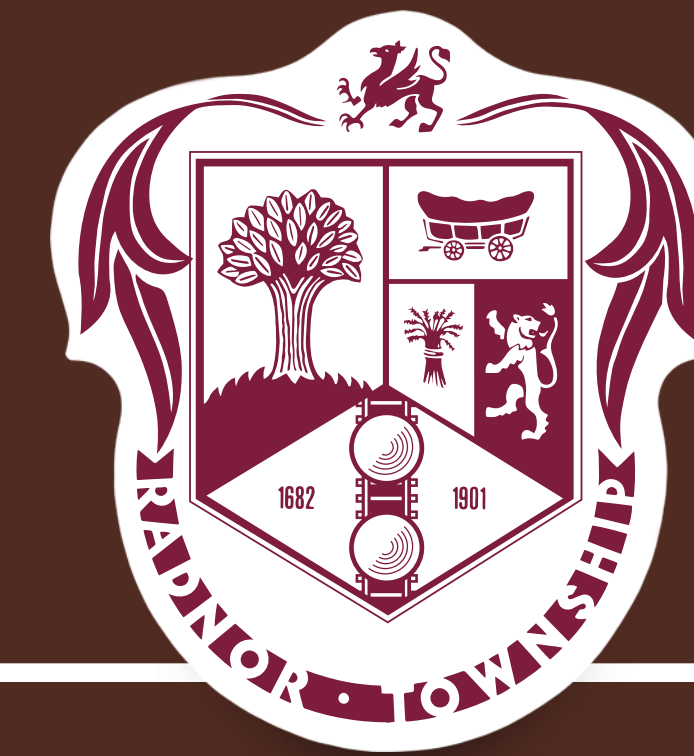


Bishop Richard Allen Park



Richard Allen (1760–1831) was one of the most influential Black leaders of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. In 1794, Mother Bethel African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church was consecrated in Philadelphia, the first church building within the A.M.E. denomination. Allen was elected the first bishop of the A.M.E. church in 1816. Today, there are 7,000 A.M.E. congregations worldwide.



The First Black Property Owners in Radnor Township

Bishop Richard Allen Park sits near a property line that once separated the first two pieces of land that Black individuals owned in Radnor Township. Formerly enslaved Black people named Caesar Waters, Thomas Craill, and Judy Miller owned these lots that were located in what is now the Fifth Ward of Radnor Township. Charles Humphreys, a wealthy white landowner and politician from Haverford Township, enslaved these individuals and six others, forcing them to work his land and serve him and his family for many years.

Humphreys died in 1786, and in his will he ordered his executors to free Caesar, Thomas, and Judy six months later. The will also stipulated that three acres of land in Radnor would be given to Caesar and seven acres adjoining it to Thomas and Judy. The properties that they, their spouses, and descendants owned are outlined in red on the map to the left. Miller Street is believed to be named for the family Judy created with her husband James Miller. The people who lived in the space where this park is now located survived the cruelty of slavery and formed new lives and relationships when they became free, contributing to Radnor Township and the surrounding area. In this park, everyone can remember and honor them.

When Richard Allen Visited Radnor

In 1784, Richard Allen was a 24-year-old itinerant preacher when he walked west from New Jersey and arrived in Radnor Township. He wrote: “I walked until my feet became so sore and blistered the first day, that I scarcely could bear them to the ground.” Allen came to the home of Caesar Waters and his wife Phebe, who welcomed him and gave him a place to stay. Of Caesar, Allen wrote: “I found him and his wife very kind and affectionate to me... Never was I more kindly received by strangers that I had never before seen, than by them.”

During his stay, Richard Allen preached to the congregation at Radnor United Methodist Church, which was founded the year before. Allen noted that the congregation was of “mixed persuasions,” meaning it contained people of varied races. Allen stayed several weeks at the Waters family’s home, a short distance from this park. About his time here he said, “many souls were awakened, and cried aloud to the Lord to have mercy upon them.” Allen made a profound

impression on all of them, and one individual gifted him a horse for the continuation of his journey.

Allen returned to Radnor in the autumn of 1785 and stayed with George Gyger, founder of the Radnor Methodist Episcopal (later United Methodist) Church. Beginning in 1783, members of the church met and worshipped in a small one-room log meeting house on Conestoga Road in “Methodist Hill,” a high point of land now known as Garrett Hill. That structure is depicted in the early 20th century artist’s rendering above. Officials of the Eastern PA Conference of the United Methodist Church transferred ownership of the church property and newer stone building, built circa 1833, to St. John African Methodist Episcopal Church of Wayne in June, 2021.

