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Musician and Church Leader: Hannah Braxton Jones

Digital Harrisburg

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Messiah College is a Christian college of the liberal and applied arts and sciences. Our mission is to educate men and women toward maturity of intellect, character and Christian faith in preparation for lives of service, leadership and reconciliation in church and society.
The Early Years
Hannah Braxton was born to Joseph and Charlotte Braxton in Williamsburg, Virginia, on May 12, 1852. In 1866, her parents moved their family to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, where they eventually bought a home in the Old Eighth Ward on 134 Tanner’s Alley. Two short years after moving to Harrisburg, Hannah’s mother died. Hannah was just 16 years old.

Second Baptist Church
Seventeen-year-old Hannah and her father were founding members of Harrisburg’s Second Baptist Church in 1869. Under Hannah’s leadership, the church developed a thriving Sabbath School and music program. In 1872, she married George Jones, together they had two children: James and Mary Anne. Hannah loved music; she helped start the church choir, served as organist, and organized magnificent musical events that featured such renowned figures as Marian Anderson, the first African American to sing with the Metropolitan Opera. Second Baptist is now located on Forster St. and continues the legacy of ministering to the community.

Resounding Legacy
Hannah’s leadership and administrative skills extended beyond the church to civic organizations such as the House of Ruth, Good Samaritans, and Daughters of Samaritans. In addition, she was a dedicated music teacher. She did all of this while providing for her family by working as a domestic, one of the few jobs available to African-American women at that time. In 1928, when Hannah died, she left behind a rich legacy for her family and community. Hannah’s great-granddaughter, poet and activist Marian Dornell, explores the complicated history of race and segregation in Harrisburg in her collection of poems, Unicorn in Captivity.