

UNITED METHODIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Founded in 1855, your Conference Historical Society, in true United Methodist fashion, is part of a connection of organizations collectively engaged in what is termed "The Ministry of Memory." Since 1968, the inception of The United Methodist Church, our Society has worked in harness with our conference's Commission on Archives and History. With our daughter organization, the Strawbridge Shrine Association, we were already working toward acquisition of "the first home of American Methodism," a goal achieved in 1973. We continue in this connectional tradition.

All of us carrying on this ministry felt a great sigh of relief when the most recent General Conference decided not to abolish Commissions on Archives and History and banish it from the mind of the general church in its central Connectional Table. Of course, we only have a quadrennium of reprieve as surely there will be new attempts to restructure our life in 2020. Let us rededicate ourselves to not allowing those proposals to ignore our heritage as United Methodists.

Among the popular contemporary country music artists of our day happens to be the Zac Brown Band who have a little song which comes to mind as we contemplate the Ministry of Memory. It's titled "Keep me in Mind" and the chorus contains these words:

"Keep me in mind
Somewhere down the road you might get lonely
Keep me in mind . . ."

Now, of course, we are fully aware that the lyricist did not have historical study in mind but rather a love relationship with a girl or boyfriend. Nonetheless keeping an open mind to what the Lord has hitherto done for us, keeping it all in mind, may just prove the antidote to discouragement and lack of hope when times for the Church seem tough and lonely. So let's "keep in mind" what we, as your Historical Society, been about together this year.

SHELL LECTURES

The series began in 2015 with a lecture by John Franklin Goucher biographer, Marilyn Southard Warshawsky, a fitting premiere for a series which takes place in a space at Lovely Lane that one enters through what was once the front door to Dr. Goucher's Parsonage. Dr. Warshawsky previewed her most thorough and lively biography, which utilized material in our own manuscript collections and Conference Archives, as well as those at Goucher College and in the General Conference Archives at Drew University.

The author returned to Lovely Lane last spring to launch the publication, "John Franklin Goucher: Citizen of the World." Among Dr. Goucher's many achievements is the opening of church work in Korea. At the 2016 Conference Session, while a delegation of Korean visitors were being recognized, we presented a copy of this book to Bishop Marcus Matthews, who has shown such interest in fostering our relationship to the Korean Church and has made several trips last year (along with Dr. Warshawsky) to share in celebratory events.

The Schell series continued last year with Archaeologist Kirstie Uunila, who had previously done work at the Strawbridge Shrine and Cokesbury College sites. Now the Calvert County Historic Preservation Officer (and a lay member of our Conference), Dr. Uunilla offered a look at her recent work at the Indian Rest site there which produced artifacts showing competing religious identities in an African-American Methodist family after the Civil War.

The Society is in the process of re-envisioning the Schell Lecture Series so that it might become an event of such significance that all who read this Report will not want to miss it. The Lectures are a fitting tribute to a great leader and good friend of the Society, the Rev. Edwin A. Schell.

FRANCIS ASBURY BICENTENNIAL, 2016

As the 200th Anniversary of the death of Francis Asbury dawned, prompted by the plans already set by our British brethren, plans were initiated for appropriate observances here in Baltimore.

Through a wonderful confluence of support and planning (a true meeting of minds and hearts) from the Trustees of the Baltimore-Washington Conference and Lovely Lane Church, as well as the Historical Society, and enabled by the generosity and expertise of the Tegeler Monument Company, we were able to improve the historic signs along the roadside and at the Bishops' Lot in Mt. Olivet Cemetery, and to replace the deteriorated Bishops' Monument at Asbury's grave with a durable granite replica of the original.

At the same time, a portion of the old marble monument was salvaged and placed as a memorial to "Thomas Coke, Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church," who, having been buried at sea, had no cemetery marker. While Mt. Olivet is still facing many challenges of care and maintenance, the Bishops' Lot at Mt. Olivet is now a point of pilgrimage of which we can all now be justly proud.

Sunday, April 3, 2016, was selected for the observance (closest Sunday after the actual anniversary date of March 31). At 11 a.m., commemorative services began at Lovely Lane Church with the sermon delivered by the Rev. Alfred Day, General Secretary of the General Commission on Archives and History of The United Methodist Church. The service was immediately followed by lunch and the opening of a new exhibit assembled by the Conference Archives staff featuring items from a collection of Asbury related manuscripts.

At 3 p.m., we assembled at the Bishops' Lot at Mt. Olivet for brass music, song and prayer, placing of a floral tribute, and the unveiling of the magnificent new Monument. Despite the fact that the speaker, his notes, and all of us seemed in danger of blowing away, we were privileged to share an account of the death and multiple burials of Asbury which made him, "Itinerant Even in Death."

ANNUAL MEETINGS

The (national) Historical Society of the UMC and the Northeastern Jurisdictional Commission on Archives and History met May 24-26, 2016 in Dover, Delaware. The program was excellent with a paper by the new Chair of the Jurisdictional Commission, the Rev. Joseph DiPaulo, on Bishop Levi Scott. A native of Delaware, Bishop Scott is a seminal figure in our own Conference's history, presiding over the 1861 Session which divided over slavery, the first session of the Washington Conference in 1864 and the organization of what would become Morgan State University.

At Dover, we were well-represented by over a half-dozen attendees from Baltimore-Washington. This year, our Jurisdictional Commission meets about as far south as possible, in Charleston, West Virginia, while the Historical Society of the UMC will be hosted by the Western Jurisdiction in Anchorage, Alaska. We are pleased and proud that our Board Member, Rev. Douglas Tzan, who was awarded the quadrennial Jesse Lee Prize for United Methodist History a year ago, will attend the latter meeting.

On September 10, 2016, our Society held its own Annual Meeting at Lovely Lane Church: Baltimore City Station, in the beautiful chapel which is the first space in the Stanford White - John Goucher designed building opened for use in 1885. As part of the meeting, the Society received a first-hand report from John Strawbridge, our vice-president and also the Lay Leader of the Lovely Lane Congregation, regarding his trip to England at the invitation of the British Conference to participate as a speaker at their observances of the 200th Anniversary of Francis Asbury's death. He discovered that our British Cousins are almost as much interested in his being a direct descendant of Robert Strawbridge as in Francis Asbury!

In 2017, on Saturday, September 16, we will hold our Annual Meeting on the Emory Grove Campground at Glyndon in Baltimore County, which was founded 150 years ago. We invite you all to this gathering for fellowship, food, and celebration of both the camp meeting tradition and of the great personality after whom Emory Grove is named. Financial support of our work has continued to be a constant concern. The Society's Finance Committee has met regularly in an effort to stabilize and grow available funds—especially with a goal of recouping resources depleted during last year's Asbury Bicentennial and the Annual Conference's staff reductions four and a half years ago. This will be an ongoing project. Of course, the only real solution to this challenge is increased numbers in the modest basic memberships in the Society. Gentle reader, are you a member of your Conference Historical Society?

OTHER OBSERVANCES

On June 11, the Conference Historian, in the guise of Bishop Asbury, participated in "Colonial Day" with our daughter organization, now all grown up and on her own, the Strawbridge Shrine Association. He also participated in that Association's Annual Meeting on Oct. 15, presenting a paper on the relationship of Robert Strawbridge and Francis Asbury. On New Year's Eve, 2016, we were all deeply saddened by the sudden death of the Shrine Association's president, Rev. James F.W. Talley. A tireless promoter of Methodist memory and advocate for the work of the Shrine, Jim will be sorely missed.

On June 25, 2016, it was the joy of the President of the Historical Society to share with the Ruckle family in placing a renewed monument on the grave of Thomas Coke Ruckle, who painted the famous "Ordination of Francis Asbury." The original painting was destroyed in 1904 during the Great Baltimore Fire, but survives for us in the form of a magnificent engraving. Each year, this family holds a reunion which includes a ceremony at Mt. Olivet Cemetery where they are systematically restoring their lot.

The Ruckle family were Germans from the area called the Palatinate who moved to Ireland and then to America. Part of the family settled in New York where the redoubtable Barbara Ruckle Heck inspired the first Methodist preaching in that city and the founding of John Street Church. Another part of the family settled in Baltimore and were members of Lovely Lane: Baltimore City Station, and members of the extended Ruckle Family are buried in various parts of Mt. Olivet.

MUSEUM AT LOVELY LANE

During last year's summer session of the Ecumenical Institute of Theology of St. Mary's Seminary and University, the Conference Historian taught a course, "The Reformation at 500," coordinated with the Center for Catholic and Evangelical Theology national conference held at Catholic University of America in D.C.

While pre-dating the Methodist Movement, we might consider the implications for our heritage of the upcoming observance of the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther's 95 Theses on October 31, 2017. We will be mounting an exhibit this fall in the Museum at Lovely Lane, "Methodism and its Discontents," exploring the connections and contentions within Methodism and between Methodists and other churches of the Reformation.

We are grateful to Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal Church in Washington, for their 2016 "Christmas gift" of five high quality display cases, acquired by them from the Folger Shakespeare Library. The cases will require additional work on our part to make them suit our needs, but we could not have acquired cases of this quality without the good offices

Metropolitan AMEC and the superb support of the Conference Stewardship Administrator, Pat Thomas, in getting this gift to us.

This leads to a concluding commendation of the robust work in the Museum and especially how God has given us great leadership in the persons of Robert Shindle, our Conference Archivist and Director of Archives and History, and in Joyce White, our Archives and History Associate.

Most recently, they have been moving the contents out and back into the archival vault and reconfiguring and installing new shelving and receiving the gift of new display cases, but this has not stopped them from mounting new exhibits as portions of the museum are returned to its original purpose as display space.

It takes each member and officer working together, but when we do it is surprising what we have accomplished this year.

As the Zac Brown Band tells us:

"Well the world can be real tough

Find shelter in me . . .

Keep me in mind

Somewhere down the road you might get lonely

Keep me in mind . . ."

Just remember, keep in mind, what the Lord has done for the generations before us and still accomplishes in our days.

JOIN YOUR HISTORICAL SOCIETY!

Emora Brannan, President & Conference Historian