

# Molecular Analysis in the

Methodist Episcopal Church, the Methodist Episcopal Church South, and the Methodist Protestant Church. At the uniting conference of 1939 at Kansas City these bodies were merged to form the Methodist Church. This trend should be matched in matters archival, but in fact the Methodist Church has no officially designated institution or agency as a central repository for archival or historical materials. The Methodists lag behind several other religious bodies in this respect.

Methodist recordkeeping in general reflects a conference system dating from the beginnings of organized Methodism.<sup>2</sup> The first conference in America met in Philadelphia in 1773. The conferences are important because they create policy records. They operate on three levels, the lowest being the district conferences held annually in two or more districts in a State. Above the district conferences are the jurisdictional conferences held every four years. At present there are in the United States six of these jurisdictions—Northeastern, Southeastern, Central, North Central, South Central, and Western. Above the jurisdictional conferences is the general conference or quadrennium, which meets also every four years.

The annual conference is the basic body of the church. It elects members to both the jurisdictional and general conferences and these members are both ministerial and lay. This conference is required to keep an exact record of its proceedings and further to send to the jurisdictional conference a bound copy of its minutes for examination. This copy is ultimately returned to the secretary of the annual conference, who is responsible for its safekeeping.

The jurisdictional conference sends elected representatives to the general conference, which is the legislative body of the Methodist Church. The word of the general conference is the ultimate authority in the church on matters of discipline and faith. Its pronouncements on creedal matters are embodied in an official publication of the general conference known as the *Discipline of the Methodist Church*, issued by the Methodist Publishing House.

The records procedure described above is set forth in the *Discipline*. Original records of the daily proceedings of the general conference are placed in the custody of the general secretary of the Methodist Church, at present Dr. Leon T. Moore, 1701 Arch Street, Philadelphia. The complete proceedings and minutes of both the jurisdictional and general conferences are printed in the *Daily Christian Advocate*. In addition, the minutes of the general conference are printed separately.

<sup>2</sup> *Discipline of the Methodist Church* (Nashville, 1956); Umphrey Lee and William Warren Sweet, *A Short History of Methodism* (New York, 1956); interview with Bishop Hooten.

From the district level down the archival picture is cloudy. The chief function of the district conference is the licensing of local preachers, and the proceedings have been authoritatively described as being "of a rather informal nature and records per se do not amount to much of import." In 1957 the response to a questionnaire (sent to local church records and history committees), concerning the receiving by district conferences of required reports and their subsequent care and custody, showed that only 18 percent concerned themselves with these matters. Furthermore, district superintendents have generally been lax in taking over the records of closed congregations, and the records of existing congregations are presumably still in their custody. According to the Rev. Edwin Schell of the Methodist Historical Society of the Baltimore Conference much is to be desired in the realm of official correspondence. He states:

The official correspondence is generally not kept. There has never been any real headquarters in our church, even till now. Bishops travelled until less than 50 years ago, preachers' terms were limited. Few District Superintendents had any office other than their homes. Methodism has had a method for almost everything but for the care and preservation of records. It has been pure accident when anything has been saved for a century in our church. There is not to this day any clear understanding as to what are church records and pastoral records, (*i.e.* private), or what belongs to the Conference and what belongs to someone who was chairman or secretary of a conference, board or agency. There is no understanding as to what a Bishop leaves behind for his successor, etc. etc.<sup>8</sup>

Some important records have passed from Methodist custody. The papers of Bishop Oxnham have been deeded to the Library of Congress and will be placed in the Manuscript Division, which has other Methodist material, including two important journals.

On the credit side of the ledger there are signs that Methodists are becoming increasingly conscious of their history and that steps are being taken toward preserving their archival treasures. The World Methodist Building at Lake Junaluska, N. C., and archival consciousness on the part of leading Methodist universities are two encouraging trends in this direction.

In the strict sense, the World Methodist Building is not an archival repository; but it has been designated as an official depository of "Methodistica" by leading Methodist bodies. Some of these organizations are: the General Conference of the Methodist Church, the World Federation of Methodist Women, the World Methodist Council, and the American Association of Methodist

<sup>8</sup> Rev. Edwin Schell to the author, May 24, 1961.

Historical Societies. In fact, this building is the American headquarters of the two last-named agencies. (Dr. Elmer T. Clark serves as executive secretary of the association, and Mrs. Kenneth Stahl, treasurer, also functions as archivist.) The building was erected in 1955 and dedicated in September 1956. Housed here is the Clark collection, reputed to be one of the world's finest collections of Wesleyana. Of interest to the researcher is the building's library, containing some 10,000 volumes for use by students of Methodist history. The library contains all or most of the Methodist histories; biographies of the Wesleys, Asbury, and other early leaders of Methodism; most of the published histories of the annual conferences; and hundreds of volumes of conference minutes, including those of the Methodist Episcopal Church going back to 1773. There are also various autographs, letters, and other manuscripts, including sermons and letters of early Methodists, British and American. The World Methodist Building also functions as a museum of paintings, busts, prints, pottery, and other objects associated with Methodist history.

Many American colleges and universities are denominational in their beginnings, and their libraries have been depositories for historical materials relative to the church of their origin. This is certainly true of the Methodist universities. Some outstanding collections of Methodist historical materials are at Boston University's School of Theology; Drew University, Madison, N. J.; Duke University, Durham, N. C.; the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, N. C.; Emory University, Atlanta, Ga.; Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Tex.; and DePauw University, Greencastle, Ind. There are undoubtedly many more.

The New England Methodist Historical Society's library is housed within the library of the School of Theology of Boston University, of which Jannette E. Newhall is the acting librarian. This is a collection of some 7,000 books and pamphlets, which include such Methodist materials as early editions of the works of the Wesleys, extensive files of conference minutes, and biographies and writings of Methodist authors. There are also manuscript letters from John Wesley, Jesse Lee, Francis Asbury, and others. In addition, the library is the depository for records of Methodist churches that have closed or joined other churches. These manuscript records cover the official meetings of these churches and of their societies and other groups. Of interest is the record book of "Methodist Alley," the first Methodist church in Boston, dating from 1793.

In 1955 the library of the Board of Missions of the Methodist Church and the library of Drew University, Madison, N. J., ab-

sorbed the collection of the Methodist Historical Society of the City of New York. This gave Drew one of the most complete extant runs of annual conference minutes of the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Methodist Church. The library at Drew is reputedly one of the richest depositories of Methodist archival material in the United States. The Board of Missions' library has also extensive records on Methodist missions both at home and abroad.

The considerable material relating to the Methodist Episcopal Church South in the manuscript department of Duke University Library contains letters, diaries, journals of some early circuit riders, and some district conference records and local church histories. The Divinity School's library at Duke contains collections in Methodist biography, history, and church polity and extensive files of general conference and annual conference journals and of board reports for the Methodist Church, the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Methodist Episcopal Church South, and the Methodist Protestant Church. Also on file are the most important and representative periodicals of these four Methodist bodies.

Methodist holdings in the University of North Carolina are in two different collections in the library—the North Carolina Collection and the Southern Historical Collection, under the direction of William S. Powell and James W. Patton, respectively. The North Carolina Collection has printed material relating to the Methodist Church in the State. There are minutes of the North Carolina Conference from 1872, of the Western North Carolina Conference from 1890, and of the Blue Ridge Atlantic Conference for 1916-38.

The Southern Historical Collection has considerable material of regional interest. Reflecting church policy are such archival items as a minute book, 1831-56, of the Stokes Circuit in North Carolina; conference minutes, 1896, of the Hillsboro, N. C., Methodist Church; and a microfilm copy of the record book, 1804-64, of the Edenton, N. C., Methodist Church, as well as personal papers of Methodist preachers and laymen. Of especial interest are the papers of Edward Dromgoole, a Methodist minister of Virginia who corresponded with many early Methodist leaders. The Dromgoole papers, 1770-1871, were used by William W. Sweet in editing *The Methodists*, vol. 4 of *Religion On The American Frontier, 1783-1840* (New York, 1931). Other papers in the Southern Historical Collection include those of James Atkins, Joseph B. Cottrell, and Joseph Hoomes Davis.

Emory University of Atlanta is rich in archival and historical

manuscript materials, under the care of Elizabeth Royer, librarian of the School of Theology, and Mary R. Davis, acting chief, special collections. Among the special collections are long runs of the minutes of the individual conferences of the former Methodist Episcopal Church, Methodist Episcopal Church South, and Methodist Church, U. S. In addition, the library has complete runs from 1773 of the general minutes of the annual conferences of these churches and of the journals of the general conferences. There is also an almost complete collection of the *Daily Christian Advocate* of the general conference. Other serials available are the *Christian Advocate*, New York (complete), *Chicago Advocate* (complete), and the *Christian Advocate*, Nashville. An interesting project now underway at Emory, sponsored by the Methodist Librarian's Fellowship, is the compilation of a union list of the Methodist Corpus, eventually to be microfilmed. Finally, Emory's holdings in manuscript materials are impressive and extensive. Early Methodist greats and near-greats are represented. There are, for instance, letters to and from Francis Asbury, letters from James Osgood Andrew, and miscellaneous manuscripts of Augustus Montague Toplady, remembered for his stirring hymn "Rock of Ages."

Two other institutions rich in source materials for Methodist history are the Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University in Dallas and DePauw University in Greencastle. Although Southern Methodist is known to have extensive holdings, the recent illness of the curator has precluded obtaining detailed information. DePauw University instituted the Archives of DePauw University and Indiana Methodism in 1951 under the direction of Dr. Worth M. Tippy, a retired Methodist minister. These archives, now housed in the Roy O. West Library, are administered by Eleanore Cammack, university archivist. In them are collections documenting both the beginnings of DePauw (as Indiana Asbury University) and Indiana Methodism. There are sets of the minutes of the three active conferences in Indiana and of the former Southeast Conference, a set of general conference minutes, and the minutes of the former Methodist Episcopal Church South. In addition to strictly archival materials the DePauw library has considerable historical and biographical material relative to Methodism in this area. An annual report of the archives is published and mailed to historical societies, libraries, and archival institutions.

Methodism, like other religious denominations, needs a more clearly defined concept of its archives. A central repository or at least a central clearinghouse of archival and historical information is needed. Methodism has a story to tell and should not hide its light under a bushel of widely scattered and overlapping collections.