

# Church Came to Bermuda from Canada in the Late 1800's

For every event there is a cause. The cause of the beginning of the A.M.E. Church in Bermuda was the same as the founding of the parent body: men of colour were dissatisfied with the prejudicial attitudes of sociological and religious institutions.

To trace the history of the A.M.E. Church in Bermuda, one must return to the founding of the A.M.E. Church in 1816.

During the first two decades of its life, the growing church spread out into Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Maryland, Delaware, New York, South Carolina, Ohio and Washington, D.C. Slaves fleeing the evil system of human bondage carried with them the news of this growing church where Negroes could have freedom in worship. Many of these slaves sought refuge in Canada. As this number grew, the need for pastoral care grew.

A mission was sent to the... Several missionaries... In 1830 a "Fugitive Slave Law" was passed in America... stronger than the other law, made the recapture of runaway slaves easier... members of the Canadian churches... began to fear their position in Canada. They sensed that a relation to America even through a church would make easier their return to slavery. They

## The A.M.E. Church... ... No. 2 in a Series

This is the second in a series of articles explaining the origins of the A.M.E. Church and its introduction and growth in Bermuda. Today's article describes the birth of the Church in Bermuda.

The articles are being prepared by a committee appointed from the A.M.E. Ministers Alliance in the Colony.

petitioned the parent body for separation so that they could be under the law of Canada. The permission for separation was granted in Chatham, Ontario on October 3, 1856.

**FIRST BISHOP**  
Bishop Willis Nazery, an A.M.E. Bishop who had moved to Canada, was released to become the first Bishop of this separated church known as the British Methodist Episcopal Church. Liaison through non-voting delegations to each General Conference was maintained throughout the life of this arrangement.

The spirit of growth and missionary zeal of the A.M.E. Church continued in the separated B.M.F. Church. The news of this body reached across the waters to Bermuda. The idea of a church where Negroes would worship in an atmosphere free of bigotry and prejudice was quite appealing to the coloured people of Bermuda who were not happy with the social patterns of the existing churches.

**FIRST APPROACH**  
In the autumn of 1869, Messrs. Benjamin Burchall of St. George's, William B. Jennings, of Devonshire and Charles Ratteray of Somerset communicated with Bishop Nazery. They expressed their dissatisfaction with the racial policies of the existing churches in Bermuda, and invited Bishop Nazery to visit the Colony to consider the establishment of B.M.E. Churches here. The Bishop accepted and spent three weeks during April and May of 1870 preaching and

surveying the needs of Bermuda. The same year he sent the Rev. R. R. Morris of the Nova Scotia Conference to supervise the establishment of the B.M.E. Church here. In 1873, Bishop Nazery returned and formally organised the Bermuda Annual Conference of the B.M.E. Church. This conference existed until 1885.

**RE-UNION**  
After the pronouncement of the "Emancipation Proclamation" in 1863 in America, the B.M.E. Church began to feel a desire for organic re-union with the A.M.E. Church. In 1880, they petitioned for re-union. The petition was well received and at the General Conference of 1884, all but a few dissident churches were reunited with the parent A.M.E. Church as the Canadian Annual Conference.

In 1865, the Bermuda Annual Conference ratified this action, and has since existed as the Bermuda Annual Conference of the A.M.E. Church.

The individual histories of the present local churches indicates that many began during the work of the Rev. R. R. Morris. With a missionary zeal akin to that of the Apostle Paul, this dedicated man travelled the length of the Colony and formed worship groups and missions. The people readily responded to the opportunity to realise human dignity as it was encouraged and protected in this new church that continued the emphasis of the A.M.E. Church to realise the brotherhood of all men.

### PRESENT CHURCHES

The group formed in St. David's have become the St. Luke's Church; the group in St. George's, the Richard Allen Church; the group Tucker's Town, St. Phillip's Church; Harris Bay; the group in Bailey's Bay, St. John's Church; the groups in Crawl and Flatts united to become the Bethel Church, Shelley Bay; the group in Pembroke and Hamilton became the St. Paul Church; the group in the Whale Bay district of Southampton became the Mt. Zion Church, and the group

at Somerset became the Allen Temple Church.

In all, eight of the present 11 churches can be traced to the work of the Rev. R. R. Morris.

**THE FIRST**  
St. John's Church in Bailey's Bay has the distinction of being the first church building to be dedicated although the exact date is vague. The cornerstone was laid on October 16, 1879. The dedication occurred prior to December 25, 1881. This property has been well maintained with an addition being made to the west end in the early 1890's. A parsonage was added in 1965. The pastor is the Rev. Wilbur E. Lowe.

The second building to be dedicated was the St. Paul Church in Hamilton on December 25, 1881. This is the recognised "Mother Church" of African Methodism in Bermuda. The building site was purchased under the leadership of the Rev. R. R. Morris who started the building and laid the cornerstone. This "Cathedral of African Methodism" has become the focal point of the Conference. Her commodious building, her large congregation, her central "metropolitan" location have served well to project the zeal of the founders. A significant impact by the A.M.E. Church has been made through the work of this dedicated congregation and line of sincere pastors. The pastor is the Rev. C. B. Crawford.

**THE THIRD**  
The third building to be dedicated was Bethel, Shelly Bay. The worship groups in Flatts and Crawl united in an effort to build a meeting place. After two misadventures with gale-force winds, the church was dedicated on October 23, 1888. The Rev. G. F. Woodson was the pastor who completed the work started by Rev. Austin Richardson. Rudiments of the original groups are to be seen in the two church schools, the one at Bethel serving Flatts and Shelly Bay, and the one in Temperance Hall - the original meeting place - serving Crawl and Shelly Bay. The church is currently engaged in extensive renovations under the incumbent Pastor, the Rev. Joseph F. Whalen Sr.

The fourth building to be dedicated was Mt. Zion Church in Whale Bay, Southampton. The cornerstone was laid in 1889. The building was completed and dedicated on August 4, 1897. This church, though at one time on a circuit with Somerset and then Vernon Temple, has operated as an independent A.M.E. congregation for several years. The Pastor is the Rev. T. B. Price.

**IN TUCKER'S TOWN**  
The fifth building to be dedicated was St. Phillip's in Tucker's Town. The worship group

organised in Tucker's Town were given a parcel of land upon which to build a church by Mr. C. N. Gibbons in the area in which the Castle Harbour Hotel now stands. This site was abandoned for another site purchased in the heart of Tucker's Town. A church was erected there and dedicated August 8, 1900. When the population of that area were dispossessed in the early 1900's, the property of St. Phillip's was involved. They relocated at the present site, and the building was erected and dedicated on May 25, 1926. The Pastor is the Rev. Carl D. Ogden.

The sixth building to be dedicated was Allen Temple, Somerset. The worship group there had built a wooden structure which was destroyed by the hurricane of 1899. The present building was then built and dedicated on July 8, 1907. The parsonage was completed in 1923. The Youth Centre - the only such A.M.E. facility in the Colony was begun in 1938 and dedicated on December 11, 1960. The church is currently involved in renovations. The Pastor is the Rev. Cyril S. Butlerfield.

**PRIVATE HOMES**  
The seventh building to be dedicated was Richard Allen in St. George's. This group worshipped in private homes for 15 years. They then acquired a lot of land at Mullet Bay and built a place of worship there. On October 15, 1902, the present site was purchased. The building was erected and dedicated during the pastorate of the Rev. Harvey L. Gault who was appointed on August 5, 1924. Consistent progress has been made in improving this church plant. A parsonage was added between 1933 and 1937. The Pastor is the Rev. David L. Randolph.

The eighth building to be dedicated was the Vernon Temple Church in Southampton, East. This church began as the "Light House Mission" some 50 years ago. The mission grew slowly until efforts to erect a church building were begun in 1922. The building was dedicated on August 30, 1925. Under the Rev. R. W. Coleman the parsonage was built and a building containing a restaurant and apartments erected. The church recently completed interior and exterior renovations under the leadership of the incumbent pastor, the Rev. Donald L. Tucker.

**IN ST. DAVID'S**  
The ninth building to be dedicated was the St. Luke's Church in St. David's. This worship group were started by Mr. Morris but did not continue. In 1888 the Rev. Austin

Richard Allen there which resulted in the erection of a small building. The present building's cornerstone was laid on August 19, 1938. Under the rate of the Rev. F. Lowe, the parsonage Youth Centre were started. The pastor now is the Rev. F. Norris.

The tenth building to be dedicated was the Bethel Church, Glebe Road. The cornerstone was laid on "North Shore Mission" existed for some 30 years to the building of the church. The founder, the Rev. Johnson, held services at home until the church's cornerstone was laid. The building was completed. The church was dedicated in 1936 to W. H. Heard. In 1940, a parsonage was acquired. The provision of the church in having a new vestry and was accomplished under leadership of the incumbent pastor, the Rev. Howard Hinds Sr.

### NEWEST CHURCH

The most recent addition to the family of A.M.E. Churches is the Bethany Church in the wick. The idea for this church was conceived at the Conference of 1963. In November a Sunday School was started. On February 2, 1964, Samaritan Hall was secured as a place of meeting for the day School and worship services. The pastoral charge of the body was given to the Rev. Vernon R. Byrd. At the Conference of 1964, the Rev. Gwendolyn Onley were received as a member of the A.M.E. Church in 1964. Rev. Gwendolyn Onley was signed as pastor, and this small congregation purchased a building on Spring Hill. With the consent of the Rt. Reverend D. Bright to supervise the work of which Bethany is a part of the future of Bethany was enhanced. At his first visit, Bishop realised the enormity of the financial problems the pastor and congregation faced. Using the authority of his office, Bishop Bright won the support of the General Church for the project and secured the monies needed to complete the work. The work of the new building began in October, 1966. The cornerstone was laid on December 2, 1966, and the church looks forward to the completion of this modern edifice that will greatly enhance the work of the A.M.E. Church in Bermuda.

(Considerations of space have caused the committee to keep the historical sketches of the churches brief.)

(Next week: The Organizational Structure of the Church.)

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