

GA-1707

DISCIPLES OF CHRIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY

General Assembly Report

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John M. Imbler, Interim Executive Director

The Disciples of Christ Historical Society is alive and well! It just celebrated its 75th year of mission and ministry which began on the campus of Culver-Stockton College in Canton, Missouri. In 1958, the Society moved to the T.W. Phillips Memorial Building in Nashville, Tennessee where it resided until the summer of 2016. Today it sits in the historic Bethany, West Virginia area where the footsteps and hoof beats laid down by Thomas and Alexander Campbell, their families, and so many visiting religious and political dignitaries of nineteenth century U.S. walked and rode.

Within the Society's logo is the caption *The Future of History*. Alexander Campbell once commented, "To aid us in looking forward, let us...look back." Archival work is foundational to the mission of DCHS. The Society's archival resources are largely comprised of solicited and unsolicited donations. Since the move, the Society has received significant, some rare, materials from individuals, congregations, and wider ministries of restoration churches.

Transitions

The eleven semi-trailer loads that traveled from Nashville to Bethany have long been emptied, but the materials have yet to be all unpacked. Books, journals, brochures, congregational and judicatorial records, ministerial files, portraits, artifacts, memorabilia, and other treasures of the Stone-Campbell movement are safely stored in a temperature- humidity-controlled vault or on display throughout the building. With the support of the Renner and the Phillips-Johnson families as major donors through the years, the Renner Visitor Center, adjacent to the Campbell mansion and study and across the road from the Campbell cemetery, was renovated and expanded to house the Society and its holdings. Ground breaking occurred in October of 2015, and the building dedication took place in September 2016. It was a notable achievement to complete the construction and the massive move in less than a year. The proximity to these landmark sites and agreement between Bethany College and the Historical Society enable the Society to "manage" Historic Bethany offering educational opportunities, conducting tours, and sponsoring conferences.

The dedication service was held in conjunction with the weekend regional assembly of the Christian Church in West Virginia and closed with the Kirkpatrick Lecture delivered

by the Rev. Dr. D. Newell Williams, president and professor of modern and American church history at Brite Divinity School, Texas Christian University, Fort Worth. Dr. Williams' remarks on "Stone-Campbell History: Past and Future" captured the essence of the Historical Society's mission of protecting the past for the generations ahead.

Finances

A quiet, yet successful capital campaign over the course of two years has resulted in gifts and pledges in excess of \$280,000 submitted by eighty-five individuals, families, and foundations. Some of those gifts were designated for specific rooms and projects as well as supporting the costs of construction. Among those designations were the A. Dale Fiers president's suite and the Peter and Lynne Morgan Gathering Place – a patio for receptions and relaxing conversations. In addition, money was earmarked for a student worker endowment fund and for the purchase of archive shelving. The Rev. Dr. Peter Morgan, president emeritus of the Society, and Lynne Morgan served as campaign chairs with the (late) Rev. Dr. Harold (Hal) Watkins and Evelyn Watkins serving as honorary chairs. Begun in 2015, the campaign will run through 2018 so the goal of raising \$300,000-400,000 is still within reach.

There are two major benefits of endowments and named funds of the Society held in trust by the Christian Church Foundation: protection of the assets and the potential for greater growth. By the end of 2016, these investments approached \$7,000,000 with no indebtedness by the Society beyond the construction loan.

Personnel

Called out of retirement in May 2016 to be the interim executive director in a deployed capacity, the board determined that my credentials as a life member of the Society, educator, Disciples historian and author, and former seminary executive were among the skills needed to guide the final stages of the transition and prepare DCHS for its reconstructed life in its new location. Among the responsibilities assigned were to help facilitate the move in Bethany; manage the finances, which by then were stable; work with the board of directors to update the Society's mission and structure; and rebuild relationships with Stone-Campbell heirs through interpretation and communication.

At the September 2016 board meeting, in conjunction with the dedication of the facilities, it was voted that the Society would remain a general ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). With that critically important decision made, during this current year a search committee of the board will interview and recommend a new president, so another of my tasks is to enable a smooth leadership transition.

In August of 2016, Shelley L. Jacobs began work as archivist on a full-time basis. She came to DCHS from an affiliation with the Churches of Christ in Saskatchewan. Her master's degree in church history from Harding University Graduate School of Religion focused on restoration studies. As part of her resume, she was director of the library for Western Christian College and oversaw the transition of the archives collection to the

Saskatchewan Archives Board as the college closed. In 2010 Ms. Jacobs was named Historian of the Year by the Canadian Churches of Christ Historical Society.

Programs

Dr. Imbler participated in the North American Christian Convention of the Christian Church/Churches of Christ hosting an exhibit booth as well as at the Indianapolis General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). During the past twelve months, he has lectured publicly, taught graduate courses, and led Sunday school classes all on Stone-Campbell themes.

Ms. Jacobs moderated a session and presented a paper at the Christian Scholars Conference held at Lipscomb University on Christian Churches and Churches of Christ in Western Canada. She also led a workshop at the Pepperdine Bible Lectures entitled "From Nashville to Bethany in 2016 (The Journey of the Disciples of Christ Historical Society's Stone-Campbell Archives)."

Both Dr. Imbler and Ms. Jacobs have met and continue to meet with congregations, clergy groups, and educational institutions as well as hosting visitors, students, and researchers at the Society's building and Campbell sites.

Located in the Phillips Building in Nashville was an exhibit hall specifically honoring Oscar Haynes. Mr. Haynes was a noted African-American businessman, Disciples church leader, benefactor, and social activist from the Washington DC area who served on the DCHS board. As the transition was under way, it was determined that the permanent Haynes exhibit would be housed in National City Christian Church where he had been a member. The exhibit will display books, articles, memorabilia, artifacts, and photographs of individuals and events depicting the contributions to church and society by African-American Disciples from the nineteenth century to the present. The unveiling and dedication service for this exhibit is scheduled for National City Christian Church Heritage Sunday in October.

Engaging the Future

Even with the normal disruption caused by any major life transition, opportunities abound. In preparation for strengthening the work of the Society and the calling of a new president among the goals established are:

- 1 – increasing a financial base sufficient for the ongoing work of the Society and for its future;
- 2 – creating a multi-purpose website that tells the story of the Society with links to affiliated institutions enabling broader research capabilities and interpreting the history of the Stone-Campbell people;
- 3 – building an electronic data base for individuals seeking information on Stone-Campbell resources, genealogical records, and archival holdings;
- 4 – adopting a new constitution and enabling documents such as a collection development policy that reflects the Society's new reality;

- 5 – organizing and cataloging the archives in such a way that the materials are readily accessible to staff and researchers;
- 6 – re-establishing publications such as books, journals, and newsletters;
- 7 – sponsoring lectures on Stone-Campbell themes;
- 8 – providing resources to encourage congregations to develop their own histories.

In addition to my deep appreciation to the board of directors and to interim president the Rev. Dr. Todd Adams which have been engaged for two years to bring the Society to this healthy position, my sincere thanks to three other ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ): to the staff of the Christian Church in West Virginia for clerical, pastoral, and moral support to get us up and running; to the administration, faculty, staff of Bethany College for their welcome and willingness to share resources and time to orient us to becoming part of the Bethany community and to feel at home there; and to the public relations department of Phillips Theological Seminary in Tulsa for providing technical assistance as we rebrand DCHS towards its second 75 years.

Recommended Action: The General Board receives the report from the Disciple of Christ Historical Society and forwards to the General Assembly for consideration and discussion.