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DCHS and Its Black Materials Project

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DCHS AND ITS BLACK MATERIALS PROJECT

By James O. Duke

Over the years the Disciples of Christ Historical Society has collected materials dealing with Blacks and Black churches, and distributed throughout the files and stacks of the Society are many significant records which document and illumine this portion of the Christian community.

About one year ago, however, the Disciples of Christ Historical Society initiated a special "Black Materials Project." Spurred by the brotherhood's reconciliation call and by the increased demand for resource materials in Black history and culture, the Society set for itself two goals. The first task was to compile a guide to the Society's holdings concerning race relations in general and the Black churches in particular. Under the direction of Marvin D. Williams, Jr., this phase of the project was undertaken by Mrs. Marsha Bell Uselton and Richard L. Harrison, Jr., and, after Mrs. Uselton's return to school, was continued by James O. Duke. The second task

was, and is, to expand the Society's holdings in these important areas.

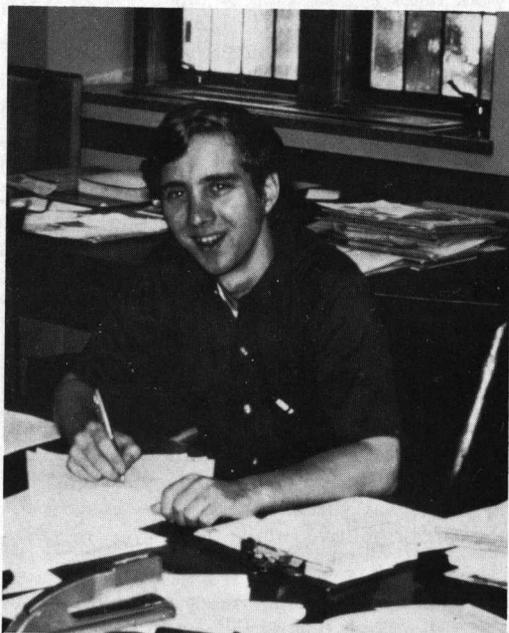
Preliminary Guide

Phase one of the project will appear shortly in the form of a *Preliminary Guide to Black Materials in the Disciples of Christ Historical Society*. The guide will publicize, to scholars and all others interested in church history and race relations, the materials located at the Society. Hopefully, this "publicity" will stimulate and facilitate research into these important areas of church history. Already there is a graduate student at Vanderbilt University, Hap C. Lyda, researching the sources here for his Ph.D. dissertation "The Development of the Black Churches in the Christian Churches."

The *Preliminary Guide* shows that the Society possesses a large number of outstanding and, in some cases, invaluable source materials on the Black church. The *Guide* lists over seven hundred entries, including the books, theses, pamphlets, and periodicals, the files on churches, agencies, educational institutions, and individuals; and the archival materials located in the Phillips Memorial.

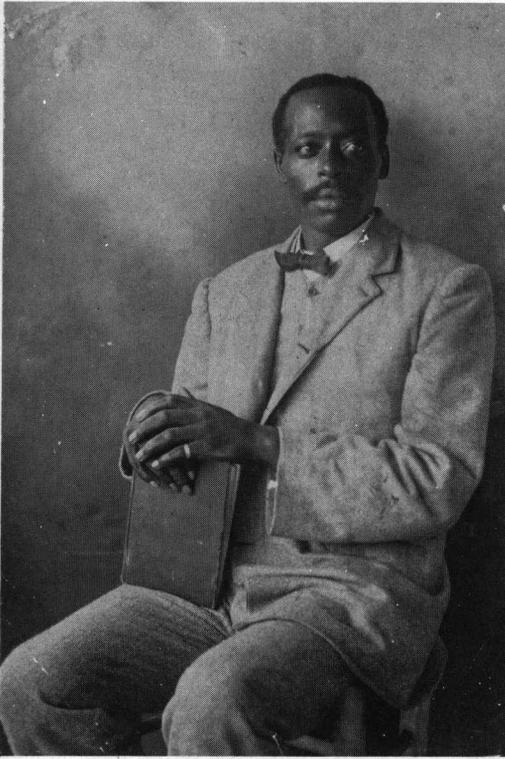
Tracking down entries in the *Preliminary Guide* can lead to many very interesting results. From the early days of the Disciples movement, Black churches and Black churchmen have shared in and helped further the cause of Christian ministry. From their ranks have come pastors, administrators, evangelists, educators, and missionaries. There is the story of another Alexander Campbell, a Black slave, who was converted at Cane Ridge and worked his way through a Disciple school. His freedom was bought by whites, and Campbell himself saved until he could purchase freedom for his wife. In the 1830's he ministered at a church in Midway, Kentucky, and in the following years he became a noted preacher in Kentucky and North Carolina.

Also to be mentioned are Alexander Cross and Jacob Kenoly. Cross, a slave, proved himself to be a fine preacher and leader, and expressed a desire to become a missionary. The people of Christian County, Kentucky purchased his freedom, and in 1853 he travelled to Liberia as the first Disciple missionary to Africa. Jacob Kenoly, another Black, was trained at the Southern Christian Institute and



Hap C. Lyda photo

Mr. Duke is doing his field work for Vanderbilt University Divinity School as a student assistant at the Disciples of Christ Historical Society. A graduate of the University of Maryland, he hopes to begin work on a Ph.D. program next fall after receiving his Master of Divinity degree from Vanderbilt. Mr. Duke has spent most of his time at the Society working on the Black Materials Project.



Jacob Kenoly, a product of Southern Christian Institute and one of the first missionaries of the Christian Church. From his arrival in Liberia in 1905 till his death by drowning in 1911, his work was one of unselfish and sacrificial devotion.

arrived in Liberia in 1905 where he served till his accidental death in 1911.

The Society is fortunate to hold the personal papers of Mrs. Sarah Lue Bostick, a home missionary of the Christian Woman's Board of Missions. Mrs. Bostick worked unceasingly organizing, overseeing, and aiding home mission work in Arkansas. The papers include Sarah Lue Bostick's autobiographical *Historical Sketch of the Missionary Work in the State of Arkansas, 1896-1947*.

Materials can be found, too, concerning numerous Black scholars and educators. Among these are George Calvin Campbell, an early principal of the Christian Institute at Goldsboro, North Carolina and long-time Professor of Old Testament and Dean of the College of the Scriptures in Louisville, Kentucky and Merl R. Eppse, former editor of the *Christian Plea* and head of the Department of History and Political Science at Tennessee State University.

The Society possesses important source materials of the National Christian Missionary Convention, Southern Christian Institute, and Mount Beulah Christian Center, the latter two at Edwards, Mississippi. There is information on Preston Taylor, founding father and guiding light of the National Christian Missionary Convention organized in 1917, minutes of the Convention's proceedings, and approximately 1300 microfilmed issues of the *Christian Plea* and its predecessor, the *Gospel Plea*, spanning the years 1900 to 1965 and even earlier. The archives of Southern Christian Institute and Mount Beulah Christian Center are being processed at the Disciples of Christ Historical Society. Worthy of special note is the major autobiography of Jephthah Hobbs, early president of Southern Christian Institute.

The *Preliminary Guide* mentions, too, some extremely interesting "ancient" works. There is, for example, a first edition copy of Alexander Campbell's "Lecture on Slavery," delivered and published in Edinburgh, Scotland in 1847 in which Campbell refuted accusations that he was proslavery. Other intriguing items are a racist tract on *The Negro*, published in Cincinnati in 1867 under the pseudonym "Ariel," and a refutation of Ariel's charges in the same year in *A Reply to Ariel*, issued in Nashville by Robert A. Young.

Continuing Project

Overall, it can be said that the materials held by the Disciples of Christ Historical Society should prove to be of inestimable value to scholars and researchers interested in Black studies and in the Disciples heritage. The completion of a *Preliminary Guide* is not a time to rest, however. Phase two of the proj-

The Mansion of Southern Christian Institute in Edwards, Mississippi, built in 1852 by the original owners, served successively as headquarters of Southern Christian Institute (1882-1953), Mount Beulah Christian Center (1954-1964), and the Delta Ministry of the National Council of Churches (1964 to the present).



ect is just beginning, and it should last indefinitely. Indeed, as significant new materials are received the *Guide* will be revised.

New materials are urgently needed to add to and to enrich our knowledge of this vital part of our history. Some contacts have already been made with church leaders, Black and white, in hope that fresh information can be gained, and such people as Miss Ann Dickerson, past secretary of the National Christian Missionary Convention; J. F. Whitfield, director of the Capital City Christian Church Corporation; Robert H. Peoples; and Pablo Cotto have supplied the Society with significant new materials.

Still, there are gaps in the story, and there is much that remains hidden in this aspect of Disciples history. Church records and bulletins, correspondence, personal papers—items frequently discounted or ignored, constitute the grass roots of historical recovery. Any item may become the key to unlock the meaning of an historical event. Thus, the Black materials project depends upon and is aimed to serve not just scholars and not just Blacks, but all people who share in the Disciples tradition. The preservation of these materials and understanding of this integral part of church history should be a concern of all.



Mrs. Sarah Lue Bostick, pictured here as a young woman, was a home missionary in Arkansas in the period 1896 to 1948. Her papers are preserved at the Disciples of Christ Historical Society. Many of the rare minutes of Negro conventions in the Society's files came from Mrs. Bostick.



The National Christian Missionary Convention first met in Nashville, August 5-9, 1917. This picture of the delegates at that first general convention is from the archives of the Disciples of Christ Historical Society.

The *Preliminary Guide to Black Materials in the Disciples of Christ Historical Society* will soon be available, listing over seven hundred books, theses, pamphlets, periodicals, archives and files on churches, agencies, schools, and individuals. One copy will be sent free upon request. Additional copies are fifty cents each. Please address requests to Marvin D. Williams, Jr., Director of the Library and Archivist, Disciples of Christ Historical Society, 1101 Nineteenth Avenue South, Nashville, Tennessee 37212.

NOMINATING COMMITTEE

David Edwin Harrell, Jr., a life patron member and trustee of the Disciples of Christ Historical Society, will head a committee to select nominees for election as officers and trustees of the Society with terms beginning July 1, 1971. Other committee members appointed by Society chairman John E. Hurt are Louis Cochran, Nashville; Harry M. Davis, Earlington, Kentucky; Willis R. Jones, Nashville; and Howard E. Short, St. Louis.

The Bylaws of the Society require that the names of the committee be published and that Society members be invited to submit suggestions.

Three year terms of the following trustees expire this year: Robert W. Burns, Atlanta; David Edwin Harrell, Jr., Mountain Brook, Alabama; Lester G. McAllister and J. Edward Moseley, both of Indianapolis; Hugh M. Riley, Los Angeles; Henry K. Shaw, Indianapolis; Howard E. Short, St. Louis; and Mrs. William H. Smith, Nashville.

The terms of all officers, who are elected annually, also expire. Present officers are John E. Hurt, chairman; Forrest F. Reed, vice-chairman; William F. Greenwood, treasurer; and Roscoe M. Pierson, secretary. The Executive Committee is composed of the officers and three other members. The additional members now are Harry M. Davis, Henry K. Shaw, and Mrs. William H. Smith.

All trustees, officers, and members of the Executive Committee are eligible to succeed themselves.

DCHS Trustee Dies

Bebe Boswell, long-time trustee of the Disciples of Christ Historical Society, died February 22 in Jackson, Tennessee.

Mr. Boswell became a trustee of the Society in 1960 and was elevated to the status of trustee emeritus in 1967. He graduated from George Peabody College for Teachers after first attending Freed-Hardeman College in Henderson, Tennessee. He was a businessman in Jackson many years. The funeral was held in the First Christian Church, Jackson, where Mr. Boswell had belonged for over a half century and was an elder.

Mrs. William H. Smith, daughter of Mr. Boswell, is now a Society trustee herself. Mr. Boswell's widow, Zelma, will continue to live in the family home in Jackson.

NEW ANNUAL MEMBERS

Cappiello, Silvio, Kensington, Md.
 Fisher, Dr. Theo. O., Albuquerque, N. M.
 Horton, Mrs. Billy M., Washington, D. C.
 Kelley, W. Ray, Eugene, Mo.
 Locker, Miss Zelma Bays, San Diego, Calif.
 Morrison, Phillip E., Annandale, Va.
 Sears, G. Howard, Silver Spring, Md.
 Thrower, Elmer, Hartshorne, Okla.
 Utley, Buford C., Memphis, Tenn.
 Williams, Mrs. Hugh E., Nashville, Tenn.

NEW STUDENT MEMBERS

McCall, Dan C., Kingsport, Tenn.
 Roos, David C., Pembroke, Ky.

NEW LIFE MEMBERS

387. Watkins, Earl L. (In memory)
 388. Cartwright, Colbert S., Fort Worth, Tex. (given in his honor)
 389. Beaumier, Mrs. Velma H. (given in her honor)
 390. Williams, Hugh E., Nashville, Tenn. (given in his honor)
 391. Pilkinton, Mrs. Betty M., Nashville, Tenn. (given in her honor)

NEW LIFE PATRON MEMBERS

34. Spencer, Dr. Claude E., Nashville, Tenn. (given in his honor)
 35. Malcor, Mrs. Dorothy D., El Monte, Calif.