

History of Race Relations in Hillsborough Presbyterian Church
A Report to Session
HPC Race Relations History Working Group

2/2/22

Introduction

In the fall of 2020, when protests against clear racial injustices were occurring across the nation, some members of the Hillsborough Presbyterian Church (HPC) requested that we look into our church's historic relationships with African Americans. The stated goal of the proposal to session was to provide the congregation an understanding of HPC's place in the history of race relations in Hillsborough and beyond as a context for our ongoing endeavor to bring healing, hope, and joy to all. The session approved the request at its November 2020 meeting and authorized formation of a working group to conduct a study and prepare a report. After a year of research and discussion we present this report to the session and congregation.

The working group examined the minutes from session meetings that were available. Water damage made some of the early records prior to 1882 illegible and the volume of minutes from 1912-1940 is missing entirely due to being lost when loaned to Presbytery. *A History of Orange Presbytery, 1770-1970* by Robert H. Stone (1970) was also used as were records from Burwell School and others. A full list of sources is included at the end of the report, and citations to these sources are found throughout.

The available session records with references about HPC's racial matters are sparse. Most session minutes are short, limiting themselves to just those factual matters of the church and issues directly resulting in voting decisions by the sitting elders. Our effort to discover and understand HPC's relationships with African Americans caused us to examine those same relationships where evidence exists of the presbytery, the Presbyterian Church at large as well as national events. While the report's focus is on HPC's history, presentation of the larger church's debates and actions around racial matters provide meaningful context, especially in the early years.

At the outset of this report it is important to articulate two fundamental assumptions about human nature, human interactions and societies that historians and this working group attempt to take in our interpretation of the historical record. These are:

1. Throughout HPC's history there have been varied and perhaps wide-ranging differences of opinion among its members about issues contemporary to the times. This would include matters as to the status, position and ethical treatment of African Americans. We assume throughout its history HPC was comprised of diverse members, each with their own individual perspectives and viewpoints about all matters. What is true today about our congregation was true through time, which is on matters overlapping with the secular world, we are not of one mind. We are reluctant to make blanket statements and conclusions about what the entire congregation thought at any point in time. We can only express what the session decided or actions of individuals where they are known, and we provide a reasonable interpretation where possible.

2. We view prior moments in history through a lens that is understanding and empathetic to the circumstances of those times. Just as the human condition has continuously changed, so too has human thought and viewpoints. When we look at the past to discern what happened and why, we must try to avoid judgements based on present-day values and perspectives alone. For example, during the period of slavery a sympathetic stance was that freed slaves could not be assimilated into white society but instead should be repatriated to Africa. This enlightened viewpoint from the times would be an anathema today.

This report presents our findings about HPC's racial relations in three sections by time periods: 1) the slavery period from HPC's founding through the Civil War, 2) the Reconstruction and Jim Crow periods through World War II and 3) the post-war period and civil rights movement to the early 1970's. Each section begins with a Historical Context, a synopsis of national events dealing with race that significantly shaped HPC or society at large. Following this is the factual information we found and some analysis. Before these periods in HPC's history are presented, a brief summary is provided of the debates and actions within the Presbyterian church dating back to 1770 concerning slavery.

For those who are interested in a more detailed overview of local and national history regarding race relations, Jarrett Barnhill has prepared a Historical Background Narrative including an extensive bibliography, which we also provide the congregation. That document is separate from our report, which is intended to stand on its own, but it may be useful to readers who would like to dig deeper into this topic.

The Presbyterian Church's Debates and Actions (1770-1850s)

The following information is taken from R. H. Stone's *The History of the Orange Presbytery 1770-1970* (7), pp. 86-89.

The first presbytery in the English colonies was established in Philadelphia in 1706. Eventually there were two synods, those of New York and of Philadelphia. In the meantime, throughout the 18th century many highland Scottish Presbyterians migrated and settled in the Cape Fear River valley of North Carolina. At the same time many Scotch-Irish Presbyterians moved south from Pennsylvania and settled in the Piedmont and later in the mountain regions. The clamor for ministers was such that the northern synods created the Orange Presbytery in 1770, which included all the colonies south of Virginia. This presbytery was subdivided and reconfigured many times beginning in 1795 until the 1980s when it was replaced by the present North Carolina presbyteries after the merger of the Southern and Northern Presbyterian Churches.

The institution of slavery was obviously a difficult one for the early Presbyterian church. At the meeting in 1774 of the Synods of New York and Philadelphia minutes indicate the first mention of the subject when discussing sending two free Black missionaries to Africa to spread the Gospel. This led to a long debate over slavery out of which there was no resolution. At the 1787 meeting an overture was made "to promote the abolition of slavery (and) the instruction of negroes, whether bond or free." A lengthy debate ensued, and eventually a diplomatically worded statement was approved that acknowledged the geographical differences of opinion on

the matter but stated that “without a proper education, and without habits of industry (abolition) may be . . . dangerous to the community.” The statement went on to recommend “such good education, as to prepare them for the better enjoyment of freedom . . . recommend it to all their people (congregants) to use the most prudent measures, consistent with the interest and state of civil society, in the counties where they live, to procure eventually the final abolition of slavery in America” [R. H. Stone’s redactions]. Late 18th-century Presbyterians clearly were well aware of the moral issue of slavery and one approach was to emphasize the education of slaves.

In 1815 the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church wrote into its records the following statement, “The Assembly observes that also in some sections of our country, under certain circumstances, the transfer of slaves may be unavoidable, yet they consider the buying and selling of slaves by way of traffic, and all undue severity and management of them, as inconsistent with the Spirit of the Gospel.” However, at least one North Carolina pastor (the English-born Rev. George B. Bourne) dissented and advocated immediate abolition. It seems clear that slavery posed a moral dilemma for the church at this time with growing regional differences. This statement denouncing the trading and mistreatment of slaves appears to be a compromise position between the abolition and the acceptance of slavery.

A parallel question to the morality of slavery was what should happen to free Black people. The 1819 General Assembly studied and debated the goals of The American Colonization Society which advocated resettlement of freed slaves to what is presently the nation of Liberia. There was much support of this solution to the “freed Negro problem”, with particular support demonstrated by congregations from North Carolina. There is no record of a discussion or decision by HPC in the session records about this effort. It is evident that during the early 19th century few if any white people thought freed slaves could successfully assimilate into white society.

In reaction to an overture by the Synod of Indiana agitating for abolition, the Orange Presbytery at its 1828 meeting responded with its own resolution, stating that “the Presbytery of Orange deeply lament(s) that their brethren of the Synod of Indiana are not satisfied with their exemption from the evil of slavery; that while it shall be for a lamentation that any of the human family are held in a state of slavery, it ought never to be forgotten that slavery is an entailed evil; that slaves are private property; that the manner in which they are held is to be determined by civil, and not ecclesiastical authority; that the subject of slavery is not understood except by those who live in slave-holding states; and finally, that the memorialists (members of the Indiana Synod) be affectionately yet firmly requested to desist from their interference with the general peace and prosperity of the Presbyterian Church in the Southern States, as affected by the subject of slavery.” By articulating the distinction between the civil and ecclesiastical authority over the institution of slavery, the Presbytery appears to say, ‘we know it’s bad but it exists, so we have to live with it.’ The same position was reiterated a couple more times over the next two decades without any discussion of alternatives. The majority of Southern Presbyterian delegates to church councils appear to have accepted this complacent stance towards the moral dilemma of slavery in the decades prior to the Civil War.

Part 1 – From the founding of HPC to the Civil War (1816-1865):

The summary below is largely based on HPC session minutes. Session minutes during these years were brief and primarily noted requests for membership, baptisms and actions toward members who had been accused of behaviors unbecoming of a Presbyterian. The mention of Black members of the church was also brief and any information garnered from other sources is appropriately noted.

Historical Context:

Slavery was well entrenched in the Southern agrarian economy and social structures at the time of the Revolution. There were movements calling for abolition of slavery and the education of African Americans in the South although these were much stronger in the Northern states. In 1831 Nat Turner, a Virginia slave, organized and led a revolt that killed over 50 white citizens. The reaction of the white Southern establishment was to view its slaves with greater suspicion and discourage teaching them to read. Churches were impacted because they were often where reading was taught as part of Biblical instruction (3, pp 6-7, 54). The abolition movement grew through the 1840's and 1850's and the underground railroad developed. Compromise grew increasingly difficult and then impossible leading to war.

Ministers throughout this period

Eight ministers served HPC between the organization of the church in 1816 and the initiation of the civil war (1, 2). The names of these ministers and their dates of service are shown below in Table 1.

Table 1. Ministers of HPC between 1816 and 1865.

Minister	Dates of Service
Rev. John Knox Witherspoon	1816-1833
Rev. S. J. Price	1834-1835
Rev. Robert Burwell	1835-1848
Rev. W.B. Browne	1850-1851
Rev. Robert Burwell	1851-1857
Rev. P.A. Martin	1858-1861
Rev. H. B. Pratt	1861-1863
Rev. Halbert G. Hill	1864-1866

Baptisms:

Nineteen Black adults were recorded as baptized at HPC between 1820 and 1856 (Table 2). No baptisms of children belonging to Black members were recorded. A surname for baptized Black individuals was rarely recorded. The owner of Black adults who were baptized was recorded where the name of a child's parents would be noted, as if the person baptized was not quite a full adult. It is interesting to note a large number of baptisms in 1834/35 which coincided with the one year service of HPC's 2nd minister, Rev. S. J. Price. No baptisms of Black individuals were noted between 1857 and 1865, the years immediately preceding the civil war.

Table 2. Recorded Black individuals who were baptized between Feb 1820 and 1856.

Baptized	Infant or Adult	Date	Names of Parents	Minister
Larkin, man of color	Adult	Feb. 13, 1820	servant of Dr. Thomas Faddie	Witherspoon
Abraham	Adult	July 2, 1822	Servant of Samuel Hancock	Witherspoon
Dacey, woman of color	Adult	Aug 1823	servant of William Picket	Witherspoon
Jane, woman of color	Adult	Apr. 10, 1824	servant of Henry Neal	Witherspoon
Bennena	Adult	Sept. 7, 1833	servant of Dr. Webb	Witherspoon
Anne	Adult	May 10, 1834	servant of Judge Nash	Price
Sarah	Adult	May 10, 1834	servant of John Scott	Price
Fanny	Adult	May 10, 1834	servant of John Scott	Price
Sarah	Adult	May 10, 1834	servant of Mrs. E. Watters	Price
Rachel	Adult	May 10, 1834	servant of H. Waddell	Price
Mary	Adult	May 10, 1834	servant of H. Waddell	Price
Mary Jane Freeman	Adult	Sept. 7, 1834	colored woman	Price
Rebecca Bird	Adult	Sept. 7, 1834	colored woman	Price
Mary	Adult	April 1845	Servant of Joseph Steele	Burwell
Annie	Adult	1856		Burwell
Henry	Adult	1856		Burwell
Hiram	Adult	1856		Burwell
Eliza	Adult	1856	Servant of Margaret Norwood	Burwell
Joanna	Adult	1856		Burwell

Church membership:

Records of requests for membership were recorded in the minutes referenced below (1; 3, pp 55-56). Church membership appeared to be with the permission of the slave owner (see Dacey, June 3, 1822 entry).

June 9, 1821: "Polly, a servant girl, came before the session to be admitted to the privileges of the church. The session, having examined her on experimental religion and being well satisfied with her experience, and of her moral character, agreed to received her."

June 3, 1822:"...Abram, servant of Saml. Hancock; Peter, servant of Jno. Faddis and Dacey, servant of Wm. Pickett, having expressed a wish to be admitted to the privileges of the church were examined as to their knowledge and experimental acquaintance with religion, were all approved. The day following, Abram appeared and was received upon a public profession of his faith in Christ and covenanting to walk as becometh his disciples. The master of Dacey was unwilling that she should join the church and Peter did not appear. "

May 10, 1834: "Anne, a servant of Mr. Nash, Sarah, a servant of Mrs. Watters, Sarah and Fanny, servants of Mr. Scott and Rachel and Mary, servants of Mr. Hugh Waddell were examined on experimental religion and given evidence of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, were unanimously received into communion of the church."

Oct. 7, 1845: "Mary, a servant of Joseph Steel, was dismissed as a member in good standing to join the Presbyterian church Hawfields."

June 30, 1858: "...and Billy (colored) applied to be received into the church. These persons were examined with respect to their knowledge and piety. The examination being satisfactory - Resolved that they be received into membership of the church.

July 9, 1858: "... and Eliza (colored) presented themselves for admission into the church. They were examined respecting to their knowledge and piety. The examination being satisfactory - Resolved that they be received into membership of the church.

Oct. 11, 1858: "...and Maria (colored) presented themselves for admission into the church and were examined on their knowledge and piety. The examination being sustained, they were received into membership of the church."

Jan. 7, 1859: "...George, servant of Major ?owerton, presented himself for membership and was examined and received as a member of the church.

July 5, 1862: "...Duncan and Lizzie, servants of Miss Eliz. Latta, were recd by letter from the Pres ch of Little River."

Although it was recorded that Rev. Burwell baptized Black adults, during the 19 years that he served as a minister of HPC, the session only received one Black individual as a member of the church during his tenure, in distinct contrast to the previous tenures of Rev. Witherspoon and Rev. Price (3).

Duncan and Lizzie, servants of Elizabeth Latta were the last communicants to be received before the civil war. Servants of Elizabeth Latta, their membership was by certificate from Little River Presbyterian Church.

No Black communicants were noted to be members of session or to hold any other leadership positions in the church.

Table 3. Recorded Black members received into or dismissed from membership of HPC from Feb 1820 to Nov 1876.

Communicant	Date Received	Date Removed	Receiving Minister
Larkin, slave of Dr. Thomas Faddie	Feb. 9, 1820	1831 removed to Indiana	Witherspoon
Joe, servant of color	Nov. 17, 1821	NN	Witherspoon
Polly, a servant girl of color, owned by William Kirkland	NN	09 Jun 1821	Witherspoon
Jack, a servant of color	Mar. 31, 1822 on certificate	1823 suspended	Witherspoon
Abram, a servant of Samuel Hancock	July 2, 1822	NN	Witherspoon
Dacey, woman of color; servant of William Pickett	Aug 1823	1831 removed to Ja.; dismissed 1837	Witherspoon
Jane, servant girl of color	Apr. 10, 1824	NN	Witherspoon
Bennena, female servant	Sept. 8, 1833	NN	Witherspoon
Anne, servant of Mr. Nash	May 10, 1834	NN	Price
Sarah, servant of Mr. Scott	May 10, 1834	NN	Price
Fanny, servant of Mr. Scott	May 10, 1834	NN	Price

Sarah, servant of Mrs. Watters	May 10, 1834	NN	Price
Rachel, servant of H. Waddell	May 10, 1834	NN	Price
Mary, servant of H. Waddell	May 10, 1834	NN	Price
Mary Jane Freeman, free colored woman	Sept. 7, 1834	Dismissed 30Sep1837	Price
Rebecca Bird, free colored woman	Sept. 7, 1834	Suspended 12 May 1837	Price
Mary, servant of Joseph Steel in Hawfields	Oct. 6, 1844	Dismissed to Hawfields church, 1845	Burwell
Billy, colored	June 30, 1858	NN	Martin
Eliza, colored	July 9, 1858	NN	Martin
Maria, colored	Oct. 16, 1858	NN	Martin
George, colored	Jan. 7, 1859	NN	Martin
Duncan, servant of Miss Eliz. Latta	July 5, 1862 Certificate from Little River	NN	Pratt
Lizzie, servant of Miss Eliz. Latta	July 5, 1852 Certificate from Little River	NN	Pratt

NN: not noted

Slave trading:

At the June 21, 1823 session meeting, the interstate slave merchandising activities of two congregants was discussed and ultimately the reputation of both was cleared.

Mr. Adams had repeatedly been asked by people to take their slaves south and sell them, and he had refused. Mr. Adams needed to travel to South Carolina to receive money that was owed him. It appears that he may have worked in South Carolina or other southern states on a routine basis, since he was quite often requested to take slaves south to sell. Another person who was also indebted to him asked him to take some of his slaves with him to sell and the money received from the sale would cover the debt. He felt justified in taking the slaves with him because their sale was the only way he could recoup the money that was owed to him. There were apparent reports of mistreatment of the slaves on the journey south; however, upon questioning of Mr. Adams, session members felt that these reports were not warranted. They reminded Mr. Adams and other congregants that "many things may be lawful to Christians which are expedient, and that the law of Christ binds us to avoid even the very appearance of evil."

At this same session meeting, a trip that Mr. Wall took to the south to engage in carpentry work was also discussed. Another individual asked to join him on the journey. Unbeknownst to Mr. Wall, this individual was making the trip to sell slaves for others. Mr. Wall sincerely regretted any damage he had done to the church by unwittingly being part of this slave merchandising effort. Session agreed that Mr. Wall's statement of innocence was sufficient to clear him of any reproach.

Slaves to benefit church:

By the 1850s, HPC found itself directly involved in the question of slave trading due to its own co-ownership of slaves that had belonged to Rev. Witherspoon. At their Aug. 11, 1852 meeting, a message from Rev. Dr. Witherspoon and his wife was relayed to session asking if the church would sell some of the slaves co-owned by the Witherspoons and HPC to Mr. Thomas Deveraux. At least some of John Knox Witherspoon's slaves had been given to the church to be managed in trust for the Witherspoon's unwell daughter. Mr. Norwood moved that the Witherspoons' request be granted, but session declined to accept the request. Session then unanimously agreed with a motion by Mr. Kirkland that it was in the church's best interest to keep the slaves. They felt that Miss Mary Witherspoon would benefit by these slaves during her life.

Church ownership and sale of slaves was again discussed, this time at the Apr. 16, 1854 session meeting. Slaves that had been given to Mrs. Susan Witherspoon by Mrs. Frances Deveraux, were managed by Dr. E. Strudwick. Mrs. Witherspoon had died, and now those slaves, which had been held by Dr. E. Strudwick for Mrs. Witherspoon, would be transferred to the trustees of the church. The trustees were tasked with selling the slaves, "provided they could find suitable homes for them." The proceeds from the sale of the slaves would be loaned out by the trustees, who would make bonds payable to themselves as trustees, with part of the interest on the bonds to be used to support Miss Mary Witherspoon, daughter of the deceased Rev. Dr. Witherspoon. It is assumed that the remainder of the interest would go to the church.

The case of Becky Bird:

At the session meeting of Apr. 14, 1837, it was noted that Becky Bird, a colored woman and member of the church, was accused by common rumor of conduct unbecoming a Christian. The actual conduct was not recorded. The pastor and Fred Nash, Jr. were appointed to visit Ms. Bird and discuss her behavior.

On May 2, 1837, session followed up on the meeting with Becky Bird. The appointed committee did meet with Ms. Bird and she denied any of the charges of misbehavior. The committee, however, believed that the charges were upheld by the testimony of others. Ms. Bird was thus asked to appear before session on a specific date. Rev. Burwell and Dr. O.F. Long would serve her the citation and furnish her with the names of the witnesses who would testify against her.

On May 12, 1837, Becky Bird appeared before session in her own defense. Ms. Bird's mistress testified against her, and based upon that testimony, Ms. Bird was suspended from church membership until such time that she would display evidence of penitence and a sincere purpose of living a new life.

The Burwell School:

The Rev. Burwell and his wife Anna started a school for girls in Hillsborough in 1837. The building is now operated as a Historic Site by the Historic Hillsborough Commission, which has done extensive research on the history of the Burwell School, the Burwell family, and their use of slave labor (3). Much of their information came from Anna Burwell's diary and letters. The Burwells are recorded as having more than 40 people of color living or working at the Burwell

School, some of whom were free but most were enslaved. Many of the slaves were rented from other local families, and payment for their services went to the owners and not the slaves.

Elizabeth Keckley's memoir:

Anna Burwell never mentioned Elizabeth Hobbs Keckley in any of her writings, but Keckley wrote her own memoir in 1868 (4) after having bought her freedom, establishing a successful business as a seamstress in Washington, DC, and becoming a confidante of her most famous client, first lady Mary Todd Lincoln. Keckley was born into slavery in the estate of Rev. Burwell's father, who sent her with the Burwells to Hillsborough when he became minister at HPC. The several years Keckley spent in Hillsborough seem to have been the low point of her entire life, and she paints an unflattering portrait of the Burwells and HPC. She describes severe beatings she received from Mr. Bingham, another local schoolmaster and HPC member, and from Rev. Burwell himself. She was also raped repeatedly by a local man identified elsewhere (3) as Alexander Kirkland, by whom she became pregnant. (Kirkland's brother John was an HPC elder, but Alexander Kirkland is nowhere listed as a member.)

Analysis:

During this time, from the organization of HPC until the Civil War, slaves were a part of white people's lives and it did not appear that ownership of another human being caused any broad moral or spiritual concern. It did seem that many HPC members wanted slaves to be treated well and had concerns with slave trading as evidenced by their concern about the rumor that Mr. Adams may have mistreated slaves on the trip to sell them in South Carolina and Mr. Wall's involvement with trading. HPC's session members believed Mr. Adams when he discounted this rumor. Further support of this is when, in 1854, HPC wanted Mrs. Susan Witherspoon's slaves sold to "good homes".

Rev. Witherspoon apparently cared about the spiritual growth of Black individuals. He baptized Black adults and accepted them as members of the church. His departure from HPC in 1833, soon after the Nat Turner revolt, might have been because he disagreed with session over the religious education of slaves (3, p. 54). His concern did not extend to actually "owning" another individual. Nevertheless, the Rev. S. J. Price who succeeded him baptized and received into membership a large number of slaves in his one-year tenure. His attitudes toward the treatment of slaves is unknown.

From the session minutes, it is clear that Black people were not considered equal to their white peers. Consistent with that time in history, Black members were not identified by a surname, but their identification was with their owner. The church may have been split as to whether African Americans should be provided a religious education, but at least some ministers and members felt it was acceptable for them to be baptized and become a member of the church. However, it is unlikely that they would have been considered full and equal members of Christ's body. The record also seems to reflect the increasing entrenchment of extreme views within HPC regarding slavery in Southern society during the pre-Civil War period, with fewer African Americans being accepted into membership over time, and behavior previously considered abhorrent such as slave trading became part of the church's own practice.

Part 2 – Reconstruction and Jim Crow eras (1865-1950):

In contrast with the multiple sources of information on HPC's race relations history in the pre-Civil War period, useful information on HPC's Black congregants and their status in the Church is largely absent over the 1865-1950 period. Session records have a few gaps up through 1882 due to water damage that rendered some of the pages partially illegible, and the volume from 1912-1940 is missing entirely due to being lost when taken to Presbytery. Several outside sources provide some context to interpret the records we do have but leave a number of questions unanswered.

Historical Context:

For a brief period starting in 1867, Republicans, including freedmen, gained control of the NC state government and enacted a progressive new Constitution that guaranteed equal rights to formerly-enslaved African Americans. However, this emancipation along with Federal Reconstruction efforts was met with extensive and often violent resistance, including the founding of the Ku Klux Klan. During the first few decades after the Civil War, a number of African Americans rose to political prominence at local and State levels, and several were elected to Congress including two from North Carolina. Even before Reconstruction came to an end with the contested 1876 Presidential election, however, these gains began to be curtailed by white Democrats who enacted increasingly severe Jim Crow laws restricting Black participation in society and in voting (5). In North Carolina these efforts culminated in the forceful overthrow of an elected coalition of African Americans and progressive whites in Wilmington in 1898. African Americans who transgressed legally-imposed or unwritten barriers to their behavior were subject to violence including lynchings well into the mid-20th century.

Attitudes in the Presbyterian Church:

On the eve of the Civil War, Northern and Southern Presbyterians split into separate denominations over the issues of slavery and secession. After the war, the two denominations remained separate with distinct differences in attitudes toward the role of African Americans in the church and society. The Presbyterian Church of the United States (PCUS), more commonly referred to as the Southern Presbyterian Church, continued to try to take a nuanced stand toward race relations immediately following the Civil War. An enlightening 1963 article (6) in the *North Carolina Historical Review* by John Bell (an HPC member at the time he wrote it) provides a useful context for understanding race-related developments in local Presbyterian churches such as HPC. In Bell's account, Southern Presbyterians desperately wanted to hang on to their formerly-enslaved members initially, possibly out of a genuine interest in their eternal salvation. However, while Black souls were considered to be of value to God, their earthly value was treated as inferior to that of white people. Predominantly white congregations and presbyteries were urged to start Sabbath schools to provide a rudimentary education to African Americans and teach them the gospel, but they largely maintained slavery-era attitudes toward African Americans' place in the church.

A few white PCUS pastors in North Carolina sought to go much farther and treat African Americans as equals in the church and in society, but most were ostracized by their colleagues and in some cases disciplined or expelled on possibly spurious charges of immorality. Some of these pastors subsequently affiliated with the Northern Presbyterian Church (PCUSA) and led

much more inclusive and egalitarian ministries with African Americans, contributing to formation of the mainly Black Yadkin, Catawba, and Cape Fear PCUSA Presbyteries in North Carolina. Many African Americans left PCUS congregations in favor of these new PCUSA congregations. These efforts also led to formation of advanced schools for higher education of African Americans such as Biddle Memorial Institute in Charlotte, which eventually became Johnson C. Smith University (6).

Many more African Americans who left Southern Presbyterian congregations during this period joined Black-led Baptist churches or denominations such as the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church. In Hillsborough, Mt. Bright Baptist Church was organized in 1866. Dickerson Chapel AME Church had been in existence since 1851 (2). According to Bell, PCUS congregations typically did not keep close track of this attrition or provide formal letters of dismissal to other churches. This also appears to have been the case with HPC, which consistently counted 5 to 9 “colored” members in its annual reports well into the 1870s, but the membership rolls at the end of Volume III of session records ending in 1882 mention only one colored member, with “died” after his name with no date given. One other African American member was formally dismissed in 1880 to join a church in Fayetteville. However, due to the water damage to this volume, it is possible that the recorded names in the typed transcript are incomplete.

In the face of this attrition of its formerly-enslaved members, the Southern Presbyterian Church gradually shifted its efforts to supporting the formation of African American congregations more or less outside the formal bounds of the denomination and its presbyteries (6). Southern Presbyterians started Tuscaloosa Institute in Alabama to educate prospective African American pastors, though not to the standards expected of white ministers; this eventually became Stillman College. However, these efforts were poorly funded. Starting around 1878, HPC’s annual reports show annual contributions to an “Institution for the education of colored ministers,” and later to Tuscaloosa Institute, but in amounts of only a few dollars annually. *A History of Orange Presbytery* (7) describes the minimal level of Presbytery-wide financial support for ministries to African Americans. Nearly all predominantly Black Presbyterian congregations in North Carolina that have persisted to the present were affiliated instead with the Northern Presbyterian presbyteries (8).

History of the Churches of Hillsborough, N.C. records the establishment of a Colored Presbyterian Church in Hillsborough in 1877 at the corner of Orange and Wake Streets. There is no information on its affiliations. The church is described as “never strong in membership or money” and was eventually disbanded due to attrition around 1928 (2).

The local context and HPC:

Table 4 provides a list of HPC ministers during this time interval (2,7). During most of this time period, HPC shared pastors with other nearby congregations. HPC session records from the 1870s and early 1880s allude to a difficult period for the church related to troubles in the nation as a whole. Much of this is probably due to the often-violent conflicts over Reconstruction, in which some HPC members played key roles. On the one hand, HPC member Frederick Nash Strudwick was a leader in the Ku Klux Klan. (His nephew Shepperd Strudwick, later a longtime elder for whom Strudwick Hall was named, was born in 1868 and is not implicated in any white

supremacist activities.) Frederick Strudwick led a foiled plot in 1869 to assassinate a state senator from Alamance County who had introduced legislation to curtail the Klan’s activities. The following year, he was elected to the State Assembly and led efforts to impeach Gov. William Holden for his actions against the Klan. Later, in the 1880s, Frederick Strudwick became co-editor of the *Hillsborough Recorder* along with HPC member and elder Calvin E. Parish and established a staunchly conservative editorial policy (9).

On the other hand, attorney John W. Norwood, who was clerk of session at HPC from 1865-1883, was a leader in efforts to oppose the Klan (10). However, after his election to the State Senate in 1872, he was an outspoken supporter of an Amnesty Bill for those who had committed violent Klan-inspired acts. In a publicized Senate speech, he espoused the popular argument that the Klan was an inevitable if extreme reaction to Northern agitators and local enablers who had stirred newly-freed Blacks to rebellion, and he argued that prosecutions for violent acts would likely implicate both Klan supporters and their opponents (11). Norwood seems to have been a moderating influence within HPC and in the community in general. Historical research by the Burwell School (based on a 1930s interview with Lindsey Faucette) shows that Norwood had owned slaves including Faucette’s family and gave some of the slaves to his children as wedding gifts, apparently breaking up families in the process. However, he was described as being intolerant of physical mistreatment of the people he enslaved. After the Civil War, Norwood granted 18 acres of his plantation to Faucette’s father and is known to have provided legal assistance to some enslaved and formerly-enslaved people (3,p. 52; 12).

Table 4. Ministers of HPC between 1867 and 1950.

Minister	Dates of Service	Notes
Henry B. Pratt	1867-1868	Also served Fairfield
William C. Smith	1869-1873	Also served Fairfield
James H. Fitzgerald	1873-1881	Also served Eno and Little River (1873-1875). and Fairfield (1873-1881)
James L. Williamson	1882-1883	
W. F. Wilhelm	1884-1893	Also served Chapel Hill (1884-1888), and Eno and Fairfield (1889-1893)
H. S. Bradshaw	1894-1900	Also served Fairfield (1894-1900) and Eno (1897-1900)
J. W. Goodman	1901-1905	Also served Fairfield and Eno (1901-1905), and New Hope (1903-1905)
H. S. Bradshaw (2 nd term)	1905-1938	Also served New Hope (1905-1935)
S. W. DuBose	1939-1947	Also served New Hope (1939-1945)
I. E. Birdseye	1947-1953	

Several items from the session minutes from the 1870s may be related to conflicts between these factions within HPC, though the details are difficult to glean. In March 1872, the session recommended “after mature thought and deliberation” that the practice of trying members for unchristian conduct be ended and requested Presbytery to make an overture to the General Assembly to that effect. Given John Norwood’s role as clerk of session, this could be seen as a precursor to his subsequent legislative support of more general amnesty efforts. The

involvement of at least one HPC member in Klan violence might have been seen as an egregious act of unchristian conduct. Given the broader weaponizing of disciplinary trials to expel pastors sympathetic to Black equality described by Bell (6), the stage may have been set for a devastating cycle of recrimination within the church if disciplinary actions were undertaken.

A few months later, the Rev. William C. Smith resigned abruptly as HPC pastor, leading to a hastily-called congregational meeting in which “a letter from him assigning his reasons for so doing” was read. The congregation accepted his resignation but left open the opportunity for him to reconsider because his resignation had been “presented to the congregation by Mr. Smith in such a manner as not to allow time for full and satisfactory consideration of a matter of so much importance.” The specific reasons given in his letter are not stated. The timing raises the possibility that he was unhappy with the session’s actions regarding church discipline or other Reconstruction-related disagreements, but there is no direct indication of this. Presbytery records show only that he was dismissed by Presbytery to the Presbytery of South Carolina (7).

In December 1873, in a session meeting also attended by the deacons (including Parish), a committee to be led by elder Thomas Webb was assigned “to ascertain & report to session the facts concerning Bethany house of worship, supposed to be property belonging to Hillsboro congregation.” Clerk of session John Norwood (apparently absent from the first meeting) was subsequently appointed to the committee, and the consultation was continued at three subsequent session meetings in early 1874, all of which were also attended by the deacons. At a later session meeting (no mention of deacons) the committee “made a report in part & was continued.” No further mention of Bethany House of Worship was found. It seems likely though far from certain that it was a gathering of Black worshipers to which the deacons were objecting while the session deferred taking any action against them. It would be several more years before the Colored Presbyterian Church in Hillsborough would be established.

Norwood included in the annual report from 1877 a rather wordy and reflective statement on the “state of religion” within HPC. Unfortunately, the transcript has a lot of missing phrases, presumed due to the water damage to this volume of session records. It includes the statement, “No separate instruction is given to the colored people.” (Interestingly, this was the year that the local Colored Presbyterian Church was founded.) The report mentions “pressure which has more or less affected . . . in the community.” It further seems to indicate that attendance has declined, and has a tone suggesting the church has done as well as can be expected under difficult circumstances but suggests room for improvement. The annual report from 1884 seems to close the book on any outreach to Black former or prospective congregants, noting that “No efforts have been made to maintain Sabbath schools for the colored people. They have their own schools.”

After Norwood’s death in 1885, there is little information to be gleaned from session records related to race relations. The best conclusion one can draw is that HPC was largely a passive player in the establishment of segregationist attitudes and practices in the church and society as a whole. Multiple lines of evidence suggest that Calvin Parish, an HPC elder beginning in 1884, may have had a strongly white supremacist perspective. He was a close associate of former Klan leader Frederick Strudwick and led a town observance memorializing Strudwick upon his death in 1890. Parish and Strudwick were co-owners and editors of the *Hillsborough Recorder*

beginning in 1887 and established that the paper would take “a firm and conservative stand on all matters affecting the public welfare,” and would be “upon all questions of politics will be thoroughly Democratic” (9). This stance would have included staunch advocacy of segregationist racial policies.

Nevertheless, HPC did continue to accept African American members by profession and by transfer, at least occasionally. Haywood Craig (aka Haywood Craig Borland) was received as a member upon profession of faith in 1886, and Albert Long was received on transfer from New Hope Church in 1895. Both are noted as Colored in the session records and membership rolls. Membership rolls indicate that Borland was dismissed at some later date to “Hillsboro Col. Church,” the only mention of the Colored Presbyterian Church in session records, and that Long left to join the A.M.E. Church. However, Borland returned in 1895, as noted in the membership roll but not the session minutes, and seems to have remained an HPC member until his death in 1945.

Interestingly, Haywood Craig Borland is also mentioned in historical notes by New Hope Presbyterian Church collected by Boyd Switzer (14). He is described as having been a “servant” of the David Craig family, members of New Hope, and his family might have been enslaved there previously. He attended New Hope Church at least on occasion with members of the Craig family and is buried on Craig property near New Hope Church.

Annual budget statements in the HPC session records up to 1912 continued nearly always to include contributions to the Tuscaloosa Institute, the PCUS-affiliated school that provided some degree of higher education to Black students, or to “colored evangelization.” These contributions were typically only a few dollars annually. The church seems to have struggled financially during this period, and session records throughout this period describe campaigns to encourage higher levels of giving to HPC in general in order to ensure pastors’ salaries could be covered.

Analysis:

It was perhaps inevitable that most Black congregants of churches like HPC would choose to leave and form their own congregations after Emancipation rather than remain in fellowship with those who had enslaved them. However, the virtual silence of session minutes about their fate is noteworthy. Some of those who departed were presumed to be the founders of the local Colored Presbyterian Church (2), whose very existence is only referred to once in passing in session records, had no recorded connection to Orange Presbytery (7), and which received no recorded financial contributions from HPC. That church struggled over its 50-year existence and eventually disbanded in 1928 (2). Likewise, session minutes are silent about any response on behalf of the church to the growing disenfranchisement of African Americans in society as Jim Crow policies were enacted and enforced.

Nothing in HPC records gives any information on how the few Black members who joined or remained at HPC were actually treated during this period. Historical notes from New Hope Church, which shared pastors with HPC until the 1940s and seems to have had more Black congregants, portray a subservient relationship to the white congregants. The New Hope newsletter article described above recounts that in the previous church building (up to the 1950s)

Black congregants would sit on benches at the rear of the sanctuary. During church Homecoming potlucks, a group of white women would dish up plates and bring them to the African Americans because they were reluctant to serve themselves (14).

It is interesting to note that in Mebane, meanwhile, a Black Presbyterian congregation was organized in the 1860s, affiliated with the Northern Presbyterian Yadkin Presbytery. Mebane First Presbyterian Church (not to be confused with the mainly white Mebane Presbyterian Church which has recently left the PCUSA) thrived and remains active to this day (13). There is no indication that HPC supported any action that would have led to similar opportunities for a full-fledged Black Presbyterian congregation in Hillsborough.

Part 3 – Post-World War II and the Civil Rights era (1950-1970s):

Historical context:

Following World War II and much service to the country, Black citizens felt a renewed desire to achieve basic rights. Change did begin to occur as a result of courageous efforts by both Black and white leaders. Jackie Robinson was brought into the Major Leagues. President Truman declared that the armed forces must integrate. The Supreme Court cast aside the “separate but equal” legacy of Jim Crow in the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. These were significant advances which cracked open doors but did not immediately result in widespread justice. That required the continued, emboldened courage of many organized people working in communities across the nation using non-violent resistance. The 1950’s saw confrontations at public schools and colleges where Blacks were attempting to enroll, resistance to inferior treatment through bus boycotts, and sit-ins beginning in Durham (Royal Ice Cream, 1957) and Greensboro (Woolworths, 1960).

Technological changes also played a major role in shaping how white Americans viewed Black Americans and their culture. Black influence on pop culture gradually permeated many white households, especially via music over the radio, through Black performers or white ones who adopted their artistic innovations such as Elvis Presley. As television became common in middle class households, civil rights events far away were being widely viewed each evening. When concentrated efforts were directed towards gaining voting rights in the South, television exposure of violent police responses became a driver for public sympathy for the Black struggle. The Voting Rights Act became law in 1965 just days after America witnessed the police violence towards the non-violent marchers in Selma, AL. After enfranchisement was nominally secured, the Civil Rights movement struggled with internal tensions between the non-violent and largely southern church-led movement and a more confrontational strategy developed in large, northern and west coast cities. Outside of the Deep South racial confrontations from the movement became common starting in the 1960s. The non-violent Civil Rights movement lost momentum after the assassination of its skilled moral leader, Martin Luther King Jr., in 1968. At the same time the attention of most of white America was redirected to the social and cultural upheavals due to widespread concern over the Vietnam War and other justice movements (e.g. woman’s, LGBTQ).

The local context and HPC:

The Civil Rights Movement accomplished a great deal but it was a long, slow process diffused across the nation. Incidents did occur in Chapel Hill in reaction to the integration of UNC-CH in the early 1960s. We are not aware of incidents in Hillsborough and rural Orange County that evoked a strong response until the integration of the public schools in the mid- to late 1960s which did involve members of HPC. As before, session records are typically sparse on details and differences which may have been discussed in meetings. Ministers who have served HPC since 1950 are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Ministers of HPC between 1950 and present.

Minister	Dates of Service	Notes
I. E. Birdseye	1947-1953	
C. H. Reckard	1954-1960	
James H. Wade	1961-1968	
Willard W. Olney	1969-1973	
Richard Parks	1974-1979	
Richard Hildebrandt	1979-1992	
James (Mickey) Efird	1993	Interim
Debbie Taylor	1994-2001	
Ed Ferguson	2001-2002	Interim
Robert Brizendine	2003-2017	
Marguerite Serrine	2017-2020	Interim
Alex Fischer	2020-present	

Because of his active participation in HPC during the years of 1959 to 2005, we reached out to Tommy Leonard to get a more detailed picture of what was happening in the church during that period of time. Tommy was originally from a farm near Lexington, NC, born in 1932, oldest of 10 children. He and his wife, Nadine, moved to Hillsborough in 1957 when Tommy was hired to teach Agriculture at Hillsborough High School. Grady A Brown was the principal of that school from 1928 until 1963, when it was closed, and he retired. Tommy then transferred to the New Orange High School when it opened in 1963. Tommy and Nadine came to HPC because they were invited by Glenn and Henrietta Auman, and became members on Easter Sunday, 1959. Their two children, Craig and Teralea were baptized at HPC. Tommy was ordained as a deacon at HPC in December of 1963. He later was ordained as an elder in 1971, serving four consecutive 3-year terms on session. Nadine died in 2004, and a year later Tommy moved to a retirement community in Thomasville, NC, near his three remaining siblings. He still considers HPC his church family.

During an interview of Tommy by Linda Jaubert, he related the following stories. Some details are corroborated from outside sources as noted.

During one period of the civil right movement, during the time Tommy served as a deacon, the church learned that Black residents in the county were planning on attending white churches. At that time, deacons served as ushers, greeted people at the door, seated them, and gave them a bulletin. The Board of Deacons had a meeting to decide what to do if Black people tried to attend a worship service at HPC. There was a heated discussion, and finally one deacon stood up and asked why they were even having this conversation. It was agreed that all should be welcome in

God's church, and the meeting ended. Several weeks later some black women came to worship at HPC and they were welcomed and seated like any other visitor. Tommy said he never forgot that.

Orange High School was built to be an all-white school, and it opened in the fall of 1963. In August of 1963, the Long and Cathcart families petitioned the School Board for their children to attend the new school, on the grounds that Central High School (changed from the Hillsboro Negro School in 1957) was not accredited. The two Cathcart children (Tonya and Narviar) were approved to attend the new school when it opened. Tommy said he went back to the year books of Orange High School and verified that these two students were part of the student body at that time. These details are also verified in an Orange County Historical Museum web posting (15).

In 1965 the Orange County School District agreed to a "freedom of choice plan", which allowed parents to request transfers for their children, and this plan was approved by the Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) in September of 1965. However, in the 1965-66 school year, only 7% of the Black students in the district attended an integrated school. In 1967 the HEW changed course, rejected the "freedom of choice" plan, and required the district to adopt a plan that would result in racial balance. In response, for the 1968-69 school year the district instituted a blanket transfer of all Central High School students to Orange High School (15, 16). Tommy said that year was a difficult one. He said one student was killed, and 60 black students walked out in protest of the expulsion of a black student (15, 16). Tommy said there was a lot of mistrust between the white and black students. Some of the divisions began to heal when four Black basketball players formerly from Central High School led the Orange High School basketball team to the State championship in 1969 (16, 17).

According to Tommy, Harry Howard was the principal during the final transition years, and many of the white residents in the community blamed him for the integration of the high school. The members of the local KKK group parked outside his home, and he received threats against himself and his family. One night in 1968 he and his family fled Hillsborough, and the School Board quickly promoted Fred Claytor (life-time member of HPC), then Assistant Principal, to Principal. He stated he would only accept the job if Tommy Leonard would be named as his Assistant Principal. Tommy agreed to do this to finish out the school year.

The session minutes for HPC through all these decades shed little light on what the church or its members thought about the Civil Rights Movement and racial relations. We assume many members did follow national events and had opinions about the movement and that these opinions likely varied widely, but the session records indicate no controversy. Tommy Leonard recounts one minister, Willard W. Olney, III, who seemed progressive for his time. In January 1969 the 28-year-old Rev. Olney was installed at HPC. According to Tommy, when he was interviewed by the nominating committee, he was asked if he favored integration. He said that he was in favor of integration, but that he would not actively pursue it. After Rev. Olney had been there for several months, he contacted the pastor of Mt. Bright Baptist Church to see if they were willing to integrate the youth groups of both churches. There was a meeting set up at Mt. Bright, but Rev. Olney was the only one from HPC to attend. Apparently, the parents of the youth at HPC did not want their children to interact with the youth of Mt. Bright, so the consequence was that there was no youth group at HPC for about 10 years. Tommy said when his children were

old enough to participate in youth group, they had to join the youth group at the Methodist Church.

Session records during his tenure do not say anything about what Tommy recounts and reveal no discord with Rev. Olney, although between the lines it seemed to be a cool relationship. Then at the Aug. 5, 1973 meeting Rev. Olney requested that his relationship with the church be terminated at the end of the month. The minutes state, “. . . it was time for him to stand back and take a new look at his present duties and to come to a decision on the future course of his life’s work and direction.” His request was approved unanimously, and he did not attend the Aug. 30 session meeting nor was he mentioned at all in the minutes. Rev. Olney died in June 2020. HPC was his first of several churches served in NC, and later he became a campus minister at NC State and ran the Presbyterian Peacemaking Center. His obituary states he “was committed to issues of peace and justice his entire ministry. He actively participated in the civil rights movement and the Vietnam era peace movement.”

Summary:

Slavery has been called “America’s original sin,” the source of moral struggle and debate within white society and the early Presbyterian church of the colonies and early nation. Some people adamantly believed it was an abomination and advocated for its abolition or, if not that, to rein it in. In 1807 the United States abolished the importation of slaves and by 1827 most Northern states had abolished it. Most Presbyterians in the South, where slavery was most embedded in the economic and social fabric, likely believed it was wrong early on but accepted it as a fact of life. Some appeared to support the institution by rationalizing white cultures “civilizing” and “soul-saving” arguments. As the young nation progressed through the first half of the 19th century, attitudes grew more polarized. HPC was founded in these times and continued through the Civil War, emancipation, reconstruction, Jim Crow and subsequent movements for civil rights for Black citizens. We are still operating within this original sin.

From the time of its founding in 1816 until the Civil War, HPC membership included a number of slaveowners, including its founding pastor John Knox Witherspoon and later Rev. Robert Burwell. While the church and many members took a benign stance for the times and taught some slaves to read and looked askance at possible slave trading by members, there was harsh abuse, including physical and sexual, as evidenced by Elizabeth Keckley’s memoir. The church itself owned multiple slaves for a period of time, and eventually sold them in the 1850s and invested the proceeds. Some enslaved African Americans were baptized and accepted into church membership subject to their owner’s approval. However, the treatment of enslaved African Americans was a controversial issue in the church, and the relatively benign attitudes of Rev. Witherspoon may have led to his departure.

Immediately after the Civil War Reconstruction presented hope and opportunity for the newly freed slaves and there were efforts to form integrated government. HPC initially attempted to retain its small Black membership and supported educational efforts for the Black community. Some members of the church such as long-time clerk of session John Norwood made efforts to improve the lives and dignity of members of the local Black community. However, different attitudes also existed as other members actively led the newly-founded Klu Klux Klan and a

resurgence of white dominance, intimidation and Jim Crow laws. Eventually white supremacy won out across the South and church records were silent or missing about HPC race-related involvement beyond very limited support of Black education. The same mixture of attitudes and sympathies about race continued into the civil rights period of the 1950s and 60s. HPC membership included local school leaders who were instrumental in efforts to smoothly integrate Orange County schools. The church called a pastor in 1968 who would go on to be a prominent civil rights activist, but it stepped back from the relationships he attempted to build with local Black congregations through an integrated youth group.

Reflections on moving forward:

Going forward, it will be up to the HPC session and the congregation as a whole to discern the church's responsibilities in light of our racial history and the most appropriate response. This needs to include a thoughtful evaluation of the extent to which our HPC forebears' involvement in slavery and subsequent racial discrimination has contributed to inequalities that persist to this day. We also need to consider how memories of both our actions and inactions during the civil rights period might continue to shape attitudes in the African American community toward HPC. Finally, we should carefully examine ways in which we can work actively to remedy persistent racial inequities in our community.

A separate but related hope is that awareness of HPC's race relations history will help us to be both humble and bold in our response to current societal challenges. There are strong parallels between the polarized responses to the emancipation of African Americans after the Civil War and the polarized responses toward calls for racial equity today. The long view of history tells us that even the more moderate responses of white Southern society toward Reconstruction (perhaps exemplified by HPC leaders such as John Norwood) were highly inadequate. However, the participants in that society were operating on uncharted ground. What appear now to be rationalizations for perpetuating the unequal racial power structure may have seemed like rational choices to many at the time. Future generations will undoubtedly weigh in on how we are facing our own uncharted ground, whether on racial issues or other critical challenges we face such as climate change, and whether we have appropriately brought our faith to bear on these choices.

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