

# TEXAS UNITED METHODIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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Editor's Letter by Wm. C. Hardt

When I assumed the editorship of this newsletter, I made an editorial decision not to include a necrology section. My main reason for the decision was the fact that this newsletter is a quarterly, and most members will already have heard of the deaths before receiving the news here. Clergy members and spouses of the TUMHS have memoirs in their respective conference Journals which are usually written by family members and should stand as the memoir of record.

I am deviating from that policy in this issue to talk about my father's role in Texas Methodist history and the TUMHS. My father, John Wesley Hardt died on June 18 after an illness of about 6 months. Memorial services were held on June 23 at FUMC Dallas. Interment of the ashes occurred later that day in Malakoff City Cemetery.

My father's interest in history became more pronounced in his mature years. This is a common pattern. He sometimes commented ruefully on the missed opportunities he had as a young man not to interview "old timers" about their early years. One striking example he told me is that when he moved to Beaumont in 1959, Seth Ward's widow was living three blocks from the church. Seth Ward, the first native-born Texan to be elected bishop, died in 1909. Think of the stories Mrs. Ward might have told!

Since his father was a member of the Texas Conference of the MECS, he attended several annual conferences in the 1920s and observed some of the leaders of the church, including Jesse Lee, E. W. Solomon, Steve McKinney, J. W. and Kate Mills---servants of the Lord whom we now know mainly through printed records rather than personal experience.

The dominant element of his historical vision was the personal interaction he had with so many people, but close behind was his involvement in the institutions of the church. He was born in the Baptist Hospital of San Antonio, but lived most of his life in housing owned by the Methodist church---parsonages, college dormitories, and finally a Methodist retirement home. He served on boards of trustees of various Methodist schools.

As mentioned above, his historical interest came later in life. He was invited to several TUMHS sessions to participate in the program, and at one of those sessions asked for my name to be put on the *Newsletter* mailing list. That was my introduction to TUMHS.

In his retirement, he turned to writing history. The results were a history of Marvin UMC, Lakeview Methodist Conference Center, and a tribute volume to Cecil Peoples of Lon Morris College. We both retired in 2000. I from high school teaching, he from Bishop in Residence at Perkins. I had written quite a bit about Texas history, but nothing about Methodist history. I suggested that we collaborate on a book about Texas Methodist history. I suggested the project as a way for us to spend more time together and provide me with an opportunity to get back in the

stacks of a library (Bridwell). The result of that collaboration was *Historical Atlas of Texas Methodism* (2008). Another result of that collaboration was a new direction and passion for my retirement years.

The Texas Conference was founded in 1840, and my father lived through more than one-half of its existence. He was a member of the MECS, MC, and UMC. He witnessed both the creation and the elimination of the Central Jurisdiction, the mechanism through which segregation of the races was maintained. He was already a veteran preacher when the first women were ordained. His class of bishops elected in 1980 contained the first female bishop of the UMC. He was present, and helped celebrate both the 25<sup>th</sup> and 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of SMU. He and his family attended the 1934 Texas Methodist Centennial celebration in San Antonio.

Perhaps you have wondered why we didn't collaborate on the life story of someone who lived thought such momentous events. We talked about it often, but disagreed about the nature of such a volume. I wanted to write a conventional biography. He was too humble to be comfortable with that and would consent to a biography only if it illuminated some larger theme. If there was to be a biography, he wanted it to illustrate a change even more momentous than those outlined in the previous paragraph. The first forty years of his life were lived in the full bloom of what he called Methodist revival culture. That culture shaped Methodism since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Its impact on other denominations is obvious, and some scholars would argue that it helped shape not only the religious landscape of the United States, but the entire American culture.

Almost every church had an annual revival. If there were five churches on a circuit, each would have its own revival and then they would often unite for a joint revival. My father told many stories about the influence of revivals. Many of the stories were about persons who made the decision for full time Christian vocation at a revival. There were stories of people who came to scoff and were converted into pillars of the church or those who went home from revivals and poured their whiskey down the drain and lived sober lives from then on. My father regularly preached 3 or 4 revivals per year through the 1940s, 1950s and into the 1960s.

Then it all stopped. UMC churches basically quit holding revivals. They gained new members through membership classes rather than revival conversion experiences. Eventually few of our churches had members who had become members through the traditional revival formula:

1. conviction of sin
2. repentance
3. joy coming with the assurance of salvation
4. resolution to lead a new, better life

He thought the transition from a revival church to a non-revival church deserved historical analysis and wanted to use his life story to illustrate it since his life so neatly bridged both eras. His was not a nostalgic yearning for the "good old days," but a curiosity to know whether a church with such revivalism DNA in its soul could live in an era without revivals. I could never develop enthusiasm for such a thematic approach so we never wrote it.

As he worked on his Lakeview and Marvin books, he would send me drafts for criticism. One of my most common comments was, "You write like a preacher. This is a history book, not a sermon." He couldn't help himself—that's what he was.

## SAENZ POSTS TUMHS ANNUAL MEETING BLOG

Bonnie Saenz, Archivist for the Rio Texas Conference, has posted pictures from the 2017 Annual Meeting on line. They may be accessed at

<https://riotexas.org/archives-blog>

Thank you so much for this post. It makes us all recall fondly the meeting at FUMC Richardson last April.

### Historic Church Pictures

Each issue contains the picture of some historic church and asks readers to identify it. Here is the picture from the Spring 2017 issue.



Hats off to those of you who indentified First United Methodist Church in Robert

Lee, Coke County. The church was organized by the Rev. Green Cotton Fields in 1891. A one room building was finished in 1895 and replaced by a more substantial structure in 1905. This building was built in 1928 during the pastorate of the Rev. J. D. Ramsey. If you look carefully, you can see the Texas Historical Commission marker just to the right of the steps.

1891 was also the year that the new town of Robert Lee was established as the county seat besting Hayrick for that honor. It was named for Robert E. Lee who had served at Fort Chadbourne which was in what eventually became Runnels County, just one county to the east.

Robert Lee was able to escape the fate of many towns when the railroad bypassed it in 1907. It maintained its relatively small population as the legal and commercial center of the county.

Here is the next church for you to identify.



(photo credit: Kevin Walters)

## Free Learning Opportunity for Local Church Historians Online.

Richard Stowe of the Indiana Conference has announced an opportunity many readers of this *Newsletter* will want to know about. Here is the description from the Indiana Conference website:

*How to be your best at the most exciting job in the local church! Designed for Local Church Historians who are serious about reviewing and improving their skills and their church's program of history. 12 weekly lessons by e-mail. No fees, travel, meetings, deadlines, exams - just solid learning in a friendly, private setting. Opportunity to apply the learning right in one's own church. Requires a dependable email address. Minimal computer skills needed. Certificate of completion at end.*

Register by September 1 at

<http://events.constantcontact.com/register/event?llr=66xuy6dab&oeidk=a07eebr79mf6ef0acb>

## Adam Poe Biography Published

Melissa A. Strangeland, great-great-great granddaughter of Rev. Adam Poe has published a biography that sheds light on one of the most significant figures in 19<sup>th</sup> century Methodism. **Adam Poe: Evangelist & Faithful Servant** available from <https://www.daystarpublishing.org>

Poe was a giant in the Methodist publishing and educational fields. He was also a founder of the Methodist Episcopal Freedmen's Aid Society.

We can document only one trip Adam Poe made to Texas, but what a trip it was! He made the trip in December 1844/January 1845 in the company of Bishop Edmund Janes who was coming to San Augustine to hold the fifth session of the Texas Annual Conference and to divide that conference into the Eastern Texas and Western Texas Conferences, an action that had been authorized by the General Conference of 1844. (Soon afterward the conferences were renamed Texas and East Texas.)

Poe was coming to get his brother's orphan children. Daniel and Jane Poe, valiant missionaries in the Gospel cause, had died the previous summer, and Daniel left instructions for his brother Adam to take care of the children.

Strangeland's biography has won a number of prizes including **Governor Thomas Worthington Book Award** for 2017

3rd place, books by a non-professional/family history, TxSGS Book Award (2016) and Honorable Mention, Saddlebag Selection Competition (2015)

## 2018 Meeting

Program Chair, Tim Binkley and Host Will Steinsiek have announced the theme for the 2018 Annual Meeting which will be held in El Paso. It is *Methodism on the Border*. We invite you to send ideas for presentations about Methodist institutions, missions, conferences, and individuals to Tim and Will. Do not limit yourself to Texas. We are eager to have presentations about Mexican and New Mexican topics too.

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## 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

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Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

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Annual dues

\$20 \_\_\_\_\_

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