Settling In

How long did it take you to settle in the last time you moved?

Now imagine 14,000 square feet of space, with more than five miles of shelving that needs to be labeled, dozens of portraits that need to be hung, six offices with their accompanying computers, phone systems and furniture that need to be set up, plus a reading room with five tables, six display cabinets, and a reception desk.

And don’t forget to imagine the volunteer work areas, resource supplies, and the receiving and processing areas.

In your new home, it took time to arrange things for the best flow, like learning not to reach for the drawer on the left that held the spatulas in the old kitchen.

It’s fun. It’s frustrating. It’s hard work. But slowly and surely, it all comes together.

Day by Day

Your ABHS professional staff (2 ¾ full-time assisted by two per diem part-time employees) work every day to improve work flow and unpack odds & ends (like the special book cradles used to hold fragile, old books while researchers read them). Staff are learning new phone and IT systems and meeting Mercer University staff who assist us with cleaning, maintenance, or communications about our new Lunch & Learn series.

Gradually, staff are tackling some of the back-log of materials that arrived right before (and right after) the move, so new items can move to their proper home in one of the collection rooms.

Staff and board members are reviewing and creating a new fee structure that better reflects the real costs of services and creating cost efficient ways to spread the word about Baptist history. They are also working to support the History Matters campaign and annual fund, so the Historical Society can make Baptist history more widely known.

Staff are also learning how to use the more advanced functions of the technology already in place, allowing ABHS to communicate better. This February, Betsy Dunbar sent our first mass email to our mailing list—a black history month bulletin insert based on information from an early publication by Illinois Baptists.

In spite of a staff shortage and travel schedules forcing ABHS to be open to researchers on a limited basis, staff are handling numerous inquiries and research appointments with aplomb.
Lunch & Learn  
An Easy Way to Share Baptist History

Taking advantage of a tradition already in place on the Atlanta campus of Mercer University, ABHS held its first “Lunch & Learn” in January, highlighting a visiting researcher.

Hajo Fröhlich traveled to ABHS from the Free University of Berlin, Germany. His research focuses on educational reforms during the last years of the Chinese Empire (1900 to 1911) and their impact on both native Chinese schools and mission schools in Guangdong province.

The informal session was titled, The Invention of a Public Good -- Education in South China, 1900-1911. Mr. Fröhlich described changes and continuities during this period, when China began providing public education, in addition to private schools like those run by missionaries. Discussion followed.

Besides those interested in Baptist mission, students and faculty from Mercer’s English Language Institute attended.

At press time, another Lunch & Learn is scheduled in March with Suryasikha Pathak, a Fulbright Fellow at the State University of New York at Oswego, discussing her research on Baptist mission and its impact on women in North East India.

In Memoriam

Dr. Robert Handy, noted church historian and beloved professor, died on January 8, 2009 in West Caldwell, New Jersey, after a long illness. A graduate of Colgate Rochester Divinity School and the University of Chicago, Dr. Handy served as a pastor, an army chaplain, and later as academic dean at Union Theological Seminary in New York City. At Union, he was best known for his four decades of teaching church history, while at the same time serving his local congregation, denomination (American Baptist Churches USA), and the scholarly and ecumenical community. For many years he served on the Faith and Order Commissions of the World and National Council of Churches.

Dr. Handy served as president of the American Society for Church History (1959) and of the American Baptist Historical Society (1974-76). He authored numerous books and articles, including A Christian America: Protestant Hopes and Historical Realities (1971, 1984) and Undermined Establishment: Church-State Relations in America, 1880-1920 (1991). He was preceded in death by his wife Barbara Mitchell, and leaves three adult children, Stephen, Marilyn, and David. A former student, Dr. David Woodyard of Denison University, recalls Dr. Handy as a fine teacher and mentor: “No one was more important than the one in his office at the moment.”

Upon his retirement, colleagues and former students published a festschrift in his honor, Altered Landscapes: Christianity in America, 1935-1985. He blessed many individuals and institutions with his service. His record of scholarship is richly represented on the shelves of ABHS, including a personal papers collection and records donated recently by the family.

Dr. Ella Pearson Mitchell

The Baptist world lost another leader, the Rev. Dr. Ella Pearson Mitchell, on November 19, 2008 in Atlanta. Known as the dean of black women preachers, Dr. Mitchell broke down many barriers. She was the first
female dean of Sisters Chapel, Spelman College, Atlanta, GA, and the first woman to preach at Hampton Ministerial Conference. She was the second African American woman to graduate from Union Theological Seminary (NYC), where she met her life partner and husband, Dr. Henry Mitchell. Just months before her death, Union Seminary honored both Ella and Henry Mitchell with their 2008 Trailblazer Award.

In addition to active church work and preaching, Dr. Mitchell taught religious education at American Baptist Seminary of the West (Berkeley, CA) and at the Samuel Dewitt Proctor School of Theology at Virginia Union University (Richmond, VA). Most recently she taught at Atlanta’s Interdenominational Theological Center, as well as at workshops and conventions across the country.

She edited five volumes of *Those Preachin’ Women* and with her husband, Henry, published their dialogical sermons, *Fire in the Well*, as well as *Together for Good: Lessons from Fifty-Five Years of Marriage*, all with Judson Press.

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Register Today!

Breakfast with Baptists!

Enjoy breakfast and celebrate Baptist history on Sunday, June 28, at the ABHS Breakfast in Pasadena, CA.

Held during the American Baptist Biennial Convention, you’ll meet old and new friends, hear about the Historical Society, and—quite possibly—learn something new about Baptist history.

This year ABHS will highlight Baptist history on the west coast with a panel of lively and knowledgeable historians.

To reserve your seat, go to the Biennial Registration page at www.abc-usa.org.

Not attending the Biennial? Reserve your seat with ABHS directly by calling Kay at 610/768-2269.

For more details as they become available, go to our website at www.abhsarchives.org and click on Events.

The last Baptist History Breakfast featured good Southern church cooking and stories of Joanna P. Moore, at historic Calvary Baptist Church in Washington, D.C.