

SOLOMON JONES

FROM SLAVERY TO BELOVED PREACHER

WHEN?
1828-1888

WHERE? Wilkes-Barre,
PA.



EVENT
Slavery to ministry

40

VOCABULARY
Coachman
Underground Railroad

When Rev. Solomon Jones passed away on January 19, 1888, Wilkes-Barre lost one of its resilience, and quiet, enduring wisdom as he found his place as minister of the Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church (A.M.E.)

Born into slavery in 1823 in Hagerstown, Maryland, Jones began life under the harshest conditions. In an act of extraordinary bravery, he escaped slavery through the Underground Railroad, traveling first to Harrisburg and eventually finding freedom and community in Wilkes-Barre.

When Jones arrived in Wilkes-Barre, the Black population was small but growing. According to the 1840 U.S. census, there were 83 Black residents living in Wilkes-Barre. He found work as a coachman for Congressman Henry Mills Fuller. Though he had little formal education, he possessed a deep hunger to learn. Mrs. Fuller later recalled seeing him seated on the coachman's bench, spelling book in hand, studying whenever the family was inside visiting. Those determined moments mattered.

Jones wanted to read so he could understand the Bible. His efforts to learn did not go unnoticed as it was not long before he was able "to read the Bible without stumbling." His ability to read coupled with his natural leadership brought opportunity to speak to the congregation of the Zion A.M.E. Church. (The church had started in 1842 and had a building by 1848.) According to Moss, Mrs. Fuller helped him prepare on Saturday night for his Sunday morning sermons. Though "not very learned," he possessed moral clarity and spiritual insight that resonated with all who heard him (Moss, 40.) In time the Zion A.M.E. elevated him to the rank of bishop, noting that a "bishop need not be scholarly, but he must be wise—and Solomon Jones had this quality"(Moss, 40.) He married Mary Danham Jones (1822-1894). They did not have children. Mrs. Jones is buried in the Wilkes-Barre Cemetery.

His ministry helped anchor Wilkes-Barre's early African-American community, offering spiritual grounding, fellowship, and dignity during a period when Black institutions were still taking root in the Wyoming Valley. He left behind a legacy shaped not by privilege or education, but by faith, courage, and the unshakeable determination to rise from bondage to leadership.

Source: Excerpted from Tony Brooks article for the Wilkes-Barré Preservation Society. This was based on Emerson Moss's "African Americans in the Wyoming Valley" published in 1992 and Wilkes-Barre Times Leader obituary for Solomon Jones, published January 25, 1888. Picture: 1892 Zion A.M.E. Church of Wilkes-Barre on Northampton and Welles Streets (no longer there).

ONLINE RESOURCES

Check out Newspapers.com for a fee after a seven day free trial.

PRINT RESOURCES

Moss, Emerson. *African-Americans In The Wyoming Valley 1778-1990*. Wilkes-Barre, PA: Wyoming Historical and Geological Society and