Jesse David Chariton, MA

Paper/presentation title:

“Addie Graves (1922-2007) and the Creation of Bethlehem Lutheran

Church in Columbus, Georgia.”

Abstract:

Addie Graves (1922-2007) grew up in Wilcox County, Alabama, which at the time was a center of Lutheran African-American missions. After moving to Columbus, Georgia, in the early 1950s, she became the first black member of the only Lutheran church in the city (Lutheran Church of the Redeemer). This is significant because most other churches in Columbus did not desegregate until decades later. It was also prior to any official desegregation action by the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod. She could have joined a different church, but she evidently felt strongly about her Lutheran faith and identity (a product of her early years in Alabama). In 1963, after racial tensions in Columbus had risen and she felt less comfortable at Redeemer, she helped establish Bethlehem Lutheran Church in her neighborhood, seeking to spread the gospel and benefit her neighbors. She did this, not out of an identification with Black Lutheranism, but because of her confessional, theologically conservative Lutheran faith. Her story is one of cultural interchange and social diversity, and provides a lens into Black Lutheranism, a subject understudied by scholars and misunderstood by laypeople.

Brief author bio:

**Jesse David Chariton** is a PhD student at Iowa State University. His research interests focus on nineteenth century US history, and include immigration, race/ethnicity, and religion. He earned a bachelor’s degree from the University of Wisconsin La Crosse, and recently completed his MA in history at Columbus State University on the Race, Ethnicity & Society track. His thesis examined religiously conservative black Lutherans in the South. He has presented papers at the American Academy of Religion and the Society for German-American Studies.