

120 YRS. IN 1986

HISTORY OF SALEM BAPTIST CHURCH

(formerly known as Second Baptist Missionary Church)

During the Civil War Champaign-Urbana was little more than prairie land, duck ponds and corn fields. Houses were scattered here and there. However, both Champaign and Urbana had a First Baptist Church and there was one Methodist church between them.

During this time period many African-American began immigrating from the South and slavery to the North and freedom. So, in 1863 J. W. Randolph (just out of the Union Army) and his wife, Anna, relocated from Memphis to Urbana. Randolph, a native of Hopkinsville, Kentucky, converted to Christianity at an early age and joined the Missionary Baptist Church in his hometown.

Accustomed to attending church, Randolph began worshipping at the First Baptist Church in Urbana, taking a seat each time in the balcony. There were very few Blacks in the area at the time; therefore, a Black face in church was a curiosity to the members and they kept their attentions focused in the balcony instead of on the pulpit. Standing this embarrassment alone several time, Randolph finally began to take his wife to church with him.

Seeing that the Randlphs would persist in attending services, a small pew, just large enough for two, was placed in the church near the door. Though they were never asked to occupy this pew, the Randolphs did, and that seemed to put the congregation more at ease.

Although the pastor of First Baptist, Rev. Riley, was very friendly, the aforementioned situation, together with the Randolphs beginning to rear a family, gave rise to the thought of organizing a church for Champaign-Urbana's people of color.

Randolph began spending his spare time looking for other Blacks in

the area. He found Martin Dandridge and his wife living as slaves in the basement of the Scott family home on, what is now, Hill and Randolph in Champaign. Explaining to the Scotts that slavery was not allowed to exist in the North, the Dandridges--an elderly couple--were given their freedom, a home on West Clark Street, furniture and provisions.

Searching further, Randolph located William and Kitty Lee living on a farm in the country. Kitty Lee was also a Missionary Baptist, but her husband was A.M.E. However, William Lee's helper was a Rev. T. J. Shores, a Baptist minister and school teacher.

It was important for Randolph to find other Baptists, because in order to form a Black Baptist church, the organizers had to be believers of Christ, baptized by a Baptist minister. There were several Blacks willing to assist in getting a church, but few met the previously noted requirements.

The search prayerfully and patiently continued until a group of five qualified Christians was formed. They were: Martin Dandridge, Susan Johnson, Kitty Lee, J. W. Randolph and Rev. T. J. Shores.

This group banded themselves together with the others who were interested and went from house-to-house holding prayer meetings. They would also go into the homes of whites to sing and pray. During their journeys they encountered many other Black Christians, most of who were willing to convert to being Baptists. They also met many others who were interested in formally expressing their belief in Christ through baptism.

A Council of Recognition was organized in 1864 composed of selected members of the First Baptist Church of Champaign, the First Baptist Church of Urbana and Bethel Church of Mahomet. Its purpose was to consider any newly organized Baptist church, its Article of Faith, its Covenant, as well as the circumstances of its organization. The council also

held the authority to determine whether a body should be recognized as an official Baptist church.

In 1867 the original group of five, having made every provision required by the Council of Recognition, founded the Second Baptist Missionary Church and began to meet at The Old Coffee Place, 406 East Park in Champaign.

The original membership, in addition to the organizers, were: a Mrs. Hopkins (who was 100 years old), Phebie Rivers, Anna Randolph, Sarah Brommwell and David Johnson; all joining by Baptism. Other early members include: ~~Fannie Strong and her granddaughter,~~ R. A. Johnson, Mary Mitchell, Anthony Johnson, Lester Johnson, a Mrs. Washington, a Mrs. Walker, Rose Brommwell Morgan, Henrietta Brommwell Alexander, Louis Brommwell, Hardy Brommwell, Edward Lee, Atrice Lee, ~~Henry Randolph, Ella Randolph, Carrie Randolph~~ and Mildred Randolph, Mike Borden, Harriet Johnson and Louella Gibbs.

Second Baptist called Rev. Williams Washington, a most excellent minister, as the first pastor of their church. Rev. Shores assisted him. Rev. Washington proved to be such a help that he was called a second time.

The next step was to erect a church building. Being that there were so few Blacks in Champaign-Urbana at the time, Randolph suggested a union church building where both the Baptist and Methodists could hold services althernately and conduct school during the week for those interested adults. All parties involved seemed to agree that this was an excellent idea.

Randolph was supplied with a soliciting paper and he began to canvass, believing that the project was honest and sincere. He readily solicited \$100.

For some reason, even though the lot was now unoccupied, a hold was on it and Second Baptist could not rebuild at the time. This situation caused for services to be held in houses and rented facilities once again.

Second Baptist called Rev. J. H. Bell next, a highly appreciated minister. There were many membership additions, among them: Fannie Strong and Miss R. A. Johnson. The next call was to Rev. Teal, a highly respected man of great ability. His pastorate was very agreeable and he was followed by Rev. Fleming, who served Second Baptist for little more than a year before resigning.

In 1887, Rev. Pearman was called. Ella Randolph and Mrs. Benton were only two of the many members who joined. His pastorate was peaceful, but short. Rev. Fleming Gray was called just the next year. Rev. Gray's administration was cloudy and his name was published in the newspapers. He was, therefore, dismissed.

Rev. Washington was called a third time to serve during the search for a new pastor. Henry, Frank, Nancy and Carrie Randolph, along with many others, were added to the membership. Second Baptist, by this time, was growing by leaps and bounds! The congregation had raised the funds to purchase a lot on East Clark Street where they proceeded to build a small church building.

It was in this new building that Rev. G. A. Turner was called to pastor Second Baptist. Rev. Turner took great interest in the children and, being a formally educated man, he proved quite helpful to the entire membership. Among those new members obtained during his pastorate were Della Turner, Lizzie Jackson, Dora Allen, Dora Anderson and Dora Randolph.

At the expiration of Rev. Turner's pastorate, REv. S. L. Harris

was called. He, together, with his dutiful wife, donated all of their time and talents toward the advancement of Second Baptist. Rev. Turner's resignation was offered to the regret of the entire congregation.

Rev. B. H. West was then called. Soon after the church held a revival. Many souls were won including: Jennie Kennie, Carrie Brooks, Della Hutchason, Daisy Hutchason, Ida Allen, Clara Rivers, Tom Ford, John Payne, Walter Clemons, John Wray, Garfield Jackson, William Heash, Archie Allen, Arthur Allen, John Randolph and Mildred Randolph.

These new converts were baptized in a body of water where the tower stood between the Big 4 and Wabash railroads. The baptism was held following morning service one February of 1893.

The entire congregation marched to the baptismal site, drawing an immense crowd of spectators. During the sacrament the waters were troubled and there was much shouting.

At the next church meeting a Trustee expressed his disapproval of the public baptism, especially since many of the new converts were children. However, a Deacon told him that his hesitations were unwarranted and the new members had all the rights and privileges of any other member. Although the Trustee was very upset, the members stood fast on their beliefs until he was calmed.

Also, under Rev. West's administration a Young People's Prayer Service was held every Sunday before the regular evening services. The youth of Second Baptist took this time to sing, pray or testify for Jesus.

The Modern Culture Society was another auxiliary Rev. West helped to organize. The society taught church discipline, etiquette, literature, music and the study of the Bible. Each meeting ended with a spelling bee.

Second Baptist joined the Woodriver District Association in 1893 and the association met in Champaign with the congregation. Because the church was too small to accommodate the delegation, services were held in a rental hall above Swannel's Drug Store (later W. T. Grant, Studio 1 and the Poison Apple) at Main and Hickory Streets. A large number of new members were received during this period and the church organized a choir under the direction of Amy Coffeen, a professional musician.

After Rev. West resigned, the church proceeded to call Rev. W. W. Stewart of Missouri in 1894. He was an excellent spiritual minister, but the young people did not get the training they had hertofore received. After serving a short time, the church received his resignation and called Rev. W. E. Helm in 1895.

Under his pastorate the Sunday School began to prosper. Old and young, alike, enjoyed the lessons each week. Sunday School members were quizzed periodically on the Bible and Bible recitation also took place. Each week, the person reciting the greatest number of verses in a given time was presented with a prize.

It was also during Rev. Helm's administration that the Union Sunday School Picnic began. All the Sunday Schools met at the city park, under the supervision of their superintendents, with banners. Positions for marching in the parade to the fairgrounds (then on South First Street) were determined by lot.

Rev. Helm oversaw the remodeling and enlarging of the church (including the installation of a baptismal pool). After completion, the church observed its first major dedication service. Rev. Stedman of the First Baptist Church of Champaign delivered the dedication sermon in a

very solemn and beautiful ceremony. It was to everyone's regret that Rev. Helm resigned in 1896.

Succeeding him was Rev. W. B. Brown who, though called by the formal majority, was not enthusiastically received. He was followed by Rev. J. W. Crushon in 1901 and Rev. J. H. Nichols in 1902, who made provisions for the purchase and clearing of the church property at 500 East Park.

Next came Rev. S. L. Edwards in 1908. He was recently out of the Methodist Conference and somewhat unfamiliar with Baptist doctrine and laws. However, it was during his pastorate that the original church (as we know it today) was erected and that the congregation changed its name to Salem Baptist Church. The church also laid a cornerstone in the building and purchased its first communion set.

The next pastor was Rev. J. M. Owens (1911) who had new pews installed (some of which are being used in the balcony today) and designated space for two classrooms and a choir room in the church. Rev. Owens was followed by Rev. S. W. Batchelor (1914), who oversaw the purchase of an organ for Salem, and Rev. S. C. Clanton (1916).

The church was later pastored by Rev. S. M. Hall who had the church decorated and the ceiling lowered. He served an extended term, comparatively, and the church felt a setback when he resigned. Rev. F. Martin filled the pulpit until Rev. R. A. Hayden was called in 1920.

Rev. Hayden helped to increase membership substantially. The church's interior was remodeled, a new Baptistry was installed along with restrooms. Rev. Hayden left Salem in 1924 and organized Pilgrim Baptist Church in Champaign. He was followed in 1925 by Rev. Dabney C. Jones.

During Rev. Jones' pastorate, the front entrance of the church was changed from the west to the south side and the front steps were remodeled.

During his nine years of service a \$16,000 indebtedness was paid off.

Late in 1933, Rev. J. J. Olive, president of the State Convention of Illinois, was called. However, his extremely enthusiastic pastorate was interrupted in August of 1937 by a heart attack and Rev. Olive's subsequent untimely death. Rev. M. L. Porter, who had been serving as Assistant Pastor, occupied the pulpit until Rev. A. S. Webb was called in 1938.

A heating plant was installed and many members added during Rev. Webb's pastorate. He ordained Rev. C. E. Campbell and Rev. O. B. Johnson. He initiated a parsonage fund, which netted approximately \$700. The Gospel Chorus and Youth Choir were also organized under Rev. Webb by the "Father of Gospel", Thomas A. Dorsey.

Rev. Webb, who served for 10 years before resigning, was very active in the district, state and national conventions. His wife, Mildred, started Salem's annual Women's Day celebration held in honor of women in Christian service.

The year 1948 brought Rev. R. A. Lillard, a fine, intellectual and spiritual minister to Salem's pastorate. Because the church was without a parsonage, Rev. and Mrs. Lillard had to rent an apartment. Shortly thereafter the Lillards and the church decided that Salem needed a parsonage.

A selection committee was formed that included: Trustees Charlie Brown, Alvin Foxwell, Theotto Bowles and Deacons David Sayles and Harrison Pierce. Pierce made inquiries about a house at 304 North Third and presented his findings to the Official Board. Brown contacted the owner and, after legal matters were settled, Trustees Brown, Bowles and Foxwell signed a contract to purchase the house for \$8,500. When Rev. Lillard

Neola Irisley
11 90

-10-

resigned 16 months later, a balance of only \$2,300 was owed on the parsonage.

Rev. Lillard recommended Rev. W. Howe Donaldson to Salem in 1949. On June 20 of that year, Rev. Donaldson was called from Murfreesboro, Tennessee. He accepted the call, and on the first Sunday in August, he began his task.

Under Rev. Donaldson nearly \$3,000 was raised to pay off the balance due on the parsonage. A mortgage burning service was held in September 1950 and Rev. Lillard was asked to speak at the special service since the parsonage was obtained during his pastorate.

The two oldest members of Salem, Deacon B. E. Payne and Mildred Gray, received the honors of striking the match and holding the mortgage, respectively.

Rev. Donaldson was also responsible for initiating the duplex envelope system; purchasing a typewriter, church office desk, new hymnals, carpet, movie projector and screen, file cabinets, adding and mimeograph machines and other office equipment for the church; as well as a new kitchen, hot water tank and gas furnace for the parsonage.

More than 200 people joined Salem during Rev. Donaldson's tenure. He organized the Young Matron's Missionary Society on April 16, 1952, and he was also responsible for the success attained through the operation of the Circle Plan.

On July 1, 1953, Rev. Donaldson resigned and accepted the pastorate at Zion Baptist Church in Peoria.

Rev. John Arlington Anderson was called to Salem in 1953. During his administration the Willing Workers Club was organized. The group sponsored a drive and purchased for the church a \$4,100 organ. Rev. Anderson also organized the Junior and Red Circle girls and on December

Neola Irisley
5-16-99

-11-

10, 1953, the Brotherhood was organized.

A children's nursery was opened in the basement and dedicated to the memory of Hattie J. Wells who had served as superintendent of the Sunday School for 28 years, beginning in 1925 and continuing until her death. Deacon James O. Wilson succeeded Mrs. Wells as superintendent.