

NEJCAH Archivist's Report
May 11, 2021
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With the onset of Covid-19 and the closing of facilities our work schedules and procedures drastically changed. In reading through the following reports from the archivists of the Annual Conferences of the Northeast Jurisdiction you will find there was progress made even though it was often difficult to gain access to our archives and staff was reduced to the bare minimum. Some of us worked remotely and others in shortened hours with no assistants or interns. Meetings and workshops were held by Zoom.

Through it all research requests and genealogical questions were answered (and it seemed as if everyone sequestered at home decided to do research). Digitization of records, journals, and periodicals made it easier for researchers, who could not travel or visit our archives, to obtain *some* of the information they were seeking. We did our best to accommodate all questions.

We also received calls from District and Conference offices to make appointments to retrieve closed church records, conference records and other materials. Those were dropped off and accepted, although they may not be fully archived yet!

It was a period of reflection on our policies and procedures. How do we best serve our Conferences with the valuable records in our care and make them accessible? We all also continued to contemplate the same issue that we have discussed through the years--lack of archival space. This has become an immediate issue as we are now faced with obtaining and managing the records of disaffiliating churches. Questions have risen, such as: What records do we need to keep? Where do we store the materials? If digitized, who pays for the digitization of the records? There is a lot of work to do!

Hopefully **all** of our Annual Conferences will have a Conference Archivist and the Archives will be open and functioning as normal by fall. Please take time to read through the reports of six of our NEJ Annual Conference Archivists. They are hard-working, dedicated, creative people who care deeply for maintaining and caring for the historical records of the Annual Conferences.

New York: Beth Patkus

Like many of us, I worked primarily from home for a good chunk of 2020. I continued to answer Archives reference/genealogy questions and manage the archives collections mostly from a distance until our partial return to the office in the fall. The archives had a couple of large accessions as part of moving our district offices from satellite locations to the conference center in 2018, and several churches have closed in the last few years – so storage space is at a premium and I have been weeding and consolidating materials. Our local church workshops and grant program were put on hiatus this past year, but we hope to restart them as in-person interaction becomes more possible. I continue to manage our district scanning project (we are scanning all of the church and clergy records that were maintained in the district offices into eBridge, a document management system). We have completed about 75 percent of the project at this point. The NY Commission on Archives and History continued to meet virtually during the pandemic, and held a day-long virtual storytelling workshop in November 2020 featuring nationally known storytellers Sheila Arnold and Donald Davis. I'm currently working with the CAH to create an online resource describing our NY Conference historic places.

Susquehanna: Milton Loyer

The main archives of the Susquehanna Conference are located in the Lycoming College library, and the entire campus is closed to persons who are not faculty, staff or students. Fortunately we have our off-campus annex, which houses our museum, our closed church materials, and several other special collections – but our annex has no copy machines, internet connections, etc. When researchers want to view materials from the main archives, I have to take the materials to the annex and follow all the proper protocols. When the researchers are finished, I need to sanitize the materials as much as possible and keep them in quarantine at the annex for two weeks before bringing them back on campus. Lycoming College has been very strict, but they have managed to have in-person classes all semester – using special isolation and/or quarantine dorms as necessary for students who must temporarily learn remotely.

We just “discovered” the original 1860-1880 handwritten minutes for the very small Pennsylvania Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church at Drew with the GCAH. These were never published, and we thought the information was lost forever. We are in the process of figuring the best way to get the material transcribed and/or otherwise available.

We also just discovered a large oil painting of Jesus in the Garden that had been rolled up and stored in the attic of a former country church building that had been converted into a house some 50 years ago when that congregation merged into another. The painting apparently had been attached to the wall behind the pulpit. The Lycoming College art department is going to help us mount and frame the painting so it can be hung in a room in the building now used by the merged congregations.

Other recent acquisitions include a rare (especially in such good condition) first 1818 edition of the Evangelical Association 's *Geistliche Viole* that came with a remarkable back story, and photocopies (from a county historical society) of a very early handwritten account of Methodism in Huntingdon PA gives information pre-dating the 1784 Christmas Conference.

We lost to COVID Rev. Bruce Gearhart, one of our faithful Commission members who had underlying health conditions. The COVID situation has resulted in the closing of some churches that had been struggling even before the pandemic, and so we have been processing closed church materials. In addition, two churches have disaffiliated, thus requiring negotiations about church records. We were able to publish both our 2020 and 2021 issues of THE CHRONICLE on schedule. The 2021 issue included a very interesting and timely article on how the church (especially our conference) dealt with past pandemics in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries – and a detailed timeline/reconstruction for future historians of the relevant conference, jurisdiction, and General Church memos/decisions of 2020.

We hope to see you all again in person in 2022.

New England: Kara Jackman

I hope you will welcome a short summary of the last year from me. I work at Boston University as archivist at the School of Theology Library. I am a department of one, with some student help. This year has been a challenge, as it has pulled me into doing more librarian work to compensate for two people leaving (one was laid off, and the other left for a higher paying position). Nevertheless, here is my summary. I look forward to joining you via zoom this year.

The New England Annual Conference Archives is located at the Boston University School of Theology Library. The Archives has thrived through the pandemic. I created two hybrid art exhibition experience for students, staff, faculty, and researchers. One focused on the works of John August Swanson and the second focuses on works of art that were published by motive magazine, a magazine for college-aged students that was published from 1941-1972. In addition, many inquiries came in as more people seem to be home and dusting off old genealogical research or returning to old academic research projects. It is so exciting to see our collections used by patrons from around the world. In conclusion, the New England Annual conference archives, New England Conference Commission on archives and history and the New England United Methodist Historical Society maintained our bi-annual meeting via zoom. We discussed a variety of topics including, how to manage records of disaffiliating churches, what district-level records to keep and send to the archives. The Archivist has also been active around the Conference talking to district superintendents and their administrative assistants about records they hold that can be moved to the archives. New England Conference recently went through redistricting. The conference went from 9 district offices to 7. Needless to say there is much work to do in preserving our history and the history of churches that the Conference serves.

Upper New York: Karen Campolieto

I am currently the Upper New York Archivist and continue working on getting our collection inventoried, labeled and in some semblance of order since the merger of four separate Upper NY sites, that are now housed in our United Methodist Center in Liverpool, NY in 2017. I am only working in Archives 8 hours per week.

We had an in-kind assessment done by New York State (DHPS/NY) in 2018 and have been working to fulfill those recommendations. We have put up new metal shelving and installed wooden slat blinds. Our constant and continual work centers on working to obtain, sort, and catalog closed church records.

In 2019, we had a Syracuse University Intern helping us with cataloging and sorting records, but since the pandemic, we have not had that opportunity. We had regular volunteers up until last year when the pandemic hit and our offices are not officially open to the public at this time. We hope to have volunteers in again when the time is right.

West Virginia: Brett Miller

The WV Conference Commission on Archives and History, in conjunction with West Virginia Wesleyan College, is continuing to digitize conference journals and to make those available online for researchers. The project began in 2018 with the digitization of the Methodist Episcopal Church journals from 1848-1939, followed by the Methodist Church journals from 1940-1967 in late 2019. Although work slowed through 2020 due to the pandemic, WV Conference archivist Brett Miller has been working diligently through the late fall of 2020 and early spring of 2021 to do quality control checks, add metadata, and upload journals to the WV Wesleyan archival repository, Pages in Time (<https://pagesintime.wvwc.edu>). Currently, journals from 1848-1948 are accessible online and are full-text searchable, with more being added regularly. The Commission anticipates outsourcing digitization of its journals from the Methodist Episcopal Church (South) in the next batch to be completed hopefully later in 2021, while work on digitizing the Methodist Protestant Church journals will be pursued in-house at West Virginia Wesleyan. Digitization work to date has been outsourced to Creekside Digital of Glen Arm, Maryland.

Peninsula-Delaware: Barb Duffin

Our Conference Archives are located in the Museum adjacent to Barratt's Chapel. In May, 2019 the "holding" tank from our well, located in a closet in the museum building, sprung a leak. Fortunately, it was discovered when there was only a flood of 2" of water throughout the museum. The "Vault" area of the museum building where our archival records are mainly

located was not affected. However, all of the library items and file cabinets were moved into the archival area making that part of the building inaccessible. All other furniture and office items were moved to our Vestry which is used for meetings, receptions following services and for preparation by bridal parties. Visitors were only able to tour the Chapel, all other activities were cancelled from May through November of 2019 while the flood-damaged floors were removed, cleaned of asbestos and new flooring installed. We also had a switch installed to turn off the water supply to the museum building when no one is there. We had just replaced all the items throughout the museum and invited visitors and researchers back in when we had to close for Covid-19.

Only 1-4 staff and volunteers have worked in the building at the same time, working in different rooms and wearing masks during the Covid closing. We have been able to complete the digitization of all of our Conference Journals. The congregations which make up the present Peninsula-Delaware Conference came from five separate annual conferences in three different denominations. These can now be accessed through our website, barrattschapel.org. Also accessible are all of the *Peninsula-Methodist* periodicals which we have. These were published for news of the Wilmington Conference from 1875-1890. We have also been working on “catching up” with archiving closed church records, donated materials and other records, just in time to receive the records from churches disaffiliating from the denomination. As with most archives we are running out of room for storage and are exploring ways of getting digital records from the disaffiliating churches.

For the past few months we have opened for tours, by appointment only, for groups of 1-5 visitors. State mandated policies have applied.