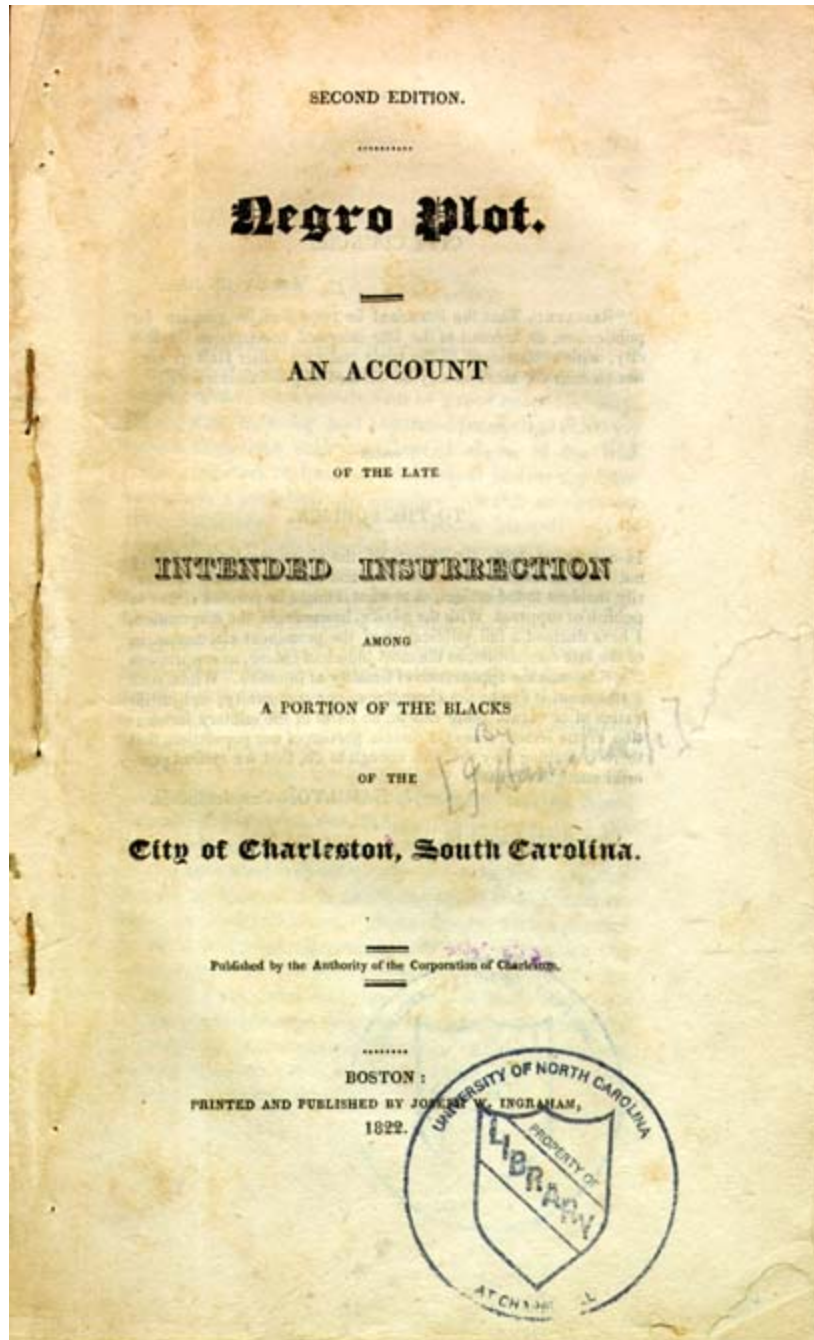


"Mother Emanuel"

African Methodist Episcopal Church History



The history of Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church reflects the development of religious institutions for African Americans in Charleston. Dating back to the fall of 1787 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Richard Allen (1760-1831) founded the Free African Society, adhering to the Doctrines of Methodism established by John Wesley. In 1816, Black members of Charleston's Methodist Episcopal Church withdrew over disputed burial ground, and under the leadership of Morris Brown. The Rev. Morris Brown organized a church of persons of color and sought to have it affiliated with Allen's church. Three churches arose under the Free African Society and were named the "Bethel Circuit". One of the Circuit churches was located in the suburbs of Ansonborough, Hampstead, and Cow Alley, now known as Philadelphia Alley in the French Quarters of Charleston. Emanuel's congregation grew out of the Hampstead Church, located at Reid and Hanover Streets.



“Negro Plot. An Account of the Late Intended Insurrection among a Portion of the Blacks of the City of Charleston, South Carolina” (J. Hamilton, Jun. Intendant Second Edition, 50 p. Boston, printed and published by Joseph W. Ingraham, 1822; published by the Authority of the Corporation of Charleston; Rare Book Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill).

In 1822 the church was investigated for its involvement with a planned revolt of the enslaved. Denmark Vesey (1767-1822), one of the church's founders, organized a major uprising of the enslaved in Charleston. Vesey was enslaved in the Virgin Islands among newly imported people from Africa. He was the personal servant of human enslavement businessman Joseph Vesey, who settled in Charleston in 1783. Beginning in December 1821, Vesey began to organize a rebellion of the enslaved, but authorities were informed of the plot before it could take place. The plot created mass hysteria throughout the Carolinas and the South. Brown, suspected but never convicted of knowledge of the plot, went north to Philadelphia where he eventually became the second bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal denomination. On July 2, 1822, Denmark Vesey and five co-conspirators were hanged in a desolate marsh outside of Charleston, South Carolina (in total, thirty-five of the enslaved were executed) because of their attempt to set in motion the largest rebellion of an enslaved population in the history of the United States--an effort astonishing in its level of organization and support. Nine thousand armed enslaved and free Black folk were to converge on Charleston, set the city aflame, seize the government arsenal, and then murder the entire white population of the city, sparing only the ship captains who would carry Vesey and his followers to Haiti or Africa.



Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church
Charleston, South Carolina