

HERE to SERVE.
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Detroit Annual Conference. (4-9-70)
[Transcribed by Archive Assistant M. Burns]

What is the purpose of the Commission on Archives and History? What service does it render? Is it something important or merely incidental and of little consequence? Should the Conference disband it, or, encourage it and provide the support it sorely needs? Similar questions might be asked but in this report we will try to give some answers which to those who are concerned are persuasive and convincing.

The former name, Historical Society”, pointed to a fundamental responsibility, namely, dealing with history, the collection of historical records, histories, related books, manuscripts, as well as providing adequate housing. In searching out and finding such things a number of interests have been upper most in the minds of those connected with the “Society”- General Methodist history, the history of the Detroit Conference, the records of former groups which have been merged into the Conference, local church histories, the pictures and biographies of our pastors, anniversary observances, Conference institutions, the work of our Bishops, as well as publications by our pastors.

Enriching our collection are the histories of other Conferences some forty of which we have. Each is a thrilling record of devotion, self-sacrifice, loyalty and courage. It is true there is a similarity in these stories as they record the efforts of dedicated men and women to spread the Gospel and the convictions of Methodist people. Yet, they are different! Because they are an account of the services of different peoples, working under varied circumstances, facing special problems, encountering unique situations, as well as

different racial and national groups. At the heart of it all was a dedication of time, talent and skill, almost unmatched and seldom excelled. Are not such records worth preserving?

John Wesley is well represented in our library. His sermons, journals, various publications, correspondence are there, telling the story of his busy life, his thinking and his work. Many of our books tell the story of his life. Francis Asbury, the stalwart pioneer and tireless circuit rider whose leadership made him the actual founder of American Methodism, is well represented. And more volumes about these great men are being added to the collection.

The biographies of many of our Bishops, along with some of their writings, fill a lengthy shelf. Bishops Havens, Matthews, Simpson, Thoburn, Berry and others find their places in this group. We would welcome others.

We take special pride in our hymn and song books. Also in the publications dealing with the hymns and songs, telling their fascinating stories, as well as the accounts of many authors and composers. Some of the hymn-books are the small volumes used by the early Methodists, both in England and America, none of which have the notes. These appeared much later. The last, and finest of all is the recently published United Methodist hymnal.

You would expect to find in the collection the bound volumes of the Detroit and West Michigan Conference minutes, as well as those of the meetings of the General Conference. At first there was but one Conference in the State. The division took place in 1856 at which time they held separate meetings, the Detroit Conference meeting at Adrian. In addition there are the journals from other American Methodist Conferences,

such as Indiana, Illinois, Ohio, Western Pennsylvania, Maryland, Florida and others. These are valuable for reference.

The books published by many Detroit Conference pastors fill more than a single shelf. The names of Elliott, Hough, Pierce, Pellowe, Gray, Fisher, Rice, Berry, Reed, Marvin, Brunger, to mention only a few, are usually well known. This part of the Commission's collection is especially prized for it indicates in some measure the high type of men who have honored and graced our pulpits.

The loose-leaf binders were mentioned in a previous article. In these will be found numerous items clipped from the Michigan Christian Advocate, telling of the activities of the local congregations, of the pastors, our Bishops, and of our great organizations, youth work and institutions. This service began over a generation ago. It is intended to be a running account of life work of our Detroit Conference churches, and to say the least is invaluable and irreplaceable.

The binders we cherish most highly are those containing the biographies and pictures of many of our deceased or living pastors. This program began when Dr. J.A. Halmhuber was president of the "Historical Society", was carried on faithfully by his successors, with able assistance by Dr. William C.S. Pellowe and Rev. Wm. H. Morford. This is a service of the first magnitude for which we are deeply grateful. It is a matter of regret that we still lack the biographies and pictures of too many of our pastors.

There are two sections in the Commissions library in which we take a great deal of satisfaction. The first, under Dr. Halmhuber's inspiration, is one of the best Methodist Protestant collections in the church. He was ably assisted by Rev. Charles Bragg, the later presidents have continued this effort. Now, we have material exceeded only by Wesley

Seminary in Washington. A year ago two representatives from the Board of Education in Nashville spent three days in the archives, examining and evaluating these holdings. They found things they had been looking for for twenty-five years and declared they had found a veritable gold mine. These records go back into the early years of the last century when the controversy over lay representation was at its height.

The other section of special significance is the collection of the former Evangelical United Brethren Michigan Conference. It is easy to become enthusiastic over this material since it includes the records of the Evangelical, the Evangelical Association and those of The Church of the United Brethren in Christ. They are unique in many ways and give still greater significance to our entire collection. They were transferred to the archives in the College Library at Adrian last fall and have only been partially sorted, located and indexed.

In addition to these there are also equally valuable records of the former Lexington, German and Norwegian-Danish Conferences. We earnestly solicit more contributions. Unless this is done shortly they will be forever lost.

To those who are interested this account provides some ideas of the extent of the Detroit Conference historical holdings and of their value to those doing special investigating, research or who need help in preparing the history of local churches or Conference institutions or who need help in preparing the history of local churches or Conference institutions or personalities. Time and again visitors have said, "This is as fine a Methodist historical collection I have found anywhere." Its value increases with the passing of the years.