Trail of Souls
African-Americans at
All Saints’ Episcopal Church: 1742 – 1864

Ante-Bellum Period
Founded in 1742, All Saints’ Church in Frederick, MD, is the oldest Episcopal parish in Western Maryland. In our pews sat some of the heroes of local and national history, including Francis Scott Key (writer of the National Anthem), his sister, Ann, who was married to Thomas Johnson (first post-Colonial Governor of Maryland), Drs. William and John Tyler and Mrs. Roger Brook Taney, whose husband was the 5th Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court famous for the Dred Scott decision. But these American heroes were also part of the darker side of our American heritage: all owned slaves, as did many of All Saints’ earliest congregants and clergy. Slaves and free blacks participated in the sacraments of the church and worshipped together from our parish’s earliest days. As early as 1821, separate Sunday Schools were conducted for white and black children, although the black school was disbanded in the early 1890s. Blacks worshipped in the gallery of the 1814 Court Street church, according to Frederick resident Hester Posey. From the earliest years of the parish, slaves of parish members and free black communicants were buried with graveside services by the rector. For most of the 19th century, the lot separate from the white All Saints’ graveyard was the final resting place for the parish’s “colored” members.

The Civil War
Maryland was a border state during the years of the Civil War. All Saints’ was a place of divided loyalties. In May, 1862, the Rev. Charles Seymour resigned as rector after some of the parishioners boycotted the church because of his Union views. The position was vacant until the Rev. Marmaduke Dillon was engaged in November 1863. In the interim, All Saints’ on Court Street and the 1856 church served as hospitals following the battle of Antietam in the fall of 1862.

Emancipation
Almost exactly one year after the Rev. Mr. Dillon’s arrival, emancipation became law in Maryland. These are some of the stories of the early African Americans to worship in All Saints’ parish.

“At the east end of the room was a gallery for the ‘colored folk’, most of them being the servants of the white parishioners.” —Miss Hester Posey, 1892

“They galleries were packed with people and also the steps leading into them” —Frederick resident
Maria Harper
*All Saints’ Parishioner from 1816 - 1884*

In 1816, ten-year-old Maria Waters arrived in Frederick from Montgomery County. Maria came to All Saints’ as a slave, the “property” of Governor Thomas Johnson’s daughter Rebecca. The Court Street Church would have had been completed only two years before her arrival. She may have been among the first to worship in the East Gallery and attend the “Colored Sabbath School.” She was confirmed by in the church by Bishop Kemp, the second Bishop in the Diocese of Maryland. She became Mrs. Robert Smith on February 18, 1832, when she was married to a free black man by All Saints’ rector Rev. Henry V.D. Johns. Shortly afterwards, parish records indicate that she moved with Governor Thomas Johnson’s daughter Rebecca “to the country”—probably referring to Loudoun County, Virginia, “across the river”. We have no record of where Robert Smith lived and worshipped, or if Maria and her husband were separated when she moved. In the mid-1800s, it was common practice for enslaved families in Maryland to live in separate households and rarely see each other—if at all. Mrs. Johnson died in 1836, and Maria returned to the All Saints’ parish in 1837, still a slave of the Johnson extended family. Her name again appears under “marriages” on March 18, 1847, when the Rev. Joshua Peterkin married her to Wilson Harper. She and her husband Wilson would have seen the construction of the present All Saints’ Church on Church Street in 1855. By the time of the 1860 census, she and her husband were free and living with the 7-year old John Harper near Record Street. Young John’s birth would have coincided with some of the most turbulent years of All Saints’ history, when anti-Union sentiment would force the Rev. Charles Seymour (1854-1862) from office during the Civil War. However, his baptism is not listed in parish registries. In fact, no “colored” baptisms are recorded in the All Saints’ registries at all from 1847-1865, and Maria Harper herself disappears from the All Saints’ registry shortly after Emancipation in 1864. By the time of the 1880 census, she owned property on All Saints’ Street and was a member of the United African Female Society. She does not appear again in the Parish Registers until her burial on October 1, 1864 at “77yr, 9mo, 8d” by the Rev. Osborne Ingle, one of All Saints’ most beloved rectors with the longest tenure in parish history. Her burial is unique: she was laid to rest in the Johnson/Graham vault in the “white” cemetery rather than in the adjacent “colored lot”. Her obituary in the *Frederick News* remembers her “upright and truthful life”. On All Saints’ Day, 1894, a Frederick News article indicates that she was buried with the Johnson family, then “the vault was sealed forever”.

“Done with this world’s troubles”: Maria Harper’s obituary remembers her “upright and truthful life” *(Frederick News, October 6, 1884)*
The Frazier Family
Separated by Slavery

The story of the Frazier children is one of separation in the harsh realities of family life under slavery. Charles and Milly Frazier were husband and wife, but they lived in separate households under different masters. Milly lived with All Saints’ parishioners—Dr. William Tyler’s family on Record Street—while her husband Charles lived with Richard Coale in distant Libertytown. After Charles was manumitted in 1845, he worked as a driver for Dr. Tyler while his wife and children remained enslaved. Under Maryland law, children born to an enslaved mother were slaves, regardless of the status of the father. Charles and Milly appear in the All Saints’ parish registry only once, when their son Charles Jr. was baptized on Nov. 2, 1846. Sadly, Charles Jr.’s name appears again under “burials” two years after Emancipation. He was buried in the All Saints’ colored cemetery in 1866, at age 21. “First Lizzie” was born in 1840 and was given to Dr. William Tyler’s daughter Susan Peck “as a wedding present”. A letter written by Dr. William Tyler was carefully preserved in the pages of the Frazier family Bible, and shows 1852 as a year of mutual tragedy for both families. Dr. Tyler’s letter grants Charles Frazier “safe passage” to travel to visit “his ailing daughter. We do not know whether the father reached his sick child in time, but we do know that both First Lizzie (12) and Susan Peck (28) died in 1852, possibly from disease. One year before First Lizzie’s death, Laura Frazier was born (1851). When Laura was still a child, Dr. Tyler sold or gave her to his daughter, Mrs. Tyler Page. A photograph shows the 8-year-old Laura serving as nanny for the Page children. After Emancipation, she remained with the Pages as a domestic servant, and married William Downs in 1883. She and her family were prominent members of Asbury Methodist Church on All Saints’ Street. Like many other African American families of the time, the Frazier family seems to have “Gone to Methodist”, as recorded in the parish registry for many “colored” communicants.

Did Charles Frazier reach his daughter, “First Lizzie” in time to see her one more time before she died?
We do not know, but the letter tucked into the family Bible speaks to the harsh reality of family separation during the era of slavery.
Asbury United Methodist and All Saints’ Episcopal Church
Intertwined Histories

The histories of All Saints’ and Asbury Methodist are intertwined, as illustrated by the stories of the Fraziers and the Hammonds. Asbury United Methodist Church has its roots in the first All Saints’ Church. William Hammond (the enslaved Catherine Hammond’s free grandfather) purchased a lot from Richard Potts, Jr., of All Saints’ parish, on or near the site of the first church on East All Saints’ Street in 1811. Seven years later, it became the site of the Old Hill Church, on the condition that the trustees allow Negroes to worship there. The church became the home of a mixed white and black congregation. Between 1838 and 1853, the numbers of African-American parishioners declined at All Saints’. Some, like the Fraziers, joined Asbury’s Old Hill Church, which came into full possession of the black congregation the year of Emancipation, when the church also welcomed the first black pastor in church history.

Old Hill Church, Courtesy of Asbury United Methodist Archives

Tribute

As we honor the enslaved “Saints among us” emancipated on All Saints’ Day in 1864, we remember the legacy of their lives, their stories, and their faith.

Selected Repositories and Sources of Information Consulted:

—All Saints’ Episcopal Church Archives
—Asbury United Methodist Church Archives
—Diocese of Maryland Archives
—Historical Society of Frederick County
—Maryland Room, Frederick County Public Libraries

—Samuel Lopez, “Divided in Politics, United in Faith: God’s Houses in Frederick During the War of Rebellion” (Hood College, Cole Prize Essay)