



Rev. C. Randolph Uncles, SSJ
(1859-1933)

Born in 1859 to Lorenzo and Anne M. Uncles, the family belonged to Baltimore's thriving free black community. They attended St. Francis Xavier Church (est. 1863) in East Baltimore, the first exclusively black Catholic parish in the country, and welcomed the Mill Hill Fathers, a men's religious community dedicated to serving people of color, when they arrived in 1873. He attended the parish school, Baltimore public schools, and the Baltimore Normal School for Colored Teachers before obtaining a teaching position in the Baltimore County public schools, where he taught for three years. Discerning a vocation to the priesthood, he turned to his parish priests for counsel and advice. He was well aware of the obstacles that lay in front of him. Prejudice and opposition to black priests within the Catholic community were strong and most bishops and religious communities refused to accept black candidates for the priesthood. At that time, there was only one black priest in the country, Rev. Augustus Tolton of Chicago. The three Healy brothers of Georgia, James Augustine, Alexander Sherwood, and Patrick Francis, had distinguished themselves as priests, but none openly recognized themselves as black. In Baltimore, the Oblate Sisters of Providence had been founded in 1829 as a religious community for women of color, but no black priest had been ordained in Maryland. The Mill Hill Fathers supported him in his decision and secured his admission to St. Hyacinthe Minor Seminary in Quebec, Canada. He excelled in his studies, becoming fluent in French, Greek, and Latin, and was valedictorian of his class. After making the decision to join the Mill Hill Fathers, he returned to Baltimore where he completed his education at the seminary established for the community, St. Joseph's Seminary, and was ordained in 1891 by Cardinal James Gibbons, becoming the first black priest to complete his training in the United States. He was assigned to teach at the newly-opened Epiphany Apostolic College (1889-1970), a minor seminary located in the Baltimore suburb of Walbrook, where he taught Latin, Greek, and history for the next thirty-five years. In 1893, he joined with four other members of his community to found the new Society of St. Joseph of the Sacred Heart, also known as the Josephite Fathers, a community dedicated to serving African Americans exclusively. He was remembered as being a man of rare intelligence and ability who possessed a commanding and dignified presence. He died after a brief illness at the age of 74 and is buried in New Windsor, New York, where the college had been located since 1925.