



ARCHER MEMORIAL A.M.E. ZION CHURCH
321 Hayden Station Road, Windsor, Connecticut 06095

Office: 688-5225

May 9, 1997

State of Connecticut Historical Commission
Cora Murray, Historian
59 South Prospect Street
Hartford, CT 06106

Dear Cora:

I am writing in reference to having Archer Memorial A.M.E. Zion Church placed on the Freedom Trail as one of the historical sites.

It is my understanding that we must write a letter stating why we feel our church should be added to the listing on the Freedom Trail.

Our church (Archer Memorial) and our cemetery was one of the first black churches in Windsor. I have enclosed a short history about the church and its founders.

As a member of the Archer Memorial A.M. Zion Church, I am requesting a plaque be placed on this site.

Archer was the starting point on the Freedom Trail last September. Everyone in Windsor and the areas around Windsor assumed we were included in the Freedom Trail. Last year, Alfred Narcisse, a member of our church began the relay race with a brief history of Archer and Sandy Archer, one of the founders of the church.

Thank you for all of your consideration.

Sincerely, *Alfred Narcisse*

The Archer Historical Committee

ARCHER MEMORIAL A.M.E. ZION CHURCH

HISTORY

The roots of the Archer Memorial A.M.E. Zion Church go back to the early 1800's when the Reverend Hatfield was sent to the Windsor community to serve a population of black residence through missionary work. Under Reverend Hatfield's direction, camp meetings were held in the pines on Pink Street, presently known as Hayden Station Road. Two other ministers, Reverends Pane and Jacob Johnson, followed Reverend Hatfield to continue to hold camp meetings through the late 1800's. In April of 1887 this was a significant year in the history and formation of the church. As a response to the request of attendees of the camp meetings, Reverend Chauncy Douglass and Reverend Mr. Bell of Hartford met at the Windsor Town Hall for the purpose of formally organizing the first African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church in Windsor, Connecticut.

The members of the newly formed church were mainly from three neighborhoods in town, Hayden Station, Cook Hill, and the center of town. It is said that these individuals were farmers, brickmakers, and a carpenter.

The original leaders of the newly formed A.M.E. Zion Church were as follows: Class Leader, Deacon Thomas Harris; Trustees, Henry Douglass, Samuel Thompson and Richard Johnson; and Steward, Theresa Anderson. The trustees later elected Samuel Thompson as treasurer, Henry Douglass as President and Daniel P. Weeks as Secretary.

The other named original member of the church who aided in the call to start this branch of Zion were, William Austin and wife, Peter Winsted and son, William Gady, Henry Caesar and wife, Albert Timms and wife, Horace Holden, Fanny Robinson, Watson Bush, James Thompson, Jane Flood, Jacob and Dilfortida Babcock, Gilbert Babcock, O. J. Elkey, the wife of trustee Henry Douglass, Mother Anderson and husband and the most senior member of the church and most well known to us today, Sandy A. Archer.

Sandy Archer, born in 1806, was considered to be a sincere Christian. Mr. Archer was born as a slave in the south. Through the underground railroad Sandy Archer escaped from his owner and came to the Windsor area where began his days of freedom. After his arrival to Windsor, Mr. Archer worked in the tobacco fields and saved enough of his earning to purchase property in the Hayden Station area.

In the late 1880's Reverend Dennis White was sent to Windsor to be the first resident pastor of the newly organized church. Although there was an organized church at this time, there still was no structure built to hold services, therefore Reverend White continued to hold camp meetings in the Pine Grove during the late 1880's and early 1890's.

In addition to not having a church structure at this time, there was no parsonage in which the new Pastor to live. On June 25, 1892, Sandy Archer and his wife Elizabeth, being mindful of

this fact, were lead to sell a plot of their land to the church for five dollars. This plot was the second house lot on the east side of Pond Road and was used to build a new parsonage for the Pastor.

In 1897 the church received another blessing. A large land owner by the name of William O. Hayden sold a parcel of land located in the Pine Grove to the trustees of the A.M.E. Zion Church for the price of one dollar. This property, being the same site where the camp meeting had been held, measured 119'W x 300'L. Shortly after acquiring this land, Mr. Fredrick Thrall donated a large sum of money to be used to build a church, which served the membership well. Rev. White, was not only a blessed minister, but was also a Master Carpenter by trade. With the help of the church members, Rev. White put his expert carpentry skills to use and built a beautiful small white church in the Pine Grove.

In 1908 Sandy and Elizabeth Archer bestowed further blessings to the church. They quit claimed another portion of their land on Pink Street (now known as Hayden Station) for an amount between one dollar and one hundred dollars for church use. In that same year Elizabeth Archer died and she was buried in the Pine Grove in an area that was designated to be used as a cemetery. On July 9, 1914, the dedicated servant, Sandy Archer died at the age of 108 and was buried beside his wife in the cemetery.

In 1915 the second resident pastor Byron Scott came to serve the membership of the A.M.E. Zion Church. He had the church moved from its original location to the land on Pink Street previously sold to the church by the Archers. It was moved by setting the church building on logs, then having it pulled by horses and rolled to the new location. After the church was moved, Reverend Scott placed a corner stone made out of cement on the southeast corner of the church and carved the inscriptions himself.

A small addition was placed on the back of the church shortly after it was moved. At this time the church was named the Archer Memorial A.M.E. Zion Church, in memory of senior member Sandy Archer.

During this same time period, the church chimney became infested with bees. In an effort to exterminate the bees with smoke, a major catastrophe occurred. The church caught fire and the roof was completely destroyed. It took the church approximately 10 years to recover and rebuild. During these 10 years, the church members tried to keep the spirit of the church alive. One member in particular, Catherine Taylor, who lived behind the church building, contributed greatly to this effort. She held church services and programs for the children at her home, as well as fund raising events. There were other members who alternated holding church services at their homes until the First Congregational Church of Windsor offered their Hayden Station chapel to Archer in order to hold services.

There were several pastors that lead the Archer membership within this 10 year span until Reverend William Durante came in the late 1930's to serve as the 16th Pastor of Archer Memorial. Under Reverend Durante's direction, the congregation worked hard to rebuild their church. Members and friends of the church, such as, George Richards, Rev. Roosevelt Scott and

Charles Henry Howard assisted in these efforts to rebuild the church. After the church was completed, Pastor Durante's two sons painted religious paintings on the interior walls of the church. Reverend Durante served as Archer's pastor for 17 years. During Reverend Durante's pastorate, Leslie Lawson, Sr. entered the ministry and from 1954 to 1956, he served as Pastor of Archer Church.

Over the next 17 years, the Archer congregation was decreasing in number and the building began to deteriorate. Even with these changes, there were several pastoral leaders who continued to guide fundraising efforts and worked with a core group of parishioners who continued to attend services.

On June 29, 1973, with the intention of building a new edifice, an additional parcel of land was purchased adjacent to the existing church property. In 1975 Reverend Claudius Williams was sent to pastor Archer and began implementing the plans to rebuild. Before these plans could be carried out, the church building that stood was condemned. The small core of members were allowed to use the First Church chapel in Hartford and the Metropolitan A.M.E. Zion Church parsonage in Hartford in order to hold services.

It was in 1981 that the present Archer structure was erected. Along with Reverend Williams, Reverend Maryann Jones, Associate Pastor of Archer and dedicated servant of God, was instrumental in insuring that the plans to build a new edifice would be brought through to fruition. Her strong commitment to Archer and her love for the Lord was then and has always been evident through her ministry and service. Several years later (1988), the Archer Missionary Society was named the Reverend Maryann Jones Missionary Society in honor of Reverend Jones.

In 1983 Reverend Bernard Richardson was sent to Archer to be the next pastor. Upon his arrival membership was scant. Through his diligence, faith and strong leadership, Reverend Richardson re-vitalized the spirit in the existing congregation and reached out to the community to draw new members. The congregation grew from a mere few to well over 100 members during his pastorate.

Reverend Richardson instituted and re-organized many church auxiliary organizations and encouraged the membership to become involved and active in their church. He also implemented many new church programs, a number of which are still in existence today.

A significant part of Archer's history lies in the cemetery grounds. As membership changed over the years, there were few who knew of the existence of the cemetery and the property surrounding it, thus the grounds had become overgrown and the cemetery could not be recognized as such.

In 1987, dedicated members of Archer took the lead in restoring the historical cemetery where Sandy Archer and other initial members of the church are buried. Members and church neighbors worked hard to bring back the original appearance of this area. At this time, Archer's historical society was formulated to revitalize and organize the history of the cemetery and the

church. Today the cemetery is enclosed with a beautiful white picket fence and has a memorial stone with the names of all who are buried there.

With a rapidly growing membership, the leaders of the church began to discuss expansion plans. Not long after, the church was notified that the State of Connecticut was planning to build a road which would cut off the church's direct access to the cemetery where Sandy Archer was buried. In addition to this, the positioning of the road would block access to the church's property beside the cemetery where the church was planning to build a new sanctuary. Reverend Richardson and designated church leaders met countless times with State Department of Transportation and Town of Windsor officials on this issue. The church did not want to sever its roots to Hayden Station Road by moving to another location in order to accommodate the church's growth.

The leadership was concerned about preserving the church's history and ensuring a future in the present location. In 1992, after the road was built, the church acquired two pieces of property from the State of Connecticut, which the State no longer needed, for \$65,000 and \$10,000 respectively.

The church had made a previous land purchase of two parcels from an adjacent property owner in October of 1991. These land acquisitions were a blessing and certainly brightened the hopes for expansions plans once again. Archer had experienced tremendous growth during Reverend Richardson pastorate. After 10 years of service to Archer he moved on to do God's work at Howard University's Andrew Rankin Chapel in Washington, D.C.

The Presiding Elder James M. Hubert of the Hartford district came to Archer to serve as the interim Pastor for one year until the succeeding pastor was named. In May of 1994 Reverend Lloyd McKenzie, Jr. was assigned as the succeeding Pastor of Archer Memorial A.M.E. Zion Church and serves as the Pastor today. Five months after Reverend McKenzie began as Pastor, the new road built by the State of Connecticut was named "Archer Road" in honor of the Sandy Archer and the rich history of the Church. The Windsor Town Improvement Committee selected this name out of 80 suggested names entered for the road naming contest. Archer's historical committee submitted the name "Archer Road" as well as two other Windsor citizens. In this same month of October, a ceremony was held by Windsor Town Council at the Archer Church in order to unveil the "Archer Road" sign.

Under Reverend McKenzie's direction, the Archer Memorial A.M.E. Zion Church continues to grow structurally, with a new vestibule recently built and beautifully kept grounds; but most importantly Archer continues to grow spiritually. Archer continues to plan for the future and we will remain mindful of those who labored before us.