

# Poetry Porch: Update

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## Tribute to the AME Church on Spring Valley Road

In May 2012, returning to the familiar roads of my childhood in southeastern Pennsylvania, I saw the sign for Spring Valley Road left, off Route 322, so I took it, and made another left on Temple Road where a good friend used to live. The property was abandoned with a DPW sign on the gate across the driveway. Circling back to Spring Valley Road, I drove past the church that I remembered as the African church. The building was also empty with a For Sale sign in front. I took a photograph of the church to keep it in my memory.

In December 2021, driving on these roads again, I saw that my friend's house on Temple Road has been replaced by a cul-de-sac of a dozen homes. But the Spring Valley AME Church has been renovated, the vines cut, the sides painted, a parking lot and walkway added.

This poem is a memory of riding with my friend past the church one Sunday morning.

### On Spring Valley Road

We rode together in the truck  
*On Spring Valley Road*  
Late Sunday morning, it was hot  
*On Spring Valley Road*  
We passed the church and looked inside  
*On Spring Valley Road*  
So many people, it was packed  
*On Spring Valley Road*  
The minister had just arrived  
*On Spring Valley Road*  
He tipped his hat as we rolled by  
*On Spring Valley Road*  
His brilliant smile enraptured us  
*On Spring Valley Road*  
He reached the door and opened it  
*On Spring Valley Road*  
We heard the congregation shout  
*On Spring Valley Road*  
Another wave swept over us  
*On Spring Valley Road*  
The sound of voices raised in song  
*On Spring Valley Road*

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I read the poem above at the tribute to the restoration of this church on June 18, 2022.

Joyce Wilson  
June 2022

## TWO AFRICAN AMERICAN CHURCHES

### One: The AME Church on Spring Valley Road in Concordville, PA



*Spring Valley Road AME Church June 2012*

I was aware of this African Methodist Episcopal church from the time I was seven years old because my best friend lived on adjacent property. I was horrified to see it abandoned when I visited the area in 2012. I wondered how much time I'd have to spend in research to locate the history and the people who had worshiped there. I regretted that I had lost touch with the African Americans in my classes at elementary school and high school. I took a photo of it for preservation. Then I got an email from Ted Goldman.

As it turned out, the photojournalist Ted Goldman was of similar mind about the importance of African American churches. He had already researched the background of this church and one in Chadds Ford (featured on *Poetry Porch* 2021). Ted has met and interviewed numerous members and descendants. He introduced me to Betty Byrd Smith who grew up in Concordville and has many memories tied to the church.



*Spring Valley Road AME Church December 2021*

Ted and Betty were glad to see my photograph from 2012 which shows the abandoned building with a For Sale sign in front. Through their efforts, the Concord Township Historic Society, who bought the church in 2014, committed to a substantial renovation. By 2020, they had painted the exterior, cleaned up the surroundings. By 2021, they had added a ramp and a parking lot. In 2022, plans are underway for an official opening. A celebration is scheduled for June 18<sup>th</sup>, the day before the celebrations around the country on June 19<sup>th</sup>, or Juneteenth, the anniversary of Emancipation.



*Spring Valley Road AME Church interior*

To get the church ready for June, graves in the adjacent yard are being researched and identified. A monument has been ordered. Because the renovations are ongoing, the celebration in June will be private and by invitation only. Another public celebration will take place in the fall, once renovations are complete.

## Two: The AUMP Church at Archie's Corner in Chadds Ford, PA

The Internet can be intrusive, and it can forge connections that might not happen otherwise. In the case of the 2021 *Poetry Porch* cover featuring the image of “Mother Archie’s Church,” connections have been made and are multiplying.



Mother Archie's Church June 1959

A retired chemist turned photojournalist, Ted Goldman contacted me through email after he found the 1959 image of Mother Archie’s on *The Poetry Porch*. As it turned out, he was researching the church as the spiritual center of the African Americans community in the area of southeastern Pennsylvania. In the example of the Reverend Lydia Archie, Ted found answers that opened up more questions about the people and the spirit that sustained them.

Information from the Chadds Ford Historical Society explains that Reverend Lydia A Archie



**REV. MRS. LYDIA ARCHIE**  
The Oldest Ordained Female Preacher in the  
African Union M. P. Church  
Chadds Ford, Pa.

was an ordained female preacher of the African Union Methodist Protestant Church. In 1891, she bought the octagonal schoolhouse in Chadds Ford and served as minister there until she died in 1932. The 1910 census describes her as Black, the head of a household, a widow, and a minister who owned property and a mortgage. Yet research online uncovers few details about her parents, her childhood, and any other family relations. Now, new questions arise. How did she achieve so much? Where did she get the education to preach and to organize the people around her into a community? She looms as a pivotal figure for many as they made the transition from slavery to freedom.



Mother Archie's ruins December 2021

Thanks to Ted’s efforts and encouragement, the Chadds Ford Township is reviewing Archie’s Corner as a site worth improving, to focus attention on the Black community that lived there, and to open up further dialogue about who they were, and to contact their descendants.

Ted added this poem I wrote to his essay on Mother Archie’s:

## Mother Archie's Church

She bought the building when it was a school  
and made it a church, with pews in two rows, their backs  
to the entrance, yet facing the pulpit, its cushion of purple  
velvet, the Bible, and jovial pot-bellied stove.

The lantern in the window lit up the night  
and beckoned those who often hurried by  
to enter the house that Mother Archie built  
where they could be free and make themselves at home.

Plantation owners had discouraged slaves'  
expression of religious ecstasies.  
At last they found the church they'd been denied  
with Black preacher, determined and ordained.

Three decades after Mother Archie's death,  
the roof and walls collapsed around the stones  
but not the passion she had nourished there  
that saved the church, its people, and their names.

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Photo of Rev. Lydia Archie from Daniel J. Russell, *History of the African Union Methodist Protestant Church*. Philadelphia: Union Star Book and Job Printing and Publishing House, 1920.