

**African American Membership in
Religious Confraternities at Holy Trinity
by Peter J. Albert**

*Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us,
Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us.*
(Lift Every Voice and Sing)

The African American community's participation in Holy Trinity parish life throughout the 19th century is abundantly apparent in our archive of sacramental records. (1) It is reflected, too, in the documentation of Black contributions to the parish, both material and financial, and in their requests for Masses to be said. (2) And we see it in the records of African American involvement in religious confraternities at Holy Trinity – one historian calls them “one of the best indications of both a commitment to the parish and to Catholicism.” (3)

The Confraternity of the Rosary

The earliest of these societies, for which we have records, was the Confraternity of the Rosary, established at Holy Trinity in 1822. The Confraternity's objectives were “to excite and maintain among the catholics of this place the true spirit of piety and devotion, and to strengthen them against the multiplied temptations to which they are exposed; also to enable them by the influence of virtuous example to be instrumental in the propagation of our holy faith among our dissenting Brethren.” Members agreed to meditate on the Rosary, make personal devotions, and gather on Sundays to recite the Rosary. (4) The Confraternity at Holy Trinity apparently lapsed after 1840, although unsuccessful attempts were later made to revive it – in 1867 as the Living Rosary, and again in 1875 as the Confraternity of the Rosary. (5)

The names of the Confraternity's members, recorded in a ledger, were initially intended to be separated by race, with entries for Whites recorded at the front of the book and those for African Americans at the back. Thus, the front cover of the ledger was stamped with the word “Rosary,” and the back with the words “Rosary. Coloured

People.” The first two pages at the front of the book bore the headings

A. M. D. G.
White Men Belonging
To
The Confraternity of the Rosary.

and

A. M. D. G.
White Females Belonging
To
The Confraternity of the Rosary.

The first two pages at the back of the book bore the headings

A. M. D. G.
Coloured Men Belonging
To
The Confraternity

and

A. M. D. G.
Coloured Females Belonging
To
The Confraternity

Within a page or two of the beginning of the ledger, however – probably still during the 1820s – entries naming White and Black members of the Confraternity began to be mixed together on the same page, rather than appearing respectively at the front

and back of the book. The change was probably made for the convenience of the writer. The names of African Americans were often, but not always, indicated by the abbreviations “col” or “col’d.” (6)

Between 1822 and 1840, the Rosary Confraternity’s ledger named 139 African American members – about a third of its membership. These are the names of the members of the Rosary Confraternity designated as African American between 1822 and 1840: Elizabeth Baker, Henrietta Barber, Rebecca Barker, Maria Becraft, Sara Becraft, Clare Bell, Henrietta Belt, Susan Berry, Matilda Boarman, Eleanor Bradford, Henry Briscoe, - Brown [first name not given], Ellen Brown, Eliza Brown, Lucy Brown, Jane Burges, Margt. Burges, Ann Butler, Chloe Butler, Eleanor Butler, Jane Butler, Leonard Butler, Lidda Butler, Louisa Butler, Maria Butler, Valinda Butler, Jane Campbell, Maria Carroll, Louisa Chandler, Mary Chandler, Elizabeth Chapman, Mary Chase, Elizabeth Chisley, Catherine Coagle, Sara Coagles, Peter Coakbuyers, Sarah Coakley, Ann Coakwire, Hellen Coale, Ann Collins, Mary Crane, Letty Curtis, Mary Davis, Ann Digges, Letty Dorsey, Lucy Doynes, Mary Dunbar, Henny Edelen, Sarah Edelen, Cecilia Eglin, Henny Eglin, Mary Etherfield, Teresa Fenwick, Lucy Forest, Julia Foy, Emilia Gant, Matilda Grant, Catherine Grandison, Barbary A. Gray, Elizabeth Gray, Mary Gussy, Sophy Hall, Ann Hamilton, Catherine Harris, Jane Harris, Julia Harris, John Harrison, Richd. Harrison, Sarah Hawkins, Eleanor Heard, Mary Henson, Barbara Herbert, Mary Hicks, James Holly, Jane Holly, Abvenago Jackson, Ann Jackson, Cath. Jackson, Susan Jackson, Elizabeth Jenkins, Jane Johnson, Margaret Johnson, Mary Johnson, Susan Johnson, Elizabeth Jones, Mary Jordan, Mary Lee, George M’Donaugh, Elizabeth M’Grouder, Mary A. MacKael, Cecilia Makle, Susan Malboro, Mary Armstead (Montgomery), David Neale, Jane Neale, Harriet Offutt, Sarah Oyster, Mary Prior, Martha Procter, Mary Procter, Matilda Procter, Rachel Queen, Henrietta Ross, Ellen Salmon, Sr., Ellen Salmon, Jr., Rachel Scotland, Linda Semmes (Butler), Maria Shorter, Priscilla Shorter, George Smallwood, Harriet Smallwood, Jane Smallwood, Margaret Smallwood, Susan Smallwood, Henny Smith, Jane Smith, Josias Smith, Mary Smith, Patience Smith, Sarah Smith, Esther Solomon, Julia Spriggs, Henrietta Sunday, Ellen Taylor, Mary Taylor, Teresa Thomas, Charlotte Thompson, Sarah Thornton, Anna Travis, Cath. Tredwin, Mary Tulip, Jane Walley, Letitia Ware,

Jane Warthen, Richard Washington, Mary Wilson, Paul Wilson, Rebecca Wilson, and Anthony Young. (7)

In 1838 alone, the Confraternity had 178 members, 68 (38%) of whom were Black and 110 (62%) of whom were White. This closely paralleled the proportion of Black marriages at Holy Trinity at this time – in 1839, 33% of the marriages celebrated in the parish involved couples designated as Black, and in 1840, 40%. (8)

For reasons that are now not clear to us, however, the reorganized Confraternity after the Civil War recorded far fewer Black members – only four in 1867, and 26 in 1875. These are the names of the members of the Living Rosary designated as African American in 1867: Sarah Hardesty, Susie Hardesty, Susanna Hatton, and William Hatton. (9) These are the names of the members of the Rosary Confraternity designated as African American in 1875: Annie Casey, Ann Chase, Frances Coakley, Charlotte Coleman, Georgia Dent, Fannie Ford, Mary Ford, Rose Ford, Mary Magdalen Gates, Henrietta Green, Mary Hall, Ellen Hamilton, Eliza Hamilton, Jane Hawkins, Anastatia Hebbons, Elizabeth Johnson, Mary Cath. Lee, Ann Magruder, Mary Marshall, Martha E. Pryor, Catherine Silas, Mrs. Mary Tillman, Mary Tillman, Ellen Washington, Elizabeth Young, and Mary Young. (10) Again, this paralleled the decline in the proportion of recorded Black marriages around this time at Holy Trinity – in 1863, 20% of the marriages celebrated here involved couples designated as Black, in 1864, 18%, and in 1865, 8%. (11)

Ongoing pew rentals by Black parishioners, which showed no decrease until the late 1870s and early 1880s, suggest that the number of African American parishioners was not substantially declining at this time, so we cannot point to a drop in the number of Black parishioners at Holy Trinity as the cause of the fall in confraternity membership. (12) Perhaps Black members left the older confraternities and moved on to newer organizations at Holy Trinity, but we cannot establish this. Perhaps, over time, those writing names in parish sacramental records and ledgers were less likely to note race. We see this in Holy Trinity's marriage registers where, with the decline in the number of enslaved parishioners, entries omitted designations of the race of African Americans. (13)

The Scapular Society

Entries in the ledger of Holy Trinity's Scapular Society span the period from 1829 to 1868. Here again, as with the Rosary Confraternity, the names of the members were intermixed racially. The ledger includes the names of 156 parishioners designated as African American. These are the names of the members of the Scapular Society designated as African American between 1829 and 1868: 1829, James Webster; 1835, Marie Tulippe; 1836, Ann; 1837, Ann County, Priscilla Shorter; 1838, Barbara Ann Grey, Catharine Nokes; 1839, John Becraft, Eliza Jane Belt; 1840, Martha Ann Adams, Ann Brown, Elisabeth Brown, Louisa Brown, Rachel Brown, Ann Coakwire, Harriet Eglan, Harriet Offutt, Elizabeth Ridgely, Mary Jane Smith, Jane Sommerville, Eliza Ann (Mr. Scott's); 1841, Harry Barns, Francis Brown, Ann Butler, Lucy Cammell, Jane Coakey, Rebecca Coakley, Maria Coal, Julia Coker, Henrietta Colbert, Ellen Delacy, Henrietta Gipson, Barbara Herbert, Martha Herbert, Julia Herris, Mary Hoggins, Jane Jackson, Lucy Jenkins, Jane Kendle, Charlotte Smith, Jul. Smith, Teresa Thomas, Jane Warning; 1842, Elizabeth Belt, Ellen Dolan, Catharine Faloh, Margaret Faloh, Anna Foy, Catharine Herbert, Ann Williams, Ellen Williams; 1845, Maria Lukens, Mary Smith; 1843, Rebecca Barker, Ann Elizabeth Dorsey, Martha Jackson, Mary Ann Johnson, Martha Smith, Betsy Speaks, Mary Jane Taylor, Charlotte Thomson; 1846, Mary Lu, Emelia McCenny, Eliza Ann Richly, Cicilia Semmes; 1853, Mary M. Belt, Ellen Delacy, Mary Ann Hunt, Andrew Montgomery, Albert Murray, Mary Virginia Tracter; 1854, Emilia Greenwood, Mary Ann Guthrie, Maria Wilson; 1855; Elizabeth Cole, Harriet Gray; 1856, Sophia Chaise, Martha Coakley, Susanna Dodson, Maria Harris, Hannah Johnson, Edward Lee; 1857, Matilda Carroll, Mary Hamilton; 1859, Catharine Carroll, Ann Maria Coakley, James Cornick, George Dodson, Mary Dodson, Susanna Dorsey, Benjamin Ford, John Ford, Agnes Gray, Francis Gray, Emily Jackson, Louisa Murray, Virginia Ridgeley, Francis Smith, Martha Smith, Rose Ann Smith, Mary Tillman, Mary Woodard; 1860, Mary Agnes Bennett, Maria Boyd, Louisa Carter, Sarah Carter, Mary Francis Coakley, Harriet Coffee, Isabella Crawford, Albert Dodson, Jos. Dyson, Alice Hill, Kate King, Cecilia Neale, Elizabeth Jane Neale, Florence Smith, Harriett Smith, Margaret Stoddard; 1861, Charlotte Baggett, Maria Beall, Mary Brown, Henry Chandler, Lucy Coakley, Sarah Dade, Cecilia Neil, Martha Ross, Ann Shorter, Maria Smallwood,

Harriett T. Smith, Harriette Williams; 1863, Henrietta Barker, Mary Clegget, Martha Coakley, John Cole, Margaret Cole, Ada Coquia, Mary A. Countee, Charles Dodson, Ida A. Dover, Josephine Augustina Hall, Sarah McCarthee; 1867, Albert Francis Moore; 1868, Nettie Clark, Charlotte Coleman, Lucy Johnson, Rosanna Johnson, Mary Jones, Christine Lee, Seraphina Neale, Annie Olvins, Mary Josephina Price, Christina Smackum, Mary Walton, Edward Wilkins, Chas Williams, Jas. Worton. (14)

Other Black parishioners, designated as African Americans in the ledgers of other Holy Trinity confraternities, are not so designated in this one. (15)

The Cent Society

A third confraternity, the Cent Society, was organized in 1834; it was later known as the Sanctuary Society. Subscribers agreed to pay a penny a week to be used for “ornamenting the Holy Altar, Tabernacle, Sanctuary & Church, & to promoting the Solemnity of Divine Worship.” The names of contributors were recorded in a ledger, and a Mass was offered “for all the Members of the Society, living & dead, at least once a month, on a Sunday,” and the ledger was “placed on the Altar during that Mass, because it contains the Names of all the Members of the Cent Society.” (16)

No fewer than 212 African American men and women were listed as contributors to the Cent Society in 1834. In this ledger, Black men and women were listed in columns separate from each other and separate from the columns for White men and women. The names of White men and women often carried titles – for example, Miss Mary Fenwick, Mrs. Mary Ann Fearson, Mr. Patrick Gorman – but the names of Black members were seldom distinguished in this way. African American subscribers to the Cent Society in 1834 included Charlotte Ash, Eliza Ash, Ignatius Awkins, Jane Awkins, John Awkins, Julia Awkins, Sally Awkins, Susan Awkins, George Barnes, Rachel Barnes, Susan Barry, Ann Bean, Elizabeth Bell, Richard Bell, Hellen Belt, Henry Belt, John Belt, July Ann Belt, Mary Belt, Thomas Belt, Gerard Bender, Grace Bender, Matthew Blackbeck, Boon, Lewis Boarman, Mary Boarman, Matilda Boarman, Henry Briscoe, Olivia Briscoe, Barny Brown, Catherine Brown, Charlotte Brown, Eliza Brown, Lucy Brown, Mary Butler, Paul Brown, Rachel Brown, Sally Brown, William Brown, Ann Burgess, Basil Butler, Catherine Butler, George Butler, Jane Butler, Joseph Butler, John

Bulger, Cinthia Calvert, Stephen Campbell, Henrietta Carpenter, Maria Carter, Betsy Chandler, Elizabeth Chapman, Lucy Coakley, Sally Coakley, David Coakwire, Honora Coakwire, Mary Coakwire, Ann Coale, Nancy Collins, Raphael Coucey, Arlana Countee, Henry Countee, Mary Crane, Hannah Dade, Henry Dade, Bridgit Davis, Francis Dawsey, Leti Dawsey, Joseph Dodson, Margaret Dodson, Nancy Dorris, Anne Doyne, Charles Doyne, Eleanor Doyne, Julia Doyne, Lucy Doyne, Mary Doyne, Peter Doyne, Harriet Edelen, Henny Edlen, Samuel Edlen, Eliza Edenbar, Henry Edenbar, Julia Farris, Plato Farris, Teresa Fenwick, George Fills, Richard Ford, Lucy Forrest, Mary Fritt, Matilda Gant, Henry Gordon, Rosanna Gordon, Dorcas Grandison, Robert Gray, Cecily Green, William Green, Emily Grimes, Mary Gustus, Richard Gustus, Priscilla Hammon, Joseph Hardesty, Thomas Hardesty, John Harriss, Anastasia Hepburn, Charity Hepburn, Elizabeth Hepburn, Samuel Hepburn, Tabitha Hepburn, Barbara Herbert, Julia Herbert, Mary Hicks, Betsy Hodges, George Hunter, William Hutchinson, Ann Jackson, Catharine Jackson, George Jackson, John Jackson, Susan Jackson, Eliza Jenkins, Peter Jenkins, Margaret Johnson, Maria Johnson, Mary Johnson, Sally Johnson, Susan Johnson, Elizabeth Jones, Isaac Jones, Maria Jones, Mary Jones, Milly Jordan, George Kuhn, Ann Lee, Benjamin Lee, Charity Lee, Eliza Lee, Hellen Lee, Johanna Lee, John Lee, Mary Lee, Joseph Long, Catherine McGruder, Elizabeth McGruder, Cecilia MacKall, Nany Malo, Elsey Mason, Armstead Montgomery, Mary Montgomery, Jane Neal, Francis Newton, Eliza Noland, Margaret Noland, Robert Parker, Charles Penny, Henry Penny, James Penny, Eliza Peter, Mary Peter, Eliza Plant, Hellen Price, James Price, Joseph Price, Catharine Robertson, Catharine Robertson (mother), Henrietta Ross, Hellen Sammon, Nelly Sammon, Harriet Sampson, Henry Sanders, Mary Scott, Lucy Sedges, John Setege, Ann Shorter, Michael Shorter, Priscilla Shorter, George Sims, James Sims, Leandor Sims, Susan Sims, Valinda Sims, Clare Smallwood, Harriet Smallwood, Jane Smallwood, Susan Smallwood, Thomas Smallwood, Charity Smith, Clement Smith, Henny Smith, John Smith, Maria Smith, Stephen Smith, Charles Spick, Catharine Taylor, Lucy Taylor, Ann Thomas, George Thomas, Maria Thomas, Catharine Thompson, Lewis Thompson, Ann Veal, Moses Veal, Mary Vincent, Charles Ware, Letty Ware, James Webster, Nancy Williams, Paul Wilson, Rachel Wilson, Rebecca Wilson, Ann Maria Wood, Benjamin Woodward. (17)

When the Cent Society was revived in 1865, 77 members were listed as African Americans – again, far fewer members than in the 1830s. African American subscribers to the Cent Society in 1865 included Mary Custis Adlum, Richard Barker, Margaret Bellows, Melinda Butler, Alice Carroll, Mary Chandler, Mr. Chandler, Annie Chase, Margt. Chisley, Stacie Chisley, Emily Coakley, Bertha Cole, Johanna Cole, Margaret Cole, Mary Cole, Raphael Cole, Tabitha Cole, Charlotte Coleman, Julia Dines, Jane Dodson, Mildred Dodson, Fannie Ford, Mary Ford, Rose Ford, Sarah Foyer, Mrs. Furgerson, Cecilia Fush, Adolphus Hall, Mary Hall, Annie Hardesty, Georgiana Hardesty, Sarah Hardesty, Mary Harlow, Sarah Hatton, Anastatia Hepburn, Alice Hill, Annie Hodges, Blaine Kearney, Miss Margaret Kengla, Mrs. Susan Kengla, Miss King, Mary Lee, Cecilia Mackall, Mary Marshall, Giugarinna Maze, Salvador Maze, Martha Mitchell, Andrew Montgomery, Charles Montgomery, Mary Montgomery, Henrietta Morriss, Henry Morris, Sarah Naylor, Julia Neil, Frances Norman, James Norman, Amelia North, Richard Parker, Charles Plowden, Charlotte Plowden, M. O. Reily, Mary Riggs, Ann Shorter, Catharine Silas, Ann Smackum, Miss Smackum, Louis Smackum, Nancy Smackum, Ester Solomon, Julia Spriggs, Mary Stewart, Mary Tilman, Annie Toyer, Sarah Turlee, America Wharton, Susan Wilkinson, Mary Young. (18)

All together, African American participation in these three religious societies at Holy Trinity spanned half a century, from the 1820s to the 1870s, and included hundreds of members. The names recorded in the ledgers of these three confraternities provide us with an invaluable resource for documenting African American membership in the parish and participation in parish activities, not simply for individuals but for entire families. In the Rosary and Scapular societies, for example, we find Anne Marie Becraft as well as her sister Sara and brother John, and in the Rosary, Scapular, and Cent societies we find ten members of the Belt family and ten members of the Coakley family. The ongoing commitment we see reflected in these ledgers underscores the importance for African American parishioners of their life of faith and their involvement in Holy Trinity's parish community. Theirs was, indeed, "a song full of faith" and "a song full of hope." (19)

Notes

1. See Peter J. Albert, "African American Baptisms at Holy Trinity, 1795-1815," above; Albert, "African American Marriages at Holy Trinity, 1795-1815," above; and Albert, "Holy Trinity's African American Community and the Cholera Epidemic of 1832," above.

2. See Albert, "'Climbing the Back Stairs,' Segregated Seating at Holy Trinity," above.

3. Margaret H. McAleer, "The Other Congregation: Patterns of Black Catholic Worship at Holy Trinity Church, Georgetown, D.C., 1795-1845," unpublished seminar paper, Georgetown University, 1986, p. 17.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 18; Laurence J. Kelly, S.J., *History of Holy Trinity Parish, Washington, D.C., 1795-1945* (Baltimore, 1945), p. 101.

5. "Holy Trinity Rosary and Scapular Societies Ledger, 1822-75," Holy Trinity Church Archives, box 13, folder 1, Georgetown University Archives, Booth Family Center for Special Collections, Washington, D.C.

6. *Ibid.*

7. McAleer, "The Other Congregation," p. 18; "Holy Trinity Rosary and Scapular Societies Ledger, 1822-75."

8. Holy Trinity Church, Marriages, 1806-71, Digital Georgetown Manuscripts Collection, Georgetown University Library, Booth Family Center for Special Collections, Washington, D.C.

9. "Holy Trinity Rosary and Scapular Societies Ledger, 1822-75."

10. Ibid.

11. Holy Trinity Church, Marriages, 1806-71.

12. See Albert, "Climbing the Back Stairs': Segregated Church Seating at Holy Trinity."

13. See, for example, the marriage record of Eliza Ann Belt and Edward Dyer on July 16, 1851, where there is no designation of race. Holy Trinity Church, Marriages, 1806-71, p. 82.

14. "Holy Trinity Rosary and Scapular Societies Ledger, 1822-75"; Kelly, *History of Holy Trinity Parish*, p. 101.

15. Among the African Americans not so designated in the Scapular Society ledger were Sarah Coakley, Martha Pryor, Louis Smackum, and Julia Spriggs. Louis Smackum was designated as African American in the Cent Society ledger; Sarah Coakley, Martha Pryor, and Julia Spriggs were so designated in the Rosary Confraternity's ledger.

16. "Holy Trinity Cent Society Ledger, 1834-65," Holy Trinity Church Arch., box 30, folder 1; Kelly, *History of Holy Trinity Parish*, p. 100.

17. "Holy Trinity Cent Society Ledger, 1834-65," Holy Trinity Church Arch., box 30, folder 1.

18. Ibid.

19. In his *History of Holy Trinity Parish*, Father Kelly mentions that African American members were also received into the Sodality, which was founded at Holy

Trinity in 1827, but they did not have a separate branch (p. 93). The Bona Mors Confraternity, founded in 1838 to help members prepare for a good death and to offer prayers for the dead (*ibid.*, pp. 101-2), reported a membership of 78 African Americans between 1840 and 1845, or some 20 percent of the membership (McAleer, "The Other Congregation," p. 19).