These are the minutes of the annual meetings of the Bethel United Baptist Association of southeastern Missouri, beginning with the organizational meeting in 1816. The Association consists of churches in Crawford, Iron, Madison, St. Francois, and Wayne counties.

A meeting to discuss the organization of the Bethel Baptist Association was held on 8 June 1816 at Bethel Meeting House in Cape Girardeau County, Missouri Territory. The first meeting of the Association was the following September. Seven churches sent representatives: Bethel, Ty-wappity, Dry Creek, and St. Francois in Cape Girardeau County, Providence and Barrens in Ste. Genevieve County, and Belleview in Washington County. Isaac Sheppard was elected moderator of the first meeting; Thomas Bull was clerk. Other prominent moderators in the early years included Wingate Jackson, Thomas O’Bannon, William Polk, and Felix Redding.

There are no minutes for 1826-1833. The designation as a “United” Baptist association first appeared in the minutes of 1834. There were no meetings during the Civil War. The Association reconvened in 1865 and has met annually to the present. Since 1952 it has met at Bethel Tabernacle at Roselle in Madison County, Missouri. In recent years the Association has consisted of twelve to fourteen churches in Crawford, Iron, St. Francois, and Wayne counties. The combined membership in 1996 was 1092 individuals in fourteen churches. The largest church is Pendleton, at Doe Run in St. Francois County. Prominent as moderators of the Association in the last twenty-five years have been Robert Graham, Woodrow Hughes, James Lacey, and Mark Sutton.

There are no minutes for the periods 1826-1833 and 1861-1864. Other than those exceptions, the minutes are complete for the entire period 1816-1996. The minutes exist in three forms: the original manuscript minute book, 1816-1994; a typeset, bound volume containing transcripts of the original minutes, 1816-1941; and printed pamphlets of the minutes for distribution to the individual churches, 1933-1996. The minutes include the names of the churches and their representatives, statistical reports on the individual membership of each church, and the “circular” letters prepared for correspondence with other Baptist associations containing both exhortation and teaching on doctrinal matters. A very useful feature of the modern minutes is the section containing the reports of pastors.

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