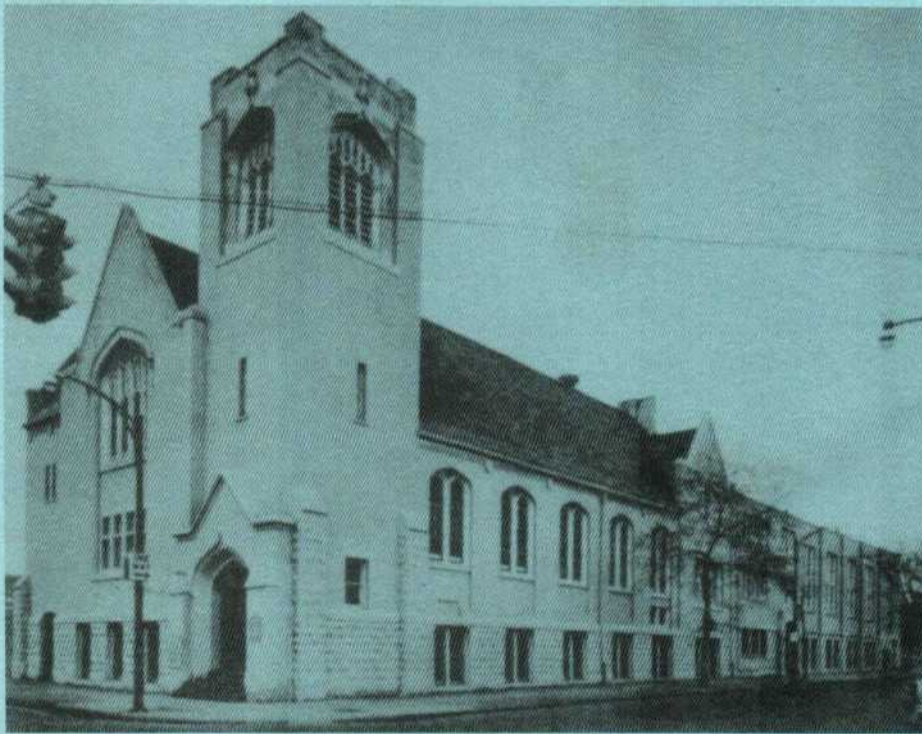


**A History of  
Bethel A.M.E. Church**

**Buffalo, New York  
1831 - 1991**



**Monroe Fordham**

**It cost our forefathers sweat and tears to bequeath the rich heritage we possess. If we would listen by the ear of faith, we would hear them say, "Take care of the church."**

Reverend Harry White, Sr. (1956)

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Bethel A.M.E. Church  
1525 Michigan Avenue  
Buffalo, NY

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**PREFACE TO THE 1991 (160th YEAR ANNIVERSARY) EDITION**



Reverend Harry J. White, Jr.

**To The Congregation of Bethel Church**

Yours is a long and illustrious history, dating back from 1831 to the present. A history that precedes the incorporation of the City of Buffalo. Your ministries are noteworthy. You have championed the cause of the oppressed by sheltering fugitive slaves from the South and assisting them in their flight to freedom. You have followed the commands of Christ by reaching, teaching and preaching. Through your various programs, you have reached out to the needy by clothing, feeding and counseling. Your teaching Ministry is well documented--Bethel Head Start having eight sites, and Bethel's Youth Enrichment Program touching the lives of disadvantaged youth and adolescents; and classes to strengthen the spiritual fiber of the church.

You have been blessed by having as your pastors some of African Methodism's finest scholars, Dr. D. Ormond Walker, and Dr. John W.P. Collier of Payne Theological Seminary. You have been blessed by having some of the churches most outstanding pulpites, among them Rev. Dr. Harry J. White, Sr. I am proud of fact that Bethel supported my education and that my ministry had its beginning in Bethel. Now through providence I have returned as your pastor, the only former Bethel Minister's son ever to have such a distinction.

As we face the 21st century, our mission is greater than ever. There are challenges which stagger the imagination, and opportunities are plentiful. Let us accept the challenge. Let us go forth with courage to serve the Lord and humanity. The harvest is plentiful, and laborers few!

Yours in Christ,  
Harry J. White, Jr., Pastor, 1991



Rev. Dr. Ja

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As we study the meeting in private l edifice that we pr determination on the duty to not only prot foundation so that o each person in the themselves, both ind institution was found

James K. Baldwin, P  
Bethel A.M.E. Churc  
Buffalo, New York  
1978



Rev. Dr. James K. Baldwin



Mrs. Hattie B. Baldwin





Rev. Dr. James K. Baldwin



Mrs. Hattie B. Baldwin

### PREFACE

In examining the lives and times of each successive generation of those whose efforts have made Bethel one of the leading churches in the First A.M.E. District, we are able to see that there is very little distance between past, present and future. We are still in pursuit of the mission that the founders of this institution set out to achieve more than 147 years ago. Like those before us, we must shoulder our share of the burden in the pursuit of that mission.

As we study the movements of Bethel's past congregations in this city; from meeting in private homes, to the Vine Street Church, to Eagle Street, and to the edifice that we presently occupy, we can envision a pattern of sacrifice and determination on their part to provide a lighthouse for this community. We have a duty to not only protect what the past generations have left to us, but to build on that foundation so that our children can share in this rich spiritual heritage. We call on each person in the present congregation to reflect on our past and rededicate themselves, both individually and collectively, to the mission around which this great institution was founded - service to God and to our fellowman.

James K. Baldwin, Pastor  
Bethel A.M.E. Church  
Buffalo, New York  
1978



## INTRODUCTION

In the General Conference of 1848, the Rev. Daniel A. Payne was appointed to the position of "Historiographer of the African Methodist Episcopal Church." As the official church historian, Rev. Payne was commissioned to launch an extensive search for records and documents pertaining to the early history of the denomination. During his long and painstaking search for historical records, his travels took him "throughout the whole of the territories embraced by the connection." From Canada West, to Washington, D.C., to St. Louis, Missouri and all across the connection, Rev. Payne traveled in hopes of finding the minutes, diaries, ministerial papers, and other church records which would enable the unborn generations to know and understand the aspirations and struggles, and the successes and failures of the pioneers who built the A.M.E. Church. After Rev. Payne had "seen and gathered all available material," he realized that the materials which had been preserved were "sparse and poor." The detailed documentations which he sought concerning the early decades of the Church's history had either been lost or were never recorded. Anxious to correct the negligence and shortsightedness which resulted in a collection of church records that were "sparse and poor," Rev. Payne left instructions to guide the generations that would follow him:

The materials of our history are now increasing, and becoming rich as well as abundant. They ought to be carefully preserved for the future historian.

To this end we cannot be too careful in electing secretaries; and the Bishops ought to conscientiously keep their own diaries and journals, both private and official. The presiding elders should be required to do the same,....Then too if the pastors will write monographs of the several pastorates which they serve, including men and women noted for their piety, usefulness and faithfulness, we shall have... varied, abundant and most valuable materials, wherewith the historiographer. . . shall be enabled to furnish to posterity an instructive history.

Those words were published in 1891 but they are just as urgent today. I wish to commend the Rev. James K. Baldwin for his foresight in organizing the Bethel History Society. Within a year the members of that society conducted an extensive campaign which resulted in locating and retrieving over 10,000 pages of records pertaining to their local church. The Afro-American Historical Association of the Niagara Frontier has organized, indexed and microfilmed those records, and copies of the microfilm have been placed in Bethel's recently dedicated history room. As Bishop Richard Allen Hildebrand stated at that dedication, "the history of Afro-Americans and the history of the Afro-American church are so tightly interwoven that it is difficult to separate the two." In carrying out its work, the Bethel History Society has made a significant contribution toward preserving the history of their church. And equally important, they have preserved an important facet of the total Buffalo Afro-American community.

The following are some of the persons whose efforts have contributed to whatever of value is derived from this present volume: Mr. Ellis Clark, Mother





## The Pre-Civil War Period

The three decades following the Declaration of Independence (1776-1806) witnessed the demise of legal slavery in the northern United States. Whether by court decree, or legislative or executive action, all northern states had by 1804 provided for the abolition of slavery. One of the results of that movement was a rapid increase in the size of "free Colored" communities in the northern cities and towns. At the same time, the widespread racial prejudice and discrimination which persisted even after slavery was ended intensified the need among those free northern blacks to establish separate and independent institutions to provide for their spiritual and social needs. Prior to the establishment of independent black churches in the northern states, the church-going blacks usually attended white churches, where they were required to sit in special "negro pews." Rather than put up with racial segregation and humiliation, many blacks felt the urge to establish their own churches. At the same time, there were those who preferred to attend an "African" church simply because of a desire to worship and fellowship among persons from a similar cultural background. The end of slavery in the north and the emerging Afro-American communities signaled a major turning point in the history of the Afro-American church. It was in that atmosphere that the movement to establish independent Afro-American churches began.

In April, 1787, the Revs. Richard Allen and Absalom Jones founded the Free African Society of Philadelphia. That organization formed the nucleus of what was to become the first independent Afro-American religious denomination in the United States--The African Methodist Episcopal Church. In 1794, Richard Allen and his associates organized Bethel Church of Philadelphia. Before long, African Methodist Societies began to appear in other northern cities. In 1816, delegates from five African Methodist congregations met at Philadelphia and formalized the establishment of the African Methodist Episcopal denomination. During the decades prior to the American Civil War, the A.M.E. Church grew to seven conference districts which included over 20,000 members.<sup>1</sup> Among its numerous member churches was the Vine Street African Methodist Church of Buffalo, New York. (In 1879 the name was changed to First A.M.E. Church of Buffalo, and in 1912 to Bethel A.M.E.).

When the Revs. Allen and Jones founded the Free African Society of Philadelphia, the first permanent white settlers had not yet arrived in the Western New York region that would in time become the City of Buffalo. The first permanent white settlers in the Buffalo area arrived during the early 1790s. When Col. Thomas Proctor reached the area in 1791 he found Cornelius Winney - a white trader, and his partner, "a negro called 'Black Joe'," to be the only non-Indian inhabitants. The evidence indicates that "Joe" was a resident of the area prior to Winney's arrival. "Black Joe," whose name was *Joseph Hodge, was reported to have "lived among the Indians a long time." He "spoke their language fluently, and had an Indian family." Hodge had escaped from slavery as a youngster and took refuge with the Senecas.*<sup>2</sup>

While the Afro-American population of Buffalo was never larger than 500 or so persons during the pre-Civil War era, Blacks were present from the very beginnings of Euro-American settlement in the area. Due to its close proximity to Canada, Buffalo attracted fugitive slaves as well as "free people of



color" who wished to remain in the United States and yet be close to the security which Canada offered. As Buffalo's Afro-American community increased in number, the need to establish independent community institutions also increased.

In many northern communities the formal organization of an Afro-American church was preceded by an informal "religious society." Initially those societies were not affiliated with any particular denomination, they were simply religious meetings that brought groups together to sing, worship, and fellowship. In time those societies usually applied for membership in established denominations. Sometimes the initial congregation would split and each splinter group joined a different denomination. That is what happened in the case of the Free African Society of Philadelphia.

While the specific evidence in regards to Buffalo is sketchy, there is sufficient reason to conclude that the Afro-American church in Buffalo, New York evolved through a pattern similar to the aforementioned. The evidence leads this writer to conclude that during the decades prior to 1830, Afro-Americans who attended church in Buffalo either worshiped in informal religious societies, or attended white churches, or both. By the mid - 1830s, the Afro-American community of Buffalo had organized two formal religious bodies - one Methodist and the other Baptist.

The "Colored Methodist Society" of Buffalo was organized in 1831.<sup>3</sup> The Afro-American population of Buffalo in that year numbered approximately 300 persons. (The city directory of 1832 lists the names of sixty-eight "Colored heads of households."). The meetings which resulted in the formation of the "Colored Methodist Society, "were held initially in a frame house on Carroll Street.<sup>4</sup> During the first several years of its existence, the society had no official ties with the A.M.E. Denomination.

The Reverend Richard Williams, one of the earliest A.M.E. itinerant ministers was the first A.M.E. minister to be sent to the Western New York region. Rev. Williams, who was described as "upright and faultless in his moral character," was eulogized as "the first regularly ordained and accredited elder who, amid great privations, carried the banner of the African Methodist Church and planted them on the shores of Canada and Western New York."<sup>5</sup>

When the New York Annual Conference convened on June 10, 1837, that body accepted and considered petitions from "St. Catherines, Canada West, and from Buffalo, asking for pastoral care." The New York Conference passed resolutions to send missionaries "into Canada and the western part of the state of New York, to explore, and as far as possible, organize and regulate what Societies they can in these regions."<sup>6</sup>

In summarizing the proceedings of the New York Conference of the following year (1838), Bishop Daniel A. Payne (first A.M.E. Church Historian) wrote:

Rev. Richard Williams, who was the missionary sent out by the previous conference to explore the region of Western New York and Canada, for the purpose of planting churches wherever the head of the church should open an effectual door, made his report. It appeared that he had established a society at Rochester, consisting of 26 persons, and also licensed a local preacher to watch over their spiritual interests. He also planted one at Buffalo, with 31 members, and licensed two local preachers.

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Bishop Payne's report further stated that "Brother George Weir, Sr., was ordained a deacon to serve the Buffalo Society."<sup>7</sup>

Rev. George Weir, Sr. was the first regular A.M.E. Pastor to be assigned to the "Colored Methodist" Church of Buffalo. Rev. Weir, described as a mulatto, served the congregation and community for about ten years. The Census tracts of 1850 indicate that the Weir family came to Buffalo from North Carolina. In addition to his religious leadership, Rev. Weir was active in the pre-Civil War reform movement and the movement to gain equal rights for people of color in the State of New York.<sup>8</sup> Under Rev. Weir, the congregation moved from Carroll Street to a frame building on Vine Street in 1839. (The former Vine Street is now that block of William Street that lies between Oak and Elm Streets). In 1845, the frame building on Vine Street was replaced with a new brick structure at a cost of approximately \$3,000.<sup>9</sup> (The congregation worshiped in the latter facility until 1928).

Throughout his tenure in Buffalo, Rev. Weir was actively involved in efforts to improve the economic, social, and political conditions of his people. Some of Rev. Weir's activities were regularly reported in contemporary Afro-American newspapers, i.e. the *Colored American* and the *North Star*. In 1840, Rev. Weir was a delegate to a "New York State Convention of Colored Citizens" to consider the political condition of people of color. In 1841, he chaired a mass meeting in Buffalo which was called to organize a petition drive for the purpose of securing equal voting rights for New York State's Colored citizens. In 1842 Rev. Weir was elected to the board of directors of the "Union Total Abstinence Society of the City of Buffalo," a local temperance society. In 1848, he organized a mass meeting to eulogize former President John Quincy Adams, who was recognized as an opponent of slavery.<sup>10</sup>

During the years of his ministry, Rev. Weir was a leading citizen in the Afro-American community of Buffalo. The Weirs became one of the more prominent black families in the city. By the mid-century, George Weir, Jr. was one of Buffalo's few Afro-American merchants. The census tracts of 1850 listed young Weir as a "grocer." He was also an officer in the Vine Street Church. Young Weir gained recognition during the post-Civil War era for his efforts to desegregate the Buffalo Public School System. (That effort will be explored later in the narrative).

Rev. Weir was succeeded as pastor in 1847 by the Rev. Thomas W. Jackson who served for a year. In 1848, the New York A.M.E. Conference sent Rev. Charles Burch to the Vine Street Congregation. The Rev. Burch, described as a "very able minister," had joined the New York Conference in 1843.<sup>11</sup> During Rev. Burch's two year tenure, some of the leading members and officers of the Vine Street Congregation left that church and organized the "East Presbyterian Church." The dissidents included Richard Jones - a whitewasher, and Richard Turner - a cook, two of the more affluent members of Buffalo's Afro-American community. The son of Vine Street's former Pastor, George Weir, Jr., was also among those who left the A.M.E. Congregation. All of the aforementioned became officers in the newly organized "East Presbyterian Church." John Simpson, whose son became one of the leading 19th century Afro-American artists, and James Whitfield - a barber and poet were also officers in the new Presbyterian Church.<sup>12</sup>

In 1850, the New York A.M.E. Conference attempted to reverse its losses



in Western New York by sending one of its top young ministers to the Vine Street Church. Rev. Jabez P. Campbell became pastor of the "Buffalo station" in 1850 and set out immediately to effect "the revival of the work of God among the members of the churches in Western New York." Rev. Campbell, who was eventually elected to the bishopric, was destined to become one of the most popular and influential 19th century leaders in the A.M.E. Denomination. In his later life, Rev. Campbell described his work in Buffalo:

In 1850 I was appointed by Bishop Quinn to the Buffalo Station, with the oversight of other charges in Western New York. Prior to my taking charge, the Church had been divided, and a large number of members had formed a Presbyterian Church, and those who remained were very much divided in their feelings and sentiments. But I was successful in gathering them together, and when I left them in 1852, the church was in a very healthy and prosperous condition.<sup>13</sup>

Rev. Campbell was born in Delaware about 1815. At an early age he ran away from his home in Delaware to avoid being sold into slavery. He went to Pennsylvania where he was eventually licensed to preach and assigned to a church in Bucks County. From Pennsylvania he was assigned to the New England area before being sent to the New York Conference and eventually to Buffalo. In 1856 Rev. Campbell was elected Editor of the *Christian Recorder* - the official A.M.E. Newspaper. (Rev. Campbell collected and preserved the early volumes of that paper. That collection is now part of the A.M.E. Church Archives).

In 1864 Rev. Campbell was elected to the Bishopric of the A.M.E. Church. He was the eighth person to be elevated to that office.<sup>14</sup> In addition to being a great preacher, a leader, and a church organizer, Rev. Campbell was an outstanding manager of the business affairs of the church. Following his death in 1891, the *A.M.E. Church Review* carried 24 pages of eulogies on his life.<sup>15</sup> Frederick Douglass was the only other person to be honored with such extensive coverage in that publication.

Rev. Campbell's wife, Mrs. Mary A. Campbell was also a dedicated and outstanding A.M.E. Church woman. She was active in the home and foreign missionary organizations. On alternate occasions she served as president and secretary of the Mite Missionary Society.<sup>16</sup> Rev. Campbell was the first former pastor of the Vine Street Church to be elevated to Bishop.

It is not clear who served as pastor of the Vine Street Church from 1852 to 1854. While Rev. Campbell recalled that he remained in Buffalo for only two years (1850-1852), the *Buffalo City Directory* indicates that he may have remained at the church until about 1854. In any event, by 1854 the Vine Street Congregation seemed to be in need of another rejuvenation. At the New York Conference, in the spring of 1854, the Rev. Henry J. Johnson was sent to the "Buffalo station." Rev. Johnson described his initial impressions of the Vine Street Church and congregation in an article published in the *Christian Recorder*:

I arrived here on 27th of July, and found my people waiting and looking for me, with much anxiety, but I did not find the church in the flourishing condition which I anticipated, from what I had heard about it.... There is much need and room for great improvement among them in this city.

In describing specifics, Rev. Johnson explained that "the house we worship in

is badly furnished with lights. The church." He further lamented a "want of attention."<sup>18</sup>

On a more optimistic note, since his arrival, things had again "through the instrumentality of the school children. (Note: At that time the school children reported that the congregation had some good additions [new members] from the Vine Street Church) had some good additions [new members] to the church in good time; and I think the good order."<sup>19</sup>

Writing in February, 1855, and extremely cold winter he and Johnson seemed pleased with the work of the church. He explained that "the God was still doing a great work in the congregation, encouraging to us all."<sup>20</sup>

It appears that Rev. Johnson succeeded in each--Revs. James M. Williams, native of New York State and in the ministry. For years he was described as a

In 1857, on the eve of the Scott Decision by the U.S. Supreme Court, the Rev. Deaton Dorrell took over the congregation from 1857 - 1862. Rev. Dorrell was described as "unselfishness," "modesty," and a "speaker." Within the larger context of the church, he was most noted for his involvement in the Home and Foreign Missions General Conferences. He also served as a manager and administrator.

The years between 1831 and 1857 were a period of growth for the Vine Street Church. In addition, it was also forced by circumstances to become an Afro-American community center, attacking its day to day problems and indirectly involved in the reform movement to the city.

The American reform movement at eliminating sin and immorality launched a direct attack



is badly furnished with lights . . . [and] we have neither choirster nor choir in the church." He further lamented that "the sabbath school has gone down for want of attention."<sup>18</sup>

On a more optimistic note, Rev. Johnson added that in the several months since his arrival, things had improved. The sabbath school was improving again "through the instrumentality of Mrs. G. Middleton." He further reported that the congregation had established a library for the use of the school children. (Note: At that time all of the black children were required to attend a poorly equipped "African School" which was located across the street from the Vine Street Church). Rev. Johnson further explained that "We have had some good additions [new members] and we have glorious meetings from time to time; and I think that we shall soon be enabled to move forward in good order."<sup>19</sup>

Writing in February, 1855, Rev. Johnson noted that "we have had a long and extremely cold winter here." In spite of the frigid Buffalo winter, Rev. Johnson seemed pleased with the progress that the congregation was making. He explained that "the God who called me to preach his word, has done and is still doing a great work in this city, and the present aspect of things is truly encouraging to us all."<sup>20</sup>

It appears that Rev. Johnson spent only one year at the Vine Street Church. He was succeeded in turn by two other ministers who spent one year each--Revs. James M. Williams and Leonard Patterson. Rev. Patterson was a native of New York State and had been a former school teacher prior to entering the ministry. For years Rev. Patterson was secretary of the New York Conference. He was described as an excellent writer of "short hand."

In 1857, on the eve of the Civil War, and in the year of the landmark Dred Scott Decision by the U.S. Supreme Court, the New York Conference assigned the Rev. Deaton Dorrell to the Vine Street Church. Rev. Dorrell served that congregation from 1857 - 1859 and was sent back to Buffalo for two more years in 1862. Rev. Dorrell was described as a man whose life was marked by "pure unselfishness," "modesty," and "strong character." He was an outstanding speaker. Within the larger context of A.M.E. Church history, Rev. Dorrell was most noted for his involvement in the work of the General Conference. He was elected as chairman of the Committee on Episcopacy at four successive General Conferences. He also served on the Board of Managers of the Parent Home and Foreign Missionary Society.<sup>21</sup> Rev. Dorrell's skills as a preacher and a manager and administrator were put to good use in Buffalo.

The years between 1831 and 1860 were crucial years in the history of the Vine Street Church. In addition to struggling to maintain itself as an organization, it was also forced by circumstances to provide a multitude of services to an Afro-American community that had to rely almost solely on the church in attacking its day to day problems. During the three decades prior to the Civil War, most American Protestant churches in the northern states were directly or indirectly involved in the American reform movement. In Buffalo, the Vine Street A.M.E. Church and the Michigan Street Baptist Church carried the reform movement to the city's Afro-American community.

The American reform movement was a religious rooted movement aimed at eliminating sin and immorality from the fabric of national life. That movement launched a direct attack on slavery, alcoholic beverages, gambling, war



and many other un-Christian practices. A major thrust of the reform movement among northern blacks was aimed at improving the overall status of people of color. Black religious leaders and reform spokesmen conducted a vigorous campaign directed at overcoming the "moral deficiencies" that had resulted from the Afro-American experience under slavery and racial caste. The northern black movement for racial elevation involved two basic components. On the one hand there was an internal emphasis on moral reform activities. Secondly, the racial elevation thrust involved an attack on slavery, prejudice and other manifestations of racial oppression.<sup>22</sup>

Many northern black reform spokesmen believed that the history of racial oppression and dependence, all of which were associated with slavery and the northern black experience, had destroyed the opportunity and incentive for improvement among many of those who came under such influences. It was commonly held that slavery and racial oppression had served to promote useless, and "sinful" habits among the victims. Most northern black religious leaders and reformers endorsed the view that in order to overcome those negative habits it would be necessary to cultivate "honesty, punctuality, propriety of conduct, and modesty and dignity of deportment."<sup>23</sup> At the same time, Afro-American spokesmen urged the race to practice industry and economy, and cultivate the intellect and acquire useful knowledge. While the campaign to overcome "moral deficiencies" was important, northern black leaders felt that it was equally important to work toward ending slavery and racial oppression. They reasoned that true racial elevation and the ultimate perfection of society would be virtually impossible unless slavery, racial oppression and similar evils were abolished. In working to improve the status of the race the Afro-American church played the most crucial role. In addition to sponsoring many moral improvement programs and activities, the church served as a base for forming numerous auxiliary groups and community organizations to promote reform activities.

The Union Total Abstinence Society of the City of Buffalo (an Afro-American group) was one of the first temperance societies to be organized in that city. Rev. George Weir, Sr., was one of its organizers and a member of the board of directors.<sup>24</sup> The Young Ladies Literary Society of Buffalo (an Afro-American group) had as its primary objective, the improvement of "those moral and intellectual faculties with which the God of nature has endowed us." That society promoted the acquisition of knowledge in literature and science. As part of their effort, the Society established a community library.<sup>25</sup> By 1841 the Buffalo Library Association (An Afro-American group) was a functioning institution.<sup>26</sup> All of the aforementioned organizations drew their members from the Vine Street A.M.E. and Michigan Street Baptist Churches.

The death of Thomas Harris, a member of the Buffalo Library Association, offered an occasion for members of that organization to articulate the Association's major objectives through a eulogy to Harris. The eulogy was delivered by James M. Whitfield, a local black barber by trade, but according to his contemporaries was also an outstanding poet, a scholar and a gentleman.<sup>27</sup> Whitfield was one of those who helped to form the ill-fated "East Presbyterian Church. In that eulogy, Whitfield explained that through cultivating the latent powers of his mind, man's character is formed. And "if those energies are guided by the correct principles . . . [man will approximate]

nearer, and nearer, in a moral point of view. In essence, education—with the press as the most important vehicle in man's quest to attain a higher moral premise, Whitfield explained its importance to the American community. He maintained that unjust and blighting prejudice against the "Colored Library Association" of the northern black population the best means for moral improvement that ultimate

To propagate their message among the churches and moral improvement societies, public lectures in which local and national figures were invited to speak. One such address was given by the "Female Dorcas Society" of the Vine Street Church. The Society was originally organized in 1838. Its purpose was to provide a means by which the black could become involved in home and community life. The Vine Street Church's Dorcas Society was a black merchant. Although Banister's remarks were actually directed to the speaker emphasized that the spiritual components of moral reform. He stressed the need to be selfless, and to be concerned about the welfare of others. He stated that, "If we were actually degraded in all their multiple capacities, we should stand forth 'redeemed,' and be included by urging the blacks of Buffalo to unite their talents, their means, and their efforts in promoting the moral and intellectual culture of the race."

For northern blacks, charity was a central theme in promoting racial self help. Banister and other obstacles based on racial prejudice and feelings of cooperation, sharing, and mutual aid, certainly reassuring for northern blacks in times of difficulties and hardships. The Vine Street Church, through the Ladies Literary and Progressive Association (an Afro-American group).<sup>31</sup>

In that address, Weir maintained that the happiness of his fellowman and the progress of the race were achieved? According to Weir, man's duty was to ameliorate and improve the condition of the race, and that all mankind had a duty to be administered to the wants of the most needy. He further argued that if the "colored people" were to follow such precepts, the race would be elevated. He concluded by stating that the "Ladies Literary and Progressive Association" was optimistic that the race could attain a higher level of elevation by disseminating "light



nearer, and nearer, in a moral point of view, to the perfection of his creator."<sup>28</sup> In essence, education--with the proper emphasis on moral values was an important vehicle in man's quest to achieve perfection. Having stated a general premise, Whitfield explained its specific applicability to the Buffalo Afro-American community. He maintained that because of the "consequences of that unjust and blighting prejudice," which northern blacks encountered, the "Colored Library Association" of Buffalo and similar institutions offered the northern black population the best avenue for the intellectual cultivation and moral improvement that ultimately led to racial elevation.

To propagate their message of moral improvement, the Afro-American churches and moral improvement associations of Buffalo sponsored occasional public lectures in which local and national black reform spokesmen were invited to speak. One such address was sponsored, in 1837, by the "Colored Female Dorcas Society" of the Vine Street Church.<sup>29</sup> The A.M.E. Dorcas Society was originally organized during the late 1820s by the Rev. Richard Allen. The purpose was to provide a vehicle through which women of the church could become involved in home missionary work.<sup>30</sup> The 1837 address to the Vine Street Church's Dorcas Society was delivered by Robert Banks, a local black merchant. Although Banks spoke directly to the Dorcas Society, his remarks were actually directed to the entire black population of Buffalo. The speaker emphasized that the spirit of charity and benevolence were essential components of moral reform. He explained that charity taught one to be unselfish, and to be concerned about the whole human family. Banks maintained that, "If we were actuated" by the principle of charity, "poverty and degradation in all their multiplied forms would soon be removed, and we should stand forth 'redeemed, regenerated, and disenthralled'." Banks concluded by urging the blacks of Buffalo to be guided by the spirit of charity, and unite their talents, their means, and their influences, and work toward improving the moral and intellectual condition of their community.

For northern blacks, charity and benevolence often served as a rationale for promoting racial self help. Because of discrimination, economic hardships and other obstacles based on race, it was essential for free blacks to cultivate feelings of cooperation, sharing, and brotherhood among themselves. It was certainly reassuring for northern blacks to know that they could count on each other in times of difficulties and need. George Weir, Jr., son of the pastor of the Vine Street Church, captured that spirit in 1843 in an address before the Ladies Literary and Progressive Association of the City of Buffalo (An Afro-American group).<sup>31</sup>

In that address, Weir maintained that man was created to promote the happiness of his fellowman and to glorify God. And how were those ends to be achieved? According to Weir, man could fulfill his divine purpose by endeavoring to ameliorate and improve the condition of the human race. He contended that all mankind had a duty to bear each other's burdens, aid those in distress, administer to the wants of the needy and extend a hand to the afflicted. Weir further argued that if the "colored" community would commit themselves to such precepts, the race would be elevated to a position of eminence. He was optimistic that the race could and would achieve such a position. Weir urged the Ladies Literary and Progressive Society to contribute to that process of elevation by disseminating "light and knowledge among their brethren."



Moral reform represented an internal effort to promote racial elevation. While northern blacks worked in their communities to erase the negative effects of slavery and racial oppression, they recognized the necessity of attacking the cause as well as the effects. Consequently, Afro-Americans in Buffalo were actively involved in the campaign against slavery. Due to being located on one of the major routes of the "Underground Railroad" abolitionist supporters in that city were in a unique position to strike against slavery by assisting fugitive slaves.

Although assistance to fugitives was usually carried out in great secrecy and is difficult to document in traditional ways, the stories of the Vine Street Church's involvement as a station on the "Underground Railroad" have become legendary. The Black Rock section of Buffalo was one of the key points where fugitive slaves crossed into Canada. Stories of fugitives being sheltered in the Vine Street Church while waiting to be slipped across the Black Rock channel have been passed through Bethel Church families and members for generations. By the mid 20th century, the church's involvement in the "Underground Railroad" had become its most important identifying characteristic for the 19th century.

In 1850 Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Act. That Act, which amended the original law of 1793, placed fugitive slave cases under Federal jurisdiction. The Act was aimed primarily at escaped slaves who had found refuge in northern communities. Under the law, U.S. Commissioners were authorized to issue warrants for the arrest of fugitives and certificates for returning them to their slave masters. In some instances, free blacks who had never been slaves were identified as fugitives and were arrested and forcibly taken into the south. Consequently, northern blacks charged that the law simply legalized kidnaping. The law further provided for a \$1,000 fine and up to six months imprisonment for citizens who aided in the concealment of fugitive slaves. Understandably, the outcry among northern Afro-American communities was swift and strong. In Buffalo, the opposition to the Fugitive Slave Act was led by the Vine Street A.M.E. Church.

On October 17, 1850, less than one month after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act, a "mass meeting of colored citizens of Buffalo," was held at the Vine Street Church. The meeting was called for the purpose of considering the Fugitive Slave Act and to adopt measures to "prevent the recapture of our brethren....The meeting produced six resolutions expressing opposition to the Fugitive Slave Act. The body also voted to re-convene the following week "at the Vine Street A.M.E. Church to settle the question in relation to our future political action."<sup>32</sup>

The women of the Vine Street A.M.E. Church were active as a group in promoting the spiritual, moral, and social uplift of their community. In addition to organizing a library, sabbath school and other moral improvement groups, the women also supported the anti-slavery movement and other political causes. It was the women of the Vine Street Church who planned the "North Star Literary Fair" in January, 1850. The purpose of the fair was to solicit subscribers and raise money in support of Frederick Douglass' Rochester based newspaper, the *North Star*. Douglass, of course, used the *North Star* in his campaign for human rights and justice in America. Douglass, who was a frequent visitor to Buffalo, presented several lectures in

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#### 1860 - 1900

The years following the Civil War ushered in a period of growth and development for the programs of the general A.M.E. Church. The Denomination began establishing churches in the southern and western states. The migration of blacks to the west, during the last quarter of the 19th century, among Afro-Americans helped to spread the A.M.E. Church movement to launch missionary

As the A.M.E. Church entered the 20th century, changes were evident. More of a significant degree of formal education, and self-help contribution, the Denomination's first in the west founded other colleges - Allen Quinn College. In addition, the Church and opened its own publishing house.

The burden of sustaining the Church's programs and facilities fell on the members. After the Civil War, the membership of the Church grew to more than 245,000 members. This shows that there were over 300,000 members clearly on the move.

The pattern of growth and development of the Church was also evident in the West. The migration of post-Civil War America was from agricultural people to a nation of cities. Buffalo shared in the prosperity of the post-Civil War period. The total population of Buffalo between 1850 and 1900 (approximately

While the nation, the general population experienced tremendous growth and development, Buffalo and the Afro-American population experienced a decline from its pre-Civil War level. The Afro-American population in Buffalo showed an increase of only about 500 people between 1850 and 1880. Moreover, the founding



the City in connection with the Vine Street Church's Literary Fair.<sup>33</sup>

During the pre-Civil War years, the pastors and congregations of the Vine Street A.M.E. Church laid a solid foundation on which future generations could build. In addition to providing spiritual and moral guidance, the Vine Street Church exemplified Christian living in its highest form. The example that it set in fighting against injustice and working to improve the quality of life in the community, in essence the task of doing God's work here on earth, would stand as a source of inspiration for generations yet unborn.

#### 1860 - 1900

The years following the Civil War and the emancipation of the slaves in the south ushered in a period of tremendous expansion in the activities and programs of the general A.M.E. Church. Following the abolition of slavery, the Denomination began establishing branch churches throughout the southern and western states. The millions of freedmen in the south and the migration of blacks to the west, represented fertile fields for home missions. During the last quarter of the 19th century, the surge of race nationalism among Afro-Americans helped to generate and sustain a renewed interest in Africa. Within the A.M.E. Church, such sentiment contributed toward the movement to launch missionary work on the African Continent.

As the A.M.E. Church entered its second half-century, a number of other changes were evident. More of its ministers and bishops were men with a significant degree of formal education. The emphasis on moral improvement, education, and self-help contributed to the expansion of programs at Wilberforce, the Denomination's first institution of higher learning. The church also founded other colleges - Allen University, Morris Brown College, and Paul Quinn College. In addition, the church organized the Sunday School Union and opened its own publishing house.<sup>34</sup>

The burden of sustaining and financing this tremendous expansion in programs and facilities fell on the membership. In the two decades following the Civil War, the membership of the A.M.E. Church jumped from 50,000 members to more than 245,000. By 1887 the official minutes of the church show that there were over 300,000 members.<sup>35</sup> The general A.M.E. Church was clearly on the move.

The pattern of growth and expansion that characterized the A.M.E. Church was also evident in the nation as a whole. The "economic revolution" of post-Civil War America was transforming the country from a rural and agricultural people to a nation that was urban and industrial. The City of Buffalo shared in the prosperity generated by the economic expansion of the period. The total population of Buffalo increased more than three fold between 1850 and 1900 (approximately 40,000 to 155,000).

While the nation, the general A.M.E. Church, and the City of Buffalo experienced tremendous growth and expansion in terms of population and financial base during the post-Civil War Era, the Vine Street A.M.E. Church of Buffalo and the Afro-American population of that city continued to remain near its pre-Civil War level. The Afro-American population of Buffalo experienced an increase of only about 500 persons during the fifty years between 1830 and 1880. Moreover, the founding of St. Philips Episcopal Church in Buffalo in



1865 meant that the small church-going Afro-American population was divided at least three ways instead of between the two existing black churches. St. Philips quickly attracted a large share of Afro-American churchgoers in the city. By 1890, St. Philips Church reported "the largest ecclesiastical racial group" in Buffalo.<sup>36</sup> The Vine Street Church was served by a number of gifted and exceptional ministers during the post-Civil War Era, but the Church as a whole did not seem to move forward. During the last half of the 19th century the Vine Street Church settled into a long holding pattern. Even though the congregation contributed to some of the important movements of the larger A.M.E. Church during the period, it appears that a major concern of the small Vine Street Church was simply holding its own and attempting to maintain its viability and integrity as an institution.

The Emancipation Proclamation took effect in January, 1863. The event sparked "jubilee celebrations" not only in the south but among northern blacks as well. Afro-American churches in many of the northern communities staged special religious services to offer thanksgiving in commemoration of the occasion. The "colored people" of Buffalo "set apart the 28th of January [1863] as a day upon which to celebrate this great event." The event was reported in the *Christian Recorder*:

The exercises of the day commenced with religious services at 10 O'Clock, A.M. at the Vine Street A.M.E. Church, where all, irrespective of sect, met and united in praise to God for the great work he had wrought. The Sermon upon the occasion was preached by Elder Deaton Dorrell. Subject, "How shall we celebrate this day?" Text was found in Ps. 1.14, "Offer unto God Thanksgiving."

Following the morning service, described above, and a lunch break, an afternoon service was held at which time "the people met again at the same place for a general interchange of sentiments [individual testimonials]." In the evening of the same day a mass meeting was held at Roth's Hall, on Michigan Street. The hall was "filled with both white and colored, and the greatest enthusiasm prevailed." Rev. Deaton Dorrell opened the evening meeting with prayer. The service included singing, more testimonials, the reading of the proclamation, and a major address by a guest speaker. The program concluded with a supper, after which "all retired to their respective homes, feeling... that they had performed the duty which they owed to God and father Abraham."<sup>37</sup>

The "Emancipation Celebration" is a typical example of the way the 19th century black church addressed itself to social and political as well as spiritual concerns. The Vine Street Church had been an important community vehicle in the attack on the evils of slavery, and it was fitting that the church should celebrate its demise.

In 1864 the New York Conference sent the Rev. Francis J. Peck to pastor the Vine Street Church. Rev. Peck was a native of Baltimore, Maryland. His father, Rev. Nathaniel Peck, was also a minister. Young Francis began preaching in his father's church at age eighteen. In 1863, at age 29, the young preacher enrolled at Wilberforce where he remained for one year. Being unable to continue his education because of a lack of funds, Rev. Peck "applied to Bishop [Daniel] Payne for pastoral work." Rev. Peck was sent to the New York Conference and assigned to the "Buffalo station."<sup>38</sup>

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As one of his first projects at the Vine Street Church, Rev. Peck "called a meeting of the young people, and organized a literary society." Twenty persons joined immediately. Rev. Peck reported that "we unanimously agreed to call it the Daniel A. Payne Literary Society of Buffalo." The naming of the Society was probably done in recognition of Rev. Payne's lifelong campaign to push education in the A.M.E. Denomination.<sup>39</sup>

During his tenure in Buffalo, Rev. Peck was appointed to an important committee to plan the 50th Anniversary celebration of the A.M.E. Church. In January, 1866 the Council of Bishops of the A.M.E. Church directed all of the various conference districts to plan and coordinate "semi-centenary services" for all of the churches and places of worship within those districts. A central coordinating committee was appointed for each district. Along with Rev. Peck, two other former Vine Street pastors, Rev. Deaton Dorrell and Rev. J.M. Williams, were appointed to the seven man committee to plan and coordinate the services in the New York Conference. The central committees were authorized to ensure that all churches within their jurisdiction set aside three days of commemorative activities which included sermons which reviewed "the doings of God towards us as a Christian denomination, during the last half century."<sup>40</sup>

After nearly two years with the Buffalo congregation, Rev. Peck acknowledged that the Vine Street Church had faced many difficulties, but expressed satisfaction with the progress that been made during his term. He reported that "the church, through God's blessings, has been moving onward in defiance of everything that appeared to stop her progress." Rev. Peck was very popular with the Buffalo congregation. He was described as "a man of the right style--honest, true, frank, ... firm [and] a good and studious preacher."<sup>41</sup>

Rev. Peck had a strong commitment to the A.M.E. Church. He summarized his sentiments on African Methodism in a letter to a fellow minister:

I have long been impressed that African Methodism was essential, and that a Church governed by colored men, untrammelled by white associations, was the only means by which we could prove our manhood and elevate our people; feeling I do no injustice by saying I believe her to be the power under God doing this great work, for she is the only colored Church in this country that educates her own ministry, that governs herself, builds her own houses of worship, pays for them herself, and is recognized by law as the rightful owner.<sup>42</sup>

In 1866 Rev. Peck was sent to a church in Albany. His replacement was the Rev. W.T. Catto, a recently ordained minister who had previously been associated with the Presbyterian Church.<sup>43</sup> It was during Rev. Catto's tenure that several members of the Vine Street Congregation launched a major effort to desegregate the Buffalo Public Schools.

During the early 19th century, the American free school movement resulted in the establishment of public schools in many northern cities. The Afro-American communities in those cities usually faced discriminatory policies, and segregated and inferior conditions whenever they sought access to those public education facilities. In most cities blacks were either denied access to the public schools altogether, or were required to attend a "colored" school. Speaking of conditions in Buffalo in 1844, Peyton Harris, a local black, complained that the education of colored youth had been "shamefully



contracted. Buffalo's "African" school was opened in 1839. Between 1839 and 1848, the school had three locations; "a room in a tenement, a negro church hall, and a basement under a central city market."<sup>44</sup> The school was finally given a discarded district school house which was located across the street from the Vine Street A.M.E. Church.

In addition to the poor condition of the building, which some white parents described as "unfit" for a school, the black children faced an even more serious problem. While most white students attended the neighborhood school in their district, the district for the "African" school was city wide. In essence, black students were assigned to the "African" school regardless of the school district they lived in. Many had to walk great distances across the city to get to the school. This problem was especially acute during Buffalo's harsh winters. The school superintendent, V.M. Rice described their pitiful plight in a published report:

It excites one's pity, to see them in cold stormy weather often thinly clad, wending their way over a wearisome distance. Anyone possessing human impulses, can but regret that, with all the other burdens which power and prejudice heap upon this people, their children, when so young, are doomed to suffer so much in striving to gain a little light to make their gloomy pathway through life less tedious.<sup>45</sup>

In 1846, a local meeting of "Colored Citizens and others," produced a series of resolutions and a petition which demanded that the Buffalo Common Council "allow the colored children to attend the district school and grant them the same privileges that white children enjoy."<sup>46</sup> The Council refused to act on the petition. The following year, 1847, George Weir, Jr., a trustee of the Vine Street A.M.E. Church, launched another attempt to bring about equality of opportunity for black children to acquire an education. Weir urged the Afro-American community to resist the "unprincipled" practices of the Common Council. He argued that, "so long as we as colored people continue to disgrace ourselves by submitting to such vile abuse, just so long will the heel of prejudice bear hard upon our necks."<sup>47</sup> Weir admonished the black community to "use all the same means to maintain our rights that our revolutionary forefathers taught us on certain occasions."<sup>48</sup>

In spite of numerous protests, the Common Council remained firm. The "African" school continued as a segregated and unequal institution for educating the city's Afro-American population. During the late 1860s, Henry Moxley, another Vine Street Church Trustee, renewed the assault on the City's segregated school policy. In 1866, Congress passed the first of a series of Civil Rights laws enacted during the Reconstruction period. The 1866 Act was designed to guarantee to persons of color "equal benefit of all laws and proceedings for the security of persons and property, as enjoyed by white citizens."<sup>49</sup> In June, 1867, Moxley charged the city with violating the Federal Civil Rights Act in denying him the right to send his children to the district school.

Moxley had come to Buffalo from Virginia in 1832. Born in 1808 in Virginia to slave parents, Moxley escaped from slavery and migrated to Buffalo at the age of twenty-four. A barber by trade, he opened his own shop in Buffalo in 1839. Moxley's barber shop must have been very successful, because by 1870 he had amassed over \$3,000 worth of taxable property. Moxley married late in life and was approaching his 60th birthday when he petitioned to have

his four school aged children. When the petition was not successful, blacks in the city decided to take action anyway. That plan of action was to sue the City at the Vine Street A.M.E. Church. C. Smith, another Trustee in the Vine Street A.M.E. Church, was the lawyer in the Michigan Street case.

The school and city officials refused to accept the colored pupils from the district school. The expulsion, a community-wide protest, and a plan further strategy. Moxley challenged the constitutionality of the segregated schools organized in the city. The suit also challenged a city ordinance established by the Common Council to limit the number of children.

Moxley's thirteen month lawsuit ended in 1868 when the State Supreme Court ruled that next several years black children would be allowed to attend the 1872 the Buffalo Common Council school. Afro-American children to attend the district school. Blacks attended sixteen Buffalo at the "African" school.<sup>50</sup> The school.

Unfortunately, racial segregation continued to limit opportunity in Buffalo school. In 1880 the Afro-American population was 800 and the number of black children was a hundred. By 1920 the Afro-American population was 4,000.<sup>51</sup> Fed by the "Great Migration" the number increased even more. When one considers the progress of one-hundred black students achieving total integration in Buffalo would be the case in the 20th century. Buffalo, the Vine Street A.M.E. Church led the attack on segregated schools.

In 1868 the Vine Street A.M.E. Church and highly educated minister Henry Moxley led the attack on segregated schools during the War Era. The Rev. Elisha W. Moxley, the leading Afro-American educator in Buffalo, assigned him to Buffalo in 1868. He spent his youth in Indiana as a student at Oberlin College. Moxley operated by the Quaker monthly magazine - *Repository* as publisher and editor of the magazine. He served for eight years as the



his four school aged children admitted to the public school in their district. When the petition was not answered, Moxley and several other prominent blacks in the city decided to send their children to the "all white" school anyway. That plan of action had been agreed upon at a series of meetings held at the Vine Street A.M.E. Church. Co-planners of the event were Lewis Smith, another Trustee in the Vine Street Church, and Peyton Harris, an officer in the Michigan Street Baptist Church.

The school and city officials responded to the tactic by forcibly removing the colored pupils from the school and denying Moxley's petition. Following the expulsion, a community meeting was held at the Vine Street Church to plan further strategy. Moxley decided to take the city to court. The suit challenged the constitutionality of the city charter which stated that "all public schools organized - in the city of Buffalo shall be free to all white children." The suit also challenged a city ordinance which required that "schools established by the Common Council shall admit all children... except colored children."

Moxley's thirteen month effort to desegregate the Buffalo Public Schools ended in 1868 when the State Supreme Court ruled against him. During the next several years black children continued to attend the "African" school. In 1872 the Buffalo Common Council voted to amend the city charter to allow Afro-American children to attend the public schools. In 1880, seventy-five blacks attended sixteen Buffalo Public schools and only thirty-five continued at the "African" school.<sup>50</sup> The following year Buffalo closed the "African" school.

Unfortunately, racial segregation, discrimination and inequality of educational opportunity in Buffalo did not end with the closing of the "African" school. In 1880 the Afro-American population of Buffalo numbered just over 800 and the number of black students in the public schools was about one-hundred. By 1920 the Afro-American population of Buffalo had reached over 4,000.<sup>51</sup> Fed by the "Great Migration" of blacks from the southern states, that number increased even more dramatically during the decades that followed. When one considers the problems encountered in attempting to "integrate" one-hundred black students into the total school system, the prospect of achieving total integration in the 20th century seems almost unattainable. As would be the case in the 20th century, the Afro-American church provided an institutional base for attacking racial segregation and discrimination. In 19th century Buffalo, the Vine Street A.M.E. Church and its individual members led the attack on segregated schools.

In 1868 the Vine Street Church received one of the long line of talented and highly educated ministers that served that congregation in the post-Civil War Era. The Rev. Elisha Weaver had already established himself as one of the leading Afro-American editor/publishers when the New York Conference assigned him to Buffalo in 1868. Rev. Weaver was a native of North Carolina. He spent his youth in Indiana where he attended Quaker schools. He was also a student at Oberlin College. In 1846 he was given a teaching position in a school operated by the Quakers. In 1857 and 1858, Rev. Weaver published the monthly magazine - *Repository of Religion and Literature*. He was appointed as publisher and editor of the *Christian Recorder* in 1860. Rev. Weaver also served for eight years as the General Book Steward of the A.M.E. Church.



After deciding to return to the pastorate, Rev. Weaver served Buffalo and several other stations in the New York and New Jersey Conferences.<sup>52</sup> Rev. Weaver's one year tenure in Buffalo was apparently very successful. In one series of meetings the church added "ten or twelve" persons to its membership rolls.<sup>53</sup>

During the decade of the 1870s the Vine Street Church was pastored by four different ministers. Rev. Abraham C. Crippen served two non-consecutive terms (1869 to 1871, and 1876 to 1879). Rev. Crippen was a native of Virginia but grew up in Philadelphia. He was a learned man and appeared to have a strong interest in improving the A.M.E. Church as an institution. On numerous occasions during the 1860s and 1870s Rev. Crippen wrote articles on Church governance, etc. Several of those articles were published in the *Christian Recorder*.

For a long time Rev. Crippen had contended for a revision in the format of the A.M.E. newspaper - the *Christian Recorder*. The pre-1869 issues of the paper contained large pages with a lot of print on each page. Much of that news, however, did not pertain to the A.M.E. Church or the national Afro-American community. In 1869 the format was changed to one that carried primarily church and "race" news. While there is no evidence that the changes were made in response to Rev. Crippen's suggestions, Crippen did express his approval of the change.<sup>54</sup>

Rev. Crippen also urged the general church to "create more districts and appoint more bishops." He maintained that under the then operating system, "there were too few bishops to cover the large territory which each was assigned." Crippen contended that under "the present set up, the bishops could not properly oversee and guide the churches under their jurisdiction." In his view, that situation was an obstacle to the future growth and development of the church. He believed that additional bishops were a necessity "in order to insure proper Episcopal supervision."<sup>55</sup>

In order to provide guidance and direction to the rapid growth and expansion that characterized the A.M.E. Church in the last half of the 19th century, it was essential that the ministers and leaders be concerned with the temporal as well as the religious side of church affairs. This was the period of the rise of corporations, big government, and a flowering labor movement. America was preparing to move into the modern era of the 20th century. In order for the A.M.E. Church to survive as a viable institution, it was essential to discuss and consider ideas such as those put forth by Rev. Crippen.<sup>56</sup>

Rev. J.W. Cooper, a young man of 31 years, was sent to the Vine Street Church in 1871. At the time of his appointment he had only been in the New York Conference for two years. Buffalo was his second assignment and he remained but two years. Rev. Cooper made his mark after leaving Buffalo. By the 1880s he had risen to a position of Presiding Elder in the New Jersey Conference.<sup>57</sup>

From 1873 to 1875, the Vine Street Congregation was pastored by the Rev. J.G. Mowbray. It appears that Rev. Mowbray attempted to bring some relief to two of the Vine Street Church's most pressing problems - the debt and the need to attract new members. There are several indicators (which will be examined later) that the church debt was a serious problem by the late 19th century. Moreover, the Vine St. Church, and the other two Afro-

American churches as well, probe stable membership during the period for Buffalo for the years 1855 and Afro-Americans in Buffalo remain (approximately 500 to 800), there population.<sup>58</sup> In other words, even regularly coming to Buffalo, a comp leaving. For the churches, this me add new members to the church re overall membership.

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Rev. Caleb Woodyard pastored ference year, 1875-1876. Rev. Wood builder. During his thirty-five year work in Buffalo), Rev. Woodyard at least a dozen churches.<sup>61</sup> It is pos that he could assist that congregat 19th century the Vine Street neig C.W. Mossell, then its pastor, wrot in the very heart of one of the wor observed that "it has been evident an absolute necessity."<sup>62</sup> That cha during Rev. Woodyard's tenure. It

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The founding of Wilberforce g jectives but different origins. On A.M.E. Church founded Union Sem for the purpose of "establishing a youth in various branches of litera mechanic arts. Union Seminary e The second movement was launch 1853. That denomination also sou tion of "Colored" persons. In Octo dedicated and opened Wilberforce



American churches as well, probably had difficulty holding a sizeable and stable membership during the period. An analysis of the State census tracts for Buffalo for the years 1855 and 1875 indicates that while the number of Afro-Americans in Buffalo remained fairly stable during that period (approximately 500 to 800), there was a great deal of turnover within that population.<sup>58</sup> In other words, even though numerous Afro-Americans were regularly coming to Buffalo, a comparable number of persons were continually leaving. For the churches, this meant that even though a new minister might add new members to the church rolls, that didn't necessarily result in a larger overall membership.

Six months after his appointment to Buffalo, Rev. Mowbray reported that "we have paid over \$250 of outstanding debts on the church." He also reported that the officers and women of the church were faithful and dedicated.<sup>59</sup> Near the end of his first year at Buffalo, Rev. Mowbray filed a progress report in the *Christian Recorder*:

We are still on the advance. We commenced our protracted meetings on New Years Evening and continued for several weeks with glorious results; believers were built up, many made confessions of faith, 27 joined the church. We have formed them into a class, and the prospects are that they will make good warriors in the church. We are now getting ready for conference. We have a great deal to do, and the time is short, but we work the harder.

Rev. Caleb Woodyard pastored the Vine Street Church during the conference year, 1875-1876. Rev. Woodyard had earned a reputation as a church builder. During his thirty-five years in the ministry (25 of which preceded his work in Buffalo), Rev. Woodyard either started or completed the building of at least a dozen churches.<sup>61</sup> It is possible that he was sent to Buffalo in hopes that he could assist that congregation in relocating. By the last quarter of the 19th century the Vine Street neighborhood was "going down." In 1893, Rev. C.W. Mossell, then its pastor, wrote that the Vine Street Church was "located in the very heart of one of the worst sections of Buffalo." Rev. Mossell further observed that "it has been evident for some time that a change of location was an absolute necessity."<sup>62</sup> That change of location obviously did not take place during Rev. Woodyard's tenure. It would continue to be a major concern of the Vine Street Church congregation for decades.

Like most member churches of the A.M.E. Denomination in the post-Civil War period, the Vine Street Church contributed toward the support of Wilberforce University. In addition to occasional contributions from individual members, the congregation supported the annual "endowment day" collections which were made in behalf of the school.<sup>63</sup>

The founding of Wilberforce grew out of two movements with similar objectives but different origins. On the one hand, the Ohio Conference of the A.M.E. Church founded Union Seminary in 1844. That institution was founded for the purpose of "establishing a seminary of learning for the instruction of youth in various branches of literature, science, theology, agriculture, and the mechanic arts. Union Seminary did not flourish and was eventually closed. The second movement was launched by the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1853. That denomination also sought to establish an institution for the education of "Colored" persons. In October, 1856 the Methodist Episcopal Church dedicated and opened Wilberforce University.<sup>64</sup>



The initial board of trustees included twenty whites, most of whom were associated with the Methodist Episcopal Church, and four blacks. Bishop Daniel Payne, of the A.M.E. Church was one of the black trustees. The school flourished until 1862 when it began to experience financial difficulties. In 1863, the Methodist Episcopal Church offered to sell the school to the A.M.E. Denomination for a sum of \$10,000. The sale of Wilberforce was consummated and a new charter secured in 1863. A new board of trustees was drawn from the A.M.E. Church and Bishop Payne was appointed as President of the institution.<sup>65</sup>

The election of a board of trustees to govern Wilberforce was an important event in the history of not only the A.M.E. Church, but Afro-Americans in general. Rev. Henry McNeal Turner stated that "for the first time in the history of the United States... the Colored man [can] boast of having a university in his possession and under his direct control."<sup>66</sup> One of the members elected to that board of trustees was Benjamin Taylor, a member of the Vine Street Church.<sup>67</sup> Referring to the newly elected board, Rev. Turner contended that Wilberforce was "in the hands of men who are not only physically, but sympathetically Colored: - Colored men, who both love and work for their race, and have for years stood like sturdy oaks, unawed by fear, and unchanged by the whirl of popular sentiments."<sup>68</sup> In time, numerous other members of the Vine Street Church would serve on the Wilberforce Board of Trustees. Moreover, in the 20th Century, Bethel would receive a former President of Wilberforce as one of its pastors.

The Rev. George W. Bailey, who pastored at the Vine Street Church during the conference year 1879-1880, was another of the ministers who regularly submitted essays and editorials for publication in the *Christian Recorder*. Although Rev. Bailey's articles usually dealt with various facets of church governance and official policy within the A.M.E. Denomination, his overriding theme was to caution the church against what he apparently perceived as an unhealthy trend toward an inordinate amount of emphasis on organization and governance and other temporal concerns, and a neglect of the spiritual side.<sup>69</sup> Rev. Bailey apparently felt that the church should place more emphasis on traditional Christian virtues. Some of his views on the importance of Christian values within the family were expressed in an essay that he wrote entitled, "Birthplace of Character."

In that essay, Rev. Bailey maintained that "the birthplace of character is not in the school house, the college, nor the church, but in the family circle . . . Hence we see the infinite importance of parents and guardians being faithful to God in the training of children, as they are to a great extent molding souls for heaven or hell." Recognizing that the impress of example is more lasting than precept, he explained that "if therefore, we would have our children [be] ornaments in society and pillars in the church of Christ, let us sow in their tender minds the seeds that will give birth to good character, mental and moral culture, religious examples, chastity peace, lofty Christian aspirations, pure love to God and all the human race, and the result will be a character fit for eternal glory." He added that "our children should never see us in dance . . . neither at the gambling table, nor quaffing the alcoholic beverage." Children raised in the Christian way will "fill stations of trust, be honored in life, lamented at death and gathered unto a happy eternity."<sup>70</sup>

Rev. Bailey's concerns about the rising emphasis on worldly and materialistic during the post-Civil War Period when they considered the possibility of a "revolution" that was transforming family patterns, the growing and blatant emphasis on materialism was standably many believed that the church was moving toward secularism.<sup>71</sup> It was that of Rev. Bailey submitted to the Christian

One of the persons who took issue with the pessimism regarding the direction of the church was Rev. George Dardis, the minister of the Vine Street Church after Rev. Bailey's departure. The *Christian Recorder* was somewhat critical of Dardis at the New York Conference. Rev. Bailey felt that the church was sliding backwards as a collective body. Dardis, then a pastor in Brooklyn, at least in New York City, the three leaders of the church were labor and income.<sup>72</sup>

It appears that Rev. Dardis was a strong supporter of the Buffalo congregation. Wherever he went, he had the ability to keep his churches "packed" and growing. In his first year at the Vine Street Church, he was "drawing power."

The work continues with unabated interest in the Christian and we are rapidly doubling our membership. We will have to extend church building to accommodate in our house at present.

There is no way of knowing how many members of the Vine Street Church were lost to Rev. Dardis' departure.

Near the end of his tenure in Buffalo, he gave an assessment of his ministry in that city.

The Rev. Mr. Dardis has but a short time to serve, but he has no superiors, and but few equals in his field, he associated with more engaged members and has full scope of his many talents.

The statement was obviously written by someone who was probably not intended, the article was somewhat disparagingly. While it was written by the Afro-American community was "progressive" people, the paper's assessment was in a "broader field" and among "more conservative" people. The Buffalo Station may be one of the connections of the late 19th century as one of the connections.







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One of the persons who took a pessimistic view of the future and pessimism regarding the direction of the church was the Rev. George Dardis, the pastor of the Vine Street Church after Rev. Bailey's departure. Rev. Dardis' departure from the *Christian Recorder* was somewhat of a setback for the Buffalo Conference. Rev. Bailey's departure and sliding backwards as a colleague of Rev. Dardis, then a pastor in Brooklyn, New York City, the third largest congregation in the city, the third largest in New York City, the third largest in the world.<sup>72</sup>

It appears that Rev. Dardis' departure from the Buffalo congregation. Wherever he went, he had the ability to keep his churches "productive" and in the first year at the Vine Street Church, he was "drawing power."

The work continues with unabated vigor for the Lord and Christ and we are rapidly doubling our membership and will have to extend church buildings in our house at present.<sup>73</sup>

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Near the end of his tenure in Buffalo, Rev. Dardis made an assessment of his ministry in the

The Rev. Mr. Dardis has but a short time to live, and he has no superiors, and but few equals in his field, he is associated with more eminent men than he has, and he has full scope of his many talents.

The statement was obviously written by Rev. Dardis and was probably not intended, though somewhat disparagingly. While the Buffalo Afro-American community was a "progressive" people, the paper's editorials suggest that the Buffalo Station was one of the best in the late 19th century as one of the best in the world.



Rev. Bailey's concerns about the decline of Christian virtues and the rising emphasis on worldly and material matters were shared by many protestants during the post-Civil War Period. Many of the revivals were alarmed when they considered the possible negative side effects of the "economic revolution" that was transforming America. The urbanism that was changing family patterns, the growing interest in science and technology, and the blatant emphasis on materialism were not easy matters to dismiss. Understandably many believed that the church itself was falling victim to the trend toward secularism.<sup>71</sup> It was that spirit which characterized the essays that Rev. Bailey submitted to the *Christian Recorder*.

One of the persons who took issue with Rev. Bailey's negative assessment and pessimism regarding the direction being taken by the A.M.E. Church was the Rev. George Dardis, the minister who was assigned to the Vine Street Church after Rev. Bailey's departure. One of Rev. Bailey's letters to the *Christian Recorder* was somewhat critical of the state of affairs in the New York Conference. Rev. Bailey felt that the conference was losing members and sliding backwards as a collective body. That letter was answered by Rev. Dardis, then a pastor in Brooklyn. Rev. Dardis cited figures to show that, at least in New York City, the three largest A.M.E. Churches were gaining members and income.<sup>72</sup>

It appears that Rev. Dardis was a gifted preacher and was well liked by the Buffalo congregation. Wherever he ministered he was especially noted for his ability to keep his churches "packed with hearers." A report filed after his first year at the Vine Street Church adds support to the stories about his "drawing power."

The work continues with unabated interest; a great many have professed faith in Christ and we are rapidly doubling our members in church strength and probably we will have to extend church building to accommodate the multitudes who cannot get in our house at present.<sup>73</sup>

There is no way of knowing how many of the "multitudes" became permanent members of the Vine Street Church, or how many continued to attend after Rev. Dardis' departure.

Near the end of his tenure in Buffalo, the *Buffalo Times* published a short assessment of his ministry in that city:

The Rev. Mr. Dardis has but a short time to remain with his flock. As a pulpit orator, he has no superiors, and but few equals in the connection. He should have a broader field, be associated with more enterprising and progressive people, that he might have full scope of his many talents.<sup>74</sup>

The statement was obviously written as a tribute to Rev. Dardis. Although it was probably not intended, the article treated the Vine Street Congregation somewhat disparagingly. While it would not be accurate to say that the Buffalo Afro-American community was not made up of "enterprising" and "progressive" people, the paper's assertion that Dardis' talents should be plied in a "broader field" and among "more enterprising and progressive people," suggests that the Buffalo Station may not have been viewed by contemporaries of the late 19th century as one of the most attractive assignments in the A.M.E. connection.



In July of 1855, the New York Annual Conference met in Buffalo. The Rev. Henry Harrison Lewis, of the Vine Street Church, was the host pastor. Although specific attendance figures were not reported, one observer noted that during the four conference days, the church was often "filled beyond its capacity." The crowds represented a boost in income for some of the area businesses. One delegate noted that during the conference "hackmen reaped a harvest and the butchers and grocers rubbed their hands with joy."<sup>75</sup>

Several ministers who, in later years, pastored the Vine Street Church, made reports at the conference. Rev. William H. Thomas, who was very active on the Missions Committee of the General Conference, gave a report for the New York Conference Committee on Missions. Rev. Horace Tolbert, described as "one of the quietest, yet one of the ablest members of the conference, reported for the Committee on Circuits and Stations. Rev. Rudolph H. Shirley read what turned out to be a rather controversial report for the Temperance Committee. It appears the temperance Committee report "permitted the use of spirits which do not contain more than a certain percent of alcohol." In essence, the report permitted "the moderate use of light wines and beers." After some earnest and interesting discussion, the report was "re-committed and the objectionable clause stricken out."<sup>76</sup> On the final evening of the conference the Vine Street Church's Literary Society presented the audience with an "intellectual treat." Following that program came the reading of appointments for the coming year. A large of Vine Street Church members were on hand in hopes that their pastor, Rev. H.H. Lewis would be reassigned to Buffalo. "When Buffalo was called and Rev. H.H. Lewis announced for the fourth year, there was a storm of applause which subsided after a half second of fury, then it broke forth again."<sup>77</sup> As fate would have it, that was Rev. Lewis' final ministerial appointment. Less than six months later, on December 30, 1885, following "an attack of apoplexy" and a "cerebral hemorrhage," Rev. Lewis died at the parsonage on William Street.<sup>78</sup> He was the first Vine Street Church Pastor to die while in that office.

Rev. Lewis' death was quite a blow to the Vine Street Congregation. Rev. Lewis was succeeded by a relative young man, the Rev. Rudolph H. Shirley. For most of the two years of Rev. Shirley's ministry in Buffalo, the Vine Street Church's "pulpit and altar [were] heavily draped in mourning." Despite the disadvantage of having to replace a very popular and talented leader, Rev. Shirley was able to give a good accounting of himself. "Besides meeting current expenses and paying for sundry repairs, the Buffalo church . . . [under Rev. Shirley] paid a little over \$800 on mortgage, interest, and other long standing debts."<sup>79</sup> Rev. Shirley reported that his major regret was that "there were but eight additions to the church" during his term. In 1890, three years after being transferred from Buffalo, Rev. Shirley was appointed Presiding Elder of the New York Conference.

One of the most brilliant ministers to serve the 19th century Vine Street Congregation was the Rev. William H. Thomas. Rev. Thomas was a native of New York. He received his education at Lincoln University and was ordained a Presbyterian minister before moving to the New York A.M.E. Conference. Rev. Thomas was widely known as "an acknowledged scholar... [and a] pulpit orator."<sup>80</sup> He was one of those ministers who, along with Bishop Payne, advocated the need for a more educated ministry in the A.M.E. Church. That was

the thrust that contributed to founding Church during the late 19th century.

Rev. Thomas' philosophy regarding knowledge and the pulpit could be summed up in an article entitled, "The Pulpit," which contended that the pulpit was a great power that deals with the mind and the heart, while softening and purifying the will. "The thirst for knowledge was innate to man," he wrote, "strong in the Negro because he has had the surrounding circumstances of bondage." He contended that our church needed a revival of the mind and the hunger of the heart. Rev. Thomas, as a model of a successful African American Calvinist, was perhaps the most influential pastor produced. His work had a profound impact on Protestant thought.

Rev. Thomas believed that education and virtues would be mighty forces in the

In every movement for reform, there is an adequate knowledge of existing evils. Hence the first step toward the reformation of a branch, every vestige of man's inborn sinfulness, and a conscious self-respect that will human soul; the third is to deserve the giving practical evidences of ability and to discharge the duties and responsibilities.

As a member of the Board of African Methodist Ministry in the Buffalo, Rev. Thomas later pastored the historic Mother Bethel in Philadelphia.

Rev. Horace Tolbert served the Vine Street Church from 1890 - 1892. One of his most significant contributions was the implementation of a "vigorous young peoples' society." He reported that, under Rev. Tolbert, the church had a large membership as the church.

By the 1890s the neighborhood of the Vine Street Church had become an overruling institution was running rampant in the neighborhood. For the sake of the children, were eager to see the church relocate. Moreover, because of its relocation, the dark tide of immorality that surged through the neighborhood, complicated by the fact that the church had to relocate. Moreover, because of its relocation, there was a little likelihood that the necessary funds for the church would be shifted rapidly.



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the thrust that contributed to founding of numerous seminaries by the A.M.E. Church during the late 19th century.

Rev. Thomas' philosophy regarding education was simple; the race needed knowledge and the pulpit could be a powerful vehicle in disseminating that knowledge. In an article entitled, "The Ministry We Need," Rev. Thomas contended that the pulpit was a great power "for the development of the people; it deals with the mind and the heart, enlightening at the same time the one while softening and purifying the other." He further asserted that, "the desire for knowledge was innate to man." His thirst for knowledge was especially strong "in the Negro because he has been so long deprived by force of the surrounding circumstances of bondage and its concomitant evils." Rev. Thomas contended that our church needed ministers who could satisfy both "the craving of the mind and the hunger of the soul." He cited the work of Jonathan Edwards as a model of a successful ministry.<sup>81</sup> (Note: Edwards, an 18th century Calvinist, was perhaps the most brilliant theologian that America has produced. His work had a profound impact on the development of American Protestant thought).

Rev. Thomas believed that education and a commitment to Christian virtues would be mighty forces in the uplift of the race:

In every movement for reform, two vital elements enter. The first requirement is an adequate knowledge of existing evils; the second, a willing capacity to correct them. Hence the first step toward the sound reform of men, is to eliminate root and branch, every vestige of mandlin sentimentality; the second to create within the individual a conscious self-respect that will develop manhood and instill integrity in a human soul; the third is to deserve the confidence of religious contemporaries by giving practical evidences of ability and capacity to sensibly appreciate, and properly discharge the duties and responsibilities.<sup>82</sup>

As a member of the Board of Trustees of Wilberforce University, Rev. Thomas was in a position to implement some of his ideas and change the African Methodist Ministry in the process. After leaving the Vine Street Church, Rev. Thomas later pastored at the Charles Street Church in Boston and the historic Mother Bethel in Philadelphia.

Rev. Horace Talbert served the Vine Street Church during the conference years 1890 - 1892. One of his most significant contributions was the development of a "vigorous young peoples' society of Christian Endeavor." It was reported that, under Rev. Talbert, the Young Peoples Society was "nearly as large a membership as the church."<sup>83</sup>

By the 1890s the neighborhood and environment around the Vine Street Church had become an overriding concern of the congregation. Vice and prostitution was running rampant in the area and many members, perhaps for the sake of the children, were eager to move to a different location. One local news article reported that the church "has done its best to hold its own against the dark tide of immorality that surges against its walls."<sup>84</sup> The problem was complicated by the fact that the church did not have the financial resources to relocate. Moreover, because of its relatively small congregation, there was little likelihood that the necessary funds could be raised internally. (Note: In addition, it probably was not easy to find a vacant church near the center of the Afro-American population. Later, during the 20th century when the white population would be shifting rapidly away from the inner city, a black con-



gregation could likely find numerous bargains in "used churches.").

The Rev. Charles W. Mossell devised a strategy which he hoped would solve the problem. Rev. Mossell secured a purchase option on a site and then proceeded to seek the endorsement and support of "the leading clergymen of the different denominations, Catholic and Protestant." Bishops John H. Vincent and S.V. Ryan, of the "Methodist" and "Roman Catholic" denominations respectively, made public appeals for financial for the proposed Vine Street Church move. Bishop Vincent stated that "the movement in behalf of a new church for the African Methodist Episcopal people of Buffalo, now in the hands of Rev. C.W. Mossell, deserves the approval of every faith who believe in the uplifting and educating the colored people of Buffalo." Bishop Ryan urged his constituents to "aid these good people to ameliorate their condition and get a location more suitable to improve the moral condition of themselves and their children."<sup>85</sup> The campaign was also endorsed by "leading clergymen of the Presbyterian, Congregational, and Episcopal Churches and also the Methodist preachers." An auditing committee was appointed and a bank account was set up.

The aforementioned effort was probably one of numerous late 19th century attempts on the part of the Vine Street Congregation to re-locate. The campaign to leave the neighborhood that was described as "one of the worst sections of Buffalo" was apparently a major focus of Rev. Mossell's work in the city. That part of his ministry in Buffalo was marked by failure. Rev. Mossell remained at the Vine Street Church for only one year.

The situation which confronted the Vine Street Church in regards to its location do not appear to have improved during the several years following Rev. Mossell's departure. Those difficulties were addressed by Bishop Abraham Grant during his visit to Buffalo in 1897. Summarizing his visit to the city, Bishop Grant reported that "we have a valuable piece of property on Vine Street, which has been owned by the connection about fifty years, but at the time of my visit I found it in a rather complicated condition." The Bishop stated that following his arrival he had a "common sense talk [with] our people." The substance of those discussions are not known but Bishop Grant noted that we left things in a more satisfactory state."<sup>86</sup>

In addition to being unable to move out of an undesirable neighborhood, it appears that the Vine Street Congregation was at least two years behind on debt reduction payments. Several months after Rev. Junius C. Ayler assumed the Vine Street pastorate, in 1899, it was reported that he had "just completed a rally realizing \$400, and [had] just appropriated the same to two years back interest."<sup>87</sup> Moreover, an A.M.E. official who visited Buffalo in 1899 expressed concern about the relatively small membership in the Vine Street Church. That official observed that a city with an Afro-American population the size of Buffalo should have a larger population.<sup>88</sup> It is not known whether that official was aware that the Afro-American population of Buffalo in 1899 numbered only about 1,600 persons.<sup>89</sup>

Difficulties notwithstanding, the Vine Street members were optimistic and "cheerful... about the future of their church." Rev. Ayler was described as "just the man for the time and the place."<sup>90</sup> In April, 1900, the Women's Day Rally was reported as a "grand success." The women raised \$400 which was designated for church debts. After the rally, one member of the church wrote

that "this unprecedented success spiritual manifestations has actuated request for Rev. J. C. Ayler's return quest of the congregation was grant the Vine Street Church for a second

As the Vine Street congregation with an apparent sense of optimism facilities as well as triumphs during the wake of those seventy years Reconstruction, several depressions touched the lives of the Vine Street parent organization, the A.M.E. Den "northern churches" to an institution

In 1900, no one could predict it in store for Buffalo. While it was not lay ahead for the Vine Street Congregational facilities would come. The congregation help, they would prevail. The belief sustained by strong people, and the several generations of Vine Street making the 20th century image of Buffalo

#### 1900-1977

In 1902 the Vine Street A.M.E. major setbacks since the down of the Vine Street members broke away from congregations—St. Luke's A.M.E. joined the Presbyterian Denominational New York A.M.E. Conference assign Rev. Giles was to replace the Rev. the Vine Street Church the previous ficers, wanting to keep Rev. Johnson which stated that "the church was made to receive anyone as pastor."<sup>91</sup> the congregation refused to allow him

On June 13, Rev. Giles obtained gregation to grant him permission, also ordered the trustees to "show be issued compelling them to install scheduled for Monday, June 18. their power to prevent Rev. Giles from preaching. The court ruled that they on proper authority in appointing submit.

Having lost in the court, the withdrew and form a separate cong



that "this unprecedented success in church government, financial and spiritual manifestations has actuated the quarterly conference in a unanimous request for Rev. J. C. Ayler's return to the charge another year."<sup>91</sup> The request of the congregation was granted, the Conference returned Rev. Ayler to the Vine Street Church for a second year.

As the Vine Street congregation entered the 20th century, they did so with an apparent sense of optimism. The church had experienced many difficulties as well as triumphs during its nearly seventy years of existence. In the wake of those seventy years lay images of slavery, the Civil War, Reconstruction, several depressions, and many other national events that had touched the lives of the Vine Street Church members. During those years the parent organization, the A.M.E. Denomination had risen from a small group of "northern churches" to an institution with international branches.

In 1900, no one could predict the profound demographic changes that lay in store for Buffalo. While it was not possible to know what specific difficulties lay ahead for the Vine Street Congregation, it was certain that some difficulties would come. The congregation was equally certain that, with Gods help, they would prevail. The belief that their church had been built and sustained by strong people, and the oral traditions that had passed through the several generations of Vine Street members would be powerful forces in shaping the 20th century image of Bethel A.M.E. Church of Buffalo.

#### 1900-1977

In 1902 the Vine Street A.M.E. Congregation experienced one of its first major setbacks since the dawn of the new century. In that year, a group of Vine Street members broke away from the church and formed two separate congregations--St. Lukes A.M.E. Zion and Lloyds Memorial (the latter group joined the Presbyterian Denomination in the mid-1920s). In May, 1902 the New York A.M.E. Conference assigned the Rev. Francis P. Giles to the church. Rev. Giles was to replace the Rev. E.A. Johnson who had served as pastor of the Vine Street Church the previous conference year. The Vine Street officers, wanting to keep Rev. Johnson as their minister, sent Rev. Giles a letter which stated that "the church was closed and that no preparations had been made to receive anyone as pastor."<sup>92</sup> In essence, according to Rev. Giles' claim, the congregation refused to allow him to preach.

On June 13, Rev. Giles obtained a court order which directed the congregation to grant him permission to preach on Sunday, June 15. The court also ordered the trustees to "show cause why a Writ of Mandamus should not be issued compelling them to install him [Rev. Giles] as pastor." A hearing was scheduled for Monday, June 16. At the hearing the Trustees did not argue their power to prevent Rev. Giles from assuming the pulpit, they maintained that they had not locked the door and had not prevented Rev. Giles from preaching. The court ruled that the New York A.M.E. Conference had acted on proper authority in appointing Rev. Giles and the officers would have to submit.

Having lost in the court, the dissident members decided to simply withdraw and form a separate congregation. Later, an apparent split within



gregation could likely find numerous bargains in "used churches.").

The Rev. Charles W. Mossell devised a strategy which he hoped would solve the problem. Rev. Mossell secured a purchase option on a site and then proceeded to seek the endorsement and support of "the leading clergymen of the different denominations, Catholic and Protestant." Bishops John H. Vincent and S.V. Ryan, of the "Methodist" and "Roman Catholic" denominations respectively, made public appeals for financial for the proposed Vine Street Church move. Bishop Vincent stated that "the movement in behalf of a new church for the African Methodist Episcopal people of Buffalo, now in the hands of Rev. C.W. Mossell, deserves the approval of every faith who believe in the uplifting and educating the colored people of Buffalo." Bishop Ryan urged his constituents to "aid these good people to ameliorate their condition and get a location more suitable to improve the moral condition of themselves and their children."<sup>85</sup> The campaign was also endorsed by "leading clergymen of the Presbyterian, Congregational, and Episcopal Churches and also the Methodist preachers." An auditing committee was appointed and a bank account was set up.

The aforementioned effort was probably one of numerous late 19th century attempts on the part of the Vine Street Congregation to re-locate. The campaign to leave the neighborhood that was described as "one of the worst sections of Buffalo" was apparently a major focus of Rev. Mossell's work in the city. That part of his ministry in Buffalo was marked by failure. Rev. Mossell remained at the Vine Street Church for only one year.

The situation which confronted the Vine Street Church in regards to its location do not appear to have improved during the several years following Rev. Mossell's departure. Those difficulties were addressed by Bishop Abraham Grant during his visit to Buffalo in 1897. Summarizing his visit to the city, Bishop Grant reported that "we have a valuable piece of property on Vine Street, which has been owned by the connection about fifty years, but at the time of my visit I found it in a rather complicated condition." The Bishop stated that following his arrival he had a "common sense talk [with] our people." The substance of those discussions are not known but Bishop Grant noted that we left things in a more satisfactory state."<sup>86</sup>

In addition to being unable to move out of an undesirable neighborhood, it appears that the Vine Street Congregation was at least two years behind on debt reduction payments. Several months after Rev. Junius C. Ayler assumed the Vine Street pastorate, in 1899, it was reported that he had "just completed a rally realizing \$400, and [had] just appropriated the same to two years back interest."<sup>87</sup> Moreover, an A.M.E. official who visited Buffalo in 1899 expressed concern about the relatively small membership in the Vine Street Church. That official observed that a city with an Afro-American population the size of Buffalo should have a larger population.<sup>88</sup> It is not known whether that official was aware that the Afro-American population of Buffalo in 1899 numbered only about 1,600 persons.<sup>89</sup>

Difficulties notwithstanding, the Vine Street members were optimistic and "cheerful... about the future of their church." Rev. Ayler was described as "just the man for the time and the place."<sup>90</sup> In April, 1900, the Women's Day Rally was reported as a "grand success." The women raised \$400 which was designated for church debts. After the rally, one member of the church wrote

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#### 1900-1977

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On June 13, Rev. Giles obtained a court order for the congregation to grant him permission to be installed. He also ordered the trustees to "show cause why a writ should not be issued compelling them to install him." The court scheduled for Monday, June 15. At the hearing, the trustees submitted their power to prevent Rev. Giles from being installed that they had not locked the door to the church. The court ruled that the trustees had no proper authority in appointing Rev. Giles to submit.

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that "this unprecedented success in church government, financial and spiritual manifestations has actuated the quarterly conference in a unanimous request for Rev. J. C. Ayler's return to the charge another year."<sup>91</sup> The request of the congregation was granted, the Conference returned Rev. Ayler to the Vine Street Church for a second year.

As the Vine Street congregation entered the 20th century, they did so with an apparent sense of optimism. The church had experienced many difficulties as well as triumphs during its nearly seventy years of existence. In the wake of those seventy years lay images of slavery, the Civil War, Reconstruction, several depressions, and many other national events that had touched the lives of the Vine Street Church members. During those years the parent organization, the A.M.E. Denomination had risen from a small group of "northern churches" to an institution with international branches.

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During the first two decades of the 20th century, the social and economic changes that were taking place in America had a dramatic impact on Afro-American population patterns in Buffalo. The Vine Street Church was also affected by those changes. As late as 1910 the black population of Buffalo numbered less than 1,800 persons. The Vine Street Congregation had not changed significantly since it was founded more than three-quarters of a century earlier. The congregation still worshipped in the same church that the original founders had used. By most standards, the Vine Street Church of 1910 was a small town church. During the four decades following the outbreak of World War I, the small Vine Street Church was transformed into a modern urban religious institution.

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When the Rev. Alonzo L. Wilson began his duties as pastor of the Vine Street Congregation in 1915, the church had not yet begun to feel the effects of the "Great Migration." During that period the physical structure of the church was described as being a "small" facility that contained only a sanctuary and a basement. The church was heated by a coal furnace. The basement was used for Sunday School and occasional board meetings. Most of the boards of the church, however, held their meetings in the homes of members. The church membership during the period was also described as "small." In spite of its small membership, the congregation was able to meet most of its obligations because of low overhead. "They didn't have a mortgage on the church," and the salaries of the minister and organist were the major financial obligations. The congregation often staged fund raising activities to attract income from outside the membership. The members sold dinners and held baked goods sales, bazaars, rummage sales and the like. The congregation did not own a parsonage. The minister lived in a rented house that the members

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During the 1920s most of Buffalo's Afro-American churches held revivals, or a similar series of protracted meetings, at least once each year. In a functional sense, those meetings served to attract large numbers of people to the church from the community at large. Especially gifted preachers, who could stir the emotions of a congregation, could easily pack the meeting house. Revivals almost always added a few new members to the congregation. One of the most popular speakers on the revival circuit during the 1920s was Mrs. Lena Mason of Philadelphia. She was the guest speaker at a revival held at Bethel during the week of February 1, 1920.. The *Buffalo American*, a local Afro-American newspaper, reported on the event: "The attendance all week has been very large and all have been of one accord in proclaiming the spiritual power and religious enthusiasm of one of the greatest women evangelists of all time."<sup>97</sup> Mrs. Mason spoke at numerous Afro-American churches in Buffalo during that era. By the end of the decade of the 1920s, more than a dozen new black congregations had been formed in the city. In their sometimes competitive efforts to attract new members, the use of revival meetings took on an added importance.

During the five years of Rev. Wilson's tenure (1915 - 1920), Bethel church began to "move forward." At the end of his term, the *Buffalo American* highlighted Rev. Wilson's ministry in the city with a special editorial entitled, "Five Years Service:"

Rev. Alonzo L. Wilson, after serving for five years as pastor of Bethel A.M.E. Church has been removed to the charge of the Metropolitan A.M.E. Church, 134 St. , N.Y. During the years that Rev. Wilson has been in the city he has rendered a great service in all directions. The church under his leadership has seen marvelous progress as to the increase of its membership as well as the accumulation of funds and the liquidation of its indebtedness. As a citizen, Rev. Wilson has been alive to all efforts which stood for progress and advancement. He was one of the prime movers in the establishing of the Negro Realty Corporation, a firm which bid fair to render great service in alleviating some of the existing housing conditions among our people. He has stood for the right as God gave him to see right, and by doing so has helped himself and all of the citizens. As he goes to N.Y., we hope that the same success will attend him.



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Rev. Wilson was sent to Metropolitan A.M.E. Church in New York City. His replacement at Bethel of Buffalo was the Rev. H. Allen Garcia (Gosh-sha). Rev. Garcia was born in St. Anne's Bay, Jamaica in 1887. His father was a "prosperous self-employed" businessman. Rev. Garcia was the youngest of six children. As a youngster, he had the advantages of "a wholesome family environment and religious training." During his youth, he decided to go into the ministry and become a missionary. In preparing for his life's mission, the young Garcia came to the United States and entered Wilberforce University. Following graduation, in 1912, he and his young bride served for two years in Liberia.<sup>99</sup>

During Rev. Garcia's two year residence, Bethel's circumstances continued to improve. As one senior member recalled, "We began to get on our feet under Rev. Garcia."<sup>100</sup> Rev. Garcia was reported to have held strongly to the belief that to be in debt was tantamount to being dishonest. Consequently, he worked hard to rid the church of debts. During his two year tenure, the congregation paid off three mortgages. In addition, the building was renovated and the organ was repaired.<sup>101</sup> Rev. Garcia also reorganized the system of collecting monies from the congregation. Prior to his administration, the congregation used to march past a table at the front of the sanctuary and deposit their cash contributions on a plate. In an attempt to establish a better accounting system with records of each member's contributions, Rev. Garcia initiated the use of envelopes in taking collections.<sup>102</sup>

In November of 1920, Mrs. Alberta F. Nelson became the "church reporter" for the Bethel congregation. In that position, Mrs. Nelson filed regular reports of church activities with the *Buffalo American*. The following report focused on general attendance at the church, and progress within the Sunday School Department:

No better evidence is needed to prove the powerful efficiency of Rev. H.A. Garcia, B.D., than the constantly increasing crowds which assemble to hear him each Sunday Morning, and evening...The Sunday School is improving and growing by leaps and bounds. Mr. Wright, the progressive superintendent makes you feel at home even on your first visit.... Mrs. S.R. Russell has proven herself to be a capable leader of the Christian endeavor. The children are being well trained and will present a pleasing spectacle to all who will attend.<sup>103</sup>

Two months later Mrs. Nelson's column reported,

increasing activities along all lines. Every department of the church is being thoroughly organized, and many new organizations are being formed. Rev. Garcia is proving himself to be efficient, progressive, and a man as such times as these need and demand.<sup>104</sup>

During the 1920s Bethel was noted throughout the community for its outstanding musical and cultural programs. The "Bethel Literary Society" presented programs which featured "vocal and instrumental" musical selections and "recitations." The congregation also sponsored plays, and musical programs which featured choirs. In 1921 Bethel launched its annual music festival. The festival was conceived as a commemorative in honor of Miss Fannie J. Catto, former organist for the Vine Street Church. The first annual program, "The Rose Festival," was held in June, 1921 and featured choirs and vocalists from the various black churches in the city. The second year's talent

included The Silver Leaf Jubilee: Quilting, and musical representatives.

In that period the church stage the "Fair" was to raise funds and activities for the community. The last week. Planning and preparing for the activities themselves. A newspaper art pre-event atmosphere among the one beehive now in preparation for the season is alive with interest, zeal and a of fun activities - contests, booths, art and handicraft exhibits, and the like.

In November, 1920 the annual week of inspiring entertainments, act play. It was a comedy and was the Buffalo's leading Afro-American man gave oral testimony concerning Bethel described the program: "Reverend Langford of Niagara Falls, [and] Rev. bringing to mind those good old days and clever way, they reviewed the the historic old Bethel - one of the Programs for the other evenings indication of "a drama entitled Fifty Yes the congregation was treated to meet Pastor Garcia, Rev. E.J. Echols (G Heard. Over twelve hundred dollars

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included The Silver Leaf Jubilee Quartet; Clifford Lane, tenor; Harold Oliver, violinist; and musical representatives from other local churches.<sup>105</sup>

In that period the church staged an annual "May Fair." The purpose of the "Fair" was to raise funds and to provide entertainment and cultural activities for the community. The festivities were usually spread over an entire week. Planning and preparing for the annual event was as exciting as the activities themselves. A newspaper article prior to the 1921 "Fair" described the pre-event atmosphere among the congregation: "Bethel Church is a veritable beehive now in preparation for the coming annual May Fair; Every organization is alive with interest, zeal and enthusiasm." The "Fair" included all kinds of fun activities - contests, booths, baked goods, home made candies, dinners, art and handicraft exhibits, and the like.<sup>106</sup>

In November, 1920 the annual Anniversary Celebration featured one full week of inspiring entertainments." The first night's program featured a two act play. It was a comedy and was described as "a scream from start to finish." The program for the second evening was more historical in content. Some of Buffalo's leading Afro-American ministers, long time residents of the area, gave oral testimony concerning Bethel's rich heritage. Mrs. Nelson's column described the program: "Reverends Durham and Nash of Buffalo, Rev. Langford of Niagara Falls, [and] Rev. Barnes of Olean did themselves credit in bringing to mind those good old days of yore. In their own individual, unique and clever way, they reviewed the past, present and prophesied the future of the historic old Bethel - one of the stations of the Underground Railroad." Programs for the other evenings included "a literary program," and the presentation of "a drama entitled 'Fifty Years From Freedom'." On the final Sunday, the congregation was treated to morning, afternoon, and evening sermons by Pastor Garcia, Rev. E.J. Echols (Cedar Street Baptist Church), and Bishop Heard. Over twelve hundred dollars was raised during the week's activities.<sup>107</sup>

Bethel also opened its doors to meetings of a political nature. In March, 1921, A. Philip Randolph, the militant young black activist and leader of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, addressed a gathering at Bethel. Randolph spoke on the topic, "Proposed Solutions to the Negro Problem." In his address, Randolph "analyzed capitalist society in its various aspects." He told his audience that capitalism "produces the force of its own destruction, and the results will be reorganization of society by the working class on the basis of industrial democracy."<sup>108</sup> Randolph concluded that the "Negro" put little faith in either of the major political parties in the United States. He urged the race to "band themselves together and become an important factor in the industrial and economical world." On Palm Sunday afternoon, 1921, the Buffalo Branch of the N.A.A.C.P. met at Bethel Church. Some of Buffalo's most prominent black ministers were actively involved in that organization.<sup>109</sup>

At the New York Annual A.M.E. Conference in May, 1921, Bethel's Pastor - Rev. Garcia, and its former Pastor - Rev. A.L. Wilson were among five persons elected to represent the conference on the Board of Trustees of Wilberforce University.<sup>110</sup> The following year (1922) Rev. Garcia was transferred to a church in New Jersey and the Rev. W. Spencer Carpenter was sent to Bethel.

Rev. Carpenter served the Bethel congregation for four years (1922 - 1926). After Rev. Carpenter's first year in office, the editor of the *Buffalo American* presented an assessment of Bethel's new pastor: "He is a live wire,



with a vision and a determination to do things in this city and wake up the community socially and religiously." The editor cited the minister for "his courage in calling an ace and a spade by their description."<sup>111</sup> It was further noted that, "In the long years of Rev. Carpenter's ministry he has been recognized as an unmuzzled preacher who fears no clique nor sect in the preaching of God's word."<sup>112</sup> That fact was demonstrated in a sermon that Rev. Carpenter preached to the Bethel congregation entitled, "Respectable Cowards." The main focus of the sermon was "the so-called Negro Aristocracy in Buffalo."<sup>113</sup>

Rev. Carpenter was a Prince Hall Mason with over 20 years of service and a long list of honors in that organization. While in Buffalo, he was "a noble of Hadji Temple, No. 61, order of the Mystic Shrine." "Tyree Lodge 43, F. and A.M. Prince Hall Masons" occasionally held their services at Bethel with Rev. Carpenter as principal speaker.<sup>114</sup>

During the first year of Rev. Carpenter's ministry at Bethel, reports published in the Buffalo American indicated the church was "really on the move." In August, 1922 the report stated that, "The church is beginning to take on new life . . . the congregation [is] larger than it has been in the past. . . Dr. Carpenter is doing a grand work." On September 10, 1922, Rev. Carpenter spoke to a capacity audience. He was complemented by a "splendid" choir under the direction of Mrs. Bertha Bailey. Later that month the Church report stated that, "We are very much pleased to see the improvement and progress that our church has made under the pastoral charge of Rev. Carpenter." In November, 1922 the church completed a rally which produced "the largest financial success in the history of our church."<sup>115</sup>

Usually Rev. Carpenter's Sunday morning sermon had a spiritual focus and was structured around a Biblical text. At the Sunday evening services, which tended to have the largest attendance, Rev. Carpenter preached "practical discourses" that focused on social and community concerns. The evening discourses included such titles as, "The Handle of the Ax: A True Discourse on Daily Life;" and "The Farmer and the Snake: Local Sin and the Horrible Results of Vice Through Venereal Infections." The latter title was probably prompted by the fact that Bethel was located in the heart of the "Vine Street Vice District."<sup>116</sup> Rev. Carpenter also preached special "segregated" services for men and others for women. His "men" and "women" only services drew large numbers of people from all over the community. One of Bethel's senior members recalled that during this period (mid-1920s) women were first allowed to come to church at night without wearing a hat.<sup>117</sup>

Rev. Carpenter's sermons were usually described as being "thoughtful," "instructive," "scholarly," and "intellectually stimulating." In addition to preaching at Bethel, he was frequently called on to speak at other community gatherings. In February, 1924 he delivered a very well researched and polished address at the Michigan Ave. YMCA in commemoration of the birthday of Abraham Lincoln. That address, which was printed in full in the *Buffalo American*, included a strong and prophetic warning on the future of America. In that speech Rev. Carpenter observed that,

as we stand with our eyes on the American Flag we see... our liberties our manhood and our womanhood hurled upon the grinding wheels of Southern political machinery leaving us with a chain upon our necks as binding as the curse of slavery.

This my friends is the reward given to those who, patriotism, and love of a second to come in the history of their race witnessed by the progress of a European disturbance. Color matters not, but which has no time to defend, whose blood has helped to plant the flag.

As I view this situation I am being American rather, now is the month of being, remembering that, having a to do

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Under Rev. Carpenter, Bethel's and cultural programs which drew. Such programs included "An Evening and prose recital sponsored by the arts Board presented Mrs. Paul A. Other events like the frequent and the yearly 'Emancipation Day' since the Civil War Era."<sup>118</sup>

In 1923 and 1924, Bethel organized church league. Bethel's team was Memorial Chapel court. In its coached by young Myron McGuire, played its regular games on Tuesday made by Bethel members, Mrs. H. Clark. In the 1923-24 season, the Bethel also fielded a basketball team.

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This my friends is the reward given by this government to ten millions of Negroes whose valor, patriotism, and love of country have helped to make American History second to none in the histories of the world. This my friends, is the condition of affairs witnessed by the congress of this country which finds time to investigate European disturbances, Cuban insurrections and Japanese discrimination in California, but which has no time to defend in our various states the liberties of black men whose blood has helped to place the American Flag where it waves today. ...

As I view this situation I am brought face to face with the reality that this free American nation, now in the zenith of its fame, will soon totter, . . . and fall in grumbling, smoldering ruin, burying in its debris the innocent as well as the guilty.<sup>118</sup>

The only way to avoid that ultimate catastrophe, in Rev. Carpenter's view, was for the nation--its government and people to turn and stand for justice and the enforcement of the constitution for all of its citizens. He urged the nation to re-capture the spirit of Abraham Lincoln.

Under Rev. Carpenter, Bethel continued to sponsor its annual educational and cultural programs which drew large crowds from the community at large. Such programs included "An Evening with Paul Lawrence Dunbar," a poetry and prose recital sponsored by the "Girls Usher Club." In May, 1925 the Stewards Board presented Mrs. Paul A. Richardson, Mezzo-Soprano in concert. Other events like the frequent musical programs, the "Annual Bethel Fair" and the yearly "Emancipation Day Celebration (which had been held annually since the Civil War Era).<sup>119</sup>

In 1923 and 1924, Bethel sponsored a basketball team in the all city church league. Bethel's team made its debut on February 6, 1923 on the Memorial Chapel court. In its initially appearance, the team, which was coached by young Myron McGuire, defeated two "fast white teams." The team played its regular games on Tuesday nights. The blue and gold uniforms were made by Bethel members, Mrs. I.L. Scruggs, Mrs. N. Steward and Mrs. J. Clark. In the 1923-24 season, the team compiled a won-13, and lost-2 record. Both of the losses that year were to St. Philips.<sup>120</sup> St. Philips was undefeated. Bethel also fielded a basketball team the following year.

In 1925, Dr. I.L. Scruggs, one of Bethel's most prominent members, was appointed to the position of "Assistant Medical School Examiner by Mayor Francis Schwab." Dr. Scruggs was hailed as "the first colored man to hold a city appointment" in Buffalo. At that time he was a member of Bethel's Stewards Board.<sup>121</sup>

During his second year as Bethel's pastor, Rev. Carpenter was stricken with an extended illness. Although he recovered and continued to be an energetic pastor, the final years of his tenure in Buffalo were continually marked by poor health.<sup>122</sup> In 1926 the Rev. Mansfield E. Jackson was sent to Bethel to replace Rev. Carpenter who was re-assigned elsewhere.

The desire of the Bethel congregation to move the church from the Vine Street location had been a long-standing goal since the late 19th century. The church was finally relocated during the pastorate of Rev. M.E. Jackson. Ironically, when the move was finally made, it was in response to an order from the City of Buffalo rather than an internally motivated decision by the congregation.

Rev. Jackson served as Bethel's pastor for nine years (1926-1935). That was longer than any minister had served since Rev. George Weir, Sr., left the congregation in 1847 after eleven years. In addition to presiding over



Bethel's relocation, Rev. Jackson implemented numerous other changes as well. He was the first Bethel minister to appoint women to the Stewards Board. During the mid-1920s the General A.M.E. Conference ruled that women could serve on the Stewards and Trustees Boards of the member churches. That option was first exercised at Bethel when Rev. Jackson appointed Mrs. W.E. Totten, Mrs. Georgetta Howard, Mrs. Sadie Dixon, and Mrs. Lester to the Stewards' Board.<sup>123</sup> Rev. Jackson believed that the Stewards Board should include some of the heads of the various church clubs and departments and most of those bodies were traditionally headed by women.<sup>124</sup>

In the late 1920s the City of Buffalo decided to extend William Street eastward to Broadway. That meant that Vine Street, which was only one block long would become part of William Street. As part of William Street, Vine Street would have to be widened thus requiring the demolition of the Vine Street Church. When the congregation was informed that part of its property was to be taken by the city, they began immediately to search for an alternate site. As it were, a Lutheran congregation was preparing to vacate its building on Eagle Street. Elwood Smith, an undertaker and member of Bethel's Board of Trustees, informed the other officers that the property might be available. After preliminary negotiations were begun, a committee composed of three women--Mrs. Ethel Holmes, Mrs. W.E. Totten, and Mrs. Helen Smith, was directed to organize and coordinate a campaign to raise the down payment on the Eagle Street Church. The fund raising rally netted approximately \$3,000. During December of 1927 the Bethel congregation prepared to vacate the facility that had served as its home for more than three-quarters of a century. On the first Sunday in January, 1928, Bethel held its first service in its new home at 551 Eagle Street.<sup>125</sup>

The neighborhood surrounding the Eagle Street Church was racially mixed. The area was formerly "an Italian settlement," but numerous blacks had begun moving into the neighborhood. The church itself was a T shaped frame building. The Sunday School Department was "on the back end of the auditorium." (The top of the T) - The auditorium (sanctuary) faced Eagle Street. The facility had a small kitchen and a small room for the minister's office. It also had an unfinished basement. Some of the officers built a room in the basement for board meetings and such. Initially, the church had a coal furnace but that was converted to an oil unit under Rev. Dawkins.<sup>126</sup>

The move to Eagle Street climaxed the end of an era for the Bethel congregation. In abandoning the old Vine Street Church, the congregation was leaving behind the physical connection with its historic past. However, the spiritual and cultural ties with that heritage of struggle, perseverance, and self esteem would continue to shape the congregation for decades.

The decade of the 1920s marked an important turning point in the history of Buffalo's Bethel Church. The mass migration of Afro-Americans to Buffalo during the 1920s had a dramatic impact on Bethel. During that period the City's black population almost tripled. By 1930, only about 18 percent of the 13,563 Afro-American residents of Buffalo were born within New York State. The percentage of native born black Buffalonians was even smaller. In 1930, more than 60 percent of the city's black population were migrants from the southern states.<sup>127</sup>

The mass migration of Afro-Americans to Buffalo brought a tremendous

infusion of new financial and human resources. The "new Buffalonians" quickly assisted the Church. The choir, Sunday School and other departments benefited from the influx. The additional revenue from the increase of the number of members with their own homes helped pay off its debts and raise the \$2,000 down payment. (Two members of the three women on the drive were "new Buffalonians"). Some of the officers and/or played crucial roles in the 1920s included: Mrs. W.E. Totten (Bethel's Steward Board), Elwood Smith (contributor to Bethel's finances), Mrs. Helen Smith (fundraiser), Dr. I.L. Scruggs (steward), Joseph Spencer (officer), Estelle Wright (reorganized Sunday School), Dr. Albert Nelson (organist), and various other officers.<sup>128</sup>

The newcomers joined with "old" members like Rudolph, Lane, Amelia and Ora Ann Lewis, and others, to form an effective leadership. The dynamic and capable leadership during the 1920s, moved the "small" church of the 19th century as an entity was interrupted only temporarily by the depression.

The stock market crash and the depression of the 1930s, interrupted the church's growth for two years after the Bethel congregation. The depression was especially hard on the city's black population and many black workers were the first to be laid off. Senior members discussed the plight of

Most of the members were out of work. The church was quite small, but Mr. Steward's leadership and the contributions of the members were the better financed members of the church. They contributed for the very thing through the years.

In 1935 Rev. Jackson was transferred to the A.M.E. Church in Brooklyn. Rev. C. Seward only stayed at Bethel for a short time. He split in his former congregation back to Brooklyn. Rev. Seward left Buffalo after the congregation in Brooklyn. The Rev. J. Rev. Seward, Rev. Perlock came to the church as a "easy going type of fellow." One who had no problems or development of Bethel Church. Rev. Perlock's tenure claims. He remained with the church for years.<sup>129</sup>



ges as infusion of new financial and human resources to the Bethel congregation. wards The "new Buffalonians" quickly assumed leadership positions in Bethel Church. The choirs, Sunday School and other departments also benefited i that from the influx. The additional revenue that resulted from the dramatic ember on ap- increase of the number of members with "good jobs," enabled the church to pay d Mrs. off its debts and raise the \$3,000 down payment on the Eagle Street Church. wards (Two members of the three woman committee that coordinated that fund s and drive were "new Buffalonians.") Some of the migrants to Buffalo who served en.<sup>124</sup> as officers and/or played crucial roles in Bethel's surge of progress in the Street 1920s included; Mrs. W.E. Totten (one of the first women appointed to ly one Bethel's Steward Board), Elwood Smith (Trustee and one of the most liberal street, contributors to Bethel's finances), Mrs. Elwood Smith (club president and of the fundraiser), Dr. I.L. Scruggs (steward), Dr. M.A. Allen (prominent laymen), of its Joseph Spencer (officer), Hattie Spencer (organized childrens choir), John for an Wright (reorganized Sunday School), John Rash (officer), Ellis Clark (officer), ate its Alberta Nelson (organist), and Matilda Seamster (club president), and many ber of others.<sup>125</sup>

The newcomers joined with "old Buffalonians" like Mrs. Ethel Holmes, Rudolph, Lane, Amelia and Ora Anderson, Mary Jane Williams, H. Henry d Mrs. Lewis, and others, to form an effective team.<sup>129</sup> The expanded membership se the coupled with the dynamic and capable ministers that served the congregation ed ap- during the 1920s, moved the "small town" Vine Street Church into the third gation decade of the 20th century as an emerging urban institution. That evolution e than was interrupted only temporarily by the depression of the 1930s.

The stock market crash and the onset of the depression began less than Bethel two years after the Bethel congregation moved into the Eagle Street Church. acially The depression was especially hard on the Afro-American community. Most ks had of the city's black population had migrated to Buffalo to work in the steel mills frame of the and other industrial plants. The depression brought massive layoffs and the Eagle black workers were the first to be terminated. Mr. Ellis Clark, one of Bethel's r's of- senior members, discussed the plight of the church during the depression: om in al fur-

Most of the members were out of work for a period of time and our offerings were quite small, but Mr. Rudolph lane, and Joseph Spencer, and Elwood Smith, those were the better financed members of the board, and they arranged to get money and contribute for the carry through during the depression days.

In 1935 Rev. Jackson was transferred from Bethel to the Bridge Street l con- A.M.E. Church in Brooklyn. Rev. Charles Steward was sent to Bethel. Rev. n was Steward only stayed at Bethel for about three months. There was an apparent ; the split in his former congregation back in Brooklyn. Some of his former d self mem- bers called him back to Brooklyn where they had formed an independent story church. Rev. Steward left Buffalo abruptly and returned to that newly formed affalo congregation in Brooklyn. The Rev. J.A. Portlock was sent to Bethel to replace l the Rev. Steward. Rev. Portlock came from Nova Scotia. He was described as "an f the easy going type of fellow." One who didn't worry too much about the specific York problems or development of Bethel Church. He left administrative matters r. In to the Bethel Trustees. Rev. Portlock's main concern was "the collecting of from ference claims." He remained with the Buffalo congregation for three lous years.<sup>130</sup>



The Rev. H.P. Anderson was appointed to the pastorate of Bethel in May 1838. His tenure was cut short by his sudden and unexpected death in October, 1939. Rev. Anderson is remembered fondly by his former members. He was described as "a lovable person, a good speaker and very conscientious." During Rev. Anderson's administration the outside of the church was remodeled and extensive repairs and improvements were made on the inside. Presiding Elder James A. Manning assumed the pastorate following Rev. Anderson's death. Rev. Manning served until June, 1940 when the Rev. William McKinley Dawkins was sent to Bethel.

When Rev. Dawkins arrived in Buffalo, World War II was raging in Europe. Stimulated by the war, American industrial production was on the upswing and the rate of unemployment was on the decline. Rev. Dawkins came to Bethel at a time when the economic fortunes of the Buffalo Afro-American community was beginning to improve. Senior members remember Rev. Dawkins as "a fine administrator." He was not a fiery preacher but he could stir the congregation with his singing. Many people attended Bethel just to hear him sing. In July of 1940, shortly after his arrival, Rev. Dawkins presented a plan which called for a complete reorganization of the internal structure of the Bethel membership. Under the plan, the total membership of the church was divided into approximately twenty groups or clubs. Each group was initially identified by a number. During the weeks after the groups were formed, each group was to meet, organize itself, and elect officers. The new pastor hoped that the group structure would provide an efficient vehicle for procuring financial assessments and enable the church to meet its expanding operating budget. One of the first projects to be assigned to the newly formed organizations was a rally to raise money to purchase a new heating unit. Each person was assessed \$100 for the rally which was scheduled for completion in September, 1940.<sup>131</sup> The project was a huge success. The old coal furnace was replaced with a new oil heating unit. The new system was officially dedicated in November, 1940.<sup>132</sup>

Rev. Dawkins worked hard to increase the number of members who actively participated in the activities of the church. He had apparently encountered a problem that would plague many ministers of the large urban churches as America entered the post-World War II and "post-industrial" eras. The migration of Afro-Americans to northern cities had resulted in an increase in membership as well as additional financial resources for many of the urban black churches. At the same time the growing Afro-American population in northern cities forced the black churches to expand their programs, services and facilities. The era of small churches, and small congregations with low overhead was quickly slipping away. In order for churches like Bethel to continue to "progress" and shoulder the expanding services and responsibilities, it was essential to involve a large number of the membership in church programs and activities.

Rev. Dawkins kept detailed records of the number of persons who attended the numerous services and contributed to the various offerings. He made regular reports to the membership concerning his analysis of that information.<sup>133</sup> The minister's report for July, 1940 showed that out of a total of \*600 members, a total of 186 contributed to the church financially (\*The 600 members is probably the number assigned by the A.M.E. Conference for

assessment purposes. Bethel's membership was somewhat less than the "assessed" number. 186 persons contributed weekly.<sup>134</sup>

Rev. Dawkins also used attendance as a gauge of member involvement. It seemed especially important in view of the minister's reports stated that "average of forty persons attended they what disappointed at what he viewed." Rev. Dawkins warned that "we are living in post-faith, and unbelief in the world, we do his spirit, we will be guided safely through." He urged the congregation to begin with.

In the sixteen month period that he completely re-organized the internal structure of the church, he laid the base for a sound fiscal policy, new heating system for the church. In numerous reports to the congregation, the larger congregation had not become and activities. However, he was always few who labored to make the program.

By the early 1940s the Afro-American community was beginning to share in the economic prosperity. During the administration of the church, the financial assets of Bethel reached a new surge of Afro-American migration, a "new talent" and human resources. D.O. Walker Era represented a new period. Bethel emerged as a first class

Rev. Walker was born in Lyons, St. Louis. He came to the United States in 1908. He attended several schools including Boston. In addition to his divinity degrees, he had pastored at numerous churches prior to his service at Bethel University. After serving five years at Bethel, Rev. Walker accepted an appointment to Buffalo.<sup>135</sup>

During his tenure in Buffalo, Rev. Walker was recognized as one of the leading ministers of the church's \$20,000 indebtedness.

As a former college president, Rev. Walker was known for his leadership in the church and the community. Shortly after his arrival, he initiated a series of programs which became known as the "New Era" program. The program was to promote a greater awareness of the community. Rev. Walker believed that the church should contribute toward a stronger sense of civi-



assessment purposes. Bethel's number of "actual" members was probably somewhat less than the "assessed" number). In September, 1940 an average of 150 persons contributed weekly.<sup>134</sup>

Rev. Dawkins also used attendance at prayer meetings and class meetings as a gauge of member involvement in church activities. Prayer meetings seemed especially important in view of the spread of Hitler's Nazi terror. One of the minister's reports stated that during the month of July, 1940 an "average of forty persons attended the prayer and class meetings." Being somewhat disappointed at what he viewed as a relatively small turnout, Rev. Dawkins warned that "we are living in perilous times, and because of the lack of faith, and unbelief in the world, we need to seek the mind of Christ, that by his spirit, we will be guided safely through the dangerous perils of our time." He urged the congregation to begin attending the prayer services.<sup>135</sup>

In the sixteen month period that Rev. Dawkins served as Bethel's pastor, he completely re-organized the internal structure of the church and established the base for a sound fiscal policy. The congregation also purchased a new heating system for the church. In spite of those successes, Rev. Dawkins' numerous reports to the congregation indicates that he was disappointed that the larger congregation had not become more involved with church programs and activities. However, he was always quick to praise the "loyal and faithful" few who labored to make the programs succeed.<sup>136</sup>

By the early 1940s the Afro-American community of Buffalo was beginning to share in the economic prosperity of the war time industrial production. During the administration of the Rev. D. Ormond Walker (1941-1948), the financial assets of Bethel reached an unprecedented high. Moreover, the new surge of Afro-American migration to the city contributed to another infusion of "new talent" and human resources into Bethel's membership. The "D.O. Walker Era" represented momentous years of growth. During that period, Bethel emerged as a "first class religious institution."

Rev. Walker was born in Layou, St. Vincent (British West Indies), in 1890. He came to the United States in 1908. A scholarly man, Rev. Walker attended several schools including Boston, Harvard, and the University of Chicago. In addition to his divinity degrees, he held a Master of Arts Degree as well. He pastored at numerous churches prior to his appointment as President of Wilberforce University. After serving five years (1936-1941) at Wilberforce, Rev. Walker accepted an appointment to serve as pastor of Bethel Church of Buffalo.<sup>137</sup>

During his tenure in Buffalo, Rev. Walker ranked with the A.M.E. Bishops in terms of power and prestige. As former president of Wilberforce, he was recognized as one of the leading ministers in the district. In the first two years of Rev. Walker's administration, Bethel was successful in liquidating the church's \$20,000 indebtedness.

As a former college president, Rev. Walker was keenly aware of the value of programs that stimulated the intellectual development of the congregation and the community. Shortly after his arrival at Bethel, he initiated a series of programs which became known as the "Bethel Civic Forum." The purpose of the forum was to promote a greater awareness of the social and political issues facing the community. Rev. Walker believed that such awareness would contribute toward a stronger sense of civic responsibility. He felt that more en-



lightened public policy would be an additional consequence. The forum featured guest speakers from all over the nation. The speakers included scholars, political leaders, religious leaders, and others with a pertinent message for the community.

The quality of the lectures is indicated by the names of some of the speakers. In February, 1942, the Rev. Dr. Lewis K. McMillin, a faculty member at Wilberforce University was the featured speaker. Dr. McMillin, who had studied in Italy and Germany before World War II, spoke on "The Meaning of the Present War For the Colored People of the World." In March, 1942, John O. Holly, President of the Future Outlook League of Cleveland, spoke on "What it Means to Achieve Victory at Home." In April, 1945 the Rev. Joseph Gomez addressed the topic, "The Christian Church faces the Future." Other Forum speakers included; W.E.B. DuBois, Adam Clayton Powell, and Benjamin Davis.<sup>138</sup>

The Forum was usually held at the church on Sunday afternoons at 5:00 P.M. The lecture was followed by a "young peoples hour" which usually included small group discussions or panels. Tea and cookies were usually served by the missionary society or some other group. The evening services would then begin at 8:00 P.M. The Forum attracted people from all over the city. Bethel's senior members recall the "Bethel Civic Forum" as an educational and cultural program in which the entire community took great pride.

Rev. Walker was one of the first of Bethel's 20th century ministers to attempt to document and write down the history of the local church. In 1943 the fruits of that concern was published in Bethel's 112th anniversary Program.<sup>139</sup> One of the highlights of that celebration was the performance of an historical pageant which was written by Rev. Walker and Katherine Oliver Huff.

That pageant was entitled "Bound for the Promisedland." Presented in five acts, the pageant was described as;

an attempt to portray in song and speech the struggles of the Negro American from his ancestral home in Africa, to the cotton plantations of the South and the populated cities of our country. It attempts to reveal his sufferings, his heart throbs, his deep longings, his aspirations and his hopes--aspirations and hopes that are the heritage of all men everywhere.

The elaborate stage production showcased talents from the congregation. Some of Bethel's most outstanding musicians, singers, and speakers participated in the show. Mary Crosby (Chappell), one of the most gifted and popular female orators in Buffalo's Afro-American community presented excerpts from historical speeches of the Civil War Era. James Calloway, Sylvester Chester, Margaret Tyree, and Majorie Green sang work songs and spirituals from the ante-bellum period. The production combined a rich mixture of music and oratory that traced the Afro-American experience through the 19th and early 20th century. The journey concluded with the audience and participants joining in the singing of "God Bless America," and the "Negro National Anthem." The pageant was produced and directed by Emeline J. Horner, Zelmer Gary, and Mary Crosby.

Rev. Walker's involvement in the community went beyond providing educational, cultural, and spiritual programs. He was the first Bethel minister

to become directly involved in the city. Bethel was expanding its role in regard to the educational and cultural sphere. Political issues facing the community were being addressed by seeking political office. It was a time of opportunity for Afro-Americans in the masses of blacks felt that they were being denied the city to implement the necessary jobs, housing and education.<sup>140</sup>

In 1945 Rev. Walker made an attempt to become a candidate for Buffalo's Elliott pageant by calling for city-state-federal the Buffalo neighborhoods. He also expressed his concern for the blacks employed as bus drivers, great they were denied employment. He urged them to apply for such jobs. He served even during the war years when the of the important issues on the mind not allow the City of Buffalo to keep policies that continued to exist right totalitarianism offered very little to group. Rev. Walker also expressed his belief that new practices will bring ultimately their full rights under the Great Democracy must justify itself by need to insure collective security.<sup>141</sup>

During the mid 1940s, Rev. Walker was assigned as pastor of the new Larchmont Bethel Church in Larchmont, New York. He was assisted by three trustees and two stewards.

In May, 1948 Rev. Walker was elected Bishopric of the A.M.E. Church. In commemoration of Rev. Walker's service to the community, Bethel sponsored a series of programs. These programs were spread over a series of churches from other denominations. Some of the community's health organizations.<sup>142</sup>

Rev. Walker provided energy during his tenure. He left the church ever known. After liquidating the congregation, under Rev. Walker, was in a special service around 1950. Mrs. Julia Moore and Mrs. Sarah W.

When the Rev. John W.P. Cell was 60 years old. He had already established had pastored for eight years and had



to become directly involved in the city's politics. Even during the 1920s when Bethel was expanding its role in community life, most of that activity centered in the educational and cultural spheres. Rev. Walker not only spoke out on political issues facing the community, he became directly involved in city politics by seeking political office. In a 1943 address, he demanded more opportunities for Afro-Americans in the "war industries." He argued that the masses of blacks felt that they were being "exploited by neighborhood merchants, and [were] forced to pay more" for food and other items. He called on the city to implement the necessary reforms to eliminate discrimination in jobs, housing, and education.<sup>140</sup>

In 1945 Rev. Walker made an unsuccessful bid for nomination as a coalition candidate for Buffalo's Ellicott District Councilman. During the campaign he called for city-state-federal cooperation in improving conditions in the Buffalo neighborhoods. He also worked to get more educational and recreational facilities for the Ellicott district.<sup>141</sup> Rev. Walker fought to get blacks employed as bus drivers, grocery clerks, and to other positions where they were denied employment. He even accompanied many persons when they applied for such jobs. He served on the Buffalo Housing Advisory Board. Even during the war years when the threat of the Nazi war machine was one of the important issues on the minds of many Americans, Rev. Walker would not allow the City of Buffalo to forget the widespread discriminatory racial policies that continued to exist right here at home. While admitting that totalitarianism offered very little hope for "the Negro or any other minority group, Rev. Walker also expressed skepticism "as to whether Democracy as now practiced will bring ultimately to the Negro and to all minority groups their full rights under the Constitution." He concluded that American Democracy must justify itself by meeting the collective needs of all the people to insure collective security.<sup>142</sup>

During the mid 1940s, Rev Walker and officers of Bethel helped to establish "Baby Bethel" Church in Lackawanna. In 1945 the Rev. George Smith was assigned as pastor of the new Lackawanna congregation. Rev. Smith was assisted by three trustees and two stewards from Bethel, Buffalo.<sup>143</sup>

In May, 1948 Rev. Walker made his second run to be elected to the Bishopric of the A.M.E. Church. He was elected on the first ballot. In commemoration of Rev. Walker's seven years of outstanding service to the church and the community, Bethel sponsored a series of commemorative programs. Those programs were spread over a full week with a different minister and choir from other churches featured each night. Guest speakers included some of the community's leading ministers representing numerous denominations.<sup>144</sup>

Rev. Walker provided energetic and innovative leadership to Bethel during his tenure. He left the church in the best financial shape that it had ever known. After liquidating the earlier indebtedness of the church, the congregation, under Rev. Walker, raised more than \$15,000 which was deposited in a special savings account earmarked for future purchase of a larger church. Mrs. Julia Moore and Mrs. Sarah Wright were put in charge of the account.<sup>145</sup>

When the Rev. John W.P. Collier arrived at Bethel, in 1948, he was 33 years old. He had already established an enviable record of experience. He had pastored for eight years and had served for two and one-half years as head



of the Department of Rural Churches at Payne Theological Seminary. In addition, Rev. Collier had done extensive work in the south under a grant from the Phelps-Stokes Fund. Rev. Collier graduated Magna Cum Laude from Wilberforce University. He did graduate work in "Missions."<sup>146</sup> In spite of his wealth of experience, his small physical stature and his youthful looks gave the initial impression that he was just a "young boy." That is what many of Bethel's members thought when Rev. Collier was assigned to their congregation. Some thought that he was too young to provide the kind of leadership that they had become accustomed to under Rev. Walker. But Rev. Collier was an "energetic and dedicated Christian gentleman" and ultimately proved himself to be a very capable minister. In his first sermon, Rev. Collier warned of the dangerous drift toward secularism in America. He explained that "church people must demonstrate the power of religion in their daily lives." He further maintained that the "problems of education, housing, health, recreation, government labor, human relationships, and war and peace are problems which demand

Church, a white congregation. A sum of \$25,000 came from several sources. The \$15,000 from the building fund was used for the purchase of several other pieces of property. The \$10,000 was furnished through a loan from the Buffalo Home for the church. The neighborhood is largely African-American populated. Although Bethel was given to the church, Rev. White let it be known that long. During the first nine months 35 new members and raised over \$10,000 in substantial amounts on the church and the Board of Trustees and



of the Department of Rural Churches at Payne Theological Seminary. In addition, Rev. Collier had done extensive work in the south under a grant from the Phelps-Stokes Fund. Rev. Collier graduated Magna Cum Laude from Wilberforce University. He did graduate work in "Missions."<sup>146</sup> In spite of his wealth of experience, his small physical stature and his youthful looks gave the initial impression that he was just a "young boy." That is what many of Bethel's members thought when Rev. Collier was assigned to their congregation. Some thought that he was too young to provide the kind of leadership that they had become accustomed to under Rev. Walker. But Rev. Collier was an "energetic and dedicated Christian gentleman" and ultimately proved himself to be a very capable minister. In his first sermon, Rev. Collier warned of the dangerous drift toward secularism in America. He explained that "church people must demonstrate the power of religion in their daily lives." He further maintained that the "problems of education, housing, health, recreation, government labor, human relationships, and war and peace are problems which demand the best the church can offer."<sup>147</sup>

Under Rev. Collier, Bethel's membership increased dramatically. The crowds were so large that folding chairs had to be purchased to accommodate the overflow. In addition to being an excellent speaker, he inspired the congregation with his warmth and sincerity. Rev. Collier is also credited with bringing more young people into Bethel.

In 1950 the New York Conference sent the Rev. Charles E. Stewart to Bethel. One of Rev. Stewart's major contributions was to convince the officers of the need to provide more suitable living quarters for its ministers. Under his administration, Bethel purchased a parsonage on Eaton Street. Rev. Stewart instituted a number of other minor changes in his attempts to improve the church. One of those changes was his order to use "real" wine instead of grape juice during the communion service.<sup>148</sup>

During the early 1950s as a result of the government's "urban renewal and redevelopment" programs taking over properties in the neighborhood surrounding the Eagle Street Church, the Bethel congregation was again faced with the necessity of finding a new home. This time they were prepared financially. As early as the late 1940s, the congregation had been interested in finding a larger church plant. Now they were faced with a degree of urgency, they were being ordered to move. In their search for a new facility, numerous options were considered. Most of the churches that they looked at were owned by white congregations that were moving out. Because of various factors, the final choice narrowed down to the church located at Michigan and East Ferry. The move was finally made during the administration of the Rev. Harry White.<sup>149</sup>

The Rev. Harry White came to Buffalo in 1952. He was a transfer from the California Conference. During Rev. White's thirteen year administration, the longest of any Bethel minister to date, the congregation achieved unprecedented heights in numerous areas. Rev. White was an outstanding speaker and had an energetic and outgoing personality. One of his first projects after becoming pastor of Bethel was to supervise the process of moving from Eagle Street.

In 1953, Bethel purchased the church located at Michigan Avenue and East Ferry Street. The property was acquired from the Covenant Presbyterian

Church, a white congregation. The cost of \$25,000 came from several sources. The \$15,000 from the building fund and the sale of several other pieces of property. The remaining \$10,000 was financed through a mortgage. At the time of purchase, the Buffalo News reported that the neighborhood was changing through the Afro-American population.

Although Bethel was given to the church, Rev. White let it be known that long. During the first nine months, 35 new members and raised over \$10,000 in contributions. Substantial amounts on the most amounts were spent on church improvements. In the Board of Trustees and as reported that during the three year period, the congregation had made substantial improvements.<sup>150</sup>

By the end of the 1950s membership had increased to approximately \$25,000 of money and manage it efficiently. The Board of Trustees and admiration from officers and members. Stewards Board Minutes represent Rev. Stewart's major contributions was to convince the officers of the need to provide more suitable living quarters for its ministers. Under his administration, Bethel purchased a parsonage on Eaton Street. Rev. Stewart instituted a number of other minor changes in his attempts to improve the church. One of those changes was his order to use "real" wine instead of grape juice during the communion service.<sup>148</sup>

April 5, 1962 was a significant day in the church's history. On that day, the church celebrated its 100th anniversary. The church had been paid off four years ahead of time and its assets in real estate and on top of it all, the congregation presented on that occasion reflected the pastor and his congregation. The anniversary stated that, "We do not point up the kind of progress for the past ten years." The leadership is directed to follow the hearts of its followers. What was the objective, namely the goal of the church.

Rev. White was able to use his ability to strike that brought them to do great things. He was kind of service that a large urban congregation in order to have a success.

In 1965 Bethel received the Rev. Crumsey, a good speaker and a leader for twenty years. The only of



In addition to the Church, a white congregation, for a sum of \$120,000. The initial down payment of \$60,000 came from several sources; sale of the Eagle Street property, the \$15,000 from the building fund that Rev. Walker had established, and the sale of several other pieces of property that Bethel owned. The remaining \$60,000 was financed through a mortgage loan from the Presbytery.<sup>150</sup> At the time of purchase, the Buffalo Bison Baseball Stadium was located adjacent to the church. The neighborhood around the church was racially mixed, although the Afro-American population in the area was steadily increasing.

Although Bethel was given twelve years to pay off the mortgage on the church, Rev. White let it be known that he did not intend to carry the debt that long. During the first nine weeks in the new facility, the church took in 35 new members and raised over \$9,000 in offerings.<sup>151</sup> In addition to paying substantial amounts on the mortgages of the church parsonage, extensive amounts were spent on church improvements. Mr. Rudolph S. Lane, Secretary to the Board of Trustees and an active officer since the Vine Street years, reported that during the three years following the purchase of the Michigan Avenue Church, the congregation spent almost \$18,000 on redecorating and improvements.<sup>152</sup>

By the end of the 1958 conference year, Bethel had reduced its total indebtedness to approximately \$32,000.<sup>153</sup> Rev. White's ability to raise large sums of money and manage it efficiently for the good of the church won him praise and admiration from officers and members alike. A note of commentary in the Stewards Board Minutes represented the opinion of most of Bethel's members: "Never in the history of our church has the stewards and Trustee Boards been in such a healthy financial condition. All of this is due to the splendid leadership of our beloved pastor." The statement added that Rev. White had "brought love, peace, and harmony into our membership."<sup>154</sup>

April 8, 1962 was symbolically one of the most momentous days in the church's history. On that day the congregation held mortgage burning ceremonies for both the church and the parsonage. The church mortgage had been paid off four years ahead of schedule. The congregation was virtually debt free, and its assets in real property were greater than they had ever been, and on top of it all, the congregation had money in the bank. The speeches presented on that occasion reflect the kind of respect that existed between the pastor and his congregation. Speaking for the membership, the mistress of ceremonies stated that, "We believe that this noteworthy accomplishment points up the kind of progressive leadership that Bethel has been blessed with for the past ten years." The minister responded by explaining that "good leadership is doomed to failure unless it strikes a responsive chord in the hearts of its followers. When pastor and people work together with a common objective, namely the good of the church, all things are possible."<sup>155</sup>

Rev. White was able to raise Bethel to new heights precisely because of his ability to strike that "responsive chord" in the membership and inspire them to do great things. He was able to motivate his members to give the kind of service that a large urban religious institution must have from its congregation in order to have a successful and viable program.

In 1965 Bethel received the Rev. G. Grant Crumpley as its new pastor. Rev. Crumpley, a good speaker and an energetic man, served as Bethel's pastor for twelve years. The only other minister to serve a longer term was Rev.



White. During Rev. Crumpley's administration, the inside of the church was almost completely remodeled; new pews were purchased for the sanctuary, a new organ was acquired, and numerous additional improvements were made which added to the beauty and comfort of the sanctuary. The large room in the basement that once served as a bowling alley but which had fallen into disrepair, was renovated and remodeled as a carpeted multipurpose room and a series of offices and classrooms. Rev. Crumpley was also instrumental in renovating and purchasing additional seating for the progressive center. The outside of the church was also painted. During his administration, Bethel expanded its involvement in the community through its sponsorship of the Bethel Head Start Program. Rev. Crumpley also initiated the purchase of a spacious new parsonage.

While the extensive renovations and physical improvements to the church were necessary and added to the aesthetic qualities as well as the value of the facilities, they were also costly. The income of the church was not sufficient to cover the costs of the improvements and the church had to be mortgaged again. Moreover, while the operating costs and related expenses which were carried by the church increased, the membership contributions and general income of the church did not parallel that increase. Consequently, Bethel slipped gradually into the same kind of economic spiral that plagued many public institutions and urban governments that found themselves in financial crisis situations in the mid-1970s.

In 1977 the New York A.M.E. Conference sent the Rev. James K. Baldwin to Bethel. With courage and determination, Rev. Baldwin quickly launched a program to improve Bethel's financial situation. During the first months of his administration Rev. Baldwin sought to regain the confidence of the church's creditors. A successful Women's Day Rally, under the direction of Mrs. Alberta Ford and her captains raised enough money to pay some of the emergency bills and get the church moving again. During those crucial months the Stewards Boards and Trustees worked closely with the pastor in planning a church budget. Club Day, the occasion on which the various boards and clubs pay their assessment, was a tremendous success. All of the boards and departments were reorganized and were put on a fixed operating budget. A mortgage committee has been formed and teams organized behind a pledge to eliminate the mortgage in five years. During much of Rev. Baldwin's first year, the congregation, and officers have worked with their minister in dealing with administrative and fiscal matters. However, Rev. Baldwin also launched numerous programs aimed at improving the church in other ways.

In an attempt to expand the services that the church provides to its senior citizens, a mini-bus is being purchased to assist the senior members in attending church services and programs. In the fall of 1977 Rev. Baldwin organized the Bethel History Society. That group was commissioned to locate and retrieve pictures, records, documents and other primary sources pertaining to Bethel's historic past. The work of the Bethel History Society has resulted in the organizing, indexing, and microfilming of over 10,000 pages of church records. In addition to preserving the history of the church, Rev. Baldwin has expressed the hope that a more thorough knowledge and appreciation of the church's rich heritage will serve to inspire the membership to not only work to keep up Bethel's tradition of high standards and service to the community,

but will cause the co  
ments. It is to those e

#### 1977-1991

Rev. James K. Baldwin (1980). In addition to microfilming, he supervised the research and microfilming in 1977. Rev. Baldwin guided its development and reorganized as well. In the process of the church. Unpublished and the Fellowship groups and organizational activities.

Rev. Baldwin also increased the height of its membership. A popular young adult church, Rev. Baldwin, initiated a school for students.

Following the resignation of Eugene E. McAshan as pastor for the next eight years, an important asset in the church. McAshan was an accomplished player on the organ was a

As an active candidate for pastor in the Western District, he initiated numerous activities which produced the Bethel radio station on local radio. He also edited the *Reporter* newspaper. Member of the Buffalo Council of Churches Commission.

During Rev. McAshan's parsonage." That property of Bethel, moved into and purchased two mini-vans for renovation were made

In the fall, 1988, the Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (Jones Tabernacle) was

Rev. Harry White was pastor during the



but will cause the congregation to move the church on to greater achievements. It is to those ends that this volume is dedicated.

Monroe Fordham, 1978

### 1977-1991

Rev. James K. Baldwin served as Bethel's pastor for three years (1977-1980). In addition to establishing the Bethel History Society, which coordinated the microfilming of Bethel's history records, Rev. Baldwin commissioned the research and writing of *A History of Bethel A.M.E. of Buffalo, 1831-1977*. Rev. Baldwin also reorganized and trained the Steward Board and guided its development into a well-functioning board. The Trustee Board was reorganized as well. In addition, steps were taken which reduced the indebtedness of the church. Under Rev. Baldwin, the interior of the church was repainted and the Fellowship Hall was redecorated. He encouraged outside groups and organizations to rent and use the Fellowship Hall for their activities.

Rev. Baldwin also organized the Celestial (young adult) Choir. At the height of its membership, the Celestial Choir was one of the largest and most popular young adult church choirs in the city. The pastor's wife, Mrs. Hattie Baldwin, initiated a scholarship program to assist Bethel's college bound students.

Following the reassignment and departure of Rev. Baldwin in 1980, Rev. Eugene E. McAshan became Bethel's pastor. Rev. McAshan served as Bethel's pastor for the next eight years. The pastor's wife, Mrs. Jewel McAshan, was an important asset in the spiritual side of Rev. McAshan's ministry. Mrs. McAshan was an accomplished pianist/organist and a talented vocalist. Her play on the organ was an important complement to Rev. McAshan's sermons.

As an active candidate for the A.M.E. Bishopric, and as the leading A.M.E. pastor in the Western New York region, Rev. McAshan was involved in and initiated numerous activities that reached beyond the walls of Bethel. He introduced the Bethel radio ministry, in which the Sunday services were broadcast on local radio. He also launched the "Bethel Church Edition" of the *Christian Reporter* newspaper. Moreover, Rev. McAshan served as vice-president of the Buffalo Council of Churches, and was a member of the City of Buffalo Sewer Commission.

During Rev. McAshan's administration, the church purchased "a second parsonage." That property became available when its owner, a retired member of Bethel, moved into a senior citizens home. The congregation also purchased two mini-vans during that period. Under Rev. McAshan, extensive renovation were made to the sanctuary.

In the fall, 1988, Rev. McAshan was transferred to Jones Tabernacle in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and Rev. Harry J. White, Jr., (then pastor of Jones Tabernacle) was assigned to Bethel Buffalo.

Rev. Harry White, Jr.'s father, Rev. Harry White, Sr., served as Bethel's pastor during the years 1952-1965. With Harry White, Jr.'s assignment to



Bethel, The Whites became the first father and son duo to serve as pastor of Bethel. The younger Rev. White had grown up in Bethel, and was in a sense returning home.

Immediately after his arrival in Bethel in 1988, it became apparent to the congregation and the Buffalonians who listened to the Bethel radio ministry, that Rev. White had a special gift as a preacher. In addition to good voice quality and an inspirational delivery style, Rev. White's sermons were well crafted essays that inspired and educated. Very early in his administration, Rev. White made it clear that he would show a major concern for the spiritual needs of the congregation. He revived weekly Bible study, and he became an active teacher in the Sunday School. His ministry launched a spiritual revival at Bethel.

In addition, Rev. White launched a church building and facilities renovation program, which was ably spearheaded by a member of the congregation--Mrs. Frances Davenport. In 1990, the pastor appointed a special committee to plan programs and activities to commemorate and celebrate Bethel's 160th anniversary. The committee planned religious, cultural, and educational activities that were scheduled throughout the year 1991. The updating and reissue of this book was part of the year-long commemoration.

During the administrations of Revs. James K. Baldwin, Eugene E. McAshan, and Harry J. White, Jr., the Bethel congregation continued to sponsor the Head Start Program, which was expanded under Rev. McAshan. The congregation also sponsored an after school tutorial and enrichment program that addressed the educational needs of inner-city youngsters, which was started during Rev. White's tenure. In the period, 1977-1991, Buffalo, like many urban and inner city communities, was confronted with diverse and complex social, economic, and spiritual problems. And, as has been true historically, the Afro-American community was especially hard hit by such problems. During that period, Bethel's ministers and congregation continued to do what the Afro-American church has always done--offer spiritual light and direction in a man-centered and materialistic world.<sup>156</sup>

Monroe Fordham, 1991

(The Confer

To date, no records of the "Colored Methodist Society" joined the African Methodist

Rev. George Weir, Sr.  
Rev. Thomas W. Jackson  
Rev. Charles Burch  
Rev. Jabez P. Campbell

Evidence Unclear  
Rev. Henry J. Johnson  
Rev. James M. Williams  
Rev. Leonard Patterson

Rev. Deaton Dorrell  
Rev. M. Moore  
Rev. Joseph M. Williams  
Rev. Deaton Dorrell

Rev. Francis J. Peck  
Rev. William J. Catto  
Rev. Elisha Weaver  
Rev. Abraham C. Crippen

Rev. J.W. Cooper  
Rev. J.G. Mowbray  
Rev. Caleb Woodyard  
Rev. Abraham C. Crippen



## APPENDIX A

### Historical List of Ministers Bethel A.M.E. Church Buffalo, New York

(The Conference Year usually begins around June of each year)

To date, no records have been found which lists the names of the persons who led the "Colored Methodist Society" of Buffalo during the period 1831 - 1835. The Society joined the African Methodist Episcopal Denomination in 1836.

Rev. George Weir, Sr.	1836-1847
Rev. Thomas W. Jackson	1847-1848
Rev. Charles Burch	1848-1850
Rev. Jabez P. Campbell	1850-1852
Evidence Unclear	1852-1854
Rev. Henry J. Johnson	1854-1855
Rev. James M. Williams	1855-1856
Rev. Leonard Patterson	1856-1857
Rev. Deaton Dorrell	1857-1859
Rev. M. Moore	1859-1861
Rev. Joseph M. Williams	1861-1862
Rev. Deaton Dorrell	1862-1864
Rev. Francis J. Peck	1864-1866
Rev. William J. Catto	1866-1868
Rev. Elisha Weaver	1868-1869
Rev. Abraham C. Crippen	1869-1871
Rev. J.W. Cooper	1871-1873
Rev. J.G. Mowbray	1873-1875
Rev. Caleb Woodyard	1875-1876
Rev. Abraham C. Crippen	1876-1879
Rev. George W. Bailey	1879-1880
Rev. George Dardis	1880-1882
Rev. Henry Harrison Lewis (Died in Office)	1882-1885
Rev. Rudolph H. Shirley	1885-1887
Rev. William H. Thomas	1887-1890
Rev. Horace Talbert	1890-1892
Rev. Charles W. Mossell	1892-1893
No Record	1893-1895



Rev. J.L. Watkins	1895-1896
Rev. W.H. Bryant	1896-1898
Rev. Seth D.W. Smith	1898-1899
Rev. J.C. Ayler	1899-1901
-----	
Rev. E.A. Johnson	1901-1902
Rev. Francis P. Giles (Appointed in 1902 but rejected by members, Church split.)	
Rev. J. Harris Accoe	1902-1905
Rev. A.Q. Norton	1905-1906
Rev. M.W. Traverse	1906-1907
-----	
Rev. E.C. Gumbs	1907-1909
Rev. A.C. Saunders	1909-1913
Rev. H.H. Williams	1913-1914
Rev. Alonzo L. Wilson	1915-1920
-----	
Rev. H. Allen Garcia	1920-1922
Rev. W. Spencer Carpenter	1922-1926
Rev. Mansfield E. Jackson	1926-1935
Rev. Charles Steward (departed abruptly)	1935
-----	
Rev. J.A. Portlock	1935-1938
Rev. H.P. Anderson	1938-1939
Presiding Elder James A. Manning (Replaced Rev. Anderson who died suddenly)	1939-1940
Rev. William McKinley Dawkins	1940-1941
-----	
Rev. D. Ormonde Walker	1941-1948
Rev. John W.P. Collier	1948-1950
Rev. Charles E. Stewart	1950-1952
Rev. Harry J. White, Sr.	1952-1965
-----	
Rev. G. Grant Crumpley	1965-1977
Rev. James K. Baldwin	1977-1980
Rev. Eugene E. McAshan	1980-1988
Rev. Harry J. White, Jr.	1988-

## The History

The first observance of Ormond Walker and his wife was in 1942. He was a member for more than fifty years. Every year since, there has been an event, a celebration, plus a

1942	Mrs. Eva Walker
1943	Mrs. Jean Totten
1944	Miss Amelia Anderson
1945	Mrs. Hattie Spencer
1946	Mrs. Ora L. Anderson
1947	Mrs. Ethel Holmes
1948	Mrs. Lucille Butler
1949	Mrs. Geneva Allen
1950	Mrs. Matilda Seamster
1951	Mrs. Emma Alexander
1952	Mrs. Pearl E. Richardson
1953	Mrs. Cora P. Malone
1954	Mrs. Algia McCombs
1955	Mrs. Rosie Wicker
1956	Mrs. Flora C. Eastman
1957	Mrs. Carolyn Thomas
1958	Mrs. Garnet Wallace
1959	Mrs. Alice Davenport
-----	
1965	Beulah Jones
1966	Bessie Washington
1967	Thelma Lanier
1968	Orstella Easley
	Maggie Shaw
1969	Ruth Holley
1970	Lillie Younger
1971	Norma Dorsey
1972	Jessie Smith
1973	Adeline Rogers



## APPENDIX B

### The History of Women's Day in Bethel A.M.E. Church

by Carolyn B. Thomas

The first observance of Women's Day in Bethel Church was led by Reverend D. Ormond Walker and his wife, Mrs. Eva Walker, in 1942, according to Mrs. Mary Bell, a member for more than fifty years. Mrs. Ruth Jackson was elected co-chairlady to Mrs. Walker. Every year since, the observance has been held, highlighted by a great spiritual event, a celebration, plus a financial Rally.

#### Chairpersons of Women's Day, 1942-1991

1942	Mrs. Eva Walker	1960	Mrs. Grace Pennington
1943	Mrs. Jean Totten	1961	Mrs. Algia McComb Day
1944	Miss Amelia Anderson	1962-63	Mrs. Frances McAllister
1945	Mrs. Hattie Spencer	1964	Mrs. Lula Peoples
1946	Mrs. Ora L. Anderson	1965	Mrs. Julia Moore (spring)
1947	Mrs. Ethel Holmes		Mrs. Matilda Seamster (fall)
1948	Mrs. Lucille Butler	1966	Mrs. Matilda Seamster
1949	Mrs. Geneva Allen	1967-68	Mrs. Adeline Rogers
1950	Mrs. Matilda Seamster	1969	Mrs. Lee Crumpley
1951	Mrs. Emma Alexander	1970-71	Mrs. Alberta Ford
1952	Mrs. Pearl E. Richardson	1972-73	Mrs. Ellen M. Morse
1953	Mrs. Cora P. Maloney	1974-75	Mrs. Clara Tate
1954	Mrs. Algia McCombs	1976-77	Mrs. Alberta Ford
1955	Mrs. Rosie Wicker	1978-79	Mrs. Hattie Baldwin
1956	Mrs. Flora C. Eastman	1980	Mrs. Carolyn B. Thomas
1957	Mrs. Carolyn Thomas	1980-88	Mrs. Jewel McAshan
1958	Mrs. Garnet Wallace	1989-91	Mrs. Ruthetta Smikle
1959	Mrs. Alice Davenport		

#### Some Former Bethel Queens

1965	Beulah Jones	1975	Vera Battle
1966	Bessie Washington	1976	Ida Smith
1967	Thelma Lanier	1977	Sarah Fogan
1968	Orstella Easley	1978	Clara Tate
	Maggie Shaw	1980	Beatrice Anderson
1969	Ruth Holley	1981	Ellen Morse
1970	Lillie Younger	1982	Florida Strickland
1971	Norma Dorsey	1985	Cecilia Sharp
1972	Jessie Smith	1986	Eleanor Dent
1973	Adeline Rogers	1987	Wilhelmina Postelle
1974	Garnet Wallace		





Rev. J. P. Campbell  
1850 - 1852

Rev. Jabez P. Campbell  
1850 - 1852



Rev. J.W. Cooper  
1871 - 1873



Rev. Mansfield E.  
1926 - 1928



Rev. H. Allen Garcia  
1920 - 1922



Rev. W. ...  
1922 - 1924



Rev. William M.  
1940





Rev. Mansfield E. Jackson  
1926 - 1935



Rev. H.P. Anderson  
1938 - 1939

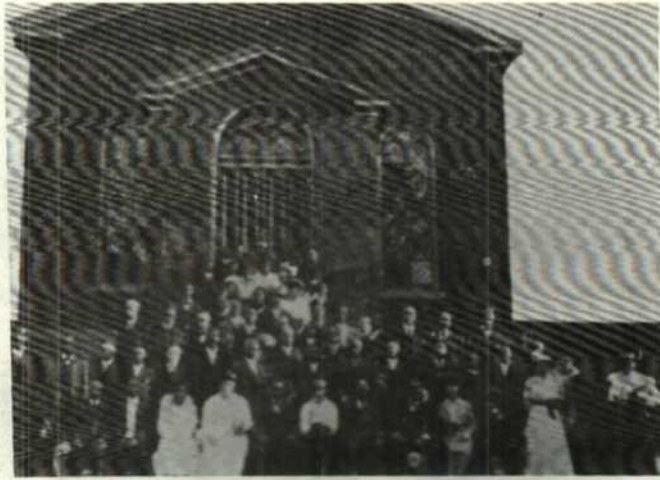


Rev. William McKinley Dawkins  
1940 - 1941

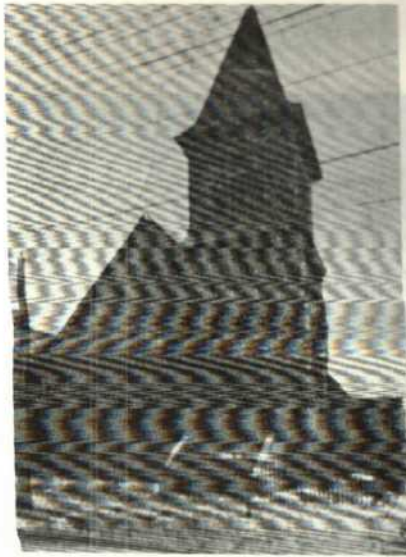


Rev. D. Ormonde Walker  
1941 - 1948





Officers and members of Bethel, 1920s. The Vine Street Church is in the background. The Vine Street Church was built during the 1840s and Bethel's congregation continued to use the facility until 1928.



Bethel Church, 1937  
551 Eagle Street



Rev. Melvin C. Crawford, Past. Pastor  
1980s and 1990s



Stewardess Board  
Mrs. Martinez, Sta  
Mrs. Woodley, Mrs.



Membe



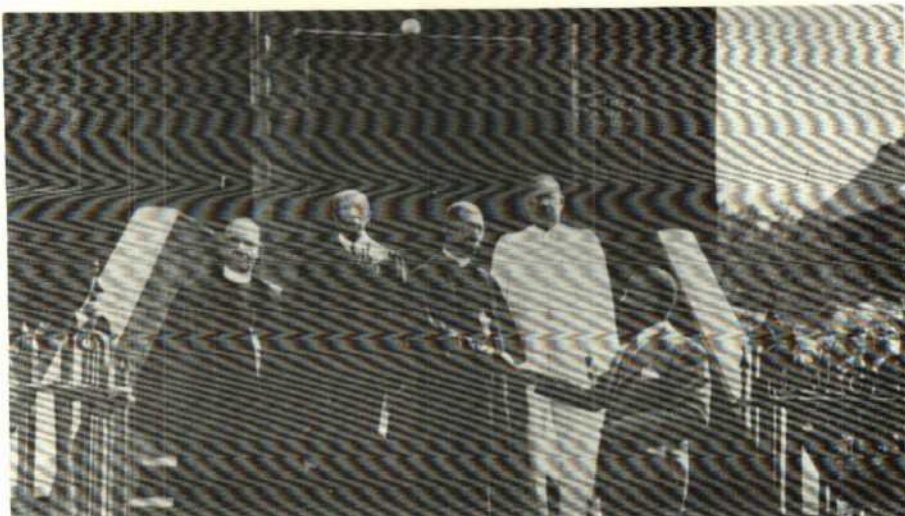


Stewardess Board # 1. Seated l - r; Mrs. Annie Foote, Unidentified, Mrs. Gary, and Mrs. Martinez. Standing l - r; Mrs. A.G. Anderson, Mrs. Mary Bell, Unidentified, Mrs. Woodley, Mrs. N. McDade. Rev. Dawkins was pastor.



Members of Kings Daughters Club. Rev. Dawkins was pastor.





Mortgage Burning Ceremonies, 1940s. Pictured l - r; Unidentified, Rev. M.G. Crawford, Asst. Pastor, Bishop David H. Sims, Rev. D. Ormonde Walker, Pastor, and Mr. Rudolph S. Lane, Treasurer.



Rev. D.O. Walker and a group of church officers.

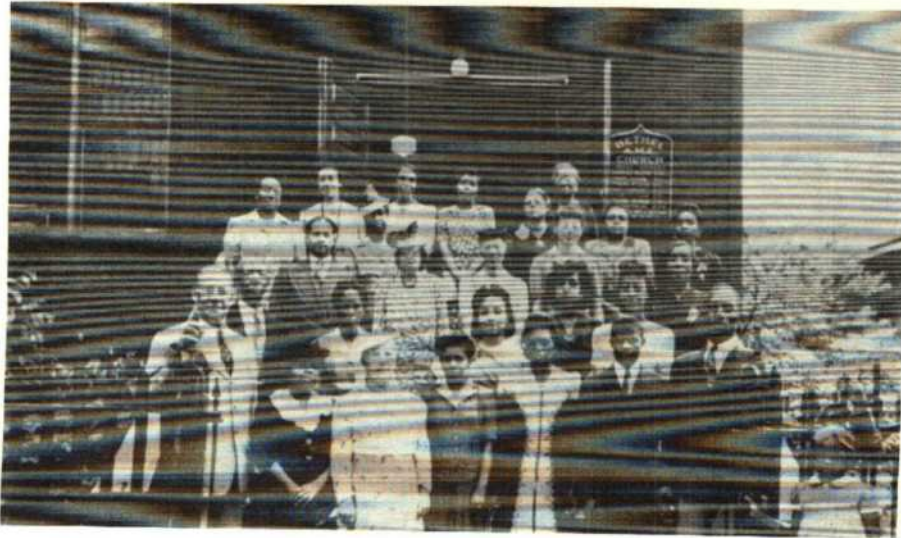


Sunday School Board member with hand on fence. Brother

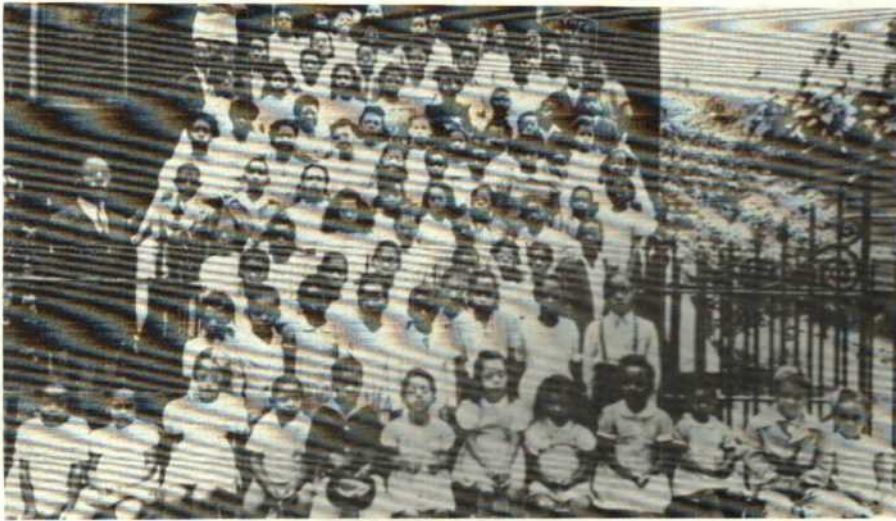


Sunday School Students (1940s)





Sunday School Board under Rev. Walker. Rev. Walker is on the end of the front row with hand on fence. Bro. Ellis Clark, Supt., is on opposite end of front row.



Sunday School Students in front of Eagle Street Church with Supt. Ellis Clark. (1940s)





Bethel's official family under Rev. John W.P. Collier. Includes Jr. and Sr. Stewards and Trustees. Rev. Collier is standing on end of second row, wearing glasses and Collar. Bishop and Mrs. D. Ward Nichols are seated.



Members of Board of Directors of Bethel Credit Union. The Credit Union was organized in 1949 and received its charter in 1950. The founder and first president was Mrs. Alberta F. Nelson. Mrs. Pearl Richardson has served as treasurer since the organization started. The present president is Mrs. Geneva Allen. Charter members include; Fred H. Bell, O.H. Thomas, Lloyd E. Allen, Mrs. Allen, Rev. Janie Tucker, Jack Glass and Rudolph Lane.

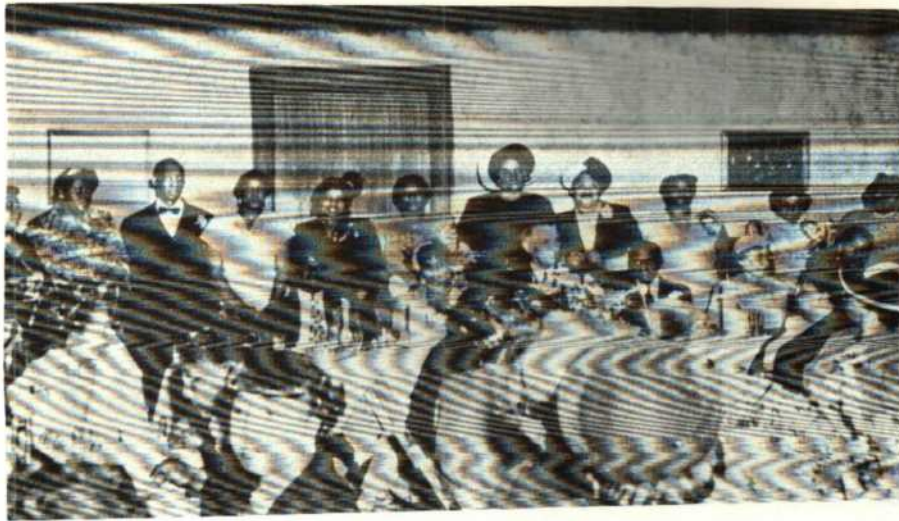


Church Dinner during the head table, third

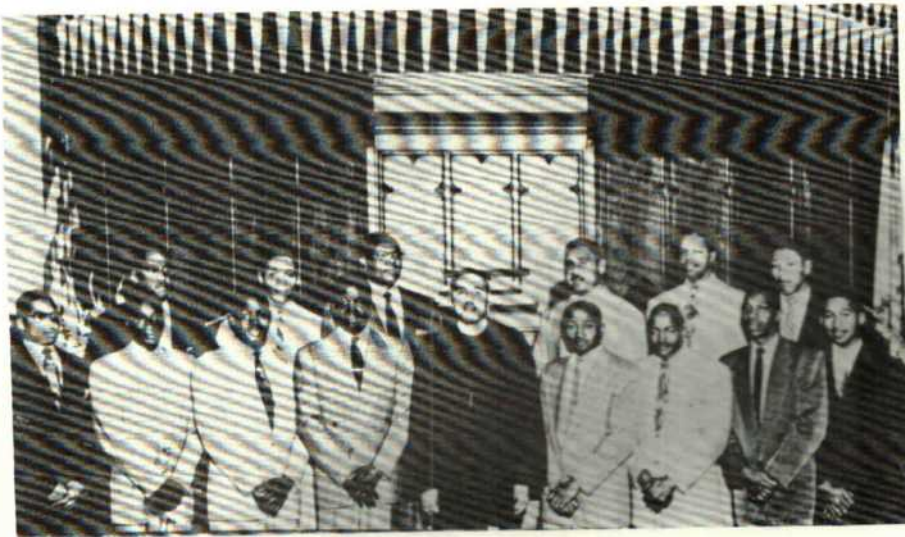


Rev. Harry White and





Church Dinner during pastorate of Rev. Charles Stewart. Rev. Stewart is seated at the head table, third from left.



Rev. Harry White and the Junior Trustees. Rev. White is in the center of first row.





Children's Choir during the pastorate of Rev. White.



Sunday School students and Sunday School Board, 1926. Rev. Harry White, Pastor.  
Carolyn B. Thomas, Supt.



Zion Travelers Club. Rev. White's left).



Nautilus Circle (Rev. White's left)





Zion Travelers Club. Rev. White, Pastor. Mrs. Ruth Jackson, President (seated to Rev. White's left).



Nautilus Circle (Young Adult Club) during Rev. White's administration.





Sons and Daughters of Bethel. The group was formed in 1940 and became one of the most influential organizations in the church. Mrs. Matilda Seamster has served as president of the club for 38 years. Mrs. Seamster is seated in second row (to Rev. White's immediate left). Sitting to Rev. White's right side is Mother Holmes, one of Bethel's members from the "Vine Street Era."



Women's Day Steering Committee. Mrs. Matilda Seamster, Pa. Peoples, Mrs. Alga D. B. Thomas.



Viola Johnson Chorus (standing), and the Business and Professional Womens Club (seated).



Women's Missionary Society. Geneva Allen, and Mrs. Morse, and Mrs. Thelma.





Women's Day Steering Committee, 1965. Seated l - r; Mrs. Lee Crumpley, Rev. G. Grant Crumpley, Pastor, and Mrs. Matilda Seamster. Standing l - r; Mrs. Lula Peoples, Mrs. Alga Day, Mrs. Ellen Morse, Mrs. Pearl Richardson, and Mrs. Carolyn B. Thomas.



Women's Missionary Organization. Seated l - r; Mrs. Carolyn B. Thomas, Mrs. Geneva Allen, and Mrs. Beatrice Barham. Standing l - r; Unidentified, Mrs. Carol Morse, and Mrs. Thelma Lanier. Rev. G. Grant Crumpley was pastor.





Women's Day Committee during Rev. Crumpley's administration. Pictured l - r; Mrs. Lee Crumpley, Mrs. Vera Gladden, Mrs. Beulah Jones, Mrs. Alice Davenport.



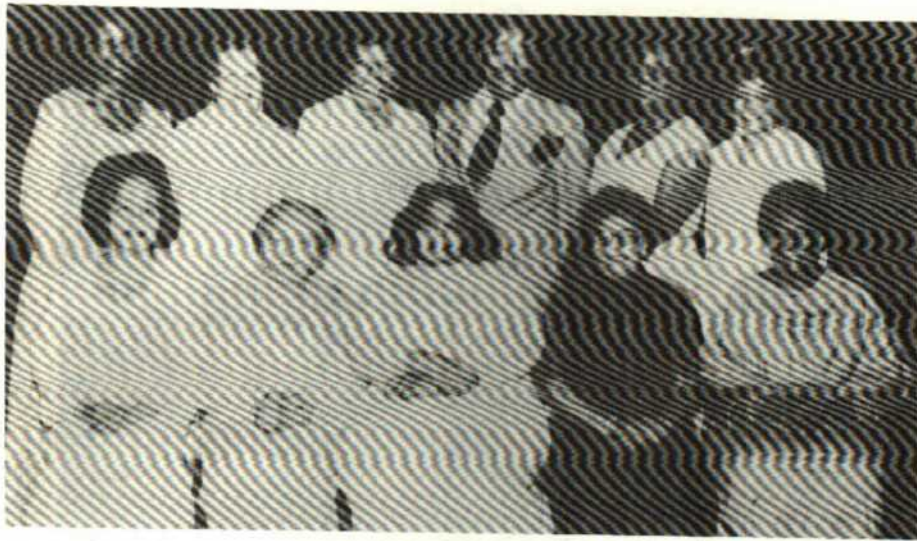
Former



Laymens Organization, 1966

Rev. Eu





Former Queens of Bethel with Rev. Eugene McAshan



Rev. Eugene E. McAshan, Pastor of Bethel (1980-88)





**Rev. Thomas Moore** joined Bethel in 1941. He taught in the Sunday School and served in many other capacities prior to being ordained in 1973. For almost 20 years, Rev. Moore has served as minister to the sick and shut-ins. In 1991, during its 160th anniversary, the congregation voted him "Man of the Year."



**Mrs. Carolyn B. Thomas** joined Bethel in 1952. Because of her community work and her involvement in the A.M.E. Church at the local, district, and national level, she is one of Bethel's most prominent members. She was named "Buffalonian of the Year" in 1990 for her leadership in founding and developing the "Food Bank of Western New York." She has served on the Episcopal Committee of the A.M.E. Church for 6 quadrennials. (Highest attainment of a lay member of the A.M.E. Denomination). She served as an elected delegate to the General Conference for 8 quadrennials (1960-1992).



Bo







Stewardesses Boards

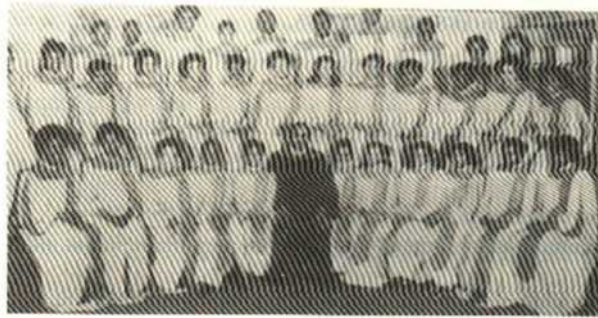


King's Daughters Club celebrated their 54th anniversary in 1991

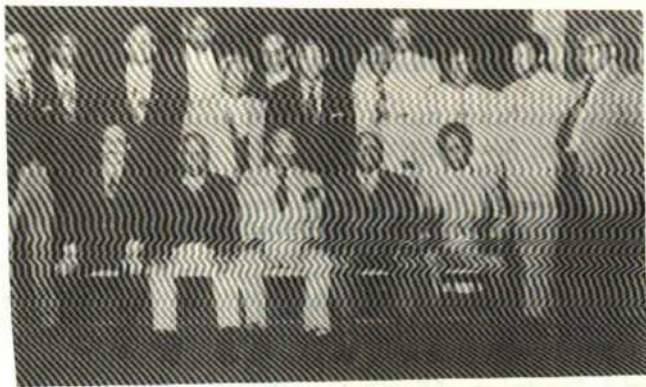


Hosts an





Celestial (youth) Choir



Men's Club



Hosts and Hostesses for 150th Anniversary Celebration (1981)



NOTES ON SOURCES

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1. Payne, Daniel A., His
2. Atkins, Barton, Mode
3. The source for that i  
112th Anniversary Program  
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date, it appears to be accur  
by checks of primary of s  
Agencies in New York State
4. Smith, H. Perry, Histe
5. Payne, History of A.M.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 117.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 119-120.
8. *Buffalo City Directory*,  
quently mentioned in news  
*North Star* between 1848 an
9. Smith, *History of Buffe*  
*niversary Program.*
10. *Colored American*, *Jur*  
*Star*, March 10, 1848.
11. Wayman, Alexander, C
12. *Buffalo City Directory*,
13. Tanner, B.T., *An Anth*
14. Wayman, *Cyclopedia*,



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*A.M.E. Church Review* (Copy in Butler Library, Buffalo State College).

*Buffalo American* (Copy in Buffalo-Erie County Historical Society).

*Christian Recorder* (Copy in Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pa.)

*Colored American* Microfilm in Butler Library, Buffalo State College).

#### FOOTNOTES

1. Payne, Daniel A., *History of the African Methodist Church*, pp. 415-417.
2. Atkins, Barton, *Modern Antiquities: Sketches of Early Buffalo*, pp.6,7.
3. The source for that is an historical sketch of the Bethel Church which was included in the *112th Anniversary Program* (1943). Contemporary documents indicate that the church was established sometime prior to 1835. Although the *Anniversary Program* gives no source for the 1831 date, it appears to be accurate because most of the other information in the program is sustained by checks of primary of sources. See also John L. Myers, "The Beginning of Anti-Slavery Agencies in New York State, 1833-1836," *New York History*, Vol. 43 April, 1962, p. 160.
4. Smith, H. Perry, *History of the City of Buffalo and Erie County*, Vol. II, p. 300.
5. Payne, *History of A.M.E.*, p. 177.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 117.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 119-120.
8. *Buffalo City Directory, 1850*, and U.S. Census Tracts for Buffalo, 1850. The Weirs were frequently mentioned in news articles from Buffalo which were published in *Frederick Douglass' North Star* between 1848 and 1851.
9. Smith, *History of Buffalo and Erie County*, Vol. II, p. 300; also historical sketch in *112th Anniversary Program*.
10. *Colored American*, June 6, 1840 and January 9, 1841; *Buffalo City Directory, 1842*; *North Star*, March 10, 1848.
11. Wayman, Alexander, *Cyclopedia of African Methodism*, p. 29.
12. *Buffalo City Directory, 1850-1851*; see also Census Tracts of 1850.
13. Tanner, B.T., *An Anthology for African Methodism*, pp. 168-169.
14. Wayman, *Cyclopedia*, pp.6-7.



15. *A.M.E. Church Review*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (October, 1891), pp. 129-153.
16. Jenifer, John, *History of the A.M.E. Church*, p.325.
17. *Christian Recorder*, October 18, 1854.
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Christian Recorder*, April 4, 1855.
21. *Christian Recorder*, Nov. 11, 1880; Wayman, *Cyclopedia*, p.53.
22. See chapter II of Monroe Fordham, *Major Themes in Northern Black Religious Thought, 1800-1860*.
23. *Colored American*, May 6, 1837.
24. *Buffalo City Directory, 1842*, p. 44.
25. *Colored American*, February 3, 1838.
26. *Ibid.*, March 13, 1841.
27. Brown, William Wells, *The Rising Sun*, pp. 469-470.
28. *Colored American*, March 27, 1841.
29. *Weekly Advocate*, February 11 and 18, 1837.
30. Wright, Richard, *Encyclopedia of African Methodism*, 423.
31. *North Star*, May 11, 1849.
32. *Ibid.*, October 24, 1850
33. *Ibid.*, January 16, 1851.
34. Payne, Daniel A., *A History of the A.M.E. Church*, for a general discussion of post-Civil War expansion in the A.M.E. Church, see chapters XXXII - XXXV.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 465.
36. Bragg, George F., *History of the Afro-American Group of the Episcopal Church*, pp. 123-124.
37. *Christian Recorder*, February 14, 1863.
38. *Ibid.*, April 4, 1898.
39. *Ibid.*, September 3, 1864.
40. *Ibid.*, January 27, 1866.
41. *Ibid.*, December 24, 1864; January 6, 1886; and July 28, 1866.
42. Tanner, B.T., *An Apology for African Methodism*, p.333.
43. *Christian Recorder*, June 30, 1866.
44. White, Arthur O., "The Black Movement Against Jim Crow Education in Buffalo, New York," pp.375-393.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 378.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 380.
47. *Ibid.*
48. *Ibid.*, p. 381.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 382.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 393.
51. Carpenter, Niles, *Natic*
52. Wayman, Alexander, *C African Methodism.*, pp. 175
53. *Christian Recorder*, Ma
54. *Ibid.*, September 11, 18
55. *Ibid.*, February 1, 1869.
56. For additional articles June 24, 1871; and Wayman,
57. Morgan, *History of the*
58. See Herbert Gutman American population of Buff at Buffalo Alumni Archives.
59. *Christian Recorder*, De
60. *Ibid.*, March 26, 1874.
61. Morgan, *History of Ne* 1884.
62. *Christian Recorder*, Ma
63. *Ibid.*, September 14, 18
64. Wright, Richard R., *En*
65. Payne, Daniel A., *Recol*
66. *Christian Recorder*, Au
67. *Ibid.*, July 25, 1863.
68. *Ibid.*, August 29, 1863.
69. *Christian Recorder*, Ap and 1884.
70. *Christian Recorder*, M
71. McLoughlin, William Period.
72. *Christian Recorder*, A
73. *Ibid.*, February 24, 18
74. *Ibid.*, May 4, 1881, as



46. *Ibid.*, p. 380.
47. *Ibid.*
48. *Ibid.*, p. 381.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 382.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 393.
51. Carpenter, Niles, *Nationality, Color, and Economic Opportunity in the City of Buffalo*.
52. Wayman, Alexander, *Cyclopedia of African Methodism*, p. 177; and Tanner, *An Apology For African Methodism*, pp. 175-176.
53. *Christian Recorder*, March 13, 1869.
54. *Ibid.*, September 11, 1869.
55. *Ibid.*, February 1, 1869.
56. For additional articles on Rev. Crippen see *Christian Recorder*, September 11, 1869; and June 24, 1871; and Wayman, *Cyclopedia*, p. 45.
57. Morgan, *History of the New Jersey Conference of the A.M.E. Church from 1872-1887*, p. 17.
58. See Herbert Gutman and Lawrence Glasco, unpublished paper which profiles the Afro-American population of Buffalo for the period 1855 and 1875. The paper is housed at the SUNY at Buffalo Alumni Archives.
59. *Christian Recorder*, December 18, 1873.
60. *Ibid.*, March 26, 1874.
61. Morgan, *History of New Jersey Conference*, p. 53; also *Christian Recorder*, December 25, 1884.
62. *Christian Recorder*, March 30, 1893.
63. *Ibid.*, September 14, 1899.
64. Wright, Richard R., *Encyclopedia of African Methodism*, p. 533.
65. Payne, Daniel A., *Recollections of Seventy Years*, pp. 150-155.
66. *Christian Recorder*, August 29, 1863.
67. *Ibid.*, July 25, 1863.
68. *Ibid.*, August 29, 1863.
69. *Christian Recorder*, April 12, 1888, plus numerous other letters published in various in 1883 and 1884.
70. *Christian Recorder*, May 23, 1883.
71. McLoughlin, William G., *Modern Revivalism*, see chapter that deals with post-Civil War Period.
72. *Christian Recorder*, April 3, 1884.
73. *Ibid.*, February 24, 1881.
74. *Ibid.*, May 4, 1881, as quoted from the *Buffalo Times*.

75. For a rather detailed account of the conference see the *Christian Recorder*, July 30, 1885.
76. *Ibid.*
77. *Ibid.*
78. *Ibid.*, January 14, 1866. For other articles on Rev. Lewis see *Christian Recorder*, July 13, 1882; May 1, 1884; and August 20, 1885.
79. *Christian Recorder*, February 24, 1887. See also December 30, 1886 for additional information on Rev. Shirley.
80. *Ibid.*, April 27, 1899. Also Wayman, *Cyclopedia*, p.161.
81. *A.M.E. Church Review*, July, 1884, pp. 61-65.
82. *Christian Recorder*, October 15, 1896.
83. *Ibid.*, March 26, 1891.
84. *Ibid.*, March 30, 1893, as quoted from *Buffalo Christian Advocate*, March 16, 1893.
85. *Ibid.* For more information on Rev. Mossell, who was an accomplished author and an authority on African History, see *Christian Recorder*, September 13, 1894; December 27, 1894; September 24, 1896; and July 12, 1900.
86. *Christian Recorder*, May 13, 1897.
87. *Ibid.*, October 12, 1899.
88. *Ibid.*, August 31, 1899.
89. Carpenter, *Nationality, Color, and Economic Opportunity in the City of Buffalo*, p. 155.
90. *Christian Recorder*, August 31, 1899. For additional biographical information see Morgan, *History of New Jersey Conference*, p. 9; an essay by Rev. Ayler appeared in *Christian Recorder*, October 12, 1899.
91. *Christian Recorder*, April 26, 1900.
92. *Buffalo Evening News* (Final Edition), June 13, 1902, p. 8; and June 16, 1902, p. 1. Other details of the incident were provided by Mother Ethel Holmes.
93. Printed program for 112th Anniversary Celebration of Bethel A.M.E. Church, Buffalo, 1943.
94. *Ibid.*
95. For general information on the "Great Migration," see John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*, (Third Edition), Chapter XXIII.
96. The descriptions of the Vine Street Church and Congregation during the 1920s were gleaned from interviews with Bro. Ellis Clark (January, 1978); Mrs. Matilda Seamster and Mother Ethel Holmes (July, 1978).
97. *Buffalo American*, February 7, 1920.
98. *Ibid.*, July 15, 1920.
99. Microfilmed Bethel (Buffalo, N.Y.) Church Papers, referred to hereafter as Bethel Church Papers, Box #16, Biographical material on Rev. Garcia.
100. Interview with Mother Ethel Holmes.
101. Bethel Church Papers, Box #15.
102. Interview with Mother
103. *Buffalo American*, Dece
104. *Ibid.*, February 17, 1921
105. *Ibid.*, October 26, 1922.
106. *Ibid.*, April 21, 1921.
107. *Ibid.*, November 18, 192
108. *Ibid.*, March 24, 1921.
109. *Ibid.*
110. *Ibid.*, June 9, 1921.
111. *Ibid.*, January 4, 1923.
112. *Ibid.*, March 27, 1924.
113. *Ibid.*, May 1 and May 8,
114. *Ibid.*, June 21, and July 1
115. *Ibid.*, August 31, Septemb
116. *Ibid.*, May 8 and 15, 1924
117. Interviews with Mrs. Mat
118. *Buffalo American*, Febru
119. *Ibid.*, October 22, 1922; M
120. *Ibid.*, February 15, 1923. s
121. *Ibid.*, February 26, 1925.
122. *Ibid.*, See numerous Janua
123. Interviews with Mother E nabel Moxley.
124. Bethel Church Papers, Bo
125. Interviews with Mrs. Alb Matilda Seamster, and Bro. Elli
126. Interview with Bro. Ellis C
127. Introductory Chapter of "Afro-Americans in Buffalo Dur
128. The list of persons menti Bethel Church Papers; the B Church.
129. Interviews with senior me
130. Interview with Bro. Ellis 14 (Sons and Daughters of Be
131. *Ibid.*, Box #5, Church B



102. Interview with Mother Ethel Holmes.
103. *Buffalo American*, December 20, 1920.
104. *Ibid.*, February 17, 1921.
105. *Ibid.*, October 26, 1922.
106. *Ibid.*, April 21, 1921.
107. *Ibid.*, November 18, 1920.
108. *Ibid.*, March 24, 1921.
109. *Ibid.*
110. *Ibid.*, June 9, 1921.
111. *Ibid.*, January 4, 1923.
112. *Ibid.*, March 27, 1924.
113. *Ibid.*, May 1 and May 8, 1924.
114. *Ibid.*, June 21, and July 19, 1923.
115. *Ibid.*, August 31, September 14 and 21, and November 23, 1922.
116. *Ibid.*, May 8 and 15, 1924, as well as other issues during the period.
117. Interviews with Mrs. Matilda Seamster, Mother Ethel Holmes, and Bro. Ellis Clark.
118. *Buffalo American*, February 14 and 21, 1924.
119. *Ibid.*, October 22, 1922; May 14, 1925; March 15, 1923; and January 4, 1923.
120. *Ibid.*, February 15, 1923. See also other issues thru April of the same year.
121. *Ibid.*, February 26, 1925.
122. *Ibid.*, See numerous January thru March issues, 1923.
123. Interviews with Mother Ethel Holmes, Mrs. Matilda Seamster, Ellis Clark, and Mrs. Annabell Moxley.
124. Bethel Church Papers, Box #25, Stewards Board Minutes, February 12, 1935.
125. Interviews with Mrs. Alberta Nelson, Mother Ethel Holmes, Mrs. Annabell Moxley, Mrs. Matilda Seamster, and Bro. Ellis Clark.
126. Interview with Bro. Ellis Clark.
127. Introductory Chapter of a preliminary draft of Ralph Watkin's doctoral dissertation on "Afro-Americans in Buffalo During the 1920s. Copy in author's possession.
128. The list of persons mentioned are names that were gleaned from official documents in the Bethel Church Papers; the *Buffalo American*, and interviews with senior members of Bethel Church.
129. Interviews with senior members of Bethel Church.
130. Interview with Bro. Ellis Clark. See also Bethel Church Papers, Box #2, "Minutes of Group 14 (Sons and Daughters of Bethel)."
131. *Ibid.*, Box #5, Church Bulletin for November 10, 1940.

132. See various church programs from Rev. Dawkins administration, Bethel Church Papers, Box #5.
133. *Ibid.*, Church Program for October 10, 1940.
134. *Ibid.*, Church Program for August 4, 1940.
135. Bethel Church Papers, Box #4, 112th Anniversary Celebration, printed programs.
136. Wright, Richard R., Jr., *Encyclopedia of African Methodism*, pp. 281-282.
137. Bethel Church Papers; numerous church programs from the years that Rev. Walker pastored at Bethel. Also interviews with Rev. Thomas Moore, Rev. Janie Tucker, and numerous other senior members.
138. Bethel Church Papers, Box #16.
139. *Ibid.*
140. *Buffalo Evening News*, September 13, 1943, p. 10.
141. Bethel Church Papers, Box #19, Newsclippings in the scrapbook of Mrs. Beulah Jones.
142. *Buffalo Evening News*, May 23, 1943, p. 10.
143. Bethel Church Papers, Box #25, see Stewards Board Minutes, January 20, 1946. Also interview with Rev. Thomas Moore.
144. Bethel Church Papers, Box #5, Printed Program.
145. Interviews with Bro. Ellis Clark and Rev. Thomas Moore.
146. Information on Rev. Collier was derived from interviews with Rev. Thomas Moore, Mother Ethel Holmes, and Mrs. Matilda Seamster. See also Bethel Church Papers, newsclippings in Box #22.
147. Bethel Church Papers, Box #22, newspaper clippings.
148. *Ibid.*, Box #25, Stewards Board Minutes, October 17, 1950.
149. Interview with Bro. Ellis Clark.
150. Interviews with numerous senior members of Bethel Church. See also Bethel Church Papers, Box #16, 139th Anniversary Celebration printed program, 1970.
151. Bethel Church Papers, Box #22, newsclippings.
152. *Ibid.*, Box #4, newsclippings.
153. *Ibid.*, Box #5, church program, May 18, 1958.
154. *Ibid.*, Box #25, Stewards Board Minutes, February 26, 1953.
155. *Ibid.*, Box #19, copies of printed program for mortgage burning ceremonies, copy in Mrs. Beulah Jones scrapbook.
156. The material on the Baldwin, McAshan, and White administrations was prepared with the assistance of Mrs. Garnet Wallace, and Mrs. Carolyn and Mr. Eugene Thomas. The author also interviewed other officers and members of Bethel to get their views on the major events of the said period.