

TEXAS UNITED METHODIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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Editor's Letter by Wm. C. Hardt

When many of us first became interested in Methodist history and archives, our sources were fairly straightforward. We went to libraries, searched in card catalogs, and then went to the stacks for the *Journals*, diaries, memoirs, newspapers, and denominational publications we needed. We might then go to the microform or microfiche readers where most of the denominational newspapers were available. You could tell a researcher by the file boxes full of 3" x 5" index cards onto which she or he had copied the nuggets of knowledge that would eventually result in a publication. When I was still a young historian, xerography became common, and instead of those file boxes of index cards, I went to the library with my pockets full of coins and file folders into which I put photocopies of the sources. That solved a big problem—trying to read what I had scribbled on those tiny cards.

Those days are gone too, swept away by the digital revolution. I suppose some library somewhere may still have an old-fashioned card catalog, but they are probably as rare as slide rules in the engineering labs.

In 1991 I wrote my vision for the history classroom of the future, "There is also instant access to libraries, museums, and archives all over the world. . ." (Wm. C. Hardt, *A Shared Past: Texas and the United States since Reconstruction*, Texas State Historical Association, 1991)

That day arrived sooner than I could have guessed. Readers of this column are certainly aware of the many digitized resources available via the internet including newspapers, annual conference *Journals*, books, and so on.

The digital revolution, though, has come with a steep price. Many of the annual conference and local church records exist only in electronic format. To use one example, for the archivist, the local church membership records are gold. They record the life of the church through accessions, transfers, deaths, and so on, and are extremely valuable. Most churches ditched the old ledger book for membership records long ago and use computer programs for the same purpose. I must admit that the church membership software programs are very valuable. They integrate the membership, visitation, and stewardship records wonderfully—but what will they leave behind for the historians of 2064?

Our General Commission on Archives and History has recently provided help for the archivists and historians in managing electronic records. It is available (electronically of course) at

http://s3.amazonaws.com/gcah.org/Resources/Guidelines_Publications/Digital_Records_GCAH.pdf

The *Guidelines for Managing Electronic Records, 2013 Edition*, is not easy reading, but it is essential reading. I encourage your careful consideration of the challenges of archival preservation in the digital age.

News From Bridwell Library

If you are in the Dallas area, you should consider dropping by Bridwell Library at Perkins School of Theology, SMU, to view the current exhibition, *Presidential Documents at Bridwell Library*. Our friend and TUMHS Board Member, Timothy Binkley has assembled an interesting collection of presidential materials from Bridwell collections.

The earliest item in the exhibit is an autograph letter from Millard Fillmore to a Methodist preacher. The exhibit also includes materials from more recent presidents including a photograph of President Dwight Eisenhower with Bishop W. C. Martin. As with other Bridwell exhibits, it can be accessed on line at <http://digitalcollections.smu.edu/all/bridwell/PresidentialDocuments/index.html> Tim, we are all grateful for your work on this project.

In addition to the exhibits, Bridwell hosts events throughout the year that TUMHS members may find interesting. Consult the Bridwell website for information about such events such as the upcoming Celebration of the Czech Memorial Torah Scrolls on Sunday, February 16 at 2:00 p.m.

The Bridwell staff is also most helpful. I encourage you to visit their website often and take advantage of the digitized resources.

Historic Church Pictures

The previous issue asked readers to identify the historic church below.



The correct answer is Bay's Chapel UMC in Montgomery County near Richards. It is about 25 miles southwest of Huntsville in the West District of the Texas Conference.

Bay's Chapel goes back to 1851 when settlers from Tennessee built a log structure that served as both church and school.

This building was built on land donated by W. H. Bay. It was dedicated in 1899. This building may seem rather plain and austere, but you should see the interior! It is a masterpiece of vernacular use of available resources. As you probably guessed, Bay's Chapel is surrounded by a pine forest, and the interior makes full use of unpainted pine for not just the structure, but also the pews, altar, communion rail, etc.

The church is pastored by our friend Rev. Eric Dehmer, whom some TUMHS members will remember from his Robert

Alexander reenactment at the 2011 Annual Meeting in Chappell Hill.

Here is the next Texas Methodist church for you to identify.



From the General Commission

The General Commission on Archives and History of the United Methodist Church has redesigned its website.

The GCAH and its website have to serve a diverse audience. Its main task is preserving the official records of the various boards, agencies, and other official bodies of the UMC. It must also provide support for the annual conference Commissions on Archives and History, Annual Conference Archivists. It also provides research help for both amateur and professional historians and genealogists.

It must be difficult for a website designer to create a site for persons of such varying levels of knowledge. I think the redesigned site goes a long way to satisfying the needs of the various constituents. Visit <http://www.gcah.org/> And see if you agree.

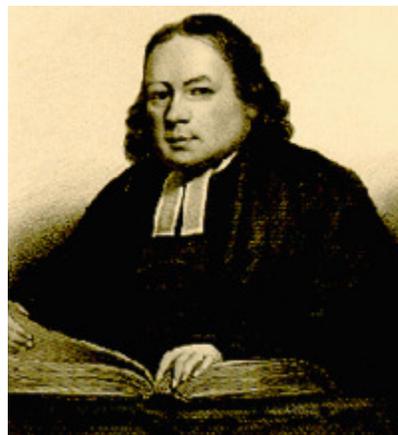
I think you will be pleased with what you find, including resources to help your

church celebrate Black History Month this February and Heritage Sunday this May.

The 2014 Heritage Sunday theme is

"The Church's Heritage in Mission: Remembering the 200th Anniversary of the Death of Thomas Coke"

Most of us remember Thomas Coke (if we think about him at all) as half of "Cokesbury." Thomas Coke deserves to be remembered for more than that. While Francis Asbury never returned to England, Coke made numerous voyages and promoted Methodist missions in the West Indies, Canada, France, and Sierra Leone. He was en route to Ceylon when he died on May 2, 1814.



Heritage Sunday resources available at gcah.org by March 1.

Dues

It's now 2014, and that means it's time for many of you to remit your dues to our Treasurer, Stewart Caffey (see address below).

Many of us are used to remitting our dues at the annual meeting, but that meeting will not occur until October. We don't want to wait that long so send them in now!

Annual Meeting

The Annual Meeting of the TUMHS will not be held in March as customary. It will be October 8-11 in conjunction with the Jurisdictional Convocation of Archivists in San Antonio.

Please do not be confused. Although the official title of the gathering is "Convocation of Archivists," it is also for anyone interested in the history of Methodism in Texas and the Southwest.

The local organizers of the Convocation have put together an outstanding program. Program, housing, and registration details will appear in a later issue.

AWARDS

Don't forget the two awards sponsored by the TUMHS.

The **Kate Warnick Award** is awarded to the best local church history published in the preceding year. There are three categories for churches with different membership sizes.

The **Walter Vernon Award** is for student essays relating to Texas Methodist History. This prize carries with it a cash prize, a spot on the annual meeting program, and possible publication in the *Heritage Journal*.

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Membership/Registration Information

The good works of the TUMHS including the Warnick Award, the Walter Vernon Student Essay Award, the Annual Meeting, the publication of the *Heritage Journal*, and lifting up the UM heritage depend upon the dues and gifts of its members. Your dues and gifts are used exclusively for these programs. We pay no rent, utilities, or insurance. Board members are not reimbursed for travel expenses. The membership benefits are a real bargain. The *Heritage Journal* alone is worth the \$20 annual dues. Please send your dues and gifts to the address below.

Name(s) _____

Address _____

Email _____ telephone _____

Annual dues

\$20 _____

(If you wish, you may join at the lifetime dues rate of \$300)

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