. In pursuance of which the society has purchased a lot of land on Talcott Street which is about 50 feet by 38 feet on which they desire to build a brick house, estimate to cost with land \$2,500, for the purpose of the aforesaid as a sufficient sum shall be subscribed."

It was understood and agreed to by the members of the African Religious Society that within six months after the construction of the church if for any reason any member desires he was entitled to the amount subscribed. After that time it was to become the property of the society.

On application a warrant was issued in due form by Seth Terry, Esq., Justice of the Peace to warn a meeting to be held on the 17th of June 1826, at which time the following named officers were elected: Prince Swan, Moderator; Mason Freeman, Clerk; Joseph Cooke, Prince Swan, William Mason, Society's committee for the ensuing year. They were the first officers of the church.

At an adjourned meeting held June 24, 1825 the building committee was appointed consisting of Joseph Cooke, William Mason, Ishmael Magira, Prince Swan, Stephen Spencer, Cybrian Nichols and Joseph Gilbert. The last three were whites as also Deacon L.

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J. Brown, Deacon Seth Terry, and Rev. Mr. Davis, who were present at the meeting. Among the active members not already mentioned were Aaron Jacobs, T. W. Skeen, Primus Babcock, Jere Asher, Henry Foster, John Blackston, Thomas Wells, George Garrison, William W. Daniels, Edmund Swere, Windsor Gardener.

On March 14th, 1833 we note with interest that a lecture on Slavery was held in the African Religious Society's meeting house. It was given by Arnold Buffam, an ex-President of the New England Anti-Slavery Society. A collection was taken up in behalf of the Society which amounted to \$43.49.

On August 28, 1833 the Church was duly organized and recognized as a Church of Christ according to the faith and order of the Congregational Churches. Rev. Dr. Joel Hawes of the First Church and the Rev. C. C. Vanarsdalen of the Second Church officiating. The records state that the members came from the First Church and other Churches in the vicinity.

In 1839 the name was changed to the First Hartford Colored Congregational Church. The Rev. E. R. Tyler was pastor. He was succeeded by the Rev. James W. C. Pennington, D.D. who was installed pastor July 16th, 1840. Dr. Pennington was a fugitive slave from Maryland and a very remarkable man. He escaped and came north by the underground railroad which had a station in Hartford in the vicinity of the Hooker property on Forest Street. He was bought later by John Hooker, a pillar of Center Church where the first meetings of this Church had been held, who gave him his papers of freedom on June 3, 1851. The deed of manumission on file in the Hartford town records today, was witnessed by Senator Joseph R. Hawley and Henry Francis. During his ministry here a joint missionary meeting was held in the Church on May 5, 1841 from which the first missionaries to the interior of Africa were sent. There were five in all. Two of these were colored and members of this Church. They were Mr. and Mrs. William Henry R. Wilson. Mr. Wilson was a native of Barbadoes, West Indies. Mrs. Wilson came from Brooklyn, Conn. Bishop Brownell of the Protestant Episcopal Church testified to her good character. The American Missionary Society was the outgrowth of this meeting.

Dr. Pennington made three trips to Europe while serving here. On his second trip, having earned a name for himself as an eloquent orator and preacher and fighter for human rights, the University of Heidelberg, Germany conferred upon him the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Divinity, the first time in its history that such an honor was conferred upon a Negro.

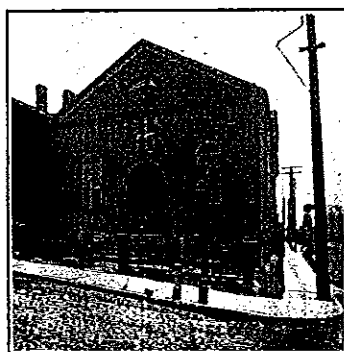
This Church has been the meeting place for many of the Anti-Slavery meetings. The intelligence and refinement, coupled with the eloquence of the visiting ministers, was an agreeable surprise to the white friends, resulting in gaining many influential friends for

the Negro. Rev. Dr. Henry Highland Garner, noted Negro preacher and orator and a number of abolitionists spoke here in the interest of Anti-Slavery William Lloyd Garrison, that great abolitionist, spoke here in 1860. 32 men went from this Church to fight for the Union during the Civil War.

On January 12, 1852 the name of the Church was changed from the First Hartford Colored Congregational Church to the 5th Congregational Church and in 1860 the name was changed to the Talcott Street Congregational Church.

In 1885 the Church extended a call to the Rev. Robt. F. Wheeler of Brooklyn, N.Y. to become teacher and pastor and in 1886 he began a ministry which lasted for 30 years, the longest in the history of the Church. During his ministry here he was successful in merging the ecclesiastical society with the Church and having the Church incorporated in 1901 according to the laws of the State of Connecticut. The present Church built in 1906 is another of his achievements. He labored long and wrought well and he is held in reverent memory by all who knew him.

On June 1, 1916, the Rev. James A. Wright, D.D. began his ministry here, coming from Haverhill, Mass., where he served the Zion Congregational Church as student pastor. Under his leadership the Church has grown spiritually, numerically and financially. A new Austin Pipe Organ has been installed and paid for. New hymnals bought, the Church redecorated inside and out, the heating plant overhauled and oil burners installed and the Duplex system of finance introduced. Junior and Juvenile Choirs organized. One of the great accomplishments of the present pastorate is the East Side Work which is operated through the Daily Vacation Bible School and the Week Day School carrying the influence of the Church into the homes. The liquidation of our mortgage is another step toward helping us to be more effective workers for the extension of the Kingdom of God through this our beloved Church.

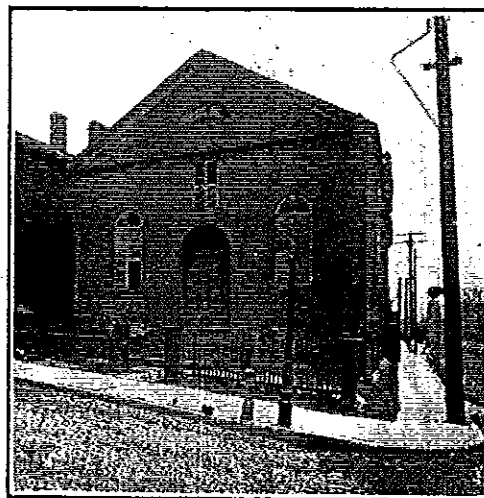


Ye Ole Meeting House

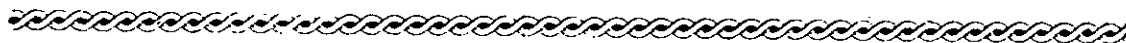
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Ye Ole Meeting House





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