

A Racial History of the First Presbyterian Church of Trenton



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Introduction

During the summer of 2021, two interns, Isaac Bledsoe and Juliet Sturge, worked in collaboration with the two interim co-pastors, Marcus Lambright and Molly Dykstra, as part the RISE (Recognizing Inequities and Standing for Equality) Fellowship sponsored by the Pace Center for Civic Engagement at Princeton University. Using reports from Princeton University, Princeton Theological Seminary, and Light Street Presbyterian Church as a guide, they worked to examine the ties to slavery among the pastors and other leaders of the church beginning from its creation in the early 1700s. They also researched written work from church members that opposed or supported slavery, and the first Black members of the church. This report also includes conclusions and reflections from interviews conducted with current members and friends of First Presbyterian.

First Presbyterian Church in Trenton has its origins starting in 1712, although it was not quite established as its own entity at that point. Churches formed in the “Hopewell” and “Maidenhead” townships, what are currently known as Trenton, Lawrenceville and the surrounding area. These churches were served by the same minister, and sometimes by the same officers. It was in 1726 that a split occurred, and the Presbyterian Church of Trenton was officially formed, in Trenton proper.¹

The state of New Jersey did not outlaw slavery until 1804, then employing a gradual process of emancipation that did not leave full emancipation until the Thirteenth Amendment in 1865. New Jersey was the last Northern state to abolish slavery.²

The following report seeks to outline the very complex and difficult story of slavery and racial justice that contributed to and comprises of the church’s history. This is necessary for First Presbyterian to serve their community well, as well as preserve the stories of some notable

¹ Morris, “Two hundred and twenty-five years, 1712-1937, First Presbyterian Church, Trenton, New Jersey.”

² Smith, “Legislating Slavery in New Jersey.”

African Americans in their history. With that in mind, this report is just the beginning in examining the history of the church and its members. In conjunction with the historical research, this report hopes to look forward and stimulate action with the experiences and commentary of current members of the congregation and community members.

Church Leaders and Slaveholding

Since the founding of the First Presbyterian Church in Trenton, there is extensive evidence of the church's ties to slavery. In this section, pastors as well as elders, trustees, and deacons of the church that employed slave labor are highlighted. It is worth noting, the research is not incontestable and simply because research up to this point has not indicated a member of the church being involved with slavery does not mean they were not. We have focused primarily on the fact that these men owned slaves, but some of them also had large impacts on New Jersey and the United States itself. To learn more about other aspects of these men's lives, we recommend reading *History of the Presbyterian Church in Trenton, N.J.* by Rev. John Hall. It was a starting point for a large quantity of this research and presents a detailed account of the positions and actions of the church leaders.

REV. DAVID COWELL (b.1704, 1736-1760)

There were three unsettled ministers of the church after its founding, Hubbard, Wilson, and Morgan.³ Very little is known about their tenure at the church past the statement of later pastor, Rev. Armstrong from 1792.⁴ Armstrong also proclaimed the first settled pastor as David

³ *The first names of Hubbard, Wilson, and Morgan are unknown as that is how they were named by Rev. Armstrong, however, John Hall speculates their full identities in *History of the Presbyterian Church in Trenton, N.J.* on page 65.

⁴ Hall, *History of the Presbyterian Church in Trenton, N.J.*, 65.

Cowell who was born in 1704 in Dorchester, Massachusetts and graduated from Harvard in 1732. He served the church from 1736 to 1760.⁵ Rev. Cowell was a trustee of Princeton University from 1748 until stepping down in 1760 and eventually dying later that same year. He was acting President of the University from 1757-1758.⁶ There is no available evidence of Rev. Cowell holding slaves, however there is evidence of a David Cowell, Rev. Cowell's nephew, reporting a slave in the runaway slave advertisements in 1783 after Rev. Cowell's death.⁷

REV. WILLIAM KIRKPATRICK (b.~1726, 1760-66)

Rev. Kirkpatrick's time and place of birth are unknown however he is estimated to have been born around 1726. He attended Princeton University and graduated in the class of 1757. He served as pastor of the First Presbyterian Church from 1760 to 1766.⁸ Kirkpatrick left the congregation in 1766 to go to Amwell. He died in 1769 as both Treasurer and Clerk of Presbytery. While no evidence was found in the New Jersey records of manumission or census records, John Hall proclaims a quote that outlines Kirkpatrick's closeness to a slave. The quote reads: "But by no survivor was he more loved and revered than by a slave, whom he owned to the time of his death, New Jersey being then a slaveholding State. This slave lived to be about one hundred years of age. To old Cato his master was the model of a man and a Christian minister, and but for his greater love to the Lord Jesus Christ, his profound veneration and deep-rooted affection might have been looked upon as idolatry."⁹

⁵ Hall, 69.

⁶ General Catalogue of Princeton University, 15.

⁷ Hodges and Brown, "Pretends to Be Free": Runaway Slave Advertisements from Colonial and Revolutionary New York and New Jersey, 287-88.

⁸ Hall, 163.

⁹ Hall, 191.

JOHN CHAMBERS (Elder 1760)

There is evidence that suggests a slave named Ann Tucker was manumitted by John S. Chambers who was serving as the executor for the state of John Chambers.¹⁰ Juliet Tucker is another slave that was manumitted by John S. Chambers.¹¹

MOORE FURMAN (Trustee 1760, 1788)

Moore Furman was a slave holder with two children (a boy born in 1788 and a girl born in 1784), bound to James Little, to be manumitted at the ages of 25 and 21 respectively. He also owned a woman named Hannah and her child Charles, to be manumitted after a term of 5 years and the age of 25, respectively.¹²

ABRAHAM HUNT (Trustee 1764)

Abraham Hunt was a leading merchant in Trenton and also served as the town postmaster. Hunt manumitted two slaves, Flora and Peter, in 1791 with Mary Bryant.¹³ There is evidence of two additional slaves, Jacob and Hannah, owned by Hunt.¹⁴

SAMUEL TUCKER (Trustee 1766)

Samuel Tucker was the sheriff of Hunterdon County as well as serving as a member of the Provincial Assembly, as President of the Provincial Congress, as State Treasurer, and as a Justice of the Supreme Court of New Jersey.¹⁵ Tucker had three slaves that were manumitted after his death by the executors of his estate. The slaves were named Catharine Jenings, Phebe Boling, and Hannah Gilpin.¹⁶

¹⁰ D'Autrechy, Some Records of Old Hunterdon County, 1701-1838, 184.

¹¹ "Hunterdon County - Slave Manumissions."

¹² "Hunterdon County- Slave Manumissions."

¹³ "Hunterdon County- Slave Manumissions."

¹⁴ D'Autrechy, 150.

¹⁵ Woodward & Hageman, History of Burlington and Mercer Counties, New Jersey (1883), p. 788.

¹⁶ D'Autrechy, 175.

REV. ELIHU SPENCER (b. 1721, 1769-1784)

Elihu Spencer was born in 1721 in East-Haddam, Connecticut. He went to Yale College, graduating in 1746. He then became a missionary to the Six Nations under the leadership of John Brainerd. Spencer was ordained in 1748 and then traveled to the Oneida tribe, stationed at Onoquaqua. He later withdrew from the mission because of difficulties with the language barriers and his interpreter.¹⁷ After Kirkpatrick's absence, there was a period of three years where the church had no permanent minister before Spencer was approved in 1769. He was also a trustee of the College of New Jersey from 1752 until his death in 1784.¹⁸ In the Abstract of Wills from 1781-1785, Rev. Spencer made no mention of any slaves in his possession at the time of his death.¹⁹ To date, the research has indicated that Rev. Spencer was not a slaveholder.

SAMUEL HILL (Elder 1771)

While there is no evidence of Samuel Hill owning slaves himself, his son, Smith Hill was a slave holder. Smith Hill manumitted a slave named Violet in 1809.²⁰

BENJAMIN CLARK (Trustee 1777)

Benjamin Clark owned two slaves named John Kimboree and James Kimbery.²¹

¹⁷ Hall, 208-211.

¹⁸ Hall, 287.

¹⁹ New Jersey State Archives, "Volume XXXV, Abstracts of Wills, 1781-1785."

²⁰ "Hunterdon County - Slave Manumissions."

²¹ D'Autrechy, 157.

REV. JAMES F. ARMSTRONG (b.1750, 1786-1816)

Born in Maryland, Rev. James Armstrong attended Princeton University, and his beginnings in ministry were interrupted by the Revolutionary War,²² in which he served as a chaplain.²³ Armstrong did own slaves, even while presiding over First Presbyterian. He owned a woman named Susan, and Susan had two children: Charity in 1806, and Marcus Brutus in 1808.²⁴ No record of manumission was found.

During Rev. Armstrong's term as pastor, on May 1, 1792 a petition was sent to the Legislature of New Jersey to advocate for manumission of slaves under 21 years old. The petition was written and sent on behalf of a collection of residents from Trenton including many members of the First Presbyterian Church congregation. The petition acknowledges the "unfortunate condition" of slaves and calls upon the legislature to expand upon a provision in Section 5 "An Act to prevent the importation of Slaves into the State of New Jersey and to Authorize the Manumission of them under certain restrictions and to prevent the abuse of Slaves" that was passed in 1780. While not all of the signatures present are legible it can be ascertained that the following Church leaders signed the petition: Peter Gordon, Benjamin Yard, Isaac Smith, Nathaniel Furman, Daniel Clark, William Green, Ogden Woodruff, and Daniel Scudder. Below is the original petition. A transcribed version of the petition will be included in the Appendix.

²² Hall, 179-180.

²³ "Revolutionary War Soldiers Interred in the Cemetery of First Presbyterian Church."

²⁴ "Hunterdon County - Birth Certificates of Children of Slaves."

HUGH RUNYAN (Trustee 1783, 1788)

Hugh Runyan was born in Burlington Co., NJ in 1738. He served as a quartermaster in the New Jersey militia. Runyan owned a woman named Diner and made a note of the birth of her child, Peter, on May 7, 1806.²⁸

ISAAC SMITH (Elder 1787)

Isaac Smith owned a slave named Dinah who was manumitted in 1823 in Bethlehem Township.

AARON D. WOODRUFF (Trustee 1789)

Aaron Woodruff was an attorney of law in Trenton. He owned a slave named Hagar who had a daughter named Betty in 1806.²⁹ He also had a slave named Mary who had a son named Harry in 1805.³⁰

PETER GORDON (Elder 1797, Trustee 1804)

Peter Gordon was influential in the city of Trenton and in the church as a trustee and elder. In 1796, he received a 10 year old slave named James from Anne Hart, who was to be manumitted after he turned 25. He also owned a woman named Hannah Hankinson while he was a trustee of First Presbyterian, and she had a child named Julian during this time.³¹ Hannah was manumitted in 1815, there was no record of manumission found for Julian.³² He also owned another woman named Maria Chambers, who was manumitted in 1815.³³ Gordon is a example

²⁸ "Hunterdon County - Birth Certificates of Children of Slaves."

²⁹ D'Autrechy, 161.

³⁰ D'Autrechy, 159.

³¹ "Hunterdon County - Birth Certificates of Children of Slaves."

³² "Hunterdon County - Slave Manumissions."

³³ "Hunterdon County - Slave Manumissions."

of the inconsistent antebellum mindsets toward slavery. He owned slaves himself, but he also had signed on to the 1792 petition that was a step toward abolition.

JOHN BEATTY (Trustee 1799 & 1822, Elder 1817)

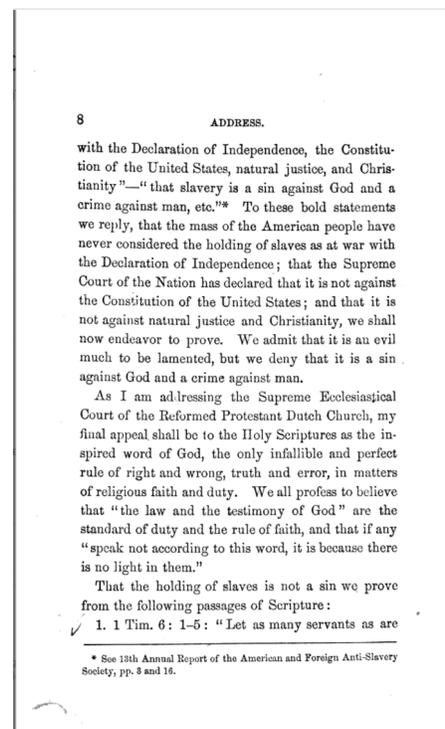
John Beatty made his presence known in New Jersey by becoming a doctor, fighting in the Revolutionary War, and later attaining political prominence. He graduated from what would become the College of New Jersey (Princeton University) and started a medical practice in Princeton in 1774. Fighting in the Revolutionary War, he attained the rank of colonel before being court martialed by General George Washington for working with the British to improve conditions for POWs. In his political career, he was elected to the Continental Congress in 1783, served in the New Jersey legislature, the U.S Congress, and as New Jersey's secretary of state.³⁴ Beatty did also own two slave women named Dinah and Diana. Dinah gave birth to a son named Henry in 1805, and Diana gave birth to a son named Hannibal in 1808.³⁵

BENJAMIN HAYDEN (Elder 1806)

Benjamin Hayden owned one slave woman named Violet, who had a child named Cynthia in 1809.³⁶

REV. SAMUEL B. HOW (b. 1790, 1816-1821)

Between 1816 and 1821, Rev. Samuel Blanchard How presided over the congregation, and while not during his time at First



³⁴ “Beatty, John | Encyclopedia.com.”

³⁵ “Hunterdon County - Birth Certificates of Children of Slaves.”

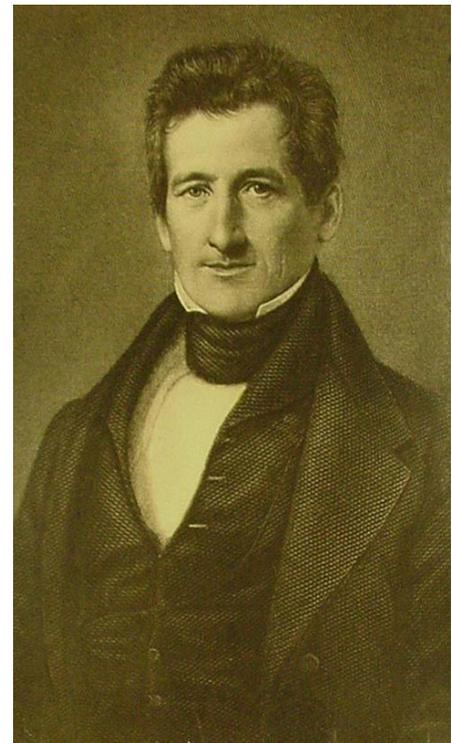
³⁶ “Hunterdon County - Birth Certificates of Children of Slaves.”

Presbyterian, How provides the clearest support of slavery of all the figures we have seen. In 1856, How delivered a message entitled, "Slaveholding not Sinful."³⁷ As the name suggests, How provides a 136 page defense of slavery to the General Synod of the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church of North America, based on the Bible.

He writes, "We admit that it is an evil much to be lamented, but we deny that it is a sin against God and a crime against man"³⁸ Not only does he assert that owning slaves is biblically justified, he also claims that abolition is sinful.³⁹ While no evidence was found of How owning slaves himself, this work presents a clear and strong case for his support of the institution of slavery.

SAMUEL L. SOUTHARD (Trustee 1818)

Samuel L Southard was another well known member of the church, and Hall even claims that "few men ever attained earlier celebrity in New Jersey".⁴⁰ A political stalwart, Southard was first elected to the New Jersey House of Representatives in 1814, was a New Jersey Supreme Court Justice from 1815 to 1820, and served in the US Senate from 1821 to 1823. He additionally served as the secretary of the Navy, interim secretary of treasury, interim secretary of war, New Jersey Attorney general, and New Jersey Governor, a post from which he resigned to accept election to the US Senate again.⁴¹ As a member of First Presbyterian, he served as a



³⁷ How, *Slaveholding Not Sinful*.

³⁸ How, 8.

³⁹ How, 12.

⁴⁰ Hall, 253.

⁴¹ "Samuel L. Southard (1823–1825) | Miller Center."

trustee beginning in 1818.⁴² While a diligent civil servant, he also owned slaves and was a supporter of the [colonization movement](#).

Southard spent some time in Virginia studying law, and it was there that he married his wife, Rebecca Harrow. When the couple moved back to New Jersey, “He [Southard] needed to find a house for himself and his bride, and to arrange for Negro servants for a wife who was accustomed to such help.”⁴³ In one certain [letter](#) to Southard, a James J Wilson informs him of two “negro boys” providing a price for one of them.⁴⁴ It is unknown if Southard did purchase these two boys, but he is documented as having sold a slave named Mira in 1813.⁴⁵ He also has two “free negroes” listed on his federal census records from 1830.⁴⁶ While his pursuit and ownership of slaves clearly demonstrates an approval of the institution, he was also an ardent supporter of the colonization movement while he was a member of the Senate, which makes it seem as though he was against slavery. Again one can see the inconsistency present in many historical figures regarding racial relations. However, given the fact that he never expressed a belief in the equality of blacks and whites, and believed the best option for free blacks was to send them back to Africa, his intentions do not seem to be towards the end of an equal black race.⁴⁷

JAMES EWING (Elder 1817)

James Ewing, of the ubiquitous Ewing family of New Jersey, was an elder during How’s time as pastor. Ewing bought a slave named Will from Anne Hart in 1796, although with

⁴² Hall, 376.

⁴³ Birkner, *Samuel L. Southard: Jeffersonian Whig*, 29.

⁴⁴ 1812: Wilson - Woodruff; Samuel L. Southard Papers, C0250, Manuscripts Division, Department of Special Collections, Princeton University Library

⁴⁵ “Sale of Slaves.”

⁴⁶ Year: 1830; Census Place: *Trenton, Hunterdon, New Jersey*; Series: *M19*; Roll: 83; Page: 466; Family History Library Film: 0337936

⁴⁷ Birkner, 50.

the stipulation that Will would be free once he turned 25.⁴⁸

REV. WILLIAM J. ARMSTRONG (b.1796, 1821-1824)

Rev. William Armstrong is not recorded as owning any slaves, and we have not found any record of Armstrong advocating for emancipation. He was known as “the friend of the colored people” and “was much interested in the welfare of slaves,” although much of this goodwill was directed solely towards the end of evangelizing Africans, and some elements of “white savior” come through in his memoirs and sermons.⁴⁹ For instance, in his sermon titled *The Missionary Spirit*, he declares, “Your influence may be felt like the dew of Heaven, among the millions of idolatrous Asia, or the benighted tribes of dark and deeply injured Africa, or the far distant isles of the sea.”⁵⁰

REV. JOHN SMITH (b. 1797, 1825-1828)

No records were found of Rev. Smith owning slaves.

BENJAMIN FISH (Trustee 1825)

Benjamin Fish is recorded with 8 slaves between the years 1850 and 1880. In 1850, the Federal Census lists him with 4 black “laborers”: John Robbins(29), Jane Jones(40), Letitia Dingeman(35), Mercy Van Moland(17).⁵¹ In the 1860 Federal Census, Fish has 2 black servants listed: Rachael Manley, a 30 year old woman, and Christianna E Longer, a 13 year old girl.⁵² In 1880, he lists Juliet Hillman (41) and Gertrude Kataman (16).⁵³

⁴⁸ “Hunterdon County- Slave Manumissions.”

⁴⁹ Armstrong, *Memoirs and Sermons of Wm. J. Armstrong*, 126.

⁵⁰ Armstrong, 377.

⁵¹ “Benjamin Fish in the 1850 United States Federal Census”

⁵² “Benjamin Fish in the 1860 United States Federal Census”

⁵³ “Benjamin Fish in the 1880 United States Federal Census”

AMOS HARTLEY (Trustee 1825)

According to the New Jersey State Department's records of slave births, Hartley owned 4 slave women. However, because of the similarity of names, it is possible that this record refers to only two women. This report will assume that they are indeed different people. The first woman, Rebecca, had a child named Hester in 1808. Another woman named Beck had two children: Lavina and Robert, in 1810 and 1813 respectively. A woman by the name of Rosina gave birth to George in 1815, and a woman named Rose gave birth to Jane in 1820.⁵⁴

REV. JAMES W. ALEXANDER (b. 1804, 1829-1833)

Rev. Alexander also was not a slaveholder, although he was a supporter and member of the [American Colonization Society](#).

SAMUEL BREARLEY (Elder 1829)

Samuel Brearley owned 4 slaves that have been recorded, and they all were manumitted by him. Dan and Dinah were freed in 1808, Tom in 1809,⁵⁵ and Maria Reasoner in 1824.⁵⁶

JOHN VOORHEES (Elder 1829)

John Voorhees owned a woman named Beth, who had a child named Dina in 1813.⁵⁷

Colonization/Emigration Movements

⁵⁴ "Hunterdon County - Birth Certificates of Children of Slaves."

⁵⁵ "Hunterdon County- Slave Manumissions."

⁵⁶ "Trenton Township Manumissions."

⁵⁷ "Hunterdon County - Birth Certificates of Children of Slaves."

The colonization movement began in the 1800's and consisted of many groups with the general goal of sending free Blacks to Africa and evangelizing the continent. The largest and most well known group was the American Colonization Society. Started in 1817, the goal of the ACS was to send African Americans back to Africa instead of grafting them into free America because many believed that Black and white could not coexist freely in America.⁵⁸ They established a colony in 1822 that would eventually become independent Liberia in 1847. This movement was controversial in both black and white circles because the intentions of the movement were dubious. Abolitionists claimed that it was a ploy to support slavery, some Blacks believed emigration would provide a better life than anything attainable in America, others saw merit in staying and fighting for freedom and justice. There also was the evangelistic argument that Black missionaries would be more effective in Christianizing the continent of Africa.⁵⁹ The goal of Christianizing Africa was especially alluring to faith communities, and various members of First Presbyterian are documented in support of the ACS. Samuel L. Southard was an strong supporter of colonization during his time in the US Senate.⁶⁰ In 1830, he wrote that "humanity and justice exult in the belief, that the gradual emancipation of the slave, and the restoration of the free to the land of their fathers, may yet afford a remedy," referring to slavery in America.⁶¹ Rev. James Alexander, who presided over First Presbyterian between 1829 and 1833, donated \$3 in February 1839 to establish a packet line between Liberia and America.⁶² Other members of First Presbyterian that are found in the List of Subscribers of the ACS are: Jonathan Fisk (Elder), Rev. John Hall (Pastor), Thomas J Stryker (Elder), and William R. Titus (Deacon).⁶³

⁵⁸ Cuffee, Ashmun, and Society, "Colonization - The African-American Mosaic Exhibition | Exhibitions (Library of Congress)."

⁵⁹ Cuffee, Ashmun, and Society, "Colonization - The African-American Mosaic Exhibition | Exhibitions (Library of Congress)."

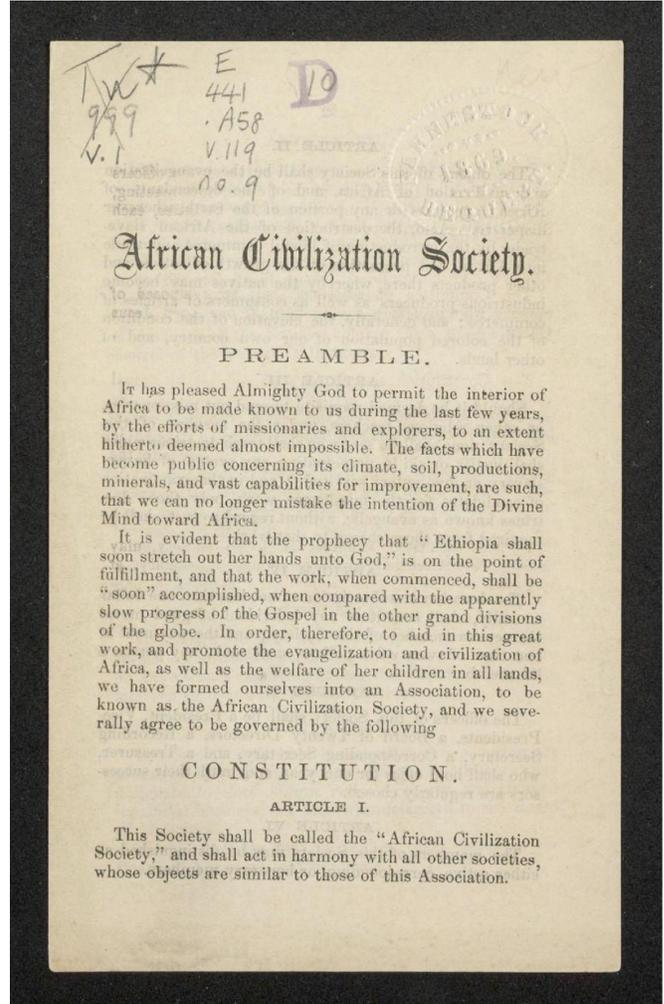
⁶⁰ Hollander, "Princeton and the Colonization Movement."

⁶¹ Southard and Newark Mechanics' Association, *Address Delivered before the Newark Mechanics' Association, July 5, 1830.*

⁶² "Subscription to the Princeton Colonization Society."

⁶³ "American Colonization Society Subscriber Lists and Life Members."

The African Civilization Society (AfCS) was an African American led group that also supported emigration to Liberia, but was not a supporter of the ACS or its subsidiaries. In its Constitution, the AfCS lists its goals as “the evangelization and civilization of Africa, and of the descendants of African ancestors in any portion of the earth, wherever dispersed. Also, the destruction of the African slave trade, by the introduction of lawful commerce and trade into Africa; the promotion of the growth of cotton and other products there, whereby the natives may become industrious producers as well as consumers of articles of commerce; and generally, the elevation of the condition of the colored population of our own country, and of other lands.”⁶⁴ Their Constitution also prohibits any missionaries who teach, justify, or perpetuate human slavery.⁶⁵ This emigration movement did not have the same immediate questionable intentions behind it as the ACS, most likely because of its African-America leadership. One notable leader of the AfCS and member of First Presbyterian was Elymas P. Rogers, who is detailed in the [Notable African Americans](#) section.



Notable African Americans

⁶⁴ African Civilization Society (U.S.), “African Civilization Society Preamble Constitution.”

⁶⁵ African Civilization Society (U.S.), “African Civilization Society Preamble Constitution.”

Through the 1800's, while many church leaders owned slaves themselves, there are a few documented instances of the congregation aiding black clergy members in their desired objectives. In 1839, Thomas Wilson, a free black man, was accepted into the congregation. Eventually, he attended Lafayette University under the direction of Rev. John Yeomans, who became President of the College after leaving First Presbyterian.⁶⁶ This was towards the end of becoming a missionary, and in April 1843, as a part of the missionary board of the Church, Wilson left for Liberia, where he taught until his death in 1846.⁶⁷

6 years later, Elymas P. Rogers, another black man, was ordained by the Presbytery. He then spent a time pastoring a church in Newark, which is hard to specify because of some



variability in name. It seems that the church was known as the First Colored Presbyterian Congregation of Newark and then Plane Street Presbyterian Church or Plane Street Colored Presbyterian Church.⁶⁸ ⁶⁹ While he was not a member of the white-led American Colonization Society, Rogers was a member of the African Civilization Society, becoming a missionary to Liberia. It was there that he died in 1861, just a

year after arriving.⁷⁰

Born in Trenton in 1847, Henry D. Wood was a member of First Presbyterian for a time until he relocated to Carthage, North Carolina.⁷¹ First Presbyterian Church was “dedicated to

⁶⁶ Hall, 263.

⁶⁷ Hall, 263-264.

⁶⁸ Jersey and Hood, *Index of Colonial and State* 212.

⁶⁹ “This October In History.”

⁷⁰ Hall, 264.

⁷¹ Richings, *Evidences of Progress Among Colo*



helping freed African Americans organize churches and schools.”⁷² In 1884, he founded John Hall Chapel, named after Rev. John Hall of First Presbyterian.⁷³ He was also supported in starting a parochial school, as well as Dayton Academy, an industrial boarding school of which Wood was Principal for a time.⁷⁴ Wood himself felt that both the church and the Academy aided in creating an incomparable environment for blacks at the time. In a glowing endorsement of late 1800’s Carthage, he wrote,

... I have yet to see the place, or the people, that compares with Carthage in its opportunities for the colored man. And the success of our efforts and the general prosperity of my people here is largely due to the sympathy and help of the good white citizens of this town. We do not claim to have wrought miracles not worked wonders in the prosecution of our church and school work, but we feel sure that on this line we have helped in the general progress, and that in the expenditure of thousands of dollars in the establishment and extension of this work, we have contributed not a little to the material community.⁷⁵

Evidently, there was quite a connection made between Wood and First Presbyterian during his time there. The congregants of First Presbyterian gifted him with \$820 as he left, and continued to support “for more than a quarter of a century” with Christmas boxes and money.⁷⁶ Seeing as it was the First Presbyterian congregants and not just the leadership who supported Rev. Wood, the Church was clearly in favor of aiding this African-American community.

FPC Today

As part of the project, members and friends of the congregation were asked about their experience with First Presbyterian and their thoughts on racial justice. Our desire was to get a sense of the church today, to complement our findings of the church “back then”. Seeing as we

⁷² Snider, “Lucean Arthur Headen.”

⁷³ Hall, 268.

⁷⁴ Richings, 174.

⁷⁵ Henry D. Wood, “Conditions of the Negro Race.”

⁷⁶ Hall, 276.

only were able to interview 8 people, we do not consider our sample to be representative, but our conclusions are helpful nonetheless.

It was clear throughout the interviews that First Presbyterian has a strong impact and presence in the surrounding community of downtown Trenton. Both members of the congregation and the outside community lauded the church's charitable efforts to do good outside their own walls. First Presbyterian has an event called Bible and Breakfast, in which they provide clothes, cosmetics, breakfast and Bible studies for the community on Saturdays. They also hand out clothes, baby formula, and other necessities to young struggling parents. For the children, they have organized memorable movie nights. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, lunch is given out to anyone who needs it by church members. To fully understand the impact and importance of this presence, it is necessary to acknowledge that the current congregation is majority white while they serve a fairly [diverse and low income community](#) with mainly people of color.

The summer of 2020 was an influential one for America in terms of racial conversation, and that was no different for First Presbyterian. Black members of the church provided articles and knowledge to educate other members on the African-American experience, as well as the history of their church. They organized a small demonstration on their front entrance in memory of George Floyd. Members participated in marches and protests, although those were not congregationally organized. This nuance came up in a few conversations, with a friend of the congregation saying, "I can say for a fact that there are individuals in the congregation who are committed to anti-racism, but I don't know how as a body they approach that." So, there is room to grow, as the leadership seeks to normalize these kinds of mindsets in the congregation.

More than anything, the importance of collaboration and partnership with community members and organizations has come to the forefront through our conversations. Arm in Arm (Formerly known as The Crisis Ministry) is currently closely connected with First Presbyterian, occupying two buildings owned by the church. The organization provides vital services to those

needing food and financial support as well as job training and housing security. FPCT also shares a ministry with The Makers Place, which is a diaper bank. Diapers are available for families who need them, and they provide additional events and programming for both mothers and children. First Presbyterian also partners with the Chosen Generation Praise and Worship Center, sharing resources and directing people to their respective foodbanks. More informally, these two organizations have had shared invites to block parties, cookouts, and talent shows. They also have built networks together to share resources and support each other.

In the future, First Presbyterian is looking forward to possible other partnerships with similarly-minded people devoted to serving the community like Cookwell which teaches formerly incarcerated people culinary skills and the Princeton Theological Seminary.

Reflections

This dive into events that transpired hundreds of years ago is necessary for First Presbyterian to function honestly and steward their place in Trenton well. This church has such an important place in the beginnings of Trenton, not only physically, but also personally. Many of the leaders and families in the early days of First Presbyterian contributed to the building blocks of Princeton University, Princeton Theological Seminary, New Jersey, and the United States itself. There is a sense of awe that the same church that served these historical figures continues to serve people in Trenton today. Yet, for that same reason, it is imperative that even the dark underbelly of the church's history is made known. Those figures that stand tall in our history books and in the church archives must be presented in a holistic manner, displaying their flaws as well as their achievements.

First Presbyterian has displayed a desire to be a light and an aiding force in their community and to do that well, they must clearly know the norms of the past in order to shed the harmful mindsets and ideologies that were normalized during those periods. Clergy members of

the church supported movements and institutions that actively degraded African Americans, and that should be addressed directly. Yet, there were also instances of helping African American people and communities in the late 1800's, and it is important to know that that is part of First Presbyterian's legacy. The congregation had such a powerful impact on Rev. Henry Wood, and that church served many African Americans during a time where most did not want them to succeed. By no means does this eradicate or equalize the harm done through slaveholding members, but it does help illustrate that usually, no historical character or institution is completely one-dimensional. The goal now, is to make the support of Rev. Wood the norm, instead of the oppressive and sometimes sneaky prejudicial norms that plagued this congregation in its past.

First Presbyterian clearly has served its community well in a few ways. For all their programming for those inside and out of the church, they seek to share what they have and better the lives of those who need it. They speak out against racial injustice and strive to make their congregation desirable and accessible to Black people. Their congregation is described as welcoming and loving by African Americans. But, as evidenced even by this project this summer, there is both a desire and a need to further investigate their history and do something with that knowledge. Two of our goals were to "create usable, instructive material which raises awareness, educates and provides opportunities for proactive and preventative action regarding racial justice in individual and congregational life, and illustrate the role of place-based community engagement in dismantling structural racism." Through our interviews, we certainly have gained a small lens into the impact of First Presbyterian's community engagement. Through our research, we have illuminated and collected a lot of history that may not be well known, and this is a launching point for the near future. It is our hope that our work can stimulate conversation that leads to real action. Action that takes the positive current mindsets of many in the church and thoughtfully addresses the harm that has been perpetrated by leaders of the church.

Our work is not comprehensive. We have not looked into the labor involved in the construction of the early church buildings, members who were not in positions of leadership, or the church's role during the 20th century. Even in the research we have done, there is room for more detail and investigation. Our hope is that we have provided a foundation so that this kind of research into the past of First Presbyterian can continue.

Appendix

Transcribed Petition to New Jersey Legislature

May 1, 1792

To the Honorable Legislative Council and General Assembly of the State of New Jersey

The Petition of *sundry* Trenton's Inhabitants of the County Burlington & Hunterdon

Respectfully *reweth*

That amidst the general spirit of freedom and liberality of sentiment which peculiarly characterised the present times, your Petitioners are happy in perceiving that the unfortunate condition of the Negros held in perpetual servitude hath not escaped observations and hath in many instances been the object of Legislative relief

That while your petitioners view with approbation the measures taken by the Legislature of this State in their favour there cannot but feel a regret that the provision contained in the 5th Section of the Act entitled "An Act to prevent the importation of Slaves into the State of New Jersey and to Authorize the Manumission of them under certain restrictions and to prevent the abuse of Slaves" passed March 2nd 1780 had not been more extensive, so as to allow persons who are so disposed to liberate their Slaves in their youth or at an age prior to twenty one years and to hold them from the time of such liberation as [indentured] servants until they shall attain the age of twenty five or twenty eight years as in the *act* in the State of Pennsylvania

Your petitioners are fully of Opinion that had the provision in the said Act been as extensive as is above mentioned numbers of those unfortunate people would obtain manumission in their youth which from a variety of circumstances not necessary to recite, is denied them at a more mature age-

We therefore pray that you will take the subject into serious consideration and if it shall appear to conduce to the great object proposed by the Law without violating the private rights of any of your constituents that you will alter the said Law so far that individuals may liberate their slaves previous to twenty one years of Age under the *restrictions* before mentioned — —

James J Wilson's Letter to Samuel L. Southard

Fulton, July 20, 1812.

Sir,

Books in the Post Office Department are very numerous and various, and if I had thought any good would arise from newspaper advertisements, it should have been employed long ago. I am, however, willing, since you are disposed to undertake it, to try the experiment.

One of the Negro boys, the eldest, is owned by Mr Gyer. I have no doubt he would suit you being a hardy active, and so far as I have seen, a good tempered and faithful fellow. Mr Gyer asks 300 dollars for him. — With respect to the other, I am not informed of any particulars, except that Daniel Gore Runyon, near this city, is the owner.

Mr Boy's' location ought certainly to be published, in some form or other. If the copy is sent to us, it shall be.

Respectfully,
James J. Wilson

S. L. Southard, esq.

FPCT Neighborhood Demographics

The FullInsite Report

Prepared for: Presbytery of New Brunswick
Study area: 0.5 mi Around 120 East State Street, Trenton, New Jersey 08608, United States of America

Base State: NJ
Current Year Estimate: 2019
5 Year Projection: 2024
10 Year Forecast: 2029
Date: 7/12/2020
Semi-Annual Projection: Fall

About the FullInsite Report

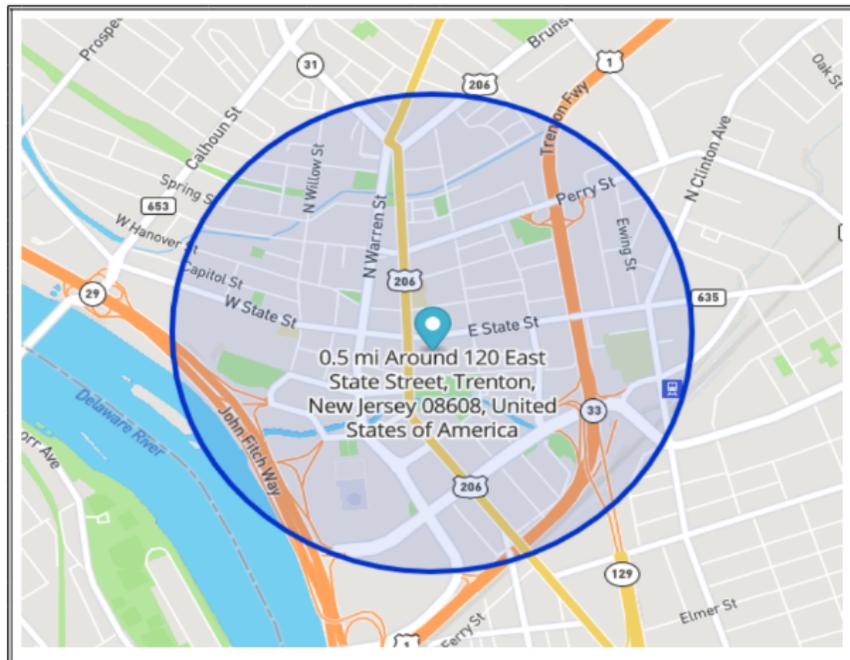
The FullInsite report is designed to provide an extensive demographic portrait of a user defined geographic area. The FullInsite integrates the full array of 2010 Census Data, the latest American Community Survey data and the new Experian Mosaic cluster system!

The FullInsite report is divided into three sections, each providing a different approach to the data. Careful consideration is given to readability and graphic treatment. The hope is that the information it presents will be more accessible to the reader.

Three Sections

- The **StoryView** Report presents 9 demographic indicators of your study area.
- The **TrendView** provides four graphs that reflect the more significant demographic trends that will shape the study area in the 5 to 10 year future.
- The **ThemeView** Report provides a wealth of demographic detail across six themes: People, Households, Families, Diversity, Housing and Work.

THE STUDY AREA



More Information

Please refer to the last page of the report for additional notes and interpretation aides in reading the report.

Sources: US Census Bureau, Synergos Technologies Inc., Experian, DecisionInsite/MissionInsite

StoryView

Significant Demographic Indicators of the Study Area's Story

1	Population Change In the 10 year future, how is the population in this area expected to change? <small>(See the Population Theme)</small>	Significant Decline	Moderate Decline	Little Change	Moderate Growth	Significant Growth
2	Household Change In the 10 year future, how are the households in this area expected to change? <small>(See Households Theme)</small>	Significant Decline	Moderate Decline	Little Change	Moderate Increase	Significant Increase
3	Families with Children Compared to the state, are families with children more or less likely to live in two parent households? <small>(See Families Theme)</small>	Significantly Less	Somewhat Less	About the Same	Somewhat More	Significantly More
4	Adult Educational Attainment For this area, what is the general level of education of the adults 25 and older? <small>(See the People Theme)</small>	Very Low	Low	Mixed	High	Very High
5	Community Diversity Index How diverse is the racial/ethnic mix of this area? <small>(See the Diversity Theme)</small>	Very Homogeneous	Homogeneous	Moderately Diverse	Very Diverse	Extremely Diverse
6	Median Family Income How does the median family income compare to the state for this area? <small>(See the Income Theme)</small>	Significantly Less	Somewhat Less	About the Same	Somewhat Greater	Significantly Greater
7	Poverty Compared to the state, are the number of families in poverty above or below the state average? <small>(See the Families Theme)</small>	Significantly Below	Somewhat Below	About the Same	Somewhat Above	Significantly Above
8	Blue to White Collar Occupations On a continuum between blue collar and white collar occupations, where does this area fall? <small>(See the Work Theme)</small>	Very Blue Collar	Somewhat Blue	Closely Split	Somewhat White	Very White Collar
9	Largest Racial/Ethnic Group In this area, which racial/ethnic group is the largest percentage of the population? <small>(See the Diversity Theme)</small>	Asian (NH)	Black/African American (NH)	White (NH)	Hispanic or Latino	Pacific Islander/Other

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