Descriptive Summary:

**Title:** Bethel A.M.E. Church Papers  
**Date Span:** 1926-1977  
**Acquisition Number:** N/A  
**Creator:** Bethel A.M.E.  
**Donor:** Bethel A.M.E.  
**Date of Acquisition:** 1977-1978  
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**Processed:** Reprocessed 2017, Hope Dunbar

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Biographical Note:
Historic Bethel A.M.E. Church is the oldest Black institution in the City of Buffalo. Organized in 1831, the Church has a proud history beginning with its original site being a station on the Underground Railroad to producing numerous leaders in all aspects of life in the City of Buffalo. Bethel is a member of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the oldest and largest of African American Methodist denominations, and is a connectional Church.

Scope and Contents:
Church ledgers; church membership; church programs; committee records; conference reports and materials; ephemera; event programs; financial reports and records; funeral programs; guidelines; letters; minutes; newspaper clippings; personal letters; photographs; planning reports; printed programs; records of marriages, deaths, and baptisms; reports of the pastor; scrapbooks; and tax records.

Inventory: See below.
Index to

The Microfilmed

Bethel A.M.E. Church Papers
Buffalo, New York

Part of

The Buffalo Afro-American Collection

A joint project of
The Afro-American Historical Association of the Niagara Frontier Inc.
and
Buffalo State College

And

*The Buffalo State College Regional History Collection

Copies of the microfilmed titles are housed at
The North Jefferson Branch Library
*The Buffalo State College Archives and
*The Monroe Fordham Regional History Center, Buffalo State College

The 16MM film was filmed with a 34X lens
Bethel History Committee (1977)

In 1977 a history committee was formed by the new pastor—Rev. James K. Baldwin. The Committee's charge was to locate and preserve the extant archival records of Bethel A.M.E. Church of Buffalo. This folder contains the minutes and proceedings of that committee during 1977.

Matilda (Watson) Seamster Collection (folders 2-13)

Minutes of Group #14 (Sons & Daughters of Bethel), (1940-47)

In July, 1940 the members of Bethel were reorganized and divided into groups which were identified by numbers. Mrs. Seamster kept the minutes of Group #14. The minutes show that in 1942 the name of #14 was changed to Sons and Daughters of Bethel. This folder contains a book of minutes of that organization from 1940-42, plus several meetings in 1947.

Sons and Daughters of Bethel (additional material in Box #4 “scrapbook”)

This folder contains numerous form letters to members and several printed programs from the 1950's and 1960's pertaining to this group.

Matilda Seamster Scrapbook

Contains news clippings, church programs, and other memorabilia pertaining to Bethel church. Materials cover the period 1940s-1960s. A variety of rich historical sources. The book was too fragile for extensive handling, hence the contents are not indexed in detail. Nonetheless, all of the contexts appear on the microfilm.

Printed Programs of Sunday Services (1940s-1977)

Fourteen folders containing printed programs that were handed out to the congregation at the regular Sunday services. Not complete for most years but still a sizable and representative collection.

Church Directory (1962)

Compiled by the Sunday School Board, this directory contains the names and addresses of the Bethel membership. In addition, it lists the weekly calendar as well as members of the following: Steward Board, Trustee Board, and Christian Education Commission. The directory also lists the officers of the various church departments, clubs and auxiliaries. The directory concludes with a list of Bethel members who were employed in professional positions.
Printed Programs of Special Events held at Bethel (1965-77)

Five folders containing printed programs of special events and services, women’s day slingers-captains-and Bailing lists, newsletters, etc., pertaining to Bethel Church. The folders do not contain programs of regular church services. The materials span the period 1965-1977 and are listed chronologically.

Bethel Church Conference Reports, 1964-1977

Financial reports, reports of the pastor, and other materials pertaining to the church. This is the type of material that would be distributed to members attending the church conference. Covers the period 1964-1977 and is listed chronologically.

Funeral Programs


General Conference Materials

Programs and other printed materials from the A.M.E. General and Quadrennial Conferences that Mrs. Seamster attended. Materials span the period from 1962-1976 and are listed chronologically.

New York Annual A.M.E. Conferences

Contains various reports and other printed materials that were included in delegates’ packets at the New York Annual Conferences. Includes materials from the following years: 1965-1972, and 1977.

WNY Church School and ACE League Fellowship Convention, (1970 & 1972)

Printed programs contain program, agenda, district officers, WNY pastors, and other information for both years.

Women’s Day at Bethel (1968)

Lists of group members, team captains, and other material pertaining to Women’s Day in 1968. Women’s Day materials for other years are included in Folder #7.
14 Laymen’s Bus to Birmingham, Alabama (1971)

The box appears to be the working file of the chairman of the planning committee for the Laymen’s trip to Birmingham. Contains slingers, member lists, bus itinerary, and other similar materials.

15 Personal

Misc., personal letters and other materials belonging to Mrs. Seamster. Pictures pertaining to Bethel Church.

16 Mrs. Rosie Freeman Box

The materials in this box were procured from various sources by Mrs. Rosie Freeman, member of the Bethel History Committee.

A. Materials on Rev. H. Alien Garcia. Numerous papers, programs, letters, pictures, etc. that pertain to Rev. Garcia—pastor of Bethel during the early 1920's.

B. Membership lists and historical information on the H.P. Anderson Club--"founded in 1937." Compiled specifically for this history project by a club member.

C. Membership list of Viola Johnson Chorus--"founded in 1946". Compiled by a member of Chorus for this project.

D. Funeral program for Rev. H.P. Anderson.

E. Official programs for New York Conferences (A.M.E.) for 1966, & 1973. Both conferences were held in Buffalo. Contains many pictures and much valuable information about Bethel and the New York Conference.

F. Bethel's 110th Anniversary Celebration, 1941. Printed program contains much historical information concerning the church in Buffalo.

G. Bethel's 112th Anniversary Celebration, 1943. Printed program with historical information and pictures.

H. Bethel's 139th Anniversary Celebration, 1969. Printed program with historical information and pictures.

I. Bethel's 144th Anniversary Celebration, 1975. Printed program contains historical information and pictures.

J. Trustees Aid Society (organized in "1937"). A short history written for this project by a member—Mrs. N. McDade.
K. Pastor's Aid Club ("organized, 1962"). Short history written by Mrs. McDade.


17. **Bro. Ellis Clark Box**

   A. Two printed programs of Sunday services under Rev. William M. Dawkins (January 19 & 26, 1941).

   B. Two legal notices to Bethel Trustees concerning the sale of church property on Eagle Street and purchase of Property at Michigan and E. Ferry, 1953.

   C. Printed program for Women’s Day, March 28, 1965 (Rev. Harry J. White). Program includes much valuable information concerning church organizations clubs, officers, etc.

   D. Copies of deeds to property owned by Bethel Church.


   F. Numerous other financial records, 1930s-1970s

18. **Mrs. Lloyd Allen Box**

   A. Women’s Mite Missionary Society (1926 - 1959)
      (1) Minutes of the Jessie D. Head Women's Missionary Society; October 7, 1926 - December 17, 1931; January 5, 1939 - August 7, 1952; and November 20, 1952 - February 12, 1959.
      (2) Various other historical materials pertaining to the Missionary Society.

19. **Mrs. Beulah Jones Box**

   A. Short history of the Daughters of Alien at Bethel Church, (written by Mrs. Jones).
   B. Personal notes of Bethel's history (written by Mrs. Jones)
   C. Record book kept by Mrs. Jones as Sunshine Chairman of the Daughters of Allen. (Two books that cover the mid-1950's).
   D. Numerous printed programs from Sunday services. Covers the period, 1940s - 1970s. These programs are also cross listed and microfilmed with the programs in the Seamster Collection—see box. No. 5.
   E. Scrap book containing newspaper clippings, pictures, and other memorabilia.

20. **Jesse Chase Box**

    Contains a letter to Bro. Chase from Bishop Frank M. Reid, Jr. The letter praised Bro. Chase's service as the Pastor's Steward. Bro. Chase was given the honorary title of Bishops Steward, (n.d.).
21. Mrs. Alice Davenport Box

Numerous letters and other materials pertaining to the history of the solidarity club (organized in 1957). Box also contains pictures.

22. Holmes, Means, and Bell Box

Contains material from Mother Ethel Holmes, Sis. Virginia Means, and Bro. Fred Bell.

A. Minutes of Stewards Board from March 19, 1935 - April, 1940, and June, 1943-May, 1961. (Mrs. Holmes).

B. Newspaper article on Bethel's move to Michigan & Ferry site. Article contains important historical material.

C. Numerous other newspaper clippings
   (1) two on Rev. Collier
   (2) Walker becomes bishop
   (3) description of old Vine Street School, etc.

D. Numerous church programs (cross filed with Seamster Collection--box #5).

E. Printed programs from Bethel's 112th Anniversary Celebration

F. Printed programs from Bethel's 144th Anniversary Celebration

G. The A.M.E. Church: 188 Years of Progress

H. "Interracial Congregation aim of A.M.E. Church Pastor (White)," a news clipping.

23. Mrs. Willa DuBard Box

This material was located and procured by Mrs. DuBard from numerous sources.

A. Bethel History. Printed programs of numerous anniversary celebrations. Also other materials that pertain to Bethel's history.

B. Short history of the Bethel Senior Choir


E. "Guidelines for Responding to the Crisis in the Cities: Action Strategies for local churches." (n.p., n.d.)
Bethel A.M.E Church Records

F. Numerous church programs from the pastorates of Revs. Charles Stewart, D.O. Walker, and Harry White.

G. Printed program from annual Women's Day Celebration, 1974.

Records from the Church Vault

25 Minutes of Stewards Board meetings: March, 1935 – April, 1940; and June, 1943 – May, 1966.  (This material is microfilmed with material in Box #22-A).

26 Church ledger book with financial transactions for 1943-1951.

27 Large book which contains the following information from the years 1948-1951; (a) marriages, p. 50-57; (b) baptisms, pp, 20-47 + 63-71; and deaths, pp, 80-83. Book also lists the number receiving communion in 1948, p. 40.

28 Minutes of joint meeting of Trustees and Stewards with new pastor—Rev. Collier (June and July 1948). Plus minutes of finance committee, April 11, 1949, plus 3 other reports.

29 Ledger book with list of misc. expenses (1942-1945).


31 Record book showing expenses for 1948-1953. Plus a list of “bills to be paid,” n.d.

32 Record book containing handwritten lists of names indicating an amount of money for each, 1954.


34 Large Book contains the following
   (a) Alphabetized list of members with amount of payment, pp.3-31. n.d.
   (b) members contributing to fuel rally (1950), pp. 43-141.
   (c) conference claims (1952-53), pp 150-183.
   (d) new members received (1952-64), pp. 200-277.
   (e) conference claims (1953-54), pp. 310-358.
   (g) mailing lists (1953-54), pp. 468-470.

35 Book containing lists of members, n.d.

36 List of members paying conference claims (1955-56).
Bethel A.M.E Church Records

37 Book containing the following information for 1959-1965:
   (a) Ledger book – Trustees finances, 1-100, 209-20, 254-266.
   (b) Ledger book of Stewards finances, 101-132.
   (c) Ledger book – Missionary Dept., 150-70, 205, & 246-47.
   (d) Sunday School Dept., 170-183.
   (e) Youth Choir, p 202-204.
   (f) Communion fund, 248-250.
   (g) Christian Endeavor, 221-229.

38 Minutes of Men’s Day Committee (1953)

39 Book containing members and contributions to “Mortgage Rally, 1959.

40 Legal documents and notices, including deeds of various properties owned by the church.
   See also box #17.

41 Misc. Papers
   (a) Official committees and members, n.d.
   (b) Motion to place more responsibility on officers, n.d.
   (c) Letter on “roofing for church,” 10/51.
   (d) Quarterly conference reports, 10/51, & 1/52.
   (e) Mortgage liquidation fund, 7/52.
   (f) Minutes of joint meeting of Stewards and Trustees, 7/52.
   (g) Minutes of Presidents Council, 6/66.

42 Pictures

43 Viola Johnson Chorus, minutes of meeting, 1948, & 1968.


45 Misc. materials that were not turned in time for indexing.

DVD/DISCS

(12) Discs of separate sermons