

Today in Columbus History:

On Tuesday, February 17, 1874, two stories appeared in the *Columbus Daily Enquirer* that dealt with the Rev. Dr. Joseph Stanton Key. The first was entitled "Interesting Analysis of Church Membership." It was joined by another article on the same page entitled "A Rather Amusing Ceremony."

The Rev. Dr. Key was the pastor of St. Luke Methodist Episcopal church. He used the analysis of church membership in Sunday's sermon to highlight the influence of women on the church. Almost two-thirds of the members were women compared to the one-third that were men.

The second story was that of an African American couple, William F. Harris and Della A. Thomas, looking to get married. The couple was licensed on Thursday, the 14th (Valentine's Day) and Key performed the wedding on the night of Sunday the 15th after the couple was turned down by several African American ministers.

Key was born in 1829 in LaGrange, Troup County, son of Caleb Witt Key, another Methodist minister. He married Susan McIntosh Snider in Savannah in 1851 and had three children: Howard, Benjamin, and Lucy. He married Lucy Thornton Kidd in Fort Worth, Texas in 1893 after Susan died in 1891.

Growing up in the church, he held every position from janitor to bishop in his lifetime. He was a junior pastor under the Rev. Dr. Lovick Pierce and was elected Bishop in Richmond, Virginia at the Methodist Episcopal Conference in May 1886. He relocated to Texas around 1890. As Bishop, he visited China, Japan and Mexico. He died in Sherman, Texas on April 6, 1920. He lived to the ripe old age of 90 and not only outlived both of his spouses, but all of his children, as well.

A four-generation photograph of Key along with his son Howard Walton Key, grandson James Biggers Key and great grandson Jack Botts Key is posted on his FindAGrave memorial page.

Howard Walton Key followed his father into the Methodist ministry and was an educator, as well, earning his Ph. D. from Emory College in 1887. He was a professor at Wesleyan Female College in Macon and served as president of several colleges including Andrew Female College in Cuthbert and the Memphis Female College in Jackson, Tennessee. He suffered a nervous breakdown there and returned to Columbus around 1899. He died in a buggy accident in 1911 and is buried in Linwood Cemetery.

His son, James Biggers Key, skipped the ministry and went into banking, instead. After attending University of Tennessee, he returned to Columbus and became an alderman at age 22. He went to work at the Merchants and Mechanics Bank as vice president in 1916 and became president the next year. He remained in that position until 1939 when he became chairman of the board. He then became chairman of the executive committee of First National Bank when it merged with Merchants and Mechanics Bank in 1953. He died in 1959 and is buried in Parkhill Cemetery.

His son James Botts Key, the youngest of the four in the photograph, followed his father at the Merchants and Mechanics bank in 1917. He became president of the bank in 1939 and then president of First National Bank in 1953 when it merged Merchants and Mechanics Bank. He became chairman of the executive committee of First National Bank in 1963 and held that position until 1966. He died in 1982 and is buried in Parkhill, like his father.

The next generation (not pictured) included James B. Key's son James William Key who also had a career at the bank. He joined the First National Bank after serving a stint in the Navy and became president of that institution in 1972. He went on to become president of First South Bankcorp, First National's holding company. He passed away a short while ago on December 29, 2020 and is buried at Parkhill Cemetery.

Compiled by Daniel A. Bellware, Muscogee Genealogical Society

Clipping from Georgia Historic Newspapers (GALILEO).

Our weekly snippets of Columbus history are usually based on a few days-worth of searching through the most popular sources for Muscogee County history. Meant to inspire readers to explore more about Columbus history, they are not exhaustive dissertations on the topic and may contain mistakes. If you have corrections or additional information, feel free to share them with the group.

Interesting Analysis of Church Membership.

Rev. Dr. J. S. Key, the eloquent pastor of St. Luke's M. E. Church in this city, delivered on Sunday morning a most interesting sermon on "Woman's Duty to the Church." To illustrate, he showed the immense influence of woman and the power she exerted in his own congregation. For this purpose he gave an analysis of the church membership.

The total consisted of 532 members: 396 females and 136 males—showing 260 more females than males.

Of these 396 female members, 156 are married, 142 unmarried, and 98 widows.

Of the 136 males, 14 are non-residents, 13 minors, and 109 city adults.

Of the 156 married females, 89 have husbands who are non-members of the church, and 67 are members.

Does not this prove how potent an influence woman may possess?

The Sunday School numbers some 300 members, showing nearly two children to every married woman and widow.

A query suggested is, Ought there not to be as many Sunday School children as there are members? Might not many be induced to attend Sunday School—the basis of all elementary training and all religious instruction—who now wander about our streets and acquire nothing save wickedness? Would not personal influence induce quite a number to come within the influence of good? We regard Sunday Schools as the grandest educators of the land.

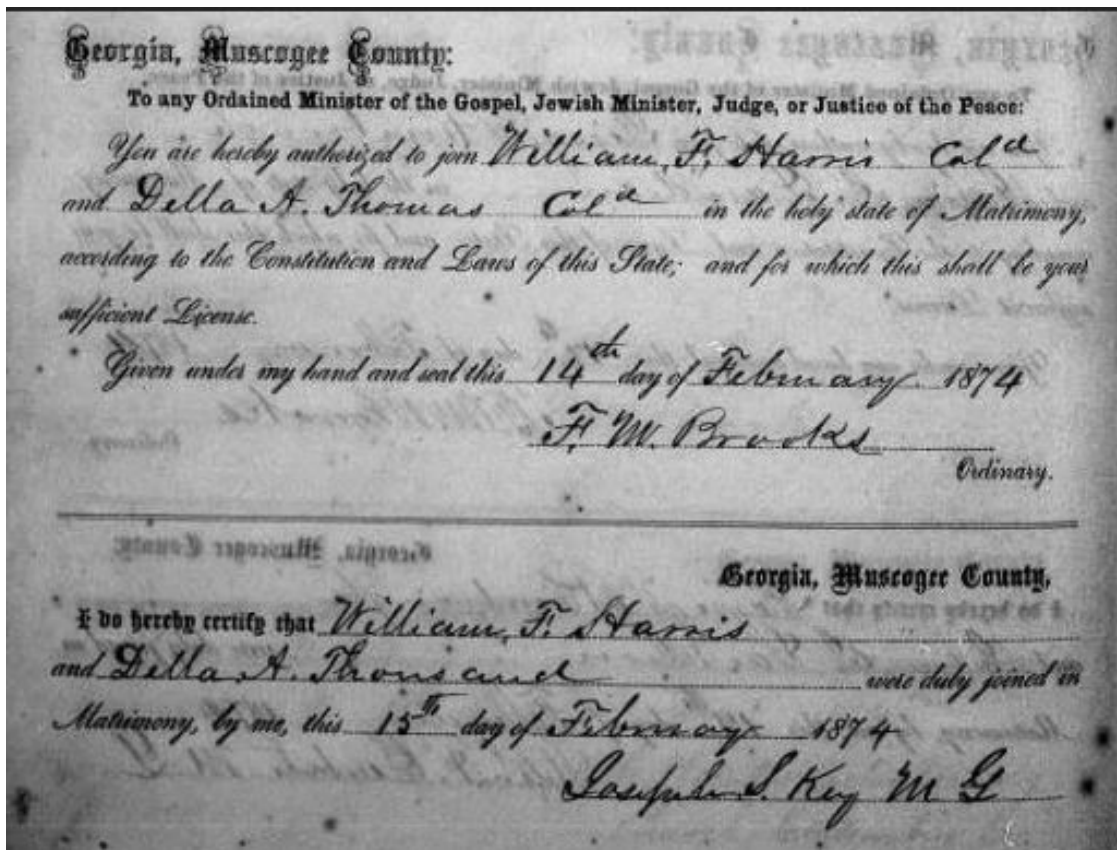
Article on "Interesting Analysis of Church Membership" from the *Columbus Daily Enquirer*, February 17, 1874, <https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/>.

A Rather Amusing Ceremony.

On Sunday evening, a number of colored people appeared in front of the residence of Rev. Dr. J. S. Key, of St. Luke's M. E. Church. At ten o'clock the family had retired, and the Doctor undressed and about to retire, when a knock was heard at the door. To the minister's demand as to what was wanted, the crowd replied they wanted to be married and would wait until the preacher was dressed. He yielded to their request, dressed, invited them to the parlor and performed the ceremony. More were in front of the house than could possibly be contained inside.

After the ceremony, Dr. Key was informed that the marriage was to be celebrated at the first colored Baptist church by Rev. Mr. Hampton. When they arrived at the church, the deacons and pastors of the church objected, because they had not been notified of the fact. The bridal party then proceeded to the colored Methodist brick church. This was out, and the pastor objected, when all proceeded to Rev. Dr. Key. The parties married were William Harrison and Della Thomas. All went away from Dr. Key's house very happy. The entire party was elegantly dressed.

The tale of a young couple trying to get married from *Columbus Daily Enquirer*, February 17, 1874, <https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/>.



Marriage record of William F. Harris and Della A. Thomas, performed by Joseph S. Key from FamilySearch.org



Four generations, left to right, Rev. Dr. Joseph S. Key, James Biggers Key, Dr. Howard Walton Key and little Jack Botts Key, in front, from FindAGrave.com