Baltimore City Commission for Historical and Architectural Preservation

Landmark Designation Report August 13, 2013



Messiah English Lutheran Church

1025 S. Potomac Street Baltimore, Maryland

Significance Summary

Located on O'Donnell Square in Canton, Messiah English Lutheran Church has served an important religious and civic role in the area since it was founded in 1889. This English Lutheran church was established to serve the growing German community in Southeast Baltimore. It provided the congregation with a religious institution that conducted services and Sunday School in English, which helped its congregation assimilate into society at large, while also retaining their faith, culture, and social ties. The church has continued to serve Canton, providing leadership on community-wide issues. The Gothic Revival church is the congregation's second church building at this location, and was constructed by Jacob Peters in 1900.

This property is eligible for designation for its role in the history of Canton and for its architecture.

Property History

This property is located on the eastern end of O'Donnell Square, in the heart of the Canton community. When the church was first established, it was located across the street from the Canton Market. The property is bound by O'Donnell Street to the north and south, S. Potomac Street to the west, and the Enoch Pratt Free Library Branch No. 4 to the east.

The church began first as a Sunday School, established by Rev. Ephraim H. Felton in September 1889 in King's Hall, a community building at O'Donnell and Patuxent Streets. Less than two months later, Messiah English Lutheran Church was chartered with seventy-five members on November 10, 1889, Martin Luther's birthday. The church was founded under the direction of General Synod Baltimore Lutheran Church Extension Society, which established English Lutheran Churches in Baltimore in neighborhoods with growing German populations.

On December 3, 1889, the congregation was given a permit to erect a brick church building on the east side of Potomac Street, across from the Canton Market Space. A month later, on January 9, 1890, the church leased that lot from the Canton Company. The congregation quickly erected a simple one story brick church by February 1890. The church was incorporated on that same day, and was accepted into the Lutheran Synod in October 1890. Within a year, an annex was constructed onto the chapel to accommodate the fast-growing congregation and Sunday School. When it was founded, the church was financed by the Synod, but the church became financially self-sustaining within three years, due to its large congregation.

Within the decade, the congregation had again rapidly outgrown its quarters. In January 1899, the Lutheran Church Extension Society decided to construct a much-needed new church building for Messiah English Lutheran Church.⁸

Prior to beginning construction on the new church, the congregation purchased the land that they were leasing from the Canton Company on March 1, 1900 for \$1,750.⁹ The present church was constructed adjacent to the original brick church, which no longer exists today. The groundbreaking for the present church occurred on April 9, 1900, and the cornerstone was laid on May 6.¹¹ This cornerstone has two dates: 1890 for the original church, and 1900 for the current church.

The two-story church is 50 ft wide by 75 feet long, with the Sunday School and library located in the first floor basement, and the main auditorium in the second floor. The building cost \$16,000, and was constructed by local contractor and builder Jacob Peters and the Port Deposit granite was supplied by Charles E. Ehman. The "handsome stone edifice" was dedicated on November 18, 1900. In 1900, the church had a congregation of 400 people, and the Sunday School had an enrollment of 500. The new church could seat close to 500. The new church could seat close to 500.

In 1906, the interior of the church was completely remodeled and the walls frescoed for a cost of \$400.¹⁶ In 1909, the congregation celebrated paying off the mortgage of the church, as well as its 20th anniversary.¹⁷

The growth of the church in the early 20th century required a building expansion in the 1920s. In 1925, a large brick educational building was constructed on the site of the 1890 chapel and annex. The building cost \$54,000 and housed half of the Sunday School, a gymnasium and a stage. ¹⁸

By the late 20th century, the congregation had shrunk, and the church couldn't afford to maintain its school building. After holding meetings with the community, the congregation decided to convert the annex building into affordable housing for seniors, thus enabling local elders to continue to live in the community. In 1991, Messiah English Lutheran Church sold the school building to O'Donnell Square Limited Housing Partnership, and the conversion into senior housing was completed in 1994. ¹⁹ The parcel was subdivided, and the school building gained its own separate address and parcel.

In 2013, Messiah English Lutheran Church has engaged the Neighborhood Design Center to make the façade of the church more inviting. The congregation has also sought this landmark designation to ensure that the church and its legacy will be preserved.

The church contributes to the Canton National Register Historic District.

Contextual History

Baltimore has a long and rich German and Lutheran heritage, starting in the eighteenth century with the establishment of Zion Lutheran Church. During the mid-nineteenth century, Germans were one of the largest immigrant groups in the city, with the German-born population of Baltimore peaking in 1890 – concurrent with the establishment of Messiah English Lutheran Church.²⁰

English Lutheran churches were an innovation that was first established in Baltimore. In 1823, members of Zion Lutheran Church formed First English Lutheran Church, which conducted its services and lessons in English instead of German. The First English Lutheran Church (and later Lutheran Church Extension Society of Baltimore City) then established other English Lutheran churches and Sunday Schools in the city. The General Synod of the Lutheran Church recognized the importance of organizing English churches for the "rapid[ly] Anglicizing young people". These churches, where the English language was used in the service and in the Sunday School, were viewed as a crucially important way to keep young people in the Lutheran faith and retain their German culture, but also help them be successful in America by teaching them English. Messiah English Lutheran Church was one of several congregations established by the Extension Society in developing Baltimore neighborhoods with German immigrant populations. ²²

The stone church was built as a memorial to the late Rev. Dr. John G. Morris, who died in 1895.²³ Morris was a prominent Lutheran minister who was the first pastor of the First English Lutheran Church, and later was the pastor at the Third English Lutheran Church in Baltimore. He had also served as the president of the Maryland Historical Society, was the first librarian of the Peabody Institute, and was an expert on the Lutheran Church and Germans in Maryland.²⁴

From the late 18th to the late 19th century, the Canton Company owned thousands of acres in what is now Southeast Baltimore. By the 1870s, Canton had grown into a city in its own right, and was "a prime example of paternal industry... They gave land for churches and built recreation halls. Stable residential patterns in Canton and Highlandtown proved how attached people had grown to their work and community....Locals consisted heavily of foreign-born in 1880, and they placed a high value on family and church."²⁵

There was a large German population in Canton in the late 19th century, comprised largely of immigrants. ²⁶ The first German church was established in Canton in 1843, the German United Evangelical Church. By the late 19th century, German immigrants and their children were assimilating into American culture, and English Lutheran churches played an important role in helping German Americans assimilate while also retaining their German heritage and Lutheran faith. Many members, particularly younger members, left the German United Evangelical Church to attend Messiah English Lutheran Church when it opened. ²⁷

Rev. Ephraim H. Felton founded the church and served as the church's pastor for the first 28 years until his death in 1915. He was one of the most beloved Lutheran pastors in the city, and an important figure in southeast Baltimore. He was also a member of the Lutheran Church Extension Society of Baltimore City, and even served as president in 1894. In 1895, Rev. Felton contested libel published in the *Baltimore Sun* about Canton and its citizens. His sermon from the pulpit dispelling the myths and sharing the truth about the industrious, faithful citizens of Canton was also published in the *Sun*. He was a champion for the neighborhood. An even served as president in the sun and its citizens.

The architect was not reported in any of the coverage about the church, so it is possible that the builder Jacob Peters designed the church, or a member of the congregation, or the design was based off of a pattern book. The builder, Jacob Peters was a prominent businessman in Highlandtown and Canton. He had a successful business as a contractor, building structures that ranged from dwellings to religious buildings, to schools to industrial buildings across the city, Maryland, and out of state. Most of the projects that he built were designed by an architect, and he worked with several prominent ones. His buildings include Emmanuel Evangelical English Lutheran Church in Highlandtown, a synagogue for Aitz Chaim Hebrew Congregation in Jonestown (now demolished), New Christ Methodist Protestant Church (now Fulton Baptist Church) on North Avenue, and the Cape Fear lighthouse in North Carolina (now demolished).³¹ Peters was also very involved in the business community in the city, and served as the treasurer of the Business Men's Association of Highlandtown, as the Vice President of the Highlandtown Improvement Association, and was a member of the Builder's Exchange Committee following the Great Baltimore Fire in 1904.³² He also helped establish Highland Lodge No. 184, Ancient, Free, and Accepted Masons of Baltimore County. 33

Messiah English Lutheran Church played a very important role in the Canton community. This church in particular served as stepping-stone for German immigrants and German Americans to adapt to life in America. Pastor Lee Hudson conducted oral history interviews with the oldest members of the church in honor of the church's centennial in 1989, and learned how the social ties established at the church ran through the rest of the community in Canton. Many members of the church got their first jobs while in high school, typically through someone that they knew from church. The majority of the congregation worked for one of the many factories and industries in Canton as middle managers. There were high levels of home-ownership among the congregation — which was a trend mirrored across the Canton community and encouraged by the Canton Company and other large businesses.³⁴

The church participated in social events in the community, holding carnivals, lawn fetes, bazaars and oyster suppers individually and as part of the larger Lutheran Church Extension Society.³⁵ In the early 20th century, the church had several service organizations, and also was engaged in social clubs and events, such as hosting a boy scout troop, an amateur baseball team, and holding lectures and plays.³⁶ The church had a close relationship with other Protestant churches in Southeast Baltimore, participating in a Sunday-School Institute with other churches, revivals, and more.³⁷

The Lutheran faith has a close association with social democracy, and for that reason, was fertile ground for union organizing and the advancement of worker's rights.³⁸ This was particularly significant in the industrial community of Canton. Members of various unions and protective organizations attended the church in large groups during the early 20th century, such as the Retail Clerks' Protective Association.³⁹

Messiah English Lutheran Church, along with a few other churches in the Canton community was very active in organizing the community during the Road War of the 1960s. The planned highway project would have destroyed the waterfront in the

neighborhoods of Fells Point, Canton, and Federal Hill. Due largely to the efforts of Baltimore citizens, the project was thwarted, and these communities have become some of Baltimore's strongest neighborhoods in recent years.

Beginning in the mid 20th century, many members of the church moved further north in the city, to Ednor Gardens, Coldstream Homestead Montebello, and other neighborhoods. However, these steadfast members remained involved in the church.

The church has served generations of citizens in Canton and Baltimore as a whole for over 130 years. Throughout the 20th century, it played an important spiritual and civic role in the Canton community. The property is listed on the National Register as a contributing property to the Canton National Historic District.

Architectural Description

The property is comprised of the two-story stone church at 1025 S. Potomac Street. The façade faces east towards S. Potomac Street. Although it was described as Romanesque in the *Sun* when it was constructed, the building is actually Gothic Revival in style. The church is constructed with square-cut quarry faced Port Deposit granite laid in irregular courses.

The front-gabled west façade is five bays wide, with the central three bays projecting slightly. The façade is framed by two buttressed pilasters on either end. The cornerstone of the church is located on the southern pilaster. The far left and far right bays both feature a gothic arched window on the first floor and a circular stained glass window on the second floor. The central three bays feature steps rising to the central lancet arch doorway flanked by two gothic arch windows on the first floor. On the second floor above a slightly projecting beltcourse is a large gothic arch window framed by two more gothic arched windows, above which is another beltcourse, topped by a large circular stained glass window in the clerestory. A copper cross sits atop the peak of the roof, and four columns pierce the roofline at the ends of the building and between the outer bays, and the columns are topped with copper pinnacles. The façade also has a decorative copper vergeboard on the gable. All of the gothic arched windows in the building have stained glass except for the arched transom over the doorway of the entrance.

The north and south elevations are five bays wide, with each bay flanked by small buttresses. One the north elevation, the first floor of each bay holds a 1/1 sash window, and the second floor holds a gothic arch window, topped by a simple cornice. The roof has two eyebrow windows above the second and fourth bays. The south elevation is identical to the north, except that there are doors on the first floor in the second and fourth bays.

The east elevation abuts the 1925 brick addition, which is located on a separate parcel and is not covered under this designation.

Staff Recommendations

The property meets CHAP Landmark Designation Standards:

- B. A Baltimore City Landmark may be a site, structure, landscape, building (or portion thereof), place, work of art, or other object which:
 - 1. Is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of Baltimore history;
 - 3. Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represents the work of a master, or that possesses high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.

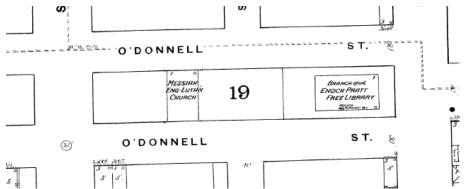
Located on O'Donnell Square in Canton, Messiah English Lutheran Church has served an important religious and civic role in the area since it was founded in 1889. This English Lutheran church was established to serve the growing German community in Southeast Baltimore. English Lutheran churches were first founded in Baltimore and adopted nationally. It provided the congregation with a religious institution that conducted services and Sunday School in English, which helped its congregation assimilate into society at large, while also retaining their faith, culture, and social ties. The church has continued to serve Canton, providing leadership on community-wide issues. The Gothic Revival church is the congregation's second church building at this location, and was constructed by Jacob Peters in 1900.

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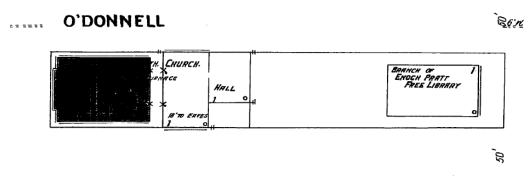
Locator Map



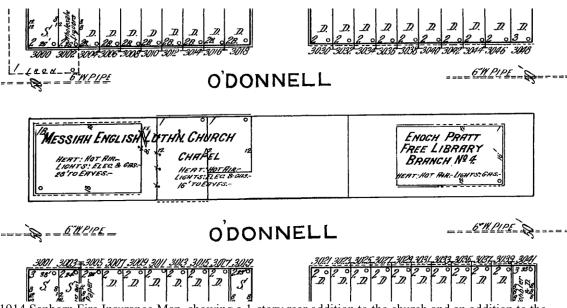
Historic Maps



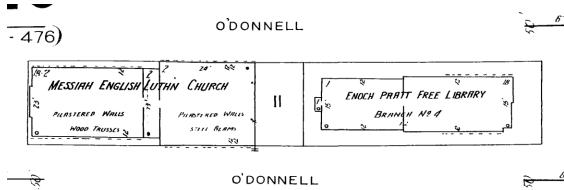
1890 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, depicting the first church (now gone) as well as the Enoch Pratt Library Branch. (Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps 1890, Vol. 1, 1890, Sheet 32a)



1902 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, depicting the new church in black, as well an addition made to the original church (Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps 1901-1902, Vol. 4, 1902, Sheet 424)



1914 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, showing a 1-story rear addition to the church and an addition to the parcel on the rear. (Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps 1914-1915, Vol. 5, 1914, Sheet 465)



1936 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, showing the new addition on the rear. (Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps 1928-1936, Vol. 5, 1936, Sheet 523)

Images



Photo of the first (now demolished) brick church building, circa 1890. Courtesy of Messiah English Lutheran Church.

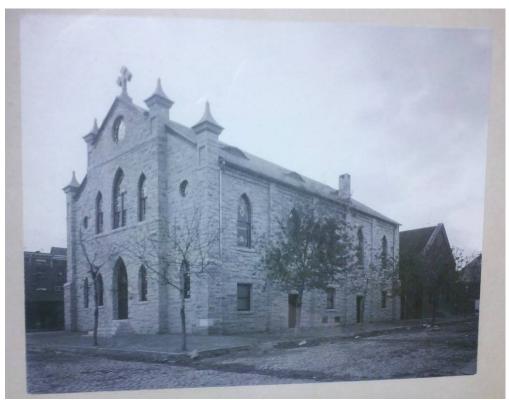
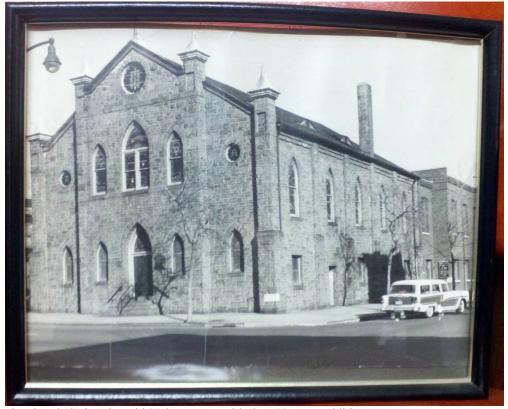


Photo of the current church, with the first (now demolished) brick church in the rear, circa 1900. Courtesy of Messiah English Lutheran Church.



The church during the mid 20th century, with the 1925 rear addition.

Current Photos



View of the church from O'Donnell Square.



View of the church from the north.



The cornerstone of the church.

¹ "CORNERSTONE TO BE LAID: That Of Messiah Lutheran Church To Be Put In Possition Tomorrow", The Sun (1837-1987); May 5, 1900; ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1987), pg. ² "Conference of Charities and Corrections" The Sun (1837-1987); Jan 27, 1890; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1987), pg. 6 ³ "NEWS OF THE CHURCHES: An Annex to a Madison Avenue Edifice -- The Ministers' Meetings" The Sun (1837-1987); Dec 3, 1889; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1987), pg. 4 "CORNERSTONE TO BE LAID: That Of Messiah Lutheran Church To Be Put In Possition Tomorrow" ⁵ "Effect of la Gippee on Church Choirs", *The Sun (1837-1987);* Jan 10, 1890; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1987), pg. 6; "THE LUTHERAN SYNOD: Additional Aid for Young Men--Messiah Church Admitted", Correspondence of the Baltimore Sun, The Sun (1837-1987); Oct 9, 1890; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1987), pg. 4 ⁶ "Messiah Lutheran Church Traces History Back to 1889" *The Post*, Nov. 27, 1931. Enoch Pratt Free Library Maryland Room Vertical Files ⁷ "SUBURBAN IMPROVEMENTS: Houses at Canton and Highlandtown Going Up by Blocks and" 8 "MEMORIAL TO DR. J. G. MORRIS: The Lutheran Church Extension Society Resolves To Build" The Sun (1837-1987); Jan 31, 1899; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1987), pg. 7 ⁹ "WOMAN'S MISSION WORK", *The Sun (1837-1987)*; Mar 7, 1900; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1987), pg. 8; Deed from The Canton Company of Baltimore to Messiah English Lutheran Church, March 1, 1900, Baltimore City Superior Court (Land Records), Liber RO 1834, Folio 10 "Trouble About His Marriage License" *The Sun (1837-1987);* Mar 27, 1900; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1987), pg. 8 ¹¹ "Funeral Of Mr. W. A. Tracey", *The Sun (1837-1987)*; Apr 10, 1900; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1987), pg. 7; "CORNERSTONE TO BE LAID: That Of Messiah Lutheran Church To Be Put In Possition Tomorrow" 12 "CORNERSTONE TO BE LAID: That Of Messiah Lutheran Church To Be Put In Possition Tomorrow" 13 "NEW CHURCH AT CANTON: The Messiah English Lutheran Is Dedicated A ..." The Sun (1837-1987); Nov 19, 1900; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1987), pg. 7; "CORNERSTONE TO BE LAID: That Of Messiah Lutheran Church To Be Put In Possition Tomorrow" ¹⁴ "NEW CHURCH AT CANTON: The Messiah English Lutheran Is Dedicated A ..."; Proceedings of the Eightieth Annual Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Maryland (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1899) Google E-book. Pg. 10, 82nd convention. ¹⁵ "CORNERSTONE TO BE LAID: That Of Messiah Lutheran Church To Be Put In Possition Tomorrow" ¹⁶ "MESSIAH CHURCH REOPENS: Repairs Have Been Made To The Interior Of The Building", *The Sun* (1837-1987); Feb 12, 1906; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1987), pg. 14 ¹⁷ "Burglars Took Breakfast", *The Sun (1837-1987)*; Dec 6, 1909; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1987), pg. 14 ¹⁹ Deed from Messiah English Lutheran Church to O'Donnell Square Limited Housing Partnership, December 27, 1991, Baltimore City Circuit Court (Land Records), Liber SEB 3065, Folio 476-477.

²⁰ Maryland State Archives, "Maryland at a Glance – Historical Chronology" Accessible at:

http://msa.maryland.gov/msa/mdmanual/01glance/chron/html/chron18.html#1800

¹⁸ "Messiah Lutheran Church Traces History Back to 1889"

²¹ "CHURCH EXTENSION: Meeting of the Lutheran Society Held at Second English Church—Officers" The Sun (1837-1987); Jan 26, 1897; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1987), pg. 7; Rev. Lee Hudson, personal communication, June 18, 2013 ²² Messiah Evangelical Lutheran Church, "History of Messiah" Available at:

http://messiahodsq.com/about-us.html

²³ "MEMORIAL TO DR. J. G. MORRIS: The Lutheran Church Extension Society Resolves To Build"; "REV. DR. JOHN G. MORRIS: He was Believed to Be at an Early Hour This Morning", The Sun (1837-1987); Oct 8, 1895; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1987), pg. 10

²⁴ "REV. DR. JOHN G. MORRIS: He was Believed to Be at an Early Hour This Morning"

²⁵ George Washington Howard, *The Monumental City: Its Past History and Present Resources* (Baltimore: J.D. Ehlers & Co, 1873) pg 769. Available as a Google book; Robert J. Brugger, *Maryland, A Middle Temperament: 1634-1980* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), pg. 352.

²⁶ Norman G. Rukert, *Historic Canton: Baltimore's Industrial Heartland...and its people* (Baltimore: Bodine and Associates, 1978), p. 60 and 64.

²⁷ Pastor Lee Hudson, personal communication, June 18, 2013; "CORNERSTONE TO BE LAID: That Of Messiah Lutheran Church To Be Put In Possition Tomorrow"

²⁸ "PASTOR DIES AT WORK: Rev. Ephraim Felton, Founder Of Messiah English ...", *The Sun (1837-1987)*; Dec 21, 1915; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1987), pg. 14
²⁹ "LUTHERAN GROWTH: Aid which the Extension Society Has Given to Congregations", *The Sun (1837-1987)*; Feb 7, 1895; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1987), pg. 8
³⁰ "CANTON VINDICATED: Rev. Ephraim H. Felton Defends Its People and Institutions", *The Sun (1837-1987)*; Mar 18, 1895; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1987), pg. 10
³¹ Engineering World: A Weekly Technical Journal of Civil, Mechanical, Electrical, Mining and Architectural Engineering and Construction, Volumes 1-3, (Chicago, The Engineering World Publishing Company, 1905-1907) Vol II, No. 3, page 308. Available as a Google e-book; "Suburban Miscellany", *The Sun (1837-1987)*; Nov 21, 1900; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1987), pg. 7; "A New Synngogue", *The Sun (1837-1987)*; May 2, 1896; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1987), pg. 10; "DEAL ON EUTAW PLACE: Warren N. Lancaster's Former Home Deeded To T. ..." *The Sun (1837-1987)*; Jun 28, 1910; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1987), pg. 4 "Charge And Counter-Charge", *The Sun (1837-1987)*; Dec 3, 1901; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1987), pg. 8

³² "Highlandtown Business Men", *The Sun (1837-1987);* Apr 21, 1896; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1987), pg. 6; "Highlandtown Improvement", *The Sun (1837-1987);* Jan 5, 1899; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1987), pg. 6; Carpentry and Building Vol. 26, 1904 (New York: David Williams Company, 1904), August 1904, pg239. Available as a Google e-book. ³³ "Broke Through The Ice", *The Sun (1837-1987);* Dec 30, 1903; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1987), pg. 7

³⁴ Pastor Lee Hudson, personal communication, June 18, 2013

³⁵ "NEWS OF THE CHURCHES: Southern Baptists' Convention In This City Next ...", *The Sun (1837-1987);* Sep 4, 1909; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1987), pg. 9; "Other 10 -- No Title", *The Sun (1837-1987);* Jun 8, 1901; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1987), pg. 7; "READY TO COMPLETE DEAL", *The Sun (1837-1987);* Oct 24, 1902; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1987), pg. 7

³⁶ "Boy Scouts In Camp At Bengies", *The Sun (1837-1987);* Aug 29, 1917; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1987), pg. 14; "AMATEUR BAIL CLUBS", *The Sun (1837-1987);* Jun 8, 1908; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1987), pg. 10; "Other 23 -- No Title", *The Sun (1837-1987);* Apr 16, 1910; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1987), pg. 7; "Other 35 -- No Title", *The Sun (1837-1987);* Mar 12, 1911; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1987), pg. W2

³⁷ "SUNDAY-SCHOOL INSTITUTE: Joint Gathering of Canton, Orangeville and Highlandtown Churches", *The Sun (1837-1987);* Mar 15, 1894; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1987), pg. 8; "Trouble About His Marriage License", *The Sun (1837-1987);* Mar 27, 1900; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1987), pg. 8

³⁸ Pastor Lee Hudson, personal communication, June 18, 2013.

³⁹ "WILL ASK MORE PAY", *The Sun (1837-1987);* Nov 26, 1902; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1987), pg. 8