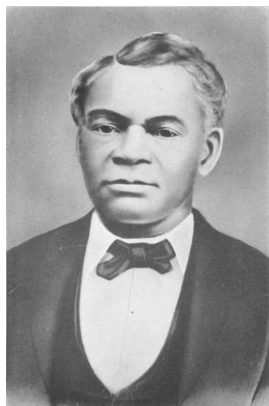


Rev. Frank Quarles

A Legacy of Learning from An Atlanta Pastor



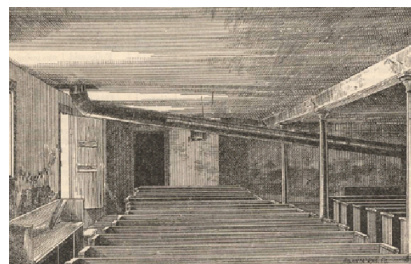
Frank Quarles
Image via NYPL.org

In the African American section of Atlanta's Oakland Cemetery, on a corner where two pathways meet, a low stone wall encircles one of the burial plots. At the corner, three narrow steps lead up to a tombstone. The stone reads: "Father Frank Quarles... Founding Pastor Friendship Baptist Church and Beloved Wife Selina." It is a simple gravesite for a man who left a storied legacy in the city.

Frank Quarles was born in 1819. For much of his life, Quarles was enslaved in Atlanta. In the late 1840's, a small group of enslaved congregants of Atlanta's First Baptist Church asked to be allowed to worship independently. The request was granted, though they continued to worship in First Baptist's building. Over the years, more people requested to join the small congregation and it grew, but still utilized First Baptist's property.

In the early 1860s, while still enslaved, Frank Quarles was ordained as a minister. It would be 1866 – nearly twenty years after it began – before the congregation would be independently organized. In its earliest days as an independent church, Frank Quarles was the pastor of the congregation – which, by that time, was known as Friendship Baptist. With the end of the Civil War still fresh, Friendship faced challenges. Its membership of poor, recently emancipated slaves provided its only resources. One offshoot of this was that the fledgling church did not have a building of its own. Instead, worshippers gathered for Sunday services in a donated railroad boxcar.

In 1865, in an effort to ease the church's burdens, Father Quarles came up with a solution. Through an agreement with the *American Missionary Association*, he helped to establish a school for Black children. Using the boxcar as its home, the school would come to be known as *Atlanta University*. It was the first – but would not be the last time – that Friendship Baptist played a role in advancing education for Black students in Atlanta.



Friendship Baptist Church basement
Image via fbcatlanta.org

In 1879, a school then-known as the *Augusta Institute* moved from Augusta, Georgia, to Atlanta. By that time, Friendship was no longer operating out of the boxcar, having moved into a building along Mitchell Street. Before it established a campus of its own, the Augusta Institute found a home in the basement of Friendship Baptist. In the years to come, the Institute would change its name twice – to *Atlanta Baptist Seminary* and to *Atlanta Baptist College* – before finally settling on *Morehouse College*.



Spelman College campus
Image via eBay

Two years later, in the spring of 1881, Friendship Baptist Church again played host to a fledgling school. Sophia Packard and Harriet Giles, two New England teachers, came to

Atlanta with the intent of supporting Black education in the south. The school they founded was called the *Atlanta Baptist Female Seminary*. Like *Morehouse* before it, the Seminary held its first classes in the basement of Friendship Baptist Church. And also like *Morehouse* and *Atlanta University*, the *Atlanta Baptist Female Seminary* would go on to establish its own campus in Atlanta. And, like *Morehouse*, it would change its name, eventually becoming *Spelman College*.

Frank Quarles passed away in 1881, the same year that the school that would become *Spelman College* began in the church's basement. He did not live to see what became of it or of the other two colleges he had generously assisted. In the decades to come, each of the three schools would grow and prosper. As Friendship had done, they each eventually would settle into their own facilities, on their own campuses. In the 1980's, more than one century after its founding, *Atlanta University* would join with *Clark College* – another Atlanta educational institution primarily for African Americans – to create *Clark Atlanta University*. Along with *Morehouse* and *Spelman Colleges*, it would garner renown that spread far beyond Atlanta's city limits.

Just as the colleges that it helped to grow have thrived over the years, so too has Friendship Baptist Church. It remained at its Mitchell Street location until 2014 when, after over 140 years, Friendship's congregation sold the property to make way for a new stadium for the Atlanta Falcons. But, the church continued at its new campus nearby.

- Takeaways:**
- 1. Frank Quarles was ordained while enslaved.**
 - 2. The now-Friendship Baptist Church began before the Civil War's end.**
 - 2. Friendship Baptist operated for a time in a train boxcar.**
 - 3. 3 Atlanta HBCU's got their Atlanta-area starts at Friendship Baptist**
 - 4. Friendship Baptist remains an active congregation.**

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