

PENINSULA-DELAWARE CONFERENCE COMMISSION ON ARCHIVES & HISTORY

Mission Statement

The mission of The Commission on Archives & History (originally incorporated as Historical Society of the Peninsula Annual Conference of the Methodist Church, Inc.) is to “collect, preserve, and maintain historical records and shrines relating to Methodism in Delaware and the Eastern Shore of Maryland.”

Operation of Barratt’s Chapel and Museum

Every annual conference has a Commission on Archives and History, but ours is the only Commission on Archives and History to own and maintain a United Methodist Heritage Landmark. In its 240th year, Barratt’s Chapel is the oldest surviving place of worship in America built by and for Methodists. On November 14, 1784 Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury met at Barratt’s Chapel and laid plans to organize American Methodists into a church independent of the Anglican Church. At this meeting the sacraments of baptism and communion were officially celebrated for the first time anywhere by ordained Methodist clergy, a symbolic declaration of independence. Therefore, Barratt’s Chapel is appropriately called the “Independence Hall of American Methodism.” In addition to the historic Chapel, the Commission on Archives and History also maintains the adjacent Museum building, which contains the archives of the Peninsula-Delaware Conference, a library on Methodist history, and displays on Delmarva Methodism. The Barratt’s Chapel site also includes a reconstructed 18th century Vestry, which is used for a variety of small events.

The Commission on Archives and History of the Peninsula-Delaware Conference, under the leadership of President C. Russell McCabe and Vice President Shirley Jackson, normally meets semi-monthly at Barratt’s Chapel or at other locations in the conference. Since the COVID’19 Pandemic the commission has met via Zoom.

Conference Archives

It is our responsibility by the *Discipline* (paragraph 641.1) to be the repository for the archives of the Peninsula-Delaware Conference and all its antecedents including the Delaware Conference, which at its final meeting designated Barratt’s Chapel as its official depository. It is also our responsibility to provide permanent safe-keeping of historical records of all closed churches within the bounds of the Conference as well as any churches which leave the United Methodist Church under provisions of the 2019 General Conference. The Archives are cataloged and housed in a fire-proof, climate-controlled section of the museum building. We maintain files for every church in the Conference and welcome new materials to be added. The staff assists researchers in using materials and also offers assistance by email and telephone requests. There is a library of approximately 3500 volumes on Methodist history.

Under the direction of the Curator/Conference Archivist, Barb Duffin, the archives and library catalogs have been transferred to PastPerfect, the standard software for museums and archives. Using an optional feature of PastPerfect, both catalogs are now available on the internet through a link on the Museum’s web site.

Volunteers have completed making digital copies of all the conference journals in the collection at Barratt’s Chapel Museum. They are currently digitizing the Peninsula Methodist, a weekly newspaper, 1875-1908. As the materials are digitized they are made

available through the Barratt's Chapel website, barrattschapel.org, under "About Us, Archives and History".

The staff has continued to work throughout the Pandemic doing digitizing, cataloging, archiving, answering research requests, and meeting a few persons by appointment. We have several volunteers who assist with activities and duties as needed.

Facilities Usage

Although Barratt's Chapel has not had an active membership since 1957 it usually remains a busy venue for worship and learning. Before the Pandemic we had weddings, funerals, and the First State Brass Concert. However, we have largely been closed to the public since mid-March. We have given tours to visitors by appointment following COVID'19 protocols. None of the regular activities, including the Confirmation Rally, the Summer Services, Lessons and Carols, and the Christmas Eve service, occurred. Bishop Johnson came to Barratt's to tape a Christmas message which was sent to all the churches in the Conference. The office at Barratt's Chapel was available through email and phone.

Outreach

Part of the mission of the Commission on Archives and History is to assist local church historians to discover, preserve and tell their own church histories. Barb Duffin, Curator/Conference Archivist, and Phil Lawton, Conference Historian, have been available to meet with researchers, church historians and others seeking information on their local church history. They are available to speak at worship services and other church events.

Maintaining the Chapel, Museum and Vestry

With a 240-year-old Chapel and two other building there are always maintenance issues. The Conference Council on Finance and Administration advanced us funds to do much needed preservation work on the Chapel. The repointing of the walls, begun in 2019 was completed in the Spring, 2020. Additionally, the crawlspace under the Chapel was encapsulated and an automatic a dehumidifier system was added. Both the Chapel roof and the Vestry roof were replaced with cedar shake shingles in 2020. In addition, thanks to a bequest, we were able to install a LED lighting system around the facilities.

The Commission on Archives and History had planned a major capital campaign for the Chapel in 2020, however, due to the Pandemic it has been postponed until a more appropriate time. We have applied for a Tax Credit from the State of Delaware for work done on the historic chapel. Once received the tax credit will be sold to help repay the Council on Finance and Administration.

Goals of the Commission on Archives and History

- Following requirements of the *Discipline*, maintain a conference archives which provides a permanent, safe depository for historically valuable records of the Peninsula-Delaware Conference and its antecedents and of closed churches within its bounds, and make those materials accessible to researchers.
- Operate Barratt's Chapel as a Heritage Landmark of The United Methodist Church, including maintenance and improvement of the physical facilities, making the Chapel and Museum available, following COVID'19 protocol, to visitors and for special services and activities, and promoting knowledge of the historical importance of Barratt's Chapel.
- Provide historical programs for confirmation classes and other groups.

- Provide training and support for Local Church Historians.
- Support the Peninsula-Delaware Conference Historical Society.
- Recruit and train volunteers to assist with the historical and archival work at Barratt's Chapel and Museum.

C. Russell McCabe, President of the Commission on Archives and History