

The Paul Family

By J. MARCUS MITCHELL*

THOMAS Paul, a black minister, and a small band of twenty persons gathered in Master Vinal's schoolhouse in Boston on August 8, 1805 for the purpose of organizing the first black church in the city.

This decision to move from the main body of the church was not an easy one for this group to make, but they were driven from God's House by the unchristian way they were being treated by their white brothers and sisters, separated into "Negro Pews" or in the gallery hidden from the minister's view. The black members were not being given an equal role in church activities. The removal of Absalom Jones and Richard Allen from prayer in a church in Philadelphia had reached the ears of the black community on Beacon Hill's North Slope.

Thomas Paul and his members moved to provide a new institution at Smith Court, The First African Baptist Church—"A Haven from the Loft."

This dedicated and pious leader, Paul, was born free in the town of Exeter, county of Rockingham, in the state of New Hampshire, on September 3, 1773. He attended the Free Will Society Academy with two of his six brothers. The Free Will Baptist Church in 1793 operated this academy for those students seeking higher education in Hollis, New Hampshire.

* Mr. Mitchell is Curator of the Museum of Afro-American History, Boston. This article was originally given as a paper at a symposium on Negro family history hosted by the Afro-American Studies Program, Boston University, March, 1972.

Thomas Paul professed his belief in Christ and was baptized by the Rev. S. F. Locke. The New Hampshire Historical Society states that he was ordained in West Nottingham by the Rev. Thomas Baldwin of Boston in 1804. Rev. Thomas Paul married Catherine Waterhouse of Cambridge, Massachusetts on December 5, 1805. The same Rev. Baldwin was listed as the minister that performed the ceremony.

The Pauls moved to Boston and became members of the First Baptist Church. Rev. Paul was reported to be an eloquent speaker and was invited to preach in many New England churches. An account from the New Hampshire Historical Society states that he preached at Ware in 1802. Another historical sketch of the Baptist Church reports that "On Oct. 27, 1803, Brother Thomas Paul, a Baptist minister of color, preached here from John 14, 27."

With the help of Cato Gardner and the congregation, a building was completed and Thomas Paul was installed as the first pastor of the First African Baptist Church on December 4, 1806. (Fig.) He had begun the movement to establish independent black Baptist churches in the United States. In 1809 he aided in the founding of an African Baptist Society in New York that became the large Abyssinian Baptist Church.

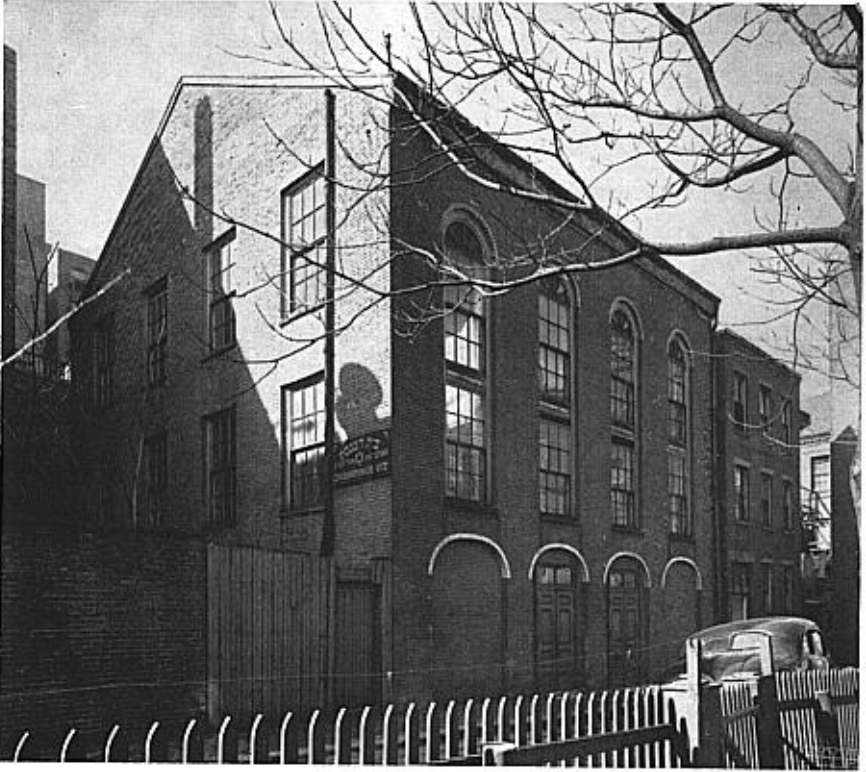
The Massachusetts Baptist Society sponsored his trips to England in 1815 and his six-month stay in Haiti. Prince Saunders, a teacher, accompanied him on the Haitian mission. Paul met with Presi-

dent Boyer, who was encouraging black people of the United States to migrate to the young black nation. Rev. Paul's inability to communicate in French limited his effectiveness as a missionary there.

The school for African children that

and named Abiel Smith School for its white benefactor.

The diary of William Bentley, D.D. provides information of the times: August 9, 1807 entry—"In Boston they had their dedication last week of the third



THE AFRICAN MEETING HOUSE, 1804, SMITH COURT, BOSTON.

ATTRIBUTED TO ASHER BENJAMIN

Photograph by Arthur Haskell in S.P.N.E.A. Collection.

started in the home of Primus Hall, West Cedar and Revere Streets, was moved to the basement of the meetinghouse. The overcrowded and unhealthy condition of the basement forced the move for a new school. The funds were provided by the will of Abiel Smith and the city to make this move possible. A school was constructed at Joy and Smith Court in 1834

Baptist Church, for they do not reckon the third, Mr. Paul's Negro Baptist, tho' entitled to some rank among them." May 25, 1818 he states—"Having Mr. Prince Saunders so much with me I thought I would go & hear Mr. Paul. . . He impressed the audience with a regard to his sincerety & many with a sense of his talents. His person is good & much

beyond that of Prince Saunders who is still the superior man.”

Rev. Thomas Paul served as Chaplin of the African Grand Lodge No. 459 (forerunner of the Prince Hall Grand Lodge) and on many important committees.

City document No. 128 lists Thomas Paul in the last meeting of the inhabitants under the town form of government, April 1, 1822, called the last town meeting. The new city government was formed on May 1, 1822 with John Phillips serving as first major. The Boston Directory of 1830 in the “People of Color” section lists Rev. Thomas Paul as living at 26 George Street.

He served the African Baptist Church from 1805 to 1829 as their pastor. Near the close of his life, April 13, 1831, he said to a friend, “since I last saw you, I have been happy in God . . . my sky has been without a cloud. I know that when the earthly home of my tabernacle is dissolved. I have a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”

The church founded by Rev. Thomas Paul was to become known as the Independence Baptist Church, Belknap or Joy Street Baptist, the Abolition Church (William Lloyd Garrison organized the New England Anti-Slavery Society there on January 6, 1832), and St. Paul before the move to the South End of Boston.

The edifice became a haven for the Jewish community that replaced the black community. The meetinghouse remained a synagogue from 1904 to 1972. (Cover.) It is now listed on the National Historic Register as a shrine to the Rev. Thomas Paul and all the people who labored to build and maintain it. It presently houses the Museum of Afro-American History.

Rev. Nathaniel Paul, brother of Thomas, was the pastor of the Union Street Baptist Church in Albany, New York. He was a noted abolitionist and is listed in William Lloyd Garrison’s *Memoirs*. Rev. Nathaniel Paul addressed the First African Society in Albany, July 5, 1827. He visited Bristol, England in 1833. His opposition to colonization plans is recorded in *The Rights of All*, which was delivered in New York on September 18, 1829. He died September 18, 1839 in Albany, New York.

Rev. Shadrack Paul, brother of Thomas, was also a Baptist minister (all seven Paul brothers were said to have been Baptist ministers). He was employed as a “circuit rider” at Epping, New Hampshire, to cover towns in Rockingham county for the New Hampshire Domestic Mission Society, established in 1819 (Epping is located in the northwestern part of Exeter).

Thomas Paul, Jr. was listed as the first black graduate of Dartmouth College. He married Miss Eusebia Louella Moss. He was the headmaster of the Abiel Smith School during the fight to end the segregated school and integrate the schools of Boston. The children of Thomas Jr. and Eusebia were Kate Euseba, Emma Louella, and Thomas.

Susan Paul, the second oldest child of Rev. Thomas Paul, was an antislavery lecturer, and was present when a mob set fire to Pennsylvania Hall in Philadelphia in 1838. Abolitionists had built the hall as a meeting place. Proslavery forces from the north moved to end their existence. Susan Paul never married.

The oldest child of Rev. Thomas Paul and Catherine, Anne Catherine, was married to Elijah Smith of Philadelphia by her uncle, the Rev. Benjamin Paul of Albany, New York in 1824.

Elijah Smith had moved to Boston in the antebellum days. He was a musical composer and traveled with the famous "Frank Johnson's Band." Elijah and Anne were active abolitionists. Their children were Thomas Paul Smith, Elijah W., Jr., Susan Paul Smith, and John Boyer Smith.

The oldest child of Anne Paul and Elijah, Thomas Paul Smith, married Elizabeth Roberts. He died March 18, 1889.

Elijah William Smith, Jr. was born on December 29, 1830, at the house on the corner of what is now West Cedar and Revere Streets, Beacon Hill, Boston. He attended the Abiel Smith School, Joy Street. Thomas served his apprenticeship as a printer with William Lloyd Garrison on *The Liberator*. He was employed as a headwaiter at Young's Hotel and continued to write articles and poetry. Among his contributions to several Boston papers were: "Robert Morris," a commemorative poem read by James Monroe Trotter at the Memorial Meeting, Charles Street A. M. E. Church, March 5, 1883; "Our Lost Leader," written on the death of Charles Sumner; and "In Memorium," dedicated to the memory of William C. Nell.

Elijah Smith was married to Eliza D. Riley on January 3, 1861, by the noted abolitionist minister, Rev. Leonard Grimes, Pastor of the Fugitive Slave Church (now 12th Baptist). The Riley family lived next to Lewis Hayden's Underground Railroad Station at 66 Southac (Phillip) Street.

The Boston Transcript presented Elijah with a writing desk as an award for his published poetry. He died on Monday, October 7, 1895. The funeral was held at Zion A. M. E. Church and he was buried in Woodlawn Cemetery.

The third child of Anne Paul and Elijah was Susan Paul, born September 19, 1838 in Boston. Her mother, Anne, died at an early age, and Susan was reared by her maternal grandmother, Catherine Paul. Susan graduated at sixteen with valedictorian honors from a private Somerville school and then moved to Pittsburg on the death of her grandmother. She served as an assistant teacher and met and married Professor George B. Vashon on February 17, 1857. The Vashons had seven children. Professor Vashon had taught at Port au Prince, Haiti and New York Central College. He was the son of John B. Vashon, an abolitionist. Mrs. Susan Paul Vashon lost her husband on October 5, 1878. Thereafter she taught school in Washington, D. C. and then moved to St. Louis where she died, November 27, 1912.

John Boyer Smith, the fourth child, was born in Boston on August 7, 1840; he never married and died on May 19, 1861 in Helena, Arkansas.

Elijah W. Smith, Jr., a poet, and Eliza Riley had two daughters. Anne Elizabeth married S. William Simms, who served as a member of the Boston Common Council from 1901-1904. Anne served as a teacher in the Boston Public School. They had five children: Ethel Anna Simms; Mrs. Edith Jackson, a present member of Peoples Baptist Church; S. William Simms; Warner Burrell Simms; and Rev. Ed. Paul Simms, honors graduate of Boston University, poet and pastor of the First Baptist Church, Norfolk, Virginia.

The second daughter, Mrs. Harriet Augusta Smith Burrell, wife of the attorney John Madison Burrell, was another of the Paul family poets; she along with William Monroe Trotter and his sister, Mrs. Maude Trotter Stewart, was

active in the protest against the showing of the film—"Birth of a Nation" in Boston and wrote a poem of protest.

The Paul family has contributed much to improve our knowledge of the black community in this country. With the bicentennial of this country near at hand, we must instill the spirit of leaders like Thomas Paul into future generations and

stop depicting scenes in "Birth of a Nation."

This paper has only touched on the many accomplishments of the Paul Family. Future research by the staff of the Museum of Afro-American History will provide a permanent collection and exhibit in the African Meeting House—"The Haven from the Loft."

With regret we inform our readers that the African Meeting House fell victim to fire this February. Although the interior was damaged and the roof was destroyed, the exterior walls and much original trim remain intact. The costs of restoration, however, will be extensively increased.