

## COMMISSION ON ARCHIVES AND HISTORY

Linda Scott, Chair

Gratia Downs Strother, Conference Archivist

David Martin, Conference Historian

The Commission on Archives and History preserves and makes available archival documents and artifacts that chronicle our TWK Conference heritage. We are located at the John Abernathy Smith Heritage Center, 520 Commerce Street, Suite 205, Nashville, Tennessee, 37203. Open by appointment.

Making most of these archival documents available online continues to be our focus for both 2022 and 2023. To make the collections easily searchable and provide quick results, updated equipment replaced outdated technology. Standard archival practice recommends three copies of each item in an archive: the original, a copy/photograph or digital record onsite on a different type of media, and a copy/photograph or digital record offsite. Scanning and digitizing documents allows us to save the second copy in a digital format and use cloud storage to meet the offsite requirement. This practice will eventually reduce our physical space requirements and increase access to our collections for clergy, laity, and the public.

For the 2021-2022 grant year, we received a \$3,600 grant from the Tennessee State Library and Archives. It was an American Rescue Plan Act grant for improving digital platforms and online services at non-profit archives, museums, and libraries. The grant is made possible by the U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services. With these funds, we were able to convert 144 rolls of microfilm — containing some of the only record evidence of our history — into searchable PDF documents which we will soon have posted online.

Gathering the records of closed churches and preserving a copy of the records of disaffiliating churches is an ongoing part of our work. Using scanning and photography also helps us to limit our square footage needs and allows records to stay in the community where they originated but still keep a copy in our conference archives.

The conference archivist and conference historian manage approximately 200 patron requests annually. Response time has slowed considerably as we are implementing digitization and cataloging, as these are slow processes. Our most requested services are:

1. Baptism and membership records
2. Family history/genealogy of clergy/laity
3. Conference and church staff requests related to church, district, and conference administration
4. Requests from historians and authors. Recent research areas have been:
  - TWK predecessor conference activity and clergy activity at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century related to Sam Jones and the Holiness Movement
  - The history of Black congregations within the Methodist, United Methodist, and United Brethren denominations
5. Coordination with churches experiencing tornado and flood damage to mitigate damage to church records

We continue to preserve the UMC historic sites in our care: the Asbury-Babb House in Wilson County, the Green Hill Cemetery in Williamson County, and Strother's Meeting House on the campus of Scarritt-Bennett in Nashville.

The majority of our commissioners are new as of January 2022. They are a skilled team of both professional and amateur archivists, historians, and museum staff. Their counsel is helping shape the archives into a readily accessible and easy-to-use entity for the TWKUMC.

We are immensely thankful for the commissioners who have served in this ministry of memory over the years and worked hard to preserve the treasured documents and artifacts of our history. Special recognition goes to Rev. Leland Carden, who served faithfully first on the commission, and then as chair, for many years. His enthusiasm for

this work is boundless and his commitment to preserving our Methodist history unwavering. The entire TWKUMC and SEJ have benefitted immensely from his work. Thanks and appreciation to you, Leland!