

## *Handy Chapel to get a hand from HistoriCorps volunteers*



*Handy Chapel. Photo by Teddy Jordan*

By Kathy Jordan

Some really great preservation work is going to happen right here in River City on May 3-6 at Handy Chapel, 202 White Avenue, and this is a shout-out for volunteers to help with the project.

For several years the Chapel House, a residence located on the church property, has been in need of some repair. Some of those repairs are now going to happen, thanks to Colorado Preservation Inc. and HistoriCorps.

Handy Chapel was placed on the Colorado Most Endangered Places list for 2011. As soon as the list was published, Patrick Eidman, Endangered Places manager, started working with Jonas Landes, HistoriCorps manager, to get funds to do some of the work on the house.

Colorado Preservation, Inc., founded in 1984, promotes historic preservation in this state by providing information, education, training, expertise and advocacy. To achieve this, CPI is partnering with historic property owners, non-profit organizations, educators and local governments throughout the Rocky Mountain region.

HistoriCorps is a partnership formed by Colorado Preservation, Inc., the United States Forest Service, and Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado. "Historicorps saves and sustains historic places

for public benefit through partnerships that foster public involvement, engage volunteers, and provide training and education.”

First, a little Handy Chapel history, so, if you decided to volunteer, you'll know the background.

In 1882, when William Austin and a few other Blacks came to Grand Junction, they attended the only church in town at the time, the Methodist Episcopal Church South.

In March 1883, Grand Junction founder George Crawford deeded the black community four lots at the corner of White Avenue and Second Street for their church. For nine years after the black community obtained the property, the group held services on the four vacant lots, come rain or come shine, while building the church.

Today Handy Chapel remains the only church building still standing in Grand Junction on lots Crawford deeded within the town's original square mile

William Austin was one of those who carried the bricks and mortar and other building materials for Hunt & McDonald, the contractors who build the church. Austin's great-granddaughter, Josephine Dickey, and several members of her family still attend church there. Josephine is also on the board of trustees for the church.

Handy Chapel has always been and continues to be there to help those in need, no matter what that need might be. Often, travelers have stopped in Grand Junction needing help. Perhaps their car had broken down or they were out of money and needed a place to stay.

Well into the 1960s, it was nearly impossible for black people to rent houses in Grand Junction. Handy Chapel reached out there too. For several years, two houses located on the church property could be used by families in need. Several years ago, one of the houses was destroyed by fire. The other is still habitable, but needs major repairs.

Today six generations of William Austin's family attend church at Handy Chapel.

HistoriCorps is looking for 10 to 12 volunteers each of the four days in May and are asking for a two-day commitment from each volunteer. Lunches, snacks and water will be available without charge to the volunteers.

Tools and safety equipment will be provided, with the exception of personal items such as solid work shoes.

An interest or history in carpentry, construction, or historic preservation is strongly encouraged but not necessary

Activity level for volunteers is moderate and not too strenuous, but volunteers should be comfortable with some lifting.

Participants in the workshop will learn how to analyze the roof structure to determine what materials can be saved and what must be replaced and whether the work meets current building code requirements. They must reestablish a foundation to stabilize a porch; remove a non-historic side porch; remove non-historic vegetation that is interfering with the building's structural stability; and do various smaller maintenance tasks related to historic buildings.

To learn more about logistics for this project, please contact:

Patrick Eidman at [peidman@coloradopreservation.org](mailto:peidman@coloradopreservation.org) or

Jonas Landes at [jlandes@coloradopreservation.org](mailto:jlandes@coloradopreservation.org)

Come on out to volunteer and help preserve this house as a reminder of the many people in need who were sheltered there. This is a great opportunity to learn about historic preservation firsthand and become a part of saving our Black Heritage in Grand Junction.

It is easy to volunteer. Just contact Anjolie Rao, HistoriCorps Volunteer Recruitment Coordinator Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado 303-715-1010, ext. 131 or go to their web site at [www.historicorp.org](http://www.historicorp.org).