The Oakland Baptist Church

Several residents of “The Fort” community were founders of the Oakland Baptist Church, which is located at the intersection of King Street and Braddock Road. The congregation started worshiping in a bush arbor as Oak Hill Baptist Mission in 1888 and moved to 3408 King Street in 1893. Despite the hardships associated with the community’s relocation and the development of Fort Ward into a historical park, the Oakland Baptist Church and Cemetery survive and stand as symbols of the self-sufficiency, integrity, and longevity of this distinctive African American community.

The Deacon Board set a strict moral and social code that guided the Oakland Baptist Church members. Deacon Lewis was the longest-serving member of the board in church history. During his 55 years on the Board, Deacon Lewis served as chairman for 38 years.

After a fire destroyed the original structure in 1931, Rev. Howard Barnes oversaw the reconstruction of a new, one-story church. In this 1939 photograph, Rev. Barnes (left) and chairman of the Trustee Board, Rev. Samuel T. Moore (right), start building the church’s construction of a new, one-story church. In this 1939 photograph, Rev. Barnes, he had been sick. And in 1939 he was getting back on his feet pretty good. And Rev. Moore, he was helping him to finish the church up there as well. And then the folks from the Episcopal High School and Seminary, when they had a breakfast break or a lunch break, they would come down here and help.”

The words of “Miss Elizabeth” make evident the church members’ fervent sense of community, determination, and self-sufficiency: “(They weren’t what you call builders, but they helped to build the church). Rev. Barnes, he had been sick. And in 1939 he was getting back on his feet pretty good. And Rev. Moore, he was helping him to finish the church up there as well. And then the folks from the Episcopal High School and Seminary, when they had a breakfast break or a lunch break, they would come down here and help.”

The Sunday School served the African American community. It represented the strength and dedication of early church founders and descendant families, many of whom still live in the area. The mission statement is “To Know God, Follow Christ, and Share by the Spirit’s Power.”

The Deacon Board and superintendent are appointed officers assisting Pastors H. Mills, Morris Johnson, Joseph Wanzer, Clarence Summers, Louis Douglas, Wilson Robinson, and Amos Turner; (front row) Douglas Johnson and Richard Nelson. In the mid-1940s, these appointed officers assisted Pastor Mills, the longest-serving pastor in Oakland Baptist Church history, in the temporal, physical, and spiritual needs of the church.

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The Oakland Baptist Church on King Street, pictured after its 1999 renovation, continues to serve the African American community. It represents the strength and dedication of early church founders and descendant families, many of whom still live in the area. The mission statement is “To Know God, Follow Christ, and Share by the Spirit’s Power.”