

ONTARIO CHAPEL SUNDAY SCHOOL
WINDSOR, ONTARIO
SALUTES

**THE 100TH ANNUAL SESSION
OF THE
SUNDAY SCHOOL CONVENTION
AND
YOUNG PEOPLES SOCIETIES
OF THE
BRITISH METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF CANADA**

JULY 10th & 11th, 1998

Rev. Daniel D. Rupwate, General Superintendent
Ms. Lee A. Chase, President - S.S.C. & Y.P.S.
Ms. Rosemary Sadlier, Honorary President - S.S.C. & Y.P.S.

Rev. Kenneth Thomas, Pastor
Ms. Lee A. Chase, Sunday School Superintendent

*"Remember now thy creator in the days of thy youth."
Ecclesiastes 12:1*

Preface

In the ancient tradition of our culture, history is preserved and passed on orally by the griot. A griot is a historian, a storyteller, a living library, a link to the past, a celebrant of culture who truly touches us.

Thank God for the African-Canadian griots, who are still with us in the Ontario Chapel family because we have very little in the way of written records on which to rely.

In preparation for this celebration, we had the privilege of talking with individuals who were willing to share their memories of the Sunday School and youth groups at Ontario Chapel and of the people involved. The memories were all very warm and happy ones. All believed that Ontario Chapel along with First Baptist, Tanner A.M.E., Sandwich Baptist and Mt. Zion were the heart of the African-Canadian community. The Sunday School at Ontario Chapel served them not only as the expected place of learning and worship, but as a training ground and a place where lifelong friendships were established.

Thanks go to Lyle Browning, June Buchanan, Douglas Ellsworth, Illa Timbers Harrison, Margaret Bishop Hurst, Delores Millben Neal, Rev. John Kel Proctor, James Roberts, Gladys Washington Shreve, Mary Stewart, Velma Browning Sydnor and Lloyd Washington for sharing their memories with me.¹

It is in the spirit of the griot and in love and honour to Almighty God that we present a glimpse of those memories.

~ Andrea Shreve Moore,

¹Editor's note: Due to the fact that there is no remaining documentary evidence all of the information in this booklet is based solely on individuals' memories. Therefore we wish to acknowledge that there are obviously many omissions and we apologize for this.

*The Ontario Chapel B.M.E. Sunday School
from the Last Decade of the Nineteenth Century to the Pre-Great War Era*

When the first session of the Sunday School convention was called, the Superintendent at the Ontario Chapel Sunday School was Mrs. Norah Larter Dunn². She was the eldest daughter of Dr. John Larter, the first Black man to practice medicine in Windsor. Her husband, Robert L. Dunn, was co-owner of Windsor Paint and Varnish Works. Mr. Dunn was the second Black man to serve on the Windsor Town Council and later the Windsor Board of Education. He had the dubious distinction of being "churched" by the B.M.E. for the sin of dancing. Norah Dunn died in 1900.³

World War I and the Roaring Twenties

Teachers during this period included Mrs. Rosie Timbers (Superintendent)⁴, whose service in the Sunday School spanned five decades), Mrs. Ethel Christian, who devoted four decades of service to the Sunday School, Miss Bernice McKinney, Gerry Nicholls, Charlie Ball, Mrs. Flossie Stewart, Elizabeth Washington, Rev. William "Pa" Harrison, Mrs. Gladys Browning, and Mrs. Ada Ellsworth. Some of the children (from toddlers to teens) were Archie Ball, Ernie Boyd, Art Harrison (later Bishop of the C.O.G.I.C. of Canada), Lorne Millben, Buster Nolan, Harry Morgan, Tom Millben, Eddie Abbott, Esther Randall, Thelma and Grace Plummer, Elmer, Allen and Goldie Millben, Ken Jacobs, Margaret, Cliff, Charles and Verna Garrell, Jim Watson, Winnie and Len Christian, Gert Chickee, Marie Proctor, Yvonne and Woody Pryor, Jimmy DeShield, and the Bishop family: Freddy, Bobby, Marvin, Marva, Eleanor, Orion, Marian and Margaret. The adult class during this period included Edith and Jesse Boyd, Marjorie Ball, Ruth Kelly and Lydia Kelly.

²Where females are listed with more than one surname, it indicates that these women worked in the Sunday School while single and later while married.

³The many itinerant preachers who were sent to Ontario Chapel by the Conference have not been mentioned in this history, but many of them were involved in the Sunday School and of course much of the Sunday School's success can be attributed in part to them.

⁴The names of individuals who served as Sunday School Superintendent at any time will henceforth be followed by the abbreviated form "Spt.".

The Thirties and Forties

During the 1930s and 1940s, many individuals were involved in teaching or working with the Sunday School in Windsor. These individuals included Mary Stewart, Velma Browning Vincent (Spt.) who devoted two decades of service to the Sunday School, Vivian "Tilly" Nall, Wilfred Simpson (Spt.), Hilda Watkins, Marguerite Jackson (Spt.), Ardella Jacobs, Cora Wright Ladd, Winifred Christian Shreve (Spt.) whose service spanned five decades, Naomi Edmunds (Spt.) whose service spanned two decades, Illa Harrison, Edith Boyd, Eleanor Bishop Hubbard, Louise Newsome Rock who contributed four decades of service, Maudie Watkins, and Archie Ball.

During this era the Sunday School also expanded to include a variety of youth groups or young people's societies and many of the Sunday School teachers took part in leading these activities. Archie Ball taught Sunday School as well as acting as a Scout leader, Wilfred Simpson taught Sunday School in addition to leading the Parliament of Youth, and during the Second World War when male role models were not available, Maudie Watkins augmented her Sunday School duties by leading the Scouts and Cubs groups.

Many of the children and young people who attended the Ontario Chapel Sunday School in the thirties and forties went on to become the mentors and pillars of our local African-Canadian society. The children and young people who received their training at the B.M.E. Sunday School during this era included Lyle Browning, Ray and Jim Roberts, Phyllis Rock, Isobel "Toby" Nall, Ken Rock, Kenneth Jacobs, Martel and Kelvin Proctor, Lloyd "Scoop" Washington and Gladys Washington, Ralph Stewart, June Buchanan, Lee Johnson, Harold, Gordon, Donald and Lloyd Lawson, Arita Robbins, Glynn Milburn, Marian Overton, Lois and Betty Lou Small, Tom Taylor, Henry Edwards, Jarvis, Woody, Delores and Buddy Millben, and Jimmy Browning.

Some of these individuals have provided us with some interesting glimpses of Sunday School life during the 1930s and 1940s. Many still have happy memories of social gatherings and special events. Lloyd "Scoop" Washington remembers with amazement that at pancake socials, Harold Lawson always ate the most by far.

Several former Sunday School students from that era also remembered that annually, the B.M.E., the A.M.E., and the First Baptist Sunday Schools held a joint picnic on Belle Isle. Each year, Mrs. Kirby, a woman of Caribbean descent who was a member of St. Alphonsus Roman Catholic Church, had to get special permission for her children, Clayton, Olive, Theresa and Reuben, to picnic with their Protestant friends. Clearly the Sunday School picnic was an event not to be missed.

Not only did Sunday School activities provide children with training in the Christian faith, but they often provided African-Canadian children with important opportunities to learn public speaking, the performing arts and other worthwhile skills. In the 1930s and 1940s, for example, three women, Minnie Chickee, Sadie Roberts and Gladys Browning, used to organize all of the B.M.E.'s Easter and Christmas concerts and plays. Children of that era remember, too, that Mrs. Will Hughes of Tanner A.M.E. Church used to put on marvellous plays using child actors from all of the local African-Canadian churches including B.M.E. Sunday School students. These events figure very dramatically in the memories of children who participated in them and are viewed by many as an important part of their training not only as Christians but as well-rounded citizens.

The Fifties and the North Star Lodge Period

Teachers and workers during this transitional period included Gladys Washington Shreve, Shirley Boyd, Verna Garrell-Stewart, Ivy Lawson Edwards, Isobel "Toby" Nall, Anita Overton-Travis (Spt.) who served in the Sunday School during three decades, Audrey Johnson White, Sharon Browning, Alzora Chase (four decades of service to the Sunday School), Eileen Timbers, Gail Carter, Lee Chase (Spt.) who also served the Sunday School during four decades, Arnold White, George Dennis, Larry Johnson (two decades of service), Marlene Patterson, Ona Richardson, Jean Scott, Andrea Shreve Moore (Spt.) with three decades of service, Bob Glenn and Madeleine Parker.

Due to the tremendous size of the Ontario Chapel Sunday School during this "Baby Boom" era, it is not feasible to include the names of all students from this period. However it is safe to say that dozens upon dozens of local African-Canadian adults can look back today upon this era and remember their participation in the B.M.E. Sunday School.

Toward the end of the 1950s, the church property was expropriated by the City of Windsor to make way for a courthouse... although the courthouse never came to rest upon that site, and a parking lot is all that can be found on the site today. The original building wherein so many generations of Windsor's African-Canadian children and youth had received their Christian training was to be torn down. Perhaps it was fitting that the final service which was held in the old church building was the Sunday School's Christmas concert in December of 1958. Jimmy Steele filmed this last service in the old church.

While the new church was being built, B.M.E. church services and Sunday School classes were held temporarily at the North Star Lodge. Participants from that era remember that holding Sunday School in the much smaller building was a challenge. The Sunday School was still very populous and many students were compressed into what seemed to be a very small space. Participants from that era remember with a chuckle that no one wanted to sit too close to the pot belly stove toward the rear of the building.

Sunday School Life In the New Church...to the Present

After the B.M.E. Church moved into its current location on University Avenue, some new faces appeared among the Sunday School's workers and teachers. They included Gloria Brooks, Joyce Robbins, Mildred Christian, Lynn Washington, Wayne Middleton, Carolyn Robinson, Fred Parker Jr., and most recently, Keticia Thomas and Jocelyn Chase. While smaller in population than it had been during the "Baby Boom" era, the Ontario Chapel Sunday School continued to effectively nurture and train many young Christians throughout this era.

Young People's Societies and Youth Organizations

During the heyday of the Ontario Chapel Sunday School, there was such a large number of children participating that workers actively sought other activities and organizations to occupy the children's time during the week. No history of the Ontario Chapel Sunday School would be complete without some attention to the many affiliated groups and organizations which provided innumerable local African-Canadian children with training, fun, excitement and a sense of belonging.

C.G.I.T. (Canadian Girls in Training)

The C.G.I.T. was a precursor of the Girl Scouts. Girls who participated wore navy skirts and white blouses, made crafts and engaged in other training activities. Led by the unforgettable Mrs. Rosie Timbers, this organization flourished at Ontario Chapel in the 1930s and 1940s.

Cubs and Scouts

While the girls of Ontario Chapel were participating in the C.G.I.T., the boys participated in Cubs and Scouts. Along with Archie Ball, Ellsworth Boston, Mr. Lyons,

Mr. Shirley Moore acted as Scout leaders. Most interestingly, during the Second World War when the dearth of available male role models threatened the continuation of the Scouts and Cubs programs, Maudie Watkins stepped in and assumed the position of Scouts and Cubs leader.

B.M.E. Rangers

Sunday School organizers recognized that the children and young people of the church needed to engage in physical activity. They organized girls' and boys' baseball teams which competed with teams from other churches in the city and county. For many individuals who were Sunday School children or young people during the 1920s/1930s, the B.M.E. Rangers athletic teams constitute one of their fondest memories. Some individuals recalled that Jim Watson was consistently the best male athlete, and that Winnie Christian was the best female athlete.

Parliament of Youth

During the 1930s and 1940s, members of the Sunday School's very populous adolescent classes participated in the Parliament of Youth, where they formally debated political and social issues of the day while learning about parliamentary procedure. Numerous alumni of this organization remembered it as an important training ground for them.

Junior Church Aid

Following in the footsteps of the earlier generation which had formed the Parliament of Youth, senior female Sunday School students formed the Junior Church Aid in the 1950s and 1960s. Under the leadership of Gladys Browning and Ruby Smith, these young individuals were trained in parliamentary procedure, learning lessons that would serve many of them well in later life.

Science, Art and Craft Club

Until the 1930s, no black youths were allowed on the premises of the YMCA/YWCA in Windsor. All of this changed when Dr. H.D. Taylor, a very prominent member of Windsor's black community, took an active role in bringing about the official desegregation of the YMCA/YWCA. He then contacted the Superintendent of the B.M.E. Sunday School, Mrs. Ethel Christian, and Ontario Chapel's pastor, Rev. Thomas Woodcock, to request that some black youths from the B.M.E. form a group which would visit the YMCA/YWCA regularly. The Science, Art and Craft Club was formed and its members were charged with the very momentous task of integrating the YMCA/YWCA. They met there on a frequent basis, engaged in many activities and even swam in the pool much to the horror of some of Windsor's less progressive individuals. Some of the members of this very special group included Javen Woodcock

(President), Doris and Jeannetta Woodcock, Ernie and Lyle Browning, Velma Browning, Winifred Christian, Jim and Ray Roberts, and Morris and George Harding.

Mother's Club/Hour-a-Day Study Club

In 1932, when Velma Browning served as Windsor's delegate to the Sunday School Convention, a motion was passed recommending that each B.M.E. Sunday School establish a mother's club. Ontario Chapel's Mother's Club functioned for two years and then in 1934 the Windsor B.M.E. mothers decided to invite other female members of the community to join them in promoting the interests of local African-Canadian children.

Together, in February 1934 they established the Hour-a-Day Study Club. Charter members from the B.M.E. Sunday School were Ethel Christian (Spt.), Vivian "Tilly" Nall, Hilda Watkins, Ardella Jacobs, Elizabeth Washington, and Gladys Browning. This group became a charter member of the Windsor Local Council of Women. Most notably, the Hour-a-Day Study Club gave out and continues to give out bursaries and scholarships to local African-Canadian youth. The first recipient was Jimmy Watson, who later became the first black City Solicitor in Canada and a very well respected attorney. Now in its seventh decade of existence, the Hour-a-Day Study Club is certainly the most enduring of the many organizations which have grown out of the Ontario Chapel Sunday School in Windsor. Having provided bursaries and scholarships to the local community for sixty four years now, this organization has had a positive and very tangible effect on the lives of countless African-Canadian youths.

The Place of the Ontario Chapel Sunday School and Young People's Societies in Our Community

It is important that we understand that during the first decades of their existence, the Sunday School and young people's societies of the Ontario Chapel B.M.E. Church were not only an important training ground for young Christian children and youths. Throughout the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, Windsor, like most other towns and cities, was a profoundly segregated community. The church, and by extension the Sunday School and young people's societies, represented the only social or cultural outlet that most African-Canadians had with the exception of bars, pool halls and the like. Black children were barred from involvement in many of the activities that non-minority youths participated in freely. The church and the Sunday School, then, acted as the gathering place and training ground on which African-Canadian young people could depend. The church and

Sunday School were not merely a church and a Sunday School, but a source of strength, a community centre, a safe haven, and the place where our culture was celebrated. Bearing this in mind, each and every one of the individuals who contributed to our oral history project indicated in some way that their days in the Sunday School played a very significant role in their development, not only as Christians, but as people. It is our hope that the Ontario Chapel Sunday School will continue to play a leading role in providing future generations with many of these same benefits.

The Ontario Chapel Sunday School History Project

While it has been a pleasure to contribute these few details to the written history of Ontario Chapel's Sunday School and Young People's Societies, the ultimate goal is to be able to produce a more complete history relating to this subject. If you have any recollections which you would like to share please contact Andrea Shreve Moore.