

THROUGH THE YEARS

AFRICAN - AMERICAN HISTORY IN CHAMPAIGN COUNTY

WINTER 1998

SALEM BAPTIST CHURCH

By Veola Tinsley

Second Baptist Church was organized at a time when there were few houses in the area. Urbana at that time was mainly prairie land, duck ponds and cornfields.

A few Christians had migrated from the South and wanted a place to worship. Mr. J.W. Randolph had come out of the Union Army in Memphis, TN (1863), along with his wife and decided to organize a church in 1866.

Mr. Randolph, Susan Johnson, Kitty Lee, and Martin Dandrage met at the Old Coffee Place at 406 E. Park Street in Champaign, Illinois and organized the Second Baptist Church. Mr. David Johnson was one of the founders. Reverend William Washington was the first pastor.

In 1908, Under the pastorate of Reverend S.L. Edwards, the name was changed to Salem Baptist Church. Pioneers of the church in 1908 were Sisters Mildred Randolph Graves, Mary Stokes, Stella Baker Lyde, Effie Payne, Lillie Crushon, and Nannie Jamerson. Second Baptist joined the Wood River District Association when it met in Champaign



Salem Baptist Church Membership, 1923

in 1908.

Salem purchased its first parsonage at 304 N. Third Street in 1948 under the leadership of Reverend Robert L. Lillard. The present parsonage at 1712 S. Prospect Avenue was purchased in 1968, under the administration of Reverend William Howe Donaldson. Under Reverend Donaldson's administration, the \$2,300 mortgage on the church was burned in September of 1950, and Reverend Lillard was invited to preach for the special service.

Reverend Donaldson retired as a pastor in April of 1981, after pastoring for 50 years. Reverend Eugene Williams was called to Salem in April of 1956. On May 27, 1957, the church built an education annex and a \$25,000 loan from the First Federal Loan and Savings Association was granted. The annex addition was started in August

of 1957, and completed in February of 1958. The annex consisted of 10 new class rooms, new restrooms, and two new entrances. The cost was approximately \$52,000.

In 1976, the church was designated a historical site by the Bicentennial Commission for being one of the oldest continuing institutions in Champaign County.

The Reverend Claude E. Shelby, Sr. was called to Salem Baptist Church August 28, 1982, and accepted the call September 11, 1981. On December 2, 1983, the church adopted a three to five year building plan, beginning in 1984, for the building of a new sanctuary. Salem had to acquire more property in order to build the 13,866 sq. ft. facility. The spacious church has a large sanctuary, several classrooms, offices, restrooms, con-

continued on page 3

A Record For Champaign And Perhaps For The State As Six Lewis Brothers Serve In Army Of United States



PFC IVON LEWIS



CORP. PORTER LEWIS



CORP. MALCOLM LEWIS



PVT. BILLY LEWIS



PVT. VERNON LEWIS



PVT. DOWL LEWIS, JR.

Above: The six sons of Mr. and Mrs. Dowl Lewis, Champaign, who ranged in age from 19 to 30 years at the time of this picture, all served in the army at the same time. Shown from top to bottom are: PFC Ivon Lewis, Corp. Porter Lewis, Corp. Malcolm Lewis, Pvt. Billy Lewis, Pvt. Vernon Lewis, and Pvt. Dowl Lewis, Jr.

Right: Mrs. Erma Bridgewater, her husband Cecil (who was a sailor and a member of one of Uncle Sam's bands at the time of this picture), and Jr. Cecil.

The Douglass Center of today was made possible by the presence of one "Colored" soldiers of the 99th Pursuit Squadron who were stationed at Chanute Air Force Base in Rantoul, Illinois in 1941.

The U.S.O., nationally created for the entertainment of our "Men in Service", did NOT welcome the "Colored" airmen in their facility here in Champaign-Urbana. Instead, the

A Tribute

The 99th Pursuit Squadron

By Erma Scott Bridgewater

New Director For Lawhead



Lawhead Servicemen's Center was created for them. It consisted of two rooms, 22'x25' each, in the basement of the old Lawhead School, located at the corner of Fifth and Grove Streets in Champaign, Illinois. It was estimated that 2500 servicemen and hostesses per month attended the center.

The City of Champaign's Recreation Department provided staff and programming, that included movies, dancing, special holiday festivities, and a snack bar. The snack bar was popular since there were few, if any, places for them to eat. Mrs. Buford of Danville, was the first director, followed by Miss Kathrine Wallace of Galesburg, and later Mrs. Erma Scott Bridgewater and Mrs. Pauline Johnson of Champaign. The latter two were named acting directors of the new center.

It was quite evident that more space was needed; and so, the Colored Servicemen's Center drive was launched in 1943 by a committee composed of Raymond Scott (Chairman), Cecil D. Nelson, Homer L. Chavis, Charles Pettiford, and Alvin Foxwell. Various fund-raisers were held, among them a concert featuring the "Southernaires", a radio and concert quartet. This committee raised \$3,000 in the Negro Commu-

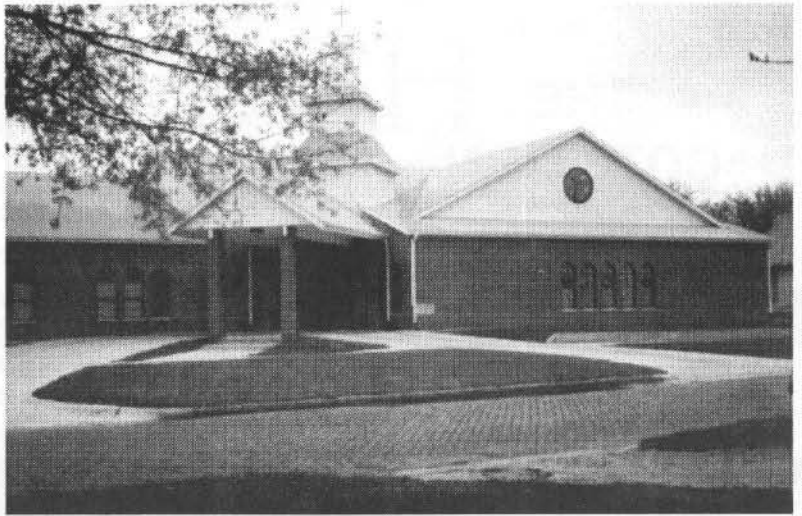
nity. These funds were used to purchase the land at the corner of Sixth and Grove Streets. Additional funds from the Community War Chest and the Federal Works Agency were allocated to build the Servicemen's Center. With the understanding that it would become a community center after the war. Many men in the community were active in this endeavor.

In reporting the dedication ceremonies, the newspaper stated that, "Corporal Robert Brooks of Chanute Field, (whose rich baritone voice has captivated numerous Champaign-Urbana audiences in the last few years,) presented two solos." Maxwell Granville (who later acted on Broadway) produced a Christmas pageant at the new center. This fact was mentioned in a book published by him in later years.

And so, in closing, to those of you present today and who were here in the early years; the treatment you received here was, unfortunately, indicative of the times. However, your legacy to our Black Community and the benefits to our youth will live on forever.

(NOTE: This speech was presented by Mrs. Erma Scott Bridgewater at the luncheon held at Douglass Center Annex honoring members of the 99th Pursuit Squadron attending the reunion, October 2-4, 1998)

SALEM BAPTIST CHURCH SCRAPBOOK



Above: The new Salem Baptist Church, completed in 1993



Above: Original Salem Baptist Church built in 1908 and remodeled in 1950



Right: Women of Salem (circa 1947)



Above: Majestic Choir of Salem Baptist Church (circa 1950)



Right: First Salem Men's Club, 1945

SALEM

continued from page 1

ference rooms, and other rooms needed for special activities.

Dedication of the new church was held on August 22, 1993. A Corner Stone Service was held August 28, 1994. Items deposited in the corner stone capsule were: a Dedication Service souvenir book (8-22-93); a picture of Todd Taylor, organist, and the choir singing outside for the 124th church anniversary and ground-breaking ceremony (newsclip from the *News-Gazette* dated June 3, 1990); a picture of the congregation taken the day before the walls were put up on the new facility (March 22, 1992); and a program from the funeral of Deacon Theotto Bowles. The Masonic Lodge conducted the ceremony.

THE COTILLION Part II

By Kathryn B. Humphrey

During the past twenty-six years, more than three hundred young black women of high school age have participated in "The Cotillion" and have received scholarships to assist them in furthering their education at various institutions of higher learning.

Of this number, a large percentage have graduated, some with advanced degrees, and have established themselves in great careers ...both locally and

in other parts of the United States.

Space will not permit the long list of success stories of the Cotillion participants, and the many interested women in the Champaign-Urbana who joined the ranks of the Gammas to support the Cotillion and its mission. It is their hope to continue this event for years to come.

To quote some of the original Interested Women in Champaign-Urbana: "This Cotillion event is one of, if not the best, organized events in this community because the proceeds from it go back to the young women who work so hard to earn the scholarships." The family and friends who support them also benefit from the experience of being part of it.

Women, one of God's greatest creations, let us prove ourselves worthy of that honor,

WHO WE ARE

Through the years collections of papers, photographs, documents of individuals, families and organizations of the African-American community have been discarded or lost because there were no local programs to seek out and preserve such materials. Recognizing this fact, the Champaign County African-American History Committee, a volunteer committee under the sponsorship of the Early American Museum and the Champaign Park District, was organized in 1992. The committee works with local individuals from Champaign County and surrounding areas to help organize and preserve historical records dealing with the African-American experience in Champaign County.

The committee has defined four areas of importance: (1) raising the public consciousness of the diversity and strength of African American contributions to Champaign County's and Illinois' heritage; (2) developing a brochure for the general public; (3) working with curriculum directors of schools to facilitate the integration of Champaign County African-American history into the curriculum; and (4) securing space for storage of research materials and artifacts.

Visit our website at:
<http://www.prairienet.org/years>

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ILLINOIS

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CAN YOU NAME THEM?



Community Leaders, 1948

Row 1: Reverend William H. Donaldson, Edgar Harris, Harrison Pierce, Charles Phillips, Sr.
Row 2: Eugene Caldwell, Reverend A.S. Webb and Reverend Elsie Tabron (Bethel A.M.E.)