

The Seaview African United Baptist Church

An important component of Africville's social structure was the church, and the roles and organizations that it engendered. The church was as old as the community itself and embodied much of Africville's sense of historical continuity. The Seaview African United Baptist Church contained within itself the principal formal organizations in the community. Through religious services, youth and auxiliary organizations, and a missionary society, it provided residents with a collective identity and fostered sentiments of solidarity. As one Africville resident put it:

Sunrise Service on Easter morning...that was a great thing. You get up on Easter morning at five o'clock and go to church there. You hear some of the loveliest things you ever wanted to hear, the spirituals; most of the people from Preston, Hammonds Plains, and right in the city here, you hear them say, 'If you want to get the spirit, you go to Africville for Sunrise Service on Easter morning, and when you come away from there, you are either lifted up or you're dead!' To tell the truth, when they tore that church down, I cried.¹⁸

Through the church, Africville residents were linked by traditions to other black communities in Halifax County and to white congregations in



the city. Pastors and lay preachers were exchanged and visiting and other social gatherings were frequent.

Since Africville was not large or wealthy enough to support a resident pastor, leadership and management of the church was left to church members themselves. Involvement in church affairs provided one with status in the community, and the church elders — the deacons, trustees, and leading “sisters” — constituted, as it were, the official representatives. They received communiqués from city officials, petitioned for needed services on behalf of Africville residents, and acted as the vehicle through which philanthropic and other voluntary organizations entered the community.¹⁹