

Bethel Church

In the 1780s, African American Methodists in Philadelphia and Baltimore walked out of white-controlled Methodist churches to protest discriminatory treatment. In 1816, these independent black Methodists from Philadelphia, Baltimore and elsewhere formally organized themselves as the “African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church.”

In Cambridge A.M.E. ministers encountered resistance when they tried to establish a ‘Bethel Society’ in 1830. But by 1847, Pine Street shoemaker, Simon Brown and other local trustees of the Cambridge “African Methodist Bethel Church” obtained a deed for this property at 623 Pine Street.

The original church apparently was a house that resident Stephen Camper moved here (for the Bethel Society). In 1877, that building burned and within two years a new church was constructed. Today the building looks as it did in 1903 when the new entrance facade with asymmetrical towers was added. In the 1960s, this church was an important meeting place for activists involved in the civil rights struggle.

Pastors Tillery and Barkley presiding over A.M.E. Summer Youth Conference



1952: Summer bible school leaders, Reverend Agatha Chester, Gwendolyn Lyte, Lillian Hollis, and Reverend Alban Barkley



1955: Everybody's birthday celebration in the church hall



Men's chorus with organist, Ida Mae Macer, and director, Lewis Henry