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Guide to the

**First African Baptist Church (Savannah, Ga.) records**

1873-1977

Processed by Victor Smythe.

## Summary

**Creator:** First African Baptist Church (Savannah, Ga.)

**Title:** First African Baptist Church (Savannah, Ga.) records

**Date:** 1873-1977

**Source:** Microfilm: Originals in First African Baptist Church, 1992

**Abstract:** The records of the First African Baptist Church of Savannah, Georgia are divided into nine series: Church Minutes; Financial Records; Membership Records; Deeds, Leases and Legal Papers; Minutes of Boards and Associations; Sunday School Records; Baptist Young Peoples Records; Workers Council Records; and Church Histories, Printed Matter and Miscellaneous.

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**Location of Originals:** Originals in First African Baptist Church; 23 Montgomery Street, Savannah, Ga. 31401

**Preferred citation:** First African Baptist Church (Savannah, Ga.) records, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library

**Language of the Material:** English

**Processing note:** Processed by Victor Smythe; Machine-readable finding aid created by Apex Data Services; revised by Terry Catapano.

## Creator History

First African Baptist Church of Savannah, Georgia is said to have been officially "born" on May 20, 1775, the day Rev. George Liele was ordained. Liele, who had obtained his freedom on August 7, 1777, noted in a covenant that the church began in December 1777. In 1782 or 1783, before leaving for Jamaica, West Indies, he baptized slaves on the Brampton plantation owned by Jonathan Bryan. One

of these newly baptized, Andrew Bryan, then organized the congregation into the first black missionary Baptist Church on January 20, 1788. Two years later, in May 1790, the First African Baptist Church was admitted into the Georgia Baptist Association.

On September 4, 1793 Andrew Bryan secured a lot on West Bryan Street which he sold to the church. This lot is said to be the oldest piece of real estate owned continuously by black people in the United States.

Andrew Cox Marshall, nephew of Bryan, was named pastor of First African Baptist Church in 1812. He later purchased property on Franklin Square for a larger church to accommodate the growing congregation.

A schism occurred in 1832 when Marshall allowed a white minister advocating a new faith to preach at First African Baptist Church. The matter came before the association of Georgia Baptist churches, known as the Sunbury Association, in November of that year and the church was condemned and its membership with the Association dissolved. Subsequently, the majority of the congregation (2,640 members) sided with Marshall and moved to the new location on Franklin Square. About one hundred fifty-five members, under Deacon Adam Johnson, remained at the original site which later became First Bryan Baptist Church.

The dispute about which church could lay claim to being the oldest African-American church organized in the state was brought to the State Missionary Baptist Connection of Georgia in 1888. The question was referred to a committee which presented a unanimous report in favor of the First African Baptist Church over First Bryan Baptist Church.

The present building of First African Baptist Church was erected in 1859 by the members, who at the time were slaves. The first black Sunday school in North America was established in 1826 at this church.

George Liele, 1775-1782

Andrew Bryan, 1788-1812

Andrew Marshall, 1812-1856

William J. Campbell, 1857-1877. During his tenure the present building was completed in 1859. George Gibbons, 1878-1884

Emanuel K. Love, 1885-1900. An adjoining lot was acquired and the church building was extended. Rev. Love led the movement to establish Savannah State College and to select its first president. He wrote the first complete history of the church in 1888, *History of the First African Baptist Church, from its organization, January 10th, 1788, to July 1st, 1888.*(SC Rare 286-L)

James W. Carr, 1901-1907. A new Baptist pastorium was acquired. Oak pews were purchased and electric fixtures were installed. Willis L. Jones, 1909-1913. All church debt was eradicated.

T.J. Goodall, 1915-1922. Active participation was maintained in the National Sunday School and Baptist Young Peoples Union Congress.

Edgar G. Thomas, 1923-1928. Rev. Thomas reviewed the facts pertaining to the origins and claims of the church. He wrote a second history, *The first African Baptist Church of North America*, in 1925. (SC 286-T)

Mack T. Williams, 1929-1931

J. Alfred Wilson, 1931-1939

Ralph Mark Gilbert, 1939-1956. Rev. Gilbert was also president of the Savannah branch of the NAACP and first president of the Georgia State Conference of the NAACP. He organized the West Broad Street YMCA and established the Greenbriar Children's Center, Inc. He was a leader in the political life of blacks in Georgia. The first credit union in a church in Georgia was organized under his pastorate in

1954. He also fought for the equalization of teacher's salaries.

Curtis J. Jackson, 1957-1961. He led demonstrations at the Board of Education and to desegregate public facilities.

William Franklin Stokes, 1963-1973. Under his leadership the church was airconditioned and the lower auditorium was partitioned for classrooms.

Lawrence McKinney, 1973-1980. The permanent museum was established during his period.

He was active in local ministerial organizations.

Thurmond Neill Tillman, 1982-present. Additional property has been acquired. Outreach ministries including local high schools and colleges have been established.

## **Scope and Content Note**

The records of First African Baptist Church, Savannah, GA were microfilmed by *The Preservation of the Black Religious Heritage Project (PBRHP)* of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, during the month of February 1992. Originals were retained by the church. The collection had been arranged previously in chronological-numerical order, in series, by college students working under the supervision of the Georgia State Historical Society. No attempt was made to re-arrange the collection prior to microfilming. The assigned numbering system which appeared on ledgers, folders and boxes was not changed. The church records are housed in closed cabinet shelves in the museum room. Some records are displayed on tables and in glass cases for easy viewing by visitors.

**Arrangement:** Records organized into nine series: I. Church Minutes; II. Financial Records; III. Membership Records; IV. Deeds, Leases and Legal Papers; V. Minutes of Boards and Associations; VI. Sunday School Records; VII. Baptist Young Peoples Records; VIII. Workers Council Records; and IX. Church Histories, Printed Matter and Miscellaneous

## **Key Terms**

### **Subjects**

African American Baptists -- Georgia -- Savannah -- History  
African American churches -- Georgia -- Savannah  
African Americans -- Georgia -- Savannah -- History  
African Americans -- Religion  
Baptists -- United States  
Church records and registers -- Georgia -- Savannah

### **Titles**

Preservation of the Black Religious Heritage Project funded by the Lilly Endowment

### **Names**

First African Baptist Church (Savannah, Ga.)

## Container List

### v. 1 r. 1 Church Minutes 1883-1887

The *CHURCH MINUTES, 1883-1887*, series is comprised of a single large ledger of early church minutes. Begun during the tenure of Pastor George Gibbons, it primarily covers letters of dismission and disciplinary proceedings. The last entries cover the early years of Rev. Emanuel King Love's pastorate.

(barely legible) April 30, 1883-September 6, 1887

### Financial Records 1889-1921, 1962-1963

The *FINANCIAL RECORDS, 1889-1921, 1962-1963*, series includes minutes on the organization of the Reformation Association for Youth of the Colored Race by Pastor Love in July 1894 and discussions on its guidance and objectives. Minutes of the executive board of Mount Olive Baptist Association's joint meeting with the Zion Association on November 21, 1894 also appear in these ledgers. Details of salary paid to the pastor and sexton and loan payments are entered. Contributions, donations and expenses made in 1962 to 1963 are included in ledger book 5.

v. 2 r. 1 also Loose Receipts May 15, 1889-Dec. 22, 1919, 1921

v. 3 r. 1 Collection and Expenses Jan. 1, 1891-March 26, 1903

v. 4 r. 1 Poor List, (revised March 11, 1900) May 1891

v. 5 r. 1 Contributions, Donations and Expenses, Names and Contributors Jan. 5, 1904-Oct. 1907, March 18, 1962-Dec. 29, 1963

v. 6 r. 1 Expenses Jan. 1904-Jan. 1908

v. 7 r. 1 Rally Book March 17, 1907-January 1910

v. 8 r. 1 Receipts and Disbursements May 1910-September 4, 1921

v. 8 r. 2 Oct. 3, 1915-Aug. 29, 1921

v. 9 r. 2 130th Anniversary Rally Jan. 12, 1911-Jan. 20, 1918

### Membership Records 1915-1926

The *MEMBERSHIP RECORDS, 1915-1926*, series is comprised of two register books with members' names and disposition, i.e., method of joining and leaving as well as pledges made. Included is information on baptisms; accessions, i.e., members joining through transfers by letters or Christian experience; reinstatements and deaths, etc.

v. 10 r. 2 Church Members, Names and Disposition Feb. 22, 1915-(?)

v. 11 r. 2 Membership Pledges March 12, 1924-Jan. 1926

### Deeds, Leases and Legal Papers 1873-1972

The *DEEDS, LEASES AND LEGAL PAPERS, 1873-1972*, series has various deeds and property papers, loan agreements, and leases. Petitions by heirs of Rev. Emanuel K. Love for salary and cash loaned to the church corporation representing indebtedness at the time of his death is an example of other matters contained therein.

b. 1A f. 1 Deeds and Property Papers Jan. 24, 1873-March 23, 1903

b. 1A f. 2 Loans and Indebtedness April 1900-Dec. 1960

b. 1A f. 3 Lease August 30, 1930

b. 1A f. 4 Miscellaneous Receipts, Papers, etc. June 29, 1907 to 1972

b. 1B Minutes of Boards and Associations 1892-1959

v. Volume r. 2

The *MINUTES OF BOARDS AND ASSOCIATIONS, 1892-1959*, series contains various minute books of deacon ward reports, monthly church conferences, board of deacons, and church organizations, including ushers association and First African Baptist Church Brotherhood. Most issues dealt with are dismission, restoration, disciplinary actions against members, election of officers and call for resignation of pastor, etc. A daily journal of Rev. Curtis Jackson (1957-61) has listing of appointments and activities with some commentary; the writing is mostly indecipherable. (See also Reel 5.)

Minutes of Boards and Associations (cont.)

- b. 1B Minutes-Discipline Meetings June 12, 1892-April 9, 1893
- v. 12 r. 2
- b. 1B Deacons Ward Reports March 21, 1910-Aug. 22, 1910
- v. 13 r. 2
- b. 1B Minutes-Regular Monthly Church Conferences Sept. 17, 1917-Feb. 12, 1933
- v. 14 r. 2
- b. 1B Minutes-Board of Deacons Feb. 11, 1918-March 5, 1934
- v. 15 r. 2
- b. 1C Watch Care January 1921
- v. 16 r. 2
- b. 1C Minutes-Ushers Association June 18, 1911-Dec. 31, 1916
- v. 17 r. 2
- b. 1C Roll-Young Men's Ushers Association 1913-1914
- v. 18 r. 2
- b. 1C Minutes-Ushers Association March 28, 1916
- v. 19 r. 2
- b. 1C Roll-Names and Addresses 1934
- v. 20 r. 2
- b. 1C Minutes-F.A.B.C. Brotherhood Jan. 9, 1929-Jan. 8, 1930
- v. 21 r. 2
- b. 1C Minutes-F.A.B.C. Brotherhood Dec. 8, 1952-Nov. 12, 1956
- v. 22 r. 2
- b. 1C Standard Daily Journal of Rev. Curtis Jackson 1959
- v. 23 r. 2

(The writing is mostly indecipherable)

r. 3 Sunday School Records 1896-1971

The *SUNDAY SCHOOL RECORDS, 1896-1971*, series is comprised of minutes and roll books listing teachers, names of enrollees, attendance, and dues paid. There are several gaps in entries for the years indicated.

- b. 1 Sunday School Minute Book
- b. 1 March 4, 1896-Oct. 17, 1897
- v. 1 r. 3
- b. 1 October 24, 1897-Dec. 24, 1899
- v. 2 r. 3
- Roll Book
- b. 1 October 24, 1897-Dec. 24, 1890
- v. 3 r. 3
- Sunday School Minute Book
- b. 1 February 17, 1901-April 13, 1902
- v. 4 r. 3
- b. 1 December 6, 1903-February 25, 1906
- v. 5 r. 3
- b. 1 September 12, 1909-June 31, 1912
- v. 6 r. 3
- b. 1 November 30, 1913-June 18, 1916
- v. 7 r. 3
- f. 8 Miscellaneous Receipts 1915-1918
- Teachers Minute Book
- b. 1 March 12, 1913-January 9, 1918
- v. 8 r. 3
- b. 2 Sunday School Minutes
- b. 2 May 9, 1915-Aug. 27, 1916
- v. 9 r. 3

	Sunday School Records (cont.)
	Sunday School Minutes (cont.)
b. 2 v. 10 r. 3	Jan. 1-June 4, 1922
b. 2 v. 11 r. 3	Sept. 17, 1916-Dec. 9, 1917
b. 2 v. 12 r. 3	Minutes of Teachers Meetings
	Jan. 16, 1918-March 14, 1923
b. 2 v. 13 r. 3	Sunday School Minutes
	Oct. 17, 1920-July 6, 1919
b. 2 v. 14 r. 3	Jan. 2, 1921-Jan. 22, 1922
b. 2 v. 15 r. 3	Jan. 1, 1922-Jan. 21, 1923
b. 2 v. 16 r. 3	Jan. 7-Dec. 30, 1923
b. 3 v. 17 r. 3	Jan. 11-Feb. 8, 1925
b. 3 v. 18 r. 3	March 1, 1925-Jan. 31, 1926
b. 3 v. 19 r. 3	Jan. 5-Nov. 16, 1930
	Sunday School Records
b. 3 v. 20 r. 3	Jan. 4, 1931-Dec. 23, 1934
b. 3 v. 21 r. 3	Jan. 6, 1935-Aug. 9, 1936
b. 3 v. 22 r. 3	Sunday School Minutes
	Jan. 5, 1941-April 5, 1942
b. 3 v. 23 r. 3	Oct. 5, 1941-Jan. 17, 1943
b. 3 v. 24 r. 3	Jan. 23, 1944-Jan. 14, 1945
b. 3 v. 25 r. 3	Individual Class Rolls
	(Incomplete) August 1945-Easter 1948
b. 5 v. 34 r. 3	Sunday School Minutes
	March 2-December 21, 1952
b. 5 v. 35 r. 3	Nov. 9, 1952-Nov. 22, 1953
b. 5 v. 36 r. 3	June 4-Dec. 20, 1953
b. 5 v. 37 r. 3	Nov. 1, 1953-Oct. 24, 1954
b. 5 v. 38 r. 3	Jan. 3-Oct. 17, 1954
b. 5 v. 39 r. 4	Oct. 24, 1954-Sept. 18, 1955
b. 4 v. 26 r. 4	Jan. 21, 1945-Jan. 13, 1946
b. 4 v. 27 r. 4	Jan. 20-Dec. 29, 1946

Sunday School Records (cont.)  
Sunday School Minutes (cont.)

b. 4 v. 28 r. 4	Jan. 4, 1947-Dec. 12, 1948
b. 4 v. 29 r. 4	Dec. 19, 1948-Dec. 11, 1949
b. 4 v. 30 r. 4	March 7, 1950-Nov. 13, 1951
b. 4 v. 31 r. 4	Dec. 18, 1949-Nov. 26, 1950
b. 4 v. 32 r. 4	Dec. 3, 1950-Nov. 11, 1951
b. 4 v. 33 r. 4	Nov. 4, 1951-Nov. 2, 1952
b. 4 v. 40 r. 4	Oct. 31, 1954-Oct. 30, 1955
b. 4 v. 41 r. 4	Sept. 25, 1955-Aug. 19, 1956
b. 6 v. 42 r. 4	Nov. 6, 1955-Oct. 21, 1956
b. 6 v. 43 r. 4	Jan. 6, 1956-Dec. 29, 1957
b. 6 v. 44 r. 4	Jan. 5, 1958-Oct. 19, 1958
b. 6 v. 45 r. 4	June-September
b. 6 v. 46 r. 4	Nov. 22, 1959-Nov. 27, 1960
b. 6 v. 47 r. 4	Dec. 4, 1960-Jan. 21, 1962
b. 6 v. 48 r. 4	Dec. 3, 1961-Dec. 16, 1962
b. 7 v. 50 r. 4	Sunday School Attendance
	April 4-Aug. 29, 1971
b. 7 v. 51 r. 4	Names, Cradle Roll, Beginners, Junior Dept., etc. n.d.

Baptist Young Peoples Records, 1 1913-1961

The *BAPTIST YOUNG PEOPLES RECORDS, 1913-1961*, series has brief minutes including song, prayer, biblical verse, subject for following Sunday with comments such as, "interesting discussion, and "program was very nice!"

Baptist Young Peoples Minutes

b. 7 v. 100 r. 4	April 6, 1913-Nov. 22, 1914
b. 7 v. 101 r. 4	Jan. 17-Sept. 12, 1915
b. 7 v. 102 r. 4	Nov. 21, 1915-July 9, 1916
b. 7 v. 103 r. 4	Sept. 17, 1916-April 19, 1917
b. 7 v. 104 r. 4	June 3-Dec. 16, 1917
b. 7 v. 105 r. 4	Jan. 3, 1918-Aug. 17, 1922
b. 7 v. 106 r. 4	Jan., 18, 1931-May 22, 1932
b. 7 v. 107 r. 4	April 8, 1934-Jan. 17, 1937

Baptist Young Peoples Records, 1 (cont.)  
Baptist Young Peoples Minutes (cont.)

b. 7 June 2, 1960-May 16, 1961  
v. 108 r. 4

#### Workers Council Records 1943-1961

The *WORKERS COUNCIL RECORDS, 1943-1961*, series covers minutes of meetings, devotional readings and discussions of biblical passages and verses with members commentaries and their experiences. Some loose pages of trustees minutes and a deacons' ordination council meeting in 1956 are among these records.

b. 1 Workers Council Minutes  
b. 1 Oct. 19, 1943-Aug. 7, 1945  
v. 113 r. 4  
b. 1 Jan. 29, 1946-Jan. 13, 1948  
v. 114 r. 4  
b. 1 March 14, 1950-Jan. 22, 1952  
v. 115 r. 4

Loose pages- Feb. 21, 1961

r. 5 Workers Council Minutes  
r. 5 March 25, 1952-Dec. 20, 1955  
r. 5 Jan. 3, 1956  
r. 5 Feb. 9, 1960-May 29, 1962  
r. 5 Trustees Minutes  
r. 5 Oct. 3, 1958-Dec. 23, 1977  
r. 5 Deacons Meeting Minutes  
r. 5 1919-Dec. 1974  
r. 5 Discipline Meetings Minutes  
r. 5 Mar. 15, 1920-Mar. 1, 1956  
r. 5 Church Histories, Printed Matter and Miscellaneous 1871-1989

The *CHURCH HISTORIES, PRINTED MATTER AND MISCELLANEOUS, 1871-1989*, series contain books on the church's history, articles, a sesquicentennial journal and an historical sketch. A few copies of the church's publication *The First African Baptist Informer* created by Rev. Ralph M. Gilbert are included. Church constitutions and death lists also appear here.

Article by Yancey, Wanda, *In Savannah, First African Baptist Church Means span class="emph">First./span>* August 1989

r. 5 Historical sketch  
r. 5 Sesquicentennial Journal 1788-1938  
r. 5 *Thomas, Rev. Edgar Garfield. First African Baptist Church of North America*  
r. 5 Constitutions of 1893, 1920  
r. 5 Death List 1885-1888  
r. 5 Church Conferences 1871-1876  
r. 5 *The First African Baptist Informer, Vol. 1, No. 3* Nov. 1942; No. 7 & 8, April/May; Vol. 2, No. 1, Sept. 1943  
r. 5 *Typescript, History of Sunday School of First African Baptist Church* July 23, 1933  
r. 5 Letter of acceptance, Rev. T. J. Goodall Mar. 22, 1915  
r. 5 Installation Services- Ralph M. Gilbert Oct. 7, 1940