

Scope and Content

1. GENERAL RECORDS

There are three record books, two large and one smaller, of the sort manufactured as official church registers.

The Historical Record (1760-1784) of the first volume is especially valuable because of the transcription of Richard Allen's autobiography. Also, the sharp distinction between probationary and full membership enforces the felt seriousness of the religious commitment.

The second volume has a well-kept record of marriages (1890-1895), sociologically important because of its notation of employments. Also under baptisms an entry indicates a Baptist-like option for immersion for those desiring it.

Unfortunately these volumes give the impression of expensive books not used fully or consistently.

2. MINUTES OF THE TRUSTEES and CASH BOOKS

The trustees, managing the property of the church, receiving and paying out, cannot vie for interest with their steward counterparts. However, as materials for the kind of sociological-economic studies in vogue today, the Minute Books and Treasurer's Books have their special value. From the beginning these books, with small exception, were well-kept in a clean, sometimes finely expressive hand. It is worthy of note that the first receipt book dates from 1832, the year after Bishop Allen's death. The fledgling church after the passing of its founder stood at the beginning of a new era.

3. CASH BOOKS and LEDGER pertaining to the Trustees

4. BOOKS RELATING TO LEADERS AND CLASSES

Minutes of the Corporation, of the Board of Stewards, of the Official Board, of the Quarterly Conference.

The presence of class books (i.e., lists of classes, their leaders and members) of dates to 1901 seem to show that the class system remained relatively intact at Bethel Church later than in many other churches. In fact, the rise of Christian Endeavor (see Other Activities) after 1902 would seem a substitutionary activity. However, since the conduct of the religious life of the church remained vested in the active membership, the Minutes of the Stewards, Official Board, Quarterly Meeting and of the Corporation show these groups functioning earlier, answering to the same problems, whether the preacher's salary, the Communion wine, or money for the indigent.

5. SPECIAL ORGANIZATIONS and ACTIVITIES

The records of these organizations include much socially suggestive material. For example, the minutes of the two early benevolent societies, one, a burial society (men), the other, for insurance money in sickness (women), present striking attempts at self-help through voluntary organizations.

The minutes of the two "trial books" show attempts to enforce the principles of the Discipline in matters both of sex, and morality and fair dealing upon those who by membership had professed to accept them. A last trial apparently was held in 1895. None of these records show rancor, and no doctrinal points are raised.

That the Sunday School had its rolls is not surprising; the catalogue of its library, on the other hand, shows it in a progressive phase.

The rise of Christian Endeavor coincides with the same development on a huge national scale throughout Protestantism in the early part of this century.

Perhaps the best guide to the special organizations of the church is provided by the Book of Membership: "Classes, Circles, Auxiliaries, Alter Guild, Ushers' Association, etc.," c. 1916.

Not to be overlooked is the assignment of ministers from Bethel Church for each week, 1839-1844, for an impressive indicator of the church's growth through the whole Delaware Valley from the preaching stations steadily extended over the area.

6. MISCELLANY

Certain objects and pictures helping to actualize the life of the church seemed worthy of inclusion: Richard Allen's Bible (although broken and disordered) from which he preached, presented to him in 1802 by Thomas Garrett, in whose family it had descended, a small 17th-century quarto, and the "love feast" tickets, two of them signed by Richard Allen.