

CHURCHES

There are strong connections between the church & struggles for social equality. This is no coincidence. Church is the cornerstone of the Black community; as leaders of the church, pastors & ministers have worked as servants of the community in its many channels flowing beyond the ecclesiastical estuary. Martin Luther King Jr. serves as one of the foremost examples of the power, authority & respect commanded by Black religious leaders, & the extent to which this endowment could be taken. Black pastors & ministers in Kingsport functioned within that same legacy. Unsurprisingly, these clerics & their congregants often followed suit upon witnessing & adapting the dynamism of Dr. King's religious-social movement.



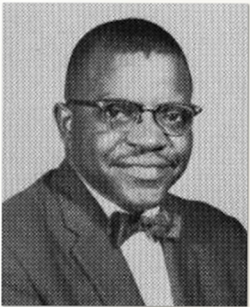
SHILOH BAPTIST CHURCH was founded on June 1, 1936 by a faction from the Willing Workers Club, congregating in a small tent on Maple Street. This original structure may have been humble, but Shiloh Baptist expanded physically and figuratively, becoming prolific in its work within & beyond Kingsport's Black community. Shiloh Baptist Church was a hub for local Black life in Kingsport during the twentieth century. This was most notably facilitated through Shiloh's musical traditions, which embodied a combination of activism and celebration.

Throughout the twentieth century, Shiloh Baptist frequently hosted musical groups who were both local (such as the Kingsport Gospel Singers) & from abroad (the Spirit of Memphis Singers in 1946). Concerts presented opportunities for the community to gather, as well as interact across racial lines.

In 1972, the church hosted an inter-faith musical service featuring a Hebrew processional, a sermon from Rev. Gaines as well as music & sermons from other Baptist, Methodist, & Catholic ministers & priests in Kingsport. Music was also an integral part of Jubilee Day, a celebration of the Emancipation Proclamation.

Reverend James Bratton Gaines was the pastor of Shiloh Baptist Church for thirty-seven years (1953-1990). He established deep roots throughout the community – endowed with authority by his position in the church & decades of faithfulness to his congregation & they to him. Gaines acquired his position in 1953, just one year before the landmark *Brown v. Board* case. With the Civil Rights Movement nearing full-swing, Rev. Gaines would guide his congregation through the troubled waters to come.

Gaines was a vocal & frequent Black activist in Kingsport, calling for those with power to liberate the Black community, "at any cost" at one local Inter-Faith Council meeting in 1970. Gaines advocated for the establishment of a fair-housing arbitration board in 1972, & in 1979 presented a three hundred-signature-strong petition to the Board of Mayor & Aldermen in order to save the Riverview pool. In 1972, the Shiloh congregation fundraised \$60,000 to construct a new church building. The A-frame sanctuary where Shiloh is still located mirrors the tent in which the church had its first meetings thirty-five years prior, demonstrating Shiloh's long-term durability, & the strength of Gaines' congregation.



Rev. J.B. Gaines



BETHEL AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPALIAN ZION CHURCH was founded in Kingsport in 1924, making it the city's second-oldest Black church that continues to gather today.

Reverend B.F. Wright served as Bethel A.M.E.'s pastor from 1943 to 1950. At the time of his departure, the Kingsport Times-News characterized Rev. Wright as a "pioneer in Negro work" due to the extent of his achievements over the previous seven years. Rev. Wright accomplished much for Bethel A.M.E., including payment of the parsonage mortgage, construction of bathrooms, a furnace, new pews, & a basement, where he established the Kingsport Colored Day Nursery

Beyond matters pertaining immediately to the church, however, Rev. Wright was the first Black man to hold office in the Kingsport Ministerial Alliance, of which he was treasurer, as well as serving on the boards of directors for the state N.A.A.C.P. & the Business & Professional League, & on the executive committee of the Boy Scouts.

Reverend John Bruce served as a minister for Bethel A.M.E. Zion Church throughout the late sixties, seventies & eighties, & as pastor during the early seventies. Rev. Bruce was born in the country of Guyana. Upon his arrival in Kingsport, Reverend Bruce became a health & social services specialist with the Office of Economic Opportunity, which funded & organized Headstart, & was promoted to director of emergency food and medical services in 1967, then in 1973 to director of Neighborhood Service Centers, & finally to Programs Supervisor in 1974.

In 1971, Rev. Bruce noticed open sewage flowing across the back steps of a unit occupied by a mother & her three children in the Sevier Street Apartments. Rev. Bruce brought the issue to the health department & the Kingsport Times-News. In the article, he pointed out that the "Sugar Shack" only received public attention when a person had been murdered there, obscuring, "these other people [who] are dying a slow death ... no one pays attention at all." Within days, a plumber had repaired the two broken sewer lines.



Rev. B.F. Wright



Rev. John Bruce



Bethel AME Zion Nursery School, 1955

Negroes to Have New Church

Above is a picture of construction work starting on the new Maple Street A. M. E. Zion church which will afford better religious accommodation for Kingsport's negro population. The new church is being built on the site of the present church as can be seen in the picture. It will be of brick construction.

Kingsport Times, February 14, 1937

Week Of Speakers Planned

St. Mark United Methodist Church will launch Key '73 beginning Sunday with a week of special guest speakers who will speak about Key '73 in the Kingsport area.

Bishop L. Scott Allen, resident bishop of the Holston Conference will be the opening night speaker. Along with Dr. J. L. Chandler, presiding elder of A.M.E. Zion Church. Monday night Rev. J. B. Gaines of Shiloh Baptist Church will speak.

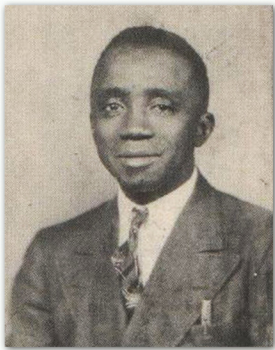
Tuesday night Rev. J. J. Campbell of Anderson Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church will be the guest and Wednesday the church will hear Rev. John Bruce of Bethel A.M.E. Zion Church.

Rev. J. E. Gambrell of Ebenezer Baptist Church will speak Thursday night and Rev. W. M. H. Stokely, of Central Baptist Church will speak Friday night.

Kingsport Times, December 15, 1972

- PRESBYTERIAN**
(COLORED)
Rev. J. M. Whitley, Pastor
Walnut Street
- M. E. CHURCH**
(COLORED)
Rev. H. A. Hatcher, Pastor
Walnut Street
- CENTRAL BAPTIST**
(COLORED)
Rev. G. W. Phillips, Pastor
Oak Street

WALNUT STREET METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH



Rev. William H. Stokely



CENTRAL BAPTIST CHURCH became Kingsport's first Black church when it was founded in 1918. Thought of as "Riverview's church" it was previously located on Oak Street. In 1941, Central Baptist moved to its new building in Riverview, & there it remains to this day. The \$6,000 (*roughly \$104,349 when adjusted for inflation*) project was fundraised by the church. Perhaps because it was the first of its kind in Kingsport, Central Baptist established a legacy of community involvement early on -- particularly for & with children.

Reverend William H. Stokely pursued children's advocacy during his thirty-seven-year pastorship at Central Baptist. Before arriving at Central in 1946, Rev. Stokely earned a teaching license from the Nelson-Merry Normal School in Jefferson City, Tennessee, & six years later, a Bachelor of Theology from Virginia Theological Seminary. Stokely also taught for eight years of his pastorship at Friendship Baptist Church in Greeneville. Reverend Stokely eventually accepted his position at Central Baptist where he remained for nearly four decades. There he aided in founding, fundraising, & recruiting for the Riverview Boy's Club, as well as leading Boy Scouts troops. Stokely also took the lead in building the Riverview Pool.

In 1923, the church campaigned to establish a Black school named after recently deceased School Board member W.M. Bennett; although the Board of Mayor & Aldermen took this idea up, they did so in founding a new, white high school, Dobyns-Bennett. Additionally, Central Baptist hosted Douglass High School's (at that time still Oklahoma School) baccalaureate ceremony in 1927. For National History Week in 1965, members of the church's Educational Club impersonated famous Black American leaders. In an effort to relieve strained race-relations in Kingsport, Central's youth group painted a white-owned building located on the border of Riverview in 1972. The store had been repeatedly graffitied in the wake of Martin Luther King's assassination four years earlier. Central Baptist Church continues to gather today, over 100 years after its initial founding & over eight decades in the Riverview community.



ST. MARK'S METHODIST CHURCH was established in Kingsport some time during the late nineteen-thirties. The church congregation & popularity were at their strongest from the 1950's to 1990's. St. Mark's was predominantly linked to the Black community during the nineteen fifties & sixties. Although the church was only temporarily predominantly Black at mid-twentieth century, that its congregation of color expanded during the heyday of Civil Rights Movement speaks to St. Mark's fluidity, flexibility, & progressive attitude regarding social change.

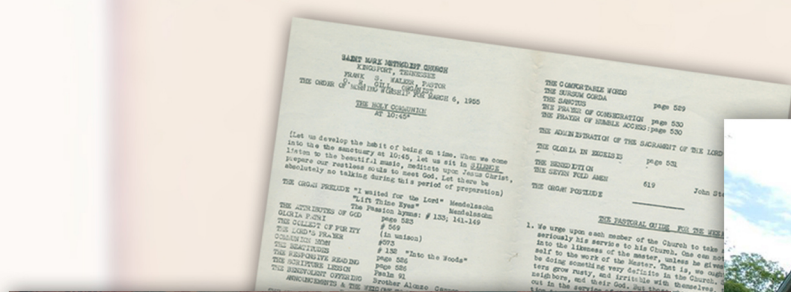
In 1951, St. Mark's hosted the East Tennessee Annual Conference, where it reported, "substantial membership & financial increases..." S.P. Manning served as pastor of St. Mark's during this time, & several years later attended Howard University. Earlier in 1951, St. Mark's was one of many institutions in Kingsport's Black community that advocated for the city to utilize the old Douglass School building as a recreation center. The city, however, turned the old building into governmental offices, & in the wake of this decision, St. Mark's opened a recreation center, complete with a canteen & nursery school, in June 1951.

Reverend Manning announced the Christian Youth Center would, "...meet a much-needed situation which has developed because teen-agers in the community have no place for recreation." St. Mark's frequently partnered with Douglass during the fifties & sixties. The church hosted a variety of different student & teacher appreciation days, as well as putting on concerts at the school.

During the nineteen-sixties, Rev. John Price Jr. pastored at St. Mark's Methodist – seemingly concurrently with his service at Bethel A.M.E. Zion Church. Price represented St. Mark's in the "Negro Ministerial Alliance", which in 1967 organized a protest against a Ku Klux Klan rally that would take place at Warrior's Path State Park later that month. During the protest, the ministers, "called upon the Board of Mayor & Aldermen to join them in forming an inter-racial committee, 'to decrease tension in our community.'"



Rev. S.P. Manning, 1951



Appeal For Racial Cooperation

To the Editor:

This letter is in reference to the article published in Sunday's paper from the Kingsport Committee of Negro Ministers. In that article they called for a showing of support from those in the community who were against Klan rallies in the area and who wished to see a lessening of tension between the races.

We certainly are in full support of their request and are horrified that a gathering of such low grade individuals

has taken place near Kingsport.

We are also pleased that the daily newspaper has the intelligence to treat Sunday's event with the contempt that it deserves.

Mr. and Mrs. G. E. McGraw,
408 Meadow Lane
Mr. and Mrs. C. E. Diebert
Mr. and Mrs. J. G. Pacifici
Mr. and Mrs. J. C. Hendon
David G. Hedberg

Negro Ministers Appeal To City

The Negro Ministerial Alliance of Kingsport spoke out in protest Saturday against the intent of a planned Klan "rally" today and expressed disappointment that white residents here have not shown open opposition to the gathering.

More important to the ministers, however, was their concern for improved communication between both races. They called upon the Board of Mayor and Aldermen to join them in forming an inter-racial committee "to

what useful purpose the Klan meeting here will serve? We know this organization only directs its intimidations and hate against Negroes and is a menace to decent law-abiding citizens. It sells hate like a department store specializing in a brand that would provide largest sales and returns.

"We are already living in a tense atmosphere. We don't see how this meeting can do anything but increase tensions. The method of this