

History of the Black Church in Boston

General Resources

Last Updated 10/31/2019

Bass, Jeff, and Rudy Mitchell, editors. *Boston Church Directory*. Boston: Emmanuel Gospel Center, 2001. See also the 1989, 1993, and 1995 editions.

The directory provides basic data on all Boston and Cambridge churches including the Black churches. This is the most complete listing of churches.

Bullock, Samuel H. *They Loved Him*. Boston: The Lavalley Press, 1951.

In a form of dialogue and diary, Samuel Bullock tells the story of the Pleasant Hill Baptist Church of Roxbury over its first dozen years. During this time the church grew from a prayer meeting of seven people to a church of 700 people with its own building.

Buttry, Daniel. *Bringing Your Church Back to Life: Beyond Survival Mentality*. Valley Forge, Penn.: Judson Press, 1988.

This book draws on the experiences of Pastor Dan Buttry when he was at Dorchester Temple Baptist Church (now Global Ministries Christian Church). It is relevant because it describes the early stages of transformation of a survivalist, declining, mostly white church into a vital, integrated church. Later the church transitioned to a majority Black Church.

Concord Baptist Church of Boston. *80 Years on the Christian Walk: 1916-1996: The Concord Baptist Church of Boston*. Boston: Select Publications, 1996.

Ellis, Alexander. *Manual of the Day-Star Baptist Church; Containing the Declaration of Faith, Covenant, Rules of Order ... with a Brief History of the Independent Baptist Church*. Boston: J. W. Chamberlain, 1876.

Finkenbine, Roy E. "Boston's Black Churches: Institutional Centers of the Anti-slavery Movement." In *Courage and Conscience: Black and White Abolitionists in Boston*, edited by Donald M. Jacobs, 169-189. Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1993.

Franklin, John Hope. *George Washington Williams: A Biography*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1998 (Originally published, Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press,

1985).

George W. Williams was pastor of Twelfth Baptist Church (1873/74-1876), leading a congregation of over 700 members at the age of 25. John Hope Franklin relentlessly pursued every detail of this amazing man's life. Williams was a pastor, prolific writer, soldier, lawyer, politician, historian, civil rights leader, and world traveler/investigator (in the Congo).

Hayden, Robert C. *The African Meeting House in Boston: A Celebration of History*. Boston: The Museum of African American History, 1987.

Hayden, Robert C. *Faith, Culture and Leadership: A History of the Black Church in Boston*. Boston, MA: Boston Branch NAACP, 1983.

Hayden covers the history of nine churches founded in Boston by 1913 (African Baptist Church/People's Baptist, Union Methodist Church, Charles Street AME, Columbus Avenue AME Zion, Twelfth Baptist, Ebenezer Baptist, St. Mark Congregational, Church of Saint Augustine and Saint Martin, and St. Cyprian's Episcopal). The acknowledgements include bibliographical information.

Hester, William Hunter. *One Hundred and Five Years by Faith, a History of the Twelfth Baptist Church, Boston, Massachusetts*. Boston: Twelfth Baptist Church, 1946.

Levesque, George A. *Black Boston: African American Life and Culture in Urban America, 1750-1860*. New York: Garland, 1994. Reprint, New York: Routledge, Taylor and Francis, 2018. See especially part III, chapter 8.

Levesque, George A. "Inherent Reformers-Inherited Orthodoxy: Black Baptists in Boston, 1800-1873." *The Journal of Negro History* 60, no. 4 (Oct. 1975): 491-525.

Horton, James Oliver, and Lois E. Horton. *Black Bostonians: Family Life and Community Struggle in the Antebellum North*, rev. ed. New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 2000.

Chapter four covers the "Community and the Church" with considerable detail on Thomas Paul and the African Baptist Church. The Hortons discuss several anti-slavery strategies used by the African American pastors of the time. They provide some helpful biographical information about the pastors and mention a number of other active church members.

Jacobs, Donald M. *Courage and Conscience: Black and White Abolitionists in Boston*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993.

[Roy Finkenbine's "Boston "Boston's Black Churches: Institutional Centers of White Abolitionists Movement]

Jennings, James. "Black Churches and Neighborhood Empowerment in Boston, Massachusetts 1960s and 1970s." Boston: Trotter Institute, University of Massachusetts, 2012. 28 pages.

Jennings, James. "Black Faith-Based Coalitions in Boston: Civic Advantages and Challenges." In *Black Churches and Local Politics: Clergy Influence, Organizational Partnerships, and Civic Empowerment*, edited by R. Drew Smith and Frederick C. Harris, 79-96. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2005.

Johnson, Violet Showers. *The Other Black Bostonians: West Indians in Boston, 1900-1950*. Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2006.

Johnson describes the experience of West Indians in Black and White churches in the early period of immigration and highlights the development of St. Cyprian's Episcopal Church as the central religious and social institution for immigrants from Barbados and Jamaica. See especially pages 55-59.

Mather, Cotton. "Rules for the Society of Negroes. 1693." Boston: Bartholomew Green, 1714. https://www.americanantiquarian.org/Exhibitions/Inpursuit/case9/9_328536_0001.jpg

Nine numbered rules written by Cotton Mather. Eight appear in Mather's diary for October, 1693. The ninth, written later, mentions his *Negro Christianized*, first published in 1706. This is the first printed record of a Boston African American congregation, although it was authorized under Mather's church and guidelines. See Cotton Mather's Diary and essay for more details and insights on the attitudes and viewpoints of the period.

McRoberts, Omar M. *Streets of Glory: Church and Community in a Black Urban Neighborhood*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.

McRoberts studied churches in the Four Corners Neighborhood of Boston. His analysis looks at the relationship between the churches and their neighborhoods. While these specific churches may not be representative of all Black churches, they reveal a variety of attitudes, theological perspectives, and involvements of churches, and their neighborhood.

Mitchell, Rudy. "Greater Boston's African American Churches" In *New England's Book of Acts*. Edited by Brian Corcoran, Steve Daman, and Rudy Mitchell. Boston: Emmanuel Gospel Center, 2007.

See also chapters: 6. “The English-Speaking West Indian Church Community of Greater Boston and Beyond by Ronald Stephenson, et al; 7. “The Haitian Church of New England by Soliny Vedrine;” 8. “The West African Church in New England by Darius and Mwaka Twagiravesu and Torli Krua;” 9. “The East African Church in New England.”

<https://sites.google.com/a/egc.org/newenglandsbookofacts/new-england-s-book-of-acts/section-two-group-reports/greater-bostons-african-american-churches>

Owens, Richard M. *I Wanted to Preach : Richard McLaughlin Owens : An Autobiography*. Boston: Select Publications, 1996.

Rev. Owens was the pastor of Peoples Baptist Church from 1936 to 1979 and was considered the “Dean of Boston’s Black Clergy.”

Paris, Arthur E. *Black Pentecostalism: Southern Religion in an Urban World*. Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 1982.

The three pioneering, Boston congregations of the Mount Calvary Holy Church of America denomination are the subject of this academic study by Arthur Paris. Bromfield Johnson was a key individual in founding the national movement and Boston churches.

Peterson, Mark A. “The Selling of Joseph: Bostonians, Antislavery and the Protestant International, 1689-1733.” *The Massachusetts Historical Review* 4 (2002):1-22. See the original text: below under Samuel Sewall.

Randolph, Peter. *From Slave Cabin to Pulpit: The Autobiography of Rev. Peter Randolph: The Southern Question Illustrated and Sketches of Slave Life*. Boston: James H. Earle, Publisher, 1893.

See especially pp. 110-115 for Ebenezer Baptist Church history. Peter Randolph was founder and pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church in Boston.

This autobiography is the story of his remarkable life. His speeches and writings brought the sufferings of slavery from the South into the hearts and minds of Bostonians.

Rhema Magazine – online in Issuu format from Sept. 2012 to Sept. 2017. Accessed 20 June 2019. <https://issuu.com/rhemamagazine> & <https://issuu.com/rhemamagazine>

Mostly featured greater Boston Black Churches and leaders. Valerie Brown was editor in chief. Although no longer continuing to publish, past issues are available online and contain valuable information on recent church history and leaders.

Sewall, Samuel. “The Selling of Joseph: A Memorial.” Boston: Bartholomew Green, and John Allen, 24 June 1700.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1026&context=etas>
https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Selling_of_Joseph

Swilley, Joe L., pastor of Bethlehem Healing Temple, Boston. Interview by M. B. Andrade.
24, 25 July 2018. (Part 1) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5LiCXJRieW4>
(Part 2) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HiXIys3AgYU>

These interview describes this Boston pastor's background and the influences and connections of Chicago's Bethlehem Healing Temple, and its founders, Bishop Charles and Mattie Poole, on Rev. Swilley and the Boston Healing Temple.

Williams, George W. *History of the Twelfth Baptist Church from 1840 to 1874*. Boston: James H. Earle, Publisher, 1874. Available online.