

NOMINATION OF HISTORIC BUILDING, STRUCTURE, SITE, OR OBJECT
PHILADELPHIA REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION

SUBMIT ALL ATTACHED MATERIALS ON PAPER AND IN ELECTRONIC FORM ON CD (MS WORD FORMAT)

1. ADDRESS OF HISTORIC RESOURCE (must comply with an Office of Property Assessment address)

Street address: **1910 Fitzwater Street**

Postal code: **19146**

Councilmanic District: **5**

2. NAME OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

Historic Name: **Union Baptist Church**

3. TYPE OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

Building

Structure

Site

Object

4. PROPERTY INFORMATION

Condition: excellent good fair poor ruins

Occupancy: **occupied** vacant under construction unknown

Current use: **House of Worship**

5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Please attach a plot plan and written description of the boundary. **SEE ATTACHED SHEET.**

6. DESCRIPTION

SEE ATTACHED SHEET.

Please attach a description of the historic resource and supplement with current photographs.

7. SIGNIFICANCE

Please attach the Statement of Significance.

[See Attached Sheet]

Period of Significance (from year to year): from

1915 to 1993

Date(s) of construction and/or alteration:

Built 1915-1916

Architect, engineer, and/or designer:

Charles W. Bolton & Son

Builder, contractor, and/or artisan:

Charles W. Bolton & Son

Original owner:

Union Baptist Church

Other significant persons:

Marian Anderson

CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATION:

The historic resource satisfies the following criteria for designation (check all that apply):

- X (a) **Has significant character, interest or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the City, Commonwealth or Nation or is associated with the life of a person significant in the past; or,**
 - (b) Is associated with an event of importance to the history of the City, Commonwealth or Nation; or
 - (c) Reflects the environment in an era characterized by a distinctive architectural style; or,
 - (d) Embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style or engineering specimen; or,
 - (e) Is the work of a designer, architect, landscape architect or designer, or engineer whose work has significantly influenced the historical, architectural, economic, social, or cultural development of the City, Commonwealth or Nation; or,
 - (f) Contains elements of design, detail, materials or craftsmanship which represent a significant innovation; or,
 - (g) Is part of or related to a square, park or other distinctive area which should be preserved according to an historic, cultural or architectural motif; or,
 - (h) Owing to its unique location or singular physical characteristic, represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community or City; or,
 - (i) Has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in pre-history or history; or
- X (j) **Exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social or historical heritage of the community.**

8. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Please attach a bibliography.

SEE ATTACHED SHEET.

9. NOMINATOR: Keeping Society of Philadelphia, LLC

Authors: **Oscar Beisert & J.M. Duffin**

Email: **keeper@keepingphiladelphia.org**

Date: **3 August 2016.**

Street Address: **1315 Walnut Street, Suite 320**

Telephone: **717.602.5002**

City, State, and Postal Code: **Philadelphia, PA 19107**

Nominators are not the property owners.

PHC USE ONLY

Date of Receipt: 8/3/2016, 4:10pm

Correct-Complete Incorrect-Incomplete

Date: 12 August 2016

Date of Notice Issuance: 12 August 2016

Property Owner at Time of Notice

Name: Union Baptist Church

Address: 1910 Fitzwater Street

City: Philadelphia State: PA Postal Code: 19146

Date(s) Reviewed by the Committee on Historic Designation: _____

Date(s) Reviewed by the Historical Commission: _____

Date of Final Action: _____

Designated Rejected

This nomination is dedicated to the memory of

MARIAN ANDERSON,

the American Contralto,

and

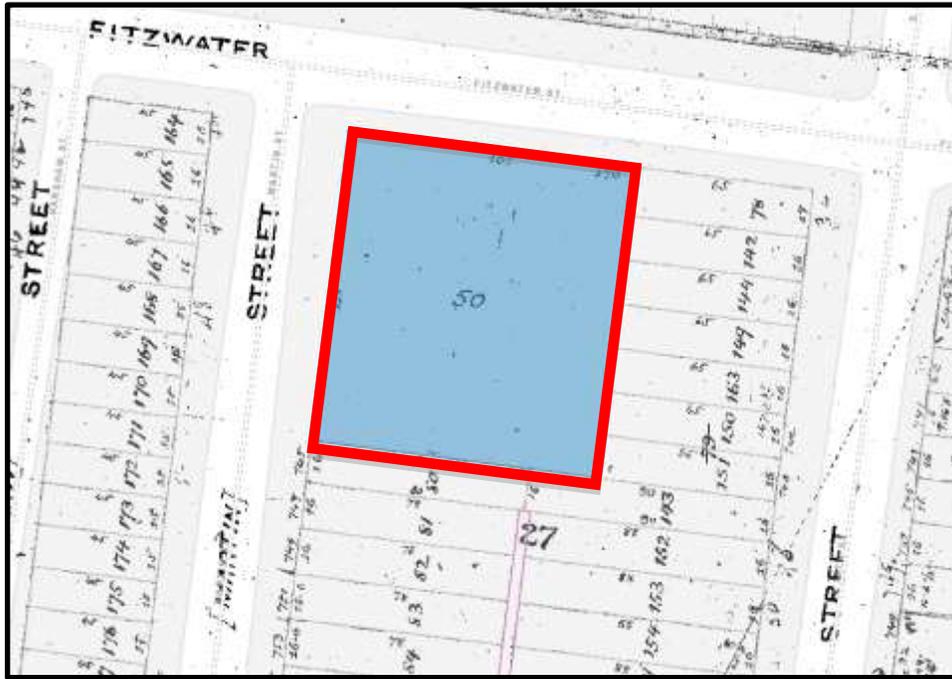
one of the most important singers of the twentieth century.



Marian Anderson. Courtesy the London Express.

May the Union Baptist Church stand forever in her memory.

5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION



Boundary depicted in red. Courtesy the City of Philadelphia.

The following description is for the boundary related to the designation of the subject building:

ALL THAT CERTAIN lot or piece of ground with buildings and improvements thereon erected at the Southeast corner of Fitzwater Street and Martin Street, CONTAINING in front or breadth on Fitzwater Street 105 feet and extending of that width in length or depth southward between lines parallel with and along the East side of Martin Street 113 feet, Bounded Northward by Fitzwater Street, Eastward and Southward by ground now or late of William Howell and Westward by Martin Street.

Department of Record Parcel 006S03-0050.

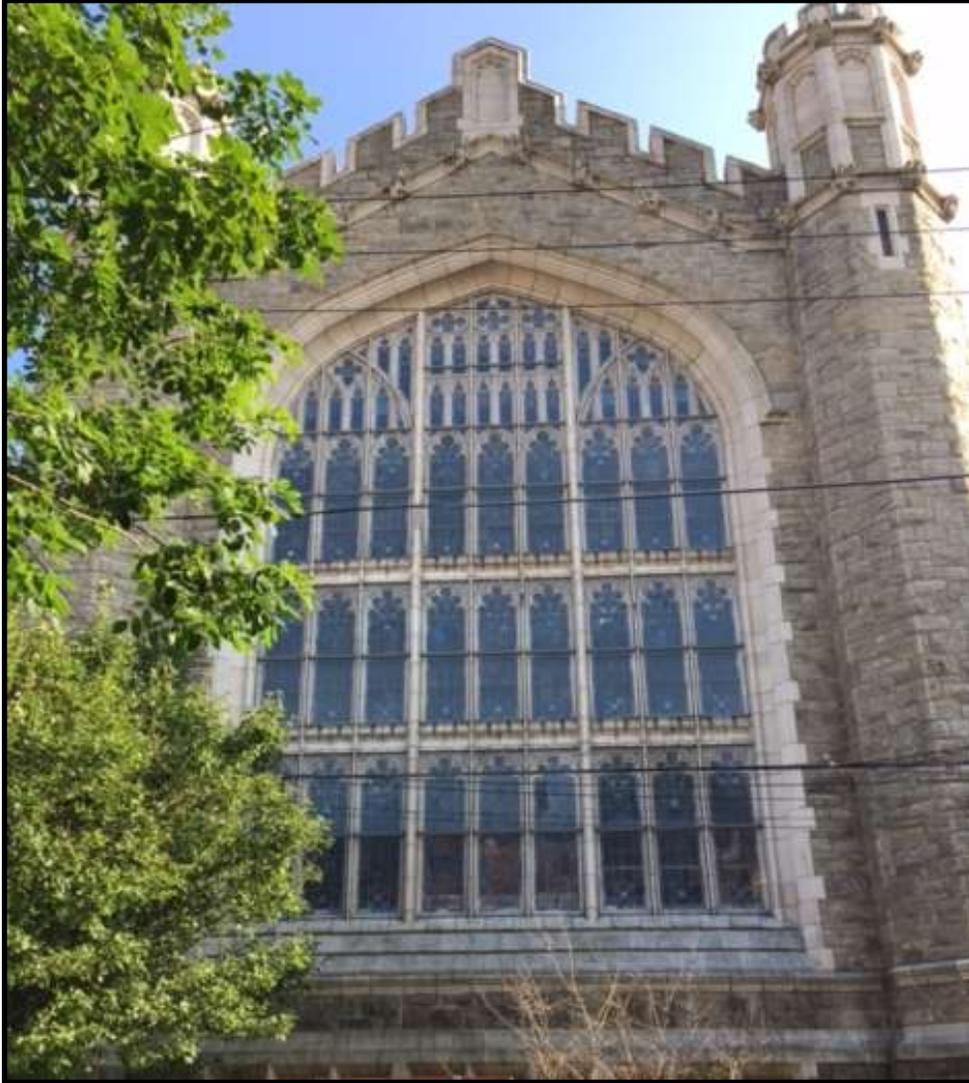
6. PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

Within the dense urban context of South Philadelphia, the Union Baptist Church is located at 1910 Fitzwater Street. Oriented north-south, facing north on Fitzwater Street, the building is a beautiful Collegiate Gothic Revival style house of worship with representative details.

Union Baptist Church is of stone masonry construction, the primary components of the façade feature rusticated stone. A light colored stone is used for architraves, lintels, and other details. Set upon a massive Gothic arch window of stained glass with tracer, this central aperture is set within a gable front central hall that is flanked by small towers that create a parapet across the central façade of the building. This parapet and window help to delineate a central hall that serves as the sanctuary, being flanked by lower sections of the building. The gable front features a crenelated parapet between the towers. The lower sections of the building on each side of the sanctuary feature double door entrances. These entrances retain original Gothic Revival wooden doors with niches set above, picked out in a light colored, smooth-faced stone. Buttresses delineate the façade of the building, one of which features the founding and construction date of the Union Baptist Church—“1832” and “1915”.

The east and west also features rusticated stone façade with the same light colored stone details in the architraves, lintels, etc. The west elevation features a narrow rectangular opening with stained glass that likely represents the belfry. The east elevation mimic the west elevation, but without the belfry window. This elevation opens onto open land.

Bas relief decorative panels, buttresses, crenulated parapets, Gothic arch window and door openings some with tracery, stone construction, and the use of spires and towers are all feature defined by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission as being of the Collegiate Gothic Revival style.



Looking south. Courtesy Oscar Beisert.



Looking southwest. Courtesy PlanPhilly.com.



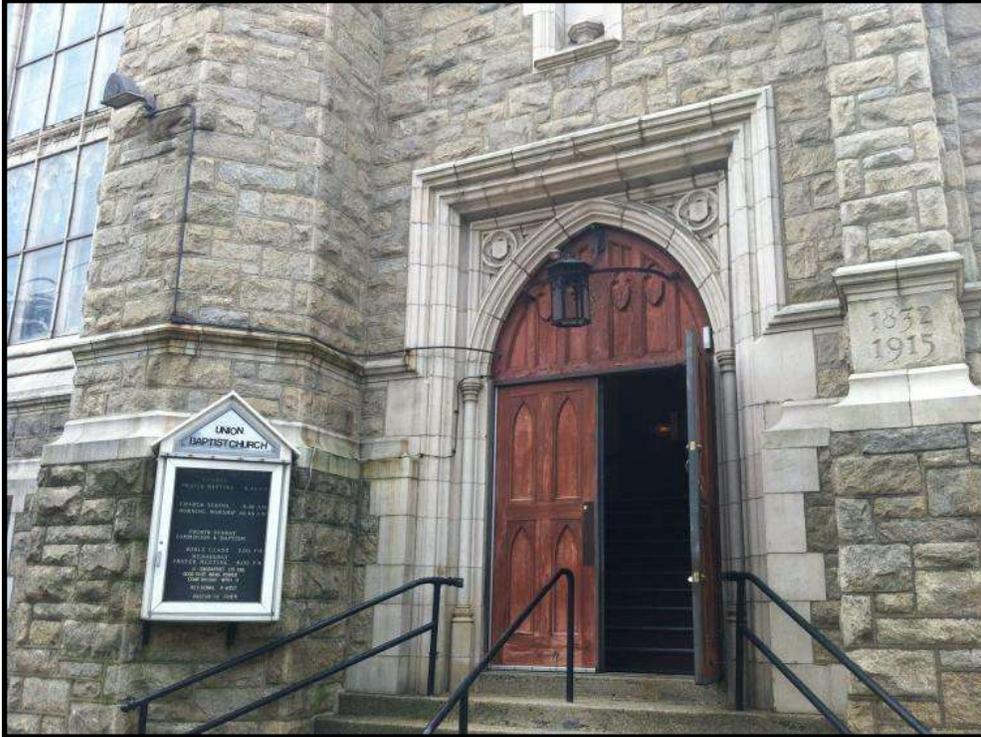
Looking southeast. Courtesy PlanPhilly.com.



Looking south. Courtesy Oscar Beisert.



Looking south. Courtesy Oscar Beisert.



Looking south. Courtesy Oscar Beisert.



Looking south. Courtesy Oscar Beisert.



Looking south. Courtesy Oscar Beisert.



Looking west. Courtesy Oscar Beisert.



Looking south. Courtesy Oscar Beisert.



Looking south. Courtesy Oscar Beisert.



Looking south. Courtesy Oscar Beisert.



Looking southeast. Courtesy Oscar Beisert.



Looking south. Courtesy Oscar Beisert.



Looking south. Courtesy Oscar Beisert.



First National Convention, ca. 1917, taken in front of the subject building.
Courtesy the Madam Walker Family Archives.

7. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Union Baptist Church is a significant resource that merits designation by the Philadelphia Historical Commission and inclusion on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. Located at 1910 Fitzwater Street in the Graduate Hospital neighborhood in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19146. The subject building satisfies the following criteria for designation:

- (a) Has significant character, interest, or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the City, Commonwealth, or Nation or is associated with the life of a person significant in the past;
- (j) Exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social or historical heritage of the community.



Drawing of Union Baptist Church's edifice in S. 12th Street in the Hawthorne Neighborhood of Philadelphia. Demolished 2015. Courtesy the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

CRITERION A and CRITERION J

Once the largest African Baptist congregation in America, the house of worship of Union Baptist Church at 1910 Fitzwater Street represents the cultural, political, economic, social and historical heritage of the African American community in Philadelphia. Founded in 1832, the congregation had several buildings prior to this edifice, which was commissioned and commenced in 1915, representing the development of Union Baptist Church as one of the most important African Baptist congregations both in Philadelphia and across the United States. As a result of their eminence in the Philadelphia community and as a Baptist congregation at large, the subject building was the second purpose-built house of worship and is the oldest, only extant building representing the congregation's 184 years in Philadelphia.

Birth of the African American Church

African American Christianity in the United States can trace its origin to the Great Awakening. Between 1740 and 1790, charismatic revivalists toured the colonies, preaching messages of salvation for all, a movement that became known as the Great Awakening. The Great Awakening made a particularly profound impact on Philadelphia because early eighteenth century Philadelphia was home to one of the largest free black communities in the

country.¹ The movement, which embraced men and women of all races and regardless of background, resonated with African Americans in particular. Historians suspect that the fervor of the Great Awakening's revival meetings resonated because to a degree, the meetings resembled those of their West African ancestors who incorporated emotional experiences such as dancing and shouting.²

Despite the egalitarian values underlying the spirit of the Great Awakening, established religious institutions remained reluctant to grant African American congregants the full rights and responsibilities granted their white counterparts. This fostered the sentiment from which separate African American denominations and congregations grew. Because the Methodist and Baptist denominations are less hierarchical and emphasized formal education of clergy less so than other denominations, most African American converts joined either Methodist or Baptist congregations that were predominantly white.³

America's independent African American church was born in Philadelphia when in 1787 a group of African American worshippers led by Richard Allen left predominately white St. George's Methodist Episcopal Church to found a separate, independent African American denomination. Allen was born into slavery in Delaware on the estate of Quaker attorney Benjamin Chew, who later served as Chief Justice of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Six years after Allen bought his freedom in 1780, he and another member of St. George's, Absalom Jones, founded the Free African Society. Established in response to the racial tensions facing cities such as Philadelphia, the nondenominational group consisted of forty-two African American Christians working to create an independent church.⁴

In 1787, African American worshippers of St. George's were relegated to standing along the back wall while pews were reserved for white members. According to Allen's memoirs, on a Sunday in 1787, the church's sexton asked African American members to vacate the main floor to worship in the gallery above. This transpired at the moment in which the pastor was leading a prayer. While praying on the main floor, Absalom Jones and William White were forcibly removed despite their protests, as they had been kneeling in prayer. This incident motivated many of St. George's African American worshippers to leave the church permanently, establishing a church of their own in which they would be safe to worship.⁵

¹ Smith, Edward D. *Climbing Jacob's Ladder: The Rise of Black Churches in Eastern American Cities, 1740-1877*. Washington, D.C. and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1988, p. 23-28.

² *Ibid.*, p. 30-31.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 31-33.

⁴ Griffith, Cyril E. "Richard Allen: The First Prominent Black Religious Leader in Pennsylvania" in John M. Coleman, Robert G. Christ, and John B. Frantz eds., *Pennsylvania Religious Leaders*, Pennsylvania Historic Studies Series 16. Camp Hill, Pennsylvania: Plank's Suburban Press for the Pennsylvania Historical Society, 1986, p. 11-12.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

Consisting of former members of St. George's, the newly formed group contemplated Methodism. With a high number of offended congregants, the members split into two independent churches in 1794: St. Thomas Episcopal Church and Bethel Church. Notably, St. Thomas, led by Absalom Jones, opted to join an existing denomination while Bethel, led by Richard Allen, retained its stronghold. In 1816, Allen founded the African Methodist Episcopal Church—a separate, independent African American denomination. The African Methodist Episcopal Church, known commonly as the A.M.E. Church, is the oldest independent African American denomination in the world.⁶

In the two decades following the establishment of the African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas and Mother Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, three other African American churches were founded, including Zoar Methodist Episcopal Church (1796) and First African Presbyterian Church (1807), and First African Baptist Church (1809). In 1809, First African Baptist Church would become the fifth.⁷

Until 1809, African American Baptists in Philadelphia worshipped in primarily white Baptist congregations. First African Baptist Church was established on June 19, 1809 by thirteen former congregants of primarily white First Baptist Church of Philadelphia.⁸ These individuals had “...come to Philadelphia from the eastern shore of Virginia to escape the cruel treatment of slave masters.”⁹ First African Baptist Church's founding members had seen their Methodist Episcopal counterparts establish a separate African American denomination, as well as a separate African American congregation in response to the denomination's failure to grant African Americans full rights and responsibilities of membership. African American Baptists faced discrimination as well, but its split, in comparison to that of the Methodist Episcopal Church, was less controversial. According to Charles H. Brooks' *Official History of the First African Baptist Church, Philadelphia*, “It is beyond controversy that the relation of the white and colored members of the First Baptist Church was of the most cordial and Christian manner.”¹⁰ In fact, First Baptist Church of Philadelphia granted each of the thirteen founding members of First African Baptist Church voluntary provided letters of dismissal to establish an independent African American congregation “...under the care and protection of their Mother Church.”¹¹ At the Philadelphia Baptist Association's annual meeting in October, First African Baptist Church was welcomed as a member. It became the fifth African

⁶ Smith, Edward D. *Climbing Jacob's Ladder: The Rise of Black Churches in Eastern American Cities, 1740-1877*. Washington, D.C. and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1988, p. 35-37.

⁷ National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form, African American Churches of Philadelphia, 1787-1949.

⁸ Brooks, Charles H. *Official History of the First African Baptist Church, Philadelphia, Pa.* Philadelphia: 1977, p. 3.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1-3.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

American church in Philadelphia as well as the first black Baptist church in Philadelphia and Pennsylvania.¹²

The founding of First African Baptist Church paved the way for the establishment of other African American Baptist churches in early nineteenth century Philadelphia. The third African American Baptist congregation,¹³ Union Baptist Church, was founded on September 18, 1832. Its founder, Reverend Daniel Scott, had arrived in Philadelphia from Petersburg, Virginia in May of that year. Shortly after settling in the vicinity of 8th and Locust Streets in the “southern part of the city,” Scott recognized the need for another African American Baptist congregation, and, subsequently, organized Union Baptist Church. Its first twenty-one members, like him, all hailed from Virginia.¹⁴

Among the important early leaders of the congregation, James Burrows migrated to Philadelphia from Virginia. Born into slavery in Virginia, Burrows became pastor of First African Baptist Church in 1832 when cousins Samuel Bivens and John Bivens volunteered themselves as collateral in exchange for Burrows’ freedom. Burrows planned to earn the amount necessary to purchase his freedom, and then return to Northampton County, Virginia to preach. Having raised the money by 1833, Burrows traveled to Virginia to free the Bivens cousins, but chose to return to Philadelphia to continue leading First African Baptist Church.¹⁵ Burrows would eventually become the third pastor of Union Baptist Church.

Under Rev. Daniel Scott, Union Baptist Church purchased a small lot on the south side of Minster Street (now Addison Street) between 6th and 7th Streets, which was immediately east of James Forten Elementary Manual Training School.¹⁶ Like most early developments in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in Philadelphia, the initial cost of the lot likely required a small amount of capitol, but required the payment of annual ground rents to a ground lord. In fact, the plot rented for \$300 per annum, payable in two equal \$150 installments. Because there was no initial substantive cost for the lot, the congregation built its first house of worship on this site; a brick building that contained an auditorium with seating capacity for five hundred, a dedicated Sunday school room, and rooms for the pastor and trustees. It was built at a cost of five thousand dollars. The site included room enough for both the building and a burial ground. Before the building was completed in 1838, the congregation convened at Benezet Hall. Benezet Hall was located at 7th and Lombard Streets.¹⁷

¹² National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form, African American Churches of Philadelphia, 1787-1949.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ “Union Baptist Church More Than 100 Years Old,” Philadelphia Tribune. Philadelphia: 1 November 1934.

¹⁵ Brooks, Charles H. Official History of the First African Baptist Church, Philadelphia, Pa. Philadelphia: 1977, p. 8.

¹⁶ G.M. Hopkins, *City Atlas of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: G.M. Hopkins, 1875).

¹⁷ “Union Baptist Church More Than 100 Years Old,” *Philadelphia Tribune*. Philadelphia: 1 November 1934.

Following Scott, who served as pastor until 1850, Rev. Sampson White (1851-1852), Rev. Jesse Bolden (1854-1861), Rev. James Hamilton (1862-1865), Rev. James Underdew (1866-1875), Rev. Thomas Henderson (1877-1879), Rev. James Rue (1880-1880), Rev. William Wallace (1881-1884), and Rev. William Stumm (1885-1891) each served as pastor of the ever growing congregation.¹⁸ In spite of the high rate of turnover among its pastorate-atypical for an African American Baptist congregation at the time, the church grew steadily. Eventually, Union Baptist Church would form the largest African American congregation in Philadelphia.¹⁹

Historic Context: Union Baptist Church

Becoming the largest African American Baptist congregation in Philadelphia by the mid-1880s, the church had outgrown its original five hundred-seat building in the 600 block of Addison Street. In 1887, it purchased a lot on the east side of 12th Street, ninety feet (90') south of Bainbridge Street in the old municipality of Moyamensing. Moyamensing was already home to of a vibrant African American community. By 1837, eighteen percent of Philadelphia's African American population lived in Moyamensing, which was surpassed only by center city (then at 62 percent).²⁰ By 1849, twenty-one percent of African American churches were located in Moyamensing.²¹

At the new location, the lot, measuring fifty-four feet (54') along 12th Street by 100 feet (100) deep,²² was located immediately north of a livery stable at 717-19 S. 12th Street.²³ At the time of purchase, the site was only partly developed, as it was then three separate parcels. These parcels included a stable on one and rowhouses on another.²⁴ The three parcels needed to assemble the lot were deeded to Union Baptist Church on September 19, 1887. The parcels were procured from George and Elizabeth Gill, who had purchased the property from Alex E. and Esther Harvey on April 9, 1881. As previously explained, this lot was also subject to the ground rents. With a small outlay of capitol upon purchase, Gill paid \$300 a year in ground rent, which was paid in two equal payments of \$150. These payments began on April 1, 1881. Though the site was deeded to Union Baptist Church in September of 1887, the sale was initiated earlier that year (indicated by a gap between the date of purchase and date in which the deed was recorded).²⁵ The church paid \$6,200, including \$5,000 in ground rent. According to the

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form, African American Churches of Philadelphia, 1787-1949.

²⁰ "Statistical Inquiry Into the Condition of the People of Color of the City and Districts of Philadelphia." Philadelphia: Kite & Walton, 1849, 29. Collection of the Library Company of Philadelphia.

²¹ National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form, African American Churches of Philadelphia, 1787-1949.

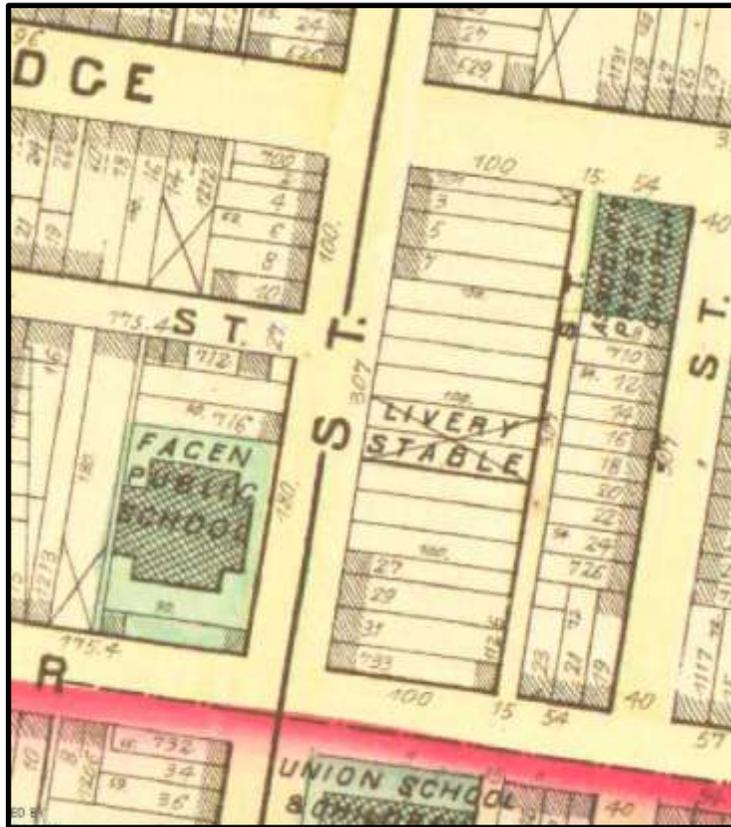
²² Recorded on 2 July 1888 in Philadelphia Deed Book G. G. P. No. 373, p. 545.

²³ G.M. Hopkins, *City Atlas of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: G.M. Hopkins, 1875).

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Recorded on 2 July 1888 in Philadelphia Deed Book No. G. G. P. No. 373, p. 545.

Philadelphia Inquirer on August 26, 1887, "It is proposed to erect a chapel on the lot, and to defer the building of a church till the money is in hand."²⁶



The subject site in 1875, prior to purchase by Union Baptist Church.
Courtesy Philadelphia GeoHistory.

On July 13, 1888, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* reported that the church had it sold its Addison Street property, and had temporarily relocated to Liberty Hall, then at 8th and Lombard Streets.²⁷ Later, the City of Philadelphia purchased the Addison Street property, Union Baptist Church's first home, from the Congregation Sons of Reuben, a Hassidic Jewish congregation, for \$10,000. Congregation Sons of Reuben, more commonly known as Congregation B'nai Reuben, worshipped at the site until its synagogue at the southeast corner of 6th and Kater Streets was completed in 1905. The city subsequently demolished the church and presumably removed the burial ground to create a schoolyard for the adjacent public school, James Forten Elementary Manual Training School.²⁸

²⁶ "Among the Churches. Religious News of Interest Concerning the Different Denominations," *Philadelphia Inquirer*. Philadelphia 26 August 1887.

²⁷ "Preacher and People. What is Going On of Interest in the Church World," *Philadelphia Inquirer*. Philadelphia: 13 July 1888.

²⁸ "The Latest News In Real Estate," *Philadelphia Inquirer*. Philadelphia: 19 December 1905.

Union Baptist Church was not alone in its procurement of a new building site. According to revered architectural historian Emily T. Cooperman, “More black churches were constructed or purchased in Philadelphia in the 1880s and 1890s than ever before...” As the African American population increased, many congregations outgrew their early buildings. The most prosperous of these congregations planned for new construction. These congregations purchased a lot and/or parcel, which were usually subject to the Ground Rent Estate. Again, this required a small outlay of capital and the payment of annual rents, but the feudal system often made the construction of a building possible. By this time, the Ground Rent Estate was becoming obsolete, allowing some congregations to immediately buy out the ground lord’s stake through a onetime payment. Many congregations commissioned new, architect-designed buildings.

The collective success of these African American congregations, as seen through the construction of numerous new houses of worship constitutes a sort-of local Renaissance within the African American religious community in this period. During this renaissance in church construction, African American congregations built over two dozen church buildings.²⁹

Congregation	Circa	Location	Building Status
African American Church of St. Thomas	1889-1890	203-209 S. 12 th Street	Demolished
Berean Presbyterian Church	1884	1906-1926 S. College Avenue	Demolished
Mother Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church	1889	419-423 S. 6 th Street	Extant
Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church	1893	460 E. Rittenhouse Street	Extant
Church of the Crucifixion	1893	620 S. 8 th Street	Altered
Galilee Baptist Church	1900	457 Roxborough Avenue	Extant
Haven Mission Church (Methodist Episcopal)	c. 1887	1511 N. 26 th Street	Demolished
Holy Trinity	1900	1818-1824	Extant

²⁹ Ibid.

Baptist Church		Bainbridge Street	
Janes Methodist Church Building	1898	528 E. Haines Street	Extant
Mount Zion Baptist Church	1894	41 W. Rittenhouse Street	Extant
North Penn Baptist Church	c. 1910	2419-2425 N. 27 th Street	Extant
Second Baptist Church (Frankford)	c. 1910	1801 Meadow Street	Extant
St. Mary's Episcopal Church	1897	1831-1835 Bainbridge Street	Extant
St. Matthew's African Methodist Episcopal Church	1897	5801 Vine Street	Demolished
St. Michael's and All Angels Church	1889	4238 Wallace Street	Extant
St. Paul's Lutheran Church	1893-1896	312 Quince Street	Extant
St. Thomas Methodist Church (Frankford)	c. 1910	4701 Tackawanna Street	Extant
Tasker Street Baptist Church	c. 1900	2010 Tasker Street	Extant
Union Baptist Church	1893	711-715 S. 12 th Street	Demolished
Union Baptist Church	1915	1910 Fitzwater Street	Extant
Zion Baptist Church	1887	1525-29 Brandywine Street	Extant
Zoar Methodist Episcopal Church	1883	1204 Melon Court	Extant

As part of the said Renaissance, African American congregations of all denominations—from African Methodist Episcopal to Roman Catholic—formed its late nineteenth century nucleus at 6th and Lombard in the southeastern section of the city. At the same time, Mother Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church removed to this location as well. was located. Union Baptist's first house of worship was less than a block away from the 'mother church'.³⁰

³⁰ Ibid.

The building at 711-15 S. 12th Street came to its current form in two stages. Dedicated in 1889, the first part of the building was designed by architect David S. Gendell (1839-1925). The architect was also a Baptist who designed a number of buildings for Baptist congregations in Philadelphia.³¹

Under the Rev. L.G. Jordan, who served the congregation from 1891 until 1896,³² the building was enlarged to its final appearance, capacity and form, constituting the second stage of its construction. The congregation commissioned New York City-based architect Thomas Bennett (fl. 1887–1913) to design replace the first building with an even larger house of worship. Bennett was a prolific architect who more often designed row houses for speculative developers in Philadelphia—particularly in the Germantown neighborhood—and in Brooklyn’s Sunset Park neighborhood.³³ He is referenced in the *Philadelphia Inquirer’s* real estate section many times, but only once as the architect of a religious building.



Union Baptist Church as it appeared in 1953.
Courtesy the City of Philadelphia.

The new, enlarged building at 711-15 S. 12th Street was dedicated on December 17, 1893. Rev. Theodore D. Miller, pastor of First African Baptist Church, delivered the keynote at the ceremony. Union Baptist Church occupied this building from 1893 to 1916. During this time, give a few details.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Union Baptist Church More Than 100 Years Old," *Philadelphia Tribune*. Philadelphia: 1 November 1934.

³³ Philadelphia Architects and Buildings, "Bennett, Thomas (fl. 1887-1913)," by Sandra L. Tatam, accessed August 1, 2015, https://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/ar_display.cfm/22271.

By 1916, Union Baptist Church boasted 2,100 members and would continue to grow its congregation.³⁴



REV. DR. W. G. PARKS

Sunday marked the occurrence of one of the most impressive corner-stone layings known to the church history of Philadelphia. The event was at Fitzwater and Martin Sts., the new site of Union Baptist Church, at present located at 12th and Balchblaga Sts.

In the presence of a crowd num-

"If you are united to Jesus the great corner stone of the church you have both a home and a country that you can call your own. Now, regardless to how the winds may blow, or the storms may rage, Jesus Christ the chief corner stone, is able to hold his temple together. Since Christ is the foundation of the church, our appeal as to doctrine and practice should be to the Bible. Christ is our only foundation

Committee for the Advancement of
Labors at Harrisburg

REGRETS EXPRESSED

At a meeting of the Executive Committee of the Philadelphia Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, which was held, Tuesday June 1, 1916, resolutions were adopted, approving the work of and extending a vote of thanks to the committee, consisting of Dr. J. M. Barber, Messrs. Ellwood Hendon, Isadore Martin, James C. Davis, W. L. H. Jones, Gen. H. White, and R. R. Wright, Jr., who had been appointed to keep in touch with the Equal Rights Bill in the Legislature at Harrisburg, and secure its passage if possible.

Regret was expressed that in spite of the good work of our Association through its committee, the Bill, because of disloyal members of various, and the ingratitude and treachery of certain members of the General Assembly, who pretended to our friends was finally so amended and passed that it is an insult to our race and absolutely worthless.

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People stands for a square deal for all. It believes that it is only by agitation, by asking for what one wants and expecting to get it, that we shall ever get what we want and accomplish that shall come in

Rendering of "the new edifice" of the Union Baptist Church, ca. 1915. Published on the front page of the *Philadelphia Tribune* on Saturday, June 12, 1915. Courtesy Proquest Historical Newspapers.

Historic Context: Union Baptist Church—1910 Fitzwater Street

By the 1910s, Union Baptist Church had again outgrown its building and sought a new location to the west. The church purchased a lot measuring 105 feet by 113 feet at the southwest corner of Fitzwater and Martin Streets in South Philadelphia (known more specifically as Graduate Hospital in 2016). Fitzwater Street Methodist Episcopal Church sold their property to the Union Baptist Church for \$28,000.³⁵ The property was paid for entirely by the time of the laying of the cornerstone.³⁶

The architect and contractors for the new building had been selected by April 1915. The *Philadelphia Courant* and Union Baptist Church had some controversy over the "contract for the building of their new edifice [being awarded] to a white man...". However, Union Baptist Church indicated that

³⁴ National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form, African American Churches of Philadelphia, 1787-1949.

³⁵ Deed: Fitzwater Street Methodist Episcopal Church to Union Baptist Church, 6 March 1913, Philadelphia Deed Book E.L.T., No. 226, p. 153, City Archives of Philadelphia; "Review of Week in Real Estate," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Philadelphia: 16 March 1913.

³⁶ "Imposing Ceremonies at Corner Stone Laying on Last Sunday," *The Philadelphia Tribune*. Philadelphia: 12 June 1915.

while they would have preferred an African American contractor, there were none who could post bond for the construction of the building.³⁷ In many ways this fact related to the construction of the building indicates the incredible accomplishment that Union Baptist Church had achieved not once, but twice in their history, as this was still a time wherein no African American contractor in Philadelphia be found with the resources to complete the project.



Rev. Dr. W.G. Parks.

Courtesy Proquest Historical Newspapers.

Published in the *Philadelphia Tribune*, Robert E. Pierce, Editor of the section called "The Pulpit and Pew" announced "Union Baptist Church To Lay Corner Stone" on Saturday, June 5, 1915:

Rev. Dr. W.G. Parks

The Union Baptist Church will lay its corner stone for their new church edifice, corner Fitzwater and Martin streets, next Sabbath at 3 p. m. This church when completed, will be one of the finest and most complete owned by colored people in this country. The pastor, Rev. Dr. W.G. Parks, and his good people deserve more than ordinary praise.³⁸

Union Baptist Church commissioned the firm of Charles W. Bolton & Son (fl. 1906-1942) to design a church edifice said to be "the finest and most complete owned by colored people in this country".³⁹

The laying of the corner stone took place as scheduled on Sunday, June 6, 1915. The *Philadelphia Tribune* reported the following on the front page:

³⁷ "The Courant Vs. Union Baptist Church," *The Philadelphia Tribune*. Philadelphia: 24 April 1915, p. 2.

³⁸ "Union Baptist Church To Lay Corner Stone," *the Philadelphia Tribune*. Philadelphia: 5 June 1915.

³⁹ Philadelphia Architects and Buildings, "Charles W. Bolton & Son (fl. 1906-1942)," by Sandra L. Tatam, accessed August 1, 2015, https://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/ar_display.cfm/18688.

Sunday marked the occurrence of one of the most impressive cornerstone layings known to the church history of Philadelphia.⁴⁰

There was reported to be a crowd of nearly four thousand persons and the service was conducted by the Most Worshipful Grand Lodge F. and A. of Pennsylvania. Led by Rev. Dr. Parks, the collection was placed in the actual opening of the cornerstone. The congregation raised \$750 that day—a tidy sum for the time period. At the time of the cornerstone laying, the project costs for construction were \$100,000.⁴¹

The subject building was complete and in use by July 1916.⁴² The final construction cost was \$125,000.⁴³



Advertisement published by the *Philadelphia Tribune* in July 1916, indicating that the new building of Union Baptist Church was in use. Courtesy Proquest Historical Newspapers.

According to revered architectural historian Emily T. Cooperman, “...Union Baptist Church was purportedly the largest African-American congregation in the United States in 1916...”, which was incidentally the year that the subject edifice was completed. Located in what is known as Graduate Hospital today, the neighborhood was African American at from the early twentieth century through the 2000s. From the time of the building’s construction through the mid-twentieth century, Union Baptist Church was

⁴⁰ “Imposing Ceremonies at Corner Stone Laying on Last Sunday,” *The Philadelphia Tribune*. Philadelphia: 12 June 1915.

⁴¹ “Imposing Ceremonies at Corner Stone Laying on Last Sunday,” *The Philadelphia Tribune*. Philadelphia: 12 June 1915.

⁴² “Advertisement,” *The Philadelphia Tribune*. Philadelphia: 15 July 1916, p. 3.

⁴³ “Union Baptist Church To Mark 128th Anniversary Sun., Sept. 11,” *Philadelphia Tribune*. Philadelphia: 3 September 1960.

one of the largest and most significant congregations in the neighborhood—along with Tindley Temple.

When Union Baptist Church constructed their building, it found itself surrounded by a dense neighborhood consisting of row houses, factories, churches (purpose-built and storefront), and a few civic buildings. There was very little green space. Many of the residents of the neighborhood worked in the factories that lined Washington Avenue, which formed the southern boundary of the neighborhood.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Federal Works Progress Administration for Pennsylvania, Land Use-Zoning Project No. 18313, *Philadelphia Land Use Map*, 1942.



Marian Anderson (1897-1993)

**This portrait was taken by Yousuf Karsh in 1945.
Courtesy the National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution.**

Criteria A: Has significant character, interest, or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the City, Commonwealth, or Nation or is associated with the life of a person significant in the past.

Marian Anderson was about nineteen years old when she first entered the subject building in 1916. She had been raised in the Union Baptist Church since her girlhood, where she first learned to sing and where the maturity of her voice and performance was achieved. The building that represented her earliest years of both song and worship was the handsome Romanesque edifice at 711-15 S. 12th Street (demolished in 2015).⁴⁵ The second church building she knew was the subject edifice at 1910 Fitzwater Street, where she always was a member. Marian Anderson bought her own home in 1924—it is steps away from the subject Gothic Revival building. The subject building is associated with

⁴⁵ The City of Philadelphia issued demolition permits for this building in 2015, despite the fact that a nomination for historic designation was submitted prior to the commencement of its demolition.

Marian Anderson, one of the most important African Americans in Philadelphia's past and perhaps the greatest Contralto of the century. Between roughly 1915-1916 and 1993, Marian Anderson attended church and sang regularly in this building. She is a person significant from the past and the subject building represents that significance. In the 2000s, the congregation of Union Baptist Church erected a historic marker in front of the subject building to honor the memory of Marian Anderson and her connection with Union Baptist Church.



Historic Marker for Marian Anderson situated in front of the subject building. Courtesy the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.

Marian Anderson (1897-1993), Daughter of Union Baptist Church

Marian Anderson. World-renowned contralto. As a child, she sang in this church. Toured Europe & U.S. starting in the 1930s. Her concert at the Lincoln Memorial, 1939, drew 75,000 people. First African American in Metropolitan Opera, 1955. Delegate to UN, 1958. Died 1993.”⁴⁶

Inscribed upon a Philadelphia Historical and Museum Commission historical marker in front of Union Baptist Church's current building at 1910 Fitzwater Street, Anderson is often associated with this site, which the congregation has inhabited since 1915-1916.

Born in 1897, Anderson was about nineteen years old by the time Union Baptist Church had completed its current building. Anderson's father, John Berkley Anderson, was a devout member of Union Baptist Church. In

⁴⁶ Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission Historical Marker: "Marian Anderson," 1910 Fitzwater Street. *Union Baptist Church, 1910 Fitzwater Street, Philadelphia Nomination to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places, Fall 2016 – Page 29*

Anderson's autobiography, titled *My Lord, What A Morning*, she describes her earliest experience of the church.

Even before I was six I was taken along to church every Sunday, partly, I suppose, to alleviate my mother's burden of taking care of three children. I would take part in the Sunday school and then sit through the main service. After my sixth birthday I was enrolled in the junior choir of the church.⁴⁷

Anderson described her first public appearance as well. It occurred shortly after she was enrolled in the choir.

I remember the day when Mr. Robinson gave me a piece of music to take home, and another copy to Viola Johnson. It was a hymn, "Dear to the Heart of the Shepherd." Viola and I were to look it over, and then we would sing it together, she the upper and I the lower part. Mr. Robinson played the melody over for us, and after I heard it enough I could remember it. Viola and I rehearsed it carefully and seriously. Then came the Sunday morning when we sang it in church—my first public appearance.⁴⁸

It would be the first performance of many at the Union Baptist Church, then of 711-15 S. 12th Street.

⁴⁷ Anderson, Marian. *My Lord, What a Morning*, An Autobiography by Marian Anderson. New York: The Viking Press, 1956, p. 7.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 8.



Marian Anderson (center) with her mother and sisters, 1910.
Courtesy the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

Following the death of their father in 1910, the Andersons struggled to make ends meet. At the encouragement of “Aunt Mary,” Anderson’s paternal aunt, the “baby contralto” shared her talents with other churches throughout South Philadelphia, which proved to supplement the family’s income. Anderson slowly gained a reputation for solo performances “for-hire,” regularly attracting out-of-town visitors. During this period, Union Baptist Church attracted visitors from throughout the country. In Anderson’s autobiography, she explained that even the friends and relatives of visitors to the church would look forward to hearing about the visit. In fact, by 1916, Union Baptist Church was the largest African American congregation in America, numbering 2,100 members.⁴⁹ In addition to Anderson’s solo performances, she also sang with other choirs and musical groups that

⁴⁹ National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form, African American Churches of Philadelphia, 1787-1949.

performed in both religious and secular venues, which included the People's Chorus, the Baptists' Young People's Union and the Camp Fire Girls.⁵⁰

Recognizing that Anderson would benefit from vocal training, members of Union Baptist Church began "Marian Anderson's Future Fund." The monies raised sponsored the services of vocal teacher Giuseppe Boghetti. Boghetti had offered to take Anderson on as a student prior to her graduation from the South Philadelphia High School for Girls in 1921.⁵¹ In her autobiography, she recalled that she would not have been able to pay for the lessons without the church's help.

They could not begin at once. There was no money for lessons... I should have known that my neighbors and the people at Union Baptist Church would find a way to provide. Mrs. Ida Asbury, who lived across the street from us, and some other neighbors and friends arranged a gala concert at our church... After all expenses, about six hundred dollars was realized, and with that money Mr. Boghetti was engaged to be my teacher.⁵²

During the five or more years that Anderson studied under Boghetti, she experienced rejection upon rejection from music conservatories. Simply put, she was black. Nevertheless, Anderson's break came on August 26, 1925, That night she performed live with the New York Philharmonic, which was a result of the organization's singing competition. Anderson had won first prize and, incidentally, was able to perform that day in August 1925. In the decades that followed, she would break barriers by performing at Carnegie Hall, the White House, the Lincoln Memorial, and the Metropolitan Opera House. She was the first African American individual to do the latter when she starred in Verdi's *Un ballo in maschera* in 1955.⁵³

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 16-36.

⁵¹ National Portrait Gallery, facetoface, "From Choir to Civil Rights: Marian Anderson's Path of Hope," by Greer Bates, accessed 1 August 2015, http://face2face.si.edu/my_weblog/2014/02/from-church-choir-to-civil-rights-marian-andersons-path-of-hope.html

⁵² Anderson, Marian. *My Lord, What a Morning, An Autobiography* by Marian Anderson. New York: The Viking Press, 1956, p. 49.

⁵³ NPR, "Marian Anderson's Groundbreaking Met Opera Moment," by NPR Staff, accessed 1 August 2015, <http://www.npr.org/sections/deceptivecadence/2015/01/07/375440168/marian-andersons-groundbreaking-met-opera-moment>



Marian Anderson accompanied by a violinist.
Courtesy the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

In 2008, architectural historian Emily T. Cooperman of ARCH Historic Preservation Consulting inventoried Philadelphia's African American churches on behalf of the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia. Intended as a planning tool, the inventory includes a three-tier system that identifies priorities for designation. Within this document, "Union Baptist Church Building No. 2" at 1910 Fitzwater Street is listed as a first tier priority because it is, "Significant in the history of AA Baptist denomination in Philadelphia, important for architectural merit, and for its association with the early life of Marian Anderson."⁵⁴ In addition, Cooperman's inventory includes a list of properties that are individually listed on the Philadelphia of Historic Places. Of the fifteen sites that are on this short list, one is associated with Union Baptist Church: the congregation's first site at 606 Addison Street.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Cooperman, Emily T. Inventory of African-American Historic Church Resources, City of Philadelphia, 2008.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

8. Bibliography

Contributors

Oscar Beisert, Architectural Historian and Historic Preservationist, worked with members of the community to submit this nomination. J.M. Duffin, Archivist and Historian also contributed to the nomination.

Sources

Anderson, Marian. *My Lord, What a Morning, An Autobiography* by Marian Anderson. New York: The Viking Press, 1956

“Among the Churches. Religious News of Interest Concerning the Different Denominations,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*. Philadelphia 26 August 1887

“Army Ex-Paymaster to Speak Here,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*. Philadelphia: 20 October 1920

Brooks, Charles H. *Official History of the First African Baptist Church*, Philadelphia, Pa. Philadelphia: 1977

Cooperman, Emily T. *Inventory of African-American Historic Church Resources*, City of Philadelphia, 2008

Federal Works Progress Administration for Pennsylvania, Land Use-Zoning Project No. 18313, *Philadelphia Land Use Map*, 1942

Frederick Miller, “The Black Migration to Philadelphia: A 1924 Profile,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 108 (July, 1984)

G.M. Hopkins, *City Atlas of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: G.M. Hopkins, 1875)

George W. Bromley and Walker S. Bromley, *Atlas of the City of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: G.W. Bromley & Co., 1895)

Griffith, Cyril E. “Richard Allen: The First Prominent Black Religious Leader in Pennsylvania” in John M. Coleman, Robert G. Christ, and John B. Frantz eds., *Pennsylvania Religious Leaders*, Pennsylvania Historic Studies Series 16. Camp Hill, Pennsylvania: Planks’s Suburban Press for the Pennsylvania Historical Society, 1986

“In Real Estate Circles. New Workshops for Blind Men---Big Building Operations,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*. Philadelphia: 12 April 1890

“Joy in the Lord’s House. Rev. Dr. Miller’s Sermon at Union Baptist Church Dedication,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*. Philadelphia: 12 December 1893

National Portrait Gallery, facetoface, “From Choir to Civil Rights: Marian Anderson’s Path of Hope,” by Greer Bates, accessed 1 August 2015, http://face2face.si.edu/my_weblog/2014/02/from-church-choir-to-civil-rights-marian-andersons-path-of-hope.html

National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form,
African American Churches of Philadelphia, 1787-1949.

NPR, "Marian Anderson's Groundbreaking Met Opera Moment," by NPR
Staff, accessed 1 August 2015,
<http://www.npr.org/sections/deceptivecadence/2015/01/07/375440168/marian-andersons-groundbreaking-met-opera-moment>

"New Hope Temple: 85 years and counting," *Philadelphia Tribune*.
Philadelphia: 7 October 2012

Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission Historical Marker:
"Marian Anderson," 1910 Fitzwater Street.

Philadelphia Architects and Buildings, "Bennett, Thomas (fl. 1887-1913)," by
Sandra L. Tatam, accessed August 1, 2015,
https://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/ar_display.cfm/22271.

Philadelphia Architects and Buildings, "Charles W. Bolton & Son (fl. 1906-
1942)," by Sandra L. Tatam, accessed August 1, 2015,
https://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/ar_display.cfm/18688.

"Preacher and People. What is Going On of Interest in the Church World,"
Philadelphia Inquirer. Philadelphia: 13 July 1888

Recorded on 2 July 1888 in Philadelphia Deed Book G. G. P. No. 373, p. 545

Recorded on 29 October 1921 in Philadelphia Deed Book No. J. M. H. No.
1169, p. 230

"Review of Week in Real Estate," *Philadelphia Inquirer*. Philadelphia: 16
March 1913

Smith, Edward D. *Climbing Jacob's Ladder: The Rise of Black Churches in
Eastern American Cities, 1740-1877*. Washington, D.C. and London:
Smithsonian Institution Press, 1988

"Statistical Inquiry Into the Condition of the People of Color of the City and
Districts of Philadelphia." Philadelphia: Kite & Walton, 1849, 29.
Collection of the Library Company of Philadelphia

"The Latest News In Real Estate," *Philadelphia Inquirer*. Philadelphia: 19
December 1905

"Union Baptist Church More Than 100 Years Old," *Philadelphia Tribune*.
Philadelphia: 1 November 1934

Union Baptist Church To Mark 128th Anniversary Sun., Sept. 11,"
Philadelphia Tribune. Philadelphia: 3 September 1960

Databases Visited

American Periodicals Series
American Philosophical Society
America's Historical Newspapers
Ancestry.com
Free Library of Philadelphia
Google Books
Hathi Trust
Newspapers.com
Philadelphia GeoHistory
Phillyhistory.com

Repositories Visited

Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia