

THE FOUNDING OF FIFTH AVENUE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Rev. Peyton Rutherford Twine gave birth to the idea of having a Presbyterian church in Roanoke for the African American community. First Presbyterian Church, a white congregation under the leadership of William Creighton Campbell gave permission to Rev. Twine to conduct group meetings and Sunday school classes for blacks in the church basement. Alternative meeting places for this early group included the Odd Fellows Hall and the A.M.E. church, as well as the homes of the founding members.¹



Dr. William Creighton Campbell



Dr. Campbell and his family²



An early portrait of Dr. Campbell



First Presbyterian Church, the first meeting place for members of Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church.³

Rev. Twine was born about 1861 in Amelia County, Virginia to Edwin and Clorinda Twine.⁴ His siblings included Edwin, Luke, James H., William and Sarah.⁵

¹ *Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church Historical Benchmarks:*

http://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/b250c2_c445f30a90544c44822368c5b74e99a2.pdf

² The portraits of Dr. Campbell and the family portrait are used courtesy of Sally Bain, archivist for First Presbyterian Church, Roanoke, VA.

³ From the First Presbyterian Church website: <http://www.fepcroanoke.org/history>

⁴ Name spelled Clorinda on tombstone in the Meade Family Cemetery, Amelia County, Virginia.

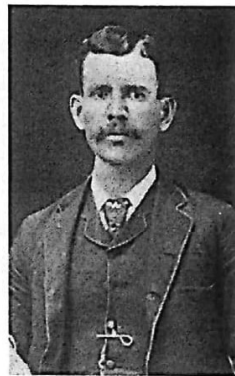
⁵ U. S. Freedman's Bank Records 1865-1871. James H. Twine records for 1882.

The Twines were slaves in the household of Hodijah B. Meade and his wife, Jane Rutherford Meade. Meade's grandson Peyton Rutherford Meade was the namesake of Rev. Twine. Clorinda Twine was such a beloved member of the Meade family that when she died in 1876, at the age of sixty, she was buried in their family cemetery.⁶

Prior to his arrival in Roanoke, Rev. Twine attended Lincoln University and Theological Seminary in Chester County, Pennsylvania. College records indicate that Twine graduated from the college in 1887 with a Bachelor of Arts degree⁷ and he continued his education graduating from the theological department in 1890.⁸ He became a licensed clergy and was ordained on May 15, 1890.⁹

Rev. Twine was in Roanoke as early as October 1890¹⁰ and by December of that year he was referred to in the Roanoke newspapers as "the colored Presbyterian preacher."¹¹ He organized three Presbyterian Sunday Schools in different parts of the city in 1890.¹² There are no records for two of the Sunday schools but one of these original small groups was the genesis for Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church. This tiny flock included: Miss Lucy Addison, a teacher and school principal; Thomas T. Henry, an attorney and principal of the Third Ward Colored School; John Riley Dungee, a well known educator; Jesse W. Wingfield, a shoemaker; Edmond Irvin Terry, a barber; Albert Franklin Brooks, Roanoke's first black postman and later a wealthy real estate investor; and Charles H. Dodson, a stonemason and bricklayer.¹³

Founding members: Miss Lucy Addison, Albert Franklin Brooks, John Riley Dungee



⁶ <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/11392026>

⁷ *Catalogue of Lincoln University for the Academic Year 1887-88.*

⁸ *General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of American, 1890; Catalogue of Lincoln University for the Academic Year 1889-1890.*

⁹ *Minutes of the Synod of Pennsylvania, Oct. 16-20, 1890.*

¹⁰ *Richmond Planet*, Richmond, VA, Saturday, Oct. 25, 1890, "Rev. P. R. Twine who was so dangerously ill at Roanoke..."

¹¹ *The Roanoke Times*, Tue., Dec. 39, 1890

¹² *Genesis, A History of Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church*, August 14, 2005.

¹³ Correct full names and occupations from Roanoke City Directories: 1888, 1889, 1890, 1891, 1892; other names provided by *Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church Historical Benchmarks*:

http://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/b250c2_c445f30a90544c44822368c5b74e99a2.pdf

The organization of the church took place at the home of Jesse W. Wingfield, who, with Professor Thomas T. Terry, composed the first Board of Elders.¹⁴ Terry was ordained as an elder at a special service on Friday, March 16, 1894.¹⁵ During the pastorate of Rev. Twine, Terry also served as the Sunday school superintendent.¹⁶ The first deacons were: Professor John Riley Dungee (who later relocated to Norfolk) and John Reynolds, a barber.¹⁷

On February 24, 1891 the Trustees of the church agreed to purchase the lot on which the church would be built. These Trustees included, Jesse W. Wingfield, Charles H. Dodson and the previously undocumented Trustee, Edward Philips. The lot was purchased from two white couples that jointly owned the property: John H. and Elizabeth Susan Bear, and Miletus Miller Jarman and his wife Elizabeth. On that date the Trustees agree to pay the \$700.00 selling price over a two year period. The deed for this property was recorded at the Roanoke City Courthouse on March 23, 1893. When the final payments were made the property reverted to the Presbytery with a clear title.

In 1891 the Trustees were already referring to the church as Fifth Avenue Presbyterian, although the deed clearly gives the location as Patton Avenue. The name of Fifth Avenue changed to Patton at the beginning of 1891 and the elders obviously chose to use the more traditional street name to designate the church they planned to build.¹⁸

Rev. Twine terminated his service to Fifth Avenue in 1892. He died at the age of 32 in the early morning hours of May 30, 1893 at the home of his brother, James H. Twine and his wife Laura. They resided at 221 W. Leigh Street in Richmond, Virginia. His final illness was reported to be long and painful.¹⁹ Until a new pastor was called, Elder and Trustee Jesse W. Wingfield conducted church services.²⁰ By mid-1893 Reverend Joseph Lee Spurlarke was leading this group of wandering Presbyterians.

On April 13, 1862²¹ Rev. Spurlarke was born into slavery in the town of Salem²² to Lewis and Betsy Spurlock.²³ During his youth he worked as a house servant for Judge Wingfield Griffin and once the judge married in 1879 his wife Claudine took a special interest in teaching the servants to read and write. These early lessons laid the foundation for Spurlarke's life.²⁴

As a young man, Spurlarke left Salem and worked as a waiter at The Greenbrier in White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia. From there he entered the Clinton Grammar

¹⁴ *Twenty-fifth Anniversary, Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church, Sunday, October 5, 1919*, booklet, page 14.

¹⁵ *The Roanoke Times*, Sun., March 18, 1894, page 5. "Interesting ordination services..."

¹⁶ *The Roanoke Times*, Sunday, May 3, 1891, page 3.

¹⁷ *Anniversary, Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church, Sunday, October 5, 1919*.

¹⁸ Roanoke City Deed Book 85, page 226-227

¹⁹ *Richmond Dispatch*, May 31, 1893.

²⁰ *Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church Historical Benchmarks:*

http://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/b250c2_c445f30a90544c44822368c5b74e99a2.pdf

²¹ *Hamilton College Literary Monthly*.

²² Some records state that he was born in Baltimore, however, census records indicate that Spurlarke was born in VA

²³ 1870 Federal Census, Salem, Virginia.

²⁴ *Salem Times Register*, June 15, 1894, "Death of Joseph Lee Spurlarke."

School, in Clinton, New York, where he prepared for college under the instruction of Rev. Isaac O. Best.²⁵ When Spurlarke entered Hamilton College in Clinton, New York,²⁶ he became the first African American student enrolled at that college.²⁷

Spurlarke exhibited exceptional athletic abilities while at Hamilton. At the New York State Inter-Collegiate Association field day in Rochester, New York on May 26, 1888, at the age of 27, he competed in the 100 yard dash, 220 yard dash, running broad jump and he ran the 440 yard dash in 56 ¼ seconds garnering second place, winning a "gold headed cane." A newspaper report from the event describes Spurlarke as "Hamilton's colored athlete and a good looking intelligent fellow."²⁸ While at the college he also played lawn tennis and baseball.²⁹

Classmate George D. Miller remembered another intercollegiate track event held at Union College in Albany, at which Spurlarke "made the record that day in the 200-yard dash and already held the record for the 100-yard dash." Miller described him as "one of the most popular men in the class."³⁰



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Joseph L. Spurlarke

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In 1889 Spurlarke was the first African American to graduate from Hamilton College. No other black students would enter Hamilton before the end of World War I

²⁵ *Hamilton College Literary Monthly*.

²⁶ *Salem Times Register*, June 15, 1894, "Death of Joseph Lee Spurlarke."

²⁷ *Hamilton College Alumni Review*, Vol. LIII, Number 2, page 3; Letters.

²⁸ *Democrat and Chronicle*, Rochester, NY, Sat., May 26, 1888, "Muscular Collegiates."

²⁹ *Hamilton College Yearbook*, 1889.

³⁰ <https://www.hamilton.edu/about/history/half-century-annals-letters/1889> (George D. Miller, del. June 1939)

³¹ Photographic portrait from the archives of Hamilton College.

³² Letter from the archives of Hamilton College.

(1918).³³ From there he entered Auburn Theological Seminary in Auburn, New York in October, 1889. While attending Auburn he took a number of diplomas for his proficiency in "the languages" while at the same time working to support himself.³⁴ Spurlarke was ordained to the ministry one day before his thirtieth birthday, April 12, 1892, at Utica Presbyterian Church in Utica, New York. He graduated from Auburn in May, 1892.³⁵ As part of the graduation exercises Spurlarke presented an "oration" entitled Three Light Bearers to the Dark Continent.

Within a year after his graduation from Auburn Theological, Rev. Spurlarke was serving Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church in Roanoke. On June 17, 1893 he was authorized to celebrate marriages by the Roanoke City courts.³⁶ When Davis Industrial College opened in November 1893 Reverend Spurlarke became president of the college which was located in the 100 block of Sixth Avenue, NW (later Harrison Avenue),³⁷ and at that time the church meetings were moved to the chapel of the college.³⁸ John Riley Dungee served as the church superintendent.³⁹

During this period, Spurlarke wrote a letter, dated September 25, 1893, from Roanoke to his Auburn classmate, Stephen Dwight Waterbury. He wrote: "I have been quite busy all summer about my church and have not gotten along very rapidly either but I cannot complain for my work this far has been quite satisfactory. You know I am in a poor town and money doesn't grow on trees down here and this depression in business just stopped my work. But I am hopeful to get the work completed some time soon. I will send you a circular so that you can see that I am engaged in some more work. Just think, I am President of an institution of learning. God has been good to me all my life long and I mean to serve him as long as I live. I sometimes think that God's will sent me here to lift up a race in ignorance." He went on to compliment several of his friends who "gave something toward the chapel."⁴⁰ Obviously he already had plans to erect a chapel for Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church.

Sadly, it was left for others to complete his work. Following a severe case of typhoid fever (accompanied by typhoid pleurisy)⁴¹ of two weeks duration, Rev. Spurlarke passed away from at the home of his father in Salem in the early morning hours of Saturday, June 9, 1894. His obituary stated: "In manners, character and education Rev. Spurlarke was a model man, and in his every day walk a pure hearted Christian, doing all that he could to elevate his race. It will be hard to fill his place."⁴²

The newspapers ran the following report: "The [First] Presbyterian Church was

³³ Biographical sketch of Roy Alexander Ellis, Burke Library, Hamilton College archives.

³⁴ *Salem Times Register*, June 15, 1894, "Death of Joseph Lee Spurlarke."

³⁵ Personal correspondence, Katherine Collett, archivist, Burke Library, Hamilton College.

³⁶ *The Roanoke Times*, Sun., June 18, 1893, page 5.

³⁷ *The Roanoke Times*, November 30, 1893, "Opening of the Industrial College."

³⁸ *The Roanoke Times*, Jan. 21, 1894.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Letter from the archives of Hamilton College.

⁴¹ *Hamilton Literary Monthly*.

⁴² *Salem Times-Register*, June 15, 1894, "Death of Rev. Joseph Lee Spurlarke."

packed to suffocation Sunday afternoon with the friends of the late Rev. Joseph Lee Spurlarke. Rev. Dr. Campbell [William Creighton Campbell], of Roanoke, conducted the funeral service and made a most touching address, bearing testimony to the regret expressed and genuine sorrow among the white people of the city. Then, also, the pastors of different colored churches were present and feelingly alluded to the loss sustained in his death. White and black mourners contributed wreaths and crosses of flowers with which to deck his grave. The procession to the grave in the Northeast Cemetery [Old Lick Cemetery] was the longest ever seen here for a colored person."⁴³

In a memorial tribute Spurlarke's Hamilton College friends expressed their conviction that "there is every reason to believe he would have wrought a work of permanent value to his people. Doubtless, what he did will live, as his memory lives, beautiful and chastened, in the hearts of his classmates."⁴⁴

Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church installed its third pastor, Rev. Lylburn L. Downing, on July 8, 1894.⁴⁵ Rev. Downing, like Rev. Twine before him, was also a graduate of Lincoln University. He would go on to lead this congregation for more than 42 years.

On September 14, 1990 a ceremony was held at Hamilton College's Burke Library to unveil a portrait of Joseph Lee Spurlarke commemorating the accomplishment of being the first African American to graduate from that college.⁴⁶ In part, the inscription reads: "He...excelled in public speaking and athletics. As a conscientious student, he commanded the respect of his professors, and his generosity of spirit won the affection of his classmates. Many remarked later that he had left a distinct influence for good upon their lives."

Manuscript by Michael E. Blankenship
February, 2018



The church envisioned by Rev. Spurlarke was left for others to complete.⁴⁷

⁴³ *The Roanoke Times*, Tue., June 12, 1894, page 2; *Salem Times Register*, June 15, 1894, "Death of Joseph Lee Spurlarke."

⁴⁴ *Hamilton College Alumni Review*, Vol. LV, Number 1, page 10.

⁴⁵ *Twenty-fifth Anniversary, Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church, Sunday, October 5, 1919*, booklet, page 3.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Photo used courtesy of The Virginia Room, Roanoke City Public Library.