

ORIGINS AND HISTORY OF CUMBERLAND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA DENOMINATION

Part I - The Second Cumberland Presbyterian Church

1874-1980

Before the Civil War, there were twenty thousand blacks in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church. Some of these persons attended the same worship services with the whites, though they had to sit in separately provided seats. Some church buildings with balconies that were originally built to accommodate slaves still stand.

Even then the blacks had their own ministers who preached for them in special services in addition to the joint services. In most cases, the state laws required some responsible white man to be present in all black services.

The black ministers were approved and ordained by the same presbyteries as the white ministers, but some occasional modifications were made on the educational requirements. In several situations, though slaves would preach to their masters and white congregations. Edmond Weir, a black man, was the first foreign missionary to be sent out by the Cumberland Presbyterian Church to Liberia, Africa. The educational level of black clergy seemed to be of high scholarship, on average.

After the Civil War ended, emancipation of slaves affected the life of denominations also. In many denominations, including the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, "blacks seemed to want their own separate denomination, and the whites were glad this was so," says Thomas H. Campbell in *Good News on the Frontier*.

Dr. William Sweet, quoted by Campbell, said:

"The Negroes were now free and many of them, if for no other reason than to put

their freedom to the test, were anxious to separate themselves from their former church masters. In many cases the Negroes were suspicious of the intentions of the Southern churches, in which they had formerly worshipped under the eye of their white masters, with the result that the Negro membership of the old Southern churches rapidly decreased."

In 1869, while the white General Assembly was in session in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, black ministers met in a separate caucus and concluded that they, too, needed to test out their new-found freedom and shake off the shackles of racism from their oppressors by founding a new denomination of Colored Cumberland Presbyterians.

In 1868, a convention was called to all colored brothers to come to Henderson, Kentucky to discuss a possible move to form separate denomination. That convention was not largely attended. Another convention was called in 1869, to meet in Huntsville, Alabama. This convention met the same fated as that of the year before. The Huntsville convention decided to defer all actions regarding the separation until the May meeting of the General Assembly.

Black Cumberland Presbyterian historian John J. Jenkins, in his book, *Souvenir History of the Colored Cumberland Presbyterian Church* describes the scene:

"The good people of Murfreesboro, (TN), influenced by their liberal-hearted pastor, Dr. Chadick, entertained the convention of colored "brethren" without cost, and accordingly, there was a large delegation present. Alabama had several ministers in this remarkable convention, namely: Rev. Hampton Jones, Rev. Alfred McCaulley, and Rev. Alfred Barnett. Rev. Hampton Jones was certainly the pronounced leader (of the separation movement) in Alabama.

Tennessee had several ministers and elders in this convention, prominent among whom were: Rev. Lewis Neal, Elder (Prof.) Jno. F. Humphrey of Fayetteville...Rev. Moses T. Weir was used as a “spokesman” for our fathers because of the ...literary attainment which he possessed. Rev. Weir’s contention before the General Assembly at Murfreesboro in 1869 (was) “that it was impossible for colored men to lean self-reliance and independence in the same church courts with white men.”

In his address to the General Assembly, Rev. Weir indicated that the black delegation needed four kinds of assistance: (1) the formulation of black Cumberland Presbyterians into separate presbyteries and synods; (2) the provision of church buildings in which they would worship; (3) the provision of hymn books and Bibles; and (4) the founding of schools for the education and training of clergy.

“It would not be for the advancement of the church, among either of the races, for our ministers to meet together in the same judicatories, “ said Rev. Weir. The General Assembly of the white church concurred in this statement and granted assistance in relation to the four requests.

The Black Church is Organized

In 1869, the first “colored” presbytery was organized. Elk River, of Middle Tennessee, was organized, followed closely by Hopewell of West Tennessee. Greenville presbytery, within the bounds of Green River Synod (white), and Huntsville presbytery, within the bounds of Columbia Synod (white) were organized in 1871. These presbyteries constituted the first synod, the Tennessee Synod, and it held its first meeting in Fayetteville, Tennessee, on Friday before the first Sunday in November 1871.

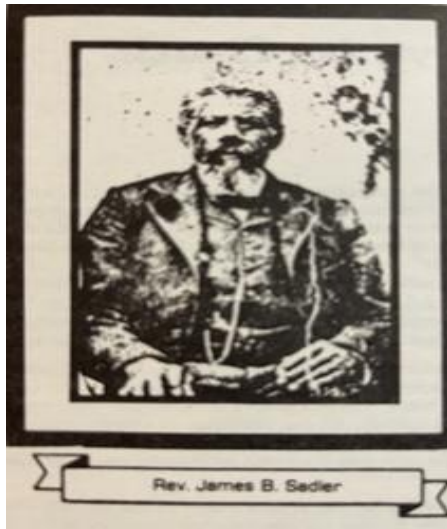
The first General Assembly was organized and constituted in the Cumberland Presbyterian Publishing House in Nashville, Tennessee, in May 1874. Among the first ministers ordained by the white church to preach in the new denomination were Rev. Lewis Neal, Rev. Samuel Fumbanks, Rev. Hamp Jones, and Rev. Pink Price. Rev. Price was elected to serve as the moderator of the first General Assembly of the Colored Cumberland Presbyterian Church.



**Cumberland Presbyterian Publishing House
Nashville, Tennessee Site of 1874 (first) Colored
Denomination General Assembly**

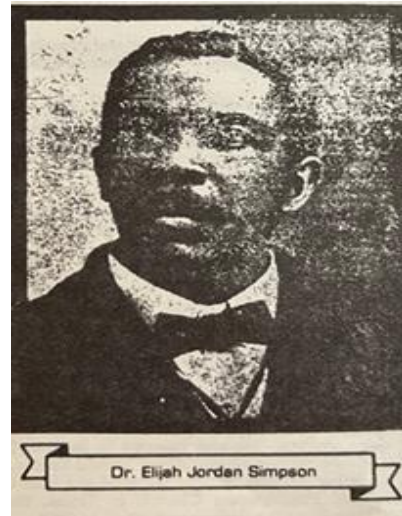
Freed slaves began to organize black congregations whatever they could. As freedom was gained and assistance given, the church began to spread to many parts of the south. The church had its beginnings west of the Mississippi when several congregations were organized in Texas in 1870.

Shortly thereafter, Rev. J. Y. Estelle of Harrison, Texas, Rev. I Snowden from Bush Chapel at Elm Mott, and Rev. James B. Sadler of Bosque County requested Waco Presbytery of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church for permission to begin a separate presbytery, and Brazos River Presbytery was duly organized and met for the first time on February 4, 1877.



The Reverend James B. Sadler (1828-1911) was he son of a slave master and a slave woman He was brought to Bosque County, Texas from Tennessee by a medical doctor named Sadler, who is assumed to be his father. It was he who founded and built the first Colored Cumberland Presbyterian Church in Texas, the Rock Spring Church. That church continues to stand in 1981.

A key leader in the Kentucky region of the church was Rev. Dr. Elijah Jordan Simpson. Dr. Elijah Simpson first saw the light of day in Crittenden County, Kentucky on October 2, 1852. The first plans of his education were laid by the young children of his master, also Mrs. M. A. Williams. In the year of 1869, Dr. Simpson began the work of a divinity student, and in 1871, was ordained as minister of the gospel by Green River Presbytery at its session held in Greenville, Kentucky. From that time, being only nineteen years of age, he had led an earnest, vigorous and tireless career in his efforts to assist in the life of his race. Being a teacher in the common schools when he was in his teens, teaching regularly and constantly holding the pastoral care of a sufficient number of churches to fully occupy his time.



In 1884, Dr. Simpson was elected as a delegate to the Pan-American Presbyterian Council, which met in Belfast, Ireland. In 1892, Dr. Simpson completed a four-year course in the Chautauqua Scientific and Literacy Circle. In 1902, the degree of Doctor of Divinity was conferred upon him by the Cadiz Normal and Theological College of Cadiz, Kentucky.

At the age of thirty years, he was elected Moderator of the General Assembly. He grasped every opportunity and with the motto: ***“Do Right, Keep Cool and Press Forward”*** meekly emblazoned upon his banner, his ambition never lagged, and his every achievement has been used as a steppingstone to reach and employ other opportunities of acquiring knowledge. Truly he was the architect of his own fortune, building wisely and well, thus erecting a monument to his race of a life of work well, worthy of their emulation.

The church continued to work and grow. By 1874, the church had 46 ordained ministers, 20 licentiates, 20 candidates for the ministry, and 3,000 communicants. Not all of the blacks had come into the new denomination. By 1886, the new denomination had grown to be about 15,000 communicants.



Rev. R. H. Goodloe, a renowned leader and pulpiteer in the church during the early 1900's, in a sermon delivered to the 1911 General Assembly, reported the statistics of the church:

"At one time, we had 375 organizations, 272 ministers, 225 church buildings, and many thousands of communicants. (We now have) one publication plant and a board of publication, with headquarters in Fayetteville, Tennessee, where we publish our paper. We have a Sunday School Department, issuing thousands of Sunday School periodicals of several different grades."

(NOTE: Excerpts extracted from the 1981 Directory of Second Cumberland Presbyterian Church. The Directory is a resource which provides a history of congregations, presbyteries, synods, and the General Assembly of the Second Cumberland Presbyterian Church. The historical information contained in this publication was compiled under the leadership and direction of the then, General Secretary/Stated Clerk of the General Assembly, Second Cumberland Presbyterian Church, Dr. Robert S. Wood, January 1, 1981.)

