

ARMSTRONG STATE COLLEGE

ANDREW BRYAN

A Biographical Paper Submitted To Dr. Roger Warlick

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History Department

By

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Andrew Bryan was born around 1716 on a slave plantation near Goose Creek, South Carolina. Sometime around 1765 he was moved to Brampton Plantation located three miles west of Savannah, Georgia. In 1775 Jonathan Bryan, Andrew's master, gave him the use of a barn to use as a church. In 1788 a Reverend Abraham Marshall ordained Andrew and, with 45 newly baptized people, a church was formed with Andrew Bryan as its pastor. This was the beginning of the first black Baptist church in Savannah. In 1790 Andrew was able to purchase his freedom from William Bryan, son of Jonathan, for 50 pounds sterling. On October 6, 1812, at the age of 96, Andrew Bryan died and is now buried in Laurel Grove Cemetery.

In 1680 Joseph Bryan, along with a small group of Englishmen, landed at Port Royal, South Carolina. He and his wife had four children, among them Jonathan who was born in 1708. Joseph Bryan's plantation, Providence, was located near Yemassee, South Carolina, and next to Providence was Walnut Hill Plantation settled by his son Jonathan in 1734.<sup>1</sup> In 1716, eight years after the birth of Jonathan Bryan, on a slave plantation near Goose Creek, South Carolina, Andrew Bryan, son of an "African Negro" by the name of Caesar, was born. Seventy-two years later Andrew Bryan would become pastor of the first Negro Baptist Church in North America. It would be through the influence of Jonathan Bryan and the dogged determinism of Andrew Bryan that would make this possible.

It was during Andrew's youth that the Society of the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (S.P.G.) established its largest mission in America near Goose Creek, South Carolina. The society was chartered by King William III in order to care for British Colonists in religious matters, as well as to look after the religious needs of the Indians and slaves. The mission was headed by Reverend Samuel Thomas who reported that he had some "one thousand slaves under his spiritual care and that most of them were able to read and speak English."<sup>2</sup> It can be speculated that the

S. P. G. had an influence on Andrew Bryan due to the size of the mission, its work with the slaves, and its close proximity to Goose Creek.

It was sometime between 1716 and 1765 that Andrew became the property of Jonathan Bryan. It was in 1765 that Andrew was moved to Jonathan's plantation, Brampton, located on the banks of the Savannah River. Once an Indian settlement, as traces of pottery, arrowheads, and implements of shell and stone are still to be found, Brampton became one of the most productive rice plantations in the community. During the 1780's Brampton became the center of an evangelical movement that led to the organization of the first Negro Baptist Church in North America. This movement progressed, "not in the colonial house where eminent men probably met, but in the fields, barns, and huts that the slaves called home."<sup>4</sup>

George Liele, considered the first Negro Baptist preacher, was granted permission from his master to preach on the neighboring plantations. Liele held services in the Brampton plantation barn and it was there, in 1783, that he baptized Andrew Bryan, Bryan's wife Hannah and several other Brampton slaves.<sup>5</sup> This small group of slaves was the nucleus for the church that was to emerge at a later date. Their progress was slow as there was no regularity in their meetings and those that did attend were required to have "sunup to sundown travel tickets from their masters," as most of them were from the rice and indigo plantations along the Savannah River.<sup>6</sup> Finally, on January 20, 1788, at Brampton's barn, the Reverend Abraham Marshall, a white evangelist and pastor of Kiohee

Baptist Church of Columbia County, Georgia,<sup>7</sup> and Jesse Peters, a black preacher, baptized forty-five of Andrew's followers and organized them into a church. Marshall ordained Andrew Bryan and appointed him pastor of the earliest Negro Baptist Church in the United States, known as the First African Baptist Church.<sup>8</sup> Sampson Bryan, Andrew's

brother, became the church's first deacon. "The following is a list of officers from the organization of the church in January 1788 to June 1, 1888: Sampson Bryan, Somerset Bryan, Dick Nethercliff, Charles Golosh, Trim Campbell, Sandy Waters, Thomas Campbell, Josiah Floyd and Harrington Demere."<sup>9</sup> These were the first set of deacons who served under Andrew Bryan. The church membership, including pastor and deacons, were all slaves who were required to get permission to attend services. The church grew from an initial 67 members in 1788 to over 250 by 1790. By the year 1800 the church would claim over 800 members.<sup>10</sup> Due to the rapid growth of his church Andrew Bryan was permitted to conduct services in the village of Yamacraw on the property owned by Edward Davis. In an era of reconstruction following the Revolutionary War, a strong opposition, for fear of insurrection, to the assemblage of so many Negroes in town forced a return to Brampton as the center of worship. On charges of plotting rebellion, Andrew Bryan and his brother were arrested, beaten and thrown in jail.<sup>11</sup> While under this torture Andrew declared to his persecutors "that he rejoiced not only to be whipped, but would freely suffer death for the cause of Jesus Christ."<sup>12</sup> Andrew and his brother were examined by the Justices of the Inferior Court of Chatham County,

Georgia, Henry Osborne, James Habersham and David Montague, who found them <sup>13</sup> innocent and released them. Chief Justice Osborne also allowed Andrew and his followers to continue their worship services anytime between sunrise and sunset.<sup>14</sup> Worship services continued at the Brampton barn until around 1790 when a change of attitude in Savannah permitted blacks once more to gather in Yamacraw.<sup>15</sup>

Jonathan Bryan did not live to see the completion of Andrew's work for on March 13, 1788 the death of Jonathan Bryan was noted in the Georgia Gazette: "On Sunday last died at this place, near Savannah, in the eightieth year of his age, the Hon. Jonathan Bryan, Esq....." <sup>16</sup> When Jonathan's will was drawn up on December 15, 1783 <sup>17</sup> it listed Andrew's value at sixty pounds sterling and Andrew's Hannah, at thirty-five pounds sterling. <sup>18</sup> In 1790, William Bryan son and heir of Jonathan Bryan, sold Andrew Bryan his freedom for fifty pounds sterling, "acknowledging also the faithful services of my Negro fellow Andrew... give and grant the said Negro fellow Andrew his full and absolute manumission." (Chatham County Record, Book G, 1789-90.)<sup>19</sup>

On June 1, 1790 Andrew bought his first piece of property from Thomas Gibbons for twenty-seven pounds sterling. "This lot, [Lot No, 12, North Oglethorpe Ward), was conveyed in 1789 by Jacob C. Waldhaven to Thomas Gibbons, on June 1, 1790 to Andrew Bryan.<sup>20</sup> The lot measured 95 feet x 100 feet and was the site for Andrew's next church.

Andrew Bryan, now a free man, moved freely about town and "gathered toward him many influential friends; and, therefore,

through Messers. William Bryan and James Whitfield, as trustees, he purchased Lot No. 7, Middle Oglethorpe Ward for thirty pounds sterlig from Matthew and Catherine Mott.”<sup>21</sup> A family residence was built on this lot for Andrew Bryan and in 1795 a church was completed. The present day First Bryan Baptist Church stands on the parcel of land and it is “believed to be one of the oldest – perhaps the oldest – piece of property in the United States in continuous black ownership.”<sup>22</sup>

In May of 1790, the First African Baptist Church was admitted into the old Georgia Baptist Association at its session at Brier Creek, Burke County and was “the only strictly [Negro] church in that body until 1794.”<sup>23</sup> On April 5, 1802, the First African Baptist Church united with the Savannah Baptist Church and the Newington Baptist Church in forming the Savannah River Baptist Association.<sup>24</sup>

In spite of much opposition the church grew and prospered. Andrew Bryan pastored the church for 24 years despite being ordained at the age of 72. He was described by Dr. Henry Holcombe, a contemporary, in the following manner:

“Andrew Bryan not only honorably obtained liberty but a handsome estate. His fleecy and well set locks have been bleached by eighty winters; and dressed like a bishop of London, he rides, moderately corpulent, in his chair, and, with many features of jetty hue, fills any person to whom he gracefully bows with pleasure and veneration, by displaying in smiles even rows of natural teeth white as ivory, and a pair of fine black eyes sparkling with intelligence, benevolence and joy.”<sup>25</sup>

On October 6, 1812, at around ninety-six years of age, Andrew Bryan died. He was buried in the “common cemetery for colored persons.”<sup>26</sup> and later removed to Laural Grove Cemetery. In May of 1979 Andrew Bryan became “Savannah’s first black to be commemorated by a historical marker which was [placed] in front of the church which the minister founded in 1788.”<sup>27</sup>

## EPILOGUE

There are several inclusive details about Andrew Bryan's life and death that need to be investigated. It is known that he had a wife and daughter but little is known about them. The Andrew Bryan Letters at the Georgia Baptist Depository could be a source of information about his family. The death of Bryan is not on record at the County Health Department nor is there a record of his burial at the Colored Cemetery or his subsequent removal to Laurel Grove Cemetery. Also a copy of Andrew Bryan's will could not be found; so therefore, the value of his estate has to be questioned. These are some of the avenues that the next researcher of Andrew Bryan might pursue.

## NOTES

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2. Charles Lwanga Hoskins, Black Episcopalians in Georgia. (Savannah, Georgia: by the Author, 1980), 2-3
3. Mary Granger, Ed., Savannah River Plantations. (Savannah, Georgia: Georgia Historical Society, 1947), 391
4. Ibid., 400
5. Ibid., 400-401
6. James M. Simms, The First Colored Baptist Church in North America. (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1888: reprint, New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), 19
7. E. K. Love, History of the First African Baptist Church from its Organization. (Savannah, Georgia: Savannah Morning News Print, 1888), 6.
8. Simms, The First Colored Baptist Church in North America, 20
9. Love, History of the First African Baptist Church from its organization, 1962
10. Robert G. Gardner, et al. A History of the Georgia Baptist Association, 1784-1984. (Atlanta: Georgia Baptist Historical Society, 1988), 17
11. Granger, Savannah River Plantations, 401-402
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13. Edgar Garfield Thomas, The First African Baptist Church in North America. (Savannah, Georgia. By the Author, 1925), 6-7.
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15. Granger, Savannah River Plantations, 402
16. Savannah Morning News, "Jonathan Bryan: Portrait of a Patriot." 15 September 1963. Savannah, Georgia. Vertical file folder-Georgia Historical Society. Jonathan Bryan
17. Granger, Savannah River Plantations, 403
18. Appendices to articles in Georgia Historical Quarterly (March 1943). Brampton Appraisalment Book C Folio 160
19. Thomas, The First African Baptist Church of North America, 37
20. Ibid., 7
21. Simms, The First Colored Baptist Church in North America, 30

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26. *Ibid.*, 73
27. Savannah Morning News, "First Marker Hailing Black Unveiled in Downtown Area." 21 May 1979.  
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