



A historic photo from 2014 shows members of the historic Vancouver Avenue First Baptist Church gathered for a group photo.

A National Landmark

Vancouver Avenue First Baptist named to historic register

Vancouver Avenue First Baptist Church has been officially listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The historically black congregation, located at 3138 N. Vancouver Ave., received word of the designation last week, a landmark status that helps preserve African American and civil rights history in Portland.

Raymond Burrell III, a historian and church leader, said it was great news to announce the historic listing and help preserve an important cultural and social institution in Portland and for the Albina and Eliot neighborhoods.

The church is steeped in Portland's black history. Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. visited the church with local black pastors during the height of the Civil Rights movement. It's one of the few remaining historic structures from a thoroughfare of Vancouver and Williams Avenues when the area was known as "Black Broadway," a hub of African American life and culture in Portland during the 1940s and 50s.

The church's roots began with the thousands of shipyard workers who came to the Northwest during World War II. Most of these new arrivals were South-

ern, many were black. Originally formed in Vancouver in 1944, the congregation moved to Portland one year later under the driving force of the Rev. Oliver Booker "O.B." Williams.

Under Rev. Williams and his wife Wila Ida Jackson-Williams, the next decade saw the church relocate no fewer than three times. As World War II ended, the housing projects closed, and the Church moved to Albina, eventually moving into its current location in 1951, a former Methodist Episcopal church built in 1909.

The church's most famous moment

came in 1961. As a central pillar of Portland's black community, the Urban League selected it as one of the stops on Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s national speaking tour. He met with the clergy and delivered a speech entitled "The Future of Integration" to the congregation, commenting that "if democracy is to live, segregation must die. Segregation is a cancer in the body of democracy that must be removed if the health of the nation is to survive."

Still a heavily segregated neighbor-

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