

collected and donated for World Hunger Day. In August 1996 the members decided to make fruit baskets to give the area poor for Thanksgiving and Christmas, and in November food was donated to the town food bank. In December the church celebrated Kwanzaa for the first time.

Efforts to help the poor were kept up in 1997. In January and April there were again collections for the World Day of Hunger. In June Esther Dozier suggested a project in which members would adopt a resident of a local nursing home; the project became reality in September. And in October \$25 was given to Construct for its walk for the homeless.

Church president Edna Wilks died in 1997 and was replaced in February 1998 by Virginia Conway. The good works continued, and the winter calendar of events had now expanded to include Kwanzaa, Martin Luther King Jr. Day, and Black History Month, along with Christmas. In November 1998 the minutes record that the members “discussed how we could do an outreach in community for Christmas, Red Cross & YMCA. [Have] asked for donations of goodies for troop. We are going to participate in that. Sis Dozier is going to contact nursing homes to see about patients who don’t have family or friends to celebrate the season and maybe give us names and sizes to donate something warm to them for Christmas. Also going to [do] our collection of food for the Food Pantry.”

During the 1990s the church also helped build the Mt. Carmel A. M. E. Zion Church in Nigeria, with which Clinton established a sister-church relationship. The pastors of the new church were Rev. Cheta Izogo and Rev. Princewill Ewoh.

Reverend Esther Dozier and the Celebration of Black History and W. E. B. Du Bois

Esther Ballard Dozier was born and grew up in rural Alabama. She came to Great Barrington with her sister Mattie to join their sister Pearl and brother-in-law Elijah Conway. In 1965 she married Henry Dozier, also from Alabama, at the Clinton Church. Although a Baptist, she joined the church in 1966, since Henry was a Methodist. Henry spent most of his career at Pfizer/Mineral Technologies in Canaan, Connecticut, and Reverend Dozier worked for thirty-five years at the Becton-Dickinson plant, also in Canaan. She was active in the church and held the position of exhorter when in 1999 the presiding elder, Nathaniel Perry, asked her

**W.E.B. Du Bois
135th Birthday Celebration**

**Saturday, February 22, 2003
2:00 P.M.**

**Clinton African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church
Great Barrington**

WELCOME

**Rev. Esther Dozier
Pastor, Clinton African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church**

MUSICAL SELECTIONS

Clinton African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church

KEYNOTE SPEAKER

**Dr. Homer (Skip) Meade
Senior Area Director, National Evaluation Systems, Inc.**

MUSICAL SELECTIONS

Price Memorial African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church

COMMENTARY

**Randall O. Westbrook
Educator, social commentator, historian, and faculty member at
Fairleigh Dickinson University, Madison New Jersey**

MUSICAL SELECTIONS

Macedonia Baptist Church

OPEN DISCUSSION

Program for the 2003 W. E. B. Du Bois 135th Birthday Celebration on 22 February 2003. Source: Clinton A. M. E. Zion Church archives.

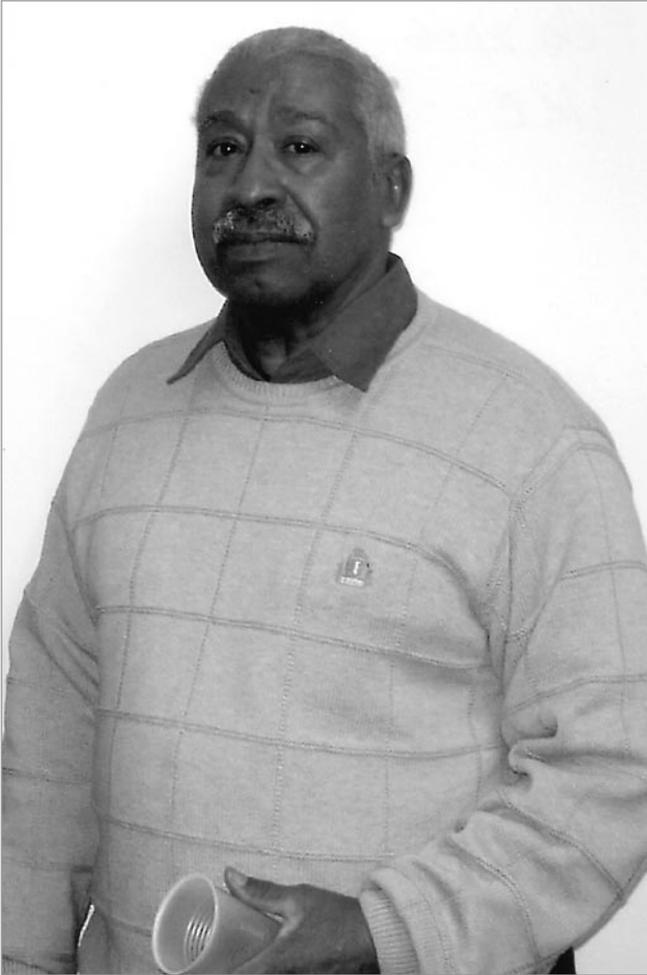
to consider becoming the church's pastor. Later that year she was appointed the church's first female pastor, and in 2000 she was ordained by Bishop George W. Walker.

Under Reverend Dozier's leadership the church has been at the forefront in promoting local Black history and especially the legacy of W. E. B. Du Bois. The first major public event took place on 9 June 2001 and centered on the program "Honoring Our History: A Celebration of W. E. B. Du Bois," held at the St. Peter's Roman Catholic hall on Cottage Street. The event featured reflections and music by the Jubilee School of Philadelphia students and faculty; remarks by Du Bois's stepson, University of Massachusetts professor David Graham Du Bois; and musical selections by the Clinton Church and Macedonia Baptist Church choirs. Concluding the event was everyone singing "Lift Every Voice and Sing," the African American national anthem, written in 1900 by part-time Great Barrington resident James Weldon Johnson.

In September 2002 the W. E. B. Du Bois River Garden was dedicated, with Reverend Dozier delivering a welcome and the church choir along with the Price Memorial A. M. E. Zion Church choir from Pittsfield providing musical selections. The River Garden was conceived by Rachel Fletcher of Great Barrington as a memorial to Du Bois and to his interest in the local environment and the Housatonic River. Ms. Fletcher also worked with Reverend Dozier on the church's programs honoring Du Bois and Black history.

On 22 February 2003 the church launched a \$20,000 fund drive with a program celebrating the 135th birthday of Du Bois at the church. The choirs of the Clinton and Price Memorial churches provided musical selections. Dr. Homer ("Skip") Meade of National Evaluation Systems, Inc., was the keynote speaker. Meade had formerly been a social studies teacher at Monument Mountain Regional High School, where he introduced a Black studies course in the 1970s. Additional commentary was offered by Professor Randall O. Westbrook of Fairleigh Dickinson University in Madison, New Jersey.

In the summer of 2003 the Department of Anthropology at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst conducted its third Summer Archaeological Field School at the W. E. B. Du Bois Boyhood Homesite on Route 23. Professor Robert Paynter ran the field school. A laboratory and interpretative center was set up at the Clinton Church where artifacts collected



Wray Gunn,
former trustee
Board chairman
in February,
2006. Source:
Karen Christensen.

at the site were processed, with some displayed to the public on tables on the front lawn. As part of the field school, lectures by Professor Warren Perry of Central Connecticut State University and Professor David Graham Du Bois were given on 1 and 6 August, respectively, with the Clinton Church acting as host.

The church commemorated its 121st anniversary on the weekend of 20–21 September 2003. On Saturday church historian David Levinson reviewed highlights and key people in the church's history, and local historian Bernard Drew furnished additional commentary. Sunday, as

Reverend Dozier pointed out, was the day for religion, with Rev. Alfred Johnson, pastor of the Gardner Memorial A. M. E. Zion Church of Springfield providing the sermon, and his church choir the musical selections. Dinner followed in the church dining hall.

Commemorations continued on 21 February 2004 with the marking of Du Bois's 136th birthday. The event was held at St. Peter's community hall, with Professor Westbrook the speaker and music provided by the choirs of the Clinton Church, Macedonia Church, Price Memorial Church, and Second Congregational Church of Pittsfield. On 18 and 19 September the church marked its 122nd anniversary with a sermon by Reverend Dozier on Saturday and a performance by the Price Memorial choir. On Sunday Rev. Clyde Talley of the Goodwin Memorial A. M. E. Zion Church in Amherst delivered the sermon, and his choir the music.

On 17 February 2005 the church celebrated Du Bois's 137th birthday. The guest speaker was Professor MaryNell Morgan, of Empire College, who discussed Du Bois's use of the sorrow songs in his *The Souls of Black Folk* and who led the assembled in singing. It was a day of mixed emotions, since the event was dedicated as well to the remembrance of David



Evelyn and Moses Haile, who were members in the 1940s and longtime neighborhood residents, in February 2006. Source: Karen Christensen.

Graham Du Bois, Du Bois's stepson and founder of the W. E. B. Du Bois Foundation, Inc., who had passed away recently. Leading a tribute to him was his colleague at the University of Massachusetts, Professor Paynter. The 17 and 18 September church anniversary celebration later that year featured the Price Memorial Choir on Saturday and a sermon by Rev. Nathaniel K. Perry of the Belmont Street A. M. E. Zion Church in Worcester and musical selections by his youth choir. Also present, on 18 September, was Mary Bridgemahon, the daughter of former pastor Rev. Alexander W. Johnson, who served in the church from 1951 to 1954. She recalled her years as a young girl in town living in the parsonage, memories of which included the fine dinners prepared for the community, children being taught how to behave, and how she felt very comfortable living in Great Barrington.

In 2005 the church hosted two events, and Reverend Dozier participated in a third, related to the African American Heritage Trail project led by Rachel Fletcher and Professor Frances Jones-Sneed of Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts. In May a panel discussing W. E. B. Du Bois received a large audience at the South County Community Center. Reverend



Rev. Dozier and her husband Henry in February 2006. Source: Karen Christensen.

Dozier was the only African American panelist, and she spoke emotionally and eloquently about what it meant to be a Black person in contemporary America, making the point that the color line Du Bois wrote about had not yet vanished. In June local historian Bernard Drew spoke at the church about the origins of the Black community in the southern Berkshires, based on his recent archival research in Sheffield. On 12 September the church hosted a panel on African Americans in South Berkshire County. Two of the panelists were former Clinton Trustee Board chairman Wray Gunn and his wife, Elaine Gunn, who had been married in the church. They discussed their experiences growing up and living in South Berkshire County.

In 2006 the church joined with four other organizations to sponsor the Friends of the Du Bois Homesite. The organization was formed to work with the University of Massachusetts, which is trustee of the site for the state, to preserve the site and make it accessible to the public.



Some people involved in the *African American Heritage in the Upper Housatonic Valley* book, in the church in 2006. Left to right: Frances Jones-Sneed, Rachel Fletcher, Robert Paynter, David Levinson, and Bernard Drew. Source: Karen Christensen.



Children of the church at the annual Du Bois celebration in February 2006. Source: Karen Christensen.

On 25 February the church held its fourth annual Du Bois birthday celebration, with a standing-room-only crowd. Reverend Dozier commented that she wished she could have but half the number present at her Sunday service. The guest speaker was Professor William Strickland of the W. E. B. Du Bois Afro-American Studies Department at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. Jay Schafer, the head of the libraries at the university, also spoke, sharing both the university's efforts to recognize Du Bois and the university's future plans. The event was dedicated to the recently departed Eloise Brinson of Meriden, Connecticut, and Ruth D. Jones of Boulder, Colorado, both former Great Barrington residents and members of the church. Music was provided by the children of the church and the Macedonia Baptist Church. On 19 March the Unitarian Universalist Church on Main Street held a peace

vigil, attended by 200 people, on the third anniversary of the war in Iraq. Reverend Dozier was one of the speakers and offered a prayer for peace: “Lord, we pray for your Blessing and strength . . . as we try to cope with this deadly war. Lord, let there be peace on Earth, and let it begin with us.”

In September 2006 the African American Heritage Trail through the Berkshires and northwest Connecticut was launched. The project was a regional effort that involved dozens of people and organizations. The church and Rev. Dozier were actively involved in planning the trail and compiling *African American Heritage in the Upper Housatonic Valley*, a book-length history of the African American life in the region and a guide to the trail. The trail and the book were of enormous significance to the African American community as they lifted the veil of invisibility that hid for many generations their presence and contributions in the Berkshires.

On 14 September the trail was officially opened with a ceremony at the Col. Ashley House in Sheffield. Rev. Dozier closed the event with the following prayer, which also seems a very fitting end for this account of the church’s first 136 years:

God of our weary years.

God of our secret tears.

*Who has brought us this far on our way. If it had not been for
you on our side, where would we be?*

*We thank you O God for the means by which you used in the
person of Elizabeth Freeman, affectionately known as
“Mum Bett,” to change the course of history.*

*We are thankful for everyone who was instrumental in making
this day possible.*

I know that you are smiling down on us and saying,

“At last they finally got it right.”

Amen