

Spruce St. Baptist Church Records

c.1939-2018

Collection Summary

Title: Spruce St. Baptist Church Records

Summary: A collection of event and service bulletins, newsletters, business documents, photographs, and news clippings detailing goings-on at the church through the last few decades, including events like homegoing services, musical performances, board meetings.

Physical Description: 14 Hollinger and 6 Half Hollinger boxes, 7.09 linear feet

Language: English

Stack Location: Archives II, Section A-17, shelves 9-11.

Repository: Metropolitan Government Archives of Nashville-Davidson County, 615 Church St., Nashville, TN 37219

Historical Note:

Recognized as the “Mother Church” of Afro-American churches in Nashville, Spruce St. Baptist Church was founded in 1841 after the Black members of the predominantly white First Baptist Church (at 7th Ave. and Broadway) were given permission to form their own separate congregation there. Nelson G. Merry, a manumitted enslaved person from Kentucky, was baptized in the white church in 1845 (after being “willed” to church as a sixteen-year-old). Eventually becoming the first ordained Black minister in Nashville in 1853, Merry served the First Colored Baptist Church from 1865 until his death.

The church itself went from an old schoolhouse at 21 North McLemore St. (now 9th Ave.) to a house on Pearl Street before finally settling permanently on Spruce Street (now 8th Ave.). After a devastating fire and disputes over the insurance proceeds in 1895, the congregation split—one part of the congregation sued to keep the name First Colored Baptist Church (now First Baptist Church Capitol Hill on Merry St.) while the other was granted the site of the old church on Spruce St. (in addition to much of the insurance payout). That congregation founded Spruce St. Baptist Church at 810 Cedar St. and are now located on 20th Avenue N. and Pearl St., and their motto remains: “to serve as a lighthouse drawing lost men to the arc of safety.” Spruce St. Baptist Church continues to its tradition of service and compassion in the community with outreach initiatives and non-profits committed to meeting the social, educational, and economic needs of families.

Scope and Contents of the Collection:

The Spruce St. Baptist Church Records contain hundreds of items collected by administrators and members of the church. The bulk of the collection is taken up with bulletins from Sunday Services for the past few decades as well as program from church’s regular and special events such as Deacons’ Day, Mothers’ Day, youth services, anniversaries, musical teas, and homecoming celebrations. A smaller portion of the collection is made up of news clippings about church happenings, photos from events, and records from the church’s business operations.

Index Terms:

Subjects:

African American Baptists

African American Churches
African American Baptists—History
African American Baptists—Southern States
National Baptist Convention of the United States of America
Christianity—United States
Church History—United States

Arrangement:

This collection is arranged into three series and includes correspondence, photographs, news clippings, printed materials, and bulletins from various events and services. Dates for these materials are mostly certain because of careful recordkeeping; however, not all items are dated.

The *programs* series documents events and services held at Spruce St. Baptist Church, and these include memorial and homegoing services, commemorations and celebrations, annual events held at the church. There are also a few bulletins collected from services at other churches. Please note: items in this series are not necessarily comprehensive. One should also consult the inventory list for specifics on types of events, names of congregants, and years.

The *ephemera* series contains handwritten notes, photographs of church members at events, and news clippings of church events and members' obituaries.

The *operations* series details business operations from the church. Items in this series include rosters and staff lists, budgets, contribution lists, strategic plans, board meeting minutes, and correspondence.

Contents Listing:

Box 1:

Folder 1: Programs—Event Bulletins

Folder 2: Programs—Event Bulletins

Folder 3: Programs—Event Bulletins

Box 2:

Folder 1: Programs—Memorial Bulletins, A

Folder 2: Programs—Memorial Bulletins, B

Folder 3: Programs—Memorial Bulletins, C

Folder 4: Programs—Memorial Bulletins, D

Box 3:

Folder 1: Programs—Memorial Bulletins, E-G

Folder 2: Programs—Memorial Bulletins, H

Folder 3: Programs—Memorial Bulletins, J

Box 4:

Folder 1: Programs—Memorial Bulletins, K-L

Folder 2: Programs—Memorial Bulletins, M

Folder 3: Programs—Memorial Bulletins, N-O

Folder 4: Programs—Memorial Bulletins, P

Box 5:

Folder 1: Programs—Memorial Bulletins, R

Folder 2: Programs—Memorial Bulletins, S

Folder 3: Programs—Memorial Bulletins, T

Box 6:

Folder 1: Programs—Memorial Bulletins, V-Y

Folder 2: Programs—Sunday Service Bulletins

Folder 3: Programs—Sunday Service Bulletins

Box 7:

Folder 1: Programs—Sunday Service Bulletins

Folder 2: Programs—Sunday Service Bulletins

Box 8:

Folder 1: Programs—Sunday Service Bulletins

Folder 2: Programs—Sunday Service Bulletins

Box 9:

Folder 1: Programs—Sunday Service Bulletins

Folder 2: Programs—Sunday Service Bulletins

Box 10:

Folder 1: Programs—Sunday Service Bulletins

Folder 2: Programs—Sunday Service Bulletins

Box 11:

Folder 1: Programs—Sunday Service Bulletins

Folder 2: Programs—Sunday Service Bulletins

Box 12:

Folder 1: Programs—Sunday Service Bulletins

Box 13:

Folder 1: Programs—Sunday Service Bulletins

Box 14:

Folder 1: Programs—Sunday Service Bulletins

Box 15:

Folder 1: Programs—Sunday Service Bulletins

Box 16:

Folder 1: Programs—Sunday Service Bulletins

Box 17:

Folder 1: Programs—Sunday Service Bulletins

Folder 2: Programs—Event Bulletins

Folder 3: Programs—Event Bulletins

Folder 4: Programs—Event Bulletins

Box 18:

Folder 1: Programs—Event Bulletins

Folder 2: Programs—Event Bulletins

Folder 3: Programs—Bulletins from Other Venues

Folder 4: Ephemera—Notes and Worksheets

Box 19:

Folder 1: Ephemera—News Clippings

Folder 2: Ephemera—Photos

Folder 3: Operations—Family Life Committee

Folder 4: Operations—Rosters and Directories

Folder 5: Operations—1999 Operational Plan

Folder 6: Operations—Newsletters

Box 20:

Folder 1: Operations—Meetings and Reports

Folder 2: Operations—Correspondence

Folder 3: Operations—Finances

Restrictions:

Restrictions on Access: In-library use only.

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Administrative Information:

Copyright: The Metropolitan Government Archives of Nashville-Davidson County retains intellectual property rights to this collection. Some restrictions may apply.

Provenance: Spruce St. Baptist Church

Processing Information: Processed by Jill E. Anderson, July 2025

Accruals: No further accruals expected.