

MANHATTAN'S HISTORIC LANDMARKS & DISTRICTS

Bethel African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church

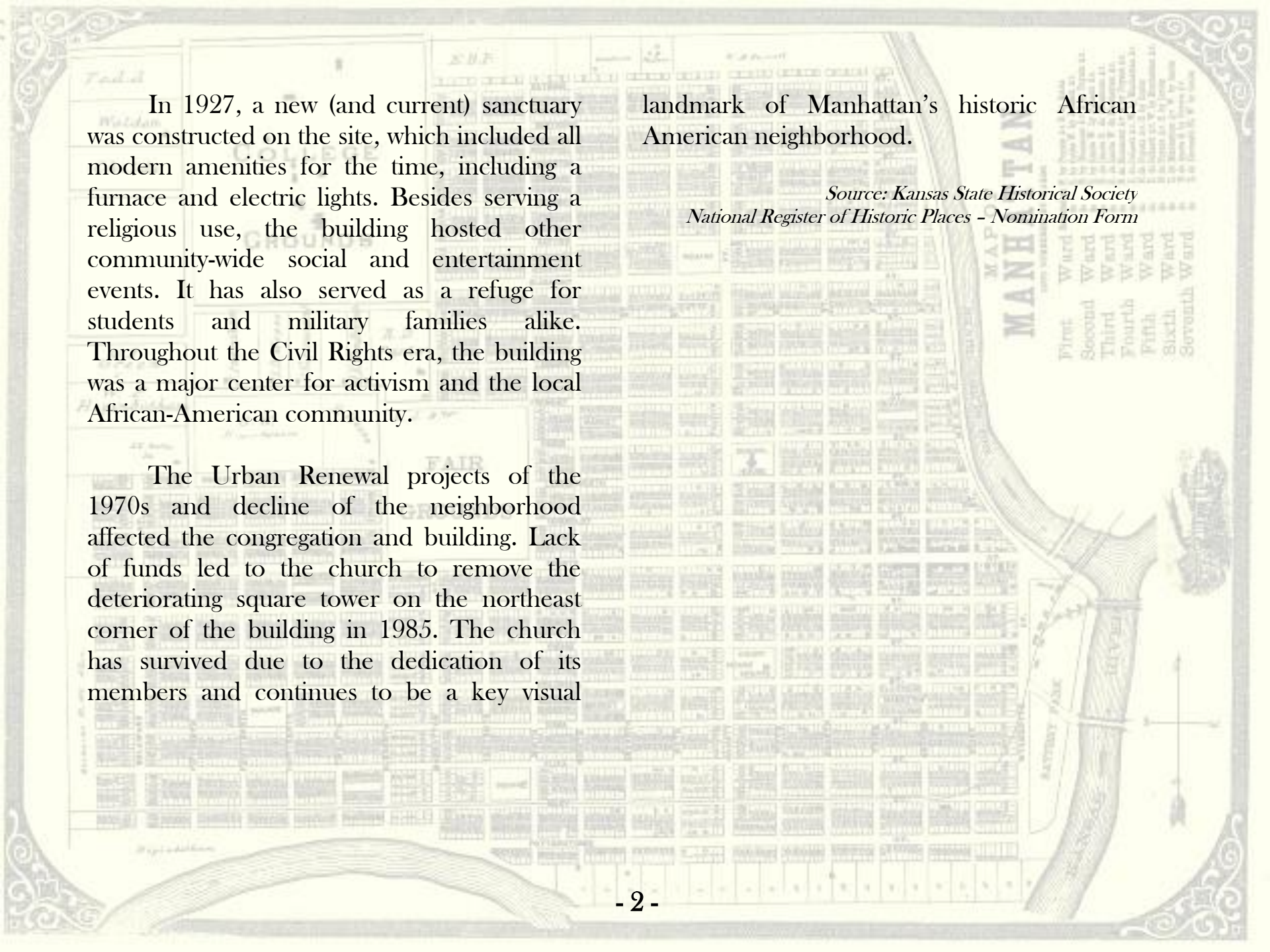


Bethel A.M.E. Church, 401 Yuma Street

The Bethel A.M.E. Church has been an important landmark and community center for Manhattan's African-American community since 1879. The church building

was constructed in 1927 and follows a modified cross plan, however; the congregation's history itself is quite older, with its origins dating back to 1879. The Church was organized after former slaves arrived in Manhattan, a city established by abolitionists in 1855. By 1880, African Americans made up 14% of the Manhattan population, compared to the earlier 3% in 1865.

On April 5, 1880, the congregation purchased lot 425 at the corner of Fourth (then Third Street) and Yuma Streets for construction of a small frame, one floor church. The Church provided seating for 150 members, although there were only 25 members in 1883, the smallest of the three black churches in town. The church was also the only African-American community building recorded in the early Sanborn maps in 1897.

A historical map of Manhattan, New York, showing a grid of streets and the Hudson River to the west. The map is titled 'MAP OF MANHATTAN' and includes a legend for 'First Ward' through 'Seventh Ward'. A compass rose is visible in the lower right corner. The map is framed by decorative scrollwork in the corners.

In 1927, a new (and current) sanctuary was constructed on the site, which included all modern amenities for the time, including a furnace and electric lights. Besides serving a religious use, the building hosted other community-wide social and entertainment events. It has also served as a refuge for students and military families alike. Throughout the Civil Rights era, the building was a major center for activism and the local African-American community.

The Urban Renewal projects of the 1970s and decline of the neighborhood affected the congregation and building. Lack of funds led to the church to remove the deteriorating square tower on the northeast corner of the building in 1985. The church has survived due to the dedication of its members and continues to be a key visual

landmark of Manhattan's historic African American neighborhood.

*Source: Kansas State Historical Society
National Register of Historic Places - Nomination Form*