EARLY HISTORY

OF

BETHEL AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH

A WORKING DOCUMENT

Since neither Bethel church records nor Quarterly Conference minutes before 1880 are available, the time of Bethel's founding has been determined from the history of Champaign County which shows that the church was organized in 1863. The Quarterly Conference Journal of 1891 stated that the church was 28 years old. Using that date, the time of origin would be 1864. So in 1863 or 1864 a small group of people, who had been holding prayer meetings and other religious meetings in their homes, got together and raised funds in the amount of $600 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 Fourth and Park Streets was purchased and the frame building at 405 E. Park Avenue was moved to 401 East Park Avenue, thus, making both building and ground the property of Bethel A. M. E. Church.

> Park Street, as it was called then, was an unpaved street, fringed by wooden sidewalks, whose protruding nails and splinters were a constant menace. These were bordered with a generous growth of dog fennel and weeds - the Street, when unfrozen, was often a mudhole in the winter, and in the early spring it contained two lanes, of rough and uncertain surface, drained by two deep open ditches - one on each side. The church building resembled the typical rural schoolhouse. With little or no foundation except the supporting brick piers, it flattened itself upon the ground.