

West Virginia Commission on Archives and History

COVID-19 shaped much of the 2020-2021 year for the Commission on Archives and History. Relocation of the West Virginia United Methodist Archives, housed at the Annie Merner Pfeiffer Library at West Virginia Wesleyan College, was postponed when the college decided to close the campus in March 2020 and to move the spring semester to an online-only mode. The bulk of the Methodist Archives was finally returned to the library between November 2020 and January 2021, and staff have begun work to catch up on the months-long backlog of reference and research requests received while the archives and the library were inaccessible. At present, the library and archives remain closed to the general public and non-campus-affiliated individuals.

As reported last year, the commission has committed support for an incremental digitization effort to scan and make accessible the journals of the various branches of West Virginia Methodism stretching back to their establishment. The pandemic hindered the plan to send journals for the Methodist Episcopal Church (South) for digitization during 2020 and also delayed work on quality control, metadata creation, and final uploading of those journals digitized to date. Slow but steady progress has been made through the late fall of 2020 and early winter of 2021, however. As of January 2021, the Methodist Episcopal (North) journals 1848-1895 were available and full-text searchable online. More journals are being added on a regular basis.

The conference's heritage landmark Rehoboth was open to the public for a shorter period in 2020, but the site still served 604 visitors during the summer in its outdoor areas. In the fall, the Rehoboth board approved applying to participate in the Partners for Sacred Places' "New Dollars/New Partners for Your Historic Sacred Place" training program. Participants were eligible for planning and capital grants. Rehoboth was selected as one of ten entities in Central Appalachia for the program. The 5-member team that participated in the virtual training between late January and April 2021 included the chair of the commission. The goal was both to gain skills that will cultivate relationships in the local and fundraising communities and to access grant funds that will pay for a professional evaluation of preservation needs of the church building. Work is now underway on the grant application.

Mary Edith Johnson, Chairperson
Commission on Archives and History