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The Methodist Archives of Epworth-by-the Sea

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Methodist Museum

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St. Simons Island occupies a unique place in the history of American Methodism. Not only was it the one place in America where both John and Charles Wesley, founders of Methodism, served the colonists in a pastoral relationship, but also it is the home of the Museum, Library and Archives of the South Georgia Conference of the United Methodist Church. These extensive holdings record the growth of Methodism in America, and especially in the South.

Though the annual session of the South Georgia Conference as early as 1916 considered organizing a historical society for the "purpose of preserving the history and traditions of Methodism in Southern Georgia," definite action awaited the sesquicentennial celebration of Methodism in America. In 1934, concerned members of the South Georgia Conference brought their awareness of the need for preservation of their priceless archives to the attention of the Conference. Two years later the South Georgia Conference voted to organize a Historical Society "whose duties shall be to preserve records of the conference, its past history, past members and to collect all data of interest from elderly persons and to preserve them for future generations, together with a record of current items of importance, and to keep before our people the glorious deeds of the heroes of the past." Until the Arthur J. Moore Building, was completed at Epworth-by-the-Sea on St. Simons Island in 1960, priority was given to the Museum-Library. Since then, increasing attention has been paid to the accession and housing of records, reports, pictures, artifacts, and other items concerned with the organization and function of the South Georgia Conference. Even so, the Archives staff still is in the very earliest stages of preparing the holdings.

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for research.

The Archival holdings of the South Georgia Conference, which provide basic data for study of the impact of the Methodist Church on the social, political, and cultural development of Georgia, are divided into five broad categories: CONFERENCE JOURNALS AND MINUTES; DISCIPLINES; ORGANIZATIONS AND AGENCIES OF THE CHURCH; PUBLICATIONS AND PERIODICALS; AND VISUAL MATERIALS. Of these, the General Minutes and the Annual Conference Journals are perhaps the most valuable resources in the Archives for research. They record every official action of the church since its establishment, give the reports of all organizations and agencies, and show changes in structure, policies and procedures. The General Conference, which meets quadrennially, has full legislative power. Its delegates, who represent the seventy-three Annual Conferences, determine the Church's policies, structure, organizational proceedings, program, order of worship, sacraments, and doctrinal statements. The Annual Conference, a well-defined geographical area, is the basic body of the church, composed of all traveling preachers in full connection with it, with a lay member elected from each pastoral charge. The reports of all the commissions, boards, organizations, and agencies of the Annual Conference, as well as the minutes of the annual session, are published in volumes titled Annual Conference Journals. The Conference Journals and Minutes are divided into two groups.

1. **General Church:** Minutes of the Methodist Societies, 1773-1794


Journal of the Adjourned Session of the 1964 General Conference, 1967

Minutes of the Annual Conferences, 1829-1839, 1859-1865, 1938, 1939, 1943-1947

General Minutes of the Annual Conferences, 1960-1966, 1971
2. **Annual Conference:** Journals:

- **Georgia Conference**, 1829-1839, 1854, 1856, 1859, 1861-1862, 1868
- **Georgia Conference (Central Jurisdiction)**, 1968, 1969
- **South Georgia Conference**, 1867-1972
- **North Georgia Conference**, 1867-1972
Mississippi Conference, 1963-1969
Oklahoma Conference, 1932
Virginia Conference, 1966-1971
West Oklahoma Conference, 1926
Philadelphia Conference, 1950
Southern California-Arizona Conference, 1969
Virginia Conference, 1969

The general rules governing the life and work of the Church, the Articles of Religion, Wesley's General Rules, the Ritual and other forms of worship, along with information on the ministry and the various church agencies are published quadrennially, following each General Conference, under the title Discipline of the Methodist Church. These files include Disciplines of the

Methodist Episcopal Church, 1798, 1808, 1829, 1846, 1850, 1858, 1862, 1912,

Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1868, 1878, 1882, 1886,
The Archives holds a quantity of annual reports of various Organizations and Agencies within the Church. These include:

- Woman's Missionary Society, Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1888, 1891, 1892
- Woman's Missionary Society, South Georgia Conference, 1879-1881, 1912-1940
- Woman's Foreign Missionary Society, South Georgia Conference, 1890, 1893-1911
- Woman's Home Missionary Society, South Georgia Conference, 1888, 1896, 1898, 1901, 1905, 1911
- Woman's Society of Christian Service, South Georgia Conference, 1941-1972
- Woman's Division of Christian Service, Board of Missions and Church Extension, 1940-1960
- General Board of Christian Education, 1935
Among the files of Periodicals and Publications are:

- Methodist Magazine, 1818-1825
- Wesleyan Christian Advocate, 1878-1885
- Historical Highlights, 1971-
- Methodist Woman, 1956-1965
- Daily Christian Advocate, 1940-1972
- Methodist Quarterly Review, 1879-1886, 1910-1930
- Historians Digest, 1971-
- World Outlook, 1955-1965

A file of Local Church Histories holds approximately 325 brief accounts of the beginnings and growth of these churches. Many of the histories contain primary material that gives interesting insights into the founding of Methodism in Georgia. The major portion of the histories are in manuscript form.

The Visual Arts collection of photographs, slides and a few artifacts provides valuable documentation of the growth of the Methodist Church in the South Georgia Conference. Maps, scrapbooks, and photographs illuminate the growth and expansion of the missionary work, which is one of the major programs of the Methodist Church. Of particular interest are photographs of Georgians who have been elected to the office of bishop in the Methodist Church, of the Council of Bishops, of General Conference Sessions, Annual Conference Sessions, and Classes of ministers ordained each year, and of various activities of other agencies of the Church. The section of Fine Arts contains three significant collections of likenesses of
the Wesleys and other principal figures in the Methodist Church. Finally, the Library of the Museum, with its 5,000 volumes, supports research in both religion and Methodism. It contains an extensive collection of Wesleyana and numbers of biographies and histories of early Methodism. (A bibliography of the Wesleyana is available upon request, but no genealogies are traced by the staff.) The Library offers as well numerous volumes and items describing the significance of St. Simons Island in the history of Coastal Georgia.

The archives and Library are open to researchers Tuesday through Friday of each week. Arrangements for research may be made by writing the Curator, The Methodist Museum, P. O. Box 407, St. Simons Island, Georgia 31522.