

An excerpt from *Dedication: Building the Seattle Branches of Mary Baker Eddy's Church, A Centennial Story* manuscript by Cindy Safronoff

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## Central Area Reading Room – 1970

*A chapter in which Mr. Milton Simons and Mrs. Martha W. Smith establish a Christian Science Reading Room in Seattle's traditionally Afro-American district, the Central Area, with the support the area Churches of Christ, Scientist. Takes place at 1134 34<sup>th</sup> Avenue East in Seattle, with events also at The Mother Church, The First Church of Christ, Scientist, in Boston, and special mention of branch churches in Tulsa, Oklahoma; Los Angeles, California; Houston, Texas; and events in Little Rock, Arkansas.*

On Sunday, February 1, 1970, the newest Christian Science Reading Room in Seattle officially opened. This was the newest joint activity of the Churches of Christ, Scientist. Located in the commercial district called Madison Park at 1114 34<sup>th</sup> Avenue, between East Union and East Spring Streets, it was referred to as the Central Area Reading Room. This new outreach effort met an urgent need. The Central District, or Central Area, was unique in Seattle, and so was this joint activity. This outreach was initiated, managed, and staffed by Afro-Americans and its purpose was uplift for people of African ancestry.

Afro-Americans were involved in the Christian Science movement from the early decades. The movement began around the time that Afro-Americans gained United States citizenship and voting rights after centuries of enslavement. In a letter in 1897 to her local church congregation in Concord, New Hampshire, in the predominately Euro-American populated region of New England where Christian Science began, Reverend Mary Baker Eddy shared how she made a high priority of praying for people throughout the world and she specifically mentioned Africans. She wrote, "...I am helping them. You have less need of me than they have..." By 1899, there were regular reports in the Christian Science periodicals about and from Afro-Americans relating to Christian Science activity, news items about the general progress being made in education, careers, and businesses, and calls for people of European ancestry to more actively apply The Golden Rule to race relations. An Afro-American man who ran "a prominent institution in the South for the education of colored people" expressed appreciation for gifts of Christian Science literature, saying, "The disseminators of such literature as you have been furnishing me, have not the remotest idea of how much good they are doing. . . . Would that we had more such friends as you." A woman from South Carolina wrote of including the laborers on her rice plantation in Wednesday evening testimony meetings and how they were learning to apply Christian Science in their lives. "This account is a strong hint of the work that may be done, and ultimately will be done, among the colored race," the editors commented, and "...although their first applications seem small, they,

nevertheless, prophesy of the larger and greater demonstrations which are certain to follow.” Leonard Perry, Jr. of Washington, D.C. joined The Mother Church in 1900 and began advertising his healing practice in the official church directory in 1906. More Afro-American Christian Science practitioners soon followed.<sup>1</sup>

Yet even as progress gave rise to optimism, societal reaction made further progress for Afro-Americans increasingly difficult, especially the establishment in the late 1800s and early 1900s of the racial segregation system referred to as “Jim Crow” laws. Marietta Thomas Webb, whose testimony was selected by Mary Baker Eddy herself for inclusion in the “Fruitage” chapter in *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* and who later became a Christian Science practitioner, concluded a testimony in the *Sentinel* with this commentary:

O, glorious Truth that makes us free; that guides us into all the avenues and through all the vicissitudes of life; that is a healing balm for all human complaints; and that protects us from all evil; and which I verily believe is to be the only salvation of my race, the Afro-American, and that it will abolish the prejudice which exists throughout these United States; for, go where we will, we are made to feel our color. But with the wide and rapid spread of Christian Science man is not only learning what the true love of God is, by loving all mankind; but he is getting out of his old prejudiced self, into the spiritual sense of man’s union with God.<sup>2</sup>

In a similar spirit, Grace Kennedy wrote in the *Sentinel* in 1919 about the challenges she faced:

For more than four years I have been struggling and fighting against the thought of my color and the bondage of the negro race. I fought and prayed daily, hourly, for that Mind to be in me ‘which was also in Christ Jesus,’ that I might see the perfect man and overcome hate, prejudice, fear, and the many beliefs which seem to rise from this bondage. This final conflict was mastered by steadfast reliance on God and the understanding gained through the study of Christian Science. . . . Through a knowledge of . . . man in the image and likeness of God, we prove man’s birthright to be dominion, not subjection.<sup>3</sup>

As legal and sometimes mandated racial segregation became more entrenched and wide-spread, the Christian Science periodicals carried occasional news items with quotes from civic and religious leaders expressing support for policies of equality and desegregation. Yet, even so, the Christian Science church, as a concession to the practices and laws of the times, adopted some segregation practices, including labeling Afro-American Christian Science practitioners as “colored” in the directory in the *Christian Science Journal* between 1922 and 1956. Branch churches with predominately Afro-American membership were also labeled in the directory of churches. In a 1950 article about the Christian Science movement in *Ebony*, a magazine by and for Afro-Americans, it was reported:

[The] basic racial principle of the church is expressed in Mary Baker Eddy’s declaration: “With one Father, even God, the whole family of man would be brethren.” Say church spokesmen: “That expresses the idea of equality of all men which all Christian Scientists accept as the spiritual fact.”

*Ebony* described Christian Science church practice and policy on segregation this way:

The attitude of the church toward the race question is idealistically fair, but neither its board of directors (the governing body) nor its manual define any overall policy regarding a color line. Equality is an ideal toward which it is pressing “as fast as humanly possible.” In the South the church complies with existing patterns and state laws which prevent race mingling but in Washington, D.C., Negroes and whites attend the same churches. In Birmingham, Alabama, Negroes and white members of the church used to meet together but they now hold separate gatherings due to intensified agitation for racial segregation by city officials. The two groups would like to meet together but the “law” forces them to observe Jim Crow. In Boston no record of racial background is kept on the official list of the world-wide membership of the Mother Church.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the difficulties Christian Scientists faced during the era of segregation, progress for Afro-Americans continued within the religious movement. Racially mixed congregations were common in the northern states. Lulu M. Knight, a member of Eighth Church of Christ, Scientist, in Chicago, became the first Afro-American Christian Science teacher in 1943 after being taught in the Normal Class by Dr. John M. Tutt. Her church on Michigan Avenue at 44th Street, built in 1911 and dedicated in 1914, was among the largest Christian Science branch churches in the world, with seating for 1300. Originally the membership had been entirely of European ancestry. In 1926 it admitted its first Afro-American member and only six years later, by 1932, there were so many, the church’s official designation changed to “colored.”<sup>5</sup>

Twenty-two Christian Science churches or societies were specifically designated as “colored.” The segregated branch churches were in the southeastern states where African slavery had once been legal—Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Missouri, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Texas—and in the nation’s capitol, Washington, D.C. Black churches were also in states that during the civil war had fought to free the slaves—California, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, New York, and Ohio. At least eleven of these churches had Christian Science Reading Rooms by 1950. The *Christian Science Sentinel* reported on dedications of several church edifices built by congregations designated “colored” from their earliest beginnings.<sup>6</sup>

In Houston, Texas, Sixth Church began with home meetings as early as 1915, formally organizing as a Christian Science Society in 1938. They built an art deco style edifice at the corner of Elgin and Hutchins Streets, across from Emancipation Park, holding opening services in September 1941. They formally dedicated on June 10, 1945, perhaps not coincidentally just before Juneteenth Independence Day, also known as Emancipation Day, a day commemorating the emancipation of enslaved Afro-Americans in Texas. It may have been with an element of pride that they engraved their designation on their granite cornerstone:

SIXTH CHURCH OF CHRIST, SCIENTIST (COLORED)

ERECTED 1941

In Tulsa, Oklahoma, Fifth Church of Christ, Scientist, began in 1927 with a few people meeting in private homes. Then after fourteen years meeting at the YWCA room in a Methodist church and later a public hall, they purchased a building lot on North Peoria Avenue and laid a cornerstone for their own edifice. The Tulsa church held opening services in 1944 and dedicated it in 1951. In Los Angeles, California, Thirty-Ninth Church formed through the efforts of one person in August 1944. Starting with twelve members, and meeting in a private home for several months, they formally incorporated on February 4, 1945, and immediately purchased a bungalow style home on Walton Avenue and remodeled it for use as a church edifice, with opening services on July 1, just before Independence Day. Many of the significant milestones in the histories of these black churches occurred on or near dates of significance: July 4, Independence Day, a date significant in both American history and Christian Science; January 31, the anniversary of the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment that officially abolished slavery; September 22, the anniversary of President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation Order; and June 19, Juneteenth, celebrated to commemorate Emancipation since 1866, coincidentally the same year recognized by Christian Scientists as the year of Reverend Mary Baker Eddy's discovery of Christian Science.<sup>7</sup>

In her chapter "Footsteps of Truth" in *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* by Mary Baker Eddy, the founder of Christian Science made a conceptual association between abolishing slavery and God's "higher platform of human rights," the way of salvation from every evil "through Christ's divine Science." Eddy wrote:

Legally to abolish unpaid servitude in the United States was hard; but the abolition of mental slavery is a more difficult task. The despotic tendencies, inherent in mortal mind and always germinating in new forms of tyranny, must be rooted out through the action of the divine Mind. . . Christian Science raises the standard of liberty and cries: "Follow me! Escape from the bondage of sickness, sin, and death!" Jesus marked out the way. Citizens of the world, accept the "glorious liberty of the children of God," and be free! This is your divine right.<sup>8</sup>

An increasing number of Afro-Americans were embracing Christian Science. In fact, the number of black practitioners and branch churches was growing exponentially, even as the general listings in the *Christian Science Journal* had leveled off and gone into decline. By the late 1950s there were fifty-two Afro-American Christian Science practitioners in Chicago where Mrs. Knight practiced and taught, as many as thirty-seven at one time, and nearly 130 Afro-American Christian Science practitioners in total advertising in the official directory. In 1961, Mrs. Knight was given the special honor of presenting at Annual Meeting of The Mother Church in Boston.

A November 1950 article on Christian Science in *Ebony* reported on the dramatic influx of Afro-Americans into Christian Science at that time. They featured prominent people, including Mrs. William L. Dawson, wife of the only Afro-American in Congress when he was elected in 1943; C.A. Franklin, a newspaper editor; Mildred Blount, a fashion designer; and entertainment industry professionals Pearl Bailey, Ernest Whitman, and Leigh Whipper. They featured some of the more than 100 Afro-Americans working at the Boston Mother Church headquarters: Janie Kennell, a seamstress; Jack Dean, a janitorial supervisor; James Wood, an elevator operator; Donald Taylor, in the press room of the Publishing Society; Bessie Braithwaite, housekeeping supervisor; Gennel Bennett, laundry supervisor; and Neville

Folkes, linotype operator. Commenting on these new recruits subscribing to the “quiet dignity” of the denominational style, *Ebony* wrote, “Frowning upon the old shout-and-moan school of ecclesiastical expression, these . . . believers find an appeal in the stark simplicity and scientific approach of Christian Science.”<sup>9</sup>

Even after the civil rights movement gained momentum, even after 1954 when racial segregation was overturned by the United States Supreme Court, Afro-Americans faced ongoing disadvantages of intense prejudice in America. A well-known example of hostility against Afro-Americans was seen in 1957 when the Federal government forcibly mandated school desegregation, starting with an all-white high school in Arkansas called Little Rock Central High. Melba Pattillo Beals was a high school Junior when she became one of the first black students there, a member of a group dubbed Little Rock Nine, almost overnight becoming a famous civil rights figure because of publicity surrounding the event and extreme threats she faced for being a pioneer. Four decades later she received the highest Congressional award for her role in the civil rights movement. She told her personal story in a best-selling award-winning book called *Warriors Don't Cry*. She shared some insights into her practice of Christian Science in an interview published in the *Christian Science Sentinel*.

“We were not heroes at that time,” Ms. Beals told the *Sentinel*, “because we did not believe that people would behave as it would turn out they did. We didn’t believe that huge mobs would attack us. We were simply making a decision for a better education.” She mentioned having acid thrown in her eyes, burning paper towels dropped on her in the bathroom, and having to escape from angry violent crowds threatening to kill her. Her grandmother had a copy of *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* by Mary Baker Eddy and a resulting unshakable conviction that there could never be a day or a circumstance without evidence of God’s love, and she helped her granddaughter survive the ordeal of physical and verbal attacks that were part of her daily education at Little Rock Central High. Through this testing experience, Beals became a dedicated Christian Scientist. “*Science and Health*,” she explained, “speaks of God’s seeing us each as equal, and of God’s constant presence for us. It doesn’t say that God is present only for someone of a particular color, shape, height, weight. It’s quite clear on the point that we are ever in the presence of Love. . . . You must see God expressed in everyone.”<sup>10</sup>

Civil rights figures like Beals opened the way for other Afro-Americans, and in succeeding years progress was made in all areas of society. Like Beals, many of them had been positively influenced and enabled by Christian Science. In 1967, U.S. Air Force Major Robert H. Lawrence, Jr. became the first Afro-American selected to be an astronaut when he was appointed to the Manned Orbiting Laboratory program. “This is nothing dramatic,” *Ebony* reported him saying. “It’s just a natural progression.” Major Lawrence grew up relatively poor in a part of Chicago later known as a slum, but *Ebony* described him as “belonging to a small and rather unique group of black people to whom the American Dream had become more than an abstraction,” and went on to explain that he had been raised in Christian Science, and, as his step-father put it, he grew up “surrounded by love.” Lawrence’s aspirations for space travel, tragically, were never realized, however, because in the final two weeks of his training, he was killed when his Starfighter jet crashed. It would be another sixteen years until an Afro-American reached outer space, U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Guison S. Bluford, Jr., aboard the space shuttle Challenger as an aerospace engineer. Like Lawrence

and Alan B. Shepard, Jr., astronaut Bluford also grew up in a Christian Science family. He would share about his first space flight in the *Christian Science Sentinel*.<sup>11</sup>

In Seattle, compared to some regions of the United States, historically Afro-Americans were treated well. According to historian Esther Hall Mumford in her book on black history in early Seattle, it was one of the best places in the country for Afro-Americans. They moved to Seattle as refugees from southern states where racial violence like mob lynchings was common—more than twelve hundred recorded lynchings in the 1890s, according to Mumford. Seattle was relatively free from such violence. But Seattle had developed its own style of racial oppression, including a less obvious but still highly effective system of segregation.<sup>12</sup>

Whites were once a racial minority in the Seattle area. Prior to the arrival in the mid-1800s of the first settlers of European descent, the only residents were the Duwamish tribe of Native Americans, an indigenous people who had been living in the area for about 10,000 years. The new Euro-American city settlement was named after the Duwamish tribal leader, Chief Si'ahl, (anglicized to Sealth, or Seattle) who converted to Christianity and encouraged peaceful negotiations between the native tribes and the new settlers in the hope of avoiding the kind of violence and war that had happened in so many other areas with tragic results. The treaty agreements required the natives to move to tribal reservations, designated areas established by the Federal Government. Ironically, the Duwamish were never formally recognized as a tribe by the Federal Government, so were never given reservation land. Even more ironically, for several years in the 1860s, Duwamish people were banned from living in the city named after their chief. A similar approach of racial segregation was eventually taken for other groups.<sup>13</sup>

While most of the original settlers in Seattle were Euro-American, some pioneers were not. Manuel Lopes, Seattle's first Afro-American resident, arrived in 1852, shortly after the city was founded. In the 1860s, just before and during America's civil war, several more are known to have arrived in Seattle. Some of these early pioneers may have been runaway slaves. They worked as barbers, waiters, or cooks, and were able to start successful businesses and purchase real estate. Migrants during the first decades after the civil war included skilled craftsmen and educated professionals. Several had close family relations to legislators and other public office holders. Afro-Americans opened boarding houses and hotels, got involved in law and politics, and started newspapers. In Seattle they were sometimes insulted or excluded or treated unfairly by individual private businesses, but Washington State law protected against exclusion on the basis of race, and a local Afro-American attorney was quick to file civil rights lawsuits for racial discrimination. In general they were integrated into society.

A steady trickle of chain migration continued as Afro-American residents wrote to friends and family in other regions of the country and encouraged them to come to Seattle where there was freedom to build a better life. By 1900 there were about 400 Afro-Americans in Seattle, still a tiny minority in a city with population of more than 80,000 that was overwhelmingly Euro-American. Unlike Chinese immigrants, the largest racial minority, which had faced more overt hostility and organized oppression, even violent efforts to force them out of the city and were excluded even from the rights of U.S. citizenship at that time and most job opportunities and restricted to living in the district south of downtown known as Chinatown, Afro-Americans were scattered throughout Seattle and had more job options. Starting in the

1890s, however, the quality of life for Afro-Americans in Seattle took a turn for the worse. As Jim Crow segregation laws became more widely established throughout the country, even in Seattle practices of exclusion became acceptable and normal, even legally supported. The trickle of migration continued, increasing the Afro-American population to several thousand in the early 1900s. Although still less than one percent of the population, the more there were, the more prejudice and hostility was shown them. As city limits expanded to outlying areas in the 1920s and 1930s, Afro-Americans were legally excluded from new housing developments through land use restrictions embedded in the subdivision property deeds, so all newcomers were channeled into two small areas. They could only purchase homes in the East Madison district, which was originally a twelve-acre farm owned by William Grose, one of the first Afro-Americans settlers in Seattle. This area became a stable, middle-class community. A second larger Afro-American center developed in the Yesler-Jackson area at the south end of downtown near the train station where the lowest cost hotels and boarding houses were located, a more transient and impoverished population of laborers, train porters, and restaurant and tavern workers. The area was known for its entertainment industry, including a vibrant jazz music scene. It was also known for its vice. More of a red-light district than a neighborhood, it was a high-crime area of prostitution, gambling, alcohol abuse, drug use, overdose, theft, murder, and suicide, having problems with sanitation and contagious disease. As these two distinct Afro-American communities continued to grow, they eventually merged together into one four-square-mile section, known as the Central Area. Even after 1948 when a ruling by the United States Supreme Court outlawed restrictive covenants, resistance by homeowners and realtors prevented most Afro-Americans from living outside the district.<sup>14</sup>

Despite being at the center of the city and despite their active engagement in civic life as informed voters and supporters of political parties (they were Democrats and Republicans and a few were Communists), there were not enough Afro-Americans in Seattle to gain political representation or develop their own economy. For their part in the larger Seattle economy, they were increasingly disadvantaged during the Jim Crow era because excluded from most trade unions. Skilled workers had to settle for menial labor and service jobs. They were paid less than Euro-Americans for the same work and had less job security. Their jobs were often in the back room where customers could not see them, or on the night shift, or crew on ships that were away from home port for long periods. Most women could only get work as domestic servants. Education was not a path for overcoming financial disadvantage. Even graduates of the University of Washington found it practically impossible to get professional jobs that matched their qualifications and they were barred from teaching jobs. High rates of homeownership among Afro-Americans in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century in Seattle compared to other regions provided some financial security, but during the Great Depression they lost their homes to foreclosure at a significantly higher rate than Euro-Americans and banking practices known as redlining made it more difficult for Afro-Americans to refinance or purchase homes.

The largest migration of Afro-Americans to Seattle began during World War 2 as the region became one of the country's largest industrial centers for national defense. Federal law prohibited defense contractors from exclusion based on race. Workers from southern states were recruited to work in Seattle at the many shipyards, the Boeing Airplane Company's manufacturing plants, and other war-related jobs. Migration continued after the war, increasing the Afro-American population tenfold by the

late 1960s until they became the largest minority group in Seattle—from less than 1% for most of Seattle history to more than 7% and increasing toward 10%. Since all the newcomers were restricted to living in the Central Area, they were crowded into the available housing, which by then was nearly a century old and somewhat dilapidated, poorly maintained by absentee landlords. It was becoming a slum from which Afro-Americans could rarely escape.<sup>15</sup>

In a 1965 *Seattle Magazine* series on the Central Area including articles entitled, “The World That Whites Don’t Know,” and “How the Ghetto Looks from the Inside,” it described “Seattle’s special brand of racial discrimination” as one of apathy more than hostility. While the plight of local Afro-Americans might be “vaguely acknowledged” by Euro-Americans living securely “in their own peaceful enclaves,” they were generally unwilling to concern themselves very much. “For them,” the article stated, “the Central Area might just as well be a foreign country, which they occasionally passed through in their automobiles, peering with distaste at ‘them’ and their funny way of life.” As to solving the seemingly intractable problems of discrimination and poverty and its resulting personal and community stresses, author Rillmond Schear believed, “Nothing more than signs of interest can have vast significance.” Even minimally successful efforts had “considerable psychological impact by merely proving that somebody was trying to do something—and, above all, that somebody cared.”<sup>16</sup>

The civil rights movement was heating up by the late 1960s, with most of the street marches, sit-ins, and riots happening in the southern states. But even in cool Seattle after Martin Luther King, Jr.’s assassination on April 4, 1968 in Memphis, Tennessee, there was a street march of 10,000 people, followed by three days of riots. Store windows were smashed, cars were lit on fire, guns were fired. That summer more violence in Seattle followed a police raid of the local office of the Black Panther Party, a militant group aligned with Black Power, a movement to keep the Afro-American community together but strengthen it.<sup>17</sup>

The following year Black Power put pressure on American churches. With the support of the National Black Economic Development Conference in Detroit, James Forman published a “Black Manifesto” that demanded that churches and synagogues pay reparations for slavery and the injustice of discrimination. They wanted \$500 million, \$15 per American of African descent, to be used for education, economic development, and promotion of Afro-American culture and perspective. To forward this agenda, the manifesto called for disrupting religious meetings and seizure of church property through force—possible “armed confrontation and long years of sustained guerilla warfare inside this country”— if demands were not met. The Black Manifesto was controversial, even among Afro-Americans. It succeeded in getting the attention of religious leaders and the media, thus, as the *Christian Science Monitor* put it, “unleashing a whole series of fast-paced developments.” Among those publicly confronted was The Mother Church, The First Church of Christ, Scientist, in Boston, which, being mid-way through the construction project for its massive ten-acre Church Center with 26-story Administration Building, 550-car underground garage, new Sunday School building with 1,200-seat auditorium, 525-foot long Colonnade Building, and 670-foot long reflecting pool, was clearly demonstrating “vast resources,” and together with its emphasis on healing, was consequently worthy of special attention.<sup>18</sup>

On Monday, June 2, 1969, at the Annual Meeting of The Mother Church, as 8000 Christian Scientists from around the world gathered, a group of Black Power activists made an unexpected visit. Thirty members of the Metropolitan Boston Committee of Black Churchmen came uninvited to the Christian Science conference to address the audience. Initially blocked from entry to the large Mother Church Extension building by security guards and closed doors, they demanded access to the meeting platform to make their case. At first they were politely told by security staff that the meeting was private, for members only. The activists were insistent, however, and tensions were rising. At this point, church officials decided to invite them in. They “entered the auditorium, came to the platform, and delivered a compelling statement on these issues.” Unitarian Universalist Hayward Henry told the audience, “The churches and synagogues of America have become such economic institutions that they themselves are party to oppression and exploitation.” United Church of Christ Reverend Virgil A. Wood challenged the Christian Scientists to lead the nation in church action to make restitution “for years of slavery, racism, and death by which the white society has robbed the Black man of his power of being.” They had a specific list of demands for the Christian Scientists. They wanted the *Christian Science Monitor* to do a series “on the American church as an economic institution.” They wanted full public disclosure of all financial assets and property holdings of the church as well as personal assets of church officers. They wanted the building owned by Second Church of Christ, Scientist, in Roxbury, Massachusetts, to be given to the Afro-Americans of Boston. They wanted all Afro-American employees at The Mother Church to be given promotions and raises. The *Christian Science Monitor* reported that the group conducted itself with dignity at all times, and as they filed out of the auditorium they received the applause of audience. Afterwards, Inman H. Douglass, Chair of the Board of Directors, invited the assembly “to take the matter into their hearts and into the privacy of their prayers. And he asked them to all join in efforts to heal the situation.” Then the meeting returned to the originally planned topic of discussion, the theme, “What can we do for our world?”<sup>19</sup>

This unusual occurrence at Annual Meeting made the national news through the *Christian Science Monitor* and beyond. A photograph of Henry addressing the assembly of Christian Scientists in the huge Mother Church Extension edifice was distributed through the AP news wire service, appearing at least in the *Boston Globe*, *Ebony*, and the *Seattle Times*. The Mother Church Board of Directors later met privately with the Boston clergymen to discuss their demands, and the *Monitor* kept readers informed on the topic. In a related article, *Monitor* editor Richard A. Nenneman emphasized that not all churches participated in social justice activities and suggested that “the reparations themselves may be a less important part of the churches’ response than original ideas they come up with themselves.” The message conveyed by the visitors “continued to reverberate around the world”—even across the continent in Seattle.<sup>20</sup>

The Seattle branch churches responded with a new Christian Science Reading Room in the Central Area. The Central Area was the only distinct district in Seattle that had never had its own Christian Science church or reading room. There may not have been a conscious decision by Christian Scientists in Seattle to exclude the non-white population, but since the branch churches were only located in predominately white districts, intended or not, it may have had the effect of exclusion. Over the decades there had been intentional outreach to Afro-Americans. Records from Dr. Walter Padgett’s launch of the Joint

Literature Distribution Committee in 1912 specially mentioned distribution of Christian Science literature to Afro-American social clubs. In later years there is record of literature outreach to Central Area schools. The jointly-maintained Reading Room that operated for several years in the late 1920s in the Maynard Building at the south end of downtown near Chinatown may have engaged with a diversity of non-whites including Afro-Americans in its mission to serve the unemployed. But for practical purposes, the Christian Science community in Seattle seems to have failed to significantly penetrate the wall of racial segregation that developed over so many decades.<sup>21</sup>

The Central Area initiative was introduced internally as being in the spirit of the early Christian Science Mission and Free Dispensaries, precursors to the Christian Science Reading Room, the original 1890s outreach to the urban masses, to “all classes of people,” including the poor and foreigners and transients and anyone else “prevented by their circumstances” from learning about Christian Science and experiencing healing. To correct a misconception of Christian Science as a white-dominated religion, the organizers felt strongly that the Central Area Reading Room staff should be Afro-American. They wanted members of the black community who were also members of The Mother Church. They had ten on their committee, all branch church members but one, and five had taken Christian Science Class Instruction. The whole effort was initiated by black members at the Capitol Hill branch, First Church of Christ, Scientist, Seattle—which was located near the northern boundary of the Central Area. Martha W. Smith, a Christian Science practitioner, served as Secretary for the organizing committee, and Milton Simons served as Chair and the initial Librarian.<sup>22</sup>

Milton Simons was an artist doing ground-breaking work in visual and mixed media. For ten years he and his wife Marianne had been running an art gallery in the Madison Park district a few doors down from the new reading room. The gallery fulfilled a long-time dream of his, and there he showcased his art and work of artists he admired and offered painting classes for the community. While serving in the Army during the Second World War, with only minimal artistic training he won first prize in the 1944 Honolulu Art Festival for a water color painting. Mr. Simons became the first Afro-American to attend the Burnley School of Art, later called The Art Institute of Seattle. Simons was also a musician. He briefly studied music at Cornish College of the arts, and his music band, “Puget Sounds,” played regular concerts at his gallery. Simons had attended Garfield High School, the most ethnically and religiously diverse public school in Seattle. He had a mixed race family and a multi-cultural upbringing. His grandfather, Andrew J. Marshall, with whom he had a close relationship, was of Choctaw Indian and African ancestry, born a slave in Tennessee and after emancipation became a factory and farm laborer and a preacher. Simons grew up “being surrounded by music”—classical, gospel, jazz, and traditional Native American. His music band was a hybrid of all these styles, and he played an instrument of his own invention that was a cross between an Indian sitar and a Japanese koto. His visual art was also a hybrid of styles and mediums. “I shred the canvas and rip it and tear it,” he explained, “and model it to change its organic structure so that it becomes part of the medium.” In May 1969 at the Henry Art Gallery at the University of Washington, Simons oversaw a mixed-media show including a wide variety of visual art, film, poetry, live music, improvisational dance, and light projection with students from the Central Area School of Performing Arts, which he co-founded and co-directed. Simons developed a reputation as a “pioneer in education and the arts.” He played music, had art displays, and taught art at the East Madison YMCA, an

important community and cultural center for the Central District. When Mount Zion Baptist Church, one of the oldest and perhaps most prominent church in the Central Area, hosted a week-long conference on social crisis in 1968, Simons spoke on a discussion panel led by East Madison YMCA director Richard M. Carter on “God’s Word and the Fine Arts.” Simons’ preacher grandfather wanted Simons to be a preacher too. “I thought about it,” Simons said, “but find that while I can talk to one person at a time, I can reach more people with my painting and my music and by living my philosophy than I can by talking.”<sup>23</sup>

As the manager for the new Central Area Christian Science Reading Room, Milton Simons would have lots of opportunity for one-on-one discussions on religious topics, and as Chair of the committee for establishing the Reading Room he would have opportunity to be a pioneer. The manager role, entitled Librarian for traditional reasons, as he helped envision it for this outreach project, was more than a manager of stock and staff. Librarian was also a public relations role, engaging with the community in any appropriate way to attract positive interest in the reading room and Christian Science. In that spirit, it seems this outreach team wanted to incorporate creative approaches in their work—the kind of creativity Simons was known for.

On November 14, 1969, a meeting was held of representatives from all the Christian Science churches in Seattle. A committee of five was formed to finalize the plans for a new reading room, for church approval. The supporting churches would pay 45 cents per member per month to cover rent and salaries. They needed another \$1900 dollars for furnishings and stock, for which they would solicit additional voluntary contributions from area churches and individuals. They received donations from as far away as California.<sup>24</sup>

This new joint activity served several purposes. Besides being an outreach to Afro-Americans, there was special focus on addressing misconceptions about Christian Science within the Central Area community, an issue seen as urgent, perhaps a response to public criticism. The Reading Room would also serve as a bridge between the Central Area and other districts of Seattle that were predominately white, and in fact, at that time, many were exclusively white. The Central Area staff would attend quarterly meetings with the staff from all the other area Reading Rooms. Members from all the area churches were encouraged to visit the Central Area Reading Room.

The organizers had initially wanted the Reading Room to be on 23<sup>rd</sup> Street at East Union or Jackson Street, near the East Madison “Y” cultural center. The actual location on 34<sup>th</sup> Avenue was also a community center of sorts, a stronghold for the Black Power movement because the Black Panther Party had its first office there. However, the Black Panthers moved their office just before the Christian Science Reading Room arrived. The Reading Room had its grand opening on Sunday, February 1, from 1:00 and 7:00PM. It was a very busy day. It was estimated that more than 500 people visited the open house.<sup>25</sup>

This reading room had all the conventional elements of the storefront model established as the new norm by the early 1950s. Its quiet study room was perched above the retail space on the second floor in a room that doubled as a committee room and a reference library for bound volumes of *Christian*

*Science Journals* and *Sentinels*. They also wanted to try some new innovations. They wanted to use the latest technology for audio to create listening stations in the upper room. They had a free literature distribution box outside and a special table for children in the sales area. Youths, from 10 to 15, were frequent visitors to the Reading Room. A new children's book from the Christian Science Publishing Society, *Travis Talks With God* by Jack Thornton was displayed in the store window and was especially popular with children visitors.<sup>26</sup>

There was some concern among the staff that they might not be able to engage with everyone in the area because of strongly held opposing religious doctrines, but this proved not to be the case. Soon after they opened, a church of another denomination invited three of the Christian Scientists to hold a two-week Bible Class for children there, an activity apparently inspired and initiated by Christian Science practitioner Martha W. Smith. As reported in one of their first newsletters to the supporting churches, most of the children in the Bible class later visited the Christian Science Sunday School and the Pastor of the church attended a Wednesday evening testimony meeting at First Church. Later, staff reported visits to the Reading Room by two ministers from other Christian denominations. One minister shared that he had read some of Mary Baker Eddy's writings in his youth and he acknowledged that he frequently used her ideas in his sermons. Over time, the derision the Reading Room staff had initially felt from neighboring businesses softened into a more friendly relationship. Christian Science was starting to be a welcome presence in the community.<sup>27</sup>

To get this new venture up and running, Milton Simons, as Chair and Librarian, had been spending six hours a day on the Reading Room, on top of running his art gallery, teaching art, performing music, and other ventures. The Central Area Reading Room was established with a competent staff team with the financial support of twelve churches. The newest joint activity of the Churches of Christ, Scientist, Seattle, was up and running. They could now focus on their mission, along the lines of what Reverend Mary Baker Eddy had written seventy years earlier in a poem entitled "The New Century":

'Tis writ on earth, on leaf and flower:  
Love hath one race, one realm, one power.  
Dear God! how great, how good Thou art  
To heal humanity's sore heart;  
To probe the wound, then pour the balm —  
A life perfected, strong and calm.  
The dark domain of pain and sin  
Surrenders — Love doth enter in,  
And peace is won, and lost is vice:  
Right reigns, and blood was not its price.

Sallie Letterlough, who became a dedicated Christian Scientist through a similar jointly-supported outreach effort in Washington D.C. during this same time said decades later, "I often think this may have been one of the finest hours of brotherhood and fellowship."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *"I am helping them"*: Eddy, Mary Baker, "Second Sunday Service, December 12, 1897," *My*, 147; "Items of Interest," *CSS*, Jan. 18, 1900; *"The disseminators of such literature"*: "Kind Words for Our Literature," *CSS*, Apr. 6, 1899; E.W.H., *"This account is a strong hint"*: "Work Among the Colored People," *CSS*, May 25, 1889; Perry: "Were African Americans involved in the early history of Christian Science?" MBEL blog, undated. Accessed Apr. 30, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> *"O, glorious Truth that makes us free"*: Marietta T. Webb, "The Protecting Power of Truth," *CSS*, Nov. 23, 1899.

<sup>3</sup> *For more than four years*: Grace Kennedy, *CSS*, Mar. 8, 1919.

<sup>4</sup> "Signs of the Times," *CSS*, July 17, 1926; *"The attitude of the church"*: "Christian Science," *Ebony*, Nov. 1950, 60; "Were African Americans involved in the early history of Christian Science?" MBEL blog post, undated, accessed Apr. 30, 2019; Jeremy Carper, "Black History Month: Toward the Undivided Human Family," *CSS*, Feb. 27, 2006.

<sup>5</sup> "Women of History: Lulu Knight," MBEL blog post, undated, accessed Oct. 30, 2017; "Christian Science," *Ebony*, Nov. 1950; "Among the Churches," *CSS*, Jan. 3, 1914; "Progress of Christian Science," *CSJ*, Apr. 1917.

<sup>6</sup> "Women of History: Lulu Knight," MBEL blog post, undated, accessed Oct. 30, 2017; *Eleven*: "Christian Science," *Ebony*, Nov. 1950.

<sup>7</sup> "Church Dedications: Houston, Texas, Sixth Church (Colored)," *CSS*, Apr. 20, 1946; *Cornerstone engraving*: photo by David Bush, Greater Houston Preservation Alliance, 2006, "Sixth Church of Christ, Scientist," HoustonDeco.org; "Church Dedications: Tulsa, Oklahoma (Fifth Church)," *CSS*, Oct. 13, 1951; "Church Dedications: Los Angeles, California (Thirty-ninth Church, Colored)," *CSS*, Dec. 17, 1949; Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "100 Amazing Facts About the Negro: What is Juneteenth?" PBS.org blog, undated. Accessed Feb. 12, 2020.

<sup>8</sup> Mary Baker Eddy, *S&H*, 225-227.

<sup>9</sup> *"quiet dignity" "Frowning upon the old"*: "Negro Recruits to Faith Like Quiet Dignity and Simplicity," *Ebony*, Nov. 1950; "Christian Science," *Ebony*, Nov. 1950; "More Than 100 Negroes Work At Big Boston Center," *Ebony*, Nov. 1950.

<sup>10</sup> *"We were not heroes at that time"*: "'A God-Chosen Opportunity,': The Story of Melba Beals and 'The Little Rock Nine'," *CSS*, Mar. 31, 2003.

<sup>11</sup> *"This is nothing dramatic" "surrounded by love"*: "Farewell to an Astronaut," *Ebony*, Feb. 1968, p. 91-92; Walter Leavy, "A Historic Step into Outer Space," *Ebony*, Nov. 1983, Guion Bluford, "My First Flight Into Space," *CSS*, Sept. 16, 2002.

<sup>12</sup> *1200*: Mumford, Esther Hall, *Seattle's Black Victorians, 1852-1901*, (Seattle: Ananse Press, 1980), 11.

<sup>13</sup> *"Chief Si'ah"*: Gregory Scruggs, "Seattle was named after a tribal chief. Now his descendants own less than an acre of city land," *Washington Post*, Oct. 11, 2019; Jennifer Ott, Dec. 7, 2014, HistoryLink.org Essay 10979.

<sup>14</sup> *400*: Quintard Taylor, *The Forging of a Black Community: Seattle's Central District from 1870 through the Civil Rights Era* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), 13, 35; Esther Hall Mumford. *Seattle's Black Victorians 1852-1901* (Seattle: Ananse Press, 1980).

<sup>15</sup> *population*: Taylor, 244.

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<sup>16</sup> “Seattle’s special brand” “vaguely acknowledged”: Rillmond Schear, “The World That Whites Don’t Know,” *Seattle Magazine*, Oct. 1965, p. 19, 16; “Nothing more” “considerable psychological impact”: Rillmond Schear, “How the Ghetto Looks from the Inside,” *Seattle Magazine*, Nov. 1965, p. 44 .

<sup>17</sup> Taylor, 292. FN 84, 85.

<sup>18</sup> “a partial atonement”: Louis Garinger, “‘Reparations’: Churches Examine Black Manifesto,” *CSM*, June 3, 1969, 10; “armed confrontation and long years”: Louis Garinger, “Black Manifesto demands on American churches explained,” *CSM*, June 5, 1969, 5; “Rising 540 Feet From Bedrock,” *CSM*, May 31, 1969, 9; Louis Garinger, “‘Reparations’: Churches Examine Black Manifesto,” *CSM*, June 3, 1969, 10; “vast resources”: George M. Collins, “Blacks Demand Reparations of Christian Science Meeting,” *Boston Globe*, June 3, 1969, 1, 14;

<sup>19</sup> “on the American church” “For too long, religious institutions”: Merelice Kundratis, “Black group in Boston lists church demands,” *CSM*, May 31, 1969; “Church calls for spiritual consecration,” *CSM*, June 3, 1969, 1, 7; “to take the matter into their hearts” “The churches and synagogues of America”: Lansing R. Shepard, “Church confrontation continues,” *CSM*, June 4, 1969, 4; Nell Gibson, “Challenging the Church: Reflections on the 1969 Black Manifesto,” Apr. 30, 2019, [WagingNonViolence.com](http://WagingNonViolence.com); “entered the auditorium”: “From the Directors,” *CSS*, June 4, 1990; “for years of slavery, racism, and death”: George M. Collins, “Blacks Demand Reparations of Christian Science Meeting,” *Boston Globe*, June 3, 1969, 14;

<sup>20</sup> Rev. Thomas Kilgore, Jr., “The Black Church: A Liberating Force For All America,” *Ebony*, Aug. 1970, 108; “Reparations Demanded in Church,” *ST*, June 3, 1969, 3; “Board Explains Position: Church Replies to Demands,” *CSM*, June 9, 1969, 5; “the reparations themselves”: Richard A. Nenneman, “Reparations issue,” *CSM*, June 9, 1969, 7; “continued to reverberate”: “From the Directors,” *CSS*, June 4, 1990;

<sup>21</sup> In the Board minutes of Fourth Church of Christ, Scientist, Seattle, there is mention of a board directive to their Literature Distribution Committee to add Garfield High School and Horace Mann School (both Central Area schools) to their regular distribution routes. (Board minutes, 04ChSea, Aug. 17, 1932. MBEL Box 40738 Folder 166017); In March 1925 Fourth Church of Christ, Scientist, Seattle, member Zora Reese briefly withdrew her membership and began forming a new Christian Science Society in Madison Park, for which she would be First Reader. There were letters between The Mother Church Department of Branches and Practitioners and the Fourth Church board, and Fourth Church apparently decided not to support the new local branch and Mrs. Reese immediately rejoined Fourth Church. The issues and reasons were not recorded in the board minutes. At the time residential racial covenants were starting to be firmly established and Madison Park was becoming a black area. It is possible Mrs. Reese’s initiative was an effort to form a black Christian Science church in Seattle. If a decision not to support such a church was made, it may have reflected a preference for racially mixed churches in Seattle. (Board minutes, 04ChSea, Mar. 2, May 4, May 29, 1925. MBEL Box 40737 Folder 164453)

<sup>22</sup> “all classes of people” “prevented by their circumstances”: “Notice of a New Departure,” *CSJ*, May 1889; “Event to Mark Opening of Reading Room,” *ST*, Jan. 31, 1970, 13; Lillian Britain, Clerk, First Church of Christ, Scientist, Seattle, to Tenth Church of Christ, Scientist, Seattle, Oct. 10, 1969. 01ChBurien; “Report of the Central Areas Reading Room,” Nov. 20, 1969; M. Ahswede, Central Area Christian Science Reading Room Policy Committee to Executive Boards, Churches of Christ, Scientist, Seattle, Nov. 2, 1970.

<sup>23</sup> “being surrounded by music”: Anne G. Todd, “Artists Realize Dream by Establishing Gallery,” *ST*, Mar. 27, 1960, 29; Marianne Hanson, “Milt Simons (1923-1973),” Nov. 12, 2012, [BlackPast.org](http://BlackPast.org); “I shred the canvas”: Anne G. Todd: “The Visual Arts: Peck Chosen to Set up Competition,” *ST*, June 5, 1960, 36; “Mixed-Media Show Opens

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Friday at U.W.," *ST*, May 25, 1969, 123; "One-Week Run for CASPA Show," *ST*, May 29, 1969, 15; "pioneer in education and the arts": Jean Batie, "Multi-Media Program Shows CASPA Talent," *ST*, June 4, 1969, 28; "'Y' Gallery Has Preview," *ST*, Feb. 6, 1966, 46; "*God's Word and the Fine Arts*": "Crises in World, Cities to Be Aired At Church Institute," *ST*, Aug. 10, 1968, 12; "Artists Support Cellar Gallery with Works and Money," *ST*, Sept. 27, 1959, 35; "I thought about it": Anne G. Todd, "Artists Realize Dream by Establishing Gallery," *ST*, Mar. 27, 1960, 29.

<sup>24</sup> "Report from the Central Area Reading Room," Nov. 20, 1969. 01ChBurien; Central Area Christian Science Reading Room Policy Committee to Executive Boards of Sustaining Churches, July 16, 1971. 01ChBurien.

<sup>25</sup> 500: "Central Area Reading Room News," Vol. 1. 01ChBurien.

<sup>26</sup> *Plan*: Policy Committee, "Committee for the Central Area Christian Science Reading Room," June 16, 1970. 01ChBurien; 1906: "Central Areas Christian Science Reading Room: News Letter," July and Aug. 1970. 01ChBurien.

<sup>27</sup> "Central Area Christian Science Reading Room: Fruitage" Feb, 1973. 01ChBurien; Bible class / youth visits: "Central Areas Christian Science Reading Room: News Letter," July and Aug. 1970. 01ChBurien; *Travis Talks With God*: "Central Area Christian Science Reading Room: Newsletter", Jan. 29, 1972. 01ChBurien; "Spring Quarter Fruitage Report, 1973, Central Area Christian Science Reading Room," 01ChBurien.

<sup>28</sup> *6 hours*: Martha W. Smith to Executive Boards of Sustaining Churches, Apr. 7, 1970. 01ChBurien; "'Tis writ on earth, on leaf and flower": Mary Baker Eddy, *Poems*, 22; "I often think this may have been": Sallie Letterlough, email correspondence, Feb. 1, 2020.