

Founding Our Church Since 1863

Shiloh Baptist Church has been pointing souls to a better religious, social, and economic life since its beginning in 1863. By so doing, we are living in the hope of a far greater life in the Promised Land.

Excerpt from Report to the Senate 1868

"There are now six churches of colored people in that city, (Alexandria) . . . "The "African Methodist Episcopal" and five Baptist churches. "First Baptist Church" . . . "Second Baptist" or "Beulah Church" . . . The "Fourth Baptist" or "Shiloh" Church was organized about 1863 at "Newton" - L'Ouverture Hospital - the military hospital for colored soldiers, which was located in the yard of "Price and Birch's old slave prison, used during the war as a prison for deserters . . . The pastor of the "Shiloh" church is Rev. Leland Warring, a colored man who, like the others (Rev. C. Robinson and Rev. G. W. Parker), was a teacher during the war. There is still another Baptist-colored church, the "Zion Baptist," located in the vicinity of the railroad tunnel. These churches have each a flourishing Sabbath school, in which old and young unite in learning to read and in the study of the Bible."

(Source: an excerpt from the Department of Education Special Report of the Commissioner of Education on the Condition and Improvement of Public Schools of the District of Columbia, submitted to the U.S. Senate June 1868, and the U.S. House of Representatives, with additions, June 13, 1870.)

A Government Mess Hall

During the Civil War, the Union Army occupied the City of Alexandria to prevent the Confederate Army from having a route into Washington, D.C., the capitol. Since the Union Army was not in the slave trade, Alexandria became a haven for runaway slaves (then referred to as contraband). These contraband and captured Confederate soldiers were housed in the old slave pen area at 1315 Duke Street. It was here that Shiloh Baptist Church began March 29, 1863, as the Old Shiloh Society when 50 former slaves gathered in a U.S. government mess hall to worship and praise God. When the congregation outgrew the mess hall, it moved to the nearby barracks. Shortly afterward, that building was destroyed by fire. Staunton School temporarily became the next meeting place. The Reverends Charles Rodgers and E. Owens, who were white, and Leland Warring, who was black, served during the first two years.

Constructing a Neat Frame Church

Under the continued leadership of Rev. Leland Warring, the congregation worked diligently until the first edifice of Shiloh, a neat frame church, was erected on West Street near Duke Street. On September 26, 1865, the new church was dedicated.

Surviving a Fire

On January 26, 1872, the Alexandria Gazette reported, "the alarm of fire about half-past twelve last night was caused by the burning of a framed building near the intersection of Prince and West streets, known as Shiloh church, a colored Baptist meeting house." It is not clear where the congregation met after the fire.

Change in Pastors

The Rev. Warring's ill health forced him to retire on March 15, 1889, after over 25 years of service, and his son, the Rev. Henry H. Warring, became the supply pastor.

A Split in the Church

According to the March 7, 1890, Alexandria Gazette account of "The Origin of the Difficulty that Caused the Split in Shiloh Baptist Church," it was during the interim years of 1889-1890 that a segment accused Rev. Henry Warring of the membership of misappropriating \$15 in fees to the Virginia Baptist State Convention and \$10 in travel expenses. He was also accused of not telling the truth when confronted about it. The majority of the membership rejected the charges and proceeded to call Rev. Henry Warring to be the pastor. Some of those aggrieved members left Shiloh and were among the founders of Mt. Jezreel Baptist Church.

Construction of a Second Edifice

Work on the second edifice, the structure at 1401 Duke Street, began in 1891 under the pastorate of the Rev. Henry H. Warring, son of the ailing Rev. Leland Warring. The cornerstone was laid with imposing Masonic Ceremonies on August 1, 1891. The new building was completed on October 1, 1893. The building cost \$8,000 and the furniture \$2,000. The new church was considered the most handsome in town, with its great bell tower, eight stained glass windows, modern circular oak pews, and a large reflector, resplendent with glass prisms, swinging from the ceiling.

Continue reading about the [history of Shiloh Baptist Church from 1914 to the present day](#).