

## HISTORY OF THE ARCHER MEMORIAL A.M.E. ZION CHURCH

on Hayden Station Road in Windsor, Ct.

The first minister of the Archer Memorial A.M.E. Zion Church was the Rev. Dennis Scott White, father of Edward Weeks White of 60 Danwood Road, a landscape gardener and noted poet and essayist. In the 1880's and early 1890's Rev. White conducted camp meetings in a beautiful pine grove he owned north of the intersection of Hayden Station and Pond Roads in Windsor. After the Revolutionary War a number of Black families settled in this area where a small Black population had lived for many years. In 1892 they totaled between 60 and 70. The camp meetings were held for two to four weeks in late summer and would last all day and on into the evenings. People would come from as far away as Granby, North Granby and Rockville, which was a great distance in the days before the automobile. They would all bring food and big dinners were served of home cooked specialties such as, fried chicken, baked beans, cakes, pie and lemonade. Occasionally three five-gallon cans of ice cream, one of each flavor, were picked up by horse and buggy in Hartford and after the turn of the century in Windsor Center. The ice cream having been shipped by trolley freight from the New Haven Ice Cream Company. Picnics and outings were a custom of the day and it was not unusual for ice cream to be shipped this way. As a matter of fact, the trolley companies owned parks and large groups would travel by trolley to the parks for outings. One popular trolley park was Riverside Park which is still used and well known today.

The program for the camp meetings included a male quartet of folk or jubilee singers. Sometimes they would be accompanied by a popular women missionary singer from Rockville, Mrs. Carroll. Those who came from Rockville would have to walk or go by horse and buggy until about 1896 when they could take the trolley to Warehouse Point and then walk the rest of the way or cross the Connecticut River and take a Palisado Avenue street trolley to

Hayden Station Road. By 1906 there was a vast network of street trolleys throughout the Connecticut Valley. Their removal has certainly proven to be a mistake.

Rev. Watts was a blind minister who visited them occasionally. He was a renowned speaker and would draw a great crowd. People came from as far away as Springfield to hear him. Travel from Springfield was very convenient by way of the railroad. There was even a train station on Hayden Station Road. The date of the first station is unknown, but the second one was built in 1875. A station has not existed there since 1933. In the late 1800's there were 14 to 16 trains stopping daily. The Rev. Watts would stay at the Rev. White's house and Edward White relates that he and his brother, then very young boys, would be given the task of leading him around and often were tempted to lead him astray. They were too young to appreciate his biblical expertise, apparently.

The speakers and singers sat on chairs on a platform set on the pine needles in the cosy dense grove and the congregation sat on benches, logs or on the soft fragrant pine needles.

Thanks to a large donation by Frederick H. Thrall Rev. White was able to build a church in the late 1800's. It was a small, but beautiful white church with a very attractive roof line. It stood in the woods near the old camp meeting site. The parsonage, now gone, was on the second house lot on the east side of Fond Road. Edward White remembers sitting on the front porch on occasions and watching David Ellsworth hauling logs over the sandy roadway. These logs were destined to be made into telephone poles.

For a decade in the very early 1900's the church had an annual turkey supper in the fall in the Old Windsor Town Hall. It was always a success. Town officials were always on hand and people from every corner of the town bought tickets or donated food.

Grace Babcock was the Sunday school teacher in the early 1900's and

her husband, Eldredge, was the organist. He worked for the General Electric Company, formerly the old Eddy Company, as a fireman and they lived at 1219 Palisade Avenue. Theodore H. Clapp was also a great contributor to the church.

The second resident minister of the church was the Rev. Byron Scott. He was a good Christian and a very hard working man. He had the church moved from its place in the pines down to the road in 1915. It was moved with the aid of horses and log rollers, an event which attracted a large audience. Rev. Scott put a cornerstone on the SE corner of the building that he carved out of cement himself. A small addition was put on the back of the church at this time. Town records (Vol. 75, page 122) list the trustees of the church at that time: Elected June 7, 1915, Mr. & Mrs. Daniel Scott, Mrs. Sadie Elkey, Clarence Williams, Mrs. Josephine Caesar, Mrs. Susan Holden, Charles Caesar, Mrs. Louis Caesar, Edward Chatfield, William Garrett, Henry Stelke, Gilbert Hubcock, Jacob Dilworth and George Richards.

The church caught fire and was gutted when an effort was being made to rid the chimney of a swarm of bees. While a new roof and other repairs were being made the congregation used the Congregational Church Chapel on Hayden Station Road (now torn down) until their church was serviceable. This time a simple roof was put on. This church stands today, but has deteriorated and a fund raising drive is presently underway to tear it down and build a new, larger church and community center. The pastor is now a non-resident one, the Rev. Claudius Williams.

The church was named in memory of Sandy Archer, said to be a sincere, earnest Christian and former slave who lived in a house like a modern split level that once stood opposite the church. When he died on July 9, 1914 he was 109 years old and Ella Garrett came into ownership of the property. Edward White's grandmother, Elizabeth Butler, ran a country store in the basement of the Archer house. When the house burned down she started a store

next to the church.

Back in the woods on the site of the first church there is a small cemetery where some earlier Black families are buried. Burials took place there as late as after WW2. About 20 graves are said to be there, however, only a few markers remain as they were all handmade and have deteriorated.

Baptisms were conducted in "the old pond" on the corner of Hayden Station and Pond Roads. The pond was much larger in earlier years and much, much cleaner; it was the source of supply for the Windsor Aqueduct Company. This was in use in the late 1700's for a few years. The water-logs (3" bore) were laid through the streets for 3 miles down to the bridge that crosses the Farmington River. This "old pond" was a gathering place where people sat on benches and talked and fished for trout. It was aprily, fed and the water was very cold. In those days people were completely immersed in water when they were baptized and a parishioner occasionally got cold feet and absolutely refused to go out into the icy water!

The First Church in Windsor on the Palisade Green has allowed the congregation to use its facilities for church suppers and other social events for the last few years. They hold events there to try and raise the funds necessary to build a new church. With such a rich and unique history this church must continue on in the State's first town of Windsor.

Donations would most gratefully be received. They may be sent to the Anchor Memorial A.M.E. Zion Church, c/o Mrs. Marian Williams, 373 Hayden Station Road in Windsor.

Written by: Joan Simmons 5/20/79

**Bibliography:** Edward Weeks White, son of the first minister of the church  
Ancient Windsor Ct. by Henry Stiles  
Historical Sketches by James Hayden  
The papers of Grace Clapp  
Ct. Historical Society publication 6/14/1893  
The Trolley Museum