The 2016 Annual Meeting of the Alabama-West Florida Conference Historical Society was held on September 19, 2016, at historic St. Stephens UMC in St. Stephens, Alabama.

During a brief three decades, beginning in the 1790s to its decline in the 1820s, St. Stephens, situated on a high bluff on the Tombigbee River where the rocky shoals forced boats traveling north from Mobile to end their journey, was the site of a Spanish fort, an American fort and trading post, and the first Alabama Territorial capital.

As early as the summer of 1799, Rev. Tobias Gibson, a Methodist missionary from South Carolina visited the area and organized religions societies in the vicinity. The Rev. Mr. Brown, another Methodist missionary came from Tennessee with a heart fervent with piety. The renowned Lorenzo Dow came across the Creek Nation in 1803 and preached to the “Bigbee Settlers.”

By 1833 the historic town was reduced to a village and by 1850 only the ruins of the old town remained. Most of the residents had moved three miles west to a settlement they named New St. Stephens. Later, the “new” was dropped and “old” became part of the old town location name.

September 19th was another beautiful day in south-western Alabama. After registration and gathering, the 2016 Annual Meeting began with prayer and a time of singing with Rev. Ed Shirley, AWF Historical Society Vice President, leading.

The morning program began with Cecilia Adams and Dr. Ashley Coleman providing us with interesting information about the St. Stephens church and community history.

Rev. Shirley, who is also the Alabama-West Florida UMC Conference Historian, presented a dramatic monologue in the persona of Bishop Francis Asbury.

After a delicious catered lunch, the sessions resumed with a presentation by Olivia Parnell about Confederate history in the St. Stephens and Washington County area and the local Methodist ministers who have served here.

The significant history of this area and its role as the first Alabama Territorial Capitol was recognized by the state of Alabama in creating the Old St. Stephens Historical Park, “Where Alabama Began”, which contains the area which was the location of the original St. Stephens. Park Director Jennifer Faith welcomed us to visit the park and told us of what we would be able to see representing the earliest of Alabama’s history as a territory.

Rev. Shirley closed the program with thanks to the pastor, those who developed the excellent brochure, those who gave presentations, and the St. Stephens congregation. He announced that the 2017 Annual Meeting of the AWF Conference Historical Society would be held on the third Thursday in September, 2017, at Pensacola FUMC, Pensacola, Florida.

After expressing the Society’s appreciation for the hospitality of the pastor and congregation of St. Stephens UMC, President Young adjourned the meeting and urged those attending to visit the Old St. Stephens Park before heading home if their time permitted.

The Index for this issue can be found on page 14.
As early as the summer of 1799, the Rev. Tobias Gibson, a Methodist missionary from South Carolina, organized religious societies in the St. Stephens vicinity. In the fall of 1800, he again appeared; now as a missionary from the Tennessee Conference. The Reverend Mr. Brown, another Methodist (Minister) missionary came from Tennessee in 1802 with a heart fervent with piety.

In 1803 Lorenzo Dow came from Georgia across the Creek Nation, encountering its dangers, almost alone. He proclaimed the truths of the gospel here, to a large audience, crossed over the Alabama and preached two sermons to the "Bigbee Settlers." He exhorted the people to "turn from the error of their ways." He began by preaching and example "To soften and refine the people, and to banish much sin and vice from the worst region that ministers ever entered." (Pickett's History of Alabama)

On a return visit later, Dow’s wife Peggy was with him. In her journal she wrote:

"We passed through some delightful country that day and ... it made my heart rejoice to meet again with those who spoke a language which I understood, and above all, to find some that loved the Lord! Lorenzo held several meetings in this neighborhood that were profitable, I trust, to some. We stayed here two nights, and a good part of three days, when we took our leave of them, and departed on our journey through the settlements of Bigbee ... through a rich and fertile soil. ... We arrived at Fort St. Stephens, situated on the Tombigbee River - it is on an eminence, and makes a handsome appearance, although it is but small. The river is navigable up to this place. It is a beautiful river; the water is clear as crystal, and land very fertile - well situated for cultivation. This will be a delightful country, no doubt, in time!

(Excerpt from "Journal of Peggy Dow," page 222.)

Methodist services were held in the town and area of St. Stephens beginning in the early 1800s, when Matthew Sturdivant was the missionary sent by Bishop Asbury of the Methodist Episcopal Church. However, there was no central place for worship.

Land for the building of a church was given by Levin Jefferson Wilson and his wife Elizabeth. A contract for the building of the church was awarded to L.J. Wilson, for $500, on April 7, 1857, according to articles of agreement between Wilson and J.G. Rush, James White, and S.D. Hooks, filed in the Judge of Probate Office of Washington County. According to Dubose History, there was a general financial panic at the time, but the church was built.

Records indicate that, at first, there was only the church at St. Stephens to be served by the pastor. In 1859, the church was moved from the Mobile District and placed in the Camden District. However, the following year, 1860, it was returned to the Mobile District. In 1867, the church at State Line, Mississippi was added, making this the St. Stephens-State Line Charge and placing it in the Butler District.

In 1868, it was once again made a part of the Mobile District, in which it has remained. In 1869, State Line Church became sufficient to support a pastor and once again St. Stephens was a one church charge.

In 1871, the St. Stephens Church and Bro. Perdue took an added task by supporting a Church School and Worship Service in a school building near what was to become Peavy’s Landing, on the Tombigbee River near Frankville, Al. The gathering was called Washington Mission until 1874 when it was named New Hope Church.

In 1881, the Bladon Springs Methodist Church, the New Hope Methodist Church and the St. Stephens Methodist Church became the Bladon and St. Stephens Charge. It was not until 1905 that the Charge's name was returned to the St. Stephens Charge.
During the past century, Methodist churches from Barlow Chapel, out from Millry, on the north, to McIntosh and Calvert have been a part of the St. Stephens Charge (or circuit as it was originally called). In 1960, Pine Grove in Leroy and Ebenezer in Wagarville were removed from the St. Stephens Charge. St. Stephens, Midway—which is near St. Stephens and New Hope comprised the St. Stephens Charge until New Hope was closed and Midway became a station church. St. Stephens and Barlow were then placed together as the Barlow-St. Stephens Charge; however, again in 2014, St. Stephens became a station church. *

The main sanctuary at St. Stephens is the original structure. Architects have visited the church to view the unique foundation. The flooring and wainscoting are also original. The first building had a bell tower which was removed when classrooms and a vestibule were added to the rear of the building; however, the bell was placed in the steeple and is rung each Sunday. Classrooms were also added to each side. Dates are not available for the added construction. *

In the 1950's, with Percy Norton as pastor, the circular altar was removed and a rectangular altar constructed which included a choir area. In 1972, with Fonda Brown as pastor, construction was begun on an education building containing five classrooms, fellowship hall, restrooms, and a kitchen. The building was paid for in less than two years and was dedicated on July 1977 in honor of Cecil J. and Lucille Faith Alston. In the 1990's, with Nadine B. Walters as pastor, the sanctuary was expanded to include the two rooms at the rear and stained glass windows replaced the frosted glass pane windows and the rectangular altar was replaced with a circular altar built using the dimensions of the original altar. *

In the early 2000's a new steeple was added as well as recorded chimes equipment, and a sanctuary sound system.

According to information obtained from church records, St. Stephens United Methodist Church is the oldest United Methodist Church in the Alabama-West Florida Conference in continuous use. *

Unless noted otherwise, this information is from Historic Memories of St. Stephens Methodist Church, compiled by Mrs. L. W. Stabler, 1962, and republished in the brochure The Historic Memories of St. Stephens United Methodist Church, St. Stephens, AL, 36569, Established April 7, 1857, prepared for the Annual Meeting of the Alabama-West Florida Conference Historical Society at St. Stephens United Methodist Church, September 15, 2016.

* Gleaned from St. Stephens church records

The Society would like to again thank all of those at St. Stephens who helped make the 2016 Annual Meeting such an enjoyable experience.
St. Stephens United Methodist Church Pastors

SOUTH CAROLINA CONFERENCE
1808-09 Matthew Parham Sturdivant
1809 John W. Kennon as junior preacher under Michael Burdge
1810 John W. Kennon - reappointed
1810 John S. Ford - junior preachers

WESTERN CONFERENCE, CINCINNATI
OHIO
1811 William Hoston - Isaac Quinn

TENNESSEE CONFERENCE
1812 Richmond Nolley and John Shrock

MISSISSIPPI CONFERENCE
1813 John Ira Ellis and Peter James
1814 John S. Ford and Thomas Owens
1815 Ashley Hewitt and Alexander Fleming
1816 Elisha Lott
1817 John McClendon and Thomas Owens
1818 Thomas Griffin and John Murrah
1819 Nicholas McIntyre and Thomas Griffin
1820 Meredith Renneau
1821 Zachariah Williams and John Patton
1822 Henry P. Cook
1823 John R. Lambuth and Lewis S. Turner
1824 Zachariah Williams
1825 John G. Lee
1826 Henry J. Brown
1827 Anderson G. McDaniel and Lewis S. Turner
1828 Lewis S. Turner
1829 Daniel Monaghan
1830 Joshua Peavy
1831 Job Foster

THE ALABAMA CONFERENCE
1832 Daniel Monaghan and Hugh M. Finley
1833 Daniel McDonald and Francis H. Ponder
1834 Anthony S. Dickinson and Newit Drew
1835 Daniel B. Barlow and David H. Atkins

i836 Daniel B. Barlow and David H. Atkins
1837 John D. Loftin
1838 Anthony S. Dickinson and Lemuel Bowers
1839 Bartlett Smith Barr
1840 Anthony S. Dickinson and George R. W. Smith
1841 Anthony S. Dickinson
1842 Thomas Killough and Duncan Fowler
1843 Thomas Killough and Joseph T. Curry
1844 John Welsey Laney and Burwell Whittington
1845 Willard J. Hunter

Methodist Episcopal Church South was Organized
1846 Joseph F. Roper and Sam Bernard Newman
1847 No Record

MOBILE CIRCUIT
1848 John Wesley Lanely
1856-57 William A. Sampey
1858 James F. R. Brandon
1859 John D. Hays
1860 John F. Evans
1861 J. E. Treadwell
1862 E. T. Nabors
1863 C. W. Calhoun
1864 U. B. Phillips
1865-66 Samuel D. Goodall
1867 J. Spurlin
1868 J. G. Rush
1869-70 A. M. Jones
1871 R. F. Purdue
1872-73 W. Hargrave Morris
1874 M. M. Dawson
1875-76 J. C. Johnson
1877-78 W. Hargrave Morris
1879-80 J. A. Green
1881-82 A. M. Jones
1883 A. J. Coleman
1884-85 Chappell S. Perry
1886-88 Orion S. Perry
1889-90 H. H. McNeill
1891 C. R. Lamar & Thomas Cooper
1892 J. R. McGaun
1893 John L. Grace
1894-95 Noah W. Beverly

1896-98 J. W. Killough
1899 T. D. Albright
1900-03 E. G. Price
1904-06 C. W. Northcut
1907-09 o. J. Goodman
1910-11 E. E. Stafford
1912-13 J. E. C. Harison
1914-15 H. E. Wilson
1916-17 J. M. Metcalf
1918-21 W. W. Jeffries
1921-23 C. E. Avinger
1924 R. J. Coxwell
1925-26 W. W. Judkins
1926-28 Mr. R. Evans
1928-30 J. C. Vickers
1931-32 C. C. Garner
1933-35 Edgar A. Howell
1936 J. P. Peacock
1937-39 N. Ray Blocker
1940-44 J. Ray Watson
1945-46 M. S. Brantley
1946-49 J. J. Lewis
1949-51 L. B. Headley
1951-52 C. H. Williams
1952-54 Leonard Howell, Jr.
1954-58 Percy W. Norton
1958-60 James C. Brown
1960-63 E. Wm. (Bill) Tracy
1963-64 Fred Folkes
1964-65 Dan Guy
1965-66 A.D. Grissett
1967-68 James G. Folkes

United Methodist Church organized
1968-71 Jeffery Dolbare
1971-72 A.D. Grissett
1972-75 Fonda L. Brown
1975-77 Jesse J. Snodgrass
1977-79 Luther T. Williamson
1979-82 Lauren Helveston
1982-85 Tommy Joe Stringer
1985-86 David L. Bromstad
1986-87 Donald Jay
1987-89 Riley Richardson
1989-94 Julie Sheffer
1994-2004 Nadine B. Walters
2004-05 Alton Moore
2005-07 Joel Watson
2007-14 Vann Bush
2014- W. Thomas Gaillard
Thomas Osmond (or Osgood) Summers (1812-1882) was an English-born American Methodist clergyman, editor and university professor. He was one of the most prominent Methodist theologians of the nineteenth century.

Summers was born in 1812 in England, emigrated to the United States in 1830, and became a Methodist minister in 1835 in the Baltimore Conference. In 1840 he became a missionary in Texas and established a Methodist community on Galveston Island.

In 1843 Summers, then about 31 years old, had been preaching for nine years. He decided to make a tour of Alabama to solicit money to pay for the erection of houses of worship for the Methodist Episcopal Church at Galveston and Houston, Texas. He was also still unmarried, and was in search of a good wife for an itinerant preacher.

Rev. Anson West, in his History of Methodism in Alabama [1893], picks up the story there.

“During the 1830s and 1840s a number of camp meetings were being established in Alabama. One of these was on or near the highway leading from the town of Marion in the County of Perry to the town of Greensborough [Greensboro] in the then County of Greene. [Editor: These towns are now in the Demopolis District of the Alabama-West Florida Conference.] Not far from an equal distance from these towns was a campground known as DeYampert’s. The well-built shed with its grand stand and spacious altar, and the commodious tents tastefully grouped about the beautiful grounds gave an air of neatness, and indicated expenditure and aggregation. A mile or more away from that encampment in the midst of beautiful groves and fertile lands stood the stately mansion of L. Q. C. DeYampert who had built the camp.

DeYampert was a local preacher and a man of great wealth. His father was a native of southern France and had been a surgeon for the patriots during the American Revolution. He, Lucius, was a dedicated Methodist and provided for annual religious services on his plantation.

At that magnificent campground, in the lovely autumn of 1843, was held a camp-meeting which made a great impression on the surrounding country. The occasion was magnified. There was much outlay and much display. Many of the preachers in charge of affairs in the surrounding country were engaged to attend the meeting.

The great event of the meeting was to be the presence of the Rev. Lovick Pierce, then stationed in Mobile, and considered a star of the first magnitude in the ecclesiastical firmament His proposed coming had been heralded far and near. The excitement was intense, all expectant were the people. The great preacher reached the Camp-ground according to engagement, but, alas! he was sick, and continued sick for many days, and could not preach. The Rev. Charles McLeod, the presiding elder [the old term for District Superintendent], was in charge of the meeting. The Rev. T. Dorman and the preachers of the work in the midst of which the Camp-ground was located, and others were present.

There was another preacher there, a stranger, one who came unheralded. The Rev. Thomas O. Summers was the man. He was then from the Republic of Texas. He was making a tour of Alabama and other States soliciting funds ... In his manners in the social circle he was brusque, in the pulpit he was stormy and fidgety. He exhibited at that Camp-meeting at DeYampert’s Camp-ground some horned frogs in alcohol preserved, which he had brought with him from Texas. It is quite easy to imagine the impression which he made on the minds of the Camp-meeting folks of Alabama concerning himself by the exhibition of his frogs, and the interest which he created thereby in this peculiar product of the then neighboring Republic of Texas.
Tradition says that about the second day of that Camp-meeting the Rev. Mr. Summers was put up to preach, and that "the effort of that hour was unacceptable to the congregation, and to Brother DeYampert it was quite offensive. He was offended by the matter of the sermon and the manner of the preacher." The other preachers filled the pulpit at the different hours from then on, leaving Summers to himself, his horned frogs, and his soliciting for funds for erecting Churches in the land from which he had brought his exhibits.

Summers, true to his business, solicited a contribution from DeYampert to assist his Churches in Texas. DeYampert gruffly refused to make a contribution.

The meeting went on, Sunday approached, Dr. Pierce continued sick. Hopes were entertained, so tradition says, that Dr. Pierce, the great preacher, would recover sufficiently by Sunday to preach on that day; but on the arrival of Saturday evening the physician who had charge of the sick man pronounced against his preaching. There was an emergency. The presiding elder called a Council, constituted of the home preachers. The business of the Council was to improvise and provide for the services of Sunday, the great day. The Council met in the capacious tent of DeYampert and the perplexing question was: Who shall preach at 11 o'clock A.M. Sunday? It was first suggested that, of course, the presiding elder was the preacher for that hour, but he humbly declined in favor of anyone who could and would meet the emergency.

The home preachers were suggested, one after another, until all had declined. Not one was willing to attempt to preach at that hour in the face of the expectation created by the trumpeted fame of Dr. Pierce.

At last one in the Council moved that the Rev. Thomas O. Summers be appointed to preach at 11 o'clock A.M. Sunday. That proposition stirred the indignation of Brother DeYampert, who railed out, "He cannot preach the gospel! The poorest preacher here can preach better." The council adjourned and dispersed without making any appointment for the great hour, and the presiding elder had the responsibility and the prospect of occupying the hour himself.

While the preachers were engaged in the consultation about the appointments for Sunday the Rev. Mr. Summers, who was being entertained at Brother DeYampert's tent, was in his room in the tent adjoining the one in which the preachers were assembled, and in such proximity that he could not avoid hearing what was said.

The morning ushered a beautiful day. It was Sunday. The people poured into the encampment by hundreds. They came from far and near. They came in style and without style. They came by all modes of travel. They came to hear the great preacher. Even the outskirts of the encampment were thronged. It took all these, the rich and the poor, to make a Camp-meeting in the forties of this century.

All these were at that Camp-meeting at De Yampert's Camp-ground in that beautiful autumn of 1843, at which the frogs from the Republic of Texas were exhibited. The gathering of that multitude was impressive. As the dusty crowds from the hills and woods swelled the throng, and as the numerous groups of the rich, with the roar and clatter of wheels and hoofs, the glare and glitter of trappings and fixtures, approached the outskirts and rolled through the encampment the interest became intense. The scene was really impressive.

The presiding elder looked upon the vast throng, and beheld the array of wealth and elegance, and at the very last moment his courage failed, and instead of preaching himself, as till that very moment he had really expected to do, he, upon his own responsibility, and at the risk of incurring the lasting displeasure of Brother DeYambert, led the Rev. Thomas O. Summers on the stand, and informed him that he must preach.

Mr. Summers knew the situation, but he was not in the least abashed. He at once proceeded with the services. He read a hymn after the manner peculiar to
himself, and then prayed. The prayer was seldom equalled. It was characterized by devotion, unction, propriety of utterance, variety of petition, and heartiness of thanksgiving. To use one of Mr. Summers's own phrases it was "good to the use of edifying." When through with the introductory part of the services, and ready to proceed with his sermon, Mr. Summers took his position at the bookboard, and looking Brother DeYampert, who was near the stand, and in full view, squarely in the face, said: "I heard it declared last night I could not preach the gospel. May the Holy Ghost enable me to preach this day to this dying people, 'not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect." He then read his text which contained a theme and swept a field suited to the order of mind peculiar to Mr. Summers, and he was that day at his best, and he drew, the Holy Spirit assisting, the audience to the theme, and before he was through with the exposition of the text the assembly gave demonstrations of great enthusiasm.

At the close of the sermon the spacious altar was crowded with penitent sinners. The meeting went on for some days longer with intense interest and with glorious results, the Rev. Mr. Summers working efficiently, and working till the conclusion of the last doxology. Brother DeYampert changed his mind, reversed his verdict, gave Mr. Summers a liberal contribution for his Churches in Texas, and he became one of Mr. Summers's greatest admirers and warmest friends.

On this same trip, Mr. Summers visited Tuscaloosa, Alabama, and had Miss Marsilla Sexton, of that place, recommended to him, by adequate judges, as a suitable lady for an itinerant preacher's wife. He wooed and won the lady thus recommended. He returned to Texas, not yet married, attended the Texas Conference in December, was transferred to the Alabama Conference, and was appointed at Tuscaloosa for 1844. He wound up his affairs in Texas and left Galveston in January, 1844. He reached Tuscaloosa in one week, and on the last day of that month he was married to Miss Marsilla Sexton, the woman of his choice.

From the time he transferred to the Alabama Conference till his death in 1882 he had his membership as a preacher in Alabama. He attained distinction as a preacher and author.

Summers moved to Nashville, Tennessee in 1850 and worked as a book editor for the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. He served as the editor of the Sunday School Visitor from 1851 to 1856, the Quarterly Review of the Methodist Church, South from 1858 to 1861, and the Christian Advocate from 1868 to 1878.

The degrees of D.D. and LL.D. were conferred upon him. He was long in the editorial work of the Church and did much other work for the Church. He was a member of the General Conferences from time to time. He was one of the Professors of the Biblical Department of the Vanderbilt University at the time of his death.

Thomas O. Summers was buried on the Vanderbilt Campus, but when his widow died his son had his remains removed to the cemetery for the city of Nashville, Tennessee.”

The First United Methodist Church of Fort Walton Beach, Florida, celebrated its 70th anniversary with a homecoming and special activities on April 10, 2016.

A history of First United Methodist Church

By Mazie L. Glover with additions by JoAnne Henderson

After the end of World War II, a sense of new beginnings swept our area along the Gulf coast.

A local newspaper was started, Eglin Field continued its expansion, the Blue Angels were formed, and the first Methodist church in Fort Walton was formed.

Before 1946, all Protestants in the Fort Walton area worshipped together in what was then called the Community Church on Beal Street, with only an occasional visiting minister to provide formal services.

Early in 1946, a small group with a strong desire to have a Methodist Church submitted an organizational petition to the superintendent of the Marianna District. As a result, the Rev. George Nothdurft was sent to the area to make a religious census. Although sufficient interest was shown to warrant proceeding, only 13 people attended the formal organizational meeting held on June 9, 1946. These 13 charter members were:

George F. and Sarah A. Lowery, Mazie Lowery Glover, George F. Lowery Jr., Johnnie Lowery Cathcart, Mr. and Mrs. Harvey Gibson, Pauline Littlefield, Mr. and Mrs. Clyde Nicholson, Mrs. L. D. Ready, Ashford Harrelson and Hillary Stewart.

For the first three years, services were held in the building that now houses the Okaloosa County School Board.

Dr. A.D. Shoemaker from the Niceville Church agreed to come over and preach at 10 a.m. each Sunday until a full-time minister could be obtained. In September 1946, a missionary, the Rev. Alan Jones, was provided by the Board of Missions to serve the new church.

By September 1947, our charter had been received and the Rev. John Lane became the first full-time minister assigned by the Conference. Membership had grown to 40 people.

A gift of $4,000 from the Board of Missions enabled the construction of a small church office on Main Street and the purchase of five acres of land, where the present church is located.

The old parsonage was built in early 1949 and furnished by the Woman’s Society of Christian Service. In August 1949, ground-breaking ceremonies were held for the church sanctuary and first wing of the educational building.

On March 4, 1950, the first worship service was held in an unfinished sanctuary filled with people. One by one, projects were finished. Most of the labor was contributed by the members. Through the years, additional wings were added to the educational building to accommodate the increase in membership.

Our church played a significant role in the establishment of other churches in the area. The Shalimar church received its Charter in 1951. Destin was organized in 1958. Trinity was established in 1960. Mary Esther in 1965 and Navarre in the
early ‘70s. In most cases, our minister also conducted services for these churches pending assignment of their own minister.

Since being chartered, First Church has been fortunate to have been served by outstanding ministers, each of whom have made significant contributions to the church’s impressive growth. They are:


We have been equally fortunate to have had some fine associate ministers including:

Bob Daffin, Jessie Shackelford, Gerald Freeman, Russ Williams, Libba Stinson, Danny Godwin, Joe Lay, Mac Fulcher, Dan Morris, Frances Turner, Dallas Little, Gordon Mark Lilly and David McAlister.

On April 12, 1987, ground-breaking ceremonies were held for the construction of the new sanctuary. This construction included inclusion of the old sanctuary as the Founder’s Chapel. On November 20, 1988, the first worship service was held in an unfinished sanctuary filled with people, just as it was on that first day in 1950.

The most recent project for our church is the Family Life and Ministry Extension. Ground-breaking was held on July 17, 2005, and it was completed in 2006. Included in this project was a refurbished pre-school wing and completion of the balcony in the sanctuary.

Through prayer, faith, and determination the church has grown to what we know today as the First United Methodist Church of Fort Walton Beach, Florida.

The Legend of the Sand Dollar

There’s a pretty little legend
That I would like to tell
Of the birth and death of Jesus
Found in this lowly shell

If you examine closely,
You’ll see that you find here
Four nail holes and a fifth one
Made by a Roman’s Spear.

On one side the Easter Lily,
Its center is the star
That appeared unto the wisemen
And led them from afar.

The Christmas poinsettia
Etched on the other side
Reminds us of His birthday
Our Happy Christmastide.

Now break the center open
And here you will release
The five white doves awaiting
To spread Good Will and Peace.

This simple little symbol,
Christ left for you and me
To help us spread his Gospel
Through all eternity.

Anonymous

https://www.fwbfumc.org/story-of-the-sand-dollar/
Gainestown is now an unincorporated community on the Alabama River in southeastern Clarke County, Alabama. George Strother Gaines established an Indian trading post here in 1809. The exact date for the founding of the town is unclear. However, the community was being referred to as Gainestown by 1815, following the end of the Creek War and subsequent closure of the trading post in 1814. Gainestown grew to be a large town during the heyday of river-based transport, but a slow decline began after the Civil War.

A tornado on March 26, 1911 destroyed at least 12 homes and much of the town, including the Methodist Church. An account of the storm, written at the time, stated that a dry goods store was destroyed, with fragments of its products found as far away as 30 miles to the east.

From Wikipedia

The Gainestown Methodist Church and Cemetery was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1999. The nomination for that honor included the following information.

Gainestown was a busy antebellum settlement and landing on the Alabama River. The Gainestown Methodist congregation dates to 1819, but the present church was built in 1911 after a tornado destroyed their circa1854 building. It is sited on a neatly-kept lawn on the west side of County Road 29, on the flat land that borders the Alabama River. The cemetery lies a few yards west of the church.

The 1911 building was constructed with salvaged materials from the original church. It was also built on the foundation of the older structure, thereby preserving the spatial relationship of the church to its cemetery.

The Gainestown Methodist Church is a simple, rectangular, gable-front building resting on a foundation of limestone piers that has been infilled with brick and concrete block. All sides of the building except the facade are sheathed in weatherboard. The steeple, which is also sheathed in weatherboard, is placed on the east end of the building above the facade. Nine-over-nine double-hung sash windows throughout the building are from the c.1854 structure but have mid twentieth-century replacement colored panes.

The facade is composed of three bays. It is faced with diamond-shaped decorative shingling in the gable. Nine-over-nine windows with shutters flank the entrance. Paired five-panel doors are topped by a four-pane fanlight which also contains mid twentieth-century replacement colored panes.

The wooden steps up to the doors are a modern replacement. North and south sides of the building contain three nine-over-nine windows with shutters which would have been symmetrically placed on the c.1854 structure. Seams in the weatherboard reveal that the east end of the building, containing the steeple, vestibule, and two small rooms, was added in the 1911 reconstruction of the church.

The interior of the church is equally simple. Through the entry one passes into a vestibule, which is divided from the sanctuary by an arched opening. Interior walls are horizontal flushboard, and the floor is of heart pine boards. The wood flooring is narrower in the vestibule and enclosed rooms on the east end of the building, an indication of its later date of renovation or construction. The ceiling is also flushboard but has been covered with modern ceiling tiles. However, a portion of the tiles have fallen away to reveal the intact boards beneath.

The sanctuary contains six rows of pine pews flanking a central aisle. The aisle leads to a very plain, solid altar rail that is painted white to match both the interior and exterior walls. The simple, undecorated altar area on the west end of the building is one step up from the sanctuary level. Three plain c.1930...
opaque glass drop light fixtures illuminate the interior.

The stones in the Gainestown Methodist Church Cemetery are a marked contrast to the simplicity of the modest church building. Stones dating from the antebellum and Victorian periods display elaborate carving and designs reflecting both the burial fashion of their eras as well as the status of Gainestown's inhabitants.

The cemetery's arrangement is notable for its scattered family plots, many of which are enclosed with elaborate wrought iron fences from the late nineteenth century. A large cedar tree stands several yards directly west of the church. Family plots are arrayed on either side of the tree and stretching out into the southwest corner of the property.

The landscape of the cemetery is very simple, as it is surrounded by woods and brush on three sides and the church on the east side. Gravestones in the cemetery include antebellum examples of Greek Revival obelisks and tablets. The most impressive and artistic stones date from the 1850s, when the plantation districts along the Alabama and Tombigbee Rivers were the focus of Clarke County's agricultural prosperity. 1 One large stone dated 1852 reflects the historic role of this site as home of both the church and masonic lodge, two important local social institutions.

According to the Alabama-West Florida Conference church information site, services are held at 11 a.m. on the 2nd and 4th Sundays with the fifth Sunday service being held on the first Sunday at 12 pm following the fifth Sunday. Rev. John Evangelista is the pastor.

Gainestown United Methodist Church is located at 16626 Walker Springs Rd., Gainestown AL.

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**Report from Dr. Fred Day**

**General Secretary**

**General Commission on Archives and History (GCAH)**

**Actions Taken at General Conference**

GCAH Members and Friends:

The final gavel has come down on the 2016 General Conference. I am pleased to report GCAH is in great shape for moving forward. All the legislation the Commission put forth or in other petitions which named GCAH came out just as we would have hoped!

Plan UMC Revised, the restructure proposal that would have aligned GCAH with the General Commission on Finance and Administration (GCFA) was defeated in committee. Other attempts to structural overhaul, realigning GCAH elsewhere and consolidating GCORR and COSROW, were referred to the Connectional Table, Standing Committee on Central Conferences, and GCFA for report at the 2020 General Conference.

GCFA’s attempts to move responsibility for collection of the majority of archive materials now sent to GCAH to individual agencies was defeated in committee.

 Legislation allowing permissiveness to annual conference Commission on Archives and History (from “shall” to “may”) was defeated in committee.

GCAH sponsored legislation adding three new Heritage Landmarks: Gulfside Assembly, Pearl River sites (Mississippi) and The United Methodist Building in Washington, DC was approved on the Consent Calendar.

GCAH sponsored legislation insuring the Discipline is in harmony with itself as to Central Conference membership on the Commission was approved on the Consent Calendar.
When most people visit South Walton, it's usually for one reason: to spend time on beautiful white-sand beaches.

However, if visitors ever leave the regular tourist stops and venture off the beaten path, they would encounter some rich history.

Point Washington United Methodist Church - one of the oldest and most historic landmarks in South Walton - stands near the end of North County Highway 395 in Santa Rosa Beach. Established in 1888, the church has a long and complicated history, according to former church historian Brenda Rees.

"There was a strong Methodist foundation here when the area was settled," Rees said. "That's because there were a lot of British who first came in 1778."

Rees is a long-time member of the church and occasionally leads informative tours of the grounds.

"Confederate Gen. William Miller got the land in 1894," Rees said. "He had been in charge of the battle of Natural Bridge that saved Tallahassee. After the war, he came here and bought land. He was also a lumber man. He owned Grayton before Mr. Gray did.

"He and his wife, Marie, donated land for the church, a park, a school, a cemetery and a black cemetery," she added. "He and his wife had no children. There is a small white sign next to the church with his name on it. He died there and is buried in Pensacola."

Rev. John Wesley

Through the more than 100-year history of the church, the congregation has been led by 30 pastors. The first was Rev. John Wesley, who had nine sons and came from Vernon to lead the church.

The community and the church took its name from Washington County, of which it was a part for a while, and the area's geographic nickname: The Point.

Over the years, the church has endured hard times, and at one point had to find its own pastor instead of being supplied one by the United Methodist Church.

But it has never closed.

The original building still stands and is used for worship every Sunday. Additions have been built onto the original structure several times, and stained-glass windows were installed only several years ago.

"Point Washington United Methodist is a real Wesleyan traditional church," Rees said. "It's very caring."

Most of its pews are dedicated in memory of the early faithful, such as one that is dedicated to one of Wesley's sons and daughters-in-law.

"Point Washington United Methodist is a real Wesleyan traditional church," Rees said. "It's very caring."

Today, due to Methodism still having a strong influence in the area, as well as the dedicated congregation and rich history, the church has become a popular place of worship, said Rees.

Traditional Sunday morning services are at 8:45a.m. in the sanctuary, and a contemporary service begins at 11 a.m. in the family life center across the road.

The family life center was built in 2000, and there also is a Stephen Center that was built in 1995 for church suppers and receptions. Thanks to its congregation, the life center is paid for.
Point Washington UMC has almost 700 members, according to church pastor Chris Eckert, and averages 300 worshipers every Sunday. Its life center houses a preschool with about 60 children enrolled.

Eckert has only been assigned to the church since July 1. He came here from Demopolis, Alabama.

"It's an amazing church and area," he said. "I feel blessed to be here. The people are friendly, and I love the quaintness and the setting with all the trees. I want people who come here to worship to feel comfortable and loved."

The church holds about five weddings per year, and Rees typically leads historical tours once a month.

The above article and photos are from the *Northwest Florida Daily News*, November 20, 2016, and are used here with the paper’s permission. Photos above are by Michael Snyder/Daily News.

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**Please Mark Your Calendar Now and Plan to Attend!**

**The Alabama-West Florida Conference Historical Society’s**

**Annual Meeting, September 21, 2017**

At the Oldest Methodist Church in Florida, Pensacola FUMC

The First United Methodist Church, Pensacola, FL dates back to 1821, when a mission was established by the Mississippi Conference and the Reverend Alexander Talley was appointed as missionary to Pensacola. At that time, what later became the states of Mississippi and Alabama as well as the area now known as northwest Florida were all part of the Mississippi Territory.

The mission began by holding meetings in the courthouse and the old theater of Pensacola.

In 1827, a lot was purchased on the north-east corner of Intendencia and Tarragona Streets and a church was built. The first services were held on June 2, 1828.

The years of 1870 – 1880 were crucial years for the church, which suffered two fires, in which the church was completely destroyed, and there was an epidemic of yellow fever.

More information about the 2017 Annual Meeting will be provided in later issues of this Newsletter.
The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, in section ¶ 641, requires that each annual conference have a conference commission on archives and history (COAH), and that it shall be the duty of that commission to collect, preserve, and make accessible the historically significant records of the annual conference and its agencies including data relating to the origin and history of the conference and its antecedents. Section ¶ 641 goes on to list a number of more detailed responsibilities of the commission.

Section ¶ 641 further states that the commission may organize a conference historical society and encourage membership therein for the purpose of promoting interest in the study and preservation of the history of the conference and its antecedents. It also says that each annual conference may have a historian to undertake specific duties as may be designated by the commission.

The Alabama-West Florida COAH members include those elected by the annual conference as well as ex-officio members. The officers of the COAH are elected by the COAH members.

For the 2016-2020 quadrennium, the members of the AWFC COAH and the year elected by the annual conference (or the position they hold as ex-officio members) are:

Rev. Oliva Poole-Reneau, Elected 2016, Chairperson
Rev. Joe Reams, Elected 2016, Vice Chairperson
Jason Greg, Elected 2012
Lori Moneyham, Elected 2012
Nell Gilmer, Elected 2016
Leslie Shannon, Elected 2016
Brad Norris, Elected 2016
Gibbs Couch, Elected 2016

Bishop David Graves, Conference Bishop
Dr. David Saliba, Conference Secretary
Rev. Ed Shirley, Conference Historian
James Young, Historical Society President
Anthony Leigh, College Representative, Recording/Financial Secretary
Sharon Tucker, Archivist
Mary Ann Pickard, Archivist

The General Commission on Archives and History (GCAH) is the church-wide body which gathers, preserves, and disseminates materials on the history of The United Methodist Church and its antecedents. It maintains archives and a library in which the historical records are kept. It publishes articles dealing with our history and represents the archives and history communities of the UMC Jurisdictions and Conferences to the General Conference. Its web site, at www.gcah.org/, contains useful reference material and publications.

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Shalimar
United Methodist Church
Shalimar, Florida
1 Old Ferry Rd, Shalimar, FL 32579

In 1951, Iona Salter and Sara Freiwald, who were members of the First United Methodist Church of Fort Walton Beach, wanted to have a Methodist church in Shalimar. They approached Reverend John H. Lane, pastor of the First Methodist Church of Fort Walton Beach, to discuss establishing a Methodist church in Shalimar.

After taking a survey and finding that a number of families living in or near Shalimar were willing to support founding a church, Mrs. Freiwald persuaded Mr. Clifford Meigs to donate a lot for the church. Rev. Lane then obtained consent for the establishment of the church from Reverend Dr. George W. Kerlin, superintendent of the Marianna District, which at the time had jurisdiction over the Shalimar area.

Mr. James Tringas, friend of the Freiwalds, agreed to allow the use of the concession room of his drive-in theater as the meeting place until a church could be built.

On June 17, 1951, Rev. Lane and several laymen from his church met with some eighteen to twenty people from Shalimar for an organizational service. Rev. Lane opened the service with a call to worship, followed by a hymn and prayer. Announcements were made concerning plans for services each subsequent Sunday.

The following Sunday, June 24, 1951, was set as Charter Member Sunday. Rev. A.E. Middlebrook, who had succeeded Dr. George W. Kerlin as Superintendent of the Marianna District, delivered the message at this service. At the conclusion of the service, the following persons joined the church and were designated as charter members: Leonard B. Brock Jr., Gloria Harrell Brock, Iona Dare Salter, Oscar Franklin Salter, Evelyn Freiwald Meigs, Sara Ferdon Freiwald (Meigs, Tras) and Jean Freiwald. The church was established as a mission church of the Fort Walton Beach Methodist Church.

During the next twelve months, Rev. Lane conducted services each Sunday at 9:30 am in the concession room. In June 1952, Reverend William D. Bruner became the first full-time pastor of the church.

Construction of the church Sanctuary began during March of 1952. Services were held in the still unfinished Sanctuary beginning on July 20, 1952.

The Shalimar United Methodist Church retained its mission status until it was officially dedicated as a standing church on January 15, 1961, with the dedication service led by Dr. C.E. Barons, District Superintendent.

During the intervening years until the present, major construction projects have given the church a new Sanctuary, Chapel, an expanded number of Sunday School classrooms and a Family Life Center.

On January 15, 2010, SUMC purchased the adjacent property currently occupied by Havertys Furniture. The building is 45,000 square feet, located on 2.33 acres and currently has 89 parking spaces. The vision for the building is to establish a Disciple Training Center to facilitate our mission of Reach, Teach and Send.

A one-story building was constructed to the rear of the original Sanctuary, containing the Fellowship Hall, rest rooms and kitchen. This building now contains the Library and Computer Lab. Partitions were used in the Fellowship Hall to divide it into Sunday School rooms with each room having its own entrance. Sunday School met for the first time in this extension on May 26, 1956, per a note in the May 20, 1956 issue of the Steeple Echo. Shortly thereafter, the other one-story building to the west, now containing Rooms 1-8, was constructed to provide additional Sunday School rooms.

May 1965 - Original Sanctuary was air conditioned.

1967 - A two-story building with a covered walk way was constructed and occupied to contain the church offices and classrooms.

1972 - The existing Sanctuary was constructed. The first service titled the “Service of Thanksgiving Peace” was held on Saturday, January 27, 1973. This is the date the Vietnam War ended. The first Sunday service was held on January 28, 1973.

1975 - The kitchen was relocated to the choir loft area of the original Sanctuary.

1983 - A two-story classroom building extension containing the church offices and classroom was constructed. The current chapel and restrooms were also constructed.

1996 - The cornerstone was laid for the Family Life Center.

During the Fall of 2008, the Sanctuary altar was redesigned and the pews were replaced.

This history is from the Shalimar UMC website at http://shalimar-umc.org/
Information and Events of Historical Society Interest

Executive Committee and Officers of the AWFC-HS

Jim Young, President
Rev. Ed Shirley, Vice President
Sharon Tucker, Recording Secretary
Mary Ann Pickard, Financial & Membership Secretary
Carolyn Coker, Member at Large
Craig Reynolds, Member at Large
Joyce Stimak, Member at Large
Myrtice Carr, Previous Past President

The Historical Society Website

http://www.awfhistory.com/

Please visit the website for the AWF Conference’s Historical Society. This website was created so that we may be more accessible to everyone with information and offer an avenue of interaction concerning our shared interest in Methodist history. Please browse through the pages to learn more about early Methodism in America, Alabama, and West Florida. We will be adding more to our internet files through the efforts of volunteers (we invite you to be one), members of the Historical Society (you can become one), and our conference archivists (we have some good ones). We regularly plan events where we enrich our knowledge of history, enjoy fellowship, and actually visit a historic location.

We’re Also on Facebook!

Follow us on Facebook. Enter “AWF Historical Society” in the search box at the top of your Facebook page. “Like” us – Follow us! Participate with comments and photos. Invite your friends.

The AWFC Historical Society Newsletter

The newsletter is published quarterly and all comments and suggestions are welcome.

If you would like to submit an article or a notice or an announcement for publication in the AWFC Historical Society Newsletter, please contact the editor, Jim Young, at youngjmy@cox.net or by phone at 850 862-8642.

Ask the former generation and find out what their ancestors learned, for we were born only yesterday and know nothing, and our days on earth are but a shadow.

Job 8

AWFC Historical Society Contact Information

Sharon Tucker, Archivist
Mary Ann Pickard, Administrative Assistant
Methodist Archives Center
1500 East Fairview Avenue
Montgomery, Alabama 36106

Telephone: 334-833-4413
FAX: 334-263-4465
E-mail: archives@huntingdon.edu

Also

James Young, President
1014 Aspen Court
Fort Walton Beach, FL 32547
Telephone: 850 862-8642
E-mail: youngjmy@cox.net

The Historical Society Fiscal Year

The AWFC Historical Society Executive Committee, at their February 2015 meeting, amended the by-laws of the Society to establish the AWFC-HS Fiscal Year as being from AWF Annual Conference to the next AWF Annual Conference.

The Executive Committee members for 2015-2016 were re-elected at the September 24th, 2015 Annual Meeting to continue to serve during the 2016-2017 Fiscal Year.

Your Help Is Needed!

Our Society has a relatively small number of members. We need your help to make everyone in the AWF Conference aware of our group and what we do. We need to educate District Superintendents, Pastors, and Church Councils about the need for an active effort in each church to collect and preserve our history.

We need to recruit new members and to involve more folks in our activities.

We need your suggestions for locations for future AWFC-HS Annual Meetings. Consider your own church or historic churches in your area and let us know.

Articles or suggestions for articles for this newsletter are also needed and will be appreciated. People, places, and events of historical AWFC interest are worthy of being featured here.
Alabama-West Florida Conference Historical Society
Membership Application
Membership is from Annual Conference to Annual Conference
2016/2017

When you join between annual conferences your membership is valid through the remainder of the year plus between the times of the next two annual conferences.

Please Provide Following Information for Individual or Church. Check the one that applies:

___ Person ___ Church
Name: ________________________________

If individual write the name of your church below:

______________________________________

Address: ___________________________________________
City: _______________ State: ___________ Zip: ___________
Phone: ___________________ E-Mail: ____________________

SELECT MEMBERSHIP TYPE

___ Annual Membership $15
___ Student Membership $8
___ Donation to Society

Total Amount Enclosed: $____._____ Make checks payable to: AWFC
In Memo/For section write “AWFC Historical Society”

Send this Membership Application to:

Methodist Archives Center
1500 E. Fairview Avenue
Montgomery, AL 36106

Are you the historian for your church? ___Yes ___No
Are you interested in being a member of the Commission on Archives and History (COAH)? ___Yes ___No ___Need more information