

Locust Hill African Cemetery

For Trentonians of African descent, this patch of land is hallowed ground, the final resting place of many Blacks who lived in the city during the 19th century. Established in 1861 and actively used until the mid-1890s, the Locust Hill Cemetery is Trenton's largest and only remaining segregated Black burying ground. It has suffered over the years. Gravestones have been removed; fill and turf now seal the graves; but the spirit and stories of the past still linger here in this special place.

Birth of a burial ground

In the late 1850s, with burying space downtown at a premium and in the face of white hostility, Trenton's leading African Methodist Episcopal congregation (Mount Zion A.M.E.) sought out a new location for a cemetery on the edge of the city. With the help of funds raised by the Trenton's Colored Female Association and in exchange for its old burial ground on East Hanover Street, the church in 1861 purchased for \$1,700 the parcel of land before you here. Burials from East Hanover Street were reinterred here, new burials were made and the Locust Hill Cemetery was born.

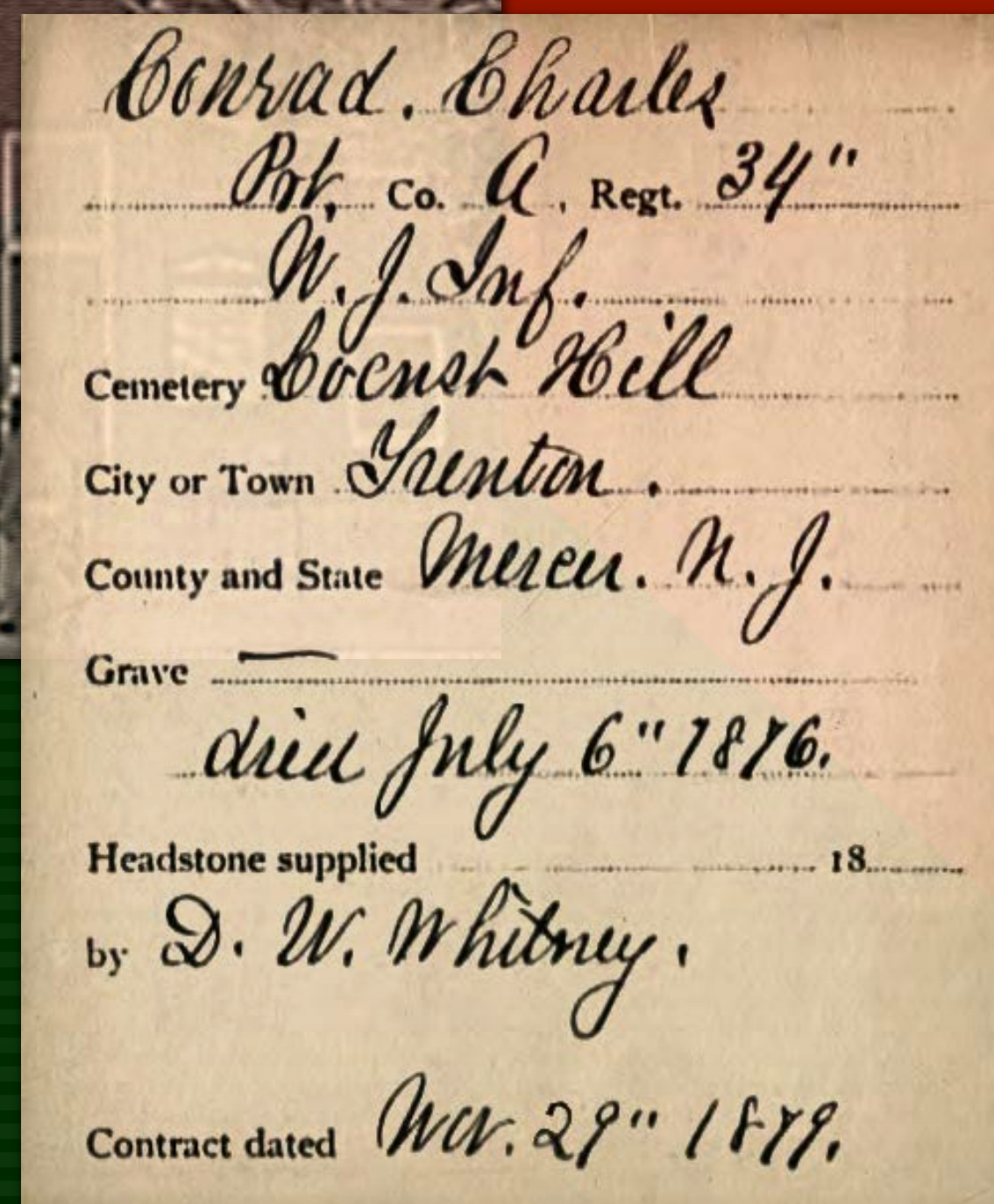
For a dozen years, the Mount Zion A.M.E. congregation operated the Locust Hill Cemetery as a private sectarian graveyard. In 1873, the newly incorporated Locust Hill Cemetery Company took ownership and opened up use of the burial ground to the city's entire Black community. Mount Zion A.M.E. maintained a strong connection, however, with a second mass relocation of burials to Locust Hill taking place in 1876 prior to the erection of a larger church building within the churchyard at their Perry Street home base in downtown Trenton.



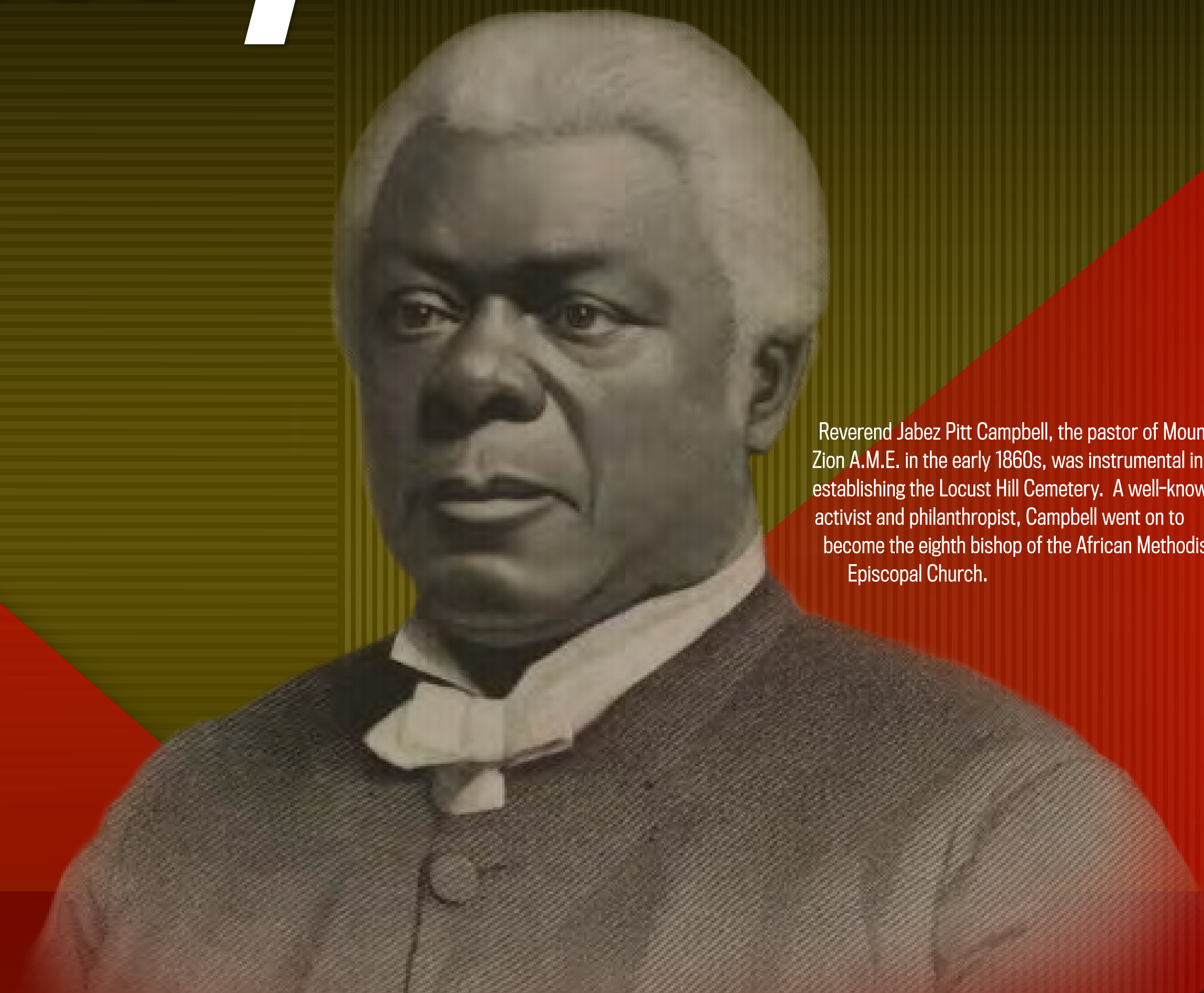
By the early 1880s, the cemetery was being hemmed in on three sides by the row homes of the mostly white English immigrants working in the nearby Coalport potteries, although the burial ground still stretched down to the banks of the Assunpink Creek. [C.C. Haven, A New Real Estate and Insurance map of Trenton, 1882].



Erected in 1876, this was the main A.M.E. Mount Zion church in Trenton and its congregation established the cemetery on Locust Hill. An earlier church, dating from 1819, enlarged in 1858, occupied this same site.



Ten or more Civil War veterans are likely interred here, some of whom received gravestones commemorating their service in the U.S. Colored Troops. Six whose names are known for certain are Charles Conrad, Nathaniel Ferris, Andrew Jackson, William H. Johnson, George McClain and Charles H. Riley.



Reverend Jabez Pitt Campbell, the pastor of Mount Zion A.M.E. in the early 1860s, was instrumental in establishing the Locust Hill Cemetery. A well-known activist and philanthropist, Campbell went on to become the eighth bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

Gone but not forgotten

The rapid growth of the white working class neighborhood of Millham in the 1880s soon led to the cemetery being surrounded by row housing. Burying at Locust Hill declined in the 1890s and the cemetery company had difficulty maintaining the property. The neighborhood began using the cemetery as a trash dump and it gained a reputation as a local eyesore. In 1911, a portion was sold off and developed in the late 1920s for a motor freight terminal, while the remainder eventually passed into City of Trenton and then private hands.

Exactly how many burials were made in the cemetery over the course of its 30+ years in use is not known. A recent count based mostly on death notices in newspapers came up with around 80 individuals, while a recent radar survey confirmed the probable existence of graves in the northwestern end of the cemetery lot. In all likelihood, the remains of well in excess of one hundred – perhaps two or three hundred – Black persons are interred here, although many graves have been desecrated through insensitive treatment over the past century or more.



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