

**MINUTES**  
**Annual Meeting**  
**The South Carolina Conference Historical Society**  
At  
**Ministers' Hall, Claflin University**  
Orangeburg, South Carolina  
Saturday, November 5, 2022

The South Carolina Conference Historical Society met on Saturday, November 5<sup>th</sup> at Claflin University in Orangeburg. The meeting was held in historic Ministers' Hall in the library room honoring Justice Ernest A. Finney, Jr., a Claflin alumnus, who was the first African American to serve as Chief Justice of the South Carolina Supreme Court. Ministers' Hall was built in 1913 and served for many years as the school's dining hall. The building currently serves as a cultural and performing arts center and in the future will house the library holdings of Justice Finney.

The meeting at Claflin was part of the Society's observance of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the 1972 Merger of the South Carolina Conference(1866) and the South Carolina Conference(1785).

During this year the Conference Historical Society and the Conference Commission on Archives and History have attempted to focus attention on this significant anniversary in a number of ways. There have been articles and columns in several editions of *The Advocate* during the year. In April, the Reverend Dr. A. V. Huff, Jr., Conference Historian, spoke to a joint meeting of the Conference Historical Society and Conference Commission at Wofford College on the topic, "Steps to the 1972 Merger".

The meeting at Claflin University on November 5<sup>th</sup> continued the observance of this chapter in the history of the now one South Carolina Conference. The meeting was especially celebratory given the election just two days earlier of the Reverend Dr. Robin Dease to the Episcopacy by the Southeastern Jurisdiction Conference. Bishop Dease is a Claflin graduate and former Claflin faculty member. She joins three other Claflin Alumni elected to the Episcopacy – James S. Thomas in 1964, Ernest W. Newman in 1984, and Joseph B. Bethea in 1988.

The meeting was hosted by Mrs. Marilyn Gibbs Drayton, Director of the Hubert V. Manning Library at Claflin, and members of her staff. Those attending began gathering at 10:00 am for refreshments, conversation, and fellowship.

**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.

Ms. Dark expressed appreciation to Mrs. Drayton for hosting the meeting at Claflin and for the preparations made by her and the Reverend Larry D. McCutcheon and those working with them for the privilege of this visit to the campus of Claflin University.

**Report of the Secretary-Treasurer – Financial and Membership Reports.** The Reverend Roger M. Gramling, the Society's Secretary-Treasurer, presented his report. His

report covered the period January 1, 2022 through August 31, 2022. Mr. Gramling reported a balance on hand at January 1, 2022, of \$5,738.71. Income for the period totaled \$1,360.00 which included Membership Dues of \$810.00 and gifts to the Society of \$350.00. The Society also received \$200.00 in annual support from the Conference Commission on Archives and History.

Expenses for the period reported totaled \$600.46 which included dues to the SEJ Historical Society of \$100.00 bringing the balance at August 31, 2022, to \$6,498.25. Membership decreased from 128 to 112 for the period mainly the result of memberships not being renewed. The 112 figure includes 49 Life Memberships and 45 Individual Memberships.

**Report of the Editor of *The Mark* and A Progress Report on the South Carolina Methodist Historical Trail Project.** Mr. Gramling reported on behalf of the Reverend Dr. A. V. Huff, Jr., Editor, who was unable to be present. The Historical Society's newsletter, *The Mark*, continues to be published in two to three issues annually. Selections from the Historical Trail Project have been regularly published in recent editions of the newsletter in order to share this information with the membership. The majority of the brief histories of the sites are being written by Dr. Huff, who also serves as South Carolina Conference Historian. To date information about twenty-four of the forty sites have been published. The brief histories of each site can certainly be reprinted in church newsletters and papers. Sharing information about these sites is encouraged. The descriptions are not copyrighted. The Secretary-Treasurer is assisting in the formatting of the newsletter.

**The SEJ Historical Society.** Ms. Dark made a brief report on the recent meeting of the Southeastern Jurisdiction Historical Society. The Jurisdictional Society held its first "in person" annual meeting since 2019, July 26-29, 2022, at Epworth By The Sea on Saint Simons Island, Georgia. The theme of the previously postponed meeting was "Walking With Wesley" and focused on the activities and experiences of John and Charles Wesley during their tenure as young Anglican priests serving the Georgia Colony during the period 1736 to 1737.

The meeting was hosted by Anne Packard, Curator of the Moore Methodist Museum at Epworth By The Sea. Included in the program were tours to Savannah, Georgia, and to Christ Church and Fort Frederica National Monument on Saint Simons Island. Among the presenters was the Reverend Franklin B. Buie of the South Carolina Conference who spoke on John Wesley's presence in South Carolina and Wesley's decision to go to Georgia. Mr. Buie serves as Membership Secretary for the SEJ Historical Society.

The annual meeting of the Historical Society of the United Methodist Church was held in conjunction with the Southeastern Jurisdiction Historical Society meeting. There were approximately fifty in attendance representing members of both societies.

The SEJ Historical Society awarded Honorary Memberships to Dennis Lamm of the North Carolina Conference and Fred Day, former General Secretary of the General Commission on Archives and History. Honorary Memberships recognize contributions to Methodist history and service to the Society.

The SEJ Historical Society elected new officers to serve for 2022-2024. Among them was the Reverend Roger M. Gramling of the South Carolina Conference who was elected President.

**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:

Mr. John J. Brooks (09/23/1937-07/17/2022)  
The Reverend Reginald D. Wilson, Jr. (09/09/1949-09/18/2022) (Life Member)  
Mr. Melvin Hayes Mizell (11/01/1938-09/26/2022) (Life Member)

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

### **Program Presentation**

History and Leadership – The 1866 Conference & Claflin University  
Presented By  
The Reverend Larry D. McCutcheon  
Assisted By  
Mrs. Marilyn Gibbs Drayton, University Librarian

Following the Business Session, the Reverend Larry D. McCutcheon, Interim University Chaplain, and Mrs. Marilyn Gibbs Drayton, Director of the Hubert V. Manning Library at Claflin, were introduced. A Claflin graduate, Mr. McCutcheon has had a long association with the University and its students having served as Director of the Orangeburg Wesley Foundation and as Pastor at Trinity United Methodist Church in Orangeburg. He is a former Superintendent of the Charleston District. Mr. McCutcheon has been a member of the South Carolina Conference since 1973.

Mr. McCutcheon cited three important sources in developing his presentation which serve as resources as well for the subject of the program: *Steps Along the Way* by the Reverend Dr. Warren Jenkins, *Passionate Journey* by the Reverend Dr. John W. Curry, Sr., and a new book, *Struggling to Learn: An Intimate History of School Desegregation in South Carolina*, by Dr. June Manning Thomas, whose father the Reverend Dr. Hubert V. Manning was President of Claflin University for twenty-eight years(1956-1984).

Mr. McCutcheon and Mrs. Drayton shared insights into how religion and education were intertwined in the beginnings and growth of the 1866 Conference and Claflin University and how the two had their origins in the need to serve newly freed African Americans in South Carolina following the Civil War. The South Carolina Mission Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church was organized in 1866 under the leadership of Bishop Osman C. Baker. Two main concerns were literacy and training for ministers of the newly formed conference. Efforts were assisted by the work of the Freedman’s Aid Society organized by the Methodist Episcopal Church.

Centenary Church, organized in 1862 by freed people of color, became a “mother church” to African American Methodists in Charleston and an early center of conference

activity. The warmth and spirituality of Methodism appealed to the large number of African Americans in South Carolina.

The Baker Biblical Institute was organized in 1866 to provide theological education. The Reverend T. Willard Lewis, a missionary of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and the Reverend Dr. Alonzo Webster, a teacher at the Baker Institute, soon acquired property in Orangeburg, South Carolina, with the financial assistance of Lee Claflin, a wealthy manufacturer, and his son, William Claflin, of Boston, Massachusetts. The Baker Institute became a part of the new school at Orangeburg which was named for the Claflin Family. Claflin University became the flagship of the 1866 South Carolina Conference and the two are bound together in their history. An agricultural and mechanical land grant college was established as a component of Claflin in 1872, separating to become South Carolina State College in 1896.

Methodist Ministers from the 1866 Conference were active in many efforts to improve the life of South Carolinians especially members of the African American community. Benjamin Franklin Randolph was an early member of the South Carolina Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church and an important figure during Reconstruction in the state. He attended the preparatory school of Oberlin College and received his college degree in 1862. He was ordained to the ministry in the Methodist Episcopal Church. At the end of the Civil War, Randolph settled in Charleston, and was employed first by the American Missionary Association and then became assistant superintendent of schools for the Freedman's Bureau.

After serving as a newspaper editor, he became active in Republican politics and represented Orangeburg County in the South Carolina Constitutional Convention of 1868. He was elected to the state senate from Orangeburg. He set out on a speaking tour of the state. Leaving the train at Hodges Station in Abbeville County (near Cokesbury) on October 16, 1868, he was assassinated by three white men. Randolph's body was taken to Columbia and was buried after a funeral attended by a huge crowd. It is likely that he was buried outside the bounds of Elmwood Cemetery. In 1871-72 the property was purchased for the use of African Americans and named Randolph Cemetery. Eventually other prominent members of the Reconstruction legislature were buried there.

In more recent years Methodist Ministers and Methodist laymen became prominent leaders in the Civil Rights Movement, including ministerial members of the Newman Family and Mrs. Modjeska Monteith Simpkins, a member of Centenary Church. Churches such as Old Bethel and Centenary in Charleston, Cumberland in Florence, Wesley Chapel in Lake City, and Trinity in Orangeburg became centers both for ministry and for leadership formation and development. African American churches have always played a significant role as a center for community life.

In 1884 the Reverend Dr. Lewis M. Dunton became Claflin's third and longest serving President. A member of the South Carolina Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, he was pastor at Centenary Church in Charleston at the time of his election. A gifted fundraiser and spokesman for the University, his thirty-eight years as President saw significant growth and development including endowment.

Mrs. Drayton and Mr. McCutcheon noted that Claflin and the 1866 Conference have produced a long list of notable and accomplished leaders. Three Claflin graduates have

served their *alma mater* as president, Dr. John J. Seabrook, the Reverend Dr. Hubert V. Manning, and Dr. Henry N. Tisdale. Robert Charles Bates was the first African American to be certified as an architect. Dr. Leo F. Twiggs, an internationally known artist, was the first African American to receive a doctorate from the University of Georgia. Four graduates, noted earlier, have been elected to the Methodist Episcopacy. William Wilson Cook planned and administered federal buildings as the first African American architect in the Office of Supervising Architect of the U. S. Treasury Department. The Reverend I. DeQuincey Newman, a distinguished member of the South Carolina Conference, was a leading civil rights activist and the first African American State Senator elected in South Carolina since Reconstruction. Judge Richard E. Fields of Charleston, a member of Centenary Church, was a prominent lay leader in the South Carolina Conference and a Trustee of Claflin University. After a period of service as a municipal judge, he was elected a South Carolina Circuit Court Judge in 1980.

Both the South Carolina Conference(1866) and Claflin University can justly lay claim to a long history of service to the people of South Carolina and beyond through many who have rendered distinguished and exemplary service to the church, the state, and the nation. Mr. McCutcheon noted in conclusion that as the South Carolina Conference(1972) observes the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Merger of the two former South Carolina Conferences, Methodists in South Carolina need to celebrate the things that we do well including the productive efforts to build bridges across the Conference's racial diversity. He noted that laymen such as the late Dr. Michael C. Watson of Bamberg was one who demonstrated his commitment to bridge building. A remarkable record of cooperation and community has been built by United Methodist Women in South Carolina. Among the organization's presidents was Mrs. Ethel Manning, the wife of Dr. Hubert V. Manning, one of Claflin's presidents. History has demonstrated the importance of dialogue and in continuing dialogue and learning about each other Mr. McCutcheon expressed his belief that we look to a great future.

With expressions of appreciation for Mr. McCutcheon and Mrs. Drayton, and there being no further business, the meeting was concluded and adjourned at approximately 12:15 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Roger M. Gramling  
Secretary-Treasurer