



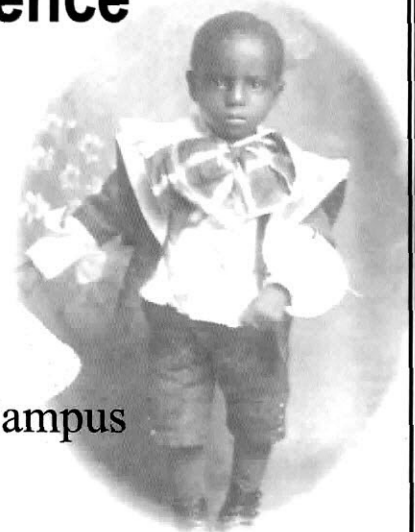
# *African American Experiences*

In Montgomery County, Texas



## **A Cultural Roots Conference**

**November 4, 2006**

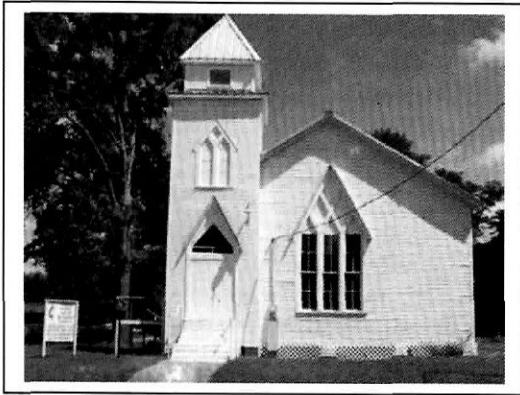


**Montgomery College, Woodlands Campus  
Texas**

*Sponsored by the Cultural Roots Committee of Montgomery County Genealogical  
and Historical Society, Inc.  
Montgomery College and the Heritage Museum*

Historical Highlights of  
**Thomas Chapel United Methodist Church**

*located in Willis, Texas on the corner of Martin Luther King Blvd and N. Kennedy St.*



Thomas Chapel United Methodist Church has the singular honor of being the *oldest* church in Willis, Texas. Abstract records show that when the township was founded, the church was already established.

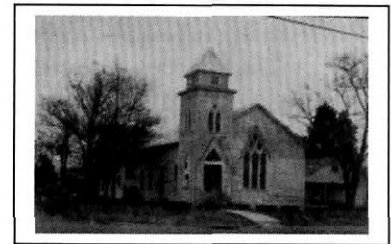
About the year 1867, or shortly thereafter, a small group of Christians came together and decided that they needed a place of worship in what is now the town of Willis, Texas. Securing land to build on was the first priority of the group. This event took place at least three years before the township of Willis was established. Just how this group came to possess the land where the church is built, and from whom the purchase was made remains a mystery.

The first Methodist Church for blacks in Willis, built of logs, became a reality in 1867 and was named Thomas Chapel Methodist Episcopal Church. **The Rev. Enoch Jefferson served as the first pastor.** The building was used as a school as well as a place of worship for a number of years.

As the town grew and more black people moved to Willis, the need to expand the present facility prompted the members to rebuild. The second church, a frame building was erected on this same site. Exact dates are unknown. This building did not serve the congregation long, it was irreparable damaged by a storm.

Immediately the congregation regrouped their resources and began another building program. In the meantime, while this building was being built, services were held under a brush harbor out in the countryside by the Granger Hall. Later the congregation moved the brush harbor into town on the spot where the Willis Colored High School stood. **In 1899, Thomas Chapel Methodist Episcopal Church, the present structure was completed under the pastorate of Rev. Edward Lee.**

Two important changes took place in the Methodist Church that affected the history of Thomas Chapel Methodist Episcopal Church. In 1939 the unification of three religious bodies effected a change of the name to Thomas Chapel Methodist Church. The year of 1968 brought a new era for the Methodist Church. Another unification of three religious bodies, a historical event, effected a change of the name to "*The United Methodist Church*". Thus, the name of Thomas Chapel Methodist Church became Thomas Chapel United Methodist Church.



Through the pastorate of Rev. M.G. Miller, the pulpit area was remodeled, the Fellowship hall was added and Modern plumbing was installed.

Under the leadership of Rev. W.H.B Tapp, the ceiling was lowered to help control the temperature in the sanctuary and air conditioning window units were installed. From 1981-1982, Rev. Isaiah T. Daviss served as pastor.

Thomas Chapel was blessed to have Rev. Collie J. Polk III as its pastor twice. Through his pastorate, new sanctuary pews were purchased, central air conditioning and heating, security lights, and handrails on the front entrance were installed.

Rev. Horace Winn III. served as pastor from 1987-1990. Under his leadership, metal chairs were purchased for the fellowship-cafeteria area and the choir stand. Steps leading to the choir room and pastor's study were also replaced.

Under the leadership of Rev. Sam I. Smith, the pews were re-stained, the windows sealed, the exterior of the building was painted and the entrance doors changed.

Rev. Richard Cox served as pastor from 1993-1994 and obtained the donation for replacement of the roof over the fellowship hall.

The conference year of 1998 brought Thomas Chapel its first clergywoman, Rev. Rose Marie Veal. Rev. Veal's grandfather, the late Rev. A.D. Phelps was also the pastor of Thomas Chapel Methodist Episcopal Church from 1932-1933.