

TEXAS UNITED METHODIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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Editor's Letter by Wm. C. Hardt

In the previous Editor's Letter I tried to make the point that our history is a crucial part of our identity as persons and Methodists. I used examples of historical controversies in the news to make the point. I was gratified by several encouraging responses. Thank you so much for extending the conversation. Events of the intervening three months, especially the Confederate flag controversy have reinforced the idea that one's view of history is hugely important. At the risk of belaboring the point, I would like to continue on the same theme and suggest that, as with many controversies, the most basic difference is one of definitions. In the flag case one side is defining history as "events of the past." The other side is defining it as "the record we create to make sense of the events of the past."

One of the most interesting assertions from several pro-flag letters to the editor was the statement, "You can't change history." Whenever I saw that sentiment, I mentally corrected it to "You can't change the events of the past." Certainly one cannot change the events of the past, but each generation finds different ways of interpreting those events. History is the way we make sense of the events of the past. It is an ever-changing construction based upon an infinitesimal percent of the events of the past—those events which generated some sort of documentary record—no documents equal no history.

Sometimes that change is occasioned by the discovery or release of new documents. Think, for example, of how our historical understanding of the Cuban Missile Crisis changed with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the sudden availability of documents from the Russian archives. More often it is by re-examining known documents with a new perspective. Our history is always incomplete and always influenced by events of the present.

Another common pro-flag sentiment has been, "Let's get rid of this revisionist history and go back to real history." They don't realize that the "real" history they are advocating was the revisionist history of the 1880's or 1920's or possibly the 1950's. It's what they learned as children or adolescents and has remained unchallenged since. That's why our textbook battles are so important. The historical framework one learns as a youth may remain for a lifetime—even when subsequent scholarship shows gross inaccuracy in those interpretations.

Back to Texas Methodist history---What are the basic unstated assumptions that shape our historical consciousness? As I read histories, I find a remarkably stable origin story all the way back to Homer Thrall and Macum Phelan, the first two historians to publish comprehensive histories of Texas Methodism.

It runs like this: Texas was a religious blank slate so the MEC sent three missionaries to bring Christianity. They worked tirelessly to establish churches in the parts of the state settled by immigrants from the United States. Other circuit riding preachers followed the first three, and within just a few years there were enough preachers to form an annual conference. After only four years there were enough churches to form another annual conference. As Texas settlement went westward,

the Methodist circuit riding system was able to evangelize the new settlements better than competing denominations so in the 19th century Methodism was the most prominent denomination.

Have new sensibilities and new scholarship made this interpretation less useful? I think so. The greatest omission in our origin stories is the almost complete lack of the recognition of the role of women in building Methodism in Texas. We also know that enslaved people of color constituted a significant percentage of early Texas Methodists, but with a very few exceptions little documentary evidence remains about their contributions, and if the documents don't exist, they aren't part of our published histories.

I have reached conclusions quite different from Homer Thrall and Macum Phelan. One such conclusion is that Texas was not a religious blank slate. Laity and local preachers had organized themselves into religious groups well before the arrival of Alexander, Fowler, and Ruter. The "big three" came not to evangelize a wilderness, but to minister to pre-existing groups of Methodists who had taken the initiative on their own. The origin story I see is much more lay-centric, democratic, bottom-up, and inclusive. I guess that makes me a revisionist, doesn't it?

Caldwell FUMC Celebrates 175th Anniversary

The Caldwell FUMC will celebrate its Quartoseptcentennial on Sunday, Nov. 15, at 2:00 p.m. The congregation has been in continual service in the Lord's work since the founding of Caldwell in 1840.

The area west of the Brazos and north of the Yegua was well known for its concentration of Methodist activity from the very beginnings of European-American settlement in the area. Methodists will recognize the Addison family name was one of the most prominent in evangelizing the state. They Addison family moved to what is today Burleson County in 1835.

Oscar M. Addison was a member of the Texas, East Texas, and Northwest Texas Conferences, and his sons, Oscar Jr.; James, and John followed their father into the ministry.

The area was also home to Elizabeth Chapel, named for Elizabeth Scott, and organized by Robert Alexander; Cook's Point, a MEC German speaking congregation; and Chriesman UMC, named for Methodist layman Horatio Chriesman who came to Texas in 1822.

The celebration will include a program on the history of Caldwell UMC, recognition of some of the former pastors, and a reception.

Caldwell is conveniently located at the intersection of Highway 21 and 36---or to those of you with an interest in the historical geography of Texas, at the intersection of the San Antonio Road (1691) and the Gulf Colorado and Santa Fe RR (1880).

News From Bridwell

The exhibit

The First Five African American Graduates of Perkins School of Theology

continues through August 21.

On August 28 another exhibit will open.

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

The earliest Protestant preaching in Texas is credited to Methodist Episcopal Church circuit rider Rev. William Stevenson (1768-1857). In 1815 he crossed the Red River into Texas from the Territory of Arkansas (now part of Oklahoma) and formed a society near Pecan Point. During the antebellum era, ministers and lay persons evangelized a significant number of Texans, organizing them into Methodist societies and Sunday Schools. Despite their success, early Texas Methodists left behind few records. This exhibition presents fifteen items from the Special Collections at Bridwell Library that document the Methodist movement during its formative years in Texas.

To accompany this exhibition honoring the bicentennial of Methodism in Texas, Bridwell Library is reprinting the *Autobiography of the Rev. William Stevenson*, recently edited by Dr. Ted A. Campbell, Professor of Church History at Perkins School of Theology.

Although the exhibits in the Prothro Gallery are worth a special trip to SMU, you might want to see what's available from the comfort of your own home via the Digital Collections link <http://digitalcollections.smu.edu/all/bridwell/browse.asp>

All sort of resources including images, documents, original manuscripts, and audio are available in this convenient form. We all owe a great big "thank you" to the Bridwell staff for their labors in making these resources available.

Thank You Dallas Friends! (Corrected)

It was brought to my attention that this paragraph which appeared in the Spring 2015 Newsletter suffered from an error of omission. Here is the corrected paragraph.

The 2015 TUMHS Annual Meeting was a great success thanks to the organizing efforts of our friends in Dallas including Tim Binkley, Michelle Grimm, Bill Bryan, Dean William Lawrence, former Dean James Kirby all from Perkins; Kent Roberts from Highland Park UMC, John Dillard NTC Archives and History Chair, and Frances Long, Archivist for both the North Texas Conference and the South Central Jurisdiction, as well as a presenter at the program.

Texas Conference Heritage Center

Most readers of this *Newsletter* are aware that the Texas Conference Archives have been in storage in Jacksonville, Texas, since July 2010 when Lon Morris College was no longer able to serve as the depository.

Many of you have asked about how the TAC Commission on Archives and History is progressing in its efforts to build a facility for the Archives.

I happy to report that the campaign to build the Heritage Center at a site owned by the Conference at Conroe is underway.

Here is an architectural rendering



The Heritage Center will provide the highest level of climate control, lighting, fire security, and protection from flooding for the Texas Conference Archives, and other documents of obvious historical importance.

A preliminary construction bid of about \$330,000 for this building has given us a target to shoot for. We are nearing that goal thanks to generosity of many faithful Methodists. All of in the Texas Conference are grateful for the many expressions of support from all around the state.

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 St. Paul's UMC, 508 N. Center St., San Antonio.



St. Paul was founded In 1866 by African-Americans who had been attending Paine Chapel MECS. The church became known very early for its activism in promoting ministries of social justice and mercy. From its founding in 1866 it also had a school. One of the innovative ministries was providing lodging for travelers who could not find hotel accommodations in the Jim Crow era. The church was especially important in the struggle for Civil Rights in the 1950s and 1960s.

Its first structure was a frame building in 1872, followed by a stone church in 1884. The present sanctuary, pictured above was built in 1922.

Here is the next historic church picture.



Heritage Journal

Our *Heritage Journal* editor, Rob Sledge, distributed volume 11 of the publication at the Annual Meeting in March.

Rob has been the editor for all 11 volumes, and taken as a whole, they constitute an important source for Texas Methodist history.

As a point of personal privilege, I would like to point out Dr. Sledge's article in volume 11, "The Rise or Decline of Texas Methodism." It is a first-rate article and deserves wide distribution throughout the denomination. It is not too late to pay your dues and obtain a copy. Dr. Sledge's email address is in the next column on this page. If you do not have Volume 11, contact him for ordering information.

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SAVE THE DATES FOR 2016! The NW Texas Conference will be hosting both the TUMHS meeting, as well as the SCJ Archivists October 4-7, 2016 in Lubbock. Plan now to attend to take advantage of the workshops and tours that are being offered by the NWT A&H Commission!

SAVE THE DATES FOR 2016!

WHAT: SCJ Convocation of Archivists of the UMC & TUMHS Annual Meeting

WHERE: [THE OVERTON HOTEL & CONFERENCE CENTER](#)



2322 Mac Davis Drive, Lubbock, TX 79401 (806) 776-7000

www.overtonhotel.com

Tentative Schedule of Events for October 4-7, 2016

TUESDAY, October 4th — 2-5PM — pre-Conference “workshop” for SCJ Archivists, 6-7PM
RECEPTION hosted by NWTX Commission on A&H at THE OVERTON HOTEL

WEDNESDAY, October 5th (*Breakfast on your own*) 9AM -Opening session for all attendees—Meet & Greet; overview of Convocation & meetings; then tour [NWTX CSC & Archives](#) and [FUMC-Lubbock](#); lunch at FUMC-LBB; speakers/presenters; tour [Southwest Collection at Texas Tech University](#); and tour of art on TTU campus; 6PM banquet at THE OVERTON (speakers and entertainment).

THURSDAY, October 6th (*Breakfast on your own*) 9AM TOURS BEGIN



then



lunch at **The Heritage**



Ranching Center

& [Cogsdell General Store](#)

TOUR BU Y & the West Texas Walk of Fame
HOLLY CENTER

THURSDAY EVENING is **FREE** for small group gatherings.

FRIDAY, October 7th-9AM — Breakfast Buffet; then TUMHS Annual Meeting at the Overton Hotel; attendees will include NWTX Conference local church historians; a **WORKSHOP** for Local Church Historians and others will be facilitated by L. Dale Patterson, Archivist-Records Administrator, GCAH, to begin after TUMHS meeting.



Membership/Registration Information

We do not send annual membership renewal statements. Our not doing so means that many of us neglect to send our annual dues. If you can't remember the last time you sent dues, it's probably time to send them again. Please print this page and send your dues and gifts to Mr. Caffey's address shown above.

Name(s)_____

Address_____

Email_____ **telephone**_____

Annual dues

\$20_____

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