

# Protestant Episcopal Church Archives

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**A**MONG the major archival collections in Austin, Tex., are the archives of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America. These are now housed on the second floor of the library of the Episcopal Seminary of the Southwest, where they occupy approximately 6,300 square feet and are available to researchers in conjunction with the library itself.

The archives have been a major responsibility of the Church Historical Society, which was founded in Philadelphia on May 17, 1910, by a handful of laymen who felt that the church had an obligation to preserve the records of its own development. The society is one of the very few official organizations of the church that were founded entirely by laymen, and the chief architect in that founding was the late William Ives Rutter, Jr., who served as its secretary for over 40 years and as secretary emeritus from 1951 until his death. The Rev. Walter H. Stowe succeeded a roll of distinguished presidents in 1936 and is the society's leader today. A 1940 statement by the General Convention designated the society as

the official agency of the General Convention for the collection, preservation, and safe-keeping of records and historical documents connected with the life and development of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, and to foster as far as possible the investigation of its history and the development of interest in all relevant research.

As an archival agency the Church Historical Society at its annual meeting on January 30, 1958, stated its functions as follows:

1. To receive, select, and preserve the archival records of the General Convention, together with those of its major committees and commissions, and the archival records of the National Council.
2. Wherever possible, to receive, select from, and preserve all archival records of the dioceses and missionary districts of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, including parochial histories.
3. To receive and preserve publications of the unofficial institutions and

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voluntary associations of the same Church and to maintain records of their activities.

4. To collect and preserve periodicals, both past and current, bearing upon the same Church.

5. To encourage use of the Society's Library as a depository for books, manuscripts, and photographs bearing upon the history of the same Church.

6. To collect, so far as may be feasible, biographical and bibliographical materials on the clergymen and lay leaders of the same Church.

7. To receive and preserve books and pamphlets about the same Church and those on whatever topic by Episcopal authors.

8. To maintain a small, carefully selected collection of general works regarding the Anglican Communion beyond the United States of America.

9. To receive and preserve, so far as may be feasible, records of organizations in which the same Church participates, such as the National Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches.

10. To publish such scholarly works in Church history and biography as editorial facilities and financial resources may permit, especially those based on archives in the custody of the Society.

Membership dues to the Church Historical Society and a budgeted appropriation from the General Convention of the Episcopal Church support the Archives. The society has the responsibility for custodianship and the employment of an archivist.

After many years in the chapel basement of the Divinity School in Philadelphia, where it was difficult for scholars, church historians, and others to make use of them, the archives in 1956 were shipped to Austin. Along with the library of the Church Historical Society, the archives are now housed in the beautiful fireproof and air-conditioned library of the Episcopal Seminary of the Southwest. Archivist Virginia Nelle Bellamy has been in charge since June of 1959, and with a staff of three student assistants and two part-time secretaries the work of arranging and cataloging is now in progress. The major holdings include:

1. Archives of the General Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church.  
2. An extensive file of diocesan journals, complete for a few dioceses; incomplete but fairly full for most dioceses. These are essential sources for diocesan history and important for general church and parish history.

3. Hand and typewritten copies of the reports of a number of missionaries sent to colonial America by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel.

4. Archives of the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society from the 1820's to the present century, including reports of missionaries and letters and accounts relating to missionary work.

5. Convention journals and periodicals of the dioceses.

6. A small library of books pertaining to the history of the Episcopal Church and a large collection of pamphlets on activities in the church.

7. A large collection of parish histories from all parts of the country.
8. Biographies of many bishops, other clergy, and prominent laymen.
9. A large collection of prayer books of the Church of England and of the American Episcopal Church.
10. Collections of bishops' letters, diaries, pictures, correspondence, journals, and sermons.

The scope of these collections can perhaps best be illustrated by listing some of the projects for which they have recently been used by scholars:

1. Beginnings of the church in colonial Massachusetts.
2. Early history of the church in the Pacific Northwest.
3. Missionary work among the Sioux Indians in Minnesota, Nebraska, and South Dakota.
4. Biographies of Bishops Ethelbert Talbot, Joseph C. Talbot, John Henry Hobart, and James DeWolfe Perry.
5. History of the Diocese of Louisiana.
6. History of the vestry system.
7. Applicability of English canon law to the American Episcopal Church.

The archives provide a rich research field for students attending the Episcopal Seminary of the Southwest. Since the seminary furnishes the housing for the archives, the students have access to archival material and the archivist offers elective courses in church history. The Church Historical Society frequently publishes material based on research in the archives. Chief users are the seminary students, graduate students, genealogists, and scholars writing books on the Episcopal Church.

In the future the General Convention will put more emphasis on the role of the archives. Officers realize that many historical documents and archives pertaining to the Episcopal Church are still scattered in institutions and depositories throughout the country, and there is the hope that some sort of guide can be compiled so that the whereabouts of such material can be made known.

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### ***Not With a Narrow Concern***

... the archivist as historian approaches the records of a divinity school not with a narrow concern for their use in administrative and internal operations, but rather with the hope of finding evidence of the school's impact on other institutions in the past and on the issues of the present.

—Lester J. Cappon, "Archival Good Works for Theologians," in *American Archivist*, 22:297 (July 1959).