

Compiled by Brandon Pieczko
September 2011

Provenance

The records of Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church were donated by Mary Haywood-Benson on March 5, 2010. The majority of the records were accumulated by Charles S. Latham; a long-serving officer and choir member at Bethel A.M.E. Church.

Physical Description: 2.2 linear ft. (2 Boxes)

Access

The records are accessible to the public within applicable copyright restrictions and limited to use at the Champaign County Historical Archives of The Urbana Free Library.

Organizational History

Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church was founded c. 1863 when a small group of African Americans who had been holding prayer meetings in their homes raised the necessary funds to erect a small frame building at 405 E. Park Avenue in Champaign. In 1877 the building was moved to a newly purchased lot at 401 E. Park Avenue (Champaign), and a parsonage was added to the property c. 1881. Bethel A.M.E. Church experienced gradual but steady early growth in its membership. Comprehensive membership figures are not available; however, in 1888 the church's members numbered 62, and by 1938 had grown to approximately 270. In 1892 the church secured a loan from the Citizens Building Association to build a new brick building. This structure, the second Bethel A.M.E. Church building, was officially incorporated and dedicated as "The African Methodist Episcopal Church of Champaign, Illinois" in 1893. Under the leadership of Rev. R.H. Hackley, the parsonage was rebuilt in 1919. By the late 1940s, the church building had become in need of extensive repairs, and the Bethel A.M.E. Church community began a ten year fundraising effort to raise \$95,000 for a new building. Construction of the new building began in 1958 based on plans designed by the local architectural firm Laz and Edwards, and was completed in early 1959. The new building, the third Bethel A.M.E. Church, was officially dedicated on April 26, 1959 under the leadership of Rev. C.M. Curry. In 1969 church members voted to approve the purchase of the adjacent property located at 405 E. Park Street (Champaign). However, as improvement plans were underway in 1970, a fire caused extensive damage to the newly acquired property. In 1977 a new parsonage was constructed on the adjacent property under the leadership of Rev. Alexander C. Wright, Jr. During the 1980s and 1990s, gradual improvements and upgrades were made to the interior of the church building, and in 2007 a new parking lot was added to the property by the Butts Construction Company of Champaign.

Bethel A.M.E. Church has long been an important religious, social, and political institution within the Champaign-Urbana community. During segregation of the early 1900s, Bethel maintained a park for neighborhood children on Ellis Street and a reading center in the 100 block of East University Avenue in Champaign. The church itself, which included a library and orchestra, was a prominent meeting destination for African American students at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. Bethel A.M.E. Church was the first church in Champaign-Urbana to have a Baraca-Philathea affiliation with the

National Baraca-Philathea Bible Study group and its lyceum attracted African American speakers from around the United States. Other administrative, religious, and social groups that continue to be active within Bethel A.M.E. Church include the Steward Board, the Trustee Board, the Lay Organization, the Fleur de Lis Club, the Kavalier Social Fraternity, the Women's Ministry, the Adult/Youth/Young Adult Choirs, the Calendar Club, and the Allen Christian Fellowship.

Bethel A.M.E. Church is situated within the Illinois Conference (state) of the Fourth Episcopal District (region) of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (international). The church and its members participate in quarterly conference meetings at the local level (Bethel A.M.E. Church Conference), annual meetings at the state level (Illinois Annual Conference), and quadrennial meetings at the international level (General Conference). See attached appendix for a chronological list of ministers who have served at Bethel A.M.E. Church.

Scope and Content

The Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church records document the internal organizational development of the church, its religious and social mission within the local Champaign-Urbana community, and its administrative relationship to other African Methodist Episcopal churches in the state of Illinois and beyond from the late 1950s to early 1990s. The bulk of these records extend from 1960 to 1990. This collection includes records which document internal administrative functions such as board meeting minutes, correspondence (limited), financial reports, and membership files; organizational activities such as local, state, and general church conferences; as well as social and devotional activities sponsored by the church and its sub-organizations like the Kavalier Social Fraternity and the Lay Organization. Of particular note is an extensive collection of church publications including weekly Sunday service bulletins from the 1960s-1990s.

Arrangement

Organized into two series: Series 1, Administrative Records (1956-1992) and Series 2, Publications (1959-1993). The records are arranged by record type within each series.

Subject Terms

Subjects: African American Churches--Champaign
Churches--Champaign
Methodist Church--Champaign

Names: Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church (Champaign, ILL.)
Champaign (ILL.)--Church History
Latham, Charles S.

Street Names and Addresses: Park Avenue (Champaign), East, 401
Park Avenue (Champaign), East, 405

Container List

Series 1: Administrative Records, 1956-1992

Consists of meeting minutes, correspondence, financial reports, planning documents for conferences and local programming, membership files, and sub-organization/council quarterly reports.

Box 1

Folder 1: Board Meeting Minutes, 1959-1964

Folder 2: Board Meeting Minutes, 1965-1970, 1974, 1992

Folder 3: Correspondence, 1960, 1969-1970, 1980, 1984-1985, 1992

Folder 4: General Financial Reports, 1961-1984

Folder 5: Quarterly Church Conference Financial Reports, 1956-1962

Folder 6: Quarterly Church Conference Financial Reports, 1963-1986

Folder 7: Quarterly Church Conference Minutes and Agendas, 1964, 1967, 1970, 1979, 1983, 1991

Folder 8: Class Leader's Council, 1969-1970

Folder 9: Lay Organization, 1987-1992

Folder 10: Kavalier Social Fraternity, 1980, 1989-1992

Folder 11: Membership Rolls, 1965-1974

Folder 12: Pastor's Counseling Worksheets, 1969-1970

Folder 13: Program Planning Worksheets, 1970

Folder 14: Charles S. Latham, 1989-1991

Folder 15: A.M.E. Church General Conference, 1964-1965

Folder 16: General A.M.E. Church Commission Reports, 1990-1991

Series 1: Administrative Records, 1956-1992 (Continued)

Box 2:

Ledger, 1958-1959

*Board Meeting Minutes from January 13, 1958 to August 31, 1959 begin on page 3.

The Official Membership and Church Record, Register, 1959-1960

*Board Meeting Minutes from October 5, 1959 to April 11, 1960 begin on page 72.

Series 2: Publications, 1959-1993

Consists of bulletins, programs, pamphlets, and flyers published by Bethel A.M.E. Church, the general African Methodist Episcopal Church, and other religious organizations.

Box 1 (Continued)

Folder 17: Sunday Church Service Bulletins, 1960-1969

Folder 18: Sunday Church Service Bulletins, 1971-1993

Folder 19: Annual Founder's Day Celebration Programs, 1985-1988, 1991-1992

Box 2 (Continued)

Folder 1: Annual Illinois A.M.E. Church Conference Programs, 1961, 1963-1964, 1966, 1968-1970, 1981, 1986

Folder 2: National and Regional A.M.E. Church Publications, 1959-1977

Oversize Item

Map Case, Drawer 1: *Districts of the A.M.E. Church*, Poster (22.25 in. x 17 in.), ca. late 1970s

Notes

Additional records pertaining to Bethel A.M.E. Church (including its Baraca-Philanthea Lyceum) are held by the University Archives of the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, and the Museum of the Grand Prairie in Mahomet, IL.

The records held by the University Archives can be found within the *Albert Lee Papers, 1912, 1917-1928* (Record Series 2/6/21; Box 3). The online finding aid for this collection is available here:

<http://www.library.illinois.edu/archives/archon/?p=collections/controlcard&id=213>

The records held by the Museum of the Grand Prairie can be found within the *Doris K. Wylie Hoskins Archive for Cultural Diversity, 1861-2009* (Drawer 10: Religious Institutions; alphabetical thereunder). The drawer-level finding aid for this collection is available here:

<http://ccha.tufl.org/ccha/pdf/03000002/0300000210000.pdf>

To schedule an appointment to view the archive, please call (217) 586-2612.

APPENDIX: MINISTERS OF BETHEL A.M.E. CHURCH

First Church, 1863-1892

Rev. Knight
J.W. Jackson, 1874
Richard Holley, 1877
William J. Davis
Charles Holmes, 1880-1881
Henry Depugh, (1872)-1883
A. A. Burleigh
E. Prior Moore, 1887
Rev. Rinehart, 1888
Rev. Campbell, 1888
Henry Lackey, 1892

Second Church, 1893-1958

Peyton M. Lewis, 1894
Jesse (E./S.) Woods
F. T. Harvey, 1896
Peter Cooper, 1897
Benjamin Arnett, 1899
George (Christbrugh/Chreslburgh), 1900
Levi P. C(h)risty, 1902
J. H. W. Jackson, 1904
Andrew T. Jackson, 1905
George W. Jones, 1911
Henry Simons
Henry W. Jame(r)son, 1914
E. G. Jackson, 1916
(R./H.) H. Hackley, 1918
J. A. Sherman, 1920
George W. Jones, 1924 (2nd term)
John H. Smith, 1929
Charles E. Brooks, 1930
C. O. Mitchell, 1932
Isaac S. Stone, 1933
George T. Shaw, 1934

T. H. Stoner
M. C. Wright, 1936
J.W. (Wiley/Wedley), 1942-1944
T. S. Henderson
John W. Wright,()-1948
Elsie Taborn, 1948-1953
Andrew R. Parks, 1953-1957
C. M. Curry, (1957/59)-1961

Third Church, 1959-Present

Blaine Ramsey, 1961-1967
W. R. Stewart, 1967-1970
William N. Guy, 1970-1971
H. Henry Walker, 1971-1974
Clarence E. Carr, 1974-1977
A. C. Wright, 1977-1983
John Q. Owens, 1983-1984
Alfred E. Johnson, 1984-1988
H. Henry Walker, 1988-1990 (2nd term)
Steven A. Jackson, 1990-1995
John Nettles, Jr., 1995
Charles B. Jackson, 1995-2002
Gregory Wilson, 2002-2004
Roosevelt Lindsey, 2004-2007
Larry D. Lewis, 2007-Present*

*N.B. Cases where spellings or dates are uncertain have been noted in parentheses. Information for the present pastor was current as of September 2011.