

EMANCIPATION TO INTEGRATION

--Mary W. Miller, Local Historian

The "ripple" effect of the Revolutionary War, which had been fought to protect the rights of mankind, reached a small rural community in Northwest Franklin County, Ohio. Four states claimed portions of the territory northwest of the Ohio River. By special dispensations Virginia, in 1784, was permitted to retain the land, 4000204 acres,--bounded by the Scioto River on the east, the Little Miami River on the west, Hardin County on the north and the Ohio River on the south. This Virginia Military District was used to satisfy the claims of Virginia's war veterans. Some of the recipients of this land were plantations owners who were also slave holders. Those who felt that slavery was wrong emancipated their slaves so that they could emigrate to Ohio and settle on their former owner's land warrant. It is not known how many of these emancipated Negroes came to the Hilliard Area (established 1853) in Northwest Franklin County. Many of them came before the village of Hilliard had even been platted.

In 1878 the school in which the Negro children were being taught was razed as was the one beside it for the White children. A single building was erected. The school system became integrated. From 1878 to 1927 an African Methodist Episcopal Church, located in Hilliard two blocks from the Hilliard Methodist Episcopal Church, held regular services. When it did close it's doors the Hilliard Methodist Episcopal Church Official Board passed a resolution "an invitation is to be extended to the colored people of the community to attend the HMEC because they had no church of their own". None joined at this time but they did attend Sunday services and all pastoral services were available to them.

While this was happening another event was developing which would change history. In 1844 the Ohio Conference of the AMEC appointed a committee to locate "suitable lands for a seminary of learning, on the *Manual Labor* plan, for the instruction of the youth, in the various branches of literature, science, agriculture and mechanic arts; and also for the young men who may desire to prepare their minds for the work of the ministry". In 1845 the committee reported that 172 acres, twelve miles west of Columbus, two miles north of the National Road [US 40] and seven miles from the area which would eventually be the Village of Hilliard. (today's location would be the northwest corner of Roberts and Hubbard Roads in Brown township) could be purchased for the sum of \$1720.00 This report was accepted and thus was laid the foundation of Union Seminary.

A charter was secured from the General Assembly of Ohio. In 1847 Bishop J. M. Brown was placed in charge, assisted by Mrs. Francis E. Watkins Harper. By 1853 financial problems were developing. In 1856 the Ohio African University at Xenia came into existence to provide facilities for the education of the estimated 30,000 colored people in Ohio. The Cincinnati Conference of the AME Church appointed John F. Wright to look into the situation and help this struggling Union Seminary. It was decided that it be disbanded and the land sold for \$6000. By 1863 all effects had been transferred to the new institution in Xenia: Wilberforce.

The Hilliard United Methodist Church as well as the local school district continues to be integrated. In 1958 there was a pulpit exchange with Clair Chapel ME Church, Columbus. Again in 1992 the pulpit exchange was with Centenary UMC, Columbus. Both were well received and now there is a continuing dialogue and relationship.

Mary W. Miller,
3611 Heywood Dr.
Hilliard OH 43026-1722
614-876-7024

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