

THE BONNER-CAMPBELL STORY

The Bonner-Campbell College story begins with the founding of Campbell College by **Bishop Jabez P. Campbell**, the eighth Bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

In 1887, Bishop Jabez P. Campbell established Campbell College in two locations: Bethel AMEC (Friars Point, MS), and Bethel AMEC (Vicksburg, MS). The college was established 22 years after freedom was won, “without the aid of Whites” (*Felder, p. 200*). By 1890, the college was operated in one location, Bethel (Vicksburg), and by 1898, the new location was established in Jackson, MS, adjacent to Jackson State College. The school was named for founder Jabez P. Campbell (8th Bishop of the AME Church and 1st President of the College).



Bethel A.M.E. Church, Friars Point, MS



Campbell College, Vicksburg Mural, First Building

From the Jackson, MS location, Campbell College guided thousands of African American students from across the globe in lower division, high school and junior college industrial and religious studies. In 1964, after 77 years, Campbell College in Jackson, MS was closed by eminent domain. **Bishop Frederick Jordan** began accepting expelled students from Burgland High School, McComb, MS, which eventually led to the College’s early demise (*Source: Bonner-Campbell 2001 Journal*).



Campbell College, Jackson, MS First Building

Strapped for cash, Campbell College graduated the last class of 1964. The College played a role in the Civil Rights Movement of the ‘60s, and some say it stood in the way of the opponents of opponents of the movement. Bonner-Campbell Institute in Edwards, MS is significantly intertwined with the legacy of Episcopal leaders who have served the 8th Episcopal District. By 1968, **Bishop I. H. Bonner** (#68) became the 26th Presiding Bishop of the 8th District. The District continued to seek a location to continue education for Blacks, and funds were raised to build structures on the church’s 1037 acres in Mound Bayou (*Felder, 2021*). The three-story structure was begun and still exists today as an unfinished structure. According to the Mound Bayou report in 2024 NMSC minutes, seventy-five of the ninety remaining acres are leased for farming. The tenant continues to pay the yearly rental fee promptly.

MERGING WITH TOUGALOO

Southern Christian Institute (Disciples of Christ - SCI), Edwards, MS, closed school operation in 1953, and merged with Tougaloo College. This led to a connection with the AME Church 18 years later. After the closing of SCI, the campus was used during the Civil Rights years for various community church retreats but also more regularly as a Head Start center until around 2000 (*Google Search*). The property was also used by the Edwards community for swimming, VBS, and other public gatherings. Civil Rights activists provided voter registration training for blacks in the State, and taught strategies for seeking equal rights, human rights, and justice for blacks. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. had visited the campus, and other professors and Civil Rights advocates from Tougaloo College offered training for African American citizens. (*Rev. Charles Bartley, AME Pastor and Civil Rights activist – interview, July 5, 2025*).

NAME CHANGE

By 1971, while planning for a location for Campbell College, Bishop Bonner received news from Dr. G. H. J. Thibodeaux, a former president of Campbell College, that land in Edwards, MS might be available through the Disciples of Christ Church, who shared similar beliefs of educating Blacks who were denied education among Whites in the South. The Disciples of Christ Church desired to sell 37 acres of property/buildings known as Southern Christian Institute to the AME Church because of the church’s service in educating Blacks at Campbell College. In an interview with Rev. George Tyler, this writer was informed that SCI and Bishop Bonner entered a legal transfer of 37 acres of the property for \$1 (*Phone interview with Rev. George Willis Tyler in April 2025*). There were six buildings, an Olympic size swimming pool, and a bell tower on the property. (*Thomas, 1996*) Securing the property in Edwards, MS resulted in the continuation of education for Blacks at Campbell College in the 8th District (Mississippi/Louisiana). **The name ‘Bonner-Campbell College then represented two Bishops’ leadership – Bishop Jabez P. Campbell (#8), 1st Bishop and organizer of Campbell College, and I. H. Bonner (#68), 26th presiding Bishop of the 8th District.** The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) had opened The Southern Christian Institute school in 1882, Edwards, MS, to educate African-Americans of freed slaves. (*Google Search*). The 89-year-old structures required much repair, as well as name changes related to outstanding AME Church clergy and lay leadership.

EPISCOPAL LEADERSHIP

Bishop Frank C. Cummings (#95), the 27th Presiding Bishop of the 8th District - *visionary bishop with business acumen*, began operations of the College administration and religious education around 1981. In addition to holding Christian Education Congress from ’81 – ’84, Bishop Cummings set in place the administrative staff and instructional leadership for classes, community use of the facilities, clergy classes/training, and Episcopal District meetings at the College. Under College Administrator Rev. R. L. Stanton, and Dean Otto Duncan, programs were begun. Mr. Eddie Lee, a lifelong native of Edwards, MS, was selected to reside on the property and become the caretaker of grounds and facilities. (*interview with Mr. Lee, March 2025*). With 44 years of experience and continuing to serve and reside on the campus, Mr. Lee assisted with this story of Bonner-Campbell.

1984 – 1992 – Bishop Donald George Kenneth Ming (#97), 28th Presiding Bishop of the 8th District, led the district from 1984 – 1992. The Bonner-Campbell College campus continued to serve the AME Church and community of Edwards for religious education and special meetings, reunions, weddings, and funerals. Bishop Ming left the District debt free. His wife, Supervisor Edith White Ming, gave concerts throughout MS and LA to raise funds to pay off the debt. Bishop Ming launched a partnership with Jackson Head Start to locate Head Start on the campus and served over 200 students and increasing employment in the Edwards Community. Bishop Ming secured the service of Dr. Shirley Hopkins to organize a display of Bishops of the 8th Episcopal District. She completed the set, and Bishop Ming displayed the pictures in the Episcopal Office in New Orleans. (*Ming, 1992*).

From 1992-1996, Bishop Robert Thomas, Jr. (#107), 29th Presiding Bishop of the 8th District, led the District in raising over \$250,000 to build a new structure on Bonner-Campbell property. He held the Buy-a-Brick campaign; held a Ground-Breaking ceremony on the campus at the front entrance, and left funds to start construction on the new building. At his time of leadership, there were six (6) buildings and an Olympic size pool on the property. He purchased 15 additional acres, increasing property to 52 acres. (*Thomas, 1996*). The campus was being used for retreats, District meetings, weddings, funerals, and religious classes. The Hinds County Head Start Program continued operation on the campus. (*Blanche Young, Director of Hinds County Head Start, was interviewed in March 2025*).

EPISCOPAL LEADERSHIP

1996 – 2000 – Bishop Richard Allen Chappelle, Sr. (#108), 30th Presiding Bishop of the 8th District, led the District in continuing to raise funds, selecting architectural plans and the contractor for laying the groundwork of the new building but left the framed structure almost completed (80%) upon his move at General Conference in 2000. More funds were needed to complete construction of the building and to improve others remaining on the property (*Chappelle, 2000*).

2000 – 2008 – Bishop Cornal Garnett Henning, Sr. (#112), 31st Presiding Bishop of the 8th District, led the District in securing the loan to complete construction of the new building; dedicated it in 2001, naming it the C. Garnett Henning Multipurpose Complex. Funds were raised with ads/sponsors in the Bonner-Campbell Commemorative Journal. Bonner-Campbell, under the directorship of Rev. William N. Love, served the church and community with meetings in the building and on the grounds. The Head Start Program operated on the campus in the Administration building and trailers on the grounds. The Religious Studies program was operated at Bonner-Campbell during the Henning administration. Around 2006, Dr. Shirley Hopkins Davis, Title III Coordinator, donated from Hinds Community College-Utica Campus desktop computers, the conference table and chairs housed in the Henning Complex. When Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans in 2006, Bishop Henning led the District in moving contents from the Episcopal Office in New Orleans to the Henning Complex. Among the contents were the portraits of Bishops of the 8th District, which had been done by Dr. Shirley Hopkins during the Ming administration. During Bishop Henning’s leadership, Bonner-Campbell served as a safe haven for AME members and others of the Edwards community during other natural disasters and tornadoes in LA and MS. He launched the Eli Conference at Bonner-Campbell to assist lay people in discerning their call to ministry (*Henning, 2008*).

2008 – 2012 - Bishop Carolyn Tyler Guidry (#122), 32nd Presiding Bishop of the 8th District, led the District in re-evaluating the property at Edwards, MS, and challenged the District to remove dilapidated, mold-infested buildings remaining from SCI days of operating a school (buildings were re-purposed for AMEC use during the Cummings and Ming administrations). She continued raising funds to eliminate the debt from loans/refinancing. Meetings were held at Bonner-Campbell in the Henning Complex and on the grounds. By this time, no Head Start Programs operated on the Campus. Community activities ceased to operate on the Campus because of the fragile conditions of most structures. Insurance requirements limited use of property by the public and in some instances, the 8th District.

2012 – 2021 – Bishop Julius Harrison McAllister, Sr. (129), 33rd Presiding Bishop of the 8th District, led the District in several projects on the Bonner-Campbell campus: upgrading the bathrooms, repairing the kitchen, etc. Also, remaining delapidated structures from earlier years - after purchase and re-designated / named for AME prominent leaders - were demolished. He led the District in installing a system for cleaning the water on the property; transformed the auditorium/gym into a worship center (newly built stationary pulpit/choir area, new chairs, altar paraments, etc.); auditorium was dedicated and named in his honor. Bishop McAllister found the portraits of bishops that Dr. Shirley Hopkins Davis had done for Bishop Ming, had them framed and placed in the conference room of the Henning Multipurpose Complex.

2021 – 2024 – Bishop Stafford J. N. Wicker (#137), 34th Presiding Bishop of the 8th District, led the District in re-capturing the 165-year history of the 8th Episcopal District: Rev. Horace McKay and Dr. Shirley Hopkins Davis organized the history into decades, which were presented by pastors during various District meetings. By 2024, Bishop Wicker led the District in burning the note on Bonner-Campbell property and all other properties with notes. Once again, the District was debt free when he left for the 52nd General Conference. Because of disrepairs to the building and the COVID 19 pandemic during his tenure of service, the campus was used sparingly. The Mortgage Burning was held in the Henning Complex on July 27, 2024.

2024 Bishop Erika D. Crawford, (#143), 35th and current Presiding Bishop of the 8th District, hit the ground running in August 2024. A new roof on was placed on the Henning Complex and plans for Edwards CommUNITY Day at Bonner-Campbell in August 2025. The plan is to name the campus ‘Bonner-Campbell Institute’ and her vision includes restoring the last remaining brick structure of the old Bonner-Campbell Administration building, paving the street leading to the Henning Complex, and further updating the Henning Complex to include a library/archives room, and restoring the kitchen to its original use of appliances. She also envisions developing major training institutes to be held on the campus. Mr. Eddie Lee continues to reside on the property as caretaker.

PHOTO GALLERY



New Conference Center
Ground Breaking Ceremony
Bishop Robert Thomas, Jr. -
November 30, 1995



Mortgage Burning Ceremony
Bishop Stafford Wicker
July 27, 2024



Administration Building and Bell Tower



Mound Bayou, MS 3-Storey Building
(Photos courtesy Rev. Horace McKay)



Martha Cummings' Girls Dormitory

SOURCES

Chappelle, Richard Allen. 2000 Report to the 46th Sessions of the General Conference, Cincinnati, OH
Eighth Episcopal District Bonner-Campbell Commemorative Souvenir Journal, 2001
Felder, Frankie O., Ed.D. Our Story: Unchained and Liberated from History. Edelweiss Publishers, Anderson, SC 2021
Henning, Sr., C. Garnett 2008 report to General Conference, St. Louis, MO
Ming, Donald G. K. 1992 Report to the 44th Session of the General Conference, Orlando, FL
Thomas, Robert. 1996 Report to the 45th Session of the General Conference, Louisville, KY

THE BISHOPS OF THE EIGHTH



Frank C. Cummings
(1976-1984)



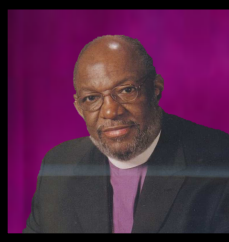
Donald George K. Ming
(1984-1992)



Robert Thomas, Jr.
(1992-1996)



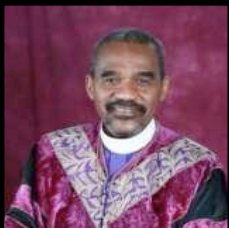
Richard A. Chapelle, Sr.
(1996-2000)



C. Garnett Henning, Sr.
(2000-2008)



Carolyn Tyler-Guidry
(2008-2012)



Julius H. McAllister, Sr.
(2012-2021)



Stafford J. N. Wicker
(2021-2024)



Erika D. Crawford
(2024)

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Rev. Dr. Hugh B. Marriott, Episcopal Supervisor
Dr. Shirley Hopkins-Davis, Co-Historical Collaborator
Rev. Horace McKay, Co-Historical Collaborator

THE BONNER-CAMPBELL STORY A HISTORICAL JOURNEY



Bishop I. H. Bonner



Bishop Jabez Pitt Campbell



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