



At Your Fingertips: Archives for the 21st Century

For its monumental collections, the American Baptist Historical Society is looking to the future to provide access that suits the style and practice of researchers today. Since 1853, the American Baptist Historical Society has held impressive and expansive records on Baptists, their missions and beliefs. **The American Baptist Historical Society, as a premier religious historical society, advances Baptist identity, promotes historical literacy and thereby inspires spiritual and social transformation.**

All historical societies and archivists are facing the challenge of archiving electronic documents. The American Baptist Historical Society is tackling this challenge, along with continuing to archive the stream of papers which have constituted the Historical Society's core collections since our founding in 1853. Creating standard ways for archiving and sharing electronic and paper media is becoming critical to the Historical Society's mission of education.

The Historical Society's most recent long term plan, developed by a remarkable gathering of its stakeholders, mandates it to "Write a feasibility study for digitizing collections and begin to implement" (*Mission, Vision and Strategic Direction Implementation Strategy 2013-2016, Goal Two, Step 4*). The result of this feasibility research has been detailed working policy and procedural templates that will be tested and refined through actual practice, as the needs and opportunities for digital projects arise.

Our working documents make clear the great promise of a digitization program for the ABHS historical collections. The Society's institutional capacity would be increased by:

- Higher visibility and greater access to the Society's incomparable historical collections.
- Higher level of overall professional collection management.
- Meaningful collaborative partnerships between ABHS and Mercer University, as well as other Baptist educational institutions, to execute and sustain digital projects.

- ABHS's ability to assist its ABC-USA partners in preserving and providing access to their born-digital material of enduring historical value.
- The opening of new revenue streams. For example, a professional digitization program gives the Society a competitive edge when applying for grants. Collection digitization also creates a great potential for more pay-for-collection-access opportunities, thus ultimately offering a feasible way for the digitization program to pay for itself.

The most essential resource required over the next five years is a highly qualified, full-time digital archivist to navigate the rapid and ever-changing waters of technology in order to establish a creative yet sustainable digitization program.

By hiring one of the first generation of digital archivists, the Historical Society has the opportunity to pioneer. With someone on staff trained in both traditional and electronic means for organizing and accessing materials, the Historical Society can create methods for storing and accessing electronic media that are sustainable. With this move forward, the Historical Society will be moving to the cutting edge of 21st century archiving techniques; i.e. methods that include providing storage and access to electronic data such as missionary e-letters, as well as building the capacity to move paper collections into digital formats.

This plan focuses exactly where the Historical Society board and staff have targeted as most critical in their strategic planning; i.e. meeting the challenges of archiving in the digital age. Ability to meet this challenge has already been demonstrated through two small digital projects, *The Morning Star* (paper publication) and *Good News*, a 16 mm film from 1950), both preserved and moved into readily accessible digital formats.

In order to move forward with the addition of a digital archivist to navigate the rapid and ever-changing waters of technology, the Society has determined that we need an input of an additional \$550,000 above and beyond our current resources. We are reaching out to our supporters around and beyond the denomination to provide us with these resources. Will you help us build the infrastructure needed to bridge the gap between traditional and electronic documents? Your pledge to this campaign will build capacity, enabling the Historical Society to bring to light critical resources for doing Baptist history.

