

**The Commission for Historical and Architectural
Preservation - Staff Report
July 10, 2007**



**Landmark Designation Report
Union Baptist Church
1219 Druid Hill Avenue
Baltimore, MD**

The Commission for Historical and Architectural Preservation (CHAP) has the responsibility of recommending to the Mayor and City Council of Baltimore the adoption of ordinances designating districts and landmarks within the limits of the City of Baltimore, having special historical, architectural, educational, cultural, social or community significance, interest, or value as Baltimore City Historic Districts or Landmarks, thereby necessitating their preservation and protection. In making its recommendation, the Commission shall give appropriate consideration to the following standards. In reaching its decision, the Commission shall clearly state which standards have been applied.

A Baltimore City Landmark may be a site, structure, landscape, building (or portion thereof), place, work of art, or other object which:

1. dates from a particular period having a significant character, interest, or value, as part of the development, heritage, or culture of the City of Baltimore; or
2. is associated with the life of an outstanding historical person or persons; or
3. is the site of an historic event with a significant effect upon the cultural, political, economic, social, or historic heritage of the City of Baltimore; or
4. is significant of the architectural period in which it was built and has distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style, method of construction, or engineering, or is the notable work of a master builder, designer, engineer, artist, or architect whose individual genius influenced his age; or
5. contributes information of historical, cultural, or social importance relating to the heritage of the community; or
6. has yielded, or may be likely to yield, archeological information important in history or prehistory.

Staff Recommendation: Approval

The Union Baptist Church meets CHAP's standards for landmark designation one through five:

1. Union Baptist Church has contributed to the development of Baltimore by being a leader in the African American community since 1852. The church has organized many charitable groups, sponsored the formation of more than a dozen churches, and supported many civil rights efforts.
2. Union Baptist Church is associated with several nationally prominent historical figures. Harvey Johnson, pastor of Union Baptist Church from 1872 to 1923, was a civil rights activist, author, and Baptist leader of national prominence. He organized the Mutual United Brotherhood of Liberty, helped found the Niagara Movement, and co-founded the NAACP Baltimore Chapter. He led the "National Texas Purchase Movement" and became a well respected author. In 1897 he established the Colored Baptist Convention. Amelia E. Johnson, Harvey Johnson's wife - author of two novels, many poems, and publisher of a literary magazine - became the second African American woman to publish a novel in

- book form. Dr. Baxter L. Matthews built the Harvey Johnson Center in 1955 and cosponsored the 1963 March on Washington. Reverend Vernon Dobson, a national civil rights leader, helped form the “Goon Squad” to help elect African American politicians and organized many civil rights protests.
3. The church became the staging area for attendees to the March on Washington in 1963, a meeting place for the Goon Squad who became instrumental in the success of Parren J. Mitchell and Judge Joseph Howard.
 4. The Union Baptist Church structure is one of several churches built by an African American congregation in the early 20th century. This late Gothic revival style structure symbolizes the importance of Union Baptist church in the Baltimore African American community.
 5. The church history contributes important historical information about Baltimore history and the national civil rights movement.

Building Description:

This ashlar granite church captures many elements of the late Gothic Revival Style. Coupled set-back piers separate the building into three distinctive bays, creating a symmetrical facade. Stone pinnacles cap each pier, and each bay rises into a gable end that is trimmed with molded stone. In the center bay, three gothic arched surrounds and portal gables frame the main entrance, a double plate-glass door flanked by two single plate-glass doors. Smaller piers flank the main entrance. Flat stained-glass windows punctuate each outer bay. Both share the same aperture and a common wood mullion. The windows are hung with one-over-one lights. Both sets of windows accompany flat, rusticated stone surrounds. Two contiguous stained-glass lancet windows accentuate the upper façade. Rusticated stone surrounds encase both sets of lancets. The upper façade of the center bay is punctuated by a window comprising four stained glass lancet windows surmounted by a stained glass wheel window. These elements are encased by a pointed rusticated stone surround.

Summary History

Union Baptist Church, organized in 1852, grew out of the First Baptist Church and a small obscure mission located near the Belair Market. The church first located in a small building on Lewis Street in East Baltimore, and Reverend John Carey became the first pastor. That same year Union Baptist church joined the Maryland Union Baptist Association, an organization of Baptist churches in Maryland founded in 1836.

From 1854 when Reverend Carey resigned to 1872 several ministers led the congregation. In 1868 Reverend Williams purchased the Disciples Meeting House on North Street (now Guilford Avenue) and Union Baptist church moved to that location.

In 1872 newly ordained Dr. Harvey Johnson began his ministry at Union Baptist Church. In just two years Dr. Johnson nearly tripled the size of the congregation from 278 to more than 700. Shortly thereafter, Dr. Johnson kindly declined the annual appropriation from the Maryland Baptist Association. This act set the tone for much of Dr. Johnson’s

activism and belief in self reliance. In 1876, the church built a larger structure on their downtown site. 28 years later in 1905, they built the current church building.

During Dr. Harvey Johnson's leadership (1872-1923), Union Baptist church helped establish more than twelve churches throughout Baltimore and Maryland: Macedonia Baptist Church (Baltimore), Calvary Baptist Church (Frederick), Perkins Square Baptist Church (Baltimore), and churches in Mt. Washington, Catonsville, Elkridge, Westminster and other areas.

The Union Baptist Church also established many organization and committees to promote the work of the church. Some of the groups were the Missionary Society, the Helping Hand Circle, the Dime Circle, the Sunday School, the Band of Hope (which evolved into the Baptist Training Union), and others. These groups worked to uplift the community through educational, economic and spiritual means.

Dr. Johnson extended his spiritual mission into several groundbreaking civil rights activities. In 1885 he organized the Mutual United Brotherhood of Liberty (MUBL) with the sole mission "to use all legal means within our power to procure and maintain our rights as citizens of this our common country." Considered the model for the creation of the NAACP, MUBL fought for the following:

- African Americans serve on jury duty;
- Hiring of African American teachers;
- Equal school facilities for African Americans;
- Repeal of the law against unwed mothers;
- Attack against lynching.

As important, MUBL helped to admit two African American attorneys, Everett J. Waring and J. Seldom Davis, to the Maryland Bar. Subsequently, MUBL funded them in several landmark civil rights cases, including the famous defense of African Americans who rebelled against their employer on Navassa Island, located off the coast South America. 27 African Americans protested inhuman treatment. The workers were arrested and shipped to Baltimore for trial. MUBL also filed lawsuit and won the first case in the U.S., striking down the identification of Negroes as cargo in interstate commerce. The Brotherhood of Liberty also propelled Harry Sythe Cummings to become the first African American Baltimore City Councilman in the early 1890s.

Dr. Johnson promoted civil rights in other groundbreaking areas. In 1892 he withdrew Union Baptist Church from the Maryland Union Baptist Association and established the Colored Baptist Convention in 1897. Dr. Johnson helped form the Niagara Movement, and NAACP Baltimore Chapter. He led "The National Texas Purchase Movement" which advocated for the federal government to buy Texas for African Americans to colonize, and he authored many sermons, newspaper and magazine articles, and the book, *The Nation from a New Point of View*.

By 1923, when Dr. Johnson passed away, he ushered Union Baptist Church from a small congregation of 278 to more than 3,000 members. He helped establish over a dozen

churches throughout Maryland and helped begin the civil rights movement in Baltimore and the Nation.

From 1923 to 1940, Reverend David Over and Reverend Timothy Boddie led the church. During this time (which included persevering through the Great Depression), the church purchased the parsonage, organized and re-organized many church groups that ministered to the basic needs of the community, and brought financial integrity to the church.

From 1940 to 1967, Dr. Baxter L. Matthews led the church. During his tenure he built the Harvey Johnson Community Center in 1955. The center provided recreational activities for local children and space for local youth organization such as the Boy Scouts. The center, one of the first built by an African American congregation, evolved into what is now known as a family life center. Following in Johnson's footsteps, Dr. Matthews also became involved in civil rights issues. He opened the church and the Harvey Johnson Center as a staging center, welcoming attendees to the March on Washington in 1963.

The community outreach and civil rights activities that centered on the church continued with the leadership of Reverend Vernon Dobson, who became a national civil rights leader. Rev. Vernon Dobson used the Harvey Johnson Center as the meeting place for the "Goon Squad" whose members planned and implemented the campaign of African American candidates for elective office. Two key political leaders from the Goon Squad were Parren J. Mitchell and Judge Joseph Howard. Mr. Walter P. Carter, a national civil rights leader, died at the Harvey Johnson Center, during one of their meetings. Reverend Dobson also helped found Baltimoreans United in Leadership Development (B.U.I.L.D.), a nonpartisan, interfaith, interracial, organization dedicated to making Baltimore a better place to live.