

COMMISSION ON ARCHIVES & HISTORY

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Mission Statement

The mission of The Commission on Archives & History is to collect, preserve, and interpret the historically significant records of the Peninsula-Delaware Annual Conference, its churches, agencies, and antecedents.

Operation of Barratt’s Chapel and Museum

Every Conference has a Commission on Archives and History. But ours is the only Commission on Archives and History to own and maintain a United Methodist Heritage Landmark. In its 234th year, Barratt’s Chapel is the oldest surviving place of worship in America built by and for Methodists. On November 14, 1784 Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury met at Barratt’s Chapel and laid plans to organize American Methodists into a church independent of the Anglican Church. At this meeting the sacraments of baptism and communion were officially celebrated for the first time anywhere by ordained Methodist clergy, a symbolic declaration of independence. Therefore, Barratt’s Chapel is appropriately called the “Independence Hall of American Methodism.”

The Commission on Archives and History of the Peninsula-Delaware Conference, under the leadership of President Kenyon L. Camper, meets semi-monthly in the Vestry at Barratt’s Chapel.

Conference Archives

It is our responsibility by the *Discipline* (paragraph 641.1) to be the repository for the archives of the Peninsula-Delaware Conference and all its antecedents including the Delaware Conference, which at its final meeting designated Barratt’s Chapel as its official depository. It is also our responsibility to provide permanent safe-keeping of historical records of all closed churches within the bounds of the Conference. The Archives are cataloged and housed in a fire-proof, climate-controlled section of the museum building. We maintain files for every charge in the Conference and welcome new materials to be added. The staff assists researchers in using materials and also offers assistance by email and telephone requests. There is a non-circulating library of approximately 3000 volumes on Methodist history.

The Curator/Conference Archivist and the Conference Historian are transferring the catalog to Past Perfect for Museums, the standard software for museums and archives.

We continue to offer digitization of local church records for preserving and making the materials easily available for researchers.

Chapel Usage

Although Barratt’s Chapel has not had an active membership since 1957 it remains a busy venue for worship and learning. We had approximately 5000 visitors for tours, special services, confirmation classes, weddings, baptisms, funerals and research in 2013. We also had approximately 100 research requests.

47 There were several special events held at Barratt's in 2013:
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- 49 • For 11 Thursday evenings, June 20 – August 26, the Commission on Archives and
50 History sponsored informal services with leadership provided by different pastors
51 from the Peninsula-Delaware Conference, including Bishop Peggy Johnson and
52 Director of Connectional Ministries Dr. Shirlyn Henry Brown. Several of the pastors
53 also brought choirs and musicians from their congregations. The first few weeks the
54 attendance was approximately 25. As word spread, though, the congregations grew,
55 so that by the last few weeks of the series over 200 people were attending. For
56 2014 the Commission is planning on expanding the Thursday evening services to 22
57 weeks.
- 58 • Bishop Johnson and the Board of Ordained Ministry held a day-long meeting with the
59 ordinands.
- 60 • The confirmation classes from the churches of the Peninsula-Delaware Conference
61 were invited to an event with Bishop Johnson.
- 62 • A Christmas Eve Communion Service was led by Bishop Peggy Johnson. The service
63 brought in many people who had never visited the Chapel before. Carol Stevens
64 provided deaf interpretation.
- 65 • The 229th anniversary of the meeting of Francis Asbury and Thomas Coke on
66 November 14, 1784 was commemorated with the traditional Anniversary Service.
67 This year it was led by Dr. Shirlyn Henry Brown, Director of Connectional Ministries
68 of the Peninsula-Delaware Conference.
- 69 • The annual Christmas Carol Service, a service of Lessons and Carols presented by
70 the music department of Wesley College, under the direction of Dr. James Wilson,
71 was scheduled. However, due to inclement weather and regard for the students'
72 safety it was cancelled by Wesley College.
- 73 • Several organizations, such as the Delaware Farm Bureau, use the Chapel for special
74 services and meetings.
- 75 • We very much appreciate the financial support of the *Friends of Barratt's*. As a way
76 of showing our appreciation we held an ice cream social and special tours in August.
- 77 • The Chapel and Museum are open every Saturday and Sunday from 1:30-4:30 for
78 visitors and researchers, as well as other times by appointments.

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80 **Outreach**

81 Part of the mission of the Commission on Archives and History is to assist local church
82 historians to discover, preserve and tell their own church histories. Barb Duffin,
83 Curator/Conference Archivist, and Phil Lawton, Conference Historian, have been available to
84 meet with researchers, church historians and others seeking information on their local
85 church history. They are available to speak at worship services and other church events.
86 They also led a workshop on preserving church records at "The Well".
87

88 In May members of the Commission attended the annual meeting of the Northeast
89 Jurisdiction Commission on Archives and History in New Hampshire, hosted by the New
90 England Conference. Our conference is scheduled to host the annual meeting in 2016.
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93 **Peninsula-Delaware Conference Historical Society**

94 The Rev. Dr. Earle Baker is the president of the Historical Society. There are two meetings
95 each year for the members of the society.

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97 The Historical Society is continuing to survey local churches to determine what historical
98 records each church has. Bishop Peggy Johnson wrote an introductory letter explaining the
99 need for the information to be centrally located with the Historical Society. A database is
100 being created and maintained as a result of the information gathered. Many requests
101 concerning baptisms, marriages, and other information frequently come to the Conference
102 Archives at Barratt's Chapel, the District offices and the Peninsula-Delaware Conference
103 office. This database will help them know where to refer persons for the particular
104 information needed.

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106 **Maintaining the Chapel**
107 With a 234-year-old Chapel and two other building there are always maintenance issues. In
108 2013 a new light was added in front of the Chapel in the same spot where there was one in
109 early photos.

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111 **Barratt's – Wesley Partnership**
112 We continue our partnership with Wesley College. The College continues to assist with
113 utilities and regular maintenance.

- 114
115 **Goals of the Commission on Archives and History**
- 116 • To be open one day during the week for ministers who want to use the Methodist
117 Library and other researchers.
 - 118 • Following requirements of the *Discipline*, maintain a conference archives which
119 provides a permanent, safe depository for historically valuable records of the
120 Peninsula-Delaware Conference and its antecedents and of closed churches within its
121 bounds, and make those materials accessible to researchers.
 - 122 • Operate Barratt's Chapel as a Heritage Landmark of The United Methodist Church,
123 including maintenance and improvement of the physical facilities, making the Chapel
124 and Museum available to visitors and for special services and activities, and
125 promoting knowledge of the historical importance of Barratt's Chapel.
 - 126 • Provide historical programs for confirmation classes and other groups.
 - 127 • Provide training and support for Local Church Historians.
 - 128 • Support the Peninsula-Delaware Conference Historical Society.
 - 129 • Recruit and train volunteers to assist with the historical and archival work at
130 Barratt's Chapel and Museum.

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133 Submitted by:
134 Kenyon L. Camper, President