

in celebration of the church's anniversary, members evoked its earlier days by recreating the tradition of the camp meeting on Sept. 12.

Members of the congregation also are researching the cemetery next to the church so that next spring they can mark the graves of former slaves who were buried there, Richardson said.

Most of the markers in the cemetery were handmade and have deteriorated over the years.

Tobacco brought workers

The African Methodist-Episcopal Zion denomination has existed since 1796, when a group of blacks in New York City decided to start their own church, Richardson said. The group had been attending services at a United Methodist Church which was so popular that black parishioners literally were crowded out, he said, adding that those services were segregated.

The name derives from the church's African and Methodist roots, as well as its episcopate structure, Richardson said. The name Zion was taken from that first parish in New York, he noted.

A black community is known to have existed in Hayden Station 200 years ago. Many of the first blacks were slaves who had been freed by their masters and given farmland to work.

By the 1890s a group of about 60 black families were living in the area. Some were descendants of the freed slaves and others had come to Windsor to pick tobacco.

The Archer church got started in the late 1800s, when a minister from the A.M.E. Zion denomination was sent to Windsor to do missionary work.

White was its first pastor, and he conducted camp meetings during four weeks in

efforts to rid the chimney of a beehive got out of hand, the church caught fire. Its roof was damaged and the inside gutted.

While funds were raised for repairs, parishioners met at the Congregational Church chapel on Hayden Station Road, which has since been torn down.

The repaired church, a small clapboard structure with a wooden cross, nailed over the door, stood until 1979, when it was condemned. The modest brick building where the congregation now meets was dedicated in 1983.

The denomination was active in the fight against slavery. Among its members were such notable abolitionist figures as Harriet Tubman, the runaway slave who devoted herself to leading other slaves to freedom through the Underground Railroad, Richardson said.

The Archer church itself has links to the fight against slavery.

Sandy Archer, for whom the church was named following his death in 1914, is buried in the tiny cemetery adjacent to the church. Out of approximately 20 graves, his is the only one that has a marker.

Archer, recalled in historical records as an earnest, sincere Christian, died at the age of 108. Dillsworth remembers the tale of his escape that brought to life for her a sad but important part of the country's history.

"You know, he walked all the way up here," she said.

A slave in the South, Archer escaped from his owner and traveling via the Underground Railroad, crossed the Mason-Dixon line to freedom, Dillsworth said.

"When he escaped, he had dogs come after him and all," she said. "The people who helped him told him to spread pepper behind him. That way the dogs would lose

parishioners.

Like Archer, Dillsworth's family and most others at the church in its early days came to Windsor to work the tobacco fields that were once abundant in the Hayden Station area. They were not an affluent group, she remembers.

"Those were tobacco days," she said with a sigh. "Everybody worked tobacco — mothers, fathers, kids."

Some women in the church worked as cleaning ladies in the larger houses in town — something Dillsworth refers to as "day work."

"I never did care to do day work," she said, wrinkling her nose. "I preferred tobacco."

Her mother came from Stamford and her father from Long Island. "Those days, everyone came to Connecticut because they knew they could find work here," she said.

Dillsworth started work sewing tobacco leaves for a local grower when she was 20 years old.

She remembers a much-different Hayden Station in her girlhood.

"It's changed so much you'd hardly know it was the same place," she said, shaking her head. "So many buildings have been torn down."

Hayden Station, also known as Haydensville or Haydens, was named after an English settler and was once a bustling riverfront center of commerce.

Now only the Hayden Station depot with its shops and restaurants hints at the area's history.

When Dillsworth was a girl the Hayden Station black community had its own militia, fire department, general store and, of course, church.

It was filled with door-to-door peddlers who would deliver staples such as bacon

friends say is known for her keen ability to recite poetry and scripture from memory. "You last longer that way."

The church has grown over the past few years from about 70 members to more than 100, filling the church building to capacity. Richardson, the pastor, said. The congregation is currently making plans to build a larger church on its Hayden Station Road property, he said.

The Archer congregation today is a mix of white-collar and blue-collar workers, Richardson said. "We have businessmen, teachers, workers at Pratt & Whitney — there's a real good balance."

Dillsworth was next-to-the-youngest in a family of seven children. She is the only one of those still living, but there are plenty of other family members around, many of them active in the Archer A.M.E. Zion Church. She now lives on Otee Circle with her niece.

"I don't know why I've been kept here so long," she says. "Land sakes, in a few months I'll be 100."

At nearly a century old, Dillsworth still displays an independent streak that made her decide to remain single. Although there was pressure on her to marry when she was young, she said, she ignored it.

"I don't like being like everyone else," she said. "I like being like me."

She says she has never been sorry about not marrying. "People always ask me that," she said. "Never once have I regretted it. I was always too busy having fun to get married."

Dillsworth said she considered leaving town for good when she was young. "I always thought that I could live most anywhere," she said.

But she's rarely left Windsor. "It's my hometown," she explained simply.

Windsor church's roots run deep

Parishioner's long memory brings A.M.E. Zion Church's past to life

By **DOREEN HOOD**
Journal Inquirer Staff Writer

WINDSOR — During a stroll through the glade behind the Archer Memorial A.M.E. Zion Church on Hayden Station Road, it is easy to envision the days when the Rev. Dennis Scott White, the church's turn-of-the-century pastor, conducted camp meetings there.

The meetings, attended by hundreds of parishioners, were characterized by worship, gospel-singing and picnics.

Ella Dillsworth remembers those days clearly. "Of course, I was just a kid then," the 99-year-old Dillsworth, who has been a member of the church all her life, says with a grin.

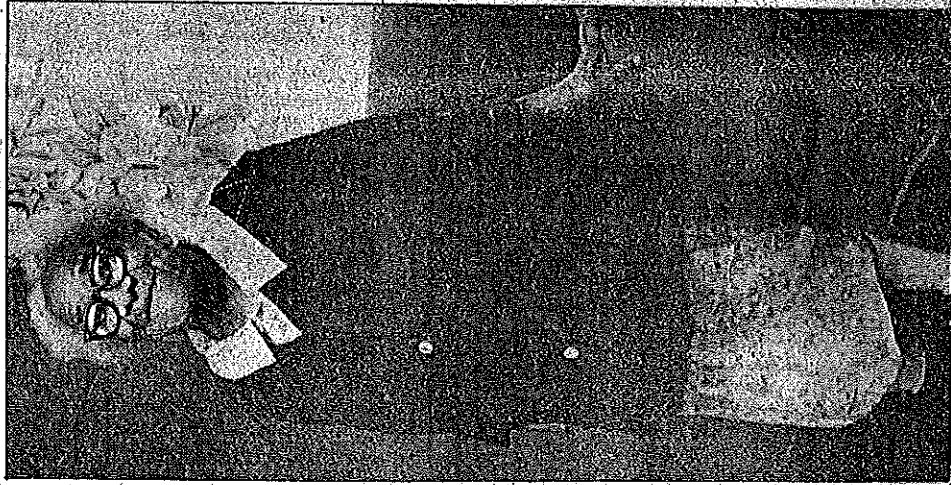
"I don't know why I've been kept here so long. Land sakes, in a few months I'll be 100."

Ella Dillsworth

Dillsworth and her family are typical of the people who have been the backbone of the parish, which is celebrating its 100th anniversary this month. Although few records exist tracing the history of the black community here, Dillsworth and others have been able to supply some valuable information.

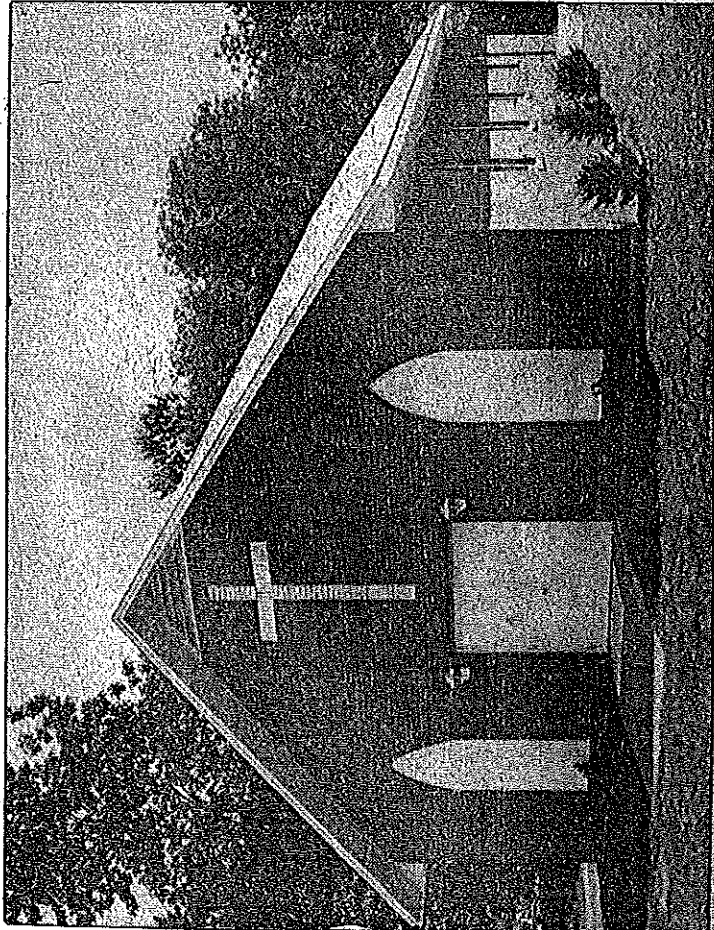
"It's so wonderful to have someone around who actually remembers," church member Cynthia Wineglass said of Dillsworth, who is her aunt.

"There's a real interesting history here," said the Rev. Bernard Richardson, a former psychologist who now is the church's pastor and a teacher at Southern Connecticut State University.



Ella Dillsworth and the Archer Memorial A.M.E. Zion Church of Windsor.

John Dunn / Journal Inquirer



the late summer. Hundreds would gather to sit on pine benches and listen to folk music and missionary songs.

The congregation built its first church with a donation by Frederick H. Thrall, a prominent local farmer.

The small white church, named after a man who had escaped from slavery, stood on what is now Pond Road, not far from the camp meeting site. In the early 1900s, when

Archer slept in barns on his way to Windsor, where he became active in the church that took his name, Dillsworth said.

About his days of enslavement, she added, Archer was silent. "He would never talk about that."

A bustling area of commerce The tobacco industry has played an important part in the lives of the church's

lea and bread.

"Now you can't even get a doctor to visit you," she said, chuckling. "No matter how sick you are, you have to go to them, even if someone has to carry you."

Although Dillsworth left Windsor briefly to work in Hartford, she returned here, retiring at age 75.

"I'm so lucky that I have good health and a good memory," she said. Dillsworth, who