

MINUTES
Annual Meeting
The South Carolina Conference Historical Society
At
Davis Mission Chapel, Spartanburg Methodist College
Spartanburg, South Carolina
Saturday, October 21, 2023

The South Carolina Conference Historical Society met on Saturday, October 21, 2023, at Spartanburg Methodist College in Spartanburg. The meeting was held in the Davis Mission Chapel.

The Reverend Timothy C. Drum, College Chaplain and Director of Church Relations, was instrumental in planning the meeting with the Society's leadership and served as host for the meeting. He shared interesting insights into the history and current state of the College.

Those attending began gathering at 10:00 am for heavy refreshments, conversation, and fellowship. The number in attendance was small and a disappointment to the Society's officers, but interest among those attending was strong.

Business Meeting. The Business Meeting of the Society was called to order at approximately 10:30 am by the Society's President, the Reverend Meredith M. Dark, who shared a brief devotional reflection based on the Parable of the Wedding Feast in Matthew 22:1-10 reminding one of the importance of not ignoring Christ's invitation to the banquet which has been prepared for us. She recognized Mrs. Joyce Plyler, past president of the Society, who shared information about her Methodist Minister grandfather, the Reverend W. G. Smith, Sr., and her grandmother, Mrs. Irma Wade Smith, and their very special relationship to Spartanburg Methodist College and its predecessor, the Textile Industrial Institute. Both met as students at TII. Mr. Smith was one of the first students to enroll and the first to graduate. Her grandmother served as secretary to the president, the Reverend David English Camak, and both grandparents are mentioned in Dr. Camak's book, *Human Gold from Southern Hills*. Mrs. Plyler displayed the graduation certificates of both grandparents which were signed by Dr. Camak. Ms. Dark noted in closing the importance of a "shared history" in which we participate and concluded with prayer.

Report of the Secretary-Treasurer – Financial and Membership Reports. The Reverend Roger M. Gramling, the Society's Secretary-Treasurer, presented his report. The report covered the period September 1, 2022, through September 30, 2023. Mr. Gramling reported a balance on hand at September 1, 2022, of \$6,498.25. Income for the period totaled \$715.00 which included Membership Dues of \$665.00 and gifts to the Society of \$50.00.

Expenses for the period totaled \$1,286.55, which included dues to the SEJ Historical Society of \$100.00 and Newsletter expenses of \$476.80, bringing the balance at September 30, 2023, to \$5,926.70. Membership decreased from 112 to 97 for the period mainly the result of memberships not being renewed. The 97 figure includes 47 Life Memberships and 42 Individual Memberships.

Report of the Editor of *The Mark* and A Progress Report on the South Carolina Methodist Historic Trail Project. Dr. A. V. Huff, Jr., Editor, reported that the Historical Society's newsletter, *The Mark*, continues to be produced containing the publication of updates to the Historic Trail Project in order to share this information with the membership. He noted that, in a time of rapid change, it is significant to be reminded of what our heritage is. He indicated that the Historic Trail Project should be completed in the near future.

The SEJ Historical Society. The Reverend Franklin B. Buie encouraged interest and participation in the SEJ Historical Society. Mr. Buie recently completed a period of service as the Society's Membership Secretary. He reported briefly on the 2023 Annual Meeting which was held in July at Bennett College in Greensboro, North Carolina. The theme of the meeting was "Methodism and the Civil Rights Movement". Included were visits to the International Civil Rights Center and Museum in downtown Greensboro and the Charlotte Brown Hawkins State Historic Site in Sedalia, NC. (The 2024 Annual Meeting has been scheduled for September 17-19, 2024, at Lake Junaluska.)

Conference Commission on Archives and History. Dr. R. Phillip Stone, Conference Archivist, stated that a great deal of 2023 has been committed to the task of collecting and processing the records requested from separating churches under the "plan of disaffiliation" imposed by the Conference leadership. Due to space limitations, the Commission has requested digitalized copies of those records for the Conference Archives. The records requested have included such items as Church Council Minutes and Membership Records. The design of the Commission has been to preserve these records for the future. The Reverend Luther H. Rickenbaker, III, Chairperson of the Commission, spoke appreciatively of the opportunity which he has had following his retirement from the parish to work as a volunteer in the Conference Archives at Wofford.

Time of Remembrance. Mr. Gramling led a time of remembering members of the Conference Historical Society who have entered the Church Triumphant since the last annual meeting of the Society. The following persons were remembered:

Dr. Robert Lewis Beamer(06/09/1933-11/28/2022) – Life Member

Dr. David C. Needham(04/17/1936-12/11/2022)

The Reverend Dr. John Moore Bullard(05/06/1932-02/11/2023) – Life Member

Mr. William Light Kinney, Jr.(10/26/1933-02/19/2023) – Life Member

Mr. Robert F. Pickens(08/17/1931-08/09/2023) – Life Member

Mr. Gramling concluded the "time of remembrance" with a prayer from the Ritual.

Nomination of Officers(2024-2025). The current officers being eligible, and willing, to serve another two year term in their current offices, Mrs. Plyler moved that they be reelected. The motion was seconded by Mr. Rickenbaker and was approved. (Following the meeting Mr. Gramling advised the other officers that it was his wish that the coming term be his last as Secretary-Treasurer having served in the office since 2006 and four years previously as President.)

Program Presentations

“Historical Photographs”
Presentation Prepared By Spartanburg Methodist College Students

Mr. Drum brought formal greetings on behalf of the College. He made special note of the faculty award made annually by the College which honors the Reverend Dr. A. V. Huff, Jr., a former member of the College’s Board of Trustees. Mr. Drum reported on efforts to encourage students at the College to become more actively involved in the study of history which has resulted in the development of the “SMC Archives Project” in which students selected photographs of the College’s past to form a collection for display on the campus in Ellis Hall and in the Library. He shared a video summary describing the Archives Project.

In response to questions, Mr. Drum indicated that Hammond Hall, Moore Gymnasium, Judd Hall, and the Library are the oldest buildings on campus. The President’s Home was taken down to provide space for a new building. He described the school’s current transition to a four year institution which is proceeding slowly. 2019 welcomed the first class of juniors pursuing a bachelor’s degree, the first degrees being awarded in 2021. Recently the College has added two new bachelor’s degree offerings, Sports Management and Professional Writing. Mr. Drum also described his responsibilities as Director of Religious Life and Church Relations which include leading Chapel Services, bible studies, counseling, and representing the Methodist Church connection on the President’s cabinet. He stated that he also currently serves as pastor of a local church.

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“Reverend Camak Found a College”
Presentation By Dr. R. Phillip Stone, Conference and Wofford College Archivist

(Dr. Stone provided the following text of his remarks for publication in these Minutes. The Society is grateful for this consideration.)

We are here this morning at an institution that has its roots in South Carolina history, in Methodist history, and in the Spartanburg community’s history. I want to look at how all three of those strands came together to help form this college. Spartanburg Methodist College was the idea of a clergyman who had been formed in a religious tradition that called for him to act when he saw a need, and the changing economy and society of early 20th century South Carolina showed that a new group of Carolinians needed educational opportunities.

South Carolina at the turn of the 20th century was changing. The Piedmont part of the state, which had been heavily agricultural before the Civil War, was on its way to being the center of the American textile industry. A new rail line came through Spartanburg in 1873, connecting the upcountry with the Northeast. In the ashes of war, town builders in the Piedmont, taking advantage of the upcountry’s natural resources, began to build textile factories. Many town builders felt like their town’s prosperity required building textile mills, and, in towns like Spartanburg, those with any money to invest soon banded together to found a mill. Men and women whose lives had been in the rural foothills and mountains of the western Carolinas came to work in these new mills. It was a completely new way of life for almost all of them. Although most South Carolinians continued to make their living in agriculture well into the 20th century, the upcountry gradually became the

center of the southern textile belt. From northeastern Alabama along the Piedmont plateau to southern Virginia, the landscape soon became dotted with textile factories. Many of the mills soon became surrounded by company-owned housing provided for the workers, or operatives, as they called them. Many moved to town with no option for nearby housing, so the mill village system grew more out of necessity. In the decades after Reconstruction, mills returned handsome profits to their stockholders.

What to townspeople seemed like progress could be a mixed blessing for the mill-hands. On one hand, textile work paid a stable wage, and sometimes it was more than they got on the farm. However, living in close proximity to one's neighbors in company housing was a different experience than farm life. While each had its challenges, being at the beck and call of the mill whistle and working for someone else was also new to them. The real challenge was that everyone, for various reasons, looked down on the mill workers. Farmers thought they only went to work in the mills because they had failed at farming. Townspeople thought they were uneducated, uncultured, and unhealthy. Many middle-class progressives of the era looked at the mill workers as a group of people that needed to be reformed. That, obviously, did not sit well with mill workers.

Just as the Upcountry was going through a period of change, so was the church. As we all know, the first Methodist great schism took place in 1844-46 over the issue of slavery. Relations between the northern and southern church were not good for decades. Defeat in the Civil War left many southern Protestant churches both financially destitute and willing to embrace a religion of the lost cause, and church became even more important in society than it had ever been before the war. Black Methodists withdrew to other denominations, leaving the Methodist Episcopal Church, South pretty much all-white and focused on justifying slavery, secession, and rationalizing the South's loss.

Dr. A. V. Huff, Jr., notes in his bicentennial history of South Carolina United Methodism that the church was in terrible shape financially in 1865, so much of the late 19th century saw attempts to recover. The Episcopal Church, the faith of the planter class, lost some of its influence, and the Methodists and Baptists rose to a new level of respectability in the state's growing towns. As South Carolina transitioned from a rural to a small-town society, churches became central fixtures of those towns, and ministers and lay leaders were recognized as town leaders. In the Methodist Church, appointments started becoming longer, camp meetings gave way to revivals, and the class meeting gave way to women's and youth organizations.

South Carolina Methodists had a history of founding colleges. Wofford had opened in 1854, followed by several colleges for women. Columbia College was founded that same year, and other colleges, including the short-lived Spartanburg Female College and later, Lander College, opened for women. Black Methodists were also college founders, having established Claflin by 1869. By the turn of the century, Wofford also had fitting schools, basically private high schools to prepare students for Wofford, in both Spartanburg and in Bamberg. The church provided considerable financial support for its colleges, though no one would accuse any college of being wealthy. A significant part of Wofford's mission was to prepare students for ministry in South Carolina, as well as providing leadership for the state's small towns. Certainly throughout its history, Methodism has valued and supported higher education.

One student who enrolled at Wofford in 1898 would embrace that mission and ministry. David English Camak was born in Fairfield County in 1880 into a Methodist family. He attended Wofford's Fitting School, and another preparatory school in Fairfield County before enrolling at Wofford. He left after his junior year to teach, then came back in 1902 to finish his senior year. As a student, he cobbled shoes to help pay his way. Most sources suggest he had felt a call to the ministry some time before, and he was licensed to preach while in his senior year. His biography in *Twentieth Century Sketches* suggests that someone offered to pay his college tuition if he would become a missionary, but he felt more of a call to work closer to home.

While a student at Wofford, Camak heard a class lecture by Wofford's new president, Henry Nelson Snyder, about the challenges facing the textile workers, and Camak decided then that he felt that to be his calling. He later explained that he felt God was calling him to do something for the "rising generation of cotton mill operatives educationally," which then would help them "morally, religiously, socially, and industrially" Snyder and Camak here are fairly typical of the attitudes of town people toward the textile class, though I think they were both well-meaning. According to *Common Ties*, Dr. Katherine Cann's history of SMC, Camak volunteered to teach Sunday School to adults at nearby Duncan Memorial Methodist Church. He realized how many of his students couldn't read. Rather than turn him into some pontificating progressive, Camak was touched by the people he got to know.

After graduating from Wofford in June 1903, he was appointed to a vacant position as junior preacher on the Union Circuit, finishing out the conference year, where he had five mill churches. He was admitted to the South Carolina Conference in December 1903 and requested a mill church. The bishop sent him to Green Street Church in Union, serving the large Union Cotton Mill village. In his first year, he came up with the idea of a cooperative school for adult mill workers who had not had a chance to get an education. Dr. Cann's book talks about an article he wrote, noting that he did believe that the mill workers wanted a chance at an education, and it was the mill system that was denying them that chance. Camak believed the church had a role to play in helping them get an education, and came up with the idea of a church, mill, school cooperative.

He later served in Jonesville, also in Union County, but the church hierarchy grew tired of his calls to uplift the mill workers, and after he was ordained elder at the 1907 Conference, the young minister was sent to the rural Saluda circuit for the next 2 years, with the idea of getting him to give up on his plan. His own uncle, a leading clergyman in the conference, told him to "leave the factory folks alone." The bias against them was pretty strong, and fairly common among the clergy. The sense was that Camak was wasting his time and talents on them. In 1910, the conference appointed him as the financial agent for the Southern Industrial Institute in Charlotte. This school had some similarities to the one he was envisioning, and it's likely he found the appointment on his own, and the conference let him go.

While the social gospel movement in Methodism may have inspired Camak's vision, the Methodist Conference was not enthusiastic about actually supporting a cooperative school for mill workers. Dr. Cann notes that Camak later said he was always in front of some conference board asking for support, and rarely getting it. His two targets for financial support were the Board of Education and the Board of Missions. The Board of Education was already supporting Wofford, Columbia, and Lander. They weren't interested in another school and didn't have much money to spare anyway. So, given the missional

nature of what he wanted, he focused on the Board of Missions. He also tried to get help from the Woman's Home Missionary Society, but they, despite their stated interest in supporting the economically disadvantaged, told him there were no funds available.

In 1911, he managed to get appointed to another mill circuit - this time a charge in Spartanburg with Duncan Memorial and Glendale churches. It was at Duncan Memorial that Camak was finally able to put his ideas into action. He was only 31, and had only been serving for about 8 years in local churches when he was able to start putting his vision, which he had been nurturing for close to a decade, into action. His vision did combine all three of the strands I've mentioned - Methodism, economic change, and the Spartanburg community. He evidently had the support of his presiding elder as well as the Board of Missions. I am sure that Dr. Snyder was able to bring some influence to bear on the presiding elder, and on other conference officials.

Camak knew from his earlier work that the support of the local mill executives was critical. He had aroused the opposition of the leadership of some of Union's mills - that leader let him know that students didn't make good workers, and having some workers get an education would demoralize other workers. However, the leadership of Spartan Mills was more open to the idea. They had already built a school in the Spartan Mill village, which the city school system actually ran, and supported the idea of "welfare capitalism" that tried to keep workers attached to the mill. Camak knew he needed Walter S. Montgomery's support. As soon as he arrived at his new appointment in Spartanburg, he made his way to Montgomery's office. Dr. Cann shares Camak's account of their first meeting. Camak wrote that Montgomery received him graciously, and offered any needed assistance as he got started as a new pastor in the village. Camak seized the opportunity, telling Montgomery about his idea for a cooperative school, where students would work in the mill one week and study the next. Montgomery immediately agreed, "Tell the young folks we'll meet them half way."

Montgomery provided a house in the village, at the corner of Farley and Brawley Streets, rent-free and sent his carpenters over to make any modifications Camak needed for the house. Camak was ready to start in September 1911, with a recent Wofford graduate named T. J. Carter, himself a product of a mill village, whom Camak had known in Union and who had worked his way through Wofford, as his second teacher. They did not have many students in the fall of 1911, but things were about to get better.

Camak later credited Montgomery as a virtual co-founder, considering the financial and institutional support he provided. Several other Spartans probably deserve a lot of credit for bringing Camak's idea to life.

At the 1911 Conference, Camak was released from his pastoral appointment, and appointed by Bishop John C. Kilgo to the school, an appointment that continued until 1924. The Board of Missions agreed to pay Camak's \$1500 salary, but emphasized he was responsible for raising funds for operations and facilities. Snyder along with two other Spartanburg leaders signed a letter endorsing the idea, and the conference elected them, as well as some other clergy and laity to the first board of trustees. It was at the first board meeting in January, 1912 that Camak was named president of the institute. Charles P. Hammond, who signed the letter with Snyder, became the board chair. He'd been an active Methodist layman in Spartanburg, and devoted much of his time to helping get the new

school going. By June 1912, the school was underway, with several dozen students being taught at whatever level they needed, from primary to high school. The average grade level was 5th grade.

The Methodist hierarchy continued to oppose Camak's institute. Bishop John Kilgo launched a personal attack on Camak and the institute on the floor of Annual Conference, threatening to refuse to re-appoint Camak to the presidency should the Board of Missions continue to pay his salary, and that the Board of Missions had usurped his Episcopal authority by establishing the school, and asserted bluntly that the Textile Industrial Institute was not a Methodist institution. He accused Camak of trying to substitute sociology for the gospel of Jesus Christ, and directed that he not raise funds as if it were a Methodist institution. Kilgo said he would hold any minister personally responsible if he allowed Camak to solicit funds in his church.

The school continued, and the Board of Education recommended Camak keep his position. Dr. Cann tells us that Camak later learned that members of the Board paid his salary that year.

It was not long after that the Conference did adopt TII as a conference institution at the urging of the General Board of Missions. Perhaps by this time, Bishop Kilgo had gone on to other conferences. His opposition is curious, since he had himself been president of Trinity College and, as a bishop, helped transform that institution into Duke University. Perhaps it does reflect some notion that he'd been circumvented, or perhaps he really did not approve of the idea. In any event, the opposition of the church hierarchy did not stop the college.

Largely with the help of Spartanburg textile leaders, Camak was able to get his college on firmer footing. Later, with the encouragement of the General Board of Missions, the SC Conference did adopt the college, and Camak had spotted land near the Saxon Mill, which the Spartanburg community helped fund. Construction on the original buildings began in 1913, only months after Kilgo's attack on Camak. Evidently Methodists and mill owners in Spartanburg were not worried about John Kilgo. There would be trying times in the Textile Industrial Institute's future, but devoted friends and supporters remained on hand to support its work and keep David English Camak's vision for a place that help the state's mill workers achieve an education alive.

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Dr. Stone concluded his presentation and entertained questions. Discussion followed. The close relationship between Spartanburg Methodist and Wofford Colleges was noted as well as the positive support of labor from the Spartanburg community which encouraged Camak's vision. The school became a junior college in 1927 and was renamed Spartanburg Junior College in 1942. The name was changed to Spartanburg Methodist College in 1974. It continues to relate to the South Carolina Conference through the Conference's Board of Missions. It was mentioned that among SMC's well known graduates was the late United States Senator Olin D. Johnston who served previously as South Carolina's governor. W. Scott Cochran serves as the eighth president of the College.

With expressions of appreciation for Dr. Stone and Mr. Drum, and there being no further business, the meeting of the Conference Historical Society was concluded and adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Roger M. Gramling
Secretary-Treasurer