

Making History in an Age of Pandemic

How often do you think to yourself: “I’m making history”? How will people of the future know how you made history?

Most people think of history as something that took place long ago. Don’t we experience a bit of cognitive dissonance when we realize that songs that were popular during our young adult years are now considered “classic” or “oldies”? But every historical moment was someone’s present time.

The current moment is indelibly marked by a global pandemic. Despite our discomfort with the unfamiliar circumstances, this moment is not unique in history: archaeologists point to evidence of epidemics devastating communities in today’s northeastern China as long ago as 3000 BCE. Some of the most deadly epidemics include the Plague of Athens in the 5th century BCE, the Antonine Plague (165-180 CE) thought to have been spread by soldiers of the Roman Empire, and the bubonic plague that killed millions in Europe during the 14th century. In the Americas, indigenous peoples were decimated by epidemics during the 16th century, making it far easier for European explorers and colonists to dominate the continent than had the First Nations populations been at full strength. Epidemics are not new in human history.

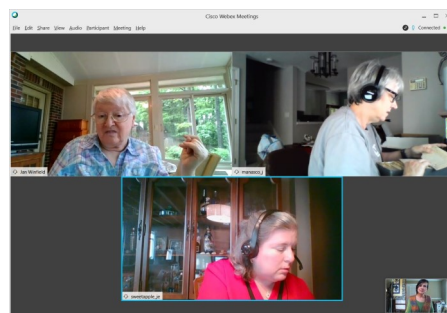
Several people have asked us how churches responded to the influenza epidemic of 1918-1919. There is interest in knowing about ministry during that pandemic. Alas! this is an article that has yet to be researched and written. A quick survey of annual reports revealed that some gatherings were cancelled due to the epidemic.

The report of the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society (now called International

Ministries) says, “The influenza epidemic, cholera, plague, famine, high prices and scarcity of food have all taken their toll and brought in their wake, anxiety and suffering. Scarcely a letter has been received during the past six months, which has not borne silent but effective testimony to the unusual and trying problems which our missionaries have been called upon to bear. The influenza epidemic was far more widespread and fatal than in America, . . . It found its way up the Congo, into the jungles of India and into inland towns of China, leaving a weary weak people behind as it took its departure.” Missionary F.W. Stait serving in South India wrote, “Those who were stricken with the influenza and the terrible pneumonia which accompanied it, flocked to the hospital, until the wards were so full that the overflow had to be cared for in cots along the verandas. We lost very few cases, only one in fact, where there was any chance at all from the first.”

Epidemics are not new. What *is* new are the extent and ease of global connectivity. To our detriment, the Novel Corona virus spread farther and more quickly than epidemics of the past because so many of us travel worldwide. Conversely, modern communications networks have facilitated the work of scientists in developing

tests, protocols, and treatment. Like many others, ABHS staff benefit from modern communications and are working from home,



ABHS virtual staff meeting

(Continued on page 2)

Church Anniversaries

April – June

We celebrate the faithful ministry of American Baptist Congregations and their pastors! The following churches mark anniversaries this quarter:

100 Years

Iglesia Bautista Hispana, Glendale, AZ;
Dr. Miguel Altamirano, pastor

30 Years

Deliverance Baptist Church, Pittsburgh, PA;
Bishop Michael W. Golphin, Sr., pastor

25 Years

Christ United Missionary Baptist Church, East Saint Louis, IL; Jimmie Hopson, pastor

If your church is celebrating a significant anniversary, request a certificate from ABHS.



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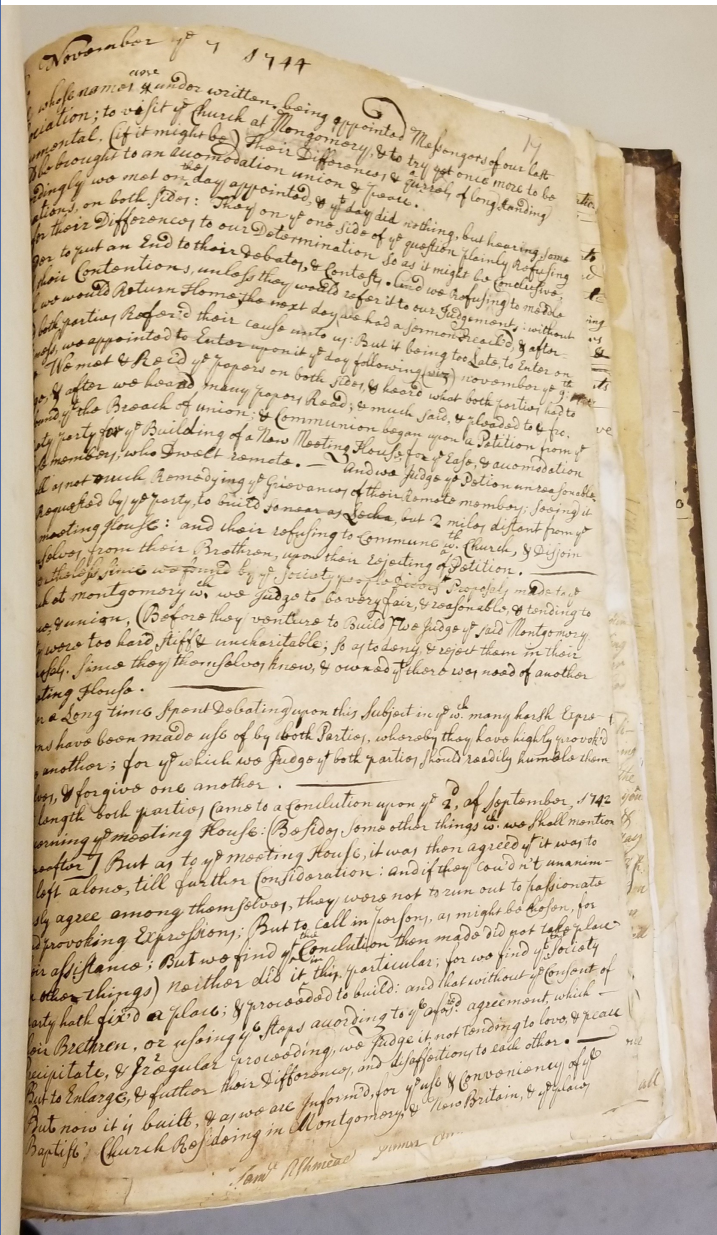
(Continued from page 1)
telecommuting.

Fifty, one hundred, or two hundred years from now, scholars will pinpoint 2020 and the Coronavirus pandemic as a moment when Christianity developed great new capacities for ministry. When this present moment becomes history, how will people know how your faith community responded? Will they know that many congregations quickly developed the capacity for online worship services – or even be able to watch our worship from their future position? Will they know which communities continued to supply food banks and provide housing for the homeless? Will you leave records reflecting the shift from pastoral visits to pastoral telephone calls and emails? It all comes down to how well *you* document these days.

ABHS would like to help you document your ministry at this crucial moment in Christian history. Our “Preserving and Sharing Your Church’s Story” resource, available on a thumb drive for \$15, offers information on record-keeping and setting up a church archives. We are also planning webinars to help with analog and digital recordkeeping and archives. You’re making history; make sure your story can be told!



Digital Archives Update: Your Turn!



Since we moved into work-at-home mode in mid-March, digital archives activities have shifted, too. Digitizing microfilm and scanning pictures ground to a halt; other projects have taken priority. In addition to refreshing hard drives that currently store much of our digital content, planning for digital preservation and access, and transcribing associational minutes holdings to add to our catalog, we are trying something new. And you can help us!

In the archives there are numerous ledger books of church records dating from the late 17th to early 20th centuries. Because they are handwritten, even after digitizing the books they are not searchable, so finding information can be a laborious task. This is where you come in: We have set up a pilot project on the crowd-sourcing platform Zooniverse, and invite you to help us transcribe these records. You'll see images of the pages and type in your transcription. You get to find out what happened when the "church met and found great division"; we get a version of the records that can be searched for names or keywords, helping genealogists and other researchers in their work.

The only requirements for participating in this project are a computer (it will not work on phones) and the ability to read cursive handwriting. You do not have to commit to any certain time or number of pages. Even if you just want to do one line it will help. Each page will be transcribed by multiple people and the results compared so you do not have to worry "what if there's a word I can't read?" Join us in putting more information "at Your Fingertips"!

at **YOUR** 
FINGERTIPS

To participate in the transcription project, visit: [zooniverse](https://www.zooniverse.org).

Research Snapshot —

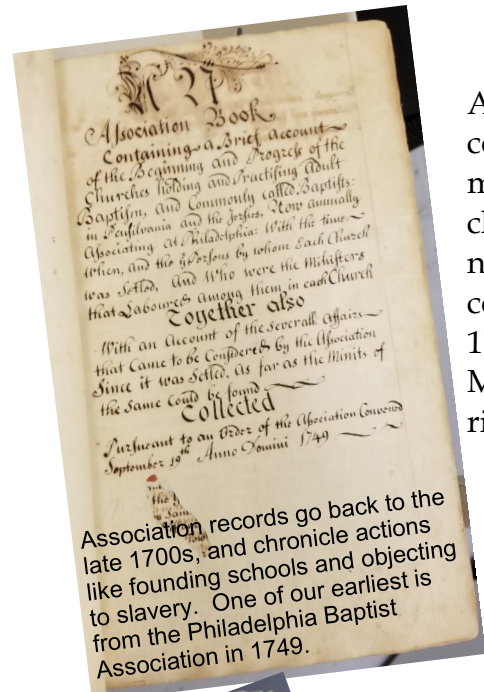
Grace Vargas, a doctoral student at Southern Methodist University, visited the ABHS archives to research US missionaries to Cuba and Cuban missionaries working in Cuba. Vargas is examining questions of religion and empire, as well as how indigenous agents were embracing and forming their religious identity. She consulted recently-processed collections from missionaries in Cuba as well as the missionary correspondence between the American Baptist Foreign Missionary Society and the missionaries they sent out. [See Video of Grace Vargas.](#)



From the Archives

Association Records

Association records are one of the largest collections at ABHS and contain a wealth of information. In addition to minutes of annual meetings, the most helpful association records give statistics on church membership, mission giving, Sunday school attendance, names of pastors, numbers of baptisms, and more, from each congregation in the association. See the images of statistics from 1700s Philadelphia Baptist Association (below) and 1875 Middle Georgia Baptist Association (far right).

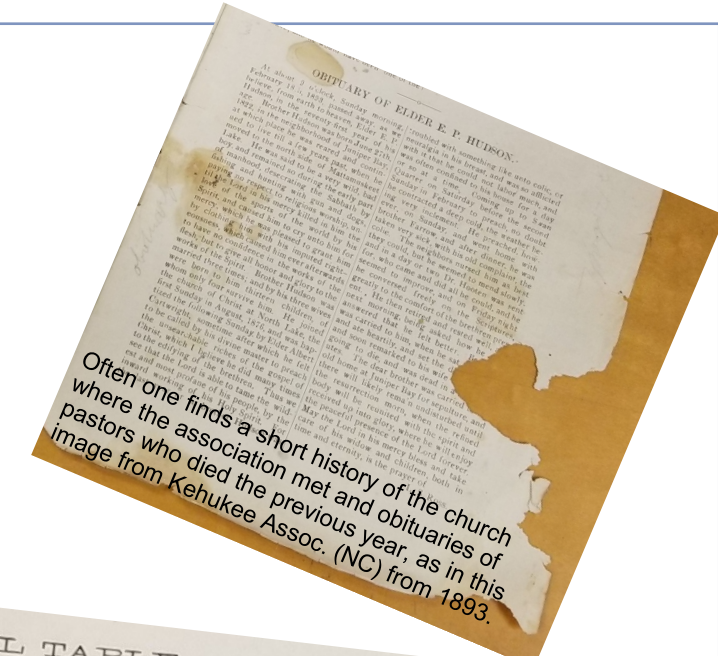


Association records go back to the late 1700s, and chronicle actions like founding schools and objecting to slavery. One of our earliest is from the Philadelphia Baptist Association in 1749.

SPECIAL NOTICE.

Brethren:—Read carefully these Minutes, that you may act advisedly in all things pertaining to our Association Meetings; see that your church letters to this body are properly prepared, furnishing plainly and succinctly all information needful to be communicated. Let every church send delegates, and the right number, and the right kind of men. Send up funds for our missionary cause, send up funds for Minutes. Read the Minutes carefully, brethren, that you may know the time and place of our next meeting, the good that results from our assembling ourselves, together when done in the name of our Lord and Saviour.

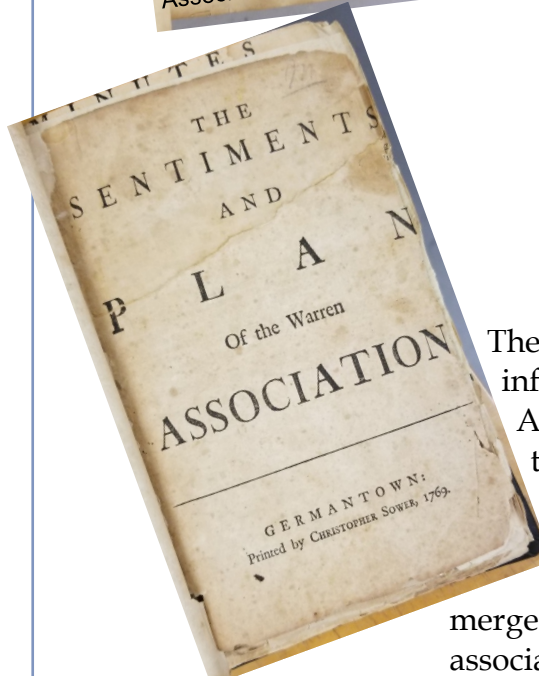
Middle Georgia Association, 1875: pleading for churches to engage with and support Associations and Regions is no new thing!



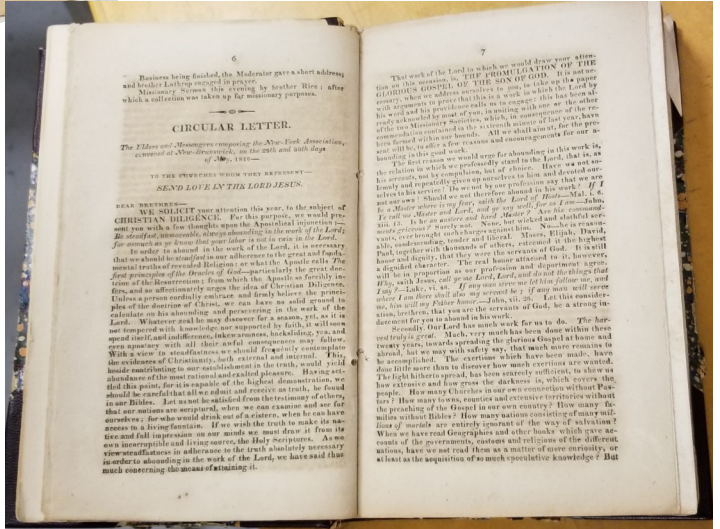
Often one finds a short history of the church where the association met and obituaries of pastors who died the previous year, as in this image from Kehukee Assoc. (NC) from 1893.

STATISTICAL TABLE.

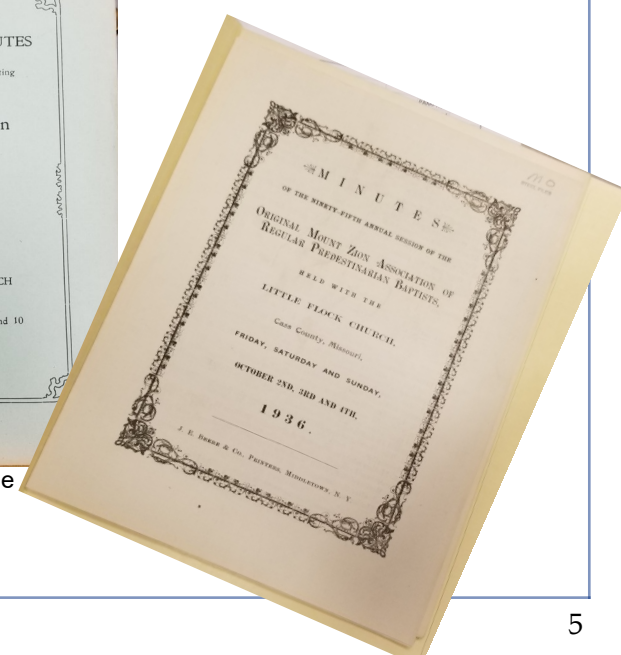
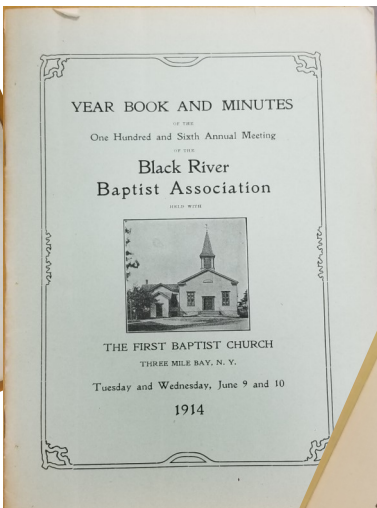
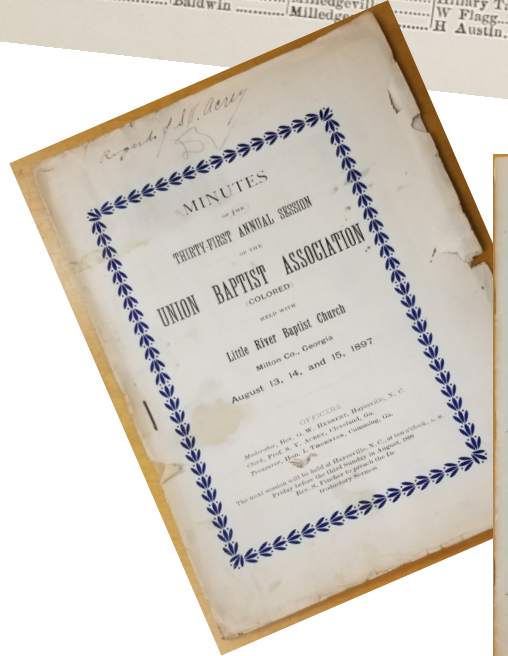
NAMES OF CHURCHES.	COUNTY.	POST-OFFICE.	PASTORS.	CLERKS.	STATISTICS												
					Minutes.	Missions.	Baptism.	Letter.	Voucher.	Restored.	Dismissed.	Excluded.	Deaths.	Total.	Meeting Times.		
Antioch.....	Twigg	Bullards Station	Wm Hill	A W Butler	\$1 00												
Bethel.....	Pulaski	Smithville	Joseph Massey	Robert Burch	1 00	\$1 50	8	3	1	3	3	1	217	3			
Bethlehem.....	Sumter	Smithville	Joseph Massey	Robert Burch	1 00								30	1			
Brown's Chapel.....	Monroe	Smithville	Joseph Massey	Robert Burch	1 00								120	1,3			
Bold Springs.....	Washington	Forsyth	Rich Pittman	J B Spohall	1 00								122	2			
Cotton Avenue.....	Macon	No 14, C R R, Oconee	Hilary Taylor	H G Pittman	1 00								122	1,2			
Corinth.....	Washington	Forsyth	Rich Pittman	J B Spohall	1 00								122	1,2			
Darien Lane.....	Jones	Macon	Thos Kelsey	Hilary Taylor	1 00								122	1,2			
Damascus.....	Baldwin	Griswoldville	Henry Williams	Jeff Scott	1 00								122	1,2			
Darbyville.....	Hancock	No 14, C R R, Oconee	T B Steward	Wm Wynec	1 00								122	1,2			
Ebenezer.....	Putnam	Wacon	Wm Brantley	Jack Adams	1 00								122	1,2			
Forsyth.....	Putnam	Wacon	Wm Brantley	Jack Adams	1 00								122	1,2			
Free Providence.....	Monroe	Eatonton	Peter Smith		1 00								122	1,2			
Griswoldville.....	Pulaski	Forsyth	G W Tally	C Cuthbert	1 00								122	1,2			
Glen Mary.....	Putnam	Forsyth	J A James	Wm Goodrum	1 00								122	1,2			
Haynesville.....	Hancock	Griswoldville	Alram Dennis	Monroe Goodrum	1 00								122	1,2			
Harriet Chapel.....	Houston	Sparta	T B Steward	Owen Virgil	1 00								122	1,2			
Henderson Grove.....	Twigg	Haynesville	Jeff Perkins	Berry Robert	1 00								122	1,2			
Jefferson.....	Putnam	Buzzard Roost	Nathan Jackson	Robert Clark	1 00								122	1,2			
Lizle Bloomer.....	Bibb	Eatonton	Romulus James	E Bryant	1 00								122	1,2			
Marion.....	Putnam	Wacon	Romulus James	H Perryman	1 00								122	1,2			
Macedonia, 2d.....	Twigg	Wacon	Sandy Cornelius	E Bryant	1 00								122	1,2			
Mount Cello.....	Wilkinson	Bullard Station	Glen Cetes	Wm Pate	1 00								122	1,2			
Mount Gilead.....	Pulaski	Milledgeville	Henry Holmon	S M A Mious	1 00								122	1,2			
Mount Liberty.....	Monroe	Lorsyth	J T Hughes	J Armstrong	1 00								122	1,2			
Mount Zion.....	Webster	Greensboro	Hardy Dykes	Isaiah Lanpins	1 00								122	1,2			
Milledgeville.....	Monroe	Plains Dura	Mark Bird	Moses Watson	1 00								122	1,2			
Mitchel Zion.....	Baldwin	Forsyth	Ell Smith	G P Culright	1 00								122	1,2			



The key to finding information in Association Records is specifying the time period for which you are looking and knowing the name of the association during that time period. Associations often merged with and split from other associations, changed their name, or dissolved completely. ABHS has association records from all over the country, not limited to ABC affiliates. ABHS staff are working on a detailed inventory of these records for our online catalog.



In addition to the "Circular Letter" to churches in the New York Association in 1816, we read that Bro. [Luther] Rice was to bring the evening missionary sermon.



More recent, printed copies often include an image of the host church.

ABHS Archives Continue to Increase

When the ABCUSA Office of the General Secretary moved its offices from the “Holy Donut” to new digs at 1015 9th Ave., there were many non-current files that they didn’t need to take with them. Such it was that in mid-February a tractor-trailer pulled up to the loading dock at the Historical Society’s Atlanta offices and disgorged ten pallets of materials! The shipment included three flat-drawer cabinets holding blueprints of the old Mission Center – we’ve already had an inquiry from a professor of architectural history –, sixty-four cartons of A/V materials painstakingly inventoried by Ron Schlosser (thank you, Ron!), and hardware for playback of outdated A/V formats. Videotapes and films produced by the Division of Communications offer irreplaceable glimpses of American Baptist programs, conventions, and conferences through the years. Many



Placing a flat-drawer cabinet



A/V equipment — contact us to sponsor its refurbishment!



Unloading cartons of A/V materials

thanks to Board of Managers Past President Garth Brokaw for his volunteer work organizing the OGS archives already at ABHS; this made room for new arrivals!

Three weeks later Garth himself drove a van down from Rochester, bringing materials from Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School.

Because of exigencies and restrictions related to the COVID19 pandemic ABHS staff are working from home. As one might imagine, this limits the work we can do, to projects requiring no access to our



ABHS Board of Managers meeting

archival materials. Nonetheless, we have added numerous records to our online catalog: inventories for 877 archival boxes from the Office of the General Secretary, 150 boxes from the Woman’s American Baptist Home Mission Society, original church records alphabetically up through Texas (21 states), and Association records (see “From the Archives”).

At the spring Board of Managers [virtual] meeting we welcomed six new Managers. We hope that in the fall we will be able to gather in person and give new Managers the grand tour.

Farewell to April Williams

Since the autumn of 2017 ABHS has been blessed to have April Williams working with us in a student work-study position. April is from Sanderson, Florida, and moved to Atlanta to do a Master’s degree in Clinical Mental Health Counseling at Mercer University.

Working closely with archivist Jill Sweetapple, she inventoried many collections, some of which have been at ABHS since as long ago as 1981! April also re-housed files, photographed artifacts, and did research that expanded the catalog records of our pamphlet collection. Our online catalog is much farther along thanks to her work.

April has now completed her degree and moved back to Florida. We will miss her quiet and dependable presence. Best wishes, April!

Many Ways to Support ABHS

We know that many people would like to support the work of the Historical Society, but don’t have discretionary money available. There are ways to support ABHS outside of your current funds. Do you make your philanthropic gifts via a donor-advised fund? Add the American Baptist Historical Society to the organizations designated to receive a gift from your DAF!

ABHS recently received a gift from the estate of Mrs. C.R. (Roberta) Tidland. We are so grateful to Mrs. Tidland for her support. Legacy giving is one way of supporting ABHS with future giving. Let us know of your plan, and we’ll add you to the Living Heritage Society. To discuss the possibilities, contact Priscilla Eppinger, Executive Director.

Join the Historical Society and Become a Time Traveler

American Baptist Historical Society membership circles are named for some of our significant Baptist forebears.



Yes! I/We want to join the American Baptist Historical Society.

Please Print

Name _____

Email _____

Address _____

Telephone _____

Birthdate _____

Under what name(s) would you like your
donation to be acknowledged?

Membership \$ _____

American Baptist Quarterly subscription:
\$50/annually \$ _____

Add \$75/year for postage to Canada, \$100/year
to other non-US countries

Gift to Endowment \$ _____

Total enclosed \$ _____

Make checks payable to ABHS and send to:
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To use a credit card go to our website:
www.ABHSarchives.org and select "Give Now."

ABHS is a 501(c)(3) organization; your
membership is tax-deductible to the full extent of
the law.

ABQ subscriptions are not tax-deductible.

Membership Circles (Memberships are for the calendar year)	Annual Gift of
Ann Hasseltine Judson Circle	\$1-50
* subscription (digital or print) to <i>Primary Source</i>	
Henry Lyman Morehouse Circle	\$51-125
* subscription (digital or print) to <i>Primary Source</i>	
* participation in "Time Travelers," reciprocal museum/ archives program http://timetravelers.mohistory.org/	
Louise "Lulu" Cecilia Fleming Circle	\$126-250
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Jitsuo Morikawa Circle	\$251-500
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Samuel DeWitt Proctor Circle	\$501-1000
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* subscription to <i>American Baptist Quarterly</i> discounted by 50%	
Helen Barrett Montgomery Circle	\$1001-5000
* benefits listed above, plus	
* private archives tour (subject to staff availability)	
Samuel Colgate Donors	\$5001 & above
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* 2 hours free consultation with staff archivist	
Living Heritage Society	inclusion in estate plan
* inclusion on a special plaque in ABHS Reading Room	

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*ABHS work at a distance:
Try your hand at
transcribing!*

American Baptist Quarterly Call for Papers

ABQ is the scholarly journal of the American Baptist Historical Society. Both established and emerging scholars are invited to submit papers written from original research. Articles and essays should be between 6,000 and 10,000 words.

If you are interested in proposing a paper for one of the upcoming issues, please contact editor Curtis Freeman (CFreeman@div.duke.edu) as soon as possible.

Upcoming Themes
The Vocation of Christian Laypeople
Theological Reflections on Pandemic
Christian Responses to Global Climate Change
Seeing the Sacred in a Secular Society
21st-Century Reformations: New Forms of Ministry for a Changed World
Bible Translations, Old and New

Our Vision

The American Baptist Historical Society, as a premier religious historical society, advances Baptist identity, promotes historical literacy, and thereby inspires spiritual and social transformation.