HISTORY OF BETHEL A.M.E. CHURCH
(Abridged)

At a church conference and get together held at Bethel A.M.E. Church, July 14, 1938, a discussion arose on the early history of the church. As a result of the discussion, Rev. Thomas H. Stoner, the pastor, appointed a committee on Church History for the purpose of research and to secure facts concerning the early history of the church.

The personnel of this committee was Mrs. Louanna Riley, Mrs. Florence Louis Mileam, Mrs. Clara Anderson Allen, Mrs. Mary Blackburn Jones, and Mr. Albert R. Lee, Chairman. The members of this committee, with but one exception were citizens of this community, and all had resided here for a number of years. They were able to call upon their own memories, and relate the traditions that had come down to them from their parents.

The committee checked facts, interpreted and evaluated all data obtained, reached conclusions and agreements which they presented to constitute the history of Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church.

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Early church records before 1880 were not found, if kept, nor was the committee able to secure Conference Minutes of early years. This can be explained easily as Bethel A.M.E. Church is older than the Illinois Annual Conference.

From diverse accounts given by early settlers, along with newspaper stories, excerpts from chronicled history of Champaign County, it must be true that the church organization known as Bethel A.M.E. Church came into being during the year 1863. The Quarterly Conference Journal of 1891 stated that the Church was 28 years old, which would place it's origin in 1863.

In 1863 a small group of people, who had been holding prayer and other religious meetings in their homes, got together and raised funds in the amount of $600.00 and erected a small frame building on the property of Mr. Jake Taylor at 405 E. Park Avenue.

In 1877, the property at the southeast corner of Park and Fourth Street was purchased and the frame building at 405 E. Park Avenue was moved to 401 E. Park Avenue, making both the building and ground the property of Bethel A. M.E. Church. During the ministry of Rev. Charles Holmes, 1880-1881, the first parsonage was built in the back of the church on Fourth Street.

Records show that on June 6, 1892 an abstract for property was signed by the following trustees: Robert English, L.H. Walden, Clay Brown, John Moss. and General C. Lee. On October 5, 1892, a meeting was held to incorporate the church and take action to build a new church and the following were named trustees for the new church: William Lee, L.H. Walden, Clay Brown, John Moss and General C. Lee.

The new church was a brick building with beautiful stained glass windows. There was an auditorium, a lecture room; a choir room that was often called the Baraca Room because of its use as a Sunday School room for the Baraca Class, which had an enrollment of 100 at one time. Bethel was the first church in the Twin Cities to have a Baraca-Philathea affiliation with the National Baraca-Philathea Bible Study Group.

On November 6, 1895 the church voted to finish the inside of the church. At this time the pews and the altar rail were installed, a new furnace and one hundred folding chairs for the lecture room. October 13, 1911, under the