

Hermon Presbyterian Church

Hermon Presbyterian Church was organized in 1869 in Rock Hill, South Carolina as a mission school and church. It was a small frame building located at the rear of the former church building on Elm Avenue, later Trade Street and now known as Dave Lyle Boulevard. Reverend J. A. Rainey was the first minister to serve the church. There were approximately forty-one (41) members. Most of these were blacks who had been members of other Presbyterian congregations prior to the Civil War and wished to have their own church organization. The church had mission status under the northern Presbyterian denomination for a number of years. By the 1890's, the group had grown sufficiently to begin the process of building a larger church.

On May 14, 1897, the Ground-breaking Ceremony was held. Participants in the Ground-breaking Ceremony included Reverend Alexander Sprunt of First Presbyterian Church, Rock Hill, Reverend C. M. Young, Reverend T. W. Thompson of Blacksburg, Reverend O. G. Jones of White Memorial Church, Reverend J. W. Moultrie of the A. M. E. Church, Professor M.D. Lee of Clinton Institute, Reverend T. S. Gilmore of Mt. Prospect Baptist Church, Presiding Elder William Robinson, and Reverend T. L. Toatley. Mrs. A. C. Rainey and Rev. C. M. Young lifted the first shovel of dirt. The building was not completed until 1903. The architect is not known.

The church was built largely through the work of its own membership, which included five brick-masons, seven carpenters and painters; they expected to build the church for five thousand dollars (\$5,000). Because the work depended on volunteer labor and an ongoing fundraising effort, they worked as long as they had materials to work with. The Church was an excellent example of a small Late Gothic Revival church building, with fine architectural details. Construction on the new church continued from 1897 until 1903.

Members who led the work included carpenter George A. Watts and brick mason Howard Agurs. Members worshiped in the fellowship room until the sanctuary was completed in 1912. Reverend C. M. Young was pastor. Prior to public support for education for blacks, Hermon Presbyterian along with Carmel Presbyterian were both meeting the needs of those who didn't have education and for the African American Community. It is uncertain how long this school existed or what grade levels were included.

During the civil rights era, Hermon Presbyterian Church, lead by its pastor, the Reverend C. A. Ivory, played a significant role in the sit-ins, marches and mass meetings held in Rock Hill. Reverend Ivory was arrested at the downtown McCrory's while trying to be served. McCrory's is the site where nine Friendship Jr. College students, who later became known as the Friendship Nine, were arrested for sitting in and requesting service at the lunch counter. Their story gained national and international publicity, and recently, a marker honoring them was erected on the site.

On May 23, 1999, Hermon Presbyterian Church broke ground on six and one half acres of land located at 107 Heckle Boulevard, Rock Hill. The pastor, the Reverend Floretta L. Watkins, Presbytery officials, the congregation, community leaders, and friends walked from Sunset Park Elementary School to the new site. On June 11, 2000, the Dedication Service for the new sanctuary was held. Gwendolyn and Joy Colter, wrote a special song commemorating the occasion. The song is entitled: "Hermon Will Rejoice In His Name."

Hermon Presbyterian Church has played an important role in the development and preservation of the ethnic heritage of blacks in Rock Hill. The church has been a cohesive-community organization for several generations among black residents of Rock Hill. Leaders in education, politics and the civil rights movement have come from Hermon and have influenced the progress made by black citizens.