

Our Baptist History

ANDREW MARSHALL A Black Hero of the Faith

While sitting in a funeral director's office, waiting for a memorial service to begin, I commented on how few were in attendance. The undertaker responded facetiously, "Pastor, you must die young if you desire a large funeral." But, as we consider the immense procession about a mile long, with fifty-eight carriages making its way from the church to the cemetery on December 14, 1856, we cannot help but wonder what dignitary is being honored. We are further shocked to find that the deceased was over one hundred years old! But let me tell you the story of the Reverend Andrew Marshall.

He was thought to have been born in 1755 in South Carolina, but no one took time to record the date of birth of the little slave-born son. Andrew's first "master" was John Houston, the colonial governor of Georgia. The governor died when Andrew was about twenty-one years of age.

Freedom had been bequeathed to Andrew at the death of the governor, for the slave had at one time saved his master's life. "The executors, however, failed to carry out the will, and Andrew was again sold . . . becoming the property of Judge Clay."

While in the service of Judge Clay, Marshall made several trips to the North, for Judge Clay had become a senator. Andrew Marshall saw General George Washington on several occasions, and when President Washington visited Savannah later, Andrew was honored by being appointed the President's "body servant" and acted as his carriage driver as well. During the Revolutionary War, Andrew Marshall had been loyal to the American cause and enjoyed recollections of General Nathaniel Green, who directed the army of the South in driving the British from Georgia and the Carolinas.

Andrew purchased his freedom about the time he was converted, and in 1785 he joined the church and was soon licensed to preach. In 1806 he became pastor of Savannah's Second Baptist Church. The church grew from one thousand to three thousand members, and it was thought best to divide the congregation. The Reverend Mr. Marshall formed a new church which took the name of the First African Baptist Church. He remained its pastor until his death on December 8, 1856. During his ministry, crowds overflowed the church building. His

reputation as a pulpiteer grew, for "his voice was . . . deep, sonorous, and tender and its capacity for the expression of pathos was unsurpassed." His piety and ability were so well known that wherever he journeyed to preach, throngs both of black and white greeted him. He was honored on one occasion to address the entire body of the legislature of the state of Georgia, and his travels took him often into South Carolina and as far south as Louisiana.

Andrew Marshall took pleasure in stating publicly that he had never had any formal education, but he possessed a considerable library and majored in reading the commentaries of Dr. John Gill, predecessor of Charles H. Spurgeon in London. During his long ministry in Savannah, Marshall baptized nearly four thousand converts.

At the time of the beginning of the First African Baptist Church in

Savannah, Marshall had led his people to purchase the facility of the old First Baptist Church (white). The years took their toll on the building as they did on its pastor. Thus, in the last year of his life, Marshall decided to raise funds to construct a new brick building. He determined to travel to the North with his wife to contact benefactors. He preached for Dr. Spencer H. Cone and others in New York. He raised \$600, but his health failed, and he was urged to return home immediately. Reaching Richmond, Virginia, he could proceed no further. Dr. Basil Manly, Jr., president of the Richmond Female College, took him into his home and cared for him for more than a month until Marshall's entrance into his Lord's presence. Andrew Marshall's remains were conveyed to Savannah, where the Reverend Thomas Rambaut, pastor of the First Baptist Church, delivered the funeral sermon before one of the largest audiences to attend a funeral at that time in Savannah.

This article is taken from This Day in Baptist History: 366 Daily Devotions Drawn from the Baptist Heritage written by E. Wayne Thompson and David L. Cummins.

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