

# TEXAS UNITED METHODIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Fall 2013 vol. 5, #2

## Editor's Letter by Wm. C. Hardt

The Editor's Letter in the previous issue of the *TUMHS Newsletter* elicited more reader response than any other. I shared my observation that an appreciation of our Methodist heritage prepares us to meet the future with confidence. In the 1930s Methodist leaders used the vision of a common history to create institutions to shape the future.

On November 24 the Texas Methodist Foundation will celebrate the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its charter with a gala celebration in Austin. I can think of no better illustration of the power of historical imagination in shaping the future than the Texas Methodist Foundation. That's because the TMF grew directly out of the celebration of the Texas Methodist Centennial in 1934.

I will oversimplify the story, but in 1934 five MECS annual conferences came together in San Antonio to celebrate the Centennial of Texas Methodism on the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of McMahan's Chapel, known as the oldest continuously operating Methodist church in Texas. The three-day celebration in San Antonio was a grand celebration with tableaux, choirs, processions, sermons, and good fellowship. Most of us know about the Centennial Celebration because of the Yearbook which is on almost every Texas Methodist bookshelf.

Here's the important point---It brought the annual conferences together to honor a common heritage, but once the celebration was over, they decided to stay together. Two years later the annual conferences met in Houston and helped celebrate the Centennial of Texas Independence by visiting the San Jacinto Battlefield. Descendants of Robert Alexander, Littleton Fowler, and other pioneer Methodist families were honored. As in 1934, the conferences decided not to make the celebration the final event of their observance, but to stay connected in a pan-Texas organization.

Five MECS annual conferences in Texas then created the Joint Commission on the Future Work of Texas Methodism. The Joint Commission was composed of both clergy and lay members, many of whom had served as organizers of the 1934 Centennial Celebration. Several of the members, including J. Walter Mills, Ed Harris, A. J. Weeks, and Glenn Flinn, were also among the core group that was simultaneously revitalizing McMahan's Chapel as an historical shrine.

In December, 1936, just one month after the annual conferences met jointly in Houston to observe Texas Independence, the Joint Commission on the Future Work of Texas Methodism met in Dallas to create the committees that would carry out its program. The Committee on Stewardship and Foundation, chaired by W. W. Fondren, immediately began plans for the creation of the Texas Methodist Foundation. The TMF received its charter in 1938 after a full five years of cooperation among the conferences centered on their common historical heritage.

Although most Methodist identity is grounded in an annual conference, in the 1930s influential Texas Methodists grasped a vision of an historical pan-Texas unity. They saw they had a common history, and immediately translated that common history into a common present and a common future. What's history good for? It's good for giving us imagination so we can venture boldly into the future.

## News From Bridwell Library

The Fall issue of the *Bridwell Library News*, available at <http://www.smu.edu/bridwell> contains much of interest to the Texas Methodist historical community. As I read the *News*, I was struck by how our friends at Bridwell Library are reaching out to the larger community. Naturally their primary mission is to support the academic work of faculty and students of Perkins School of Theology, but it is obvious from the *News* that they are eager to embrace a wide community of amateur historians, bibliophiles, those of us who are curious about our Methodist roots.

You probably knew that Bridwell usually has special exhibits, but did you know that you may secure the services of an expert guide to those exhibits? That would be just the ticket for your church group.

One tremendously generous outreach effort is **My Day In Bridwell Library Special Collections**, a program that invites you to spend time in the Special Collections with an archivist.

Bridwell also hosts a number of lectures and discussions open to the larger community.

## SOUND THEOLOGY

UM Communications, with collaboration with the General Commission, has a wonderful site that allows users to listen to historic voices from Methodist and other denominational leaders.

<http://soundtheology.org/>

There are several Texans included in the collection including Kenneth Copeland reading from his *Primer of Beliefs for Methodist Laymen* (1959), Zan Holmes, and several lectures by Albert Outler. I would like to especially lift up Rev. Joseph Lowery's reflections on the Central Jurisdiction.

## Historic Church Pictures

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



The correct answer is Millican UMC in Brazos County. Millican was the terminus of the Houston and Texas Central RR from 1860 to about 1867. It played a part in the marshaling of Confederate forces, but after the Civil War, the H&TC pushed on to Bryan and left Millican in decline. The beautiful church has recently been relocated to a more favorable site and refurbished. The area is experiencing population growth as Bryan-College Station development pushes southward, and the church prospects are good.

Here's another historic Methodist church. It's unlikely that many readers of this *Newsletter* can identify it so I'll tell you that it's the Charlton, Massachusetts UMC.

Why Charlton, Massachusetts, in a Texas newsletter? Because Martin Ruter was born in Charlton on April 3, 1785. As readers of this Newsletter probably know, he was head of the Texas Mission in 1837-1838.

We travelled to Massachusetts this past August and made a pilgrimage to Charlton in honor of the pioneer Texas Methodist preacher. Charlton UMC now has an attractive, modern building in a beautiful forest setting. Their previous building (built in 1893) still exists and has been repurposed as a quilt store.



The old organ was left behind since it couldn't be installed in the new building. Fortunately the proprietor of the quilt store is also an organist who treated us to a private recital when we entered to inquire about any memories of Martin Ruter.

As the strains of *In the Sweet, By and By* filled the quilt shop, my mind turned to the cemetery in Navasota where Ruter's remains now lie. Here's an image of the new Charlton, Massachusetts, UMC.



## Rio Texas United Methodist Historical Society Organizes

By Rev. Dr. Roberto L. Gómez

The Southwest Texas Conference Commission on Archives and History voted on August 30, 2012 to form a conference United Methodist Historical Society. Rev. Chuck Crane, Commission chairman, appointed C. D. Barrington to coordinate the formation of a historical society made of members of the Rio Grande Conference (RGC) and the Southwest Texas Conference (SWTXC) since the two conferences will unite by July 2015. Rev. Crane presided at the organizational meeting until a slate of officers could be elected.

About 20 charter members of 72 original charter members met at the San Antonio Episcopal United Methodist Center in San Antonio on September 21, 2013 to organize the Rio Texas United Methodist Historical Society. C. D. Barrington welcomed the group, gave background information about organizing the society, and shared a greeting from Dr. Dale Patterson, Archivist-Records Administrator of the United Methodist Church Archives.

Rev. Crane then presided over the meeting. He thanked C. D. Barrington and his wife, Mrs. Freda Barrington, for their work in getting charter members for the society.

The assembly considered a draft of the by-laws for the society which had been sent to all the charter members. After a brief discussion an amendment was made saying that **“The term of office for officers shall be two years with one immediate reelection permitted.”** The amendment was seconded and approved. Then the bylaws were approved as amended.

After hearing a report from a nominating committee from the SWTX Conference Commission of Archives and History the following persons were elected as officers for the new society:

President: Rev. Dr. Roberto L. Gómez, retired clergy from the Rio Grande Conference

Vice-President: Rev. Dr. Austin Frederick, clergy from the Southwest Texas Conference

Secretary: Mr. C. D. Barrington, lay member of the Southwest Texas Conference

Treasurer: Ms. Wilma J. Taylor-Greene, lay member of the Southwest Texas Conference

At large: Barbara Ford-Young, lay member of the Southwest Texas Conference

At large: Pat Zamorano, lay member of the Southwest Texas Conference

After the election, The Rev. Dr. Robert Sledge, Professor Emeritus of History at McMurry University in Abilene, Texas and Historian in Residence for the McWhiney Foundation, made a presentation on the functions and responsibilities of a historical society. He made a distinction between the Conference Commission of Archives and History and a society by saying that the former “group majors in archives and minors in history. Conversely, a society is a volunteer organization that majors in history (of the church, especially local churches) and minors in archives.”

Dr. Sledge ended his presentation by making several practical suggestions for the work of the new historical society.

Mr. Barrington announced that the South Central Jurisdiction Convocations of

Archivists and the annual meeting of the Texas United Methodist Historical Society on October 8-11, 2014 will meet in San Antonio and encouraged all charter members to participate in the various activities of the meetings.

Dr. Gómez ended the first meeting of the society with a prayer.

A note of appreciation to C. D. and Freda for their enthusiastic volunteer work in attending both sessions of the two annual conferences and recruiting members for the Society. They also did preparatory work for the first meeting of the Society.



Bishop James Dorff, Wm. C. Hardt, and Dr. Gómez in June, 2013. Picture from Dr. Gómez’s Retirement Celebration, La Trinidad UMC, San Antonio.



We add our appreciation to C. D. and Freda Barrington and Marta Rose, Conference Archivist.

## 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*.

**Warnick Awards Chair**  
Rev. Dr. William J. Bryan III  
P. O. Box 750133  
Dallas, Tx 75172  
214-768-4900  
[wbryan@smu.edu](mailto:wbryan@smu.edu)

**Heritage Journal Editor**  
Rev. Dr. Robert W. Sledge  
3141 Chimney Circle  
Abilene, Tx 79606  
[rsledge@mcm.edu](mailto:rsledge@mcm.edu)

**Newsletter Editor**  
Wm. C. Hardt  
10375 New Wehdem Rd.  
Brenham, Tx  
979-830-5210  
[wchardt@gmail.com](mailto:wchardt@gmail.com)

## Directory

### President

Dr. Garry L. Nall  
7206 Versailles Drive  
Amarillo, Tx 79121  
806-355-1450  
[gnall@att.net](mailto:gnall@att.net)

### Vice President

Rev. Dr. Dan Flores  
In transition to Albuquerque, NM  
[dflores@gmail.com](mailto:dflores@gmail.com)

### Secretary

Rev. Ms. Barbara Huggins  
901B Palestine St.  
Jacksonville, Tx 75766  
903-586-2494  
[bh@jacksonvillemethodist.org](mailto:bh@jacksonvillemethodist.org)

### Treasurer

Mr. Stewart Caffey  
5426 89<sup>th</sup> St.  
Lubbock, Tx 79424  
[stewacs@aol.com](mailto:stewacs@aol.com)

## Historic Church Puzzle

See you can identify this historic Texas Methodist Church.



## 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.

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**Stewart Caffey**  
**5426 89<sup>th</sup> Street**  
**Lubbock, Texas 79424**