



Shown above is Russell Memorial Christian Methodist Church whose pastor is the Reverend W. A. McEwan, (inset).

-Negro Church-

(Continued from Page Three)

odist Episcopal Church. It was founded in 1869 and its first pastor was Edward Markham." Dr. Miles Mark Fisher, a competent historian in his own right, gives 1886 as the date of the organization of the White Rock Baptist Church. The church's cornerstone corroborates his view.

At any rate, these two churches have been formative and constructive influences in the life of our group for nearly a century: one for 85 years; the other, 88. They came into being at a most critical time in the history of our group, whose need was their challenge and opportunity, just a few years after the end of the Civil War.

Members of these two churches with any historic sensibility—a feeling for the past and its relation to the present, cannot but look with pride upon their long record of creative service. Such persons must, of necessity, experience certain divine moments when in imagination they reproduce stirring scenes of yester years. They see those grand men of God, Markham, Edwards, Hunter, Eaton, Shepard, Browley and others; men in whom the gospel was as a fire shut up in their bones and upon their lips sharper than a two-edged sword. To the fathers and mothers of a dark day, such preachers were a fountain of inspiration and a tower of strength.

Such noble men as these held the line against subversive and discouraging forces. They laid a solid foundation upon which we today are building. They cleared the wilderness for us, preparing the way of the Lord, making straight in the desert a highway for our God, leveling mountains of difficulties, straightening crooked paths, and making rough places plain. God forbid that any of us should be so insensitive regarding our indebtedness to the fathers as not to think, feel, and say with Jesus: "Others have labored and we have entered into their labors."

It is certain that there are other churches in this town the origin of which dates back far enough to affect its members with the sense of history. The Rev. A. W. Lawson, pastor of the Gospel Tabernacle Holy Church, points back 64 years to the origin of that body. The cornerstone of the new edifice in process of erection by the Saint Mark's A.M.E. Zion Church gives 1899 as the year it was organized. There are probably other churches here as old as these or older.

At the outset, we noted the difficulty of measuring the influence of the church upon the progress of a people because the church deals largely with intangible realities. Yet, there are certain factors that may indicate that influence. These factors will be pointed out in paragraphs to follow.

The number of members constituting a church is indicative of the extent of its influence whether it is great or little. Take for instance, the church on the day of Pentecost. It began the day with 120 members. It closed the day with 3,120 members. That was a miracle of influence. The Saint Joseph Methodist Church began in 1869 with six members. Today, its membership totals 800. With an unimpressive numerical beginning, White Rock Baptist Church now has almost 1,500 members. Likewise, Mount Vernon has about 1,500 members, Saint Mark A.M.E. Zion almost 800, and Union Baptist, 500.

The Gospel Tabernacle has almost 200, Morehead Baptist approximately 500; Mt. Zion nearly 400, First Calvary 500, Ebenezer 800, Oak Grove 400; Saint Titus about 150, North Side, 150; New Bethel, 400; Mt. Gilead, 400; St. Paul about 400; Russell

Memorial CME 400, Mt. Olive, nearly 400; West Durham Baptist 400; and Covenant Presbyterian, nearly 300.

Nine churches in the same connection as the Gospel Tabernacle Holy Church must have a considerable combined membership. The membership of some churches is not mentioned here because of difficulty in contacting authoritative sources. The over all influence of the aggregate membership of our churches must be great indeed. In fact, this membership itself is the product of church influence. What this aggregate totals cannot be stated without the knowledge of the membership of each church. One minister estimates it at 18,000. This seems to be too liberal a figure. Fifteen thousand would seem to be more in line with actuality. At any rate, our churches hold quite a host of persons who acknowledge Christ as their savior and have organized them to do effective service.

One of the best organized churches here is the Mount Vernon Baptist Church. The pastor, the Rev. E. T. Browne, is somewhat of a genius at organizing people. He has a most competent co-worker in his wife, Dr. Rose Butler Browne.

Here, we find a church with five choirs, a Sunday School organization that raises about \$200 per Sunday, a children's church of more than 300 members with their own ushers, deacons, and a youth council working with adult councils. They meet practically every Sunday in a service of their own.

Mount Vernon has two buses, a recently dedicated plot of land of 92.8 acres including a lake and two houses. This church also has a Credit Union to which its members may go for help in time of financial strain. It is said that no member in Mount Vernon needs to be idle if he desires to work.

A great deal of space would be required to describe the organization and activities of the Mount Vernon Baptist Church.

A brief statement may be made concerning other closely organized churches. The White Rock Baptist Church has a fine organization. Its district organization is hardly excelled anywhere. The Church sponsors recreational activities for its youth, a program which now has become a model for other churches. The pastor, Dr. Miles Mark Fisher, had the vision and the courage to initiate such a program years ago.

Mt. Zion Baptist Church, West Durham Baptist, Ebenezer Baptist, Saint Joseph A.M.E., in fact, many of the city's churches are closely and effectively organized.

It is significant to mention here the Nurse School of the St. Joseph A.M.E. Church. This school was established in 1952. Instruction is given the children enrolled, wholesome meals served, and proper rest periods observed. "For the convenience of the parents, the school opens at 7:45 a. m. and does not close until the last child is called for. In an effort to make this service as helpful as possible, this school operates on a year round basis.

In such an organized effort,

the people learn to pool their resources and are trained and disciplined for effective living and service. Especially are the young people helped. I have seen some of them evidence an unbounded enthusiasm for their church and pastor because they have a sense of belonging, of being needed and appreciated.

Durham church people have embarked on a building program which is another evidence of the vitality of their religious faith, and growing influence. Until recently, we had few attractive church edifices and scarcely any adequate for the most effective religious effort. But there has been a great change in the last six years.

The following churches have built new edifices, splendid brick structures of beauty and attraction: St. John Baptist, First Calvary Baptist, Morehead Ave. Baptist, Ebenezer Baptist, Oak Grove Free Will Baptist, Russell Memorial CME, and the Metropolitan Methodist Church.

Most, if not all of these structures, have provisions for the educational requirements of the church.

The first church to erect an educational building of the first rank—the finest in town among our group, was the Saint Joseph A.M.E. Church. This building has added dignity, grace, beauty and impressiveness to the area in which it is located. It represents a monumental achievement under the administration of the Rev. D. A. Johnston, the present pastor. There are three other churches now under construction.

The Seventh Day Adventists are erecting a new edifice. The Covenant Presbyterian Church building is in process of completion, and The Rev. S. P. Perry

has launched a building program which is progressing rapidly. The cornerstone has already been laid. When completed, this edifice, house of worship and educational building combined, will probably constitute the largest structure in town. It is located on the corner of Pine and Pickett Streets.

The Rev. A. S. Croom is putting up a modern brick structure on Roxboro Street with a fine education annex. This project will represent an outlay of more than \$125,000 when completed. The old structure on Corporation Street is available for any activities the church decides essential.

A few churches in the city have made extensive renovations. A permastone incasement has made Mount Zion Baptist Church quite attractive.

It is probable that total church property here may be evaluated at from \$2,500,000 to \$3,000,000. This is no small outlay for a people most of whom belong to the laboring class and are subject to intermittent employment at wages not too attractive.

The churches of Durham, too, make their influence felt through a body known as the Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance of Durham and Vicinity. The preamble to the constitution of that body indicates the aim and purpose to serve the community with greater effectiveness.

"We, as ministers of the Lord Jesus Christ and overseers in His church, realize that the success of our efforts does not depend alone on personal spiritual experience and individual qualification. We also realize that in a cooperative organizational fellowship in which we share our experience, knowledge, and hopes, and together study means by which we may better serve our churches and the communities in which they exist, we find ourselves for a more effective ministry.

Such a fellowship makes for a clearer vision of our mutual needs and dependence, binds us more closely together in the bonds of unity and solidarity, and makes more likely the realization of that power indicated in the biblical pronouncement, "One shall chase a thousand and two put ten thousand to flight." Thru such a fellowship, our churches may be led into a closer unity, solidarity, and cooperative endeavor, and find means to pool their resources—material and spiritual—for their mutual edification, community welfare and the upbuilding of the Kingdom of God."

Three important results have come from this union of the churches thru the Ministerial Alliance: It has promoted interdenominational harmony, more friendly relations and greater cooperation. Top level harmony has paid off.

In the next place, this union has enabled the churches more effectively to deal with community problems and to meet them with concerted action rather than with a unilateral or separate ineffectiveness.

Finally, it has caused various professional, business, and civic groups, not to mention individuals aspiring to sell themselves to the public, to seek thru the ministers the support of their churches.

Through the Minister's Alliance the churches have made a splendid response to charity appeals. They have contributed to various relief agencies. The program of the alliance calls for an annual bequest of \$1,000 to Lincoln Hospital.

The Negro ministers meet once a month with the white ministers of the city in a body known as the Baptist Minister's Alliance. The Rev. A. S. Croom served as its first president. The Rev. C. E. McLester is serving in that capacity now; and, the Rev. J. S. Stewart is serving as secretary.

The fellowship in this body has been fruitful; a help to each group of ministers. Discussions relative to racial issues have been engaged in with candor, frankness, and a satisfying degree of objectivity. We have, through this fellowship been able to bring before the white ministers of the city, prominent thinkers of our group. It is expected that this bi-racial leadership contact will add to the measure of racial understanding and harmony.

Some of the ministers of Durham have held their churches for many years. Rev. C. F. Cox, who organized the Oak Grove Free Will Baptist Church 30 years ago, is still its pastor. Rev. T. C. Graham has been at West Durham 33 years. Rev. Wm. H. Fuller at Mt. Zion 27 years; Rev. Mr. Croom at Union Baptist over 30 years; Rev. M. M. Fisher at White Rock 22 years; Rev. J. H. Peppers at St. Paul 18 years; and Rev. Perry at St. Mark 18 years. Here then are seven ministers who have given Durham a combined total of more than 180 years of service.

The work and influence of our churches is not confined to local areas. Affiliation with larger bodies, associations, conferences, and conventions enables the local churches to project themselves to meet needs in state, national and international areas.

The Baptist Churches contribute to Shaw University thru associations and the State Baptist Convention. They contribute to

foreign missions through the Lott Carey Convention.

An evidence of a church's influence is reflected in attendance. To my knowledge, some churches in Durham carry large morning crowds. Reports lead us to believe that a goodly number of other churches are well attended. Attendance on evening services, save in a few instances, leaves much to be desired.

In Durham, our professional and business men are good attendants and workers in their churches. That has been our observation respecting at least three churches. The biggest names in the business, civic, and professional life of Durham are church men. They serve on their church boards; some are active in Sunday School work, and some are choir members. We have noted that the pioneers in the development of Negro business in this city were devoted to the church.

My final word has to do with the ministers of Negro Durham. Durham has some men of outstanding ability both as organizers and preachers. Any man who can hold a crowd Sunday after Sunday, year in and year out, must be rated as a good preacher; and in Durham, there are some preachers who speak to a full house every Sunday. They have a message; an appeal to the whole man, the heart, mind and will.

Intellectually, Durham has a good representation among its preachers. Some of its ministers hold degrees, academic and honorary. There are others without college background who, through years of private study, self-discipline, and experience compel the admiration of all the brethren and the envy of some. The people hear them gladly.

It is interesting to note the schools from which our ministers have received degrees or attended. Morehouse College, Virginia Union University, Shaw University School of Religion, Chicago University, Bates College, Bangor Theological Seminary, Livingston College, Hood Theological Seminary, Johnson C. Smith University, New York City Bible Institute, the McCormick Theological Seminary, Benedict College, and Allen University. A number of ministers pastoring out of the city live in Durham.

Some years ago, a prominent citizen here, asked the late Dr. C. C. Spaulding if the sermon uttered this citizen had heard over the radio was typical of the preaching in our Negro church. (Please turn to Page Seven)

GREETINGS

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