

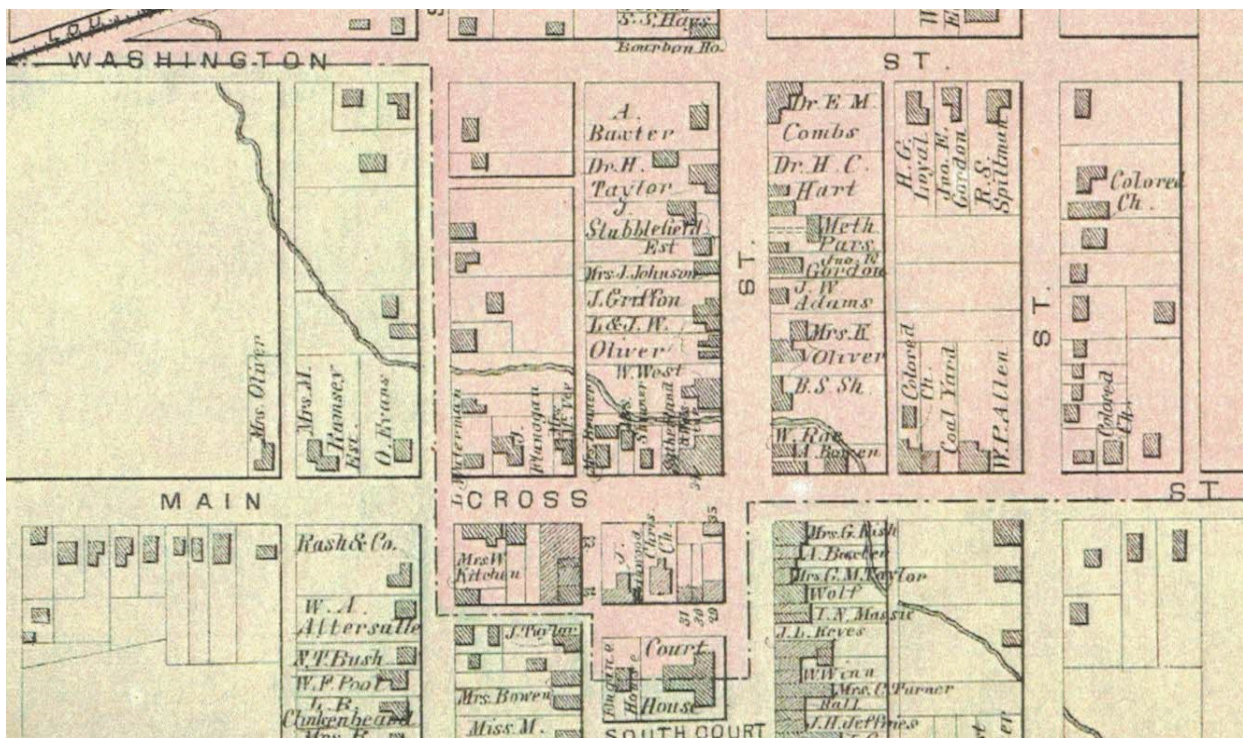
WHERE IN THE WORLD?

CME Church in Winchester

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According to a Methodist church history of Winchester, “a number of years before the Emancipation, the black people of this locality were permitted to worship in the basement of the First Methodist Church.” This congregation may have given rise to the first documented black church in Winchester, the African Methodist Episcopal Church, which later became the Colored Methodist Episcopal (CME) Church. The earliest record of the church is an 1866 deed for the purchase of a lot in Winchester. On the 6th day of February that year, Joshua S. Neale and wife Amanda sold a lot to John Allen, James Winn and John Massie in trust for the “African Methodist E[piscopal] church of Winchester.” The price was \$230, paid in cash. The congregation may have been established earlier; the February 1866 date reflects when the church acquired its first property in Winchester. More about this lot later.

On January 1, 1870, the CME Church of Winchester purchased a second lot, and it was here they built their first church building. The property was acquired from Charles W. Williams and Jesse T. Williams and wife Margaret for the sum of \$1,140. The lot, known as the “Old Williams Factory,” fronted on Main Cross Street (Broadway) 30 feet 2 inches and ran north 203 feet 7 inches on the east side of an alley (Church Alley). This deed identified the church trustees as Reuben Ragland, Shelton Jones and William Irvin.



The first CME Church and Parsonage were built at the corner of Main Cross and the alley just east of Main Street. The second Church and Parsonage were built at the corner of Main Cross and Highland Street. Both are shown on the 1877 Beers map above.

In 1870, the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Winchester changed their affiliation to the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church in America. The latter was formed that year at their First General Conference in Jackson, Tennessee, and the conference accepted a petition from the Winchester church, dated November 25, stating that “We trust that you will listen to our prayers, and accept this graciously from your brethren in Christ at Allen’s Chapel, main cross street, Winchester, Ky.” The petition was signed by the following church officers: John Allen, Thomas Webb, Richard Trotter, Harrison Martin, Jacob Carey, *Stewards*; James Austin, *Class Leader*; Edward Massie, George Gardner, Sheet Irvin, *Trustees*; Reuben Taylor, *Pastor*.

In 1875, the trustees of the CME Church—Reuben Railey, Shelton Jones and James Todd—sold off the back of this property, 130 feet 9 inches, to John McDonald for \$150. The deed states that the property conveyed began at “the northwest corner of the Church and parsonage property,” which suggests that these two buildings were built sometime between 1870 and 1875. Both buildings are shown on the 1877 Beers map of Winchester: the “Colored Church” on the northeast corner of Main Cross Street and the first alley east of Main Street. The old brick church building still stands at the corner of Church Alley.

The congregation later built a new church and parsonage on the property originally purchased in 1866. This lot was “situated on the northeast corner of Main Cross Street and [Highland] Street in the town of Winchester Ky. adjoining the lots of William Webb [and] Alfred Porter (men of color).” An 1898 deed describes the property as “a certain lot of ground with church building and parsonage thereon.” Both the new church and parsonage are shown at this location on the 1877 Beers map, so the congregation’s move from Church Alley must have come by that date.

The 1898 deed, mentioned above, was made to reassign the Broadway-Highland Street property from the original trustees—John Allen, James Winn and John Massie—to their “successor trustees.” The 1898 trustees were identified as Nelson Ramsey, William Bell, Isaac Young, Jessie Evans and George Benton. The deed states that the lot fronted on Broadway 118 feet and ran north 67 feet on Highland.



The old CME Church as it looks today.

In 1898, the same year the trustees amended their deed to the Broadway-Highland Street property, they erected a new edifice at that location. The cornerstone is dated July 17, 1898. The new church, called Allen Chapel CME, served its congregation there for over a century.

In 1926, the church sold off its buildings at Broadway and Church Alley. The CME Church of Winchester—W. C. Hopewell, chairman; Henry Warfield, treasurer; Jonas Rucker, Eldred Green, John Downey, Grant Yates and George Weathers, trustees—conveyed the property to Ernest Jordan for the sum of \$3,000. The officers and trustees met “at the Church Building on the property” on April 10, passed a resolution authorizing the sale of the property, and concluded the sale on August 6. Ernest Jordan operated his business, Jordan Electric Company, in the old church building for many years.



Remnants of the Gothic arched windows can still be seen.

The city of Winchester purchased the property in 2001. The old church was used for a time by Parks and Recreation but, because of structural problems, is now vacant. The only indication that the old building was ever a church is the remnants of the Gothic arched windows, which have been blocked in with brick.

Note: Winchester Colored Baptist Church, established by the spring of 1867, may be the second oldest African-American congregation in Winchester. That year the church purchased a lot on Highland Street, where the present First Baptist Church Highland now stands.

Sources

“Allen Chapel CME” and “First Baptist Highland,” *Winchester Sun, Centennial Edition*, September 9, 1978; Clark County Deed Book 42:216, 43:27, 44:158, 46:207, 65:613, 104:230, 228:216, 384:120; Charles H. Phillips, *History of the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church in America* (Jackson, TN, 1925), pp. 27-35, 45-46; D. G. Beers Company, *Atlas of Bourbon, Clark, Fayette, Jessamine and Woodford Counties, Ky.* (Philadelphia, PA, 1877).