

Congregation works to save century-old chapel

By JEFF HAMPTON The Virginian-Pilot of Norfolk EDENTON, N.C.





ADVANCE FOR MONDAY JULY 23 AND THEREAFTER - In a May 31, 2017 photo, Kadesh A.M.E. Zion Church is seen in Edenton, NC. Hurricane Isabel in 2003 flooded much of Edenton, sending waters more than 4 feet deep surging around the foundations of some of the state's oldest structures. That included the Kadesh A.M.E. Zion Church. Parishioners and town leaders are striving to restore the historic church. **The Virginian-Pilot via AP** Jeff Hampton

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A black congregation and leaders of one of North Carolina's oldest towns are teaming up to save a hurricane-damaged chapel built more than a century ago.

Grants from prestigious national organizations and fried chicken dinners made by local cooks play some of the parts.

Hurricane Isabel in 2003 flooded much of Edenton, sending waters more than 4 feet surging around the foundations of some of the state's oldest

structures. That included the Kadesh A.M.E. Zion Church.

The towering walls creaked and leaned with the wind until they were shored up with thick metal braces. Carpenters removed the tall, Tiffany stained-glass windows to protect them from breaking. The bell heard for generations from its three-story tower went into storage. Congregation members scrambled to find another place to meet.

"Those were terrible times," said Audrey Bond, lifelong church member and owner of a clothing alteration business on Broad Street. "It was a beautiful sanctuary."

Most of this town's stately homes and public buildings tell the story of white officials and proprietors who incorporated the town of 5,000 in 1722, attorney and town Councilman Sambo Dixon said. The church's restoration will start a greater focus on black-owned structures, he said.

"This is one of the most important African American sites in the state," Dixon said. "This will be a wonderful symbol of our ability to come together as a community."

The church's beginnings go back to 1857. Forty years later, the expanding congregation hired local carpenter Hannibal Badham and his two sons to build a sanctuary on Gale Street large enough for 400 . Badham and his sons were highly regarded craftsmen and built many houses in Edenton, a town known for some of the oldest structures in the state.

The carved door frames and the ceiling arching two stories above the chapel floor are among the examples of woodworking mastery, said Mike Ervin, executive director of the Edenton Historical Commission.

"This is before there were power tools," he said. "It was an amazing feat by hand."

Bond remembers when the ringing church bell drew hundreds to the services.

The largest funerals and community gatherings in the black community were held at Kadesh Church.

Now parts of the original wood floor are rotting. Weathered plywood has replaced the missing windows in attempts to block the elements. Bats and pigeons inhabit the bell tower. Termites chew at the wooden frame.

The project will cost more than \$1 million. Restoration of the stained-glass windows alone will cost about \$250,000, Ervin said. The historical commission hopes to purchase a pipe organ from the 1890s similar to the original that would replace the aging contemporary organ still inside the church.

Project engineers from McPherson Design Group have done historic projects in Virginia, including at Jamestown.

The National Fund for Sacred Places has promised \$250,000, Ervin said. Dixon said he is working on a \$50,000 grant from The National Trust for Historic Preservation, and there are plans to hire a professional fundraiser.

The town and church leadership are applying for grants. The congregation of about 50 active members also has held a food-related fundraiser featuring some of the best fried chicken around, Bond said.

"Everybody is so happy about what's going on at Kadesh," she said.



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