Trinity UMC is Celebrating Black History Month

As we enter into February, Black History month, we’d like to build on a bit of Springfield’s Black History. Perhaps you’ve heard of the Mason Wright Assisted Living Community on Walnut St. Its beginnings go back to a Black business man, Primus Mason. Mason was born in Monson in 1817, but as a young man he moved to Springfield where he worked in a variety of jobs from pig farmer to clearing dead horses from the street to collecting old shoe leather which he sold to the Armory to use in hardening gun barrels.

As he saved his money, he began investing in an un-developed district of Springfield where no one else showed interest. Later he sold the land to the McKnight Brothers, developers of the McKnight-Hill District. Mr. Mason outlived both his wife and his daughter and upon his death he left the substance of his estate to establish a “home for aged men.” His original vision has now grown into a Senior Living Community that includes independent apartments, assisted living, and a floor dedicated to memory care.

Throughout Springfield’s history, Black people have contributed to the economy of Springfield through a variety of businesses. We want to highlight some of those currently open. We hope you will spread the word about Black-owned business you already frequent and try out some of the ones we share if they are new to you.

This week we’d like to introduce Sonja Yelder, Springfield native and owner of The Souper Sweet Sandwich Shop. Just as the name says you can get a variety of generous-sized sandwiches along with amazing desserts. In addition, Ms. Yelder, who trained at Le Cordon Bleu in Paris, offers salads and soups – all homemade using ingredients from local farmer’s markets. Located at 929 Belmont St in Springfield, be sure to check out the entire menu at www.soupersweetsandwichshop.com. If you work downtown treat yourself to Ms. Yelder’s creative sandwiches at Granny’s Baking Table, which she co-owns with Todd Crosset. You’re in for a treat at either location!

Trinity will also be celebrating spirituals each week in February.

This Sunday’s spiritual is “Steal Away”.

Today, the expression “steal away” means to sneak away or hide, but spirituals have hidden codes, with messages for slaves to run away on their own, or with the Underground Railroad.

The words had a double meaning: "Steal away to Jesus" on the surface, meant dying and going to heaven, but also symbolized escaping to freedom.

This song was used by many people who helped lead slaves to freedom. Harriet Tubman and Nat Turner were both leaders who used it as a means of gathering people who were headed to freedom and keeping them unified in their journeys. Harriet Tubman was sometimes referred to as “Moses”, likening her Moses who led the people to the mountain. (Exodus 19:16-23).

The words and music of “Steal Away to Jesus” were created by Wallace Willis, a slave who became a Choctaw freedman in Hugo, Oklahoma (now once again part of the reservation of the Choctaw Nation, thanks to the Supreme Court ruling of July 9, 2020). The hymn can be interpreted as an expression of spiritual longing to be united with Jesus.