

Black History Month Profile

Jehu Jones, Jr.

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Jehu Jones, Jr. 1786-1852

Jehu Jones Jr., the first African American Lutheran pastor, was born in Charleston, South Carolina on September 4, 1786, to slave parents, Jehu Sr. and Abigail Jones. Jones' parents were freed in 1798.

Jones was originally affiliated with the Episcopal Church but, finding himself increasingly drawn to Lutheranism, around 1820 he became a member of St. John's

Lutheran Church in Charleston. With the encouragement of his pastor, the Reverend John Bachman, Jones traveled to New York to be ordained by the New York Synod in 1832. Jones then became a missionary to Liberia to help the freed slaves in that country. Jones came back to Charleston after his ordination and was jailed briefly for violating South Carolina's law prohibiting the immigration of free Blacks.

After his release, Jones moved to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (the largest city in the country at that time), and in June 1833 the Pennsylvania ministry decided that he should be appointed "to labor as a Missionary...among the colored people in Philadelphia under the direction of our Ministers." On February 16, 1834, the St. Paul's congregation that Jones founded decided to build a church with the help of other Lutheran congregations. In June of that year, he purchased two lots on Quince Street in Philadelphia for the church. Jones also founded Lutheran churches in Gettysburg and Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, but those were not exclusively black congregations. The first congregation of St. Paul's Lutheran Church was composed of twenty impoverished black Philadelphians. Assisted by Pastors Philip Mayer of Philadelphia and Benjamin Keller of St. Michael's Church in Germantown, Jones laid the cornerstone for the building (only recently identified to be still standing at 310 South Quince Street). The congregation paid nearly 40 percent of the costs by the time the building was dedicated in 1836. Because the rest of the funding (about \$1,300) wasn't





obtained, the building was sold at a sheriff's auction in 1839. Jones continued to serve the congregation until 1851.

Jones tried to start a Lutheran church in New York City in 1849, but the New York Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church barred him from doing so because of what they charged as the mismanagement of finances at St. Paul's Church. Jones responded in a pamphlet arguing that the unpaid debts were beyond his control because of racial prejudice against the congregation. Reverend Jehu Jones Jr. died at age 66 in 1852. St. Paul's Church survived only a few years after his death. The Lutheran Church remembers Jones (and his priestly service) annually in the Calendar of Saints.

