Elba United Methodist Church

On February 11, 2011, the Elba United Methodist Church sanctuary was 100 years old. An Anniversary and Homecoming Event was being planned for Sunday, Feb. 13, 2011. But there was a problem........

There were no church records due to floods in 1929, March 1990 and again in March 1998.

Where do you begin? [1]

You begin by asking members if they have any information on the history of the church. A history of the church had been written in 1975 by Lamar S. Ranier, Jr., and a copy was secured. The local library had microfilm copies of the weekly newspaper, The Elba Clipper, going back to the early 1900’s. An article from 1911 gave a good description of the new sanctuary, which had been dedicated on Feb. 11, 1911. An earlier church had been dedicated in 1884 in a different location; but that building was sold in 1910 and no photos were available.

The Methodist Archives at Huntingdon College were searched. Old photos and church directories were searched for and many were found. Senior members of the church were interviewed. Copies of the Christian Advocate for Alabama were searched at the Alabama State Archives. Information about members before the 1990 flood had been recorded by hand as a cumulative record. In 2009 this info was put on the computer. This included baptisms.

The Pea River originated near a ferry across the Pea River in southern Alabama in the early 1830s. Originally called Bridgeville, a U.S. post office was established in the town by 1841. In 1851, a lottery to determine a new name for the town was held. One citizen had been reading a biography of Napoleon Bonaparte and his suggestion of "Elba" was the winner. In 1852, Elba became the county seat of Coffee County. A logging railroad first reached Elba in 1892, and the first permanent rail line arrived in 1898.

The Pea River is an essential component of the history of Elba and the Elba UMC. It frequently flooded the town and the floods of 1990 and 1998 especially caused extensive damage to the church as discussed later in this history.

Armed with the information that was gathered and compiled, planning continued for the Homecoming and 100th Anniversary event for February 13, 2011. Rev. Jay Winston, the pastor who was serving the church during the 1990 flood was invited to be the speaker.

A display of old photographs was created, and a 60-year old church cookbook was copied so that each guest could have a copy. The 1975 History of Elba UMC was updated and copies made available for each guest.

February 13, 2011 arrived and the day was a huge success.

For the outstanding work done by the Elba UMC Historian and the other members and friends of the church in recovering and preserving this information, the Alabama-West Florida Conference Commission on Archives and History awarded Elba UMC the Alabama-West Florida Conference Heritage Award for 2011. It was presented by Bishop Paul Leland at the Annual Conference in June 2012 (see photo at end of this article.)

Where and what is the Elba United Methodist Church, and why had their records been lost?

Let’s begin with the town itself.

Elba, Alabama. The town which eventually became Elba originated near a ferry across the Pea River in southern Alabama in the early 1830s. Originally called Bridgeville, a U.S. post office was established in the town by 1841. In 1851, a lottery to determine a new name for the town was held. One citizen had been reading a biography of Napoleon Bonaparte and his suggestion of "Elba" was the winner. In 1852, Elba became the county seat of Coffee County. A logging railroad first reached Elba in 1892, and the first permanent rail line arrived in 1898.

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Former pastors were researched and addresses obtained to invite those who served for the past 25 years, as well as members who moved away over the years. Bulletin inserts were provided for the 4 weeks before Homecoming to tell about the history of the church such as the history of the church’s bell and the history of the

light in the steeple. A DVD of historical church scenes was prepared for distribution at the Homecoming.

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Early History of Elba UMC. The following is A Brief History of the Elba United Methodist Church, compiled by Lamar S. Rainer, Jr., for the Homecoming Celebration, February 17, 1974.

“Although there was no permanent white settlement where Elba is located until about 1840, just prior to the creation of Coffee County out of the western portion of Dale, Methodism officially entered the area in 1826, with the establishment of the Pea River Mission by the Tallahassee, Florida, District of the South Carolina Conference. The Mission became a Circuit in 1830.

One of the earliest preachers in this area was Zacheus Dowling who rode the territory in the 1830’s. It is almost certain that this was the same Zacheus Dowling assigned to the Elba Circuit in 1856 as its fourth minister. His permanent residence was at Daleville at that time and it is known that he married his second wife in Santa Rosa, Florida, in July of 1856. He was 64 at the time. Zacheus Dowling lived for 92 years and is buried in Mt. Liberty Cemetery west of Greenville Alabama.

A nephew of Zacheus, Angus Dowling, was the Circuit’s 20th minister, serving from 1888 through 1892. The Christian Advocate credits him with over 2,000 conversions during his ministry!

It is not known exactly where or when the first Methodist church in Elba was established but the conference records show that Robert Shaw Rabb was appointed to the Elba Circuit on December 15, 1853. It is logical to assume that a church existed here prior to that time under another name since the name of the town was changed from Bentonville to Elba just prior to its selection as the county seat in late 1852; however, a search of the Conference Archives failed to disclose anything prior to the 1853 date.

An interesting fact disclosed by the list is that one pastor, William C. Robinson, served the early church three times: two years from 1858 to 1860, a one year term in 1867, and for two years again from 1870 to 1872. The Elba church was originally in the Camden District and subsequently in the Lowndesboro, Orion and Union Springs Districts. From 1875 through 1881, the church was not listed in the conference records which means that it was not the main church on the circuit, and unfortunately, the conference minutes do not indicate the circuit on which the church was located.

With the re-establishment of the Elba Circuit in 1882, it was placed in the Marianna, Florida District. Subsequently the church was transferred back into the Union Springs District and then in succession was in the Troy, Dothan, Troy (again), and Andalusia Districts.

The September 3, 1884, Christian Advocate contains a note on page three from S. H. Nettles saying that Elba’s new church was dedicated last Sunday. Samuel Hazelwood Nettles was appointed to the pastorate of the Elba Circuit in 1883.

This church was located at what was then the foot of Simmons Street on the bluff which formed the east bank of Beaverdam Creek. Simmons Street did not cross the creek at that time and the church was located on a spot approximately between and behind the Mullins and Clark homes. (Note: the Mullins home is the peach colored house across from the State Farm office on Adkinson Street that occupies the old Clark home). It was a white frame building with a small steeple. The auditorium occupied the entire building. It is presumed that Sunday School was held in the various corners. A row of large pews was located down the center of the building and short rows of smaller pews occupied the sides.

Whether a church building previous to this one dedicated in 1884 occupied the same site is unknown and Probate records do not indicate any prior site by the name Methodist Church or any variation thereof. The probability is that it is indexed in the name of one of the Trustees. But the facts concerning the location of and the description of the 1884 church has been verified by Judge J. O. English, C. O. Allred, and several ladies whose names shall remain unknown!

The Church served the congregation -- and others (Judge English tells of attending services there while the building was loaned the members of the Church of Christ for services performed by a visiting minister since they did not have a church during his boyhood) -- until early in 1911 when the present building was completed. The lot had been purchased two years before from the Knight family for $750.00. The parsonage lot was purchased on June 24, 1898, from the E. E. Beard Estate for a family for $750.00.

An article from The Elba Clipper, dated Tuesday, February 14, 1911, gives a good description of the then new building.

Sunday, the new Methodist Church was occupied for the first time. Sunday School was held at the usual hour. At
11:00 a fine audience was on hand to attend the first preaching service. Rev. Mr. Feagin took for his text the 22nd verse of the 74th Psalm and preached an able sermon.

Fine musical selections were rendered by the choir. At the conclusion of the services a start was made on raising the money to purchase seats suitable for the building. At night another good audience was on hand.

The church is a fine structure. Practically the whole community joined in its erection and the whole town is proud of it. It is a large brick structure with main auditorium, Sunday School room, Pastor's Study, Primary Room, Ladies Parlor, and etc. The ceiling is high and of ornamental steel and the church has fine art glass windows. The church is lighted throughout with improved gas light of illuminating qualities.

When the Sunday School room is thrown in with the church the seating room will accommodate nearly 1000 people. The cost of the church when completed will be about $11,000.00. It is said that in some communities where material is more expensive that churches from the same plan have cost nearly twice as much.

The Pea River. The Pea River, a major factor in the history of Elba, has frequently flooded, causing great damage to the town. The flood of 1865 was the first to destroy the town. Another devastating flood occurred in March 1929 when airplanes were used to drop supplies to the completely flooded town.

A levee was built around the town in 1930. Flood gates were erected and drainage systems improved. Floods continued, however, with especially severe floods in 1938, 1959 and 1975. The worst flood ever recorded in Elba occurred in 1990, when the river crested at 48 feet and the levee broke. Elba was completely flooded for four days, and the town was nearly destroyed. More floods struck Elba in 1994 and 1998. The floods of 1990 and 1998 were especially disastrous for the Elba United Methodist Church.

The Flood of 1998. In March 1998, Andy Ellis, the Director of Communications of the Alabama-West Florida Conference, reported that flood waters had swamped Elba, Alabama, and the Elba United Methodist Church for the second time in 8 years. He wrote:

An El Nino-powered storm moved slowly across the Southeastern United States March 7 and 8, 1998, dumping as much as a foot of rain in some sections of south Alabama and claiming five lives, including that of one child. The downtown area of Elba -- a small community in the southeastern corner of the state -- was under as much as six feet of water after the rain-swollen Beaver Dam Creek broke through a levee in two places on the morning of March 8. Beaver Dam Creek is a tributary of the Pea River, which was responsible for a similar flood in the town in 1990.

Half of the town's 4,000 residents were forced to evacuate. Due to the lack of warning and the rapidly rising water, boats and Army helicopters from nearby Fort Rucker were used to pluck residents from rooftops.

The Elba United Methodist Church is under six feet of water, and many homes near the area have at least three feet of water standing in them, said Curtis Henderson, associate director of the Alabama-West Florida Conference Council of Ministries. “We are waiting to see
what the river is going to do in the way of cresting,” Henderson said. “We will be sending out an alert to all our districts as soon as we have a better idea of the damage.”

In 1990, the first floor of the Elba church had been flooded, and a building housing the church’s fellowship hall was completely under water. The organ and all of the furniture in the sanctuary had to be replaced afterward.

Andy Ellis

According to Nell Gilmer, Church Historian, church records have been lost or damaged in all the major floods. Her explanation of how they went about recovering their history for the 2011 anniversary and homecoming was made into a presentation which was given at the 2012 Annual Meeting of the AWF Historical Society at Huntingdon College. (The introductory section of this article is based on that presentation.).

Elba was again threatened with flooding in December 2015. Historian Gilmer reported that, “We did not have any problem with flooding inside the new levee but just to be safe, members of our church gathered on Christmas Eve and took a lot of records, vehicles, etc. to higher ground. Then they moved pianos, office equipment, etc. to a higher, safer place in the church. Needless to say, we were very busy Christmas day and many days afterwards helping with flood recovery - and are still helping out.”

The church archives are now housed in a secure filing cabinet on the second floor of the sanctuary.

The Elba United Methodist Church has persevered over the many decades that it has served the Elba community, recovering from floods and any other difficulties that arose from time to time.

Construction is underway on a new church wing with completion expected in the summer of 2016. Elba UMC continues to be a vibrant and active church, serving God and God’s people.

Reverend Michael J. Lawler is the Pastor.

[1] Thanks to Nell Gilmer, Elba UMC Church Historian, for providing a copy of the presentation that she developed for the 2012 Annual Meeting of the AWF Historical Society, for the photo of the new wing construction, and for helpful information about the church and the 2011 Homecoming and 100th Anniversary Celebration.

Elba UMC Windows

Extracted from a compilation by Peggy DeVane

This information about the windows was written by Pattie Weiland and is from the Enterprise Ledger.

"In his book, Pea River Reflections, Coffee County
Probate Judge, historian and author Marion Brunson tells of the story of Cordelia Lee Costello and the legacy she left. Mrs. Costello was the daughter of Charles and Elizabeth Lee, Coffee County pioneers who came to Elba from Georgia in the early 1800's. She married Pierre Costello, an Irishman who immigrated to this country from Limrock, Ireland.

Costello found his way to Elba, and after marrying Miss Lee, was elected the county's second probate judge. When the Civil War broke out Costello joined the Confederate Army. He was killed in Murfreesboro, Tennessee on January 4, 1863.

Following the death of her husband, Mrs. Costello continued to be visited by tragedy. None of her three children survived to adulthood. But she was a strong and courageous woman and she took it upon herself to see that the memory of her husband, as well as the other soldiers of the confederacy, would not be forgotten by the generations to come.

Brunson says after the war, most communities in the South managed to scrape together enough money to build monuments to their confederate soldiers. Mrs. Costello poured all her energy and resources into raising enough money to build a monument in the Elba Courthouse Square. She went door-to-door, begging pennies in order to fulfill her dream. However, the post-war poverty in Coffee County was so devastating, she could not raise the necessary funds to build the monument.

At the same time, the First United Methodist Church of Elba was under construction. With the approval of those who had contributed to the memorial fund and with the permission of the congregation, Mrs. Costello had a group of stained glass windows installed in the new church in honor of the Confederate Soldiers from Coffee County.

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These stained glass windows have been tended to with care and affection. When the second story portion of the church was added, the two windows in the choir loft had to be moved. Boyd Murphree took on the responsibility of storing them for years. They remained in storage until Mary Morrow's children had one restored and placed between the Garrett-Dunaway Room and the Men's Bible Classroom. These are the words found on the plaque near this stained glass window: "The restoration of
The Local Church Heritage Award
The Alabama-West Florida Conference

The Alabama-West Florida Conference Commission on Archives and History (COAH) presents "The Local Church Heritage Award" at the Annual Conference to the church most diligent in preserving its heritage during the previous calendar year.

There are three criteria a church should meet in order to be considered for the award:

1. During the year, the Church celebrated in a special way an anniversary.

2. A copy of the form “Historical Information on Churches” for the church must be on file in the Conference Archives.

3. The Church must have submitted the “Local Church Update” form to its annual Charge Conference.

Please contact the Archivist, Sharon Tucker at stucker@hawks.huntingdon.edu or phone 334-833-4413 for help with these forms or for more information about the award.

In addition, the submission should include as much supplemental data as possible for the COAH to consider. It is best to arrange this information in a notebook or scrapbook. The more you can “show” your celebration, the easier it is for the evaluators to experience your celebration.

There were two 2015 Local Church Heritage Award Recipients:

Fairview United Methodist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, held their 100th Anniversary Celebration in 2014.

Every event year was celebrated in some way as their special anniversary year. Fairview UMC held a revival featuring “The Cobb Family” in early August. On August 31, 2014, they observed their anniversary with a “100th Birthday Party.” Their “Homecoming” was remembered on September 21, 2014, with their previous pastor, Rev. Gary Miller. The church used this special year as a time to gather past history, remember pastors who previously served, and anticipate their future.

Bradford’s Chapel United Methodist Church in Tuskegee, Alabama, held their “Homecoming Celebration” on September 28, 2014.

There were beautiful decorations, special music, and singing. As folks gathered at the church a slide show was playing with pictures from Bradford Chapel’s past. Several people, both children and adults, dressed in period clothes to enjoy family and friends.

The youth even presented a special dance. Rev. Walter Albritton returned to Bradford’s Chapel to join in the fellowship and deliver the sermon. After a wonderful service and luncheon, guests were invited to have their pictures made in front of a horse drawn carriage, a Model-A car or some vintage trucks. This very active church created a beautiful scrapbook to remember their festivities.

Some Recent Past Recipients of the Heritage Award were:

2014 - Frisco City United Methodist Church
2013 - No recipient
2012 - Elba United Methodist Church
2011 - Fairhope United Methodist Church

Submission forms for the Heritage Award can be downloaded at:

http://www.awfumc.org/heritageaward.

The Deadline for submission is May 3rd.
Century United Methodist Church, Century, Florida
Severely Damaged by President’s Day 2016 Tornado

In the mid-to-late 1800s, and even all the way into the mid 1900s, the pine forests of South Alabama and Northwest Florida were prime sources of lumber for the booming economy of the United States and much of the rest of the world.

As transportation improved with the advent of branch railroads, lumber mills were constructed all over this area. The Alger-Sullivan Lumber Company built a large mill just south of the Alabama state line in Florida, and also created a town to support it. They named the town Century in honor of the newly entered twentieth century.

The town built by the company on their land originally had four distinct levels of housing, small shotgun houses for the black workers, small frame houses of various styles for the white workers, larger one-story frame houses for the foremen and managers, and large two-story houses for the officers and administrators. Soon afterwards, several shops and professional buildings were built in addition to the company-built and run commissary. The streets were lined with company-planted water oaks and many of the houses had picket fences.

Two churches were built on land donated to the congregations by the Company. The Century Methodist Church, built in 1902, was a simple, basically rectangular, frame vernacular building with a front gabled roof. A square tower with a pyramidal steeple roof formed the entrance in the middle of the main façade and there was a small, gabled roof over the entry steps. A later addition on the rear gave the building a T-formation. The exterior was wood clapboard with cornerboards. The Century Baptist Church, built in 1904, was similar, but had a bell tower at the southern corner of the main façade, and a small, gabled vestibule in the middle of the façade.

The first mill burned in 1910 but was immediately replaced. The original notion was that the timber would only last about ten years or so. But the mill’s management planned for and allowed creative cutting and replanting in the forests; thus the mill in Century operated for almost 50 additional years before it was finally closed. It produced more southern pine board feet per year than any other mill in the south.

On Presidents’ Day, February 15, 2016, an EF-3 strength tornado struck Century. Over 80 structures were destroyed or severely damaged, and among those was the Century United Methodist Church. It was partially moved from its foundation and suffered considerable damage.

NorthEscambia.com, an on-line newspaper serving Century and the surrounding area, reported a few days after the storm:

The community has leaned on the Century United Methodist Church for about 114 years. A simple, but beautiful wooden church that’s stood strong on Church Street since just after the turn of the Century. Notably, a couple of years longer, we’re told, than the Baptist church next door.

Now the church building is precariously leaning after last Monday’s tornado lifted it off its foundation and shifted the entire building about two feet away. The building, according to a structural engineer, is a total loss and in danger of possible collapse. It will have to be torn down.

Since Monday, church members and volunteers have worked, despite the danger, to remove stained glass windows, pews and other furniture, and chandeliers from the building. Members and former members have stopped by, some posing for pictures on the porch, and reminiscing about the weddings and funerals and special services — the important moments in their lives and the in the lives of their families — that took place in the little wooden church.

Some are quick to point out that Church is the gathering of the Lord’s people, not the physical building.

That Century UMC body, for now, will be holding services in a house they own just across the street from the tornado-damaged church.

Rev. Janet K. Lee is the pastor of Century UMC. She has served there for 16 years.
Win This For Your Church!

A precious keepsake for any United Methodist and their church is a quality print of John Wesley. Everyone that has joined or renewed their AWF Historical Society membership since June 2015 and through noon, Tuesday, June 14th, 2016 will have their name entered in the drawing for this beautiful print. There’s a membership application form included in this newsletter.

The 2016 Alabama-West Florida UMC Annual Conference will begin on the afternoon of Sunday, June 12, 2016, and will end around noon on Wednesday, June 15th.

The winner will be announced on the Tuesday afternoon of Annual Conference, June 14th. You don’t have to be present to win.

The retail value of this framed print is $300. It will look wonderful in any United Methodist Church building’s foyer or hallway. The affixed label at the bottom says:

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AWF Historical Society
2016
John Wesley
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We urge you to come by and visit our display booth at Annual Conference and fill out a membership application to join or to renew.

Too, keep an eye out for John Wesley who may be seen wandering around the Annual Conference with membership applications in his hands!

Thanks to Rev. Ed Shirley who contributed the print and to Dan Fraley, Brundidge UMC, who contributed the professional framing.

Your Support is Needed at the 2016 Annual Conference

We will again share a table with the Commission on Archives and History (COAH) at Annual Conference where we can display items that help explain what our Society is and encourage folks to join us.

As a member or friend of the Society we urge you to come by the table, sit a spell, and talk with folks who stop by to look at the displays; tell them about our upcoming Annual Meeting in September, and encourage them to join.

The Historical Society also supports the COAH in helping to set up for the Memorial Luncheon honoring the spouses and families of AWF clergy who have passed on since the last Annual Conference. If you’re available on the afternoon of Sunday, June 12th, we’ll welcome your help.

Mark Your Calendars Now for our 2016 Annual Meeting

Plans are being made to hold our 2016 Annual Meeting on September 15, 2016, at St. Stephens UMC, St. Stephens, AL. Details will be provided as they are finalized.
Driving on Interstate 65 South of Montgomery?
It’s only a Slight Detour to visit the
Fort Deposit United Methodist Church

On their way north or south on Interstate 65, thousands of people have stopped at the intersection of I-65 and Alabama 185, about 15 miles north of Greenville, to see and buy the famous treats at Priester’s Pecan Company.

Most have also seen the sign pointing toward the town of Fort Deposit about three miles west of the Interstate and thought nothing of it. Yet Fort Deposit is the home of a historic Methodist church that is well worth the small detour to see.

Fort Deposit was named for a fort constructed by federal troops during the Creek War of 1813-14 on the site around which the town developed. Known originally as Fort Deposite, the structure was established on a bluff along the Old Federal Road in October 1813 by Gen. Ferdinand Claiborne as a fortified camp that housed as many as 1,200 men. It served as a staging area for Claiborne before his troops engaged the Red Stick Creeks at the Battle of Holy Ground (Econochaca) in December 1813. He left about 100 men, along with wagons, supplies, and sick soldiers at the fort before the engagement, and his forces returned to the fort which was a strategic location. The settlers from the surrounding country often used the Fort as a refuge and for protection from the Indians. Slowly, the Fort grew into a small town: the Town of Fort Deposit. A post office was established in 1855 and a railroad line linking Montgomery and Florida was created in 1861. [Christopher Maloney, Auburn University]

The Methodist church there was organized in 1861 as the Fort Deposit Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Marion Elias Lazenby, in his HISTORY OF METHODISM in Alabama and West Florida, wrote of the Fort Deposit Methodist Church’s role in what he called an “unusual occurrence” which took place at the Annual Conference in Tuskegee in December 1879.

Robert Paine, senior Bishop of the Church, was presiding and a charge of maladministration was brought against J. M. Mason, pastor at Fort Deposit, by two members there. It seems that these two men were planning to sell whiskey in connection with their general merchandizing business. They charged that J. M. Mason had "stated positively" that this would be in violation of the Discipline and would result in their expulsion from the church.

The merchants charged that "in consequence of this statement, we, not having yet engaged in the business, withdrew from the church to avoid expulsion, thereby losing our privileges as members of the M. E. Church, South." The merchants stated that "former pastors have not so ruled on this question, and to our certain knowledge members of the M. E. Church, South, in good standing in their respective churches, are engaged in this business in other localities."

The merchants did not get very far with their charge. Bishop Paine "gave expression to the opinion that the pastor had done no more than was his duty under the law of the Church; and, on motion, the character of J. M. Mason was passed and his official administration unanimously endorsed by the Conference."


Ms. Dickson writes that the present sanctuary construction was begun in 1899 and completed in 1900.
She adds that “This building, one of the most ornate wooden churches in the South, exhibits characteristics of the High Victorian Gothic: asymmetrical massing, complex rooflines; turrets, towers, and gables; and weatherboarding and shingles of contrasting colors. Note also the five graduated Gothic lancet windows below the wagon-wheel window. The sanctuary – constructed over a raised basement and accessed by bowleg staircases leading to dual entries – features exposed beam ceilings and the original carved wood pews.”

The church continues to maintain an active ministry in the area and has weekly worship services. Fort Deposit United Methodist Church is served by Reverend Dennis Carlson.

Priester's Pecans
by Jim Young

The Priester’s Pecans store, to me at least, is associated with Methodists because of many trips I’ve made from my home town of Fort Walton Beach to and from Montgomery, AL, usually on Alabama-West Florida Conference business. It’s rare when groups from our church travel north on I-65 to Annual Conferences or other AWFC meetings that they don’t stop at Priester’s. The treats there are well worth the stop to eat on the spot and to take home as gifts.

The story of Priester’s Pecans is part of the story of Fort Deposit. As the town grew, so did the pecan trees that had been planted around the town – lots of them!

By 1935 there was a healthy trade in the town with automobiles buzzing back and forth on the main route between Mobile and Montgomery. Mr. Lee C. Priester owned and operated a Texaco station that serviced these travelers. But his customers wanted more than gasoline. Mr. Priester, or L.C. as he was always called, decided to offer refreshments and a little taste of the South.

He hired a local man to help him gather pecans. The ripened nuts were knocked down from the trees with a long stick and gathered in sacks to bring to the porch of L.C.’s home next door to the service station where they were displayed for sale.

No one is exactly sure when "Special Order Number One" was placed, but a salesman who stopped to buy gasoline asked L.C. for a special favor. He wanted the pecans cracked and shelled to be picked up on his return from a business trip. L.C., being a good businessman, promised it would be done, and it was. After similar requests, L.C. arranged for local ladies to work for him on a contract basis, cracking and shelling pecans.

Priester Pecan Company started with that first customer's request. The pecan business grew with help from Mrs. Priester and the local ladies. Soon the back porch could no longer handle the volume and a larger facility was purchased. With increasing sales, L.C. realized the need for a financial partner. He approached his long-time friend and business associate, Hense Reynolds Ellis who owned the oil distributorship that supplied L.C.’s service station and a saw mill. With a simple handshake and an initial loan of $200, Hense became the silent partner in Priester Pecan Company. Members of the Hense family became involved in the company and L.C. also stayed active in making Priester’s a success until illness forced his retirement.

When Interstate 65 bypassed Fort Deposit, it was a natural thing to move the business a few miles east on highway 185 and build a modern store there. The town limits, as this map shows, were even adjusted so that Priester’s Pecans is still in Fort Deposit!

There are very few United Methodists, or any others for that matter, who can resist stopping at Priester’s when traveling north or south on I-65 in this area!

Thanks to http://www.priesters.com/aboutus
The United Methodist Church was formed in 1968 by the merger of the Evangelical United Brethren Church and the Methodist Church. From the Church of England roots of the Methodist Church and the Reformed and Lutheran Church roots of the Evangelical United Brethren Church grew a strong unified denomination to serve God’s people.

Good Morning, I’m going to present a little history lesson about the Evangelical United Brethren Church - known as the EUB Church. This is the other side of our United Methodist Church. It’s why we are called United Methodists.

But first, I need to tell you how I came to be standing up here today - with this topic: You see, I was raised in the United Brethren Church, as were my parents and grandparents. In fact, we all were members of the same church in Johnstown, PA. We sat in the same pew for generations. This church was first served by a circuit rider and will celebrate its 176th birthday this Nov. 18th [2014]. In 1946 the United Brethren Church merged with the Evangelical Association Church. In fact, the merger ceremony took place in our church in Johnstown - and we became the Evangelical United Brethren (EUB) Church.

[My husband] Ted and I were baptized, confirmed and married in this church and our three children were also baptized there.

So you can see, I was truly an EUB member until the merger with the Methodist Church in 1968 [when I became a member of the United Methodist Church]. Wherever the Air Force assignments took us - we always joined the closest UMC.

While attending all these various United Methodist churches, I soon developed a small pet peeve: Not many church members nor even the clergy ever said “United” Methodist when talking about the church. It was just “Methodist” and since I was an EUB member for 20 some years - I noticed!

One day, I mentioned my pet peeve to Adelma [Lauer] and I said (just to her) - I should give a little talk to [the United Methodist Women] circle about the EUB Church. And, that’s all it took - just a quiet mention to Adelma - and here I am! It’s just the fact that I don’t want all the wonderful United Brethren and EUB people and their histories to be forgotten and lost.

As I talk about the EUB Church and the Methodist Church, please speak up if I make a mistake so we can all have the correct information. I’m really not an expert on either denomination.

The first page of your guide [the handout] shows the symbol of the EUB Church. The second page is the "family tree" showing the history of the EUB Church. We’ll start with Philip William Otterbein: He was the man we [EUB children] heard about in Sunday School, not John Wesley.

Philip Otterbein was one of the two founders and one of the first two Bishops of the United Brethren Church. He was born in 1726 in Dillenberg, Germany to Rev. and Mrs. John Otterbein, one of six sons and one daughter. All 6 sons graduated college and seminary and all became ministers. The daughter married a prominent minister.

Otterbein was cultured and well educated and considered a distinguished missionary. At the age of 26, the German Reformed Church sent him to America to help minister to 90,000 German people settling in Pennsylvania. The year was 1752.

For the next 61 years, Otterbein ministered in America, mainly in PA and Maryland. He initiated the 1st mid-week prayer and Bible study meeting in the American churches in 1759. Otterbein died in 1813 at the age of 87. He is buried beside the church he loved and preached in for 40 years in Baltimore, MD - Otterbein Church. It is now called Old Otterbein Church and is considered the Mother Church of the United Brethren Church and is still used regularly.
The second founder of the UB Church was Martin Boehm: He was born in 1725 to Jacob and Barbara Boehm of Lancaster, PA. He was chosen by lot to become the minister of the local Mennonite Church at the age of 31. But Boehm felt that he lacked the assurance and power of Jesus Christ in his life. He prayed for a heart-warming experience to deepen his faith. After many months he had an epiphany while plowing his field. Now preaching with confidence and fervor, he was made a Bishop in the Mennonite Church in 1761. He was expelled from the same church for being too evangelical, but he kept on preaching. One day in 1767 a great religious meeting of peoples was held in a barn near Lancaster, PA. Philip Otterbein was there and was deeply moved listening to Boehm preach. When Boehm had finished, Otterbein left his seat, embraced Boehm and declared “We are Brethren”. Thus began the United Brethren Church, in 1767.

But I need to tell you that there are many established Mennonite and Brethren churches throughout Pennsylvania, Maryland and Ohio to this day. Their denominations are alive and well.

The United Brethren church began to expand - through the work of circuit riders (one rider could have as many as 30 churches.) The expansion included Ohio, Maryland, Virginia, and Pennsylvania - mostly west across the Allegheny Mountains. When the circuit riders were gone, a LAY LEADER was appointed to run the church until the circuit rider came back. The church was strongly against slavery so it did not expand much to the south.

One famous UB circuit rider, Christian Newcomer (1769-1830), was called the "St. Paul" of the UB Church. He was in the saddle daily for 53 years, preaching in homes, schools, barns and churches. He crossed the Allegheny Mountains about 50 times during his service. He gathered missionary money - a first in those days. He was a bishop from 1813 – 1830.

In the mid to late 1700’s, crossing the Allegheny Mountains was no small feat. In those days the mountains and everything west of them was considered wilderness, fraught with wild animals and vicious Indians. Just traders, trappers and Indians had ventured as far west as Pittsburgh and the Ohio River. So what Christian Newcomer accomplished was quite remarkable. If not for these courageous circuit riders, the church would not have grown as rapidly as it did.

In 1800, Boehm and Otterbein began a yearly conference. Thirteen ministers attended the first meeting in Maryland. They elected Boehm and Otterbein (both in their 70s) Bishops and adopted the name United Brethren in Christ. This denomination makes the claim as the 1st denomination actually begun in America! In 1789 Otterbein wrote a Confession of Faith which was adopted in 1815 as the statement of church doctrine.

I must mention the special friendship of the two major players in our church history in America: Otterbein and Francis Asbury. Otterbein was sent from Germany in 1752 to minister to the German settlers in the New World; and John Wesley sent Francis Asbury in 1771 to minister to the Irish and English settlers. It’s no wonder that these men would become acquainted and eventually become lifelong friends and associates. They both preached Arminian Theology that denied that God had preordained an elect number of people to eternal bliss. They believed that God is for all people and that appealed to the common people in the New World.

The first organizational meeting of the first Methodist Church [in America] took place in 1772 at the Otterbein Church in Baltimore, Maryland. And, when Asbury was ordained as the first Methodist Bishop in America at the Lovely Lane Meeting House on December 27, 1784, he requested that Philip Otterbein assist at the ordination. (Asbury was the only Methodist missionary to remain in America during the Revolutionary War.)

Now, the merger with the Evangelical Church happened this way:

Jacob Albright was the founder of the Evangelical Association. The two denominations (Evangelical Association and United Brethren) had considered merging since the early 19th century because of their common emphasis on holiness, evangelism and German heritage.

Jacob Albright was born in 1759 near Pottstown, PA. His heritage was German Lutheran but he converted to Methodism in 1790 at the age of 31. He preached and formed classes in the German settlements and he was ordained a minister in 1803. He was elected a Methodist bishop at the 1st annual conference by his followers in 1807.

His evangelical movement did not take place until after his death in 1808. His Methodist followers formed their own German-speaking church partly because of a lack of cooperation with the English-speaking majority of American Methodists in 1816. Thus Jacob Albright is considered one of the founders of the United Methodist Church. There is an Albright College in Reading, PA. The highest scholarship awarded is the Jacob Albright Scholarship.

And so, after many years of meetings and discussions, the merger of the two denominations [the Evangelical Association and the United Brethren] was realized in 1946. The merger ceremony took place November 16, 1946, at our Johnstown church. At this altar we United Brethren became Evangelical United Brethren. But one item to
sadly note: Before this merger, women were ordained as ministers in the United Brethren Church (since 1889,) but that privilege was lost due to the merger with the Evangelicals.

The doctrine of the EUB Church was contained in the Confession of Faith written by Otterbein. Personal salvation was emphasized and it was ecumenical in outlook (promoting Christianity throughout the world). In 1966, it approved a plan of union with the Methodist Church and on April 23, 1968 the Uniting Conference was held in Dallas, Texas.

As of 2012, there were approximately 34,892 United Methodist congregations, 9 million members in the US and 4.4 million members in Africa, Asia and Europe. Membership is shrinking and growing older in the US, but growing abroad.

Our days of merger might not be over: Since 1985, the United Methodist Church has been exploring a possible merger with these historically African and American Methodist denominations: The African Methodist Episcopal Church, The African Methodist Episcopal Zion, and The Christian Methodist Episcopal Church.

The Commission on Pan Methodist Cooperation and Union was formed in 2000 to carry out the work on such a possible merger or, at least, of a greater link to cooperation with these and other denominations.

And there you have a brief history of the Evangelical United Brethren Church and how it came to be a part of the United Methodist Church.

Please remember the Evangelical United Brethren Church and its founders when you say “United Methodist.”

Jackie Foster is a member of Trinity United Methodist Church, Fort Walton Beach, Florida. She gave this presentation to the Trinity UMC United Methodist Women in 2014.
Will the General Commission on Archives and History be Demoted and Removed as an Independent Commission?

A Word from Dr. Fred Day, General Secretary

Greetings, Historical Society Friends:

By now you are probably aware that The General Commission on Archives and History (GCAH) could be demoted to the role of a committee of one of the denomination’s larger boards or agencies as numerous plans to realign the administrative and programmatic structure of the General Commissions and Agencies of the UMC come before General Conference 2016.

Dr. Fred Day
General Secretary, General Commission on Archives and History

One of the plans being considered is a revision of Plan UMC which was ruled unconstitutional at the 2012 General Conference. This plan would remove GCAH’s status as an independent Commission with a seat at the Connectional Table and relocate it under the General Council on Finance and Administration or possibly the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry. The plan also removes the Committee on the Status and Role of Women and the General Commission on Religion and Race from the Connectional Table and would conflate their function into a Committee on Inclusiveness.

By way of this column, I am providing you with some talking points about the critical and strategic reasons why GCAH must remain an independent commission in the structure of the UMC. I hope these will be helpful to you as you interact with your annual conference’s delegates and others who will be attending General Conference.

10 Reasons GCAH is Critically Important to the UMC

1. GCAH is much more than an administrative book and record collection agency. We’re the UMC’s ministry of memory, its history detectives and storytellers. By understanding the past, GCAH helps the UMC envision the future! Check it out at: www.gcah.org

2. As the keepers of the Church’s ethos and DNA, GCAH brings voice and gravitas to the Connectional Table’s visioning, planning and programming of the life and witness of the UMC.

3. Have fears for the financial security of the denomination? GCAH uses less than 1% of the overall UMC budget, processing records equal to the height of a 30-story high building each year.

4. We’re tweeting stuff that makes people excited and proud to be United Methodist @UMCHistory OR Stumped for a cool UMC themed #TBT? You should see the archives! We can "Throw Back Thursday" all the way to the Wesley brothers and forward to their impact today.

5. Got Records? Need information on how to manage electronic records for your annual conference or your local church? We’ve got you covered: http://bit.ly/recordsPDF.

6. Still worried about the financial security of the denomination? A restructure aligning GCAH with another board or agency would increase administrative and travel cost.

7. Celebrating an anniversary; writing a local church or annual conference history, or looking for ways to make being United Methodist relevant to ministry today? We can help! http://.gcah.org/resources/how-to-write-a-local-church-history.

8. Our state-of-the-art facility houses more than 2 miles worth of valuable records. Come take a tour and see for yourself. What other board or agency can provide us with what we have at the Archives and History Center in Madison, NJ?

9. We’re still making history! GCAH awards $80,000/yr. in awards, prizes and grants that inspire and support publication of the next generation of Wesley and Methodist Studies scholars and providing for 46 Heritage Landmarks around the world.

10. The UMC needs an "honest broker" in times of dispute and conflict between groups or agencies in the denomination. Records housed and services here have the integrity of a neutral party.

Historian’s Digest, Winter 2016

What is a Heritage Landmark of the United Methodist Church?

There are currently forty-six Heritage Landmarks of The United Methodist Church. The Book of Discipline defines a Heritage Landmark as "a building, location, or structure specifically related to significant events, developments, or personalities in the overall history of The United Methodist Church or its antecedents." The Heritage Landmarks of United Methodism remind us of those people and events that have shaped our history. They are tangible reminders of our heritage and their preservation helps keep our denominational legacy alive.

One of these landmarks is located in the area of the Alabama-West Florida Conference, the Asbury Manual Labor School/Mission at Fort Mitchell, Alabama. Fort Mitchell was built by the Georgia militia in 1813 during the Creek War on the main Indian trade route to the Tombigbee River. In September 1821, the South Carolina Annual Conference sent the Rev. William Capers to Fort Mitchell as “missionary in South Carolina and to the Indians.” After negotiations with the chiefs of the Creek Nations, he opened the Asbury Manual Labor School and Mission in 1822 to teach Creek children reading, writing, and other “civilized” skills.
2015-2016 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

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The AWFC Historical Society Fiscal Year

The AWFC Historical Society Fiscal Year is from one AWF Annual Conference to the next AWF Annual Conference.

Important Notice

If you’ve been receiving these newsletters as paper copies through the US Postal Service, please note that this will be the last issue that will be distributed that way. Due to supply, printing, and postage costs, the Executive Board has voted to discontinue the distribution of paper copies.

If you’ve been getting a paper copy, please send us an email address where we can send your future issues. If you don’t have a personal email account, perhaps you could have it sent to a relative or friend who would then get it to you. We will also continue to post the newsletters on our website at:

http://www.awfhistory.com/

We are sorry for the inconvenience.

APR 2016
Alabama West Florida Conference - Historical Society

Executive Committee Meeting – February 25, 2016

The Executive Committee of the AWFC-HS met on Thursday, February 25, 2016. The meeting was held in the Methodist Archives Center at Huntingdon College at 10:30 a.m. Carolyn Coker, Joyce Stimak, James Young, Craig Reynolds, Ed Shirley, Mary Ann Pickard, and Sharon Tucker were present.

President Jim Young opened the meeting with a short devotional and opening prayer. Jim then presented the President’s Report. He acknowledged the Annual Report for the Annual Conference Brochure of Reports (and 2016 Journal). The status of the newsletter was presented. In the next newsletter Jim plans to write about the journey Elba UMC has taken with their records and documents before and after the flood damage. He also plans to include Century UMC and the damage they are facing from the tornado. Next Jim brought up the upcoming support needed by the COAH at Annual Conference from the Historical Society. Any members in attendance are encouraged to help at the COAH/AWFC-HS table. The COAH also needs assistance at the Memorial Service and Luncheon.

Vice President Ed Shirley talked about the Website and Facebook group status and plans. We are getting new hits daily and it is a wonderful way to publicize the society. The AWFC-HS received a thank you note from Gibb’s Couch for the money the society will be donating to the coffee table book published by her late husband and Joe Harrington are producing. The money will be sent as soon as Gibb’s directs it. Ed gave each member a handout he had prepared for the Annual Conference Membership Give-away. As people join the society their names will be placed in a drawing for a beautiful framed print of John Wesley. The winner will be drawn and announced on Tuesday afternoon. A few suggestions were made to change the drawing tab and Ed will handle that. The next annual meeting of the AWFC-HS was discussed. A motion was made by Joyce Stimak and seconded by Craig Reynolds that the meeting be held on September 15, 2016. At this time the meeting is planned to be held at St. Stevens UMC and will include historical presentations, singing, reports on the history of St. Stevens, and lunch. Raleigh Wilkerson will cater the meal. The cost of the meeting will be $5.00 above the cost of the meal. The motion was approved as read. She then reviewed the assistance needed at Annual Conference. On the shared table the COAH will need only room for the stand-up board describing what the COAH does and a display area for the winner of the Annual Heritage Award for the local church. The AWFC-HS can have the rest of the table to display information about the next Annual Meeting and the John Wesley framed print and any other items they might need to display.

Mary Ann Pickard presented the financial status of the society. A copy of the report is enclosed. The ending balance for February 2016 is $3,820.00. Mary Ann also gave a membership report. At this time we have eight yearly paying dues members and twenty-seven lifetime members for a total of thirty-five members.

Since the reports handled the Old Business, President Jim Young asked for New Business. After a brief discussion a motion was presented by Carolyn Coker and seconded by Mary Ann Pickard that in the constitution the office of Financial Secretary be changed to Financial/Membership Secretary. The motion passed.

A motion was presented by Carolyn Coker and seconded by Craig Reynolds that the dues for yearly paying members be increased from $12.00 to $15.00 per year (except for student membership which will stay at $8.00). The committee talked about life memberships. It was decided that the life membership plan would not be advertised but will be accepted until Annual Conference 2017 if anyone wants to join that way. The motion to increase dues passed.

Due to our financial report dropping each year it was understood that we will really need to make a membership push at Annual Conference. Another way to save on expenses will be to adjust the cost of distributing printed newsletters. In the future we will stop mailing a printed copy of the newsletter to those who don’t have email. Announcements will be made for those receiving printed copies to submit an email address or make sure they have access to the website. The question arose on how we can get more churches to pay for membership of their church Historian. Hopefully at Annual Conference we can point out the benefits of membership to any pastors who visit our table.

The next meeting of the Alabama West Florida Conference – Historical Society will be September 15, 2016. After a closing prayer by Craig Reynolds the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted:
Sharon Tucker
Recording Secretary

Annual Conference vs. Annual Meeting

An Annual Conference in the United Methodist Church is a regional body that governs much of the life of the “Connectional Church.” To complicate things, the yearly meeting where clergy and lay members of the Annual Conference discuss church business, worship together, and have a time of reunion and fellowship, is ALSO called an Annual Conference.

The Alabama-West Florida Annual Conference Historical Society calls its yearly meeting an Annual Meeting.
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