

Collection #
M 1270
OM 0637
BV 5219–5220, 5222

**BETHEL A.M.E. CHURCH (INDIANAPOLIS, IND.) ADDITION
1871–2016**

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February 2017

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June 2017

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

www.indianahistory.org

COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION:	Manuscript Materials: 7 manuscript boxes, 3 bound volumes, 2 oversized manuscript items Visual Materials: 1 cold storage color photograph box, 2 photograph boxes, 2 OVB photograph boxes, 1 panoramic photograph Printed Materials: 14 printed collection items Artifacts: 9 artifacts
COLLECTION DATES:	1871–2016
PROVENANCE:	Bethel A.M.E. Church, Indianapolis, Indiana, 2016
RESTRICTIONS:	Items listed as being in cold storage need at least four hours to acclimate, so patrons are advised to call ahead of their visit if they wish to view those items to allow for thawing time.
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ALTERNATE FORMATS:	Indiana Historical Society Digital Images
RELATED HOLDINGS:	Bethel A.M.E. Church Records M1240; Bethel A.M.E. Church Board Minutes F0597; Stout Family Papers M1280
ACCESSION NUMBER:	2016.0235
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 of the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

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.

In 2016, the congregation sold its building to a company that planned to locate a hotel in that space.

Sources:

Information in collection

[M1240: Bethel A.M.E. Church \(Indianapolis, Ind.\) Collection Guide](#)

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

This collection is divided into ten series. The first and main series is the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Indianapolis, Indiana. This series reflects the organization of the church and its many activities.

Series 2 contains the materials about the overarching body of the A.M.E. Church, the General Conference. Worldwide, there are twenty districts within the General Conference. The first section has information about the conference, followed by specific folders for various districts.

The Indiana Conference, to which Bethel A.M.E. Church belongs, is part of the Fourth Episcopal District. Series 3 has information about a few of these annual meetings, including conference journal/ledgers from the early twentieth century.

Series 4 and 5 are the Women's Missionary Society and the Lay Organization, respectively. Both of these organizations contain information about Bethel, as well as other churches.

Christian and secular education has been a major mission for the A.M.E. Conference for years. The folders in this series mirror that interest.

Series 7, 8, and 9 (Other Churches, Organizations, and Individuals) look at the broader community. The churches, organizations, and individuals may or may not have a direct association with Bethel.

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