

Absalom Jones & Richard Allen

by the Very Rev. William B. Lane,
Interim Dean, Cathedral Church of
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Absalom Jones was born into slavery in Delaware in 1746 and later sold to a shop owner in Philadelphia. In 1774, he purchased his freedom. Richard Allen was born into slavery in Philadelphia in 1760 and later sold to a new owner in Dover, Delaware. He purchased his freedom in 1783 and eventually returned to Philadelphia. Both men became lay ministers at Saint George's Methodist Episcopal Church in that city.

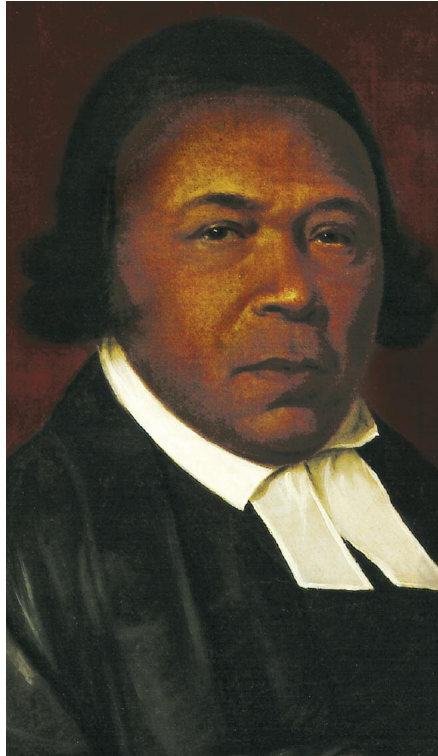
In 1786, the white members of Saint George's decided that the African-American members of the congregation must sit in the balcony, and Allen and Jones led a walkout from the church. Absalom Jones became an Episcopalian and was ordained and founded St. Thomas Episcopal Church in Philadelphia. Richard Allen wanted to remain in the Methodist tradition and founded the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Both men were active in the struggles against the evil of slavery and were founders of the Free African Society which assisted men and women coming from slavery to freedom.

The stories of Richard Allen and Absalom Jones are stories of faith, love, courage, and perseverance. These men are saints of American Christianity and admirable mentors for all of us.

Searching for Absalom Jones: A biography ... finally

by Jen Mason, editor

It's hard to believe that in all these years, no one has ever written a biography of this great man," said Mary Sewell-Smith, of the Historical Society of the African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas in Philadelphia. But thanks to

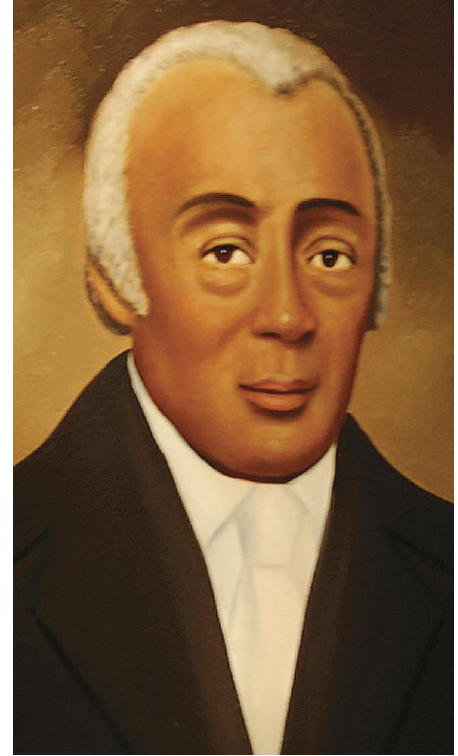


Portrait of Absalom Jones, 1810
by Raphaelle Peale (1774-1825)
Oil on paper mounted to board
30 x 25 in. (76.2 x 63.5 cm)
courtesy of Delaware Art Museum,
Gift of Absalom Jones School, 1971

the work of an Episcopalian in Lewes, this fact is becoming history as well.

It began a bit by chance. Betsey Farlow, a freelance writer and a member of St. Peter's, Lewes, entered a contest with the Delaware Art Museum to write stories for children inspired by the art. Children visiting the museum could then listen to the stories on their iPods as they viewed the work. There were 40 works from which to choose, and the museum chose 20 stories to record. Betsey was inspired by a portrait by Raphaelle Peale from 1810 titled *Portrait of Absalom Jones*. She knew she'd heard the name, but she knew nothing about him. She started doing some research, and the more she did, the more shocked she became that she hadn't heard more about this extraordinary man.

Betsey wrote her story, and it was chosen to be one of the 20 stories recorded (find a link to hear it on our website: www.DioceseofDelaware.net). But her exploration and her efforts only began there. She's now working with a research assistant (Margaret Beall, also of Lewes, who brings a background in



Portrait of Richard Allen
Image courtesy of Mother Bethel AME
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history) to build a full biography. The working title is *Searching for Absalom Jones*, and it is part biography and part creative non-fiction, with some reflections on what has been a remarkable research process worked in.

"The things that she is uncovering are amazing," said Sewell-Smith "Beyond our mission here at St. Thomas's Historical Society to preserve the legacy of our church, we find that our work is contributing greatly to the wider understanding of African-American history here on the east coast. Having a full biography of the Reverend Jones will be such a valuable contribution to that, and we're so excited by her work!"

Betsey's goal is to create a book that is less academic or scholarly and more accessible and appealing to the general public. "I want to write something that really helps people get to know this important man."

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