

The beginnings of Bethel

As told by Clifford Freeman Dixon

In 1895, I, Clifford Freeman Dixon, arrived in this city with my parents. Reverend S.S. Freeman was sent here from the California Conference to start the AME church as its pastor. He brought with him two daughters, Clifford and Ruth, and his wife, Lenora.

When we arrived there were the old pioneers, the Crawfords. Mr. Crawford was a ship caulker and he lived in the southwest part of Portland, which was most of the residential district of the so-called Blacks at the time. His daughter was named Hattie Redmond. She became soloist of the First Methodist Church of Portland, white.

There was Allen Flowers, who was a pioneer. Mr. Flowers came here as a cabin boy on a ship from San Francisco to Portland and he had made several trips into Portland as a young man. Seemingly he like it so his last trip into Portland by ship he jumped ship and ran up into the woods of the west side, which now is past Broadway. There was nothing but trees and whatever because Front Street was the only main street at that time, facing the Willamette River.

When the whistle blew to shove off and they had departed for California, he came back down out of the woods and began a livelihood. Just how long he lived in Portland that time as a young man I can't recall, but he finally went to Tacoma, Washington, where he met his wife Louisa Thatcher. They were married and returned to Portland and lived on Northeast Victoria Avenue. Victoria Avenue was named for Mother Flowers because she came from Victoria; she was of foreign-birth and she was given the honor. Victoria Avenue was and still is just two blocks long. The property that Father Flowers bought ran from Victoria to First Street, which is one block, and now across the street on First is the Baptist Church where Reverend Clow was once the pastor.

However, they turned those lots into a small farm and there they raised their boys in their younger days, who were: Lloyd, Ralph, Elmer, and Irvin. Mrs. Flowers, Louisa as we called her, raised these boys until around ten or twelve. They decided to buy a tract of land on Mt. Scott and Father Flowers owned twenty-five acres there, built a large two story home for his family. They raised a great deal of fruit such as berries, truck gardening and the boys helped to work.

Across the road from them was some land which Father Flowers leased and he leased this land to break wild horses, and that was his sons vocation. Many times Ralph and Lloyd would tell of their experiences in breaking horses. Ralph always was a daredevil. Time passed and the land was bought by a couple. This couple turned it into a cemetery which is now called Mt. Scott Cemetery. Then it became the business of putting the land in shape to become a cemetery. The couple were very, very close to the Flowers and spent much of their time visiting with Dad Flowers and family.

The boys began to grade the land and get it into shape. After a time it became a beautiful spot for the deceased.

Time passed and the Flowers began to come back to the city.

There was a Mr. Jenkins who owned the first church building at 13th and Northwest Everett, a Black man. There was no church edifice nor property owned at the time. Mr. Jenkins turned his building over to Reverend S.S. Freeman to start the First A.M.E. Church. At that time the Southern Pacific Railroad was the only transportation into Portland from California and the depot was down close into town. The old depot now is a shed on the west side of the Broadway Bridge.

Mr. Jenkins had a daughter who kept house for him. I would imagine she must have been pushing close to thirty years old, which we'd call an old maid. However, she met one of the railroad porters who ran in here and they fell in love. One Sunday on the porter's trip back to California, they married and Reverend Freeman married them. The man took his bride back to California on his trip south. Sunday night Mr. Jenkins daughter didn't show up so Mr. Jenkins called Reverend



REVEREND S. S. FREEMAN

Freeman telling him she was gone and asking if Reverend Freeman had seen her. "Oh, I married her and they left on his trip to California. He is a railroad porter." Now you remember, Mr. Jenkins owned the building that we worshipped in, which was a frame structure, and we lived in the rear in housekeeping rooms.

Mr. Jenkins was so angry over the news that the next day he padlocked the church to keep us from worshipping in or occupying it. So, Reverend Freeman had to get out and find a place to worship. This being a small congregation, Reverend Freeman had no money; the congregation had no money. So Reverend Freeman and his wife opened a boarding house for the railroad men, a two story building down close to the depot. They found this to be quite a lucrative business and began to earn a small amount of money. Young women of the congregation came to help my mother in serving the public and the old timers began to rally around Reverend Freeman, trying to find a place to worship.

Reverend Freeman found a building on 10th street, about three lots from the corner. It was a two story building with a basement. In those days basements were not excavated, so it was built on top of the ground and up to the second story. It formerly was a Japanese mission and they were ready to sell. So Reverend Freeman decided to take it over as a house of worship for the congregation of the AME Church. They would not sell the church for fear of not getting their money, so Reverend Freeman signed personally as owner of the property and made the down payment. There was a house in the rear and we lived in this four room house as a parsonage.

The old timers who worshipped in this church included Mr. Wisdom and Mrs. Minor, whose son was Eugene Minor. He and I attended school together in 95 and 96. Mrs. Rhodes and her daughter, Ora. The Logans, Mr. and Mr. John Logan. Mr. Logan was a Master Mason. He was not a member of the church but he was a well-wisher and helped in any way that he

could.

Mrs. Minor was very helpful in setting up women's aid in the church. Then there was Mrs. Mitchell, whose daughter was Pearl. Then came Mr. and Mrs. Fred Thomas who had two children, a daughter, Ulysses and a son, Freddy. Mr. Thomas was working at the Portland Hotel as the coffee maker for the hotel dining room. Then came Jesse Coles, who married Mr. Grayson and became a movie star in Los Angeles, California area. I think her picture was "Gone With The Wind."

There was a woman who was very kind to the family of Freemans, Mrs. Yates. Everyone called her "Mammie Yates." She lived down close where the Southern Pacific train came down 4th Street all the way to the depot. She must have lived between Fourth and Fifth street.

Mrs. Watson and a Mrs. Thomas's daughter, Bonnie, who is Dick Bogle's grandmother. Her son was Dick Jr. and he had a son who is now our TV commentator. Mrs. Watson's daughters Hazel, Lula, Kitty and Tuttie. I loved Tuttie because she was an invalid; a child raised in a wheelchair until her passing.

A Mrs. Miller, whose daughter was Pearl and later married Mr. Mitchell. Mr. Keene, whose daughter was Norma. He had an express business across from the old depot and did all of the hauling for various people and groups.

We had a Mrs. Dora Newman. She was a singer in the 90s. Sergeant and Mrs. Haskins and their daughter, Ida, who married my uncle Gus Freeman.

In 1898 the Golden West became a Hotel. This building was first known as Fremont House, a rooming house owned by whites, on the corner of 7th and Everett.

Reverend Freeman had retired in the early part of his ministry and went into business, starting a fancy grocery store on the corner of Seventh and Ankeny. Then as the population on the West Side grew, he moved the business to 7th and Davis, all the time moving his family right along with his business and occupying several rooms for a dwelling to raise his family. The Reverend Freeman was a very fine carpenter so it wasn't hard for him to make a way for his family's living.

I recall during the grocery business on Seventh and Davis having to drive the grocery wagon to deliver groceries at the Fremont House, now known as the Golden West. Our old horse named "Maude" wouldn't run if you put a firecracker under her, but she was gentle, evidently knowing a child was driving the wagon. I was around seven, eight or nine at the time.

We left the store business and my father, Reverend Freeman, went back into the ministry.

The Golden West Hotel was taken over by a man named W.D. Allen, who had a family of wife and sons. The hotel was beautifully run and well occupied. In those days the town was wide open and everything went to help bring the customers in.

Next door to the north was a little church building occupied by the First Baptist Church, Black. The church stayed there for several years. The first businesses that I recall are the fancy grocery store and the hotel at Seventh and Everett run by W.D. Allen, the First Baptist Church next door on Seventh, Mr. Keene across the street from the old depot, a railroad shed house now. The restaurant in the Golden West was Mr. Richardson, proprietor. It was on West Everett Street between Third and Fourth Streets, that Reverend Freeman started a restaurant, trying to raise enough money to support the First AME Church. So he opened up a restaurant in the area that was set aside for Black entrepreneurs. This district was known as a "sporting district" that occupied little one and two room houses for sporting women who solicited their trade.

Reverend Freeman, being a family man, moved his family to his place of business which was directly across the street from the Black saloon. There were rooms upstairs that he turned into a home for his wife and two daughters.

During the time between 1904 and 1908, which was