HISTORIC ST. PAUL A.M.E. CHURCH

A History of Faith, Freedom, Education, and Black Civic Leadership

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ORGANIZED 1820 • SANCTUARY BUILT 1826 • A.M.E. CONNECTION 1865

Updated Edition • September 2026

A Living Congregation and a Historic Place

Founded in 1820 and still active today, Historic St. Paul A.M.E. Church is among Kentucky's oldest continuously active African American congregations. Its story begins with Black Methodist self-determination in slaveholding Lexington and continues through worship, property ownership, Underground Railroad tradition, education, civic leadership, preservation, and community service.

The congregation completed its brick sanctuary in 1826 and secured legal title to the original property through trustees in May 1827. Historic St. Paul formally affiliated with the African Methodist Episcopal Church in September 1865. These dates mark three distinct events: congregational organization, sanctuary construction, and denominational connection.

How to read this history

Documented facts are stated directly. Church tradition is identified as tradition. Where evidence is incomplete, later, or conflicting, the uncertainty is preserved rather than filled with assumption.

History at a Glance

1789	Lexington Society of Methodists organized; a shared Methodist starting point.
1820	Free and enslaved Black Methodists organize the North Upper Street congregation.
1826	Members complete the brick sanctuary.
1827	Trustees secure the original 33-by-95-foot property for $280.
1850	Trustees acquire a narrow adjoining strip of land.
1862-63	The church acquires a parcel including part of the former city stray pen; a portion is later resold.
1865	The congregation formally affiliates with the A.M.E. Church; David Smith says he appoints Rev. George H. Shaffer as pastor.
1866	Kentucky A.M.E. ministers and churches are received into the Ohio Annual Conference at Chillicothe. A later First Methodist history reports that about 300 Black members joined Upper Street.
1867	The Ohio Annual Conference meets in Lexington.
1868	The first Kentucky Annual Conference is organized at Quinn Chapel, Louisville, in September.
1876-77	The annex area was expanded along the Mechanic Street side, and a parsonage was built; the 1826 sanctuary itself was not enlarged.
1906	The present bell tower is added during a major remodeling; church tradition holds that the upper interior is reconfigured.
2025	Historic St. Paul is listed in the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom.

1. An Independent Black Congregation, 1820-1827

The sanctuary looking west toward the pulpit and choir area. Photograph provided by Kieser Consulting Group.

In 1820, free and enslaved Black Methodists separated from the Lexington Society of Methodists and organized their own congregation on North Upper Street. The evidence supports an independent Black institutional beginning. It does not support the later claim that Historic St. Paul was founded as a mission of Hill Street Methodist Church or that the founders needed formal permission from that later institution.

Following the evidence: the Hill Street connection reconsidered

The churches share an early Methodist connection, but the dates distinguish their institutions. The white Methodist congregation did not move to High Street until 1840, and the building later known as Hill Street Methodist Church dates to 1841-1842. By then, the Upper Street Black congregation had existed for more than twenty years, worshiped in its brick sanctuary since 1826, and held property through trustees since 1827.

A later institutional history reports that about 300 Black members left the white Methodist congregation in 1866 and joined the Black worshipers on Upper Street. The approximate number has not been independently confirmed. The careful conclusion is that this movement strengthened an already established congregation; it did not create Historic St. Paul.

A relationship timeline - not a founding timeline

Historic St. Paul emerged from Lexington's early Methodist community, but it had an established Black institutional life before the Hill Street name, before the Hill Street building, and before the reported 1866 membership movement.

The stable meetinghouse and the 1826 sanctuary

The congregation first worshiped in a brick building on property owned by Charles Wilkins. The building had formerly been used as a stable. Portions of that original stable remain visible in the basement and are incorporated into the foundation beneath the 1826 sanctuary. The surviving masonry is a direct physical connection between the earliest meetinghouse and the sanctuary that still anchors the church campus.

Members completed the brick sanctuary in 1826. In May 1827, the congregation secured legal title to the original 33-by-95-foot lot for $280 through trustees Daniel Francis, John Skinker, Benjamin Tibbs Sr., William Dolan, and Peter Lewis. These trustees were free Black leaders, property owners, artisans, and businesspeople; some had formerly been enslaved. Their action demonstrates Black legal, financial, and institutional agency during slavery.

Charles Wilkins in fuller historical context

Charles Wilkins owned the property that the congregation initially rented and later purchased for its church site. An 1827 newspaper notice issued by his executors identified him as deceased and advertised the sale of ten enslaved people from his estate.

Wilkins's relationship with the congregation should not be described using later, unverified language that portrays him as its protector.

2. Black Ownership and a Growing Church Campus

Historic St. Paul's early property history reveals a congregation building permanence through its own trusteeship. In 1850, Charles Buckner, James Turner, Robert Dolan, Liberty Ross, and Moses Spencer acquired an adjoining 7-by-95-foot strip for one dollar. This acquisition added a narrow strip of land to the church property.

In 1862, while slavery remained legal in Kentucky, the church purchased an additional 125-by-100-foot parcel for $400. The tract included part of Lexington's former city stray pen. Eighty feet was resold in 1863 for $242, while the congregation retained land needed for its campus. Historic St. Paul church records confirm the five trustees as Moses Spencer, Henry Britton, Andrew Bryant, Henry Bryce, and John W. Bell.

Church oral tradition connects the former stray-pen area with efforts to protect freedom seekers, holding that animal odors may have obscured human scent and confused tracking dogs. The property purchase is documented; the freedom-related use of the land is preserved through congregational memory.

Annex, parsonage, and later remodeling

1876-1877: Research determined that the church's annex area was expanded along the Mechanic Street side of the property, and a parsonage was built. The parsonage later became known as the settlement house. This work expanded the church campus but did not enlarge the original 1826 sanctuary.

1906: A major remodeling was completed under Rev. C. C. Townsend, and the present bell tower was added. Surviving sources place the cost at approximately $11,000-$12,000. The building marker preserves the 1826 construction date and the 1906 remodeling.

Later generations: The congregation continued to repair and adapt ministry spaces while preserving the 1826 sanctuary as the historic center of the campus.

The building marker records the sanctuary as built in 1826 and remodeled in 1906 by C. C. Townsend.

The stained-glass windows and Lynda Thomas

The sanctuary's stained-glass windows are among Historic St. Paul's most recognizable interior features. The late Lynda Thomas (1955-2015) researched their religious symbolism and created the original wall print *The Windows of Historic St. Paul* during the pastorate of Rev. Kenneth E. Paris. Her research and design remain an important part of the church's interpretive history. The precise dates and sequence of installation of the sanctuary windows remain subjects of continuing historical research.

The concealed upper level and the 1906 remodeling

Before the 1906 reconfiguration, the sanctuary worship space had a lower ceiling that concealed an upper area between the ceiling and roof. Church oral tradition holds that this concealed level contained passageways, structural and building systems, and a larger hidden area associated with the church's freedom history. Its precise development sequence remains under continuing study.

The 1906 reconfiguration

During the major 1906 remodeling under Rev. C. C. Townsend, the present bell tower was added. Church oral tradition further holds that the sanctuary ceiling and upper interior were reconfigured, opening more of the building's vertical volume to the worship space and reducing the formerly larger concealed area to the small upper room that survives today. The elevated upper door, surviving stairs, and pathways are consistent with a broader upper-level circulation system, although no surviving architectural plans have yet been located that show the precise earlier arrangement.

Rear of the sanctuary. The elevated upper door is visible above the double doors at right and provides physical evidence of an upper-level circulation route. Photograph provided by Historic St. Paul A.M.E. Church.

Building sequence

The congregation built the sanctuary in 1826 and added a narrow strip of property in 1850. During the 1876-1877 campaign, the annex area was expanded along the Mechanic Street side, and a parsonage was built. The parsonage later became known as the settlement house. This work expanded the church campus but did not enlarge the original 1826 sanctuary. Before the 1906 reconfiguration, a lower sanctuary ceiling concealed an upper level. The 1906 remodeling added the bell tower and, according to church oral tradition, reconfigured the upper interior. Portions of the earlier stable remain visible in the basement foundation beneath the sanctuary.

3. African Methodism and Formal A.M.E. Affiliation

William Paul Quinn
A.M.E. bishop and western missionary leader

Rev. David Smith
Kentucky missionary, 1865

Rev. George H. Shaffer
Photo courtesy of Gail Nordahl

Before formal affiliation

Historic St. Paul governed its property and local affairs independently for decades before formally joining the African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1865.

Rev. James King belongs in this earlier Black Methodist setting. King was an enslaved Black minister in Lexington who traveled into Ohio and served the Cincinnati congregation that developed into Allen Temple A.M.E. Church. Current research does not identify King as a St. Paul pastor or member; his importance here is that his life shows Lexington's Black Methodist relationships crossing the Ohio River before St. Paul's formal A.M.E. affiliation.

The 1865 "stormy meeting"

A December 26, 1920 Lexington Herald retrospective described a "stormy meeting" over the congregation's denominational future. The account places Rev. David Smith and Rev. William H. Miles in the debate and says the members ultimately agreed to enter the A.M.E. Church.

In 1865 Miles was a Methodist minister; the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church was not organized until 1870. At its founding conference he was elected to the episcopacy, and the C.M.E. Church identifies William H. Miles as its first bishop.

Why the 1920 article matters

The newspaper also said Rev. C. T. Shaffer was placed in charge as St. Paul's first pastor after affiliation. That retrospective statement helps explain how C. T. Shaffer entered the church's later written history. Earlier denominational evidence, however, identifies his brother George H. Shaffer.

Correcting the Shaffer identification

Rev. David Smith's 1881 firsthand autobiography states that, after the Ohio Annual Conference met at Delaware, Bishop Quinn appointed him missionary to Kentucky. Smith wrote that he brought St. Paul's Church, Lexington into the A.M.E. connection and appointed Rev. G. H. Shaffer as pastor. The 1916 Centennial Encyclopaedia further records that C. T. Shaffer was licensed to preach in 1867 by his brother, Rev. G. H. Shaffer, at Frankfort, Kentucky, and entered the itinerancy in 1870.

Corrected 1865 identification: Rev. George H. Shaffer, not C. T. Shaffer. The 1920 Herald account should be preserved as the documented source of the later C. T. Shaffer attribution, not treated as controlling evidence for the pastor's identity.

Sources: B. W. Arnett, Semi-Centenary Celebration of the A.M.E. Church of Cincinnati (1874); David Smith, Biography of Rev. David Smith (1881), p. 93; The Lexington Herald, Dec. 26, 1920; Richard R. Wright Jr., Centennial Encyclopaedia of the A.M.E. Church (1916); Isaac Lane, Autobiography of Bishop Isaac Lane, LL.D. (1916); C.M.E. Church history.

The 1865-1868 A.M.E. Conference Transition

Two early A.M.E. sources preserve different parts of St. Paul's transition from missionary affiliation to regular Annual Conference oversight.

David Smith, 1881

Firsthand account: Smith says Bishop Quinn sent him to Kentucky, brought St. Paul into the A.M.E. Church, and appointed G. H. Shaffer as pastor.

and died in peace.

LEXINGTON, Ky., is a fine city. The A. M. E. Church was organized here by Rev. David Smith in 1865. The first pastor appointed was Rev. G. H. Graham, of Ohio. The first Annual Conference was held there in 1867. The church has been greatly improved since, and is now a very fine edifice.

A. W. Wayman, 1882

Lexington entry: Wayman names G. H. Graham of Ohio as the first pastor 'appointed' and records an Annual Conference in Lexington in 1867.

Conference chronology

1865 Ohio Annual Conference at Delaware. Bishop Quinn appoints David Smith missionary to Kentucky. Smith brings St. Paul into the A.M.E. connection and appoints George H. Shaffer.

1866 Ohio Annual Conference meets at Chillicothe. Kentucky ministers and churches are received into the Ohio Annual Conference because no Kentucky Annual Conference exists. Grafton H. Graham is present.

1867 The Ohio Annual Conference meets in Lexington. Benjamin W. Arnett is received on probation there and receives his first appointment from that conference.

1868 Kentucky remains under Ohio Conference jurisdiction into the spring. In September, the first Kentucky Annual Conference is organized at Quinn Chapel in Louisville.

How the evidence fits together

The evidence strongly supports this sequence: Smith's 1865 missionary-era assignment of George H. Shaffer, followed by Grafton H. Graham's formal Lexington/St. Paul appointment at the 1866 Ohio Annual Conference. Wayman later called Graham Lexington's first pastor 'appointed.' The original 1866 stationing list has not yet been located, so the conclusion is based on combined denominational evidence and A.M.E. appointment practice.

Sources: Smith (1881); Wayman (1882), p. 99; The Legacy of African Methodism in the Third Episcopal District (1988); Centennial Encyclopaedia (1916); B. W. Arnett (1874).

4. Hidden Architecture and Underground Railroad Memory

The concealed upper room, doorway, narrow stairs, pathways above the sanctuary, and view toward the bell tower. Church research photographs; concealed room and doorway by Aleigha Sullivan.

Church tradition holds that the sanctuary began serving as an Underground Railroad station when it was completed in 1826. No surviving written record identifies the first freedom seeker sheltered here or the exact date of the station's first use. The congregation's inherited history nevertheless places freedom-seeking activity at the church from its earliest years.

The building contains a concealed upper room, narrow interior stairs, brick-lined pathways above the sanctuary, elevated openings, and access toward the bell tower. Foundation stabilization work in 2025 also exposed a small doorway in the room below the hidden area, on the side of the campus historically associated with the former city stray pen.

The elevated door visible on the rear sanctuary wall and the surviving pathways are consistent with the interpretation that the present small room formed part of a broader upper-level circulation system. Church oral tradition preserves the understanding that this concealed level was larger before the upper interior was reconfigured during the 1906 remodeling.

The existence of these spaces is documented. Their precise original construction dates and the identity of every person who used them cannot be determined from appearance alone. Underground Railroad activity depended upon secrecy, so public deeds, directories, and church minutes were unlikely to describe illegal assistance. At the same time, secrecy should not be used to prove every unrecorded claim.

Evidence key

Documented record: deeds, newspapers, directories, church records, and physical features. Church oral tradition: congregational memory concerning refuge, concealment, and the former stray-pen area. Historical interpretation: conclusions drawn from overlapping evidence, dates, locations, and networks.

In 2025, Historic St. Paul was listed in the National Park Service's National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom. That recognition affirms the importance of preserving both the building and the integrity of its interpretation.

5. Rev. James King and the Lexington-Ohio Connection

Father King's House, where Cincinnati's A.M.E. society was organized Feb. 4, 1824. Image from the 1874 Allen Temple history.

Lewis and Harriet Hayden Memorial, Lexington. Photo by Erinod333, CC BY-SA 4.0.

Why King belongs in this history

Rev. James King provides important evidence of early religious connections linking Black Methodists in Lexington with communities across the Ohio River decades before Historic St. Paul formally joined the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

An 1874 history of Cincinnati's Allen Temple A.M.E. Church records that King was an enslaved Black minister residing in Lexington, Kentucky. His enslaver permitted him to hire his own time and gave him a pass that allowed him to travel to the congregations he served. For several years, King traveled between Lexington and Cincinnati to minister to the Black Methodist congregation at Deer Creek.

Allen Temple officially organized in 1824

King later remained in Ohio and, together with Rev. Philip Brodie, helped lead the Black Methodist group that became Allen Temple A.M.E. Church. After King and Brodie led the group away from the Methodist Episcopal Church in protest against racial discrimination, Rev. Moses Freeman formally received the congregation into the A.M.E. connection. Allen Temple was officially organized on February 4, 1824, in James King's home.

Connection to Historic St. Paul

King's story is significant because it shows that Black Methodist religious life in Lexington and Ohio was already interconnected in the early 1820s. At that time, Historic St. Paul was the known separate Black Methodist congregation in Lexington. No record reviewed to date establishes King as a member or pastor of Historic St. Paul, but his Lexington residence and repeated ministry across the Ohio River reveal the wider Black Methodist network in which the congregation developed.

Interpretive note

The phrase "hire his own time" preserves the source language more accurately than saying King traveled "on lease." It acknowledges both his enslaved status and the unusual mobility that enabled his cross-river ministry.

6. Parallel Paths and Shared Freedom Networks

From Gilson Berry's appeal to the Hayden family escape

Gilson Berry had escaped slavery, but members of his family remained enslaved in Lexington. Through Rev. John Mifflin Brown, Berry's appeal reached abolitionist Calvin Fairbank. Fairbank came to Lexington in 1844 intending to assist Berry's family. When they did not appear at the planned meeting, that mission could not be completed.

While in Lexington, Fairbank and teacher Delia Webster became involved in another freedom story: the escape of Lewis Hayden, his wife Harriet, and Harriet's son Joseph. Fairbank did not originally travel to Lexington to rescue Hayden. His presence grew from Berry's family appeal, showing how one freedom effort could open the way for another.

Henry Britton in Lexington and the Phoenix Hotel

Henry Harrison Britton's presence in Lexington is documented by the 1862 Little College Lot map reproduced in Window on the War, which labels the Henry Britton residence on the west side of North Mill Street, between Third Street and Gratz Alley. That same year, Historic St. Paul church records identify Henry Britton as one of the trustees in the 1862 land purchase.

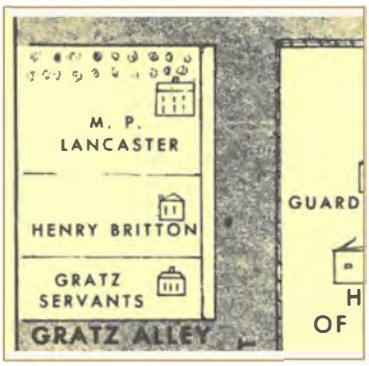
Britton's obituary confirms that he once lived in Lexington and worked as a barber at the Phoenix Hotel. He later moved with his family to Berea, Kentucky, the interracial community established under the leadership of abolitionist John G. Fee, where he and his wife Laura spent their later years and died.

Lewis Hayden had also worked at the Phoenix Hotel while enslaved before his 1844 escape. The shared institution is historically significant, but available evidence does not establish that Hayden and Britton worked there during the same period, knew one another, or collaborated in Hayden's escape.

Lewis Garrard Clarke

Lewis Garrard Clarke also moved through Lexington's freedom environment. After escaping slavery, Clarke returned to Kentucky twice seeking his brothers. He first sought Milton, who had already escaped; on a later journey he helped his younger brother Cyrus reach freedom. No evidence currently identifies Historic St. Paul as assisting those rescue journeys.

Clarke's later connection with St. Paul is documented. He spoke at the church in 1892, and his funeral was held there in December 1897 before his burial in Oberlin, Ohio. Clarke should be described as a documented speaker and funeral honoree associated with St. Paul; available evidence does not establish that he was a member.



Henry Britton residence on the west side of North Mill Street, between Third Street and Gratz Alley, detail from the Little College Lot map reproduced in Window on the War.

The larger road to freedom

Historic St. Paul was not isolated. Its story belongs to overlapping Black Methodist, abolitionist, family, workplace, and community networks. Shared places and associates provide context, but do not by themselves prove a specific collaboration.

7. Freedom Work Beyond Emancipation

Historic St. Paul congregation inside the sanctuary, February 21, 1932. Photograph by Lafayette Studios, Lexington, Kentucky.

Historic St. Paul's commitment to liberation did not end with slavery. After Emancipation, the church became a center of Black education, mutual aid, civic leadership, political organizing, and civil-rights advocacy.

1866: The church hosted the gathering associated with the Kentucky State Benevolent Association, an early statewide Black mutual-aid and civil-rights organization.

1867: The State Convention of Colored Men met at St. Paul to organize around education, political rights, economic advancement, and the needs of formerly enslaved people and free Black communities.

1885: The Colored State Convention addressed racial violence, political disfranchisement, education, and equal citizenship.

1892: St. Paul hosted an anti-segregation convention and continued its role as a center of organized resistance and public advocacy.

James Turner and Black education

Rev. James Turner (d. 1885; birth year under continuing research), a plasterer, trustee, property owner, and educational advocate, worked with Black taxpayers, local supporters, the American Missionary Association, and the Freedmen's Bureau to expand educational opportunities. He must not be confused with Rev. James M. Turner, a later A.M.E. minister who served St. Paul in the late nineteenth century.

Public leadership after slavery

St. Paul provided a place where Black Kentuckians gathered to organize, debate, educate, and advocate. The sanctuary was not only a worship space; it became a civic platform for freedom work after emancipation. This section retains the distinction between documented events hosted at St. Paul and broader movements in which members, pastors, and community partners participated.

8. Pastoral Leadership and a Living Ministry

Before formal A.M.E. affiliation, Historic St. Paul had local pastoral and lay leadership. After its September 1865 affiliation through Rev. David Smith's missionary work, the congregation entered regular Ohio Annual Conference oversight when Kentucky churches were received in 1866. Current research clarifies the earliest post-affiliation sequence while preserving the distinction between missionary assignment and formal conference appointment.

Corrected early A.M.E. leadership sequence

1865 - Rev. David Smith	Missionary appointed to Kentucky by Bishop William Paul Quinn; Smith brought St. Paul, Lexington, into the A.M.E. connection.
1865 - Rev. George H. Shaffer	Smith's 1881 firsthand account says he appointed G. H. Shaffer as pastor of St. Paul.
1866 - Rev. Grafton H. Graham	Wayman identifies Graham of Ohio as Lexington's first pastor "appointed." He was present when Kentucky churches entered Ohio Conference oversight at Chillicothe in 1866. The combined evidence strongly supports his formal St. Paul appointment at that conference; the original stationing list has not yet been located.

Jurisdiction: Historic St. Paul remained within the Ohio Annual Conference until the Kentucky Annual Conference was organized in September 1868. The Annual Conference held in Lexington in 1867 was the Ohio Annual Conference, not the Kentucky Annual Conference.

Leadership across generations

Rev. C. C. Townsend led the major 1906 remodeling. Recent pastoral leaders include Rev. Robert E. Keesee, Rev. James Stowe, Rev. George A. Moore, Sr., Rev. Kenneth E. Paris, Rev. Kenneth J. Golphin, Rev. Troy I. Thomas, Rev. William R. T. Hale, Dr. Robert A. Strode, Rev. Dr. Stephanie M. Raglin, and Rev. Dr. Walter R. Henry. Rev. Kenneth J. Golphin, who also served as pastor, now serves as Presiding Elder of the Louisville-Lexington District. As of September 2026, Rev. Dr. Walter R. Henry serves as pastor.

A historically Black church for everybody

The African Methodist Episcopal Church was founded in response to discrimination against people of African descent. Its Christian faith and membership are not limited by race. Historic St. Paul remains rooted in Black history while welcoming people of every race and background to worship, learn, serve, and participate in community life.

The continuing work of the church

- Worship and spiritual formation rooted in the A.M.E. tradition.
- Education, youth development, and preservation of Black history.
- Community service, health and wellness, fellowship, and public engagement.
- Heritage interpretation and tours connected with the Network to Freedom listing.

The church continues the work begun by its founders: worshiping God, building community, educating future generations, preserving sacred space, and advancing freedom and justice.

9. Preservation as Ministry

The 1826 sanctuary and later bell tower remain the heart of Historic St. Paul's living campus. Historic St. Paul A.M.E. Church archives.

Preservation is part of Historic St. Paul's ministry. Protecting the sanctuary and associated campus safeguards a place where generations worshiped, sheltered memory, organized for justice, educated children, and served the wider community.

- **2020:** Roof work completed.
- **2024:** Front facade and bell tower work completed.
- **2025:** Major foundation stabilization completed, including footers, retaining walls, drainage, guttering, structural reinforcement, organ-floor work, and related interior repairs.
- **2026:** Part 2 of the historic tax-credit rehabilitation work approved; planning continued for the remaining work needed for final certification.

Current phase and separate priorities

Remaining priorities for the current historic-tax-credit phase include protection and enclosure of the historic stairwell area, replacement of the sanctuary HVAC system, and plaster and paint restoration of sanctuary walls and ceilings. Separate major preservation priorities include stained-glass/window conservation and additional masonry/tuckpointing.

The church's preservation work has been supported by members, friends, contractors, engineers, architects, grantmakers, preservation organizations, and public agencies. Their combined work protects a nationally significant historic site while preserving it as an active house of worship.

Research Approach and Historical Standards

Historic St. Paul's strongest public history comes from preserving the building, naming evidence honestly, honoring oral tradition, and updating interpretation when stronger primary or denominational sources are located.

Confirmed historical anchors

Use 1820 as the congregational founding date, 1826 as the sanctuary construction date, and September 1865 as the formal A.M.E. affiliation date. Identify the 1862 trustees as Moses Spencer, Henry Britton, Andrew Bryant, Henry Bryce, and John W. Bell. Identify the 1867 Annual Conference held in Lexington as the Ohio Annual Conference; the Kentucky Annual Conference was organized in September 1868.

Interpretive standards

For Rev. James King, explain the Lexington-Ohio Methodist connection without claiming he was a St. Paul member or pastor unless additional records are found. For the 1865 stormy meeting, identify William H. Miles as Rev. William H. Miles at that time and note that he later became the first bishop of the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church. Identify Rev. George H. Shaffer, not C. T. Shaffer, as the pastor David Smith says he appointed in 1865. Identify 1866 as the strongly supported year of Rev. Grafton H. Graham's formal appointment through the Ohio Annual Conference at Chillicothe, while noting that the original stationing list remains to be located.

Publication principle

State documented facts directly; identify church oral tradition as tradition; qualify interpretations where records are incomplete; and preserve later local accounts as part of the history of interpretation when stronger evidence corrects them.

Selected Historical Sources and Image Credits

Core sources for the 1865-1868 correction

1. David Smith, Biography of Rev. David Smith (1881), p. 93. Firsthand account naming Rev. G. H. Shaffer.
2. A. W. Wayman, Cyclopaedia of African Methodism (1882), p. 99. Lexington entry naming Rev. G. H. Graham of Ohio as the first pastor appointed.
3. R. R. Wright Jr., Centennial Encyclopaedia of the A.M.E. Church (1916). Documents the C. T. Shaffer chronology and Ohio/Kentucky conference history.
4. The Legacy of African Methodism in the Third Episcopal District (1988). Confirms Kentucky churches were received into the Ohio Conference in 1866 and names G. H. Graham among those present.
5. B. W. Arnett, Semi-Centenary Celebration of the A.M.E. Church of Cincinnati (1874). Documents Rev. James King, Allen Temple's 1824 organization, Grafton H. Graham, and the 1867 Ohio Conference at Lexington.
6. Daniel A. Payne, History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (1891). Used for historical A.M.E. appointment practice.
7. "St. Paul A.M.E. Church," The Lexington Herald, Dec. 26, 1920. Preserves the stormy meeting account, William H. Miles's presence, and the later C. T. Shaffer identification.
8. Foster Ockerman Jr., First Methodist/First United Methodist institutional history, reproduced by the Lexington History Museum. Reports that about 300 Black members left the white Methodist congregation in 1866 and joined Black worshipers on Upper Street. Count treated as reported, not independently confirmed.

Additional institutional, site, and image sources

Historic St. Paul A.M.E. Church deeds, pastoral roster, church records, research files, architectural evidence, photographs, and oral tradition; Henry Britton obituary; Frances Dallam Peter, Window on the War: Frances Dallam Peter's Lexington Civil War Diary, ed. John David Smith and William Cooper Jr. (Lexington-Fayette County Historic Commission, 1976), including the Little College Lot map by Howard Evans (1933); National Register documentation; National Park Service National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom materials; A Sanctuary of Faith and Freedom (2026); Following the Evidence: The Hill Street Connection Reconsidered (2026); and historical accounts concerning Lewis and Harriet Hayden, Lewis Garrard Clarke, Calvin Fairbank, Delia Webster, John Mifflin Brown, and Lexington Black Methodist history.

Selected image credits

Church exterior/bell tower: Historic St. Paul A.M.E. Church archives. Sanctuary: Kieser Consulting Group. Pulpit: Rev. Dr. Robert A. Strode. Concealed room/doorway: Aleigha Sullivan. Rev. David Smith: Biography of Rev. David Smith (1881). William Paul Quinn: New York Public Library, public domain. John Mifflin Brown: A.M.E. General Conference program (1900), public domain. Rev. William H. Miles portrait: Dsdugan - Self-photographed, CC0, Wikimedia Commons, curid=82863985. Hayden monument: Erinod333, CC BY-SA 4.0. 1932 congregation: Lafayette Studios. Henry Britton map detail: Window on the War, Little College Lot map. Church and parsonage photograph: Dennis Carpenter, Fall 1976, Northside Historic Residential District, Photo #60; National Register documentation, 1979.

Research and acknowledgments

Historic St. Paul A.M.E. Church, Lexington, Kentucky.

Prepared from the Historic St. Paul A.M.E. Church Research Archives under the research coordination of Priscilla Sullivan.

We gratefully acknowledge Gail Nordahl, great-great-granddaughter of Rev. George Henry Shaffer, whose family knowledge brought the Shaffer identification to our attention and helped clarify the historical record distinguishing Rev. George Henry Shaffer from his brother, Bishop Cornelius Thaddeus (C. T.) Shaffer.

We gratefully acknowledge Carver C. Gayton for his assistance with the research concerning Lewis Garrard Clarke and for helping strengthen the historical interpretation of Clarke's documented association with Historic St. Paul.

We also acknowledge the late Lillian Ballew Gentry (1927-2020), whose efforts successfully secured grant funding from the Kentucky African American Heritage Commission for the installation of protective coverings over all 20 stained-glass windows.

Mrs. Gentry also contributed to the documentation and recognition of Historic St. Paul A.M.E. Church as a contributing historic property within the Northside Historic Residential District, which is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

The original *Windows of Historic St. Paul* wall print was researched and created by the late Lynda Thomas (1955-2015).

Historic St. Paul A.M.E. Church

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Our Journey Through Time

A concise timeline of faith, property, freedom, education, and public witness.

1820 — CONGREGATION ORGANIZED

Free and enslaved Black Methodists organize the North Upper Street congregation.

1826 — BRICK SANCTUARY BUILT

Members complete the sanctuary that remains the historic heart of the campus.

1827 — PROPERTY SECURED

Trustees secure legal title to the original church-site property.

1850 — LAND EXPANSION

Trustees acquire a narrow adjoining strip of land.

1862-63 — ADDITIONAL PROPERTY

The church acquires more campus land, including part of the former city stray pen.

1865 — A.M.E. AFFILIATION

The established congregation formally enters the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

1866 — OHIO CONFERENCE

Kentucky A.M.E. churches are received into the Ohio Annual Conference at Chillicothe.

1876-77 — ANNEX & PARSONAGE

Annex area expanded along Mechanic Street; a parsonage was built. The 1826 sanctuary itself was not enlarged.

1906 — MAJOR REMODELING

The present bell tower is added during the C. C. Townsend remodeling.

2025 — NETWORK TO FREEDOM

Historic St. Paul is listed in the National Park Service Network to Freedom.

Remembering Our Past. Celebrating Our Present. Inspiring Our Future.

TO GOD BE THE GLORY.

The Parsonage and the Evolving Church Campus

A visual record of the campus before the present education building

Historic St. Paul A.M.E. Church and former parsonage, Fall 1976. Photograph by Dennis Carpenter; Northside Historic Residential District, Photo #60. The parsonage stood beside the sanctuary before the present education building. National Register documentation, 1979.

Historic St. Paul's campus continued to develop as the congregation's ministry expanded. Research concerning the 1876-1877 building campaign determined that the church's annex area was expanded along the Mechanic Street side of the property, and a parsonage was built. The parsonage later became known as the settlement house. This work expanded the church campus but did not enlarge the original 1826 sanctuary.

This photograph illustrates the growth of the church campus around the historic sanctuary. It helps readers see the relationship between the sanctuary, bell tower, and former parsonage before construction of the present education building.

Historical Accuracy Notes

What is confirmed, what is reported, and what remains under study

CONFIRMED IN THIS EDITION

The congregation was organized in 1820; the brick sanctuary was built in 1826; and church property was secured through trustees in 1827, 1850, and 1862–1863. Formal A.M.E. affiliation occurred through Rev. David Smith's missionary work in 1865. Kentucky churches were received into the Ohio Annual Conference in 1866; the Kentucky Annual Conference was organized in September 1868.

REPORTED LATER ACCOUNT

A later First Methodist/First United Methodist institutional history compiled by Foster Ockerman Jr. and reproduced by the Lexington History Museum reports that about 300 Black members left the white Methodist congregation in 1866 and joined Black worshipers on Upper Street. This is included as an important reported movement, not as an independently confirmed membership count.

CORRECTED INTERPRETATION

The reported 1866 membership movement did not establish Historic St. Paul. By then the Upper Street congregation had already existed for about forty-six years, worshiped in its brick sanctuary for about forty years, held property through trustees since 1827, and formally joined the A.M.E. Church in September 1865. The 1876-1877 campaign expanded the annex area along the Mechanic Street side and included construction of a parsonage, later known as the settlement house. This work expanded the church campus but did not enlarge the original 1826 sanctuary.

CONTINUING RESEARCH

The original 1866 Ohio Annual Conference stationing list remains a target for archival research. The precise dates and sequence of the sanctuary stained-glass windows remain under study. The former parsonage image is now identified as a Fall 1976 photograph by Dennis Carpenter for the Northside Historic Residential District documentation.

Publication standard

State documented facts directly; identify church oral tradition as tradition; qualify interpretations where records are incomplete; and preserve later local accounts as part of the history of interpretation when stronger primary or denominational evidence corrects them.

HISTORIC ST. PAUL A.M.E. CHURCH

A Legacy of Faith. A Future of Hope.

Lexington, Kentucky

A Living Witness

For more than two centuries, Historic St. Paul has stood as a house of worship and a witness to Black faith, institution-building, freedom, education, and community leadership. The congregation continues to preserve its 1826 sanctuary for worship, public history, Legacy Tours, and future generations.

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Organized 1820 | Sanctuary built 1826 | Formal A.M.E. affiliation 1865

National Register contributing property | National Park Service Network to Freedom site

Remembering Our Past. Celebrating Our Present. Inspiring Our Future.

To God Be the Glory.