



WHY HAVE ARCHIVES?

Archives serve a very important function in the church. They identify your unique congregation, record its decisions, and leave a visible trail of activities. Identifying and preserving records of value is important for each local church. The most basic benefit is to help the congregation fulfill legal and financial obligations, but the church's past can:

- Serve as a resource for current work,
- Remind the congregation about mistakes that still apply to the present,
- Provide illustrations for publications,
- Assist persons seeking to know more about their family history, and
- Enrich anniversary celebrations.

GETTING STARTED

1. Establish Guidelines
2. Appoint a Committee and/or Historian/Archivist
3. Find space
4. Select Materials

Survey the building. Look into files, storerooms, cupboards, attics, and basements, even the furnace room. Clearly mark "to be saved" any historical items you may find. Put a notice in bulletins or newsletters or write former clergy or members, asking people to let you know where they have seen things stored or put for future reference.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

All documents made or received by the church in its ministry and operation, and judged to be of permanent value for legal, information, or illustrative purposes.

Legal Documents:

Deeds, mortgages, blueprints, trust agreements

Official Congregational Records:

Minutes of congregational business meetings and church boards

Membership rosters

Annual financial reports, audits

Biographical material for pastors, paid staff

Official Organizational Records:

Minutes, publications, and related items from youth, men's, and women's groups;

Sunday School, special committees

Published materials:

Annual reports, newsletters, worship bulletins, church histories, membership directories, special events (anniversaries, installations, retirements)

Ephemera/Memorabilia:

Scrapbooks, photo albums, tangible objects (e.g. various hymnbooks used for worship, communion sets, plaques, etc.) – if identified.



Procedures for working with historical records

Guidelines for what to look for and what may be of value are available from the Historical Society. Please contact us if you have not already done so. Answering the questions WHO, WHAT, WHEN, AND WHY of good reporting will help you start the process. The initial first step is always to survey what categories of materials you have and what should be kept.

The essential records you select for archiving will constitute a record group. The “creator” who knows their value best prepares them for storage.

Step 1: Arrangement

Creating order, sorting the materials

If the collection already has order, keep that order.

For instance, is it filed alphabetically or chronologically?

If there is no order, start by putting like with like: letters go together, minutes with other minutes, photos with photos, etc.

Physical care

Unfold; remove metal fasteners, rubber bands, and string

Photocopy acidic (browned and deteriorating) paper and newsprint

Remove items from binders

Throw away duplicates (no more than 2 file copies are needed of anything!)

Discard cardboard, Kraft envelopes, junk records

Storage

Items should be in folders and placed in order

Re-folder in acid-free archival folders

Each folder needs clear identification (either handwritten or with labels)

Bound volumes should be placed in consecutive order

Additional archival supplies, particularly records storage boxes, may be purchased from an office supply store, rather than using cardboard boxes to send them to ABHS.

Step 2: Description

Inventory

You have to know what you are transferring

An inventory list functions as an “index”

List the items in detail as you place them in a box, include dates

Make a list for each box you plan to transfer

There is no category “miscellaneous”

Only materials with an inventory list and a signed transfer form are accepted by the American Baptist Historical Society.