

MINUTES

The South Carolina Conference Historical Society Of The United Methodist Church

Meeting At

Washington Street United Methodist Church

Columbia, South Carolina

Saturday, November 4, 2017

The South Carolina Conference Historical Society of the United Methodist Church met jointly with the Conference Commission on Archives and History for the Annual Meeting of the Historical Society on Saturday, November 4, 2017, in the Chapel of Washington Street United Methodist Church, Columbia, South Carolina. Sixteen persons signed the Attendance Register. Those attending gathered for fellowship and refreshments prior to the meeting.

Call To Order. The Annual Business Meeting was called to order at approximately 10:30 am by the Society's President, the Reverend J. Robert Huggins, with words of welcome to members of the Commission, Historical Society, and guests. He noted that the theme of the meeting connected many organizations – Washington Street UMC, the University of South Carolina, the Historical Society, the Newberry County Historical Society, the United States Forest Service, and the Conference Commission on Archives and History. He noted several items including the film on Mount Bethel produced several years ago, the connection to the Crenshaw and Finch Families, and the response from the head archaeologist of the Sumter National Forest.

Devotional Period. Ms. Joyce E. Plyler, Vice Chairperson of the Society, was recognized to lead a devotional period. She opened the devotional with prayer. Scripture passages shared were Proverbs 9:9-10, Isaiah 35:3, and Asbury's text for the opening of Mt. Bethel Academy, I Thessalonians (5): 14. She indicated that Asbury used the Proverbs text for a sermon in South Carolina several days before the Mt. Bethel opening perhaps in response to what he experienced as the wild and disorderly conduct he found among some on the frontier. The Isaiah text suggests the intent to transform this country. She suggested that perhaps Asbury was thinking of the Mt. Bethel School as one instrument of such transformation.

Ms. Plyler then focused on the Thessalonians text which Asbury used as the dedicatory text for the school. She reviewed various passages to determine what was the most likely chapter from which the text was taken. She concluded that most agree that the text was from the 5th Chapter of Thessalonians due to the context of his sermon. Mt. Bethel was to be not just a place of learning but a place for expressing faith in God and for teaching morals. She stated that one must remember that when the early Methodists talked about education they were talking about knowing whose we are and who is indeed the source of all wisdom. True wisdom always comes in submission to God's will. Ms. Plyler closed the devotional period with prayer.

Time of Remembrance. The Reverend Roger M. Gramling, Secretary-Treasurer, led in a time of remembering two members of the Historical Society who have died since the last Annual Meeting. The following names were called:

The Reverend Dr. Clinton Jones Lupo, Jr. (05/07/1926 – 04/04/2017)

The Reverend L. Junior Graham (08/05/1932 – 08/27/2017)

Mr. Gramling shared brief remarks about the service and accomplishments of these two Ministers of the South Carolina Conference who were being remembered and concluded the time of remembrance with the reading of Henry Van Dyke's poem "Life".

Nomination of Officers for 2018-2019. Mr. Gramling reported that the current officers had either agreed to continue to serve for another two-year term or had not requested to be relieved. Accordingly, they were presented for re-election, and were re-elected.

2017 Recognition of Centennial and Bicentennial Churches. Mr. Huggins named those churches recognized during 2017 for one hundred and two hundred year anniversaries. He concluded the naming of the five churches with prayer.

1917 – Sharon, Western York Charge, Rock Hill District

1817 – Bethlehem, Bishopville, Hartsville District

1817 – Few’s Chapel, Greer, Greenville District

1817 – McKendree, Trenton, Greenwood District

1817 – New Hope, Bennettsville, Marlboro Circuit, Marion District

Report of the Commission on Archives and History. Dr. Stone reported that he continues to serve as the Conference Archivist. The Reverend Luther H. Rickenbaker who serves as Chairperson of the Conference Commission on Archives and History assists in the Archives as Senior Research Assistant. He noted that inquiries and reference requests continue to come to the Archives regularly although fewer requests are being received from the obituary index. Students continue to assist with digitalization. Claflin University continues to maintain its archives. The Commission will meet following the meeting of the Historical Society.

Report of The Mark. The Reverend Dr. A. V. Huff, Jr., Editor, reported that The Mark continues to appear hopefully reminding members of the meetings and activities of the Society. The Mark also seeks to keep members informed about opportunities and workshops that are available in addition to its regular items such as the President’s Report. Submitted articles and other information is welcomed.

Report of the Secretary-Treasurer. The Reverend Roger M. Gramling, the Society’s Secretary-Treasurer, shared copies of the Financial Report and the Membership Report for the period November 1, 2016, through September 30, 2017, which are made a part of these Minutes. The report was reviewed and items noted. Mr. Gramling reported a balance on hand at September 30, 2017, of \$27,739.32. This figure includes \$26,324.49 designated and held in trust by the Society for the Burdine Lodge Restoration Project. Unrestricted balance at September 30, 2017, was \$1,414.83, which is lower than desired for an operating balance for the Society.

He also reported that Life Memberships had increased by one to 37, at September 30, 2017; Individual Annual Memberships had decreased from 59 to 48; Institutional Memberships increased from 7 to 10; and Commission Members remained constant at 10, for a total of 105 members, down from 112 at November 1, 2016. He noted that renewals have fallen short even though a number of reminders are usually sent. This may be indicative of a lack of interest or an aging membership no longer interested or able to reply. (Members are placed on the Inactive Status after two years of no response to the dues notices.)

The report of the Secretary-Treasurer was received as presented.

Program Presentation
“Mount Bethel Academy, Crenshaw-Finch Cemetery, South Carolina College
and Washington Street United Methodist Church.”

Mr. Ernest Shealy, Newberry County Historical and Museum Society
Dr. Michael C. Broome, Historian, Washington Street United Methodist Church
The Reverend J. Robert Huggins, President, SC Conference Historical Society

Mr. Huggins introduced Mr. Ernest Shealy of the Newberry County Historical and Museum Society who spoke about Mount Bethel Academy from the perspective of Newberry County history. He noted that some areas of the county had an “unruly” reputation as Newberry County was a new area in the 1790’s. It became something of a crossroads for people working their way down the “Carolina Road” and had areas of separate settlements becoming something of a “melting pot”. Mount Bethel became an important preparatory school for South Carolina, North Carolina, and Georgia. Mount Bethel was an institution of classical learning. Many churches sponsored schools, but these schools were only primary schools. Mount Bethel opened a step-up to higher education. Although it operated for only twenty-five years under Methodist auspices, it

went on to be a community school and, even after the building was taken down, the name continued in Mt. Bethel-Garmany which functioned as a high school until 1951. Mount Bethel Academy provided during those twenty-five years a classical preparation for a college education. The first classes of South Carolina College came from Mount Bethel Academy, some receiving degrees in fewer years than normal because of the quality of the Mount Bethel preparation. The building did not survive beyond the 1870's when the school was relocated. None of the homes for faculty and student lodging survive. The roads were moved over time. Only the cemetery survives. Mount Bethel was the only school in Asbury's educational plan which was still in existence at the time of his death in 1816.

Mr. Jonathan M. Leader, the State Archaeologist, a division of the South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology, was present to speak to the general area of what archaeology could contribute to the history of Mount Bethel Academy. He was confident that some archaeological evidence could be found at the site including the hearths of the fire places and the footings of the building. He indicated that an excavation would take probably three to five years and would cost thirty to fifty thousand dollars, as well as the need for volunteer sweat labor. Permits would have to be secured for such a project. The project would require considerable focus and commitment. He also cautioned about possible problems with looters which has become quite a black market industry and the protection of the site which is on federal property. He indicated that there is a track for persons working for a particular degree who could be involved in such a project as a part of the degree requirements.

A question was raised about the possibility of being able to ascertain the names of students who attended Mount Bethel before coming to South Carolina College from the early records of South Carolina College.

Dr. Huff reported on a presentation at the recent meeting of the SEJ Historical Society about the archaeological excavation of Bethel Academy in Kentucky. That site is located about three miles from Asbury College where the meeting was held.

Dr. Michael Broome spoke next on the connection between Mount Bethel Academy and Washington Street United Methodist Church. He expressed appreciation to the Society for coming to Washington Street and to his wife and other members of the Records and History Committee for assisting in the hosting of the meeting.

The connection with Washington Street Church focuses on the Reverend John Harper. Harper was admitted to the British Methodist Conference in 1786, ordained deacon by John Wesley on August 3, 1787, and ordained elder by Wesley the following day.

Responding to an appeal from Thomas Coke, he served as a missionary in the Caribbean from 1787 until 1794. His sons, William and John Wesley, were born while he served there. In poor health, he came to America in 1795. Asbury welcomed him and assigned him to circuits. In late 1798 Harper accompanied Asbury to Charleston. There he encountered serious threats against his life due to the Methodist position against slavery. He decided to leave the itinerant ministry and moved to Columbia. In December 1801, he purchased two lots in Columbia on the corner of Washington and Marion Streets.

At the Annual Conference in December, 1802, he chose to locate, and became a local elder which allowed him to preach and administer the sacraments where he resided. In 1803 he organized a Methodist Society in Columbia and in 1804 built a church on the lots which he had offered to the Society, the beginning of Washington Street Church. In 1805 Asbury appointed another to the Columbia church, and John Harper left the city to assume new duties at Mount Bethel Academy. His sons, William and John Wesley, were enrolled in the school. John Harper died not long after his move to Mount Bethel and is buried in the cemetery there.

On October 18, 1987, Washington Street Church erected a marker to the memory of the Reverend John Harper at the cemetery site. His exact burial site in the cemetery has not yet been identified. William Harper went on to the South Carolina College, studied medicine, then law, served in the General Assembly, became a jurist, served in the United States Senate, and became an advocate for states' rights and a leader in the

Nullification cause. John Wesley Harper also went on to the South Carolina College, studied law in New Orleans where he died young in 1810.

Mr. Huggins shared several pages of information on Mount Bethel and spoke of the connection to certain families including the Crenshaw family. He stated that Mount Bethel as one of the early schools of Methodism opens the door to further study and exploration as we look at how best to preserve and maintain this part of our history for the Methodist connection.

Respectfully submitted,

Roger M. Gramling
Secretary-Treasurer