

History of the Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society, Inc.

Early in 1977, a small group of historians and genealogists met informally to explore concerns of mutual interest. Among the concerns was the possible need for an organization that would focus largely, but not exclusively, on family history and genealogy of minority groups. They felt that these groups had been largely overlooked over the years. It was agreed that those persons who were interested would give further thought to the idea. They would discuss it with colleagues and meet at a later date to pursue the possibility and desirability of establishing such an organization. This initial, informal meeting proved ultimately to mark the beginning of the Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society (AAHGS). The purpose of the organization would be to foster and encourage historical and genealogical studies of families of all ethnic groups, with special emphasis upon African-Americans since the greatest deficiency was to be found in this area.

The second meeting of what proved to be the founding members of the Society was held on May 5, 1977 at the home of James Dent Walker, Washington, D.C., Elizabeth Clark-Lewis, Marcia Eisenberg, Marcia M. Greenlee, Debra Newman Ham, Jean Sampson Scott, Paul E. Sluby, Sr., and James Dent Walker were present. The persons at that meeting decided that they would act as the Board of Directors and temporary officers until general elections could be held. The first general election of officers occurred in March 1981.

On November 30, 1981, AAHGS received its Certificate of Exemption from the District of Columbia, and on April 30, 1982, the Federal Government recognized the Society.

Over the years, the membership continued to grow. As of 2020, there are 33 Chapters throughout the United States, including the James Dent Walker – District of Columbia Chapter (AAHGS-DC). The AAHGS-DC chapter was initially chartered in May 1991 under the name The National Capital Area Chapter until 1994 when the name changed to the James Dent Walker Chapter in honor of the AAHGS founding President, James Dent Walker, who was also a lifelong resident of Washington, DC.

The AAHG-DC chapter has included many noted historians and we encourage all of our members to document their family histories in their own way. Many of the members are not native to the DC area and the research undertakings are not restricted to local genealogy/history. AAHGS-DC sponsors educational trips such as trips to the Library of Virginia, James Madison's home, Montpelier and the Harriet Tubman in Cambridge, Maryland.

We have collaborated with such institutions as the National Archives and Records Administration, the Library of Congress, Howard University, the Historical Society of Washington, DC, the Association for the Study of African American Life and History and the DC Public Library.