

Minnie Richmond of Pleasant Ridge

Romulus Richmond was not the only minister in the Pleasant Ridge community. The wife of his cousin, Minnie Richmond, also engaged in ministry in the Flora Fountain UBC Church, and other churches in the area. She was a very effective and persuasive speaker, and preached not only in churches, but in revival meetings around the area, especially in Crawford County.



Today we tend to view the ministry as one of many professions requiring higher education, but in the 18th and 19th centuries ministers held positions of high honor. Many were educated at America's finest and oldest universities such as Yale and Harvard, both of which were established to train clergy. A well educated minister brought to a community an aura of industry, refinement and culture. A charismatic minister kept the church alive by bringing in new members and holding the old ones.

Religion was of great importance in the Pleasant Ridge community, providing a domestic influence that encouraged education and provided a common social platform for that community. The effort of the people of Pleasant Ridge to educate and train their children is proven in the success of many descendants, among them successful college educated professionals now spread across the country. As early as 1863 the Grant County Herald reported: *"In '50 or '51, William Horner settled a colony of colored people (the Pleasant Ridge community) several miles west of Lancaster. The Horner colored people...are noted for industry, upright conduct, morality and business habits – having accumulated considerable property. We learn there is not a dissenting voice against the colored children attending the public schools. There are no demagogue Democratic leaders in the district to rouse up a prejudice against them, and no politicians since Horner left."*

So far as I am aware, there is no record of Minnie Richmond having acquired any higher education, but all acknowledged her as intelligent, quick witted, and charismatic. She was the child of one of John Greene's daughters. A rather prejudiced description of her appeared in The Bloomington Record in 1934: "*Minnie it seems was inclined to have ideas of her own.... In her home she was known to be the ruling spirit and seems to have made life rather taught for Old Pete (Peter Richmond, her husband) ...In fact she seems to have been the Sister Aimie (Aimee Semple McPherson – famous evangelist of the 20's and 30's) of the Ridge.*" She must have had a very magnetic personality, for the accounts that remain describe her meetings as bringing many to the altar of salvation. A member of the Knapp Creek Church in Richland County wrote; "*Our preacher, Rev. A.H. Smith...sent for Sister Richmon (sic), our evangelist to come help him. She came and stayed two weeks. We sure had plain gospel preaching from those whom we believe to be indeed faithful and earnest workers for God and the up building of his cause. There were over twenty that came to the alter to seek the Lord.*"

Minnie was involved in a doctrinal dispute in the larger church, and Flora Fountain went with the "radicals" One of the issues in dispute was whether a Christian should join secret societies, such as the Mason's. Her husband's cousin, Rev. Romulus Richmond was a member of the Prince Hall Masons of the United Grand Lodge of Iowa at Chariton. By 1896 she was an official ordained minister of the radical United Brethren Conference. The Brethren accepted women in the pulpit, and several were ordained in Southwest Wisconsin in this period. In 1899 the Church Conference made the longstanding practice official: "*Whenever any godly woman presents herself ...for authority to preach the gospel among us, she may be granted a license, provided she complies with the usual conditions required of men who wish to enter the ministry of our church*" Minnie was one of the pioneers in what is now the United Methodist Church.

Minnie and her husband moved to Burton after she had held revival meetings there in 1895, and she traveled throughout Richland, Crawford, and Grant counties leading revival services and prayer meetings. She did all this while raising at least four children. In 1896 her husband Peter sold his farm, an acre of which he had donated as a place to build the log church years before. By 1900 she had been assigned her own circuit in Crawford County, and they moved to a farm they rented in Clayton Township in that county. They were the only African Americans in the county. It was here that her powers as a revivalist reached their greatest power.

The Grant County Herald of March 3, 1898 trumpeted the headline "AN AWFUL CRIME". The article told a strange story: "*Sheriff Hymer brought to Lancaster today from Soldiers Grove a man who has confessed to being a partner in one of the most brutal and inexcusable murders that ever disgraced the name of Grant county. His name is Pierce Noggles and his home is near Soldiers Grove, Crawford County. His story is that about six years ago he and two friends met in Platteville on Saturday afternoon and had a social time drinking together. Later they started to go to the residence of an acquaintance east of the city. The three were in a single buggy. When about a mile from Platteville they saw a Jew peddler coming down the road and one of the party said "I'm going to have that fellow's money." The peddler was stopped and killed, his body robbed of money and valuables and then cut into pieces, put into his valises and buried under a beer vat near the Platteville brewery*

"The manner of his confession is almost as remarkable as the crime. Mrs. Minnie Richmond, a colored evangelist, whose home is in the "colored settlement" near Lancaster, has been holding meeting in and about Soldiers Grove and it was at one of her meetings – a prayer meeting at a private house – that the man's troubled soul compelled him to confess his awful guilty knowledge. Harassed by a conscience that made his life a veritable hell, ever confronted by the figure of a dead man lying in the roadside in a pool of blood, haunted by a cry for mercy, he could no longer keep the secret. The murder would out. The colored woman's exhortation aroused his fear of judgment and awakened his sluggish mind to do right in the sight of both God and man." What oratorical and persuasive powers Minnie must have had!

Eventually Minnie gave up preaching and moved to Madison. She divorced Peter Richmond and married a man named Brown. So far as is known, she gave up the ministry. What makes her important is that in that time she was a strong African American woman, blazing a trail that countless others are free to follow because of pioneers like her.