

SECOND BAPTIST - Church has deep roots in black history

BY TOM JACKSON. February 4, 2013 – Sandusky Register



Register photo/LUKE WARK - The Rev. Reginald Taylor gives the morning service on Sunday to a small but enthusiastic congregation at Second Baptist Church in Sandusky. The church, which was built in 1849, was once a key stop in the Underground Railroad for many slaves on their journey to freedom in Canada.



An oil painting of Jesus carrying a cross adorns one wall of Second Baptist Church in Sandusky as Pastor Reginald Taylor gives the morning service on Sunday. The painting, along with another on the opposite wall depicting the baptism of Jesus, were painted by artist Charles Sallee Jr, a prominent artist and interior designer in the middle of the last century. ABOVE



Members of the Second Baptist Church Combined Choir, led by Deacon Jacob Marshall, sing a song of praise at Sunday morning service.

SANDUSKY

Sandusky's Second Baptist Church is second to none in its impact on local history. The storied past of the church at 315 Decatur St. is being recalled as Black History Month is celebrated across the U.S. Second Baptist, which boasts its own historical marker in the front, has gone by several names in its 164 years.

Seven former slaves and black freemen formed the church in 1849, under the name Zion Baptist Church.

Before the Civil War it was reorganized under a new name: First Regular Anti-Slavery Baptist Church. It was a bold name, and the church lived up to it.

The Sandusky History blog, citing an account by the 19th century anti-slavery advocate and lawyer Rush Sloane, notes that local blacks were the backbone of the Underground Railroad, the secret network that helped slaves who escaped bondage in the South make their way to freedom in Canada.

"Sandusky's Second Baptist Church was an active station on the Underground Railroad," according to the blog. "Fugitive slaves were fed and housed at the church while waiting for their passage to Canada."

The church changed its name to Second Baptist Church in 1920. In 1929-30, the original wooden frame of the church was enclosed by the current brick building.

Church members built a new frame around the old one, enclosing the entire original structure, said Mark Barrett, scholar in residence at the Cleveland Institute of Art. A few current church members, some at least 90 years old, “actually remember the process when they did it,” said Darwitt Garrett, a church deacon whose parents and grandparents were also members.

Garrett said the modern-day church has 150 to 200 members, although active members account for about half that.

Second Baptist is a Bible-based church that believes in the Lord, Garrett said, and church members are like family. “We may not be a family biologically, but we are a family spiritually,” he said. “And we treat each other like family.”

Many prominent blacks in Sandusky figure into the church’s history. The Sandusky History blog mentions Sophronia Jefferson, born as a slave in Kentucky in 1842. She died in 1927.

In a 1924 newspaper interview, Jefferson recalled how difficult it was for slaves in the South to get news during the Civil War. In fact, black people were not allowed to mention Abraham Lincoln’s name.

In the interview, Jefferson said news of the Emancipation Proclamation in 1862 was the greatest moment of her life. The second greatest moment: news of Gen. Robert E. Lee’s surrender in 1865, effectively ending the Civil War.

Waudell William Hunter (1907-75) began practicing medicine in Sandusky in 1935, according to the history blog. At the time the Sandusky Register reported he was the first black person to register his license to practice medicine in Sandusky, during Probate Judge John Tanney’s six years in office.

Barrett visited Second Baptist Church as he researched his article on Charles Sallée Jr. (1911-2006), the first black graduate of the Cleveland Institute of Art. Sallée was a prominent artist and interior designer, and one of his projects was revamping the Hotel Cleveland in downtown Cleveland, now known as the Renaissance.

The sanctuary in Second Baptist Church has two of Sallée’s oil paintings — one depicts the baptism of Jesus, while the other shows Jesus carrying a cross.