Boehm Tercentenary Celebration: The 1717 Migration of the Lancaster County Swiss-German Mennonites

To commemorate the 300th anniversary of the arrival of Jacob Böhm, (the progenitor of the Boehm family) to Pennsylvania, Darvin L. Martin will discuss the genetic background and the land records of local 1717 Mennonite families. The presentation will begin at 3:00 PM, October 22nd in Boehm’s Chapel, 13 West Boehms Road, Willow Street, PA 17584. While the event is free and open to the public, donations will be greatly appreciated.

Since 2010, Martin has been exploring the DNA of Swiss-German Mennonite families and has used this data to reconstruct the ethnic origins of local Anabaptist families back into medieval Europe or beyond.

The influx of the seventy 1717 Mennonite families greatly changed the culture and ethnicity of Lancaster County. Martin will discuss where these families settled within the confines of the townships in proximity to Boehm’s Chapel. Among the surnames common to the area are, Baumgardner, Brackbill, Boehm, Brenneman, Eshleman, Good, Harnish, Herr, Hess, Huber, Keagey, Kendig, Kreider, Meili, Stehman, and Witmer.

The anniversary book, *Sowing Seeds of Faith, A Boehm History, The First 300 Years, 1717-2017*, will be available for purchase. The approximately 225-page book presents an insight into the Pequea Township Böhm family, a history of the beginnings of Boehm’s Chapel and Church including brief notations for more than 200 hundred early circuit riders and Methodist pastors who have served the congregation, which originated on the Boehm homestead, in 1775. Books are available by contacting boehmschapel@gmail.com or phoning 717-872-4133. Shipping and handling fees will be added to mail orders.

Update on GCAH Engage History Project

*by Dale Patterson*

The General Commission on Archives and History crowd-sourcing transcription project, Engage History, has had a very busy four months. The project is inviting individuals to transcribe the captions to one hundred year old photographs. The photographs were originally arranged in more than 200 albums with two to five images per page. During the past four months, a total of 31 individuals have participated in the project and more than 2,000 pages have been transcribed. Some of the participants worked on several sections and then took a break, while others work on a small number of pages each day. We have one or two people who seem to transcribe pages during their lunch hour, and at least one night owl. On average, about 500 pages are completed each month.

The most popular albums so far are the Portrait albums which have images of missionaries. These are some of the first to appear on the browse screen and are also of interest to historians and genealogists. Many of these images were probably used in articles and slide shows on mission work. However, squeezed in among the missionary photos are images of famous individuals as well as images of news-makers. It is an odd collection. If you are interested in learning more about the project, visit the home page at http://catalog.gcah.org/omeka/ and select Tips from the menu at the top of the page.
Letter from the President

Dear Friends in NEJCAH:

There is a trend today to condemn great figures from the past, once we have identified their moral blind spots or failures. Thus, Jefferson and Washington, who waxed eloquent about liberty, were slaveholders and therefore bald-faced hypocrites, period. Or Columbus was the author of destruction and genocide, end of story. But history is always more complicated than that. And such attitudes are no better than the opposite tendency of a century ago to just about divinize people like Jefferson and Columbus as idealized figures, almost demi-gods.

Figures from the past were neither gods nor demons, but human beings, like us – sinful people and products of their age (as we are of ours). As Christians, we should not be surprised to learn that the great people of history had some pretty bad blind spots – because we of all people should know that sin pervades everything.

What makes people from the past “great” is not that they had no glaring faults, but that they made some significant contribution to our society or our world; that they rose above their time in some remarkable way. As an example, I was reminded recently of the story of Bartolomeo del la Casas, a 16th century priest, who had no problem with the union of Church and state, no concept of religious liberty or pluralism, and who regarded the Spanish king as defender and protector of the faith – which we know involved some not-so pretty stuff in Spain, like the Inquisition. Yet this same de la Casas wrote in astonishing terms about the full equality and human dignity of the natives of North America, advocated for their full human rights and right to self-determination in governance, and condemned the Spanish colonial project as tyrannical and unjust – in ways that stand out powerfully for the times.

This is not about defending Confederate statues; after all, I’m a New York-born yankee. If a community decides through its elected leaders that certain statues should come down because the figures they represent don’t merit being remembered as making some great contribution, that is fine with me. What concerns me is a general cultural attitude that condemns people from the past because they don’t think like us. We wind up the poorer by not learning from them.

Perhaps we should apply the golden rule to our historical ancestors, and ask how we might like to be judged by historians in, say, 200 years. We’d probably want them to understand us within the context of our own times, not make myths of us, or force us into the molds of political or cultural categories of their day; nor would we want them to dismiss or demonize us for our blind spots. We would want them to treat us fairly – knowing that they, too, will be judged by the future, and in the end, all of us will be judged by the One who has the final Word.

– Joe DiPaolo
From the General Secretary

In recent months I have been greatly inspired by a young pastor who is leading a left-for-dead church to resurrection. What stimulates me is the way his success is rooted in the very United Methodist DNA it is the General Commission on Archives and History’s charge to promote and preserve.

The church on its last legs happens to be my home church. St. James UMC, located in the Olney neighborhood of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, was once on a circuit that Francis Asbury traveled. Once a simple meeting house, the church grew into a stately Gothic building boasting a congregation of more than 1,000 at its peak, but has now plummeted to the point that a gathering of twelve disciples looks like a large crowd.

When a new pastor was appointed last July there were six at Sunday worship. Today the number is pushing 100 and doesn’t begin to count all the people St. James engages for worship, community gatherings and service opportunities. The church is born again, transformed from missional failure to missionary force.

The pastor began his appointment by posting a sign on the church’s front lawn: FREE COMMUNITY BREAKFAST. He then took to walking the streets and knocking on doors. The fourth Saturday eat-in hasn’t become a feeding of the five thousand yet but there are hundreds coming through the church doors again – not to mention plenty of volunteers who have caught the spirit, some of them former members who moved from the city to the suburbs.

The pastor’s strategic approach to ministry is simple, direct, and historically Methodist: Take the church to where the people are. Where the people “are” in St. James’s neighborhood is different from its earlier days. The zip code is the same, but the residents are more socially, culturally and economically diverse than before, so English classes, free music lessons, a SHARE food program, free wireless access and open space for children and youth to play in the church gym after school and on weekends has helped the church reinvent outreach. There’s also a program for men and women newly-released from incarceration. The pastor, a tradesman in his pre-ministerial vocation, has gathered friends with carpentry, HVAC, and electrical skills to help neighborhood people “move off State Road” as he puts it, towards dignity, leaving prison or welfare systems in the rear-view mirror. St. James is even turning the parsonage, a marvelous Tudor-style home, into a base camp for Volunteers in Mission and GBGM US-2 missionaries. The eight bedroom house hosts up to 32 difference-makers.

By now you might be wondering what this story has to do with The General Commission on Archives and History. Inspiration aside it sounds more like a plug for work of The General Board of Global or Discipleship Ministries. But if GCAH can’t see it who can? St. James has become Philadelphia’s Foundery! John Wesley’s first Methodist meeting place in London was an abandoned cannon factory turned into a worship, discipleship and community service center with a dispensary, apothecary, free school for street kids, almshouse, homeless shelter, credit union.

What’s happening at St. James is classically Methodist, strategically Wesleyan and historically grounded in what happens when we are true to form. The reason I am excited by my home church and the transformation happening there is NOT because my memories of happier times will be preserved or because St. James is surviving where so many others across our conferences are failing. I am buoyed because a pastor and the congregation and community he is inspiring are empowered by the right stuff from our denominational DNA:

- Faith and life grounded in a theology of love and inclusion, God’s jaw-dropping, boundary-breaking, new-life-igniting, ALL consuming, merciful, redeeming, perfecting, ALL sufficient love for ALL people as raison d’etre and passion for outreach;

- Opportunities to gather people together in groups, experiencing God’s love, mercy and justice in Jesus Christ therein, striving to incorporate God’s love into daily life;

- Personal and community experience of God’s love, moving from inward change to outward service, becoming difference-makers in the wider world, offering new ways of thinking, acting and being, discovering that TOGETHER (connectionally) is better than alone.

This is United Methodism 101, a heritage not only undergirding discipleship and mission but inciting it. St. James’s recent success isn’t a matter of history looking backward, nor is it to be explained away as the result of good leadership, location or timing. St. James is an affirmation of our Methodist source, soul, heart and spirit intertwining; the genetic material that makes us who we are and still lives and grows in each of us. How about an enthusiastic “AMEN!” when we live in and up-to being the church our forebears bequeathed to us?

We live in a time when so much denominational energy swirls with uncertainty about the future viability of the Church we know and love, about how to best engage complex questions on credo, life, behaviors and faithfulness to covenants that have wrestled us to the ground for 50 years or more. Some predict these issues and struggles will find us more the UN-TIED
The 32nd annual Boehm's Apple Festival will be held, rain or shine, October 7, 2017, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. on the Boehm’s Chapel Campus. Live music will be presented by Jay Eddie & His Cowgirls. Craft stands will line the chapel walkway and fill the church fellowship hall. The 1791 chapel will be open for tours. The video, “The Boehm Legacy,” will be available for viewing in the Tying Shed. Luncheon foods will be available courtesy of Stehman’s Memorial United Methodist Church. Homemade apple ice cream, apple nuggets, apple dumplings, hot and cold cider, chicken and corn and ham and bean soup and the ever popular Grandview UMC apple bread will also be available for purchase.

- The Boehm’s Chapel Advent service is planned for December 3, at 3 PM. The traditional program of Lessons and Carols will include a capella congregational singing and special music. For additional information please Email, boehmschapel@gmail.com or call 717-872-4133.

- Old Burlington UMC in Bradford County PA celebrated its annual history commemoration service on August 13. Its original log chapel was built in 1794 and the current church on the same site in 1822. The church is on the National Register of Historic Sites.

- The Western Pennsylvania CAH has moved its archives from Allegheny College in Meadville PA to Old Salem UMC in Greenville PA.

- What I witness at St. James gives me great hope. It reconnects me with more than just my home church. It reconnects me with my HOME Church, with what called me by her name in the first place, to the deeper, purposeful and historic roots of a grace-filled, outreaching movement centered on a passionate desire for people to experience the love of God. This movement once sparked revival in two continents, reached further since, and still has a long way live and serve before “thy kingdom come, thy will be done.”

  – Fred Day