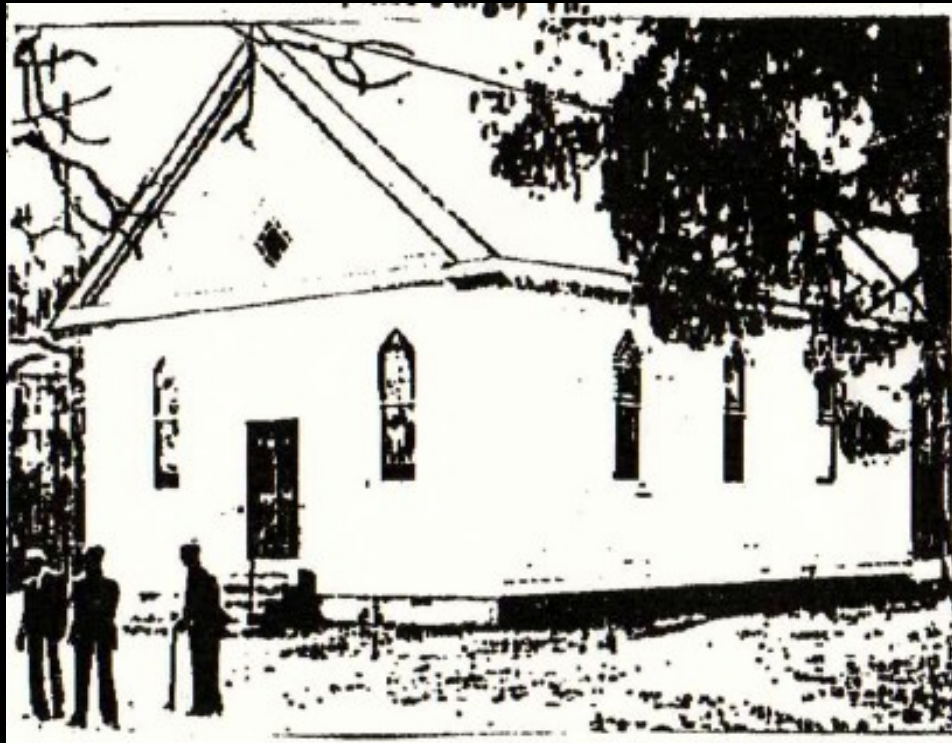


Keep the Doors Open: A Case for Preserving Individual and Institutional History

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Mount Pleasant Baptist Church
New Kent County, Virginia

INTRODUCTION

How does a 127-year old rural Black organization thrive in the 21st century?

Founded in 1889 by free Blacks and former slaves, this church witnessed both the beginning and ending of Jim Crow laws and the election of our nation's first Black president.

Today it struggles to keep its doors open.

A small congregation of mostly older adults who are direct descendants of the church's founders must find solutions that will preserve their stories and pass down their songs and traditions for younger generations to cherish.

RECOMMENDATIONS



Secure the Roots

Embrace the organization's unique history by recording, preserving, and sharing the stories of the founders and community.

Highlight relevant historical events that demonstrates the organization's ability to thrive in spite of the odds.

Build a Strong Core

Celebrate the multigenerational diversity within the organization. Discuss the needs of the often most vulnerable group and design strategies to build a supportive infrastructure.

Anticipate the Changing Seasons

Utilize institutional memory to find creative solutions that grow the organization and move it forward.

CONCLUSIONS



Mount Pleasant Baptist Church
Oral History Project

1. Mount Pleasant Baptist Church relies heavily on oral tradition in order to tell its 127-year-old story and that makes it vulnerable to lose it. Developing a 21st century knowledge management system will not only preserve that historical data but it will also serve as a reference when the leadership team strategizes for the future.
2. The act of listening to one another share stories about themselves and their ancestors reminded them of the church's profound significance to the community and reinforces a desire to work together to keep the doors open.
3. Using various disciplines like history, anthropology, psychology, and business to develop this capstone, my research brought me closer to my own story. The HDO program has afforded me the opportunity to learn and develop the skills needed to serve this organization as it will be a part of my life forever.

METHODS	TECHNIQUES USED
Snowball Sampling	Met a subset of Mt. Pleasant Baptist Church starting with a local historian and descendant of one of the church's founders then church elders and family members. Also met with scholars in Black history, historical preservationists, and archivists.
Observation	Attended Sunday services and Founder's Day Celebration, which included the traditional Sunday service plus a church picnic for family and friends.
Archival Materials	Collected and photocopied church documents including the original handwritten deed and surveyor's analysis; slave records; photographs; church bulletins; and the church's cemetery's map.
Oral History	Received approval from the university's Institutional Review Board. Audio and video recordings of the church's elders, pastor and those who wanted to talk about the church's significance. Transcribed, coded data, analyzed and wrote report.
Questionnaires	Surveyed those who are descendants of the founders or who have memories of Mt. Pleasant Baptist Church.
Literature Review	The history of the Black church pre and post Emancipation; Erikson's Psychosocial Developmental Theory; Knowledge Management; and Oral History.

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Want to learn more about the Mount Pleasant Baptist Church Oral History Project?



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