



927

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "X" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church

other names/site number Bethel A.M.E. Church

2. Location

street & number 512 6th Street SE not for publication N/A
city or town Cedar Rapids vicinity _____
state Iowa code IA county Linn code 113 zip code 52401

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide X locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Bruce G. Bennett
Signature of certifying official Date 10/31/2013
Iowa DSHPO
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official Date _____
State or Federal agency and bureau _____

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:
✓ entered in the National Register
 See continuation sheet.
 determined eligible for the
National Register
 See continuation sheet.
 determined not eligible for the
National Register
 removed from the National Register
 other (explain): _____

Edson H. Beall
Signature of Keeper Date of Action 12.19.13

Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church
Name of Property

Linn County, Iowa
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing Noncontributing

- | | |
|---------------|--------------------------|
| <u> 1 </u> | <u> </u> buildings |
| <u> </u> | <u> </u> sites |
| <u> </u> | <u> </u> structures |
| <u> </u> | <u> </u> objects |
| <u> 1 </u> | <u> 0 </u> Total |

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

 N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION/religious facility

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION/religious facility

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE 19TH & EARLY 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS /
Colonial Revival

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE
 BRICK
roof ASPHALT

walls BRICK

other GLASS

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church
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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

ETHNIC HERITAGE/BLACK
SOCIAL HISTORY

Period of Significance

1931-1963

Criteria Considerations (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or a grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Significant Dates

1931

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Unknown

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS)

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data

- State Historic Preservation Office
 - Other State agency
 - Federal agency
 - Local government
 - _____ University
 - Other
- Name of repository:

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property less than 1 acre

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone Easting	Northing	Zone Easting	Northing
1	15	610999	4648161	3
2				4

 See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Jan Olive Full /Historian

organization Tallgrass Historians L.C. date May 2013

street & number 2460 S. Riverside Drive telephone 319.354.6722

city or town Iowa City state IA zip code 52246

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

- A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- A **sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Bethel African American Methodist Church (Mr. B.G. Taylor, Contact)

street & number 512 6th St. SE telephone 319-363-1251

city or town Cedar Rapids state IA zip code 52401

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Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).
Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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7. Description

Summary Paragraph

Constructed in 1931, Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church (hereafter Bethel or Bethel AME Church) is located in central Cedar Rapids, county seat of Linn County, Iowa. The city's downtown retail shopping district is four to five blocks to the northwest, while the Cedar River is about equally distant to the southwest. Most of the area between these landmarks was heavily inundated with flood water in 2008, but the church was at the edge of the worst flooding and emerged relatively unscathed except for some damage in the raised basement.¹ The church property is just north of the intersection of 6th Street SE and 6th Avenue SE, in an area once primarily residential but now mixed with medical offices and support services related to Mercy Medical Center, which is located a few blocks to the east. Also, a large modern post office was built about a block to the southeast. Rectangular in shape, the church has a footprint of 34 by 58 feet providing 1972 square feet of space on each of two levels. Its gable front faces southwest. This angled orientation is due to the property's location within the original town plat, which is aligned toward the diagonal route of the river rather than cardinal directions. The building faces a cluster of late nineteenth and early twentieth century frame houses across 6th Street SE. Its long southeast elevation nestles close to the block's central alley. Across the alley from the church sits a new medical office building. The church's neighbor on the opposite side from the alley was until recently an empty lot but now has a low modern building on it. The church's small parking lot is located directly behind the building and is accessible via the alley. Surrounded by a grass yard on the southwest front and northwest side, there are virtually no landscaping features other than low juniper bushes on either side of the stairs to the front entrance. The 1.5 story, raised basement, Colonial Revival-inspired church is made of concrete blocks veneered with two types of red bricks. The walls are clad with smooth common bricks laid with flush gray mortar and the decorative details are created through the use of rough textured bricks laid with deeply raked red (or red painted) mortar. The trim is painted white and includes the cornice returns on the front gable, window sashes throughout, and a louvered oculus window vent high above the front entrance. Windows on the front wall, in the fanlight transom over the front double-door entrance, and comprising the Palladian-like arrangement high on the rear wall are filled with "stained glass" arrangements of simple geometric patterns in creamy white and pale yellow squares joined by lead caming. The interior is uniformly painted white on both floors. Its main-floor sanctuary is traditionally arranged in a "lecture hall" format, with a central aisle flanked by multiple rows of light-stained wooden pews. Each block of pews also is accessible from side aisles. The altar area at the northeast end of the sanctuary is raised slightly and separated from the pews by a low railing. Behind the altar is seating for the choir and flanking it are a piano and an organ. The lower level is finished with a large meeting room, small galley kitchen, restrooms, and two small offices used by the pastor and for the business office.

Exterior: General and Shared Features

The foundation appears from the exterior to be solid concrete, though this may be a layer that conceals the concrete blocks. Above grade, the walls are uniformly stretcher courses of red bricks with a mottled coloration laid with flush gray mortar. Window heads on the façade and rear walls are round-arched and formed by two brick rowlock courses. On the side walls, window headers are flat with only the stretcher courses of brick exposed, indicating a flat, probably steel, structural header behind the bricks. Window sills throughout are formed by a brick rowlock course sloped downward to facilitate rain run-off. Decorative window shapes are reserved for the stained-glass windows on the front and rear walls, while both long side walls contain four sets of paired double-hung sash windows on the upper level and similar single and paired windows at grade for the basement level. The side wall windows are standard sizes, rather than the tall "Gothic" windows that often illuminate small Midwestern church interiors.

¹ The damage included the loss of most church records.

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Exterior: Primary Façade / Front Gabled Wall

The front wall is symmetrical with a central entrance at grade flanked by two large stained-glass windows on either side. These large windows are slightly above and to either side of the front double-door entrance. Centered at the top of the gable is a prominent, round oculus vent. The Colonial Revival influence on this vernacular church is seen primarily on this front wall with elements such as the rounded fenestration, the "fanlight" transom over the entrance, and the use of the second type of red brick to form quoining around the front entrance and at both front corners. This decorative quoining stands slightly proud of the surface walls and employs a rough-textured brick and deeply raked red mortar. The combination of this brick, which looks as if it was coated with large granular sand, and the deep shadows it creates, makes the quoining detail quite visible from a distance. The front corner quoins are capped by white pediment returns. The oculus vent at the gable peak is contained within a circular opening defined by header bricks and four evenly spaced, slightly projecting keystone details of stretcher bricks. A final design element from the Colonial Revival style book is found on the rear, northeastern wall where three windows are used to form a Palladian-like arrangement that, from the interior, appears over the pulpit and choir bench to backlight the large Christian cross that hangs in front of the windows.

The white stone (or cast stone) cornerstone is located on the front south corner of the church nearest the alley and sidewalk. The front side of the cornerstone, which faces the sidewalk, has the chiseled words "BETHEL AME CHURCH" and "Benj. H. Lucas, Pastor." Around the corner, the narrower side facing the alley reads "1872-1931."

Side walls and Rear Elevation

Bethel's two long side walls are similar. They have paired double windows on the main level over paired and single windows on the lower basement level. The exceptions to this are toward the rear of the building, where on the alley side is found the brick chimney stack for the heating system and an exterior side door. On the opposite long side wall, a double window in the lower level is located near the rear corner and approximately above this is a former exterior door, now permanently sealed. This doorway and a nonextant exterior staircase formerly permitted egress from the raised altar area inside but they have been eliminated to accommodate the organ space inside this corner. Likewise, on the rear wall, a small window on the main level has been closed off because of the installation of the organ. At the ground level are two windows that are similar to the rest, one single and one paired.

Interior: Main Level

Stepping through the front doors of the church, one either turns left and ascends a short staircase to the sanctuary, or right to descend down another short staircase to the lower level. Dark red carpet covers stairways and the main level, and walls and ceilings are uniformly white. The stain-glass rounded transom over the front door has a small central image of three crosses on a hill at sunrise. Stained glass in the two windows on either side of the front door also has imagery; the one on the northwest side has a dove, the other one an open bible.

The sanctuary is filled with twenty light-colored wooden (maple?) pews that appear to be from the 1950s. The wide center aisle separates the two blocks of pews, each of which contains 10 pews. The pews face northeast toward the raised altar area, which also has a choir pew against the rear wall, an organ in the northeast corner, and a piano in the southeast corner. The large three-part stained-glass windows in the rear wall are positioned to be high above the pastor during services as well as to catch the rising morning sun. There is no imagery in these windows but a large, detached cross hangs in front of them. A low spindled railing separates the congregation from the raised altar platform. Overhead, the ceiling is sloped over the congregation's seating and then flat over the central aisle. It is covered with acoustic tiles from which small glass chandeliers and ceiling fans hang. The lighting appears to be from the 1950s.

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Interior: Lower Level

The lower level has smaller rooms arranged around a large central meeting and all-purpose room. The flooring is vinyl tile and the ceiling is covered by a new dropped ceiling with large acoustical and lighting panels. Bathrooms are located at the base of the main stairs toward the front of the building. A small galley kitchen, with a large pass-through window to the meeting room, is located along the alley side of the building. Toward the rear of the building, under the altar above, are the business office and the pastor's office. Because of the water damage in 2008, features and finishes in this lower level are new.

Integrity

The building is intact and has good historic integrity. The only exterior alterations appear to be the sealed door and window on the rear northwest corner. Interior alterations include the lower level finishes. On the main level, the ceiling tiles have been added and the spindled railings at the altar end of the church are newer.

- (1) location: the church is in its original location;
- (2) design: the exterior is unchanged except for the sealed door and infilled window, both at the rear of the building;
- (3) setting: the surrounding neighborhood has undergone considerable change since 1931 as the medical buildings expand out from Mercy Medical Center. There are still houses immediately across the street and around the corner however. No survey has been done to record exactly how many such residences remain but the trend is clear. Listing on the National Register of this building may enhance its ability to withstand the trend;
- (4) materials: the exterior materials are original, while interior finishes have been modernized;
- (5) workmanship: the workmanship employed in building are reflected best in the skills needed to lay the brick and the decorative quoining. These are intact;
- (6) feeling: integrity of feeling is intact because of the very good exterior integrity; integrity of feeling inside the building is also very good on the main level, not the least of which is because the creams and yellows of the stained-glass windows filter in a remarkably serene light;
- (7) association: the residences across the street are wood frame and from the turn-of-the-twentieth century, and preserve the association of the church to its neighborhood and the residents it serves.

Credit

This nomination was supported in part by the State Historical Society of Iowa, Historical Resource Development Program.

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8. Narrative Statement of Significance

Summary Paragraph

Bethel A.M.E. Church in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, is significant under Criterion A as the home since 1931 of the oldest historically black church in the city. Criterion Consideration A applies since the church derives its primary significance from its historical importance. In addition to its essential religious function, from its establishment in 1870 or 1871 Bethel's pastors and congregations also have encouraged civic duty, fostered racial pride, promoted the value of education, and worked to improve the general welfare of the always-small local population of African Americans. The church, which replaced an earlier mid-1870s frame edifice, provided a physical venue for its members to meet, socialize, and form a kinship of strength in the face of local prejudice, in addition to and as an integral part of the congregation's religious aspirations. All of this interaction enhanced community among local black residents and connected them to the greater family of African Americans in Iowa and beyond the state. Bethel continues to serve its members as a social and religious institution today, though there are now several other black churches in town and even while it faces mounting pressures to physically relocate. The Cedar Rapids church shares the trials and struggles common to the smallest of churches of all denominations, but it also reflects the historical burdens unique to black Americans. Organized by African Americans of southern origins who traveled north to adopt the separatist-oriented African Methodist Episcopal faith, the founders of Bethel in Cedar Rapids embraced a denomination with distinctly different goals than black churches with more southern origins. The church thus carries on traditions grounded in nineteenth-century free and freedpersons of the Northeast and transplanted to the upper Midwest by missionary African Americans. The period of significance runs from commencement of construction and placement in service in 1931 to the arbitrary 50-year term of National Register guidelines. The significant date of 1931 recognizes the ceremonial laying of the building's cornerstone and the building's placement into service.

Historical Foundations of Bethel AME Church¹

The modern African Methodist Episcopal Church has its origins in Philadelphia in the late eighteenth century. A former slave, Richard Allen purchased his freedom in 1777 and converted to Methodism the same year.² By 1786 Allen was in Philadelphia where he was a shoemaker with a traditional craft shop of a few workers. With the profits from his business ventures, Allen was able to amass considerable wealth.³ As a faithful adherent to John Wesley's Methodism, Allen also held regular prayer meetings during which he preached to increasing numbers of the city's free black population. The formation of the first Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia, which is known as the "Mother Church" or "Mother Bethel," was prompted by an extreme humiliation heaped on Allen and another black leader, Absalom Jones, when they attempted to pray one Sunday at St. George Methodist Episcopal Church. Until their numbers became uncomfortably large for the white congregation, black church members had been permitted to sit on the main floor of St. George's for Sunday services. Knowing officials wanted to change that policy and have them sit in the balcony, Allen and Jones initially took seats at the front of the balcony. "But the church authorities had actually reserved an even less conspicuous place for their Negro worshippers in the rear of the gallery." Allen and the others were ejected when they refused to cut short their prayers and relocate to the rear of the balcony.⁴

¹ This section is expanded from the historical text for the Bethel AME Church in Iowa City, Iowa, a National Register nomination written by the author in 2000.

² John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967), 162.

³ Clarence E. Walker, *A Rock in a Weary Land: The African Methodist Episcopal Church During the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 6-7. When he died, Allen's estate was valued at approximately \$44,000 (Ibid.).

⁴ Leon F. Litwack, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1969), 191.

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Allen and members of the mutual aid association, the Free Africa Society, began to raise the funds for construction of their own Methodist church free and independent of the white church authorities. "Actually, Allen had previously favored separate facilities to accommodate the large number of Negro worshippers; however opposition from both races had compelled him to abandon the idea."⁵ Several years after leaving St. George's, the new church building was completed and dedicated in 1784 as Bethel African American Methodist Episcopal Church.⁶ "The house was called Bethel, after the example and... in the spirit of Jacob."⁷ Richard Allen's Methodism was northern and separatist in nature, missionary in its goals, and valued education as a necessity for both its members and clergy. Historian Clarence E. Walker argued that "the founders of the A.M.E. Church believed that Methodism's discipline would transform the lives of their people and make them useful and productive members of American society" by adopting, in effect, the "Yankee virtues of industry, thrift, and self-reliance."⁸ The northern black churches that were organizing before the Civil War, according to Leon F. Litwack, "proved to be the most dynamic social institution in the Negro community, affording its members an all too rare opportunity to assemble freely, vote for officers, and express themselves spiritually, socially, and politically."⁹

Much of the missionary zeal of the Bethelites focused on the South both before and after the Civil War where there were many souls to convert but also stiff competition for them. The northern-based Bethel AME Church found itself in competition for new black members in the South with the Methodist Church North, the Zion AME Church, and the Methodist Church South. Beyond Methodism, the Bethelites also encountered the strength of the Baptists in the South during Reconstruction.¹⁰ The number of very early AME churches established in Iowa strongly suggests, however, that the Bethelites' missionary zeal looked westward as well to the south. Indeed, historian Leslie Schwalm has said "The spread of black congregations *throughout the upper Midwest began with two of the earliest black communities in Iowa: Muscatine (1848) and Keokuk (1857).* When the wartime diaspora out of the South created a demand for more churches, the upper Midwest became a fruitful vineyard for the major black denominations, particularly as the AME Church grew into a truly national organization."¹¹

The following table is by no means exhaustive and some source dates conflict; however, the list does record a remarkable number of black Iowa Methodist churches that were established early on within a virtually all-white state. The number of churches organized by such a miniscule population certainly suggests something more complex was going on in addition to a desire for organized worship. The phenomenon points to the broader role for the churches as organizations serving the complex needs of the black community. According to one historian, "with the withdrawal of thousands of blacks from white-dominated churches, the black church became the central and unifying institution for the postwar black community."¹²

⁵ Ibid., 192.

⁶ Ibid., 194.

⁷ Daniel A. Payne, *History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* (Nashville, Tennessee, 1891; reprinted by Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1968; reprint used), 5. "The white Methodists of New York had much the same attitude toward their Negro fellows as those of Philadelphia. The result was a withdrawal of Negroes from the John Street Methodist Episcopal Church and the establishment of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church in 1796" (Franklin, 163).

⁸ Walker, 3, 7. According to Walker, "John Wesley, the father of Methodism, preached a simple doctrine...and outlined a guide to Christian ethics [which prohibited] swearing, fighting, drinking, Sabbath breaking, gossiping, failing to pay debts.....Methodists were also required to be plain in speech and dress." (Ibid., 5).

⁹ Litwack, 196.

¹⁰ See Clarence Walker's study of the AME Church's missionary efforts in *A Rock in a Weary Land*.

¹¹ Leslie Schwalm, *Emancipation's Diaspora: Race and Reconstruction in the Upper Midwest* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 144 (emphasis added).

¹² Litwack, 471.

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Table 1. Black Methodist Churches in Iowa Organized 1849-1924¹³

Name of Historic Church (source of info)	City	Year Organized	Year Building Constructed - Stylistic Influence	Primary Material	Status
AME (Schwieder, 86; Silag, etal, ¹⁴ say 1867)	Muscatine	1849	1851 (Dykstra, 16) - Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Bethel AME (Schwalm, 144; SHPO record; Silag, etal, 389)	Keokuk	1857 or 1864	1890, c. [or earlier] - Vernacular Gothic Rev.	Wood	Nonextant - demo-ed c. 2005 by City as vacant & dilapidated
St. John AME (SHPO record)	Burlington	1867	1886, by - Vernacular Gothic Rev.	Wood	Extant - Eligible in 2002 under A and C
Bethel AME (SHPO record)	Iowa City	1868	1868	Wood	NRHP listed, 2000
Bethel AME (SHPO; H. Smith says 1874)	Clinton	1868	1884 - Vernacular Romanesque	Brick	Extant - NRHP Eligible in 1979 under C
Bethel AME	Cedar Rapids	1870 or 1871 (sources differ)	1931 - 2 nd church building - Vernacular Colonial Revival	Brick	Subject of the this NRHP (replaced 1874 bldg. ¹⁵)
Bethel AME (SHPO record)	Davenport	1875	1909 - Craftsman	Stucco	NRHP listed - Architect designed (Clausen & Clausen)
AME (H. Smith)	Washington	1879	Unknown	Wood	Nonextant since 1972
AME (H. Smith)	Council Bluffs	1880	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Malone AME	Sioux City	1883	1920	Wood	Extant
AME (H. Smith)	Ottumwa	1893	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
AME (Gradwohl & Osborn)	Buxton	1900, circa	Wood, Gothic Revival	Unknown	Nonextant
Burns M.E. (H. Smith)	Des Moines	1906	Unknown	Unknown	NRHP listed
Colored M.E. (H. Smith)	Des Moines	1909	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Payne AME (Neymeyer, 87; <i>WCFCourier.com</i>)	Waterloo	1912	1870s "railroad chapel" relocated from Ill. Central RR property	Wood - Vernacular gable front	Extant but converted to other uses; large modern addition; congregation now in a new building nearby
Kyles AME Zion	Des Moines	1919	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
AME	Ft. Madison	1924	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown

¹³ A NRHP multiple property listing of all the extant black churches in Table 1 would be appropriate following additional research. Identification of additional churches should be one of the overall research goals.

¹⁴ In their book, Silag, Koch-Bridgford, & Chase list a number other AME churches in Iowa, including Clarinda and Keosauqua, but those are not listed here without additional details or confirmation.

¹⁵ Luther A. Brewer and Barthinius L. Wick, *History of Linn County, Iowa, From its Earliest Settlement to the Present Time. Volume I* (Chicago: The Pioneer Publishing Company, 1911), 570.

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African Americans in Iowa and Cedar Rapids

Well before it became a state, Iowa established an anti-slavery stance with the important and well-known case of *In the Matter of Ralph (a colored man) on Habeas Corpus*. The 1839 legal matter was brought before the highest territorial court after a Missouri master entered the territory and seized Ralph, who had been his slave in Missouri. Ralph had been permitted to work in the Iowa territory over a five year period in order to purchase his freedom but failed to make the payment. The court ruled that Iowa had been a “free soil” territory since 1820 and thus prohibited slavery. Further, the court held that “the master, who, subsequent to [1820] permitted his slave to become a resident in the Territory of Iowa, could not afterwards exercise any acts of ownership over him within the said Territory.”¹⁶

When Iowa became a state in 1846 Missouri was the only adjacent state not reserved as free soil by the Missouri Compromise of 1820. Many of the more than 102,000 settlers in Iowa at the time of statehood were of southern origins, from states like Virginia, the Carolinas, Georgia, Kentucky, and Tennessee. Some of the thousands of new white settlers to Iowa had traveled north via the Missouri and Mississippi rivers; others overland, especially settlers from Missouri who filtered into the southern tier of Iowa counties and moved north.¹⁷ These white settlers may have never owned a slave but had lived in jurisdictions where slavery was a fact of life. Free blacks at the time of statehood numbered fewer than 350 and probably closer to 200. Most “worked in the [lead] mines at Dubuque, or as laborers in the river towns of Burlington, Davenport, and Keokuk.”¹⁸

A clash of southern and northern values in free-soil Iowa regarding slavery would exist throughout the 1850s. During this antebellum era, the state (including several communities not far south of Cedar Rapids) was located along at least two routes of the underground railroad. And Iowa historians have long accepted the assertion that followers of abolitionist John Brown trained in and around Springdale, Iowa, about thirty miles to the southeast of Cedar Rapids.¹⁹ According to Leola Nelson Bergmann, blacks who came to Iowa before and during the Civil War, “often settled on the first suitable piece of land or in the first little village they came to after crossing the border.”²⁰ Those who did not labor in the river port towns, then, often settled first in or near the southernmost communities of the state, presumably where the southern culture of white settlers persisted most intensely. So long as their numbers were small blacks could be largely ignored, Leslie Schwalm has argued. However, as the number of black migrants arriving in the state grew, white residents increasingly understood that the “consequences of emancipation extended well beyond the slaveholding South” and state legislators responded with restrictive black laws.²¹

African Americans and the Bethel AME Church in Cedar Rapids

By 1870, about the time the Cedar Rapids Bethel AME Church was organized, there were 5,762 African Americans living in Iowa, the majority of whom were born in Missouri (27%) or were free-born Iowa natives (24%). The next three most

¹⁶ Louis Pelzer, “The Negro and Slavery in Early Iowa,” in *The Iowa Journal of History and Politics* 2 (October 1904) 4: 472.

¹⁷ Pelzer., 473.

¹⁸ Leola Nelson Bergmann, *The Negro in Iowa* (Des Moines: State Historical Society of Iowa, 1948; reprinted in 1969), 11, 14. Reprint used.

¹⁹ See for example the *WPA Guide to 1930s Iowa* (reprinted 1986), 101. According to Iowa underground railroad historian, Lowell Soike, Brown was not in Springdale during the winter of 1854-55, while his men trained, but was in the East fund raising. Email communication to the author, 4/12/2013.

²⁰ Bergmann, 35.

²¹ Schwalm, 81.

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common nativity states were Kentucky, Virginia, and Tennessee—all older slave states—with 12, 9, and 6 percent, respectively.²² Of the 5,762 individuals, only 41 (or 0.7%) lived in Cedar Rapids. As the second Bethel church building was being planned in Cedar Rapids in 1930 or 1931, the state as a whole had grown to two and a half million souls, but only 17,380, or 0.7 %, were black. At the same time, Cedar Rapids' total population in 1930 was 56,097, of whom 746, or 1.3%, were African American, roughly twice the number as statewide.²³ What had caused the percentage of Cedar Rapids African Americans to double between 1870 and 1930, to rise in real numbers from 41 to 746 individuals? According to one local historian, a large part of the increase was the result of coal mine closures in southern Iowa and the withering of Buxton, a community with a "large component of black people, which counted not only miners but also merchants, accountants, secretaries, school teachers and principals..."²⁴ After the decline of mining in the Buxton area, beginning around 1918 and lasting through the next few years, "black families relocated to Des Moines, *Cedar Rapids*, Waterloo, Sioux City, Council Bluffs, Dubuque, and other major cities in the Midwest in hopes of starting a new life. The population growth of these cities can be attributed to the steady migration from the declining coal towns in southern Iowa."²⁵ World War I also created job openings in Cedar Rapids for African Americans, especially in the meat packing and railroad industries, after white workers left their jobs for the military.²⁶

According to scholar Gabriel Victor Cools, writing in 1918, the Cedar Rapids black population had come principally from Missouri. Most lived in the eastside Cedar Rapids neighborhood known as "Oak Hill, which is about five minutes' walk from the packing houses."²⁷ Some Oak Hill men also worked for the railroads or as janitors and porters because "these were the only occupations that were open to black men."²⁸ Most black women in Oak Hill stayed at home to raise their families and did not attempt to work.²⁹ Childless women worked as personal servants or in domestic service as maids and cooks.³⁰ Other newcomers to the city, especially Bohemian (Czech) immigrants, worked in the packing houses along side the blacks and lived in the Oak Hill neighborhood too, which Cools described as a "wretched" place of dirt streets and one- and two-room dilapidated cabins.³¹ The "Hill" was and is located south and southeast of 8th Avenue SE, about two blocks southeast of the Bethel AME Church. Bethel's location in the 1870s had been determined by a gift of land from white benefactors at a time when the town's black population was so minor that no identifiable "black neighborhood" existed. When the Bethel congregation built their new church building in 1931, its neighborhood just north of Oak Hill still remained largely white.³²

There was no "overt segregation" in Cedar Rapids, according to Oak Hill historian Eric Smith, because the African American population remained such a small part of the city's total population. Nonetheless, he argued, it did exist in fact.³³ Segregation and racial discrimination limited the black community's ability to prosper in Cedar Rapids well into the twentieth century,

²² Bergmann, 32.

²³ *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930*. Population Table 9, p. 120. Available on *Google.com*, accessed 4/11/2013. Also, Table 16. Iowa – Race and Hispanic Origin for Selected Large Cities and Other Places: Earliest Census to 1990; accessed on 4/12/2013 at www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0076/IAtab.pdf.

²⁴ David M. Gradwohl and Nancy M. Osborn, *Exploring Buried Buxton: Archaeology of an Abandoned Iowa Coal Mining Town with a Large Black Population* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1990), 2.

²⁵ Eric A. Smith, *Oak Hill: A Portrait of Black Life in Cedar Rapids, Iowa* (Los Angeles: Amen-Ra Theological Seminary Press, c. 2007), 1; citing as authority Rick Halpern and Roger Horowitz, *Meatpackers* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996), 119. Emphasis added.

²⁶ Gabriel Victor Cools, "The Negro in Typical Communities in Iowa" (Unpubl. M.A. thesis, State University of Iowa, 1918), 95.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 95.

²⁸ Smith, *Oak Hill*, 12.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 28.

³⁰ Cools, 99.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 96.

³² Smith, 40.

³³ *Ibid.*, 16.

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just as it did all over the state and the country. This situation perpetuated deep poverty for some families and restricted others' ability to advance economically, often leading to illegal activities in some quarters and apathy and resolve in others.³⁴

Over the years Bethel church played a sustained role in uplifting Oak Hill and Cedar Rapids black residents from these troubles, by providing "a place where black folks can be themselves...a rest haven to forget about the problems and stresses of everyday life for a minute and gather strength from a higher source to face their problems. Self-expression, recreation, and entertainment are a few of the reasons why many black folks attend church."³⁵ Longtime member of the Bethel AME Church Connie Hillsman told Oak Hill historian Eric Smith: "Bethel has always been an integral part of Cedar Rapids blacks and also a communication tool for the total community. Being one if not the earliest black church it has remained a symbol of perseverance through all economies."³⁶

The Cedar Rapids Bethel AME Church

Bethel had been organized with 13 members in 1870 by three founders, J.H. Bowlen, George Scott, and Edward C. Thomas, the latter of whom was the only surviving founder by 1912 when the church was able to buy its first parsonage. Thomas was a Tennessee native (and likely ex-slave) who was born about 1853. While it is unknown when he arrived in Iowa, he was only 17 when he and the two others organized the church in Cedar Rapids.³⁷ By 1880, Thomas was 27, married four years to the first of two wives and providing a home in Cedar Rapids for four stepdaughters. All the females in the household had been born in Mississippi, wife Mary in 1843 and three of her daughters during the Civil War (1862, 1864, 1865), with the youngest born in 1868. They lived on 8th Street,³⁸ at the northern edge of the Oak Hill neighborhood. Their home was surrounded by white Bohemian neighbors, many of whom worked as "pork packers," with no other African Americans on the block.³⁹ Thomas worked as a laborer and then machinist for the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad. He lived in the same spot for the next 31 years, at least until 1912 when a short feature in the local newspaper identified him as the organizer and sole surviving original member of the Bethel church. The article revealed also that membership had grown to 95 by 1912 and, just that year, the church had been able to afford to buy a parsonage at 909 S. 9th St. SE (again, in the Oak Hill neighborhood) for the current minister. The newspaper claimed the growth of the church had been successful through both the "philanthropic spirit of the Caucasian people of Cedar Rapids, and a great sacrifice upon the part of the colored people."⁴⁰

The first time this white "philanthropic spirit" aided the church was in 1874, when a prominent Cedar Rapids couple, John F. Ely and Mary A. Ely, sold for a dollar a 40- by 60-foot portion of a city lot fronting 6th Street SE (then called Monroe Street) to Bethel for a church building. The deed, a copy of which is extant and in the possession of the church, was dated June 8,

³⁴ Ibid., 114-117. Cools claimed that "extreme poverty [was] practically unknown" among Cedar Rapids' blacks despite income levels "far below the minimum income of the white workman." But, he concluded, it may simply have been that blacks were more secretive about their condition and groups such as the "colored women's club and the social service work of the two churches have managed to take care of the majority of cases of indigency...thereby keeping their troubles within the group." Ibid., 112.

³⁵ Ibid., 40.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ U.S. manuscript census data for the *Tenth Census of the United States: 1880*, available online at *Ancestry.com*; *Cedar Rapids Evening Gazette*, 5/15/1912, named Thomas as the sole surviving organizer of the church. Church records in the collections of the African American Museum of Iowa (located in Cedar Rapids) name the other two organizers. Biographical information is very sketchy on Bowlen and Scott. Neither appear to have remained long in Cedar Rapids and Scott's name is simply too common for searching online data bases without more details. Bowlen may have been the same J.H. Bowlen listed as a "colored" barber in the 1862 Philadelphia city directory (*Ancestry.com* on 4/19/2013).

³⁸ This house is extant at 918 8th St. SE, Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

³⁹ U.S. manuscript census data for the *Tenth Census of the United States: 1880*.

⁴⁰ *Cedar Rapids Evening Gazette*, 5/15/1912.

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1874 and stipulates “that said Church shall erect and complete a church building upon said ground, worth and to cost at least fifteen hundred dollars free of all liens and debt within a period of two years from this date.” Had the church failed, the land would revert to the Elys. Dedication ceremonies took place in July, 1876, with an AME bishop from Baltimore traveling to Cedar Rapids to officiate.⁴¹

According to a 1911 history of Cedar Rapids, John F. Ely and Mary A. Ely “for a generation were leaders of the business and social life of this city.”⁴² Presbyterian in faith and Republican in politics, John was a medical doctor who arrived in Cedar Rapids in the 1848 to look after the business affairs of his deceased brother, Alex, a miller who had operated both lumber and flour mills in town. John eventually married Alex’s widow and served as a surgeon in the Civil War.⁴³ Dr. Ely appears to have given up medicine, becoming instead a land speculator and business financier in this nascent village on the Red Cedar River. Among his most notable efforts in boosting Cedar Rapids’ fortunes was the assistance he provided in the early 1850s toward the founding of what became Coe College. The family name also survives in the form of the small town of Ely, Iowa, founded in 1872 south of Cedar Rapids near the Linn-Johnson county line. Mary seems to have been as well-positioned on the town’s social ladder as her husband was in the business circles. “Mrs. Ely was a very philanthropic woman,” according to the 1911 historians, and “was the leader of all the charitable works for many years” including training the next generation of elite women to whom she would pass the torch.⁴⁴

From its founding, Bethel has been led by a long list of ministers, most of whom remained only briefly. This pattern reflects an AME tradition and a major structural difference from black Baptist churches, a difference grounded in Richard Allen’s earliest separatist philosophy of building a network of African American churches through missionaries. “The AME system of quarterly meetings and an annual General Conference sustained a significant connection among churches and between regions. The network was further reinforced by the practice of itinerancy [of mobile pastors]...and by the frequent visitations of bishops through the conference. Baptist congregations, however, largely relied on the skills and enthusiasm of individual ministers, and black Baptists sometimes joined white congregations before black churches could be organized.” Black Baptists in Iowa did not begin to form churches until 1878, as much as eight years later than southern Baptist organizations.⁴⁵ Historian Leslie Schwalm quoted at length the Reverend John W. Malone, a former slave and then free man from North Carolina, who came to Iowa in 1862 to begin his “itinerancy for the AME Church. Later, looking back on a quarter of a century of missionary work, he recalled ‘having unfurled the banner and planted the standard in Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Dakota, etc. ...I have been away many months at a time... in order to succeed in organizing Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, and Dakota.’” Schwalm concluded that Malone’s experience “was multiplied many times over by the itinerant churchmen who—with their wives and families—began building congregations and churches throughout the upper Midwest.”⁴⁶

The Cedar Rapids Bethel AME Church’s experience with ministers fits this pattern of itinerancy. Between 1871 and 1928, the church had 23 ministers, with each staying an average of just under two and a half years.⁴⁷ While promoting growth and expansion of the denomination generally, itinerancy also had its downside for individual churches. Membership could grow slowly and suffer from a lack of leadership. This was the gist of Gabriel Victor Cools’ assessment in 1918 of the Cedar Rapids AME church. While “the churches continue to be the social centers for the people,” Cool thought the Bethel church membership in particular had become too conservative and was failing to motivate its members, especially the youth, in

⁴¹ *History of Linn County, Iowa* (Chicago: Western Historical Company, 1878), 510.

⁴² Brewer and Wick, 159.

⁴³ See www.usgennet.org/usa/county/linn/civil_war/24th/graves/johnfely.html; accessed on 3/29/2013.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 326.

⁴⁵ Schwalm, 145.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 143-144.

⁴⁷ Smith, *Oak Hill*, 44.

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social and educational matters.⁴⁸ Another scholar, Hazel Smith, studied Iowa's black churches in 1926 for her master's thesis. She too formulated some harsh impressions about the results of ministers changing so frequently, stating "the average Iowa Negro minister's residence in one locality is short. The time is ordinarily from two to five years... They usually move more often than do the white ministers" and "the tenure is longer, on average, in the Baptist denomination" also.⁴⁹ The African American minister in Iowa, Smith claimed, was "ill-fitted to assume the moral leadership of the people" and she also concluded that the financial struggle for most black churches continued to be severe.⁵⁰ "The majority of the Negro congregations are very small and it is usually a burden for them to pay the pastor's salary and meet the annual budget... The church was usually small and modestly equipped and often the parsonage was a very poor structure."⁵¹ Bethel's 1874 wooden church, the pride of the congregation for many years, showed the "revenges of time" by early in the twentieth according to Gabriel Victor Cools. "It does not seem that any repairs have been made to the building since its construction forty-four years ago."⁵² Thus by the time a pastor by the name of Benjamin H. Lucas was called to assume the Bethel charge in 1928, the church was in serious jeopardy of losing its relevancy for the Cedar Rapids African American community.

Benjamin Horace Lucas – Leadership at a Critical Juncture

Reverend Lucas was born in July, 1879 in Brooklyn, Illinois. Called "American's first black town," the majority-black town was located across the Mississippi River from St. Louis, Missouri.⁵³ Lucas's parents were from the South, maybe Mississippi, maybe Missouri, or another southern state—the census records differ. By 1903, 24-year-old Benjamin was living in Chicago where he married a woman named Jessie Hudson that same year. Seven years later, in 1910, the couple resided in a racially mixed neighborhood in Springfield, Illinois, where Benjamin worked as a "weighman" in a coal yard. Living in the state capital, Lucas, a Republican and in his late 30s by 1916, clearly became interested in politics and successfully ran for a seat in the Illinois House of Representatives, where he served from 1917 until 1919. He had worked a number of jobs at this point, including postal clerk, fire marshal, and investigator for the state agency that regulated out-of-state corporations, but during his term in the Illinois state house he also worked in the insurance business.⁵⁴ Lucas also registered for the draft in 1918 during the World War I era, and his draft card listed his permanent home address as back in Chicago. By 1920, he was clearly living in Chicago and still working as an insurance agent. Lucas was obviously a talented and energetic man who had graduated from college,⁵⁵ worked his way up to white-collar middle class jobs in Chicago, and had political aspirations. At some point, he also answered the calling to become a minister of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. The Cedar Rapids congregation of Bethel AME Church soon would benefit from Reverend Lucas's talents and guidance in many ways.

Lucas and his wife, Jessie, arrived in Cedar Rapids to take charge of Bethel in 1928, replacing a pastor who had only been in town one year. They moved into the parsonage at 909 9th Street SE, the only African American residents on the block.⁵⁶ The

⁴⁸ Cools, 103-104.

⁴⁹ Hazel Smith, "The Negro Church in Iowa" (Unpubl. M.A. Thesis, State University of Iowa, 1926), 68.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 54.

⁵¹ Ibid., 68.

⁵² Cools, 108.

⁵³ The town was founded in the 1820s by free and fugitive blacks. Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua, *American's First Black Town, Brooklyn, Illinois, 1830-1915* (University of Illinois Press, 2002).

⁵⁴ Benjamin Lucas's accomplishments are noted by a Chicago-based organization that seeks to preserve the history of influential African Americans. Called "The History Makers," this group primarily focuses on the creation of oral history videos of living African Americans, but appears to have archival information on influential black Americans from the past as well (see www.thehistorymakers.com). Lucas also has a biographical entry in: Erma Brooks Williams, *Political Empowerment of Illinois' African-American State Lawmakers from 1877 to 2005* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, Inc., 2008), 7.

⁵⁵ *Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940*. Available on *Ancestry.com*; accessed on 3/27/2013.

⁵⁶ *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930*. Available on *Ancestry.com*; accessed on 3/27/2013.

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Lucas's efforts to reinvigorate the congregation, spiritually and communally, appear to have been started immediately. The same year Reverend Lucas arrived, an active women's church group called the "Pastor's Aid Club" was organized, perhaps prompted by Jessie Lucas who did not have children and did not work outside the home. The club's goal was to organize and sponsor "money making projects and programs" to aid the church and its mission.⁵⁷ One of the most important and long-lasting events this group initiated was a large formal dinner event called the "Allen-Lincoln-Douglass" banquet. The first banquet was held in February, 1928, and it became an annual event thereafter lasting at least through the 1990s.⁵⁸ The banquet, which honored AME founder Richard Allen, President Abraham Lincoln, and orator-abolitionist Frederick Douglass, grew so large that it was held in a variety of facilities outside the church over the years. Prominent and inspirational speakers were always featured and the annual events sometimes had a theme such as history as a "great teacher."⁵⁹ The legacy of this particular Bethel activity, which fostered a sense of community for the entire congregation if not the entire Cedar Rapids African American population, was so important it received a formal salute from the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, or the NAACP, presented in 1992 at the 64th annual Allen-Lincoln-Douglass banquet.⁶⁰

In addition to inspiring groups such as the Pastor's Aid Club, Reverend Lucas quickly determined to replace the old wood-frame, Gothic Revival church building that had housed the congregation since the 1870s, and about which Gabriel Victor Cools made such negative observations as early as 1918. To this end, in 1931 construction was started on the new, present brick church building. While records related to the new building's funding and construction are lost to time or to the Flood of 2008, it is very likely money raised by the Pastor's Aid Club was augmented in ways similar to the original fundraising efforts for the wood church in the 1870s and the parsonage in 1912. Sometimes a call was sent out generally through the local press appealing for funding from the general community,⁶¹ but more often the public was invited to fundraising rallies at the church,⁶² or fundraising events and barbeques in a local park.⁶³ One of these elaborate summertime events included food billed as "old time southern" fare, an entertainment program that featured "a "jubilee concert company of talented musicians and singers," and "amusements" like foot races, potato races, and three-legged races.⁶⁴

By the time the cornerstone of the new church was ready to be placed in late July 1931, the church had raised \$3,000 but still needed another \$8,500 to finish construction. The public ceremony attracted a large crowd of 300 people to watch the new church's cornerstone be set in place and listen to a number of speakers that included ministers and officials of both AME and Baptist denominations, as well as the Cedar Rapids mayor. The Masons played a featured role in the cornerstone ceremony,

⁵⁷ In addition to their fundraising, the club sponsored events at the church like concerts of gospel and spiritual signers. *Cedar Rapids Evening Gazette*, 4/24/1949. Records of the club are located in the "Vernon & Phoebe Smith Family" folders (2) in the collection of the African American Museum of Iowa (Cedar Rapids), specifically contained in A2003.003, Box 6 Folder 3, and Box 4 Folder 17 [hereafter Smith Family Collection]. This museum collection contains church pamphlets and various documents, including a short history of the church with a listing of most pastors and the years they served. The history was written by Mrs. Gladys Taylor.

⁵⁸ The banquet may have taken over another long standing annual event, the celebration of "Emancipation Day." *Cedar Rapids Evening Gazette*, 7/30/1913.

⁵⁹ Preliminary planning notes for the 1989 banquet in the Smith Family Collection. Speakers over the years included prominent local businessmen such as Robert Armstrong, and notable African Americans with Iowa roots like Fred "Duke" Slater, a Clinton, Iowa, native and University of Iowa "Hawkeye football great of the early 20s" who later became a judge in Chicago. *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, 2/15/1957.

⁶⁰ The NAACP's relationship with Bethel was long-standing with the church hosting meetings of the group as early as 1919. *Cedar Rapids Evening Gazette*, 11/22/1919. The Iowa Federation of Colored Women's Clubs also met at the church. *Cedar Rapids Evening Gazette*, 5/23/1921. Both of these specific newspapers date to meetings held in the older wooden church but indicate the supportive community fostered by Bethel in Cedar Rapids.

⁶¹ *Cedar Rapids Evening Gazette*, 5/9/1911.

⁶² *Cedar Rapids Evening Gazette*, 6/19/1912.

⁶³ *Cedar Rapids Republican*, 7/23/1905.

⁶⁴ *Cedar Rapids Evening Gazette*, 8/19/1912.

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perhaps because Reverent Lucas himself was a Mason.⁶⁵ The “grand master of the Negro Masonic lodge in Iowa” came from Davenport to actually lay the stone, assisted by the “worshipful master” of the local Mount Olive lodge and other area Masons.⁶⁶ This ceremony represents a confluence of two independent African American institutions and its significance is especially meaningful as a reinforcement of the sense of community fostered by the AME church itself. According to Leslie Schwalm, the origins of black Masonry are similar to the origins of Richard Allen’s AME church:

African American Masonry, known as “Prince Hall Masonry” after its West Indian immigrant founder, traced its U.S. origins to Hall’s apprenticeship and advancement within a British lodge in Boston on the eve of the American Revolution. Having been rejected for membership by the white Massachusetts Grand lodge, Hall and his black fraternal associates were finally granted a charter by the (white) Grand Lodge of England in 1787. When they severed their connection to the British in 1847, they established their own Grand Lodge in the United States...Lodges enabled men to learn and practice the association’s rituals; socialize new members; organize and furnish meeting rooms; acquire leadership skills; distribute charitable relief to ill members, widows, orphans, and others in need; and engage in public ceremonies—*most prominently, laying cornerstones for black churches* (emphasis added).⁶⁷

Black Masonic lodges had been in Iowa as early the 1840s when Jacob Pritchard and Alexander Clark arrived in Muscatine, on the west banks of the Mississippi River. Pritchard, who assisted in the formation of Muscatine’s AME church, and Clark are credited by Schwalm as being “instrumental in Masonry’s westward expansion” into the upper Midwest before the Civil War.⁶⁸ The historical association and mutually supportive roles of the AME church and the African American Masons, at least in Iowa, are, therefore, well established.

When the accomplished Benjamin Lucas finally left Bethel church to return to Chicago in 1933, after five years in Cedar Rapids, he left behind a strong new church building and a reinvigorated congregation with energetic support organizations. In the years since, the church has grown to more than 150 members and continues to play a community-reinforcing role in the lives of Cedar Rapids’ African Americans. The Pastor’s Aid Club continued to fund raise through its popular annual Allen-Lincoln-Douglass banquet, and this women’s club and another group called the Men’s Brotherhood, continued to sponsor cultural events for the church such as the concerts given by the gospel “Silverstone Singers” and the “Wings over Jordan” choir.⁶⁹ Various Bethel pastors since Lucas have carried on his activism by participating in local public discussions on civic duty and race relations.⁷⁰ And the church continues its outreach programs of providing various forms of assistance to those in need.⁷¹ As Connie Hillsman, long-time member, put it, Bethel AME Church “is a mainstay...it’s like coming home. I look around and say, ‘I’m home’.”⁷²

Design Inspiration

While no designer has been identified, the number of stylistic details employed in the Bethel church building suggests that someone with architectural interests or training had a hand in planning the building, not necessarily an architect, but perhaps

⁶⁵ Williams, 7.

⁶⁶ *Cedar Rapids Evening Gazette*, 7/27/1931.

⁶⁷ Schwalm, 161.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ *Cedar Rapids Evening Gazette*, 4/24 and 7/2/1949.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 2/9/1950 and 2/8/1951.

⁷¹ Mr. Bev George Taylor, to author. December 2011.

⁷² “140 Years of fellowship,” *Cedar Rapids Evening Gazette*, no date, but c. 2010. Clipping posted in a display case in the church’s lower level meeting room.

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someone in the congregation or the building contractor.⁷³ The loss of church records to flooding means that source will likely never be known for sure. The following paragraphs do not constitute an attempt to establish Criterion C significance, but are simply an exploration of the *potential* design inspirations that were available to the builders of the Cedar Rapids church. The discussion is solely intended to provide historical context.

Potential design inspiration might have come from the spiritual side of the church and the congregation's desire to honor its past. The Mother Bethel AME Church in Philadelphia is the original AME church founded by Richard Allen in the 1790s. This early organization has held services in four distinct buildings over its long history. The fourth and present building was constructed in 1890 as a massive stone Richardsonian Romanesque edifice.⁷⁴ While it has rounded arches, little else suggests any architectural connection to the Cedar Rapids Bethel AME building. The third Mother Bethel church, which was used from 1841 to 1889, was a vaguely Greek Revival building appropriate to its construction era. Called the "Red Brick" church, this gable-front building had the same basic rectangular footprint and simplicity of design as the Cedar Rapids church. It had a strictly symmetrical façade, cornice returns, and an oculus window. Two stories in height, the "Red Brick" church had the unusual feature of two separate front doors that flanked a central double-hung sash window. Each doorway had a pedimented surround. Line drawings appear to be the only readily accessible images available for this building outside, perhaps, local Philadelphia archives. No photo of it was located.⁷⁵

Another potential inspiration for the church's Colonial Revival architecture is found in the design of All Souls Unitarian Church, by architects Coolidge and Shattuck, built in 1924 in Washington, D.C. Architectural historian Marcus Whiffen argued that All Souls was a copy of the 1722-1726 St. Martin-in-the-Field Church in London, "which was a favorite model of [American] church buildings in colonial times." Just prior to the Civil War, another copy of that London church was begun in Boston. According to Whiffen, that Boston church – the Arlington Street Church (1859-1861)—was the "building that from the viewpoint of history may be seen as the first harbinger of the Georgian Revival." Other commonly used terms for Georgian Revival are "Neo-Colonial" and "Colonial Revival."⁷⁶ Some 60 years later in Washington, D.C., All Souls Unitarian Church, the third edifice built by this Unitarian congregation in this city, was yet another copy of London's St. Martin-in-the-Field.

What does the elegant 1924 All Souls church have to do with a small, simple AME church built in 1931 hundreds of miles away in Cedar Rapids? Strip away the most ornate features of All Souls Unitarian Church – the temple-front portico and the tall spire – and the two buildings' shared Colonial Revival features emerge. Basically, both are low rectangular boxes turned 90 degrees from the typical broad colonial facade. Behind the decorative balustrade atop All Souls' roof a similar double-sided and shallow-pitched gabled roof appears. Both buildings are of red brick with prominent quoining used to highlight architectural details, such as around their centered, front double-doors and down the corners. All Souls' quoins are stone, while Bethel's are of contrasting brick. All Souls' corner quoining is best seen on the spire base and the building's dependencies behind the church; Bethel's are prominently displayed at its front corners. A form of fanlight sits over both buildings' front entrances, a true, pie-wedge divided-light transom in the case of All Souls and a fanlight shape filled with stained glass at Bethel. Repetitive round features are important in both buildings. At All Souls, this includes a rounded cartouche on the portico's pediment, a round oculus window in the base of the spire, and the clock face just above a louvered

⁷³ The decision to abandon the Gothic Revival's palette of details, which had been used in Bethel's prior wood frame church, is also a clue to the planning approach used for the new building. This change certainly indicates the church pastor or congregation were intentionally looking elsewhere for inspiration for the new church.

⁷⁴ A photo is available online at: <http://www.ushistory.org/tour/mother-bethel.htm>.

⁷⁵ A line drawing is seen at: http://www.motherbethel.org/~mother35/photos_church_photos.php?id=12

⁷⁶ Marcus Whiffen, *American Architecture Since 1780: A Guide to the Styles* (Cambridge: The M.I.T. Press, 1969), 160-163. Whiffen divides the Georgian Revival style into Neo-Adamesque and Neo-Colonial subtypes (Ibid., 159). The *National Register Bulletin: How to Complete the National Register Form*, at 26, classifies Georgian Revival as an alternative stylistic term for Colonial Revival.

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vent in the spire's shaft. The rounded features in the Bethel building are largely found in the front wall, used for door and window headers and the oculus vent at the gable peak. And while the Palladian-type window on the rear wall of Bethel is missing in All Souls, it *is* found on the rear wall of the original model, St. Martins-in-the-Field, with the same illumination effect of casting shafts of light down toward the pulpit and the worshippers beyond.⁷⁷ All in all, though evidentiary proof is absolutely lacking, the possibility that the paired down, simplified Bethel AME Church's design influence is grounded in the Colonial Revival style as used in prominent churches such as All Souls is an enticing theory.

Beyond simply being ecclesiastical architecture, why would All Souls Unitarian Church be an appropriate design inspiration for the Bethel AME Church? Because All Souls also had a long history (if somewhat mixed early on) of supporting abolitionist and equal rights movements for African-Americans. This history includes direct association with Frederick Douglass.⁷⁸

Future Plans

There are no plans for any changes in the church or its function, though the pressure continues to convert the land in this neighborhood from residential to medical-related.

⁷⁷ Both interior and exterior images of all three churches, St. Martins-in-the-Field, Arlington Street Church, and All Souls, are readily available on the internet simply by searching with the church and location city names. Photos of the three exteriors are included as Additional Documentation.

⁷⁸ The church was organized in 1821, with a founding member, Charles Bulfinch, second architect of the U.S. Capitol, designing the church's first building. From its inception, All Souls had a congregation that included many of the nation's most prominent men, including John Quincy Adams, John C. Calhoun, and future Washington mayors, William Winston Seaton and Joseph Gales, Jr. According to the church's own historical narrative, before the Civil War, "although many members of the congregation were northerners, South Carolinian [John C.] Calhoun went on to defend slavery and become a hero to secessionists." But other actions by the church stand in stark contrast to Calhoun's and foreshadow the strengthening commitment to equal rights for African Americans. For example, in 1859, on the eve of the Civil War, the church tolled its bell "throughout the day that John Brown was hanged for leading the raid on the federal arsenal at Harper's Ferry," an action that angered city officials and earned the bell the nickname Abolitionist Bell. During the war, the church building was turned into a Union hospital and the congregation held Sunday services in the U.S. Senate Chamber, services frequently attended by Abraham Lincoln. After the war, when the congregation decided to erect a new building in 1877, a general from the Union army presided over the dedication of the new building and "among the prominent worshippers at the second church [was] African American activist and public official Frederick Douglass." By 1913, the congregation had outgrown this second church too and plans for a third building were made. The cornerstone was laid by congregation member, President William Howard Taft, but World War I delayed construction of this third extant building at a new site until 1924. Taft's membership in All Souls, and his death in March, 1930, may well have been the reason the architecture of the church came to the attention of the designer of Bethel AME in 1930 or early 1931. Taft's funeral conducted at All Souls would have been front page news in most local newspapers. Unfortunately, because of the loss of church records to the 2008 flood, and a large gap in the availability of the main Cedar Rapids newspaper for the year 1930, the inspiration behind Bethel church's architecture will continue to remain theoretical and may well be a blend of all of the above. *All Souls Archives and History: Moments in a Church's History*, accessed at <http://www.all-souls.org/archives> on 4/3/2013.

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9. Major Bibliographic References

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Cedar Rapids Evening Gazette, 11/22/1919.

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Cedar Rapids Evening Gazette, 7/27/1931.

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10. Geographical Data

Verbal Boundary Description

The nomination includes the 40' by 60' portion of Lot 1, Block 45 of the Original Town plat of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, on which the building is located. This 40' by 60' parcel is located in the south corner of Lot 1, which is 60 feet by 140 feet overall. The building sits close to the sidewalk at the southwest front of the parcel and lies adjacent to the public alley on the longer southeast side. The property includes the paved parking lot at the rear of the building.

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes the entire parcel historically associated with the church building during the period of significance.

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**Cedar Rapids, Linn County, Iowa, with approximate location
of the nominated property circled.**

(detail obtained 5/2/2013 from U.S.G.S. 7.5' topographic map: <http://ortho.gis.iastate.edu/server.cgi?wmtver=1.0&request=map&bbox=607999,4645159,613999,4651159&width=600&height=600&layers=dr24&format=jpeg&srs=EPSG:26915&styles=>)



1 mile



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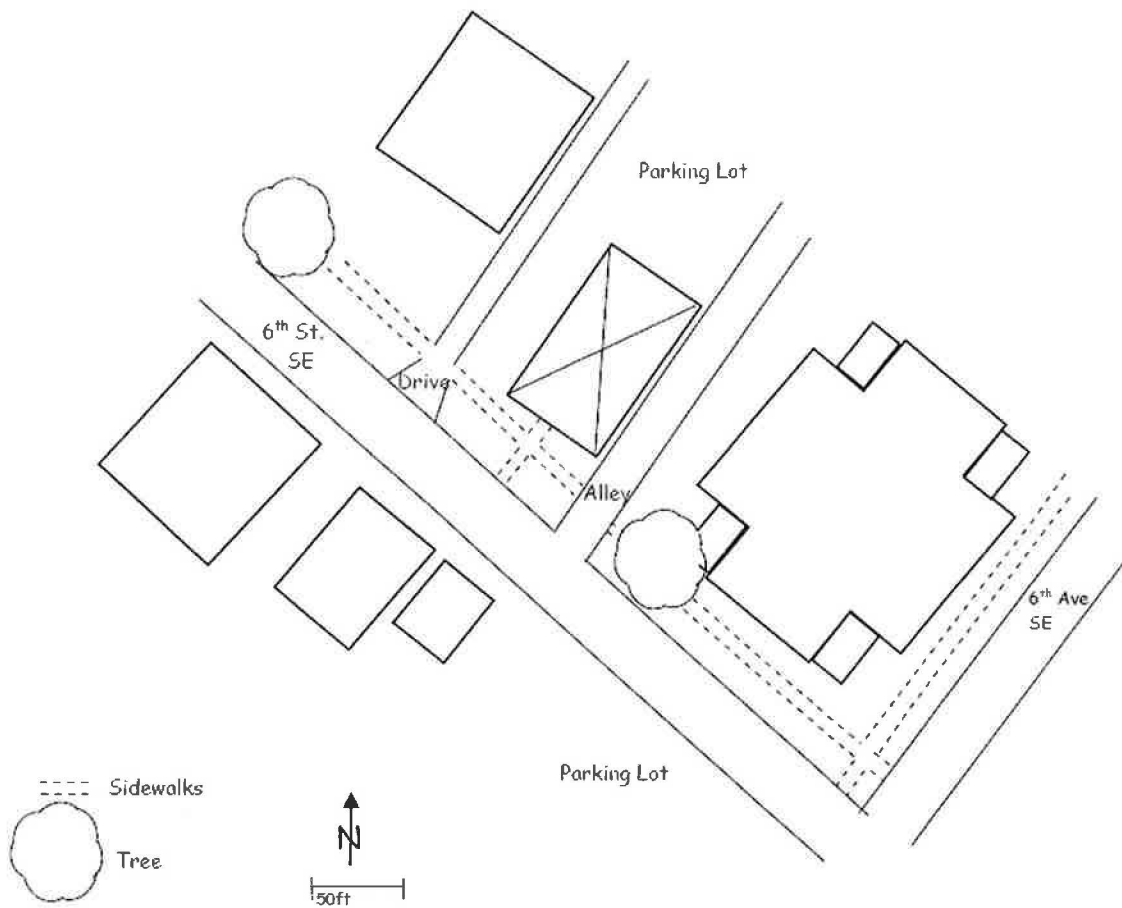
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Site Plan

(sketch map by Talgrass Historians L.C., 2013)



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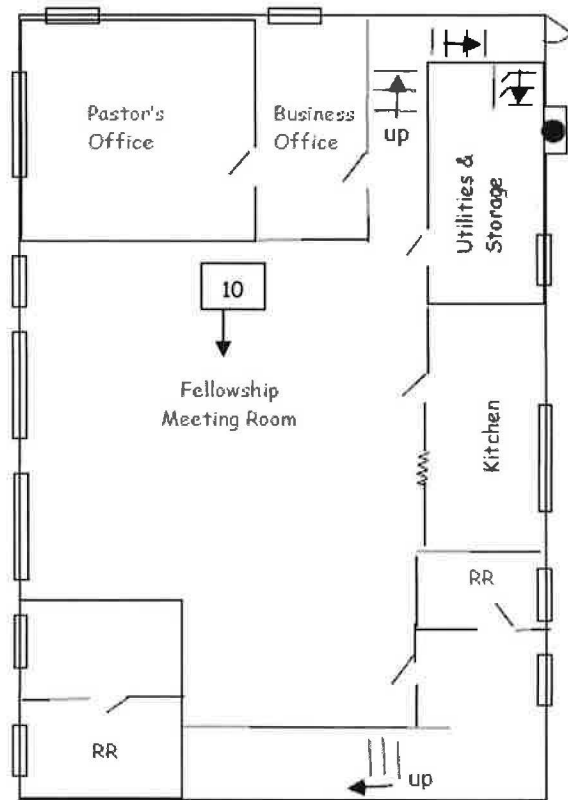
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Floor Plans & Photo Keys (sketch plans by Tallgrass Historians LC, 2013, not scaled)

LOWER LEVEL



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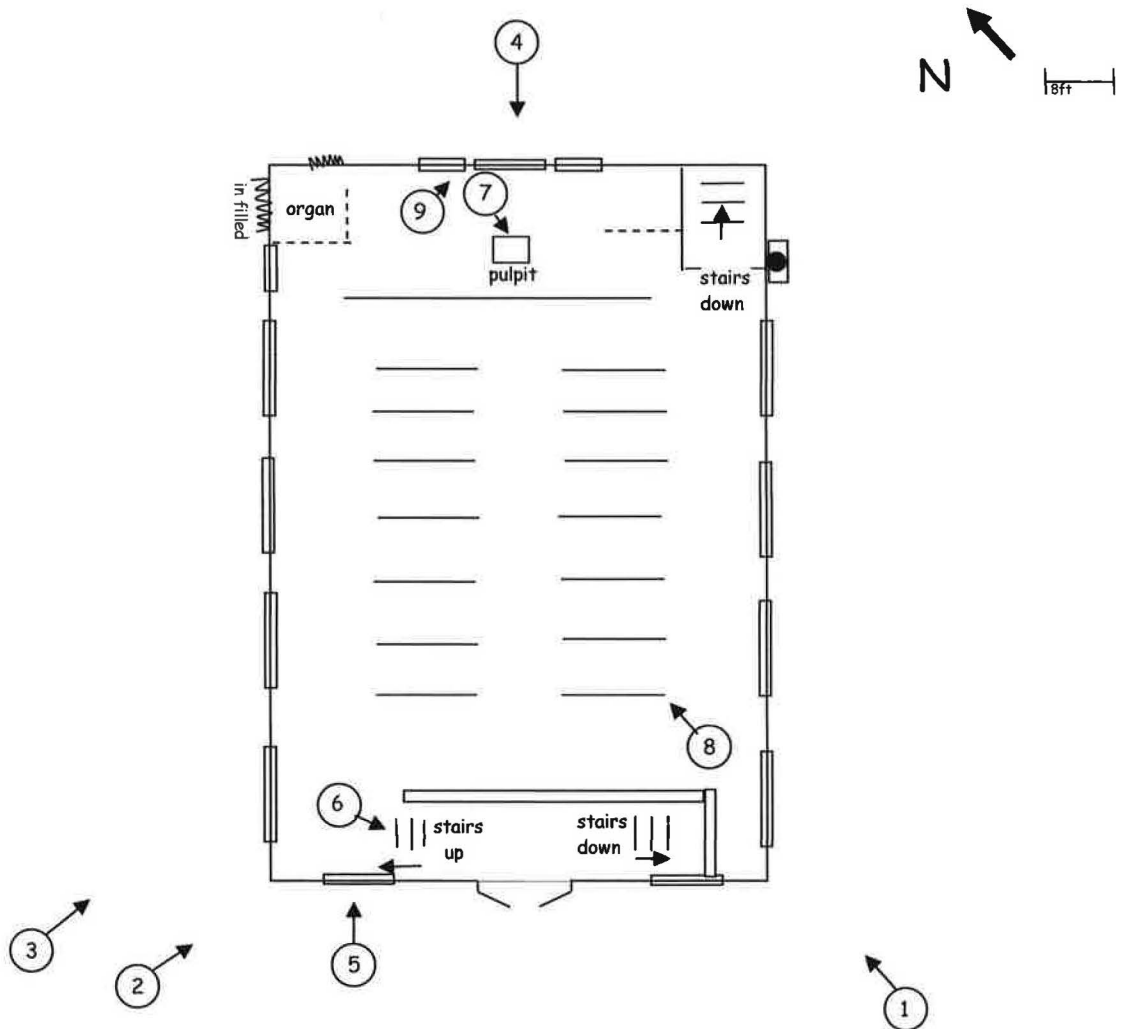
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Floor Plans & Photo Keys (sketch plans by Tallgrass Historians LC, 2013, not scaled)

MAIN LEVEL



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Photograph Label Information

Nos. 1, 2, and 7 are written on the photographs; Nos. 3, 4, & 5 share information.

3. Tallgrass Historians L.C., Jan Olive Full
4. December, 2011; March 2013
5. n/a (digital files)
6. Photograph #1: Exterior, SW façade and SE side, looking N
Photograph #2: Exterior, SW façade and NW side, looking E
Photograph #3: Exterior, NW side and SW façade, looking E
Photograph #4: Exterior, NE rear, looking SW
Photograph #5: Exterior, detail of façade window, looking NE
Photograph #6: Interior detail of front entrance, looking S
Photograph #7: Interior of main level from organ corner, looking SW
Photograph #8: Interior of main level from back of pews, looking N
Photograph #9: Interior, main level, of rear wall windows, looking NE
Photograph #10: Interior lower level (basement) of fellowship meeting hall, looking SW

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Additional Photographs



1931 photograph of the cornerstone ceremony (Courtesy of Bethel AME Church)

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Circa 1910 photograph of the former Bethel AME Church with a large group of women and two men (Courtesy of Bethel AME Church)

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Potential Design Inspiration (see Section 8 text)



St.-Martin-in-the-Field, London, UK (1722-1726)
Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Martin-in-the-Fields on 23May2013

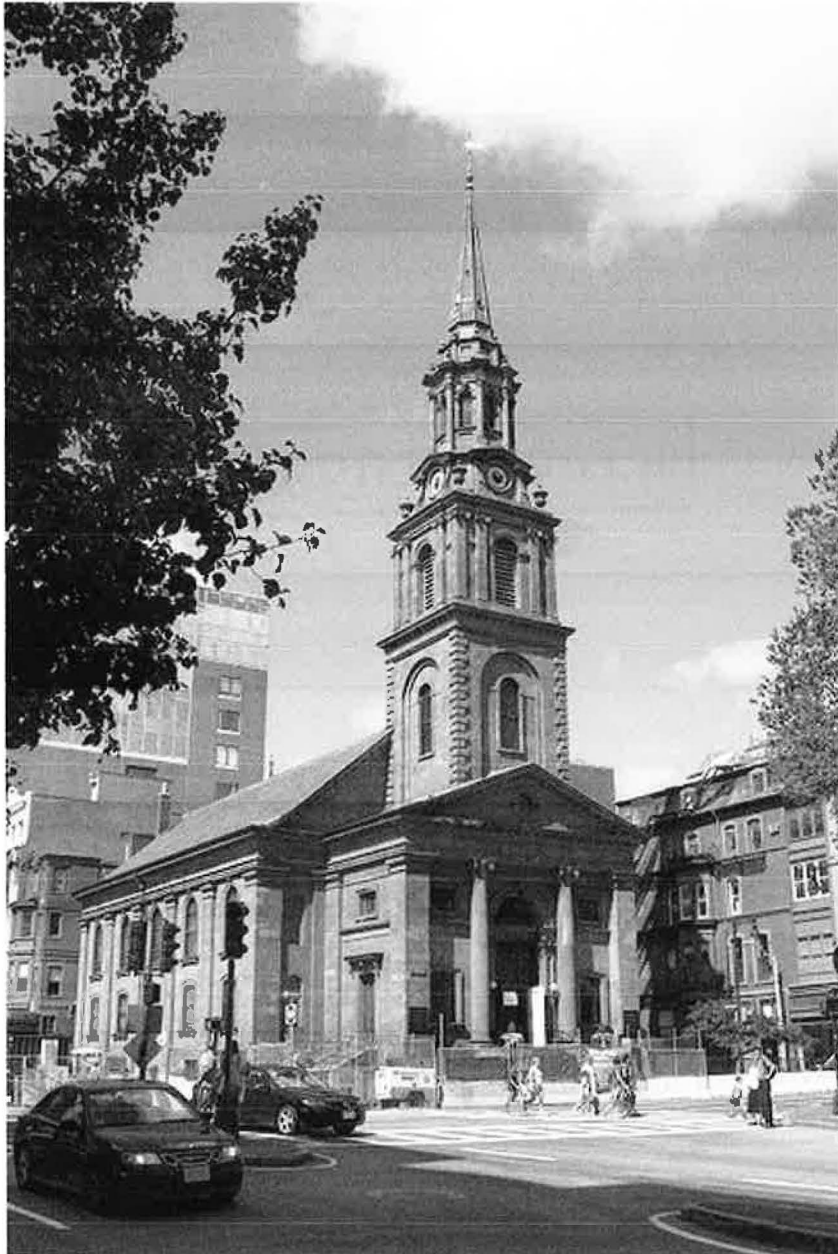
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Arlington Street Church, Boston (1859-1861)

Source: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Arlington_Street_Church,_Boston_MA.jpg
on 23May2013

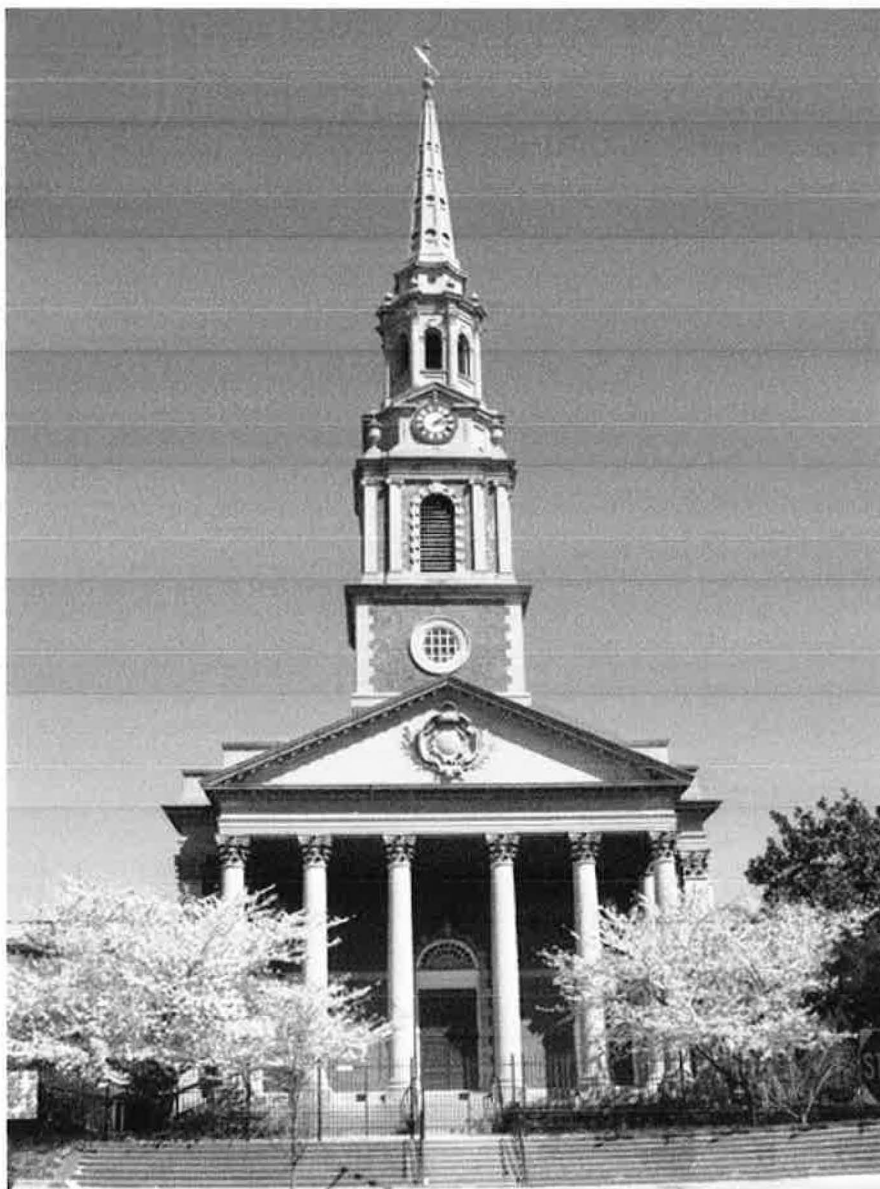
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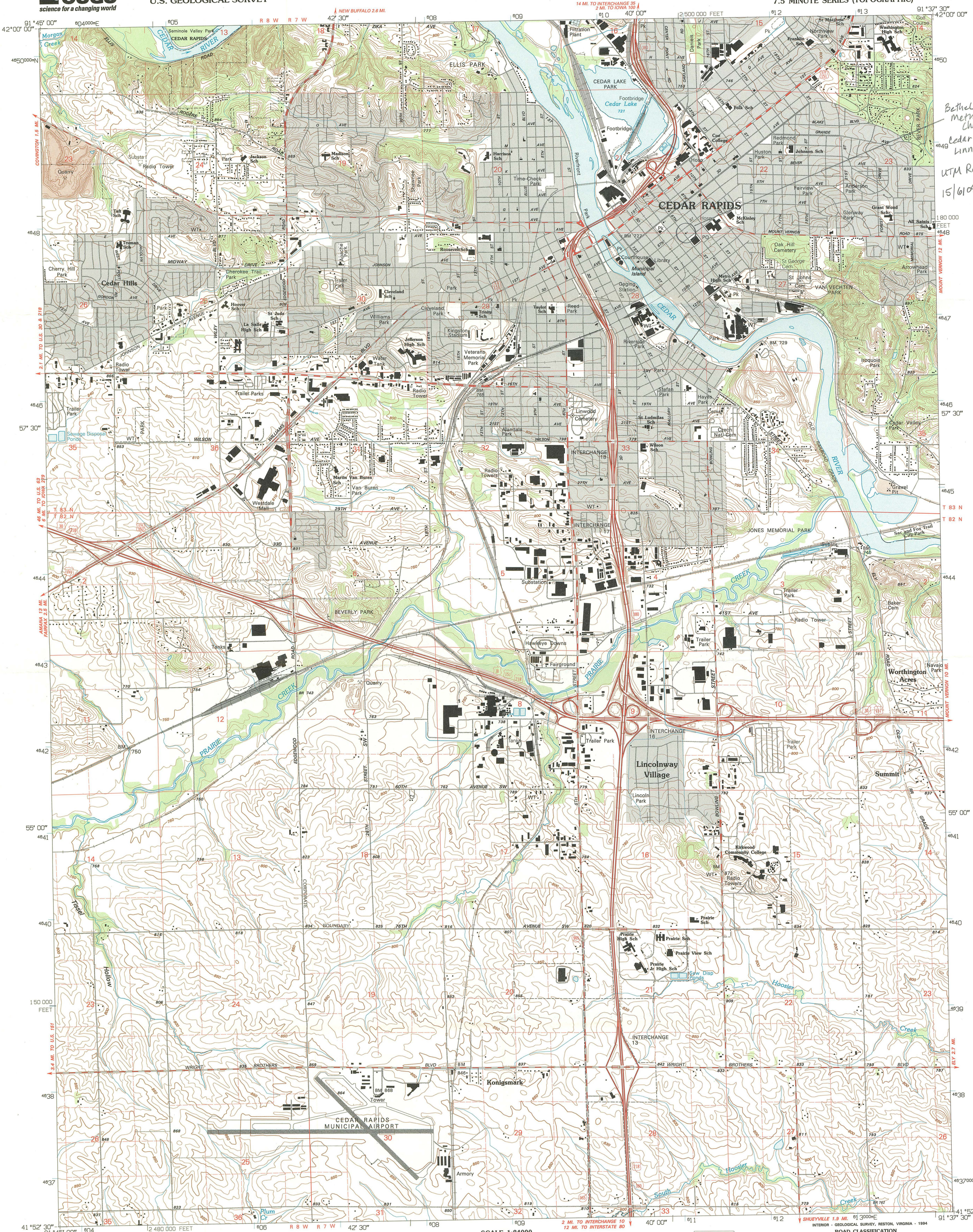
All Souls Unitarian Church, Washington, D.C. (1924)

Source: <http://www.religionnews.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/thumbRNS-WORSHIP-HOUSES042413b.jpg> on 23May2013



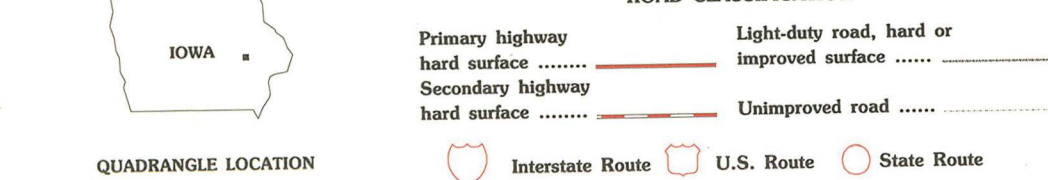
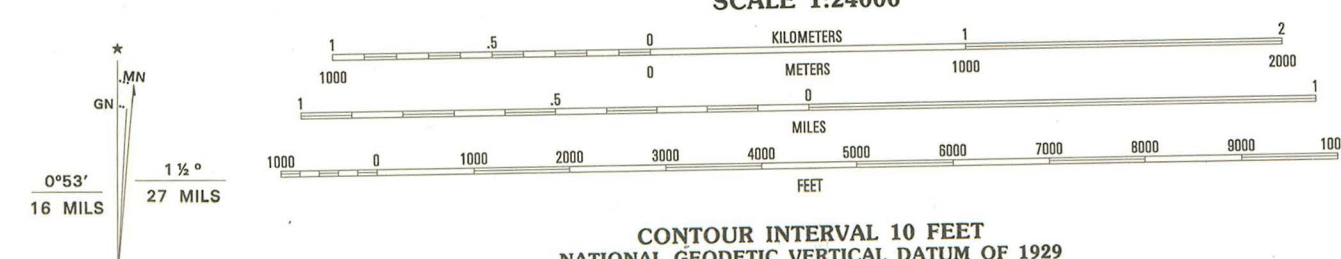
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U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

CEDAR RAPIDS SOUTH QUADRANGLE
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7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)



*Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church
Cedar Rapids, IA
Linn County, IA
UTM Reference:
15/610999/4648161*

Produced by the United States Geological Survey in cooperation with State of Iowa agencies. Control by USGS and NOS/NOAA. Topography by photogrammetric methods from aerial photographs taken 1965. Field checked 1967. Revised from aerial photographs taken 1990. Field checked 1992. Map edited 1994. Universal Transverse Mercator projection. 10,000-foot grid ticks: Iowa coordinate system, north zone 1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks, zone 15, shown in blue 1927 North American Datum (NAD 27). North American Datum of 1983 (NAD 83) is shown by dashed corner ticks. The values of the shift between NAD 27 and NAD 83 for 7.5-minute intersections are given in USGS Bulletin 1875. Gray tint indicates areas in which only landmark buildings are shown. Fine red dashed lines indicate selected fence and field lines where generally visible on aerial photographs. This information is unchecked.



QUADRANGLE LOCATION

1	2	3	1 Shellburg
2	3	4	2 Cedar Rapids North
3	4	5	3 Marion
4	5	6	4 Fairfax
5	6	7	5 Hiattman
6	7	8	6 Amann
			7 Swisher
			8 Ely

CEDAR RAPIDS SOUTH, IOWA
41091-H6-TF-024
1994
DMA 7667 I NW - SERIES V876

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, DENVER, COLORADO 80225 OR RESTON, VIRGINIA 22092 FOR SALE BY U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, IOWA CITY, IOWA 52240





BETHEL
African Methodist Episcopal Church
Singing Members Welcome! (1000)
Wed. 7:00 PM
Pastor: REV. WILLIAM C. PERKINS (1952)

512

BETHEL
A.F.M.E. CHURCH



BETHEL
AMERICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH
CHURCH SCHOOL 9:30 AM
SUNDAY MORNING WORSHIP 11:00 AM
WED BIBLE STUDY 6:00 PM
REV. WILLIAM C. PERKINS PASTOR



MEMORIAL
BRICK WORKS BROWN, CASE
111
111
111















UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY NAME: Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church

MULTIPLE NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: IOWA, Linn

DATE RECEIVED: 11/01/13 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 11/25/13
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 12/10/13 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 12/18/13
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 13000927

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N
OTHER: N PDIL: N PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N
REQUEST: N SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: N NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

ACCEPT RETURN REJECT 12.18.13 DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

Entered in
The National Register
of
Historic Places

RECOM./CRITERIA _____

REVIEWER _____ DISCIPLINE _____

TELEPHONE _____ DATE _____

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N

If a nomination is returned to the nominating authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the NPS.

CULTURAL AFFAIRS

MARY COWNIE, DIRECTOR
CHRIS KRAMER, DEPUTY DIRECTOR



SUSAN KLOEWER
ADMINISTRATOR



MATTHEW HARRIS
ADMINISTRATOR

October 31, 2013

Carol Shull, Chief
National Park Service
National Register of Historic Places
1201 Eye Street, N.W.-- 8th Floor
Washington, D.C. 20005

Dear Ms. Shull:

The following National Register nomination(s) are enclosed for your review and listed if acceptable.

- Waterloo Masonic Temple, Waterloo, Black Hawk County, Iowa
- Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, Cedar Rapids, Linn County, Iowa
- Waverly Municipal Hydroelectric Powerhouse, Waverly, Bremer County, Iowa
- Sexton Hotel, Stuart, Guthrie County, Iowa

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Foster Hill

Elizabeth Foster Hill, Manager
National Register and Tax Incentive Programs

STATE HISTORICAL BUILDING
600 EAST LOCUST
DES MOINES, IOWA 50319

T. (515) 281-5111
F. (515) 242-6498

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