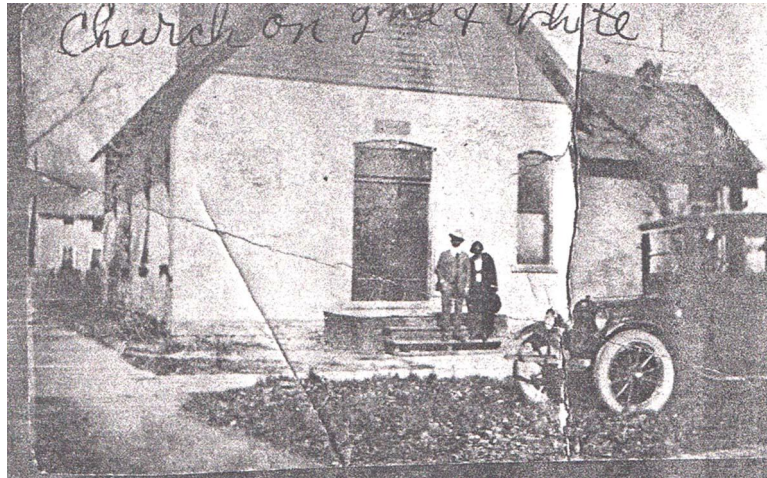


Pioneer black church needs donations for matching grant



*Iona Hines Anderson and her husband, Morris Anderson, in front of Handy chapel, circa 1920.
Harry Butler photo*

By Kathy Jordan

Since the completion of Handy Chapel in 1892, congregation members have offered spiritual and physical refuge to anyone in need – friend and stranger alike. The small white chapel and chapel house on the northeast corner of Second and White Ave. have served as shelters and places of respite for homeless families, stranded travelers or anyone in need of help.

Handy Chapel, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, Historic Places, has stood proudly on its corner since being built in 1892.

Now, after 119 years of service to the community, Handy Chapel needs assistance from the public, and a drive to raise \$47,500 has begun. This amount, plus \$15,000 which chapel members have saved, represent their 25 per cent of the \$204,690 grant they were awarded in August from the Colorado State Historical Fund.

Local, state and national attention became focused on the chapel when it was placed on the 2011 list of Colorado's Most Endangered Places.

During the first week of May this year HistoriCorps, a program with Colorado Preservation, Inc. replaced the roof with historically correct cedar shingles and stabilized the front porch on the Chapel House east of the church. Without the new roof the house would have been unusable. One future use for the house could be as a museum dedicated to the Black history of Grand Junction.

However, work must be done on the chapel itself to stabilize and repair a failed foundation, repair the roof and historic windows and doors, rehabilitate the interior, and update the building

to comply with building codes and ADA regulations to improve building access, the heating system, and replace wiring.

Handy Chapel congregants have but a few short months to raise the \$47,500 and it will happen if we join together as a community - as neighbors - to fund this important work. Your donation will go directly to the Handy Chapel Building Fund, where 100 per cent of the money raised will be used to fund the restoration project.

Today, Handy Chapel is the only church building still standing in Grand Junction on its original site. It was built on lots in Grand Junction's original square mile and deeded to the local Black community by Grand Junction Founder George Crawford for \$1 on March 24, 1883.

William Austin, great-grandfather of Josephine Dickey of Grand Junction, was one of several Blacks in the community who carried the bricks, mortar and other buildings materials for Hunt & McDonald, contractors for the church.

For several years after the church was completed, services were conducted by traveling ministers from the African Methodist Episcopal church.

That changed after Austin's daughter and Josephine's grandmother, Lizzie Austin Taylor, returned to Grand Junction, after becoming an ordained minister while living in Salt Lake City. There, Lizzie's husband, William Wesley Taylor, was owner-publisher of the Utah Plain Dealer, the only Black newspaper in Utah at the time. After her husband's death in 1907, Lizzie returned to Grand Junction, where she ministered at Handy Chapel.

Josephine's uncle, Booker Taylor, was also a minister at Handy Chapel for many years.

In the 1980s the AME Conference claimed ownership and sought to sell Handy Chapel. Josephine and her daughter, Helen Dickey Wirth, succeeded in retaining ownership after an eight-year court battle. During these eight years, the church and house were rented out to various organizations. Unfortunately, during that time the church was stripped of its pews, tables, piano, organ, pulpit and other furnishings.

Today, two men share ministerial duties at the church.

Harry Butler is the minister at Saturday services. Harry's great-grandfather, Elijah Hines, an early-day settler in Grand Junction, was a Civil War Union Army veteran and a member of the Grand Army of the Republic. Harry's family has also attended church at Handy Chapel since the church was built in 1892.

Josephine's grandson, John Paul Dickey, is the fifth generation of her family to hold services at Handy Chapel. His service is on Sunday.

Handy Chapel is modest in size and design, but the importance of its history is enormous for both the city of Grand Junction and the state of Colorado.

If you are interested in helping preserve this important part of Grand Junction's early-day history, you can make a donation to the Handy Chapel Trust Building Fund Account. Make your check out to the Handy Chapel Building Fund, in care of American National Bank, Downtown Branch, 131 N. Sixth Street, Grand Junction, CO 81501. Your contribution is tax-deductible, and after your donation has been received you will be sent the tax-exempt number for your use.