

Church remembers prominent members

By CAITLIN NEARHOOD, nearhood@sanduskyregister.com



First Congregational Church of Christ pastor Lenore Kure talks about James Madison French (below), a member of the church who became Sandusky's first NAACP president, at a service of remembrance Sunday in Oakland Cemetery.



SANDUSKY

For its 200th anniversary, Sandusky's First Congregational United Church of Christ hosted a service of remembrance for nine past members who made a difference in both the congregation and community.

For one former member, James Madison French, a headstone was purchased and dedicated in his honor. French's grave was previously unmarked.

First Congregational UCC member Robin Pratt found a photo of French taken by Sandusky photographer Willard A. Bishop on eBay. After further research on the Sandusky History Blog through the Sandusky Library, Pratt discovered French was a member of the church.

After sharing his findings with First Congregational UCC pastor Lenore Kure, she agreed the church should buy a headstone for French — with the photo Pratt found on eBay on it. Franklin Monuments in Norwalk made the headstone.

French, born in 1863, was the first president of Sandusky's NAACP. He was also a successful businessman in Sandusky.

In between hymns, other former members of the church recognized include:

- Eunice and Mike Kryeski, who helped found the New Departure plant
- Samantha and Moors Farwell, Sandusky's first mayor
- F.D. Parish, Erie County's first prosecuting attorney who helped with the Underground Railroad
- Ruth Frost Parker, a philanthropist and her parents, Zella and John Frost
- Rev. Fisher, one of the church's first pastors, who performed funerals for Sandusky's cholera epidemic victims and soon succumbed to the illness
- Jim, Carol, Charles and Roxie Judson; Charles was a city commissioner and friend of President Warren G. Harding. Charles' son, Jim, was the church's historian for several years.
- Glenn Everett and his grandmother, Fanny Everett; Fanny was Erie County's first female sheriff's deputy who also worked as a probation officer and assisted managing Sandusky community charities, like the Humane Society of Erie County.
- Claudia Lickfelt, a faithful member of First Congregational UCC

As Sunday's service came to a close, Kure encouraged the congregation to follow past members' example. "Let's be inspired to make a difference in the world like they did," she said.

Tombstone text - The back of James Madison French's headstone reads:

In 2019, the 200th anniversary of First Congregational United Church of Christ, this stone was placed on the unmarked grave of James Madison French in honor of his contributions to our church and the Sandusky community. Believed to be the son of a slave, and growing up in the church, he overcame racial discrimination and became a highly successful and wellrespected businessman and outstanding citizen.

He was president of the local council of the NAACP, the Loyal Legion of Labor and the Negro Welfare League. James also helped to found the first colored Boy Scout troop and served as both clerk and treasurer of First Congregational Church. During World War I, he was a member of the Red Cross Committee of the Erie County Joint Defense Council.

James died of a massive heart attack in 1922 at the age of 58. The bulk of his estate was left to Oberlin College for the education of “deserving Afro-American students.” The check could not hold the thousands who attended his funeral, including a congressman, representatives of the various civic and charitable socitieies of which he was a member, county and city officials, back officials, and church members and friends. He was survived by several cousins.

Well done, good and faithful servant. Matthew 25:21