This summer my wife and I took two of our grandchildren on a historical pilgrimage in observance of the 50th anniversary of the Voting Rights March from Selma to Montgomery. We visited the Civil Rights Memorial at the Southern Poverty Law Center and ran our fingers across the inscribed names of the martyrs who died in the struggle. We saw Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, the only church Dr. Martin Luther King ever served as senior pastor. We visited the Lowndes County National Park Interpretive Center where once stood a tent city, occupied by tenant farmers evicted because they dared to register to vote. We saw the monument where Viola Liuzzo, an Anglo mother of five from Detroit was killed because she was driving some of the marchers home. Yes, we also crossed the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma where peaceful protestors were beaten by state troopers and local police. Believe me, I cried more than once as I remembered the courage of the marchers.

Sometimes one learns history from documents, and sometimes one learns history from place. I returned home with a renewed sense of the power of faith communities when they give themselves fully to the Gospel message of redemption and spiritual liberty and also an emotional understanding of the importance of churches in the “transformation of the world.” The sites we visited showed better than books that the movement grew out of churches and succeeded because of the deep spirituality of the participants.

Many of you reading this Newsletter are committed to the cause of historic preservation of church buildings. I returned from my trip this summer with renewed appreciation for the thousands of faithful Methodists who realize that historic church preservation is not about bricks and mortar. We do not save historic churches out of sentimentality. It is about the way that physical objects can transmit an understanding of the events that have occurred in a particular place as nothing else can. Historic churches help us gain renewed faith in the power of congregations to transform lives.

Our heritage does not embrace sacredness of space in the same degree as many other religious traditions. We don’t venerate reliquaries or make pilgrimages to healing sites. Instead, we trace our Texas Methodist roots back to brush arbors and camp meeting sites, temporary facilities which served the purpose for a little while and then were superseded.

Suppose we were compiling a pilgrimage route of historic Texas Methodist churches where inspired congregants created history. Here’s my short list. I’m sure everyone reading this Newsletter could add more.

**Travis Park** in San Antonio where the *Upper Room* originated.
**First Methodist Dallas** where Golden Cross started.
**First Methodist Houston** which held brotherhood banquets to combat anti-Semitism.
**St. Stephen’s in Houston** where the Society of St. Stephen began.
**St. Paul’s in San Antonio** crucial to the civil rights struggle in that city.
**Bering UMC** in Houston that provided healing ministries to HIV positive persons shunned by society.
**La Trinidad** in Fort Worth where Deaconess Eugenia Smith worked among the families of packing house employees.
North Texas Whirlwind Hits Rio Texas Conference Archives  
(Submitted by C.D. Barrington)

A whirlwind of activity led by Tim Binkley, Frances Long and Jean Traster guided a team of Rio Texas Conference Commission on Archives and History members and Conference staff in organizing the long dormant Conference Archives. After three days and over 200 work-hours the room was transformed from an unorganized “dumping-ground” to a functioning archive.

Following the untimely departure of Archivist/Historian, Marta Rose due to health issues, and in the midst of the unification of the Rio Grande and Southwest Texas Annual Conferences forming the Rio Texas Conference, the room became a collection of assorted materials from various donors, closed churches and “space-seekers”. This intensive pre-sort effort revealed a considerable amount of duplication as well as items that were not appropriate for an archive - their removal reclaimed much valuable shelf space. It also set the stage for future efforts for more extensive sorting, cataloguing and filing of the myriad vital historic documents and artifacts.

Among the primary goals of the Commission on A&H is to make the information available to Conference staff, historians and researchers while preserving Conference history.

Left to right:
Freda Barrington, C.D. Barrington: Volunteers
Jean Traster: Former Archivist, South Central Jurisdiction and Central Texas Conference Archivist, Texas United Methodist Historical Society and Polytechnic UMC
Patty Chebultz: Rio Texas Conference Database Administrator & Building Manager
Rev. Valli Blair: Chair, Rio Texas Conference Commission on Archives and History (RTCCAH)
Elizabeth Jimenez: Secretary, RTCCAH
Frances Long: Archivist of South Central Jurisdiction and North Texas Conference Archivist, Bridwell Library at Southern Methodist University

Additional pictures can be seen at:  
https://onedrive.live.com/redir?resid=C5E7DFD2B61441FC!53238&authkey=!AGOTeq1y_bBxqHM&ithint=folder%2c
News From SMU

SMU wrapped up a four-year celebration of its centennial in September, and I am delighted to report on a number of personnel changes, exhibits, and opportunities that will be of great interest to the Texas Methodist historical community.

- Dr. Paul Barton is now Director of the Mexican American & Hispanic-Latino/a Church Ministries Program and Director of United Methodist Regional Course of Study School. He assumed these two positions on July 1. Dr. Barton is both an author and CAH chair.
- Dr. William J. Bryan, III, is now Associate Dean for Student Affairs. He will continue to chair the Kate Warnick Awards Committee. The address for submission of entries will not change. We also know Dr. Bryan as a costumed re-enactor and look forward to his next appearance as some Methodist from our past.
- Dr. Ted Campbell has edited William Stevenson’s Autobiography. It is available online through the Bridwell website.
- Archivist Timothy Binkley has asked me share the exciting news about a exhibit honoring a pioneer Methodist preacher,

The exhibit will be in the Great Hall of Perkins School of Theology from November 16-20.

If you are not familiar with the life of Jose Polycarpio Rodriguez, you are really missing one of the great stories of our heritage. Rodriguez squeezed more adventures into one lifetime than most of us could imagine. I encourage you to attend this exhibit.

On the evening of November 17 there will be a special film and reception. It’s free, but reservations are requested at map@smu.edu

Don’t forget the exhibit.

Early Texas Methodism: 1815-1860 (Co-curators, Tim Binkley and Jim McMillin)

This exhibit will continue until Dec. 21.
Historic Church Pictures

Each issue of the Newsletter has an image of one of our historic churches.

Here is last issue’s image. It is Richland UMC in Navarro County in the Central Texas Conference.

Richland UMC traces its origins to 1847 and its founding by the Revs. J. E. Ferguson and J. G. Hardin, both of whom produced famous sons on different sides of the law--- Governor “Pa” Ferguson and the notorious gunman, John Wesley Hardin. In 1966 the American Association of Methodist Historical Societies designated Richland as the oldest continuously operating congregation in the Central Texas Conference.

Richland was typical of the numerous settlements of the Blackland Prairie. When the Houston and Texas Central Railway established a stop in 1871, farmers could ship their cotton to market. The town prospered. When “King Cotton” was dethroned as the main engine of the Texas economy, the town declined in population. More recent developments, including the construction of Richland-Chambers Reservoir which was impounded in 1987, have brought population back to the area which is about 12 miles south of Corsicana.

Here is the next historic church for you to identify.

Save the Date

Don’t forget the combined meeting of the TUMHS and the South Central Jurisdiction Convocation of Archivists to be held in Lubbock from Oct. 4-7, 2016.

Registration materials, a full schedule, housing information, etc. will be included in the Aug. 1, 2016 Newsletter. In the meantime, put the date on your calendar.
Speaking of Dates... 

As mentioned above, we are celebrating the bicentennial of the first recorded Methodist preaching in Texas. Bridwell’s issuing of William Stevenson’s *Autobiography* in digital form is a great addition to our resources. Thank you Ted Campbell for editing it!

There is another anniversary to celebrate this year.

The Texas Conference was founded on December 25, 1840 in Rutersville, Fayette County. It was organized by Bishop Beverly Waugh who left his home in Baltimore the previous August 4 and made his way to Texas. He attended the Michigan Annual Conference and then presided over the Rock River, Illinois, Missouri, and Arkansas Conferences. The bishop arrived in Galveston on Dec. 5 where he was met by T. O. Summers. After a grueling slog through the mud, they arrived at Austin where Waugh preached in the Capitol on Dec. 20. The following Friday was Christmas Day and also the birthday of the Texas Conference.

The Texas Conference was formed from districts that had been part of the Mississippi Conference so it hit the ground running. In just one quadrennium it was large enough to divide into two—Eastern and Western, and in 1858 its southwestern appointments were broken off to form the parent of today’s Rio Texas Conference. The northern portions of the Texas and East Texas Conferences were split off in 1866.

December 25, 2015 thus marks the 175th anniversary of not just the Texas Annual Conference but also of all five UMC annual conferences lying completely in Texas.

Don’t you think such an anniversary is worthy of celebration? Part of the founding at Rutersville was a celebration of the Christmas Conference of 1784 which created the MEC. Waugh, Alexander, Summers, Fowler, and the others were very much aware of their place in the great stream of Methodist history. Are you?

About a month ago I circulated an idea among a few Methodist history friends that we ought to mark our 175th with some sort of celebration.

My first idea was an open air communion service at Rutersville on Friday, Dec. 25, but the feedback on that idea was unanimous---No! Not on Christmas Day!

Perhaps someone reading this *Newsletter* feels called to organize an event at or near Rutersville. Perhaps it would be better to encourage all local congregations to celebrate it on their own on Sunday, December 27. Let me know your ideas.

Btw: Waugh didn’t get back to Baltimore until February.

This Week in Texas Methodist History Nears Ten Year Milestone

On the first Saturday of January, 2006 I posted the first entry in a blog, *This Week in Texas Methodist History* [http://txmethhistory.blogspot.com/](http://txmethhistory.blogspot.com/)

I have been able to continue posting weekly blogs continuously since then. The one I intend to post for December 27 will complete 10 years. All 500+ entries are archived on the site and are searchable by keyword. You will notice that the site affords the opportunity for readers to post comments.

Thank you for your kind support of this blog.
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