

**Guide to the Oral History of
PRATHER, JAMES E., REVEREND (1911-2002)**

Biographical/Historical Notes

Reverend James E. Prather was a community leader in Montgomery County. He was born in Prathertown (an area Gaithersburg), Maryland in 1911. He attended Asbury United Church Seminary, Rockville Baptist Seminary, and Catholic University. Prather was the long-time Pastor of the Poplar Grove Baptist Church in Darnestown. He also was a member of the Montgomery County Medical Care Foundation, Board of Trustees of Suburban Hospital, and the Masonic Lodge of Rockville. He also served as a member on the Advisory Committee on Integration in the Public Schools. Prather also wrote a book about his ancestral home, Prathertown.

Interview – Interviewed March 9, 1976 and April 7, 1976 by Andrea Stevens for MCHS.

Subject

African-Americans – Prathertown community
Gaithersburg (Md.) – Prathertown community
Prathertown – History
Slavery
Suburban Hospital Board of Trustees
Suburban Hospital

Subject Names

Prather, Ann
Prather, John
Prather, Marshall
Prather, Moses
Prather, Reason

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The Rev. James E. Prather

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Note: The index below refers to principal topics covered in two 45 minute interviews with the Rev. Prater. However, this paper is a condensation of those interviews rather than the literal transcripts which are on file at the Montgomery County Historical Society.

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- 1 - Introductory Notes- The interviewer points up the experiences of the Prater family as representative of many Montgomery County Black citizens who once made up 50 per cent of the population.
- 3- After slavery- the elder Praters scratch to buy land, build rough houses. Children grow up; some stay, some marry and move away.
- 6- Other Prater town families, most related to Prathers.
- 7- Father farming, mother taking in washing, 32 Prather town children going to school. Prather town now a little island surrounded by spreading developments; developers persuading blacks to sell their property.
- 8 - Rev. Prather's boyhood- walking to school in Laytonsville. Schooling of black children sacrificed for farm work.
- 9- Visiting grandmother in Washington; all the time visiting churches.
- 10- His rain spout business in Gaithersburg, pressure from whites to move it.
- 12- Contrast between domestic jobs held by sisters and those of his educated daughters. His preaching and evangelical work.
- 13- Old time camp meetings- Emory Grove meeting ground bought by Edward Johnson for ball park.
- 14- Johnson's business start from one taxi cab, his beer garden. Other social gathering places.
- 15- Prather's 31 years in ministry, radio program in Frederick, travelling male chorus.
- 17- Membership on Board of Education integration committee, hostile threats, Molotov cocktail exploded in church, NAACP membership.

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- 18 - Meetings with Martin Luther King. Prejudice at Sugar Loaf Mountain
- 19 - Grandson who would be minister. Like inspiration of son, James, who died in Viet Nam.
- 20- Work at Suburban Hospital and membership on Medical Foundation Board
- 21- Progress from Kerosene lamp days and hope for future despite apathy.