Collection #
F 0597

BETHEL AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH (INDPLS.) BOARD MINUTES, 1871–1909

Collection Information

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Cataloging Information

Processed by

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Manuscript and Visual Collections Department
William Henry Smith Memorial Library
Indiana Historical Society
450 West Ohio Street
Indianapolis, IN 46202-3269

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COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION:	One reel of microfilm
COLLECTION DATES:	1871–1927
PROVENANCE:	
RESTRICTIONS:	None
COPYRIGHT:	
REPRODUCTION RIGHTS:	Permission to reproduce or publish material in this collection must be obtained from the Indiana Historical Society.
ALTERNATE FORMATS:	
RELATED HOLDINGS:	SC 1438 Bethel A. M. E. Church (Indianapolis, Ind.) Sunday School Records, 1892
ACCESSION NUMBER:	1980.1020
NOTES:	

HISTORICAL SKETCH

Richard Allen was the leader of the movement that founded the African Methodist Episcopal denomination. Bethel African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church was built in Philadelphia by Allen and others in 1794. The church is known as "Mother Bethel."

Bethel A.M.E. Church was established in Indianapolis in 1836. It was started in the home of Augustus Turner who lived on Georgia Street between what is now West and Capitol Streets. The church began to grow and early on was known as the Indianapolis Station.

Sometime after spring 1857 Christ Church Episcopal, located on the Circle in downtown, Indianapolis, sold its building to Bethel. Bethel moved the building to land situated on the north side of Georgia Street between Senate Avenue and the canal. By 1859, the church hosted its second annual Indiana Conference of the A. M. E. Church and formally became the Bethel A. M. E. Church. This was one of a string of churches within the denomination named Bethel throughout Indiana and the country.

An esteemed group of men served as pastors of Bethel A. M. E. in Indianapolis during the 19th century. For example, Elisha Weaver was appointed as editor of *The Repository of Religion and Literature*, an A. M. E. publication that promoted education during the antebellum period and Willis Revels, a physician, served as a recruiter and surgeon for the 28th United States Colored Troops during the Civil War. James Matthew Townsend was pastor of Bethel during the late 1870s and went on to serve as missionary secretary of the Indiana Conference and travelled abroad several times. He was elected to the Indiana State Legislature in 1884.

Bethel was destroyed by arson in 1864 while Revels served as pastor. The Civil War and the destruction of the church caused financial woes for the church. In 1866, part of the membership left Bethel and formed Allen Chapel A. M. E. Bethel built on its current site at 414 West Vermont Street in 1870. Over time, it has made some exterior changes to its building.

During the first half of the twentieth century, Bethel A.M.E. continued to have an active membership. Many of the city's African Americans patronized the denomination. In more recent decades with much of the black population moving outward from the downtown area, the church's attendance has declined. The church has been traditionally known for its outreach from hosting the nineteenth-century black state conventions to its social programs including an adult day-care, well-baby clinic, and a credit union during the twentieth century. It was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1991.

Sources:

Collection materials

Lilly, Eli. The Little Church on the Circle. Indianapolis: Indianapolis: Rector, Wardens, and Vestrymen of Christ Protestant Episcopal Church, 1957.

Warren, Stanley, "The Bethel African American Episcopal Church." *Traces of Indiana and Midwestern History*, Summer 2007.

Indiana Historical Bureau website http://www.in.gov/history/markers/Bethel.htm, accessed May 7, 2013

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The one-reel microfilm collection contains: Volume 1: board minutes (1871–1881) of the Bethel AME Church in Indianapolis; Volume 2: board minutes of the church (1906 – 1909); and the printed proceedings of the Indiana Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church for various years from 1911 through 1927.

The church is referred to as the Vermont Street Bethel AME Church from the March 22, 1871 through the March 25, 1878 minutes. Beginning with the April 8, 1878 minutes, the church is routinely noted as the Bethel AME Church. According to the minutes for the ten-year span covered by the board minutes book in Volume 1, there were four pastors for the church beginning and ending with William E. Trevan.

Pastorates (1871–1881):

William E. Trevan	March 1871 – August 1871
Nathan Mitchum	September 1871 – August 1874
D. P. Seaton	September 1874 – September 1877
J. M. Townsend	September 1877 – August 1879
William E. Trevan	September 1879 – June 1881 (end of minutes book)

The minute book includes entries for members present, class financial reports, public collections, and what the minister was paid. From 1871, Lafayette Goins was listed as secretary recording the minutes. Beginning in the fall of 1878, J. M. Wheeler held that position.

According to Volume II: board minutes of the church (1906 – 1909), George H. Shaffer served as the pastor of the church throughout the time period.

The printed proceedings of the Annual Session of the Indiana Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church contained within the collection include the following years:

1911 Bethel AME Church in Richmond from September 6 – 10
Rt. Rev. C. T. Shaffer, D.D. M.D., presiding bishop of the 4th District

1912 Wayman AME Church in Kokomo from September 11 –16

1913 Bethel AME Church in Marion from September 10 – 15
Rev. R. J. M. Long

1917 Bethel AME Church in Anderson from September 12 – 16
Rev. J. M. Nickles

1923 Bethel AME Church in Bloomington from September 26 – 30
Rev. A. L. Washington

1924 Bethel AME Church in Indianapolis from September 24 – 28
Rev. Charles S. Williams

1925 Allen Chapel AME Church in Terre Haute from September 23 -27
Rev. H. H. Black

1926 Bethel AME Church in Muncie from September 22 – 26
Rev. G. S. Smith

1927 Bethel AME Church in Indianapolis from September 21 – 22
Rev. R. L. Pope

The annual printed proceedings contain detailed information about the various churches, missions, and circuits throughout the Indiana Conference. The proceedings comment on the staff, buildings, and work of the various entities. They provide a good glimpse of how wide spread the work of the African Methodist Episcopal Conference was throughout the state during the first quarter of the 20th century. In addition to individual reports pertaining to local entities, the proceedings include general reports from statewide committees concerning education, finances, publications, temperance, and the state of the country and the state of the church.

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CATALOGING INFORMATION

For additional information on this collection, including a list of subject headings that may lead you to related materials:

1. Go to the Indiana Historical Society's online catalog: http://opac.indianahistory.org/

2. Click on the "Basic Search" icon.

3. Select "Call Number" from the "Search In:" box.

4. Search for the collection by its basic call number (in this case, F 0597).

5. When you find the collection, go to the "Full Record" screen for a list of headings that can be searched for related materials.