

## **2016 Report of THE COMMISSION ON ARCHIVES AND HISTORY**

The purpose of the Arkansas Conference Commission on Archives and History is to promote and care for the historical interests of the United Methodist Church in Arkansas, as outlined in The Book of Discipline. The Commission coordinates and oversees its three entities: (1) The Arkansas United Methodist Church Archives/Winfred D. Polk Methodist Archives on the Hendrix College campus in Conway; (2) The United Methodist Historical Society of Arkansas; and (3) The United Methodist Museum of the Arkansas Conference, located in the First United Methodist Church, Little Rock.

Authorized and established by The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, the Commission on Archives and History, supported by apportioned funds, “shall promote and care for the historical interests of the United Methodist Church and its antecedents... [It] shall see that such holdings are available for responsible public and scholarly use... [It] promotes collection and dissemination of information and materials concerning the historic witness made individually and collectively by women, racial and ethnic peoples, and other constituencies” whose voices have been muted in the past. The “Ministry of Memory” helps us learn from our past as we anticipate our priorities for the coming years. It also helps us maintain transparency and accountability across denominational agencies.

In other words, Archives and History is in the ministry of telling stories about people of faith, and it is also in the ministry of listening for and collecting new stories so that all of us may re-tell them. Recently, Rev. Fred Day, General Secretary of the General Commission on Archives and History of the United Methodist Church, reminded us that our archives and our museum are not mere collections of moldy, dusty old stuff. They are “living things, not collections, which tell who we are and what we do. They shape the stories we have to tell.” Stories, since the time of cave men around a campfire, have brought us together and have helped us discover who and whose we are. Sharing stories has inspired mankind to see things in different ways and to try doing things in new ways. Stories have encouraged us to persevere through hardships and disappointments, and they have re-vitalized us when we were burned out. Stories of the Old Testament sustained the Israelites in exile, and vivid parables by the greatest of teachers, Jesus, help us remember what is important in our lives. Today as never before, we need stories of faith and of God-moments to “help bring people to some kind of ‘felt’ experience which plummets them into the love of God” (Fred Day).

Listed below are some of the ways that the Conference can measure the progress of the three areas of ministry these apportioned funds support:

- **Provide quality facilities with trained and enthusiastic personnel**

Open to the public every Thursday and by appointment, the resources of the Archives in Conway are available without charge to anyone wishing to do research on topics related to the United Methodist Church and its predecessor organizations. Two archivists work independently and together to assist researchers, and both archivists are available by phone, e-mail, or appointment to help persons unable to come into the archives during regular hours. Both archivists have prior experience as employees within the Arkansas Conference and are well-versed in the terminology and organizational connections of the United Methodist Church. Also, we are fortunate to have as our museum curator one who has expertise in this special ministry. The Arkansas Conference is one of the few conferences that maintains a museum to preserve and display objects relating to our Methodist history. The Museum, located in First United Methodist Church, Little Rock, is open for walk-in visits every Tuesday and at other times by appointment. This past year the museum board investigated internships to assist the curator at the Museum. Recently, an internship was approved by the University of Arkansas at Little Rock Public History Program, and two graduate students in the UALR program will intern at the UM Museum. After the museum board interviewed candidates for the internship, the first intern was selected, and he began work at the Museum in February 2016. The museum board believes that an intern will add a vital component to our connection with the local university and help expand our outreach into the community. Although the museum managed to find some donors to fund this internship in 2016, it needs Conference funding to continue this program. Our two archivists and our

curator are compensated for part-time work by apportioned funds.

- **Serve the research needs of churches and individuals**

In 2015, the Archives assisted 87 individuals and churches with their requests for information. To prepare for church celebrations, several researchers sought information on their church's history and a list of pastors appointed to their church through the years. Researchers also requested information on such topics as the history of Hendrix College and of Sloan-Hendrix Academy as well as biographical information about a bishop, a family of Arkansas pastors, and several persons who excelled in social and humanitarian endeavors. An inspiring story about discipleship emerged when personnel at the Lighthouse for the Blind in Little Rock began planning its 75th anniversary celebration and contacted the UM Archives for information about its founder, Rev. Jefferson W. "Buddy" Smith, a blind Methodist minister. According to church records, a Rev. Jeff Smith had been recommended for Admission on Trial into the Traveling Connection in the Camden District of the Little Rock Conference. He had been the Camden District Evangelist and the Conference Evangelist. In 1940, with the help of a few friends and a \$100 donation, Rev. Smith established a small shop where blind citizens could obtain employment. The shop was located near the Arkansas School for the Blind where Rev. Smith had attended school. In 1945 when the Ninth Street shop was dedicated, Helen Keller, the outspoken advocate for people with disabilities, attended the ceremony. By the mid-1960s a 16-month campaign to raise funds for a new building resulted in 50,000 contributions from Arkansans. This building at 69th and Murray Streets was dedicated in March 1966, and remains the location of the Lighthouse for the Blind in Little Rock. Smith's obituary lists him as the founder and superintendent of the Arkansas Lighthouse for the Blind from 1940 until his death in 1973. His son, Rev. Dr. Woodrow "Woody" Smith, who died in December 2014, was a United Methodist minister in Arkansas, Louisiana, and Texas. His granddaughter, Rev. Pamela Cicioni, also a United Methodist minister, is currently serving in Rogers, Arkansas. Typically, most of the research requests come from within the state of Arkansas. This year, however, there was a query from a New York Times reporter who was writing an obituary and wanting information about the deceased's father, who had been a Methodist minister in Arkansas.

At the Museum in 2015 there were approximately 240 visitors, with a five-year total of about 1,000 visitors. A significant activity at the museum in November 2015 was participation in the Children's Ministry Forum, a three-day event for children's ministry leaders in large United Methodist congregations. This national conference, sponsored by Discipleship Ministries (formerly the United Methodist General Board of Discipleship), the Large Church Initiative, and the United Methodist Publishing House, chose First United Methodist Church in Little Rock as its venue because of the museum and the historical church setting of FUMC, LR. During the summer curriculum planners from the Forum met with the museum curator and Pam Snider, the event coordinator for FUMC, Little Rock. They planned a formal tour for three groups of 25 each at the Museum one afternoon and also had the Museum open during the Forum. There were visitors from far and wide—Colorado, Wyoming, Kentucky, Missouri, Kansas, Washington, Oklahoma, Tennessee, etc. In addition, the curator led a well-received session for the confirmation class at FUMC, Little Rock.

- **Provide access 24/7 through a user-friendly website and a Facebook page**

An attractive and easy-to-use resource, the new website, [www.arkansasumcarchives.com](http://www.arkansasumcarchives.com), reaches out 24/7 to all readers with internet access. In 2015 there were 3,722 visits to the website, with 849 visits to the site in December alone. Maintained by the archives, it contains information pertinent to the Conference Commission on Archives and History, the UM Archives, the UM Museum, and the UM Historical Society. To date, our archivists have scanned and posted to this website issues of the Arkansas Methodist newspaper from 1884-1909, several documents and books on the history of the Methodist church in Arkansas and on the Evangelical United Brethren Church; an index to the Little Rock Conference appointments from 1820-1990; and the North Arkansas Conference Journals beginning with 1914. In addition, the site offers links to print and video resources on the Wesley family, the United Methodist Church and its predecessor organizations, the archives of other United Methodist Annual Conferences, and the General Commission on Archives and History. Lori Lemley, a volunteer, designed a website for the Museum, and it is nearing completion. Also, the curator maintains a Facebook group, "Arkansas United Methodist Museum." She regularly posts photos of works in the museum collection and writes a short article on each posting. Each post has been well received by group members. The museum board is working to make the Museum more user-friendly in every way possible, and it is looking at ways to reach out from the Mu-

seum to take our story into the community.

- **Utilize up-to-date equipment to facilitate delivery of information in a timely and professional manner**

Another measure of the progress of this ministry is the creative application of up-to-date computer and scanner equipment for rapid retrieval and delivery of professional-looking copies of documents. For example, using an iPhone or iPad, the archivists present requested material in a digital format and deliver it, via e-mail, quickly and at low cost to the Archives. Last year the Archives purchased a Minolta color copier which is used to scan and reprint documents and pictures in color to make superior copies on acid-free paper for archival preservation.

- **Engage in a major digitalization project**

A significant measure of progress is the digitalization of the Arkansas Methodist newspapers from 1884 to the present, an ongoing project which must be accomplished before the crumbling paper issues completely disintegrate. Because outsourcing the scanning was very slow and very costly, this project has gained momentum since the purchase last year of an “Image Access BookEye Profession” 4 VIA book scanner. Now the archivists themselves can scan these fragile, old papers, and the project can move along faster. We are indebted to the Winfred D. Polk Charitable Trust through the United Methodist Foundation of Arkansas for the gift of this state-of-the-art scanner. By owning the scanner in the Archives, rather than out-sourcing the newspaper job, the archivists can save the Conference around \$40,000 in scanning costs and use the new equipment for additional projects as well.

- **Educate and inform the public**

The three agencies under the Commission work together to bring educational events and publications to the public. One outreach of the Historical Society is its newsletter, Occasional Papers, published once or twice a year on some aspect of Arkansas Methodist history and mailed to 200 members across the state. Also, each spring the Historical Society holds a luncheon with an educational program on a topic related to Arkansas Methodism. In spring 2015, Mr. Randy Frazier, a nationally recognized motivational speaker, prepared a program especially for our historical society and focused on spiritual renewal. In an inspiring, educational presentation called “Time and Opportunity,” he highlighted significant events in the settlement of Arkansas, the trade routes, and the confluence of roads which followed rivers or paths of easiest movement. Then Mr. Frazier brought us to recognize how many of our accomplishments and achievements occurred just when we crossed opportunity, bringing about a catalyst for change in the lives of the people. Churches and “camp meeting” sites were a part of this process of renewal and spiritual growth across our state and our nation. In closing, the speaker challenged the members “to camp at the crossing of time and opportunity to discover treasures in clay vessels.” Such actions can bring about revival in the Historical Society and in our churches. With the power of the Holy Spirit, we can create vital congregations that make disciples of Jesus Christ, who make disciples equipped to transform lives, communities, and the world. This year the Historical Society plans to scan and distribute CDs of Mr. Frazier’s presentation and to use it as a tool for leading congregations to better understand their need for revival and spiritual growth.

From time to time the museum offers special tours and receptions, centered on a particular topic or group of people in the church. For example, the museum has sponsored a reception which recognized African-Americans in our church’s history. Also, the museum hosted a very successful loan exhibition, “Methodism on the American Frontier,” featuring folk art paintings by Rev. John S. Polk, depicting old Methodist church structures. Also to raise awareness of the museum, the museum organization joined several professional associations:

- (1) American Association for State and Local History, and
- (2) the Arkansas Museum Association.

Both the Archives and the Museum had displays at the Arkansas Annual Conference in June. These display areas were hosted by the archivists, the curator, and board volunteers who answered questions and distributed information to Conference attendees. Additionally, they offered, at a nominal charge, CDs which contained the texts of several out-of-print books on Arkansas Methodism.

- **Create an experience, not merely provide information**

A visit to the museum is an ideal way to experience the past... see the hard, wooden pews (no cushions); touch the communion chalice used by faithful brothers and sisters of another era; see photographs of faithful souls

your pastor or your parents talked about when you were a child. In a similar way, we hope pages posted on the web from old Arkansas Methodist newspapers will help readers live a little in the lives of Arkansans of a hundred years ago and generate feelings that “plummet them into the love of God.” These newspapers were the CNN and the internet of another era, as they gave people information on local, state, and national news, especially for rural Arkansans. But these were also the Facebook and Twitter of that me, revealing the lifestyle of pastors and their congregations and showing how our Methodist brethren grappled with the issues of their day - temperance, prohibition, politics, etc. Even ads for products such as miracle medicinal cures give us a glimpse into the lives of our brothers and sisters in an era before antibiotics and modern medicine. But there are also stories in these pages about the ministry of women who saved nickels and dimes from their egg and garden produce sales to send missionaries to rural areas of our state and around the world. There are stories for children about “Father Wesley,” articles for young people who dreamed of a ending Galloway or Hendrix College, and lengthy obituaries, o en weeks a er a death, with inspiring language we could only hope someone might say about us when our me comes. Also, to help people experience their history, the museum board plans to do more temporary exhibits. Two are planned for 2016: (1) a photography competition with a professional group of photographers to capture images of Arkansas churches, coordinated by board member and photographer Bill Burgin; and (2) “Missions with the Needle: Friendship Quilts and Needlework” by Linda Baker, curator. The curator and board agree that changing exhibits will keep people coming back to the museum as well as generate interest for first- time visitors.

- **Generate goodwill and spread the joy that comes from sharing the Story**

Progress may also be measured in the mutual goodwill and the joy of sharing that collaboration on creative projects fosters among all participants. This year several pastors and laity have given us old Conference Journals, six vintage maps of Arkansas, two copies of History of Methodism in Arkansas by Horace Jewell, and other materials related to the Methodist Church in Arkansas. A church in Conway and a pastor in El Dorado invited the archivists to visit their libraries and take anything that the Archives could use. Similarly, pastors and laity have enjoyed sharing treasured mementos with the Museum. In addition, volunteers have continued to interview present-day saints and to be inspired by the oral histories they have recorded for future generations. Reaching beyond the state and the Conference, the Arkansas Commission on Archives and History has worked with Commission personnel in other conferences and in the General Commission as we mutually seek ways to con nue the unique Ministry of Memory and to bring about a spiritual revival in the United Methodist Church.

Like our very own souls, the work of Archives and History will always be a work in progress. Our archivists, our curator, and our volunteers continue to collect documents, memorabilia, and photographs for long-term storage and quality preservation, especially materials about present-day clergy and ministries, local churches, and closed churches within our Conference. In all our work, we take seriously our responsibility to decide what materials are history-making and worthy to belong in the collections to tell the Story. Recent equipment purchases, such as the Minolta color copier and the BookEye book scanner, help us meet our goals and those of the Conference as they extend our glimpse into the lives of the people of faith of our day and of those who came before us. In all we do, we seek to be good stewards of apportioned funds and other gi s and to maximize their usefulness. Therefore, with hearts open to the Holy Spirit, we move into the future with our Mission: “To make disciples of Jesus Christ equipped to transform the world with excellence and passion.” “Come, Holy Spirit, come.”

- Information on the Arkansas UMC Archives / Winfred D. Polk Methodist Archives from Marcia Crossman, Archivist (ArkMethodist@Hendrix.edu) or Carole Teague, Archivist (ArkMethodist@Hendrix.edu)

- Information on the UM Museum of the Arkansas Conference from Rev. Dr. Candace Barron, Museum Board Chair (candace.barron@arumc.org)

- Information on the UM Historical Society of Arkansas from Rev. Ron Clark, Historical Society Chair (ronald- 2016 Arkansas Conference Journal clark1510@comcast.net).

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