

HISTORY OF ALLEN CHAPEL

The Allen Chapel A.M.E. Church building at Columbus Avenue and Fulton Street was constructed in 1894, at a cost of \$3000. The building was constructed for the Bethel English Lutheran Church. It displays the Gothic Revival style in its pointed, or lancet, door and window openings and the steepness of the primary gable facing Fulton Street and the secondary gable facing Columbus Avenue. The use of rough-cut stone for exterior ornamentation shows the secondary influence of the Richardsonian Romanesque style.

The Bethel English Lutheran Church was a recently chartered congregation that had broken away from an older Lutheran congregation in Manchester. The congregation worshipped in the present Allen Chapel building between 1894 and 1905, when it moved to a larger building at Manhattan and Franklin streets.

The Chartiers Street African Methodist Episcopal Church purchased the building in late 1905, paying \$12,000. The congregation changed its name to Allen Chapel African Methodist Episcopal a short time after the transaction. Allen Chapel used the building as its main worship site for nearly a century. The congregation commissioned a number of improvements to the building during that time. Recently, as a result of the growth of the congregation, Allen Chapel moved its main place of worship to California Avenue on the North Side. The congregation now uses the historic church building at Columbus Avenue and Fulton Street for youth programs.

Detailed information on the history of Allen Chapel is contained in the following report.

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OWNERSHIP

Pre-construction

April 1, 1894 (Allegheny County Deed Book 870: 541): William and Louisa F. Schmitt of Allegheny City conveyed property on which Allen Chapel now stands to the Bethel English Lutheran Church for \$9500. The lot was described as being located at the northeastern corner of Columbus Avenue (then Washington Avenue) and Fulton Street and measuring 48' along Columbus Avenue by 128'9" along Fulton Street to Warner Street. The lot was located in the Sixth Ward of Allegheny City, which became part of the City of Pittsburgh in 1907.

John Schmitt had purchased the lot from Joseph H. Dulles and his wife on June 13, 1849 (Deed Book 154: 383). John Schmitt died while owning the property and was survived by his widow and one son. His son, William Schmitt, conveyed title to the lot to his wife, Louisa F. Schmitt, on March 26, 1888 (Deed Book 588: 516).

Post-construction

October 2, 1905 (Deed Book 1413: 295): Bethel English Lutheran Church of Allegheny City conveyed the church building at Columbus Avenue and Fulton Street to Adam Hoffman of Allegheny City for \$10,000. The building occupied the lot described in the 1894 deed, measuring 48' wide by 128'9" deep.

November 10, 1905 (Deed Book 1430: 548): Adam and Johanna M. Hoffman of Allegheny City conveyed the church building at Columbus Avenue and Fulton Street to the Chartiers Street A.M.E. Church for \$12,000. The building occupied the lot described in the 1894 deed, measuring 48' wide by 128'9" deep. The Chartiers Street A.M.E. Church was subsequently renamed Allen Chapel A.M.E. Church. The church property was made smaller by the widening of Columbus Avenue between 1906 and 1926, when the Columbus Avenue Bridge was constructed. Allen Chapel purchased additional parcels on Fulton Street, adjoining this parcel, in 1981 and 1999.

AGE OF ALLEN CHAPEL

Construction

The Bethel English Lutheran Church had the church building now known as Allen Chapel built in 1894.

Plat maps published in and before 1890, and an 1893 fire insurance map, show that Allen Chapel had not yet been built. The 1893 shows that the lot on which the church was later built then contained a house facing Warner Street and a wash house at the southeastern corner of Fulton and Warner streets. The Bethel English Lutheran Church purchased a lot containing the present site of Allen Chapel on April 1, 1894.

Allegheny City building permit docket shows that on April 14, 1894, the Bethel English Lutheran Church received a permit for the construction of a one-story church building on Washington Avenue (now Columbus Street) in Allegheny City (now the North Side). The church building was to be of brick construction and measure 32'6" wide by 73' deep.

The 1895 Pittsburgh city directory listed Bethel English Lutheran Church at Washington Avenue and Fulton Street for the first time. A 1901 plat map also confirms that the church had been built.

Construction cost

The estimated construction cost of Allen Chapel was \$3000. Costs of other buildings constructed in Allegheny City in the 1890s included:

- 1824 Ley Street, Troy Hill, \$1500, 1904
- 1303 James Street, East Allegheny, \$3000, 1905
- 4017 Northminster Street, Brighton Heights, \$3200, 1895
- 3504 Perrysville Avenue, Observatory Hill, \$3650, 1897
- a carriage house at 705 Brighton Road, Allegheny West, \$4500, 1898
- 1623 Rhine Street, Spring Hill, \$5000, 1897
- 1235 Page Street, Manchester, \$5000, 1898
- 930 West North Avenue, Allegheny West, \$5317, 1895
- 2014 Osgood Street, Fineview, \$5400, 1894
- 61 Riverview Avenue, \$5500, 1898
- 3344 Perrysville Avenue, Observatory Hill, \$8400, 1896
- 940 West North Avenue, Allegheny West, \$10,000, 1895
- 920 North Lincoln Avenue, Allegheny West, \$35,500, 1903

The contractor: Hugh D. Coene

The Bethel English Lutheran Church hired Hugh D. Coene, one of the founders of the church in the same year, to build the church at Columbus Avenue and

Fulton Street. Hugh D. Coene was a carpenter and building contractor who lived on Grant Alley in Allegheny City.

Architectural style

Allen Chapel was constructed in the Gothic Revival style. The building's primary Gothic Revival features are its pointed, or lancet, door and window openings and the steepness of the primary gable facing Fulton Street and the secondary gable facing Columbus Avenue. The Gothic Revival was the most popular style used in the construction of churches in the Pittsburgh area and throughout the northeastern and midwestern United States during the second half of the 19th century. The style was used in the design of massive urban cathedrals; edifices built for working-class congregations such as the founders of the Bethel English Lutheran Church; and small wood frame churches in remote rural areas.

The secondary influence of the Richardsonian Romanesque style is shown in the use of rough-cut stone for some of the exterior ornamentation of the church building and in the corbels within the primary gable facing Fulton Street. The Richardsonian Romanesque style was widely used in the design of public buildings, middle-class and upper-class houses, and some commercial buildings in the United States between the late 1880s and about 1900. The style was developed in the 1870s and 1880s by Boston architect Henry Hobson Richardson. In Pittsburgh, Richardson designed the Allegheny County Courthouse and Jail (1884-88) and Emmanuel Episcopal Church at the corner of West North and Allegheny Avenues in Allegheny West (1885-86).

Known records do not identify an architect who is credited with design of Allen Chapel.

Widening of Columbus Avenue

Fire insurance maps indicate that the 1200 block of Columbus Avenue was widened to its present width between 1906 and 1926, apparently in association with the construction of the Columbus Avenue Bridge. Properties on the southern side of the block were not affected, but properties on the northern side, including the Allen Chapel lot, lost approximately 30' in the widening.

Comparison of the 1906 and 1926 maps shows that the street widening caused Allen Chapel to lose its yard, which had extended 30' or more from Columbus Avenue to the southern exterior wall of the church. The maps also indicate that a number of houses on the northern side of the block were moved back on their lots in association with the widening project.

BETHEL ENGLISH LUTHERAN CHURCH

Local historical records provide information on Bethel English Lutheran Church, which had Allen Chapel constructed in 1894.

The earliest European-American settlers in Western Pennsylvania, in the mid-18th century, included a number of families of German origin or descent who were members of the Lutheran faith. Over the next several decades German-speaking Lutherans gradually assimilated, and some preferred to attend church services that were held in English rather than in German. The English Evangelical Lutheran Church was founded as a result of this change.

In Pittsburgh, the First English Evangelical Lutheran Church was founded in 1837. German Lutheran Churches were founded in Pittsburgh and Allegheny City around the same time. By 1876, the church (now First Lutheran Church at 615 Grant Street) was one of at least five English Lutheran congregations in what is now Pittsburgh. Those congregations included Emmanuel English Lutheran Church, on Chateau (then Chartiers) Street in Manchester.

In 1893, as a result of apparent discord within the Emmanuel English Lutheran congregation, a majority of its members left to found Bethel English Lutheran Church. The Bethel English Lutheran Church congregation was formally chartered on March 6, 1894 (Allegheny County Charter Book 20: 144). The congregation's charter members were:

- the Rev. J. Martin Hankey, 189 Franklin Street
- Albert M. Hartzell, a tinner living on Columbia Alley
- Joseph Agens, a laborer living on Marshall Avenue
- Wesley H. Collmer, a salesman living on Chateau Street north of Nixon Street
- Sylvester Holt, a molder living on Warner Street
- Leonard Wallace, a molder living on Laurel Alley
- Hugh D. Coene, a carpenter and building contractor living on Grant Alley, and the builder of Allen Chapel
- William Bardoner, a laborer living at the northwest corner of Juniata and Manhattan Streets
- Charles Graham, an engineer living on Rush Street
- John H. Hains, a painter living on Marshall Avenue

The Bethel congregation commissioned the construction of its building at Columbus and Fulton Streets in April 1894, five weeks after it received its charter. The congregation, originally 51 members, grew to 191 adults and 450 Sunday School students during the remainder of the 1890s. The congregation's growth appears likely to have resulted in the sale of the church property in 1905. The congregation then sold their original church building to the Chartiers Street A.M.E. Church congregation, and moved to a larger building at the southeastern corner of Manhattan and Franklin Streets in Manchester. Bethel English Evangelical Lutheran Church remained at that location until approximately 1960.

CHARTIERS STREET A.M.E. CHURCH ALLEN CHAPEL

The African Methodist Episcopal Church was founded circa 1787 in Philadelphia by Richard Allen (1760-1831), a former slave who left the Methodist congregation to which he belonged and founded a new denomination. The African Methodist Episcopal Church was the first denomination that was founded for an African-American membership. Additional A.M.E. congregations were soon founded in eastern Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania.

The first A.M.E. congregation in western Pennsylvania was New Bethel A.M.E., founded in 1808 in Pittsburgh. The early church weathered adversity, including not only racial prejudice but also the loss of its house of worship in Pittsburgh's Great Fire of 1845. By 1865, what is now the city of Pittsburgh contained four A.M.E. congregations: Bethel, on Wylie Avenue in the Lower Hill District, Allen, on Arthur Street in the Lower Hill; Brown Chapel, near Federal Street in Allegheny City (now the North Side); and the Wesleyan Mission on Lockhart Street in Allegheny City. Pittsburgh directories indicate that during the next decade, additional A.M.E. churches were founded in East Liberty and on the South Side.

Brown Chapel, believed to be the first A.M.E. Church on the North Side, occupied its longtime location at Hemlock and Boyle Streets by 1876. By the later years of the 19th century Manchester, approximately a mile west of Brown Chapel, was home to a small but growing number of African-American families. They included families who lived in the small houses that lined the neighborhood's alleys and other residents who worked for some of the wealthy families living on streets such as West North and Pennsylvania Avenues.

A comparatively small group of worshippers that was a predecessor of Allen Chapel began to hold services at an unknown location in a storeroom on Manhattan Street at some point during the last few decades of the 19th century. The group also worshipped in a paint shop in the area before they found a more suitable site on Chateau (then Chartiers) Street. The church was called the Chartiers Street Mission, suggesting that it may have maintained some affiliation with Brown Chapel at that time.

As a result of the concentration of African-American families in Manchester, the Chartiers Street African Methodist Episcopal Church was founded informally in 1889 and was chartered on March 3, 1890 (Allegheny County Charter Book 16: 89). Allegheny County records list the church's charter members as:

Daniel Dorsey, a laborer living on Warner Street
Joshua Frazier, a laborer living on Warner Street
William H. Robinson, a laborer living on Warner Street
George W. Stevenson, a porter living on Warlo Street
Charles Diggs, a laborer living on Galveston Street

William Miner, a laborer living on Galveston Street
Clarence Brown, a laborer living on Beaver Avenue

The Chartiers Street A.M.E. charter listed additional "subscribers," who included a number of women. The subscribers, together with the charter members, may have constituted the entire adult membership of the church at the time of its charter. They were:

Thomas Charles, Warner Street
James Sliffer, a laborer living on Warner Street
John Gross, Warner Street
William Lucket, a driver living on Sheffield Street
John H. Ridgely, a laborer living on James Street
James H. Robinson, a laborer living on Woods Run Avenue
Joseph Richards, Columbus Avenue
Mary A.B. Richard, address unknown
Mary L. Truman, Warner Street
C.F. Carroll, a laborer living on Manhattan Street
Mrs. E. Chambers and Jennie Chambers, Warner Street
Reeba Meaner, Galveston Street
Esther Lucket, Sheffield Street
Fannie and Estella Diggs, Galveston Street
Lizzie and Jeanie Dorsey, Warner Street
Estella Smith, Belmont Street
George Smith, Belmont Street
Mar (sic) Mayo, Liverpool Street
Mrs. Rev. R.C. Ransom, Chateau Street
Alex Stephenson, Magnolia Alley.

The future Allen Chapel congregation worshipped in a wood frame building that the congregation owned at 1720 Chartiers (Chateau) Street, just south of Columbus Avenue, between 1889 and 1905. In the latter year, the congregation was able to purchase the vacated former Lutheran church building at Columbus Avenue and Fulton Street for \$12,000 (comparable to \$500,000 or more at the beginning of the 21st century). The congregation moved into the building, and shortly thereafter changed its name from Chartiers Street A.M.E. Church to Allen Chapel A.M.E. Church.

Reverend P.A. Scott was the congregation's pastor at the time of the move to Columbus Avenue and Fulton Street. Rev. Scott was pastor when the congregation satisfied its mortgage on Chartiers Street, which helped make possible the 1905 move. He left Allen Chapel in 1906, and was followed by a succession of pastors.

Allen Chapel appears to have prospered, most likely as a result of the expanding economy in the years before the beginning of the Great Depression in 1929. The congregation was able to commission some improvements to the church building, including the replacement of the original gas lighting with electric lighting between 1906 and 1926, as indicated by the 1906 and 1926

fire insurance maps. Other improvements followed, including during the 1954-1964 pastorship of Rev. J.O. Edwards and during the pastorship of Rev. David U. Brown, between 1978 and 1993.

Allen Chapel recently constructed a building on California Avenue, which has become its main worship site. The congregation now uses its church building at Columbus Avenue and Fulton Street for youth programs.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

The following materials accompany this report:

- A copy of part of an 1852 map depicting the North Side
- Copies of parts of fire insurance maps of the area around Allen Chapel, published in 1893, 1906, and 1926, and the 1926 map, updated by the publisher to 1950