

# Historical Messenger

Newsletter of the Commission on Archives and History, Detroit Annual Conference, United Methodist Church  
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## Looking Toward 150 Years of the Detroit Conference: By the Numbers

2006 will mark the 150th Anniversary of the Detroit Conference which was founded in 1856. It grew out of the Michigan Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church which began in 1836 with approximately 4000 members in Michigan (and 14,000 in Ohio). The MI Conference comprised most of Michigan and a part of northern Ohio. In 1840, the Ohio portion was removed and Southwestern MI added from the Indiana Conference so that it now covered the entire state. In that year the Michigan Conference had more than 11,000 members. In 1856 the Detroit Conference was separated from the Michigan Conference and held its first Annual Conference at Adrian First Methodist Episcopal Church on September 17, 1856. It had nearly 11,000 members and probationers in its seven districts (Owosso, Adrian, Ann Arbor, Detroit, Flint, Romeo, and Lake Superior). An eighth district (Port Huron) was added in 1858. In the Conference's founding year, its largest congregation was Grand Blanc in the Flint District with a total of 247

members. Its smallest congregation was Midland in the same district with 6 members. The highest paid pastor was A.D. Wilbur whose salary of \$890 dwarfed that of the lowest paid preacher, T.C. Gardner, who made \$125.

The Methodist presence in Michigan grew large enough to warrant a local Methodist newspaper. In 1874, the *Michigan Christian Advocate* began serving Methodists in the state. In 1885, the MCA had a circulation of about 7,000; by 1890 it was nearly 16,000.

The Conference continued to grow in the following decades. In 1896 it exceeded 50,000 members, in 1906, 60,000, and by 1926, the Detroit Conference had over 86,000 members.

This growth was well represented in the city of Detroit itself. In 1859, the city had five ME churches with 664 members and probationers. By 1877, there were six churches and nearly 1700 members; in 1887, thirteen churches and over 3000 members. By 1940, Detroit's Metropolitan Church alone had 7,000 members, making it the largest Methodist congregation in the nation.

*Continued on Page 2*



In 1856, the Detroit Annual Conference (1) was formed, leaving the rest of the state in the jurisdiction of today's West MI Conference (2)

(To contrast these amounts, the highest salary of the Michigan Conference was \$525). By 1866, the Conference had grown to over 15,000; by 1876, over 23,000; a decade later it passed the 30,000 member mark (full and probationary members).

Inside this issue:	
<b>Article:</b> Detroit Conference, 150 Years by the Numbers	1-2
<b>Article:</b> The Railroad and a Witness to History: Rev. E. E. Caster on the Road (1890)	3-6
<b>Feature Article:</b> The Methodist War on American Fiction, 1865-1914	6, 9
<b>Notes:</b> From the Archivist	7
<b>Article:</b> Jurisdiction on Archives and History in WI	8
<b>Notes:</b> Detroit Conference on Capital Punishment (1866) & Nat'l Disarmament (1890)	10
<b>Notes:</b> MCA Editor James H. Potts on Gun Control (1911)	11
<b>Forms:</b> "Church History of the Year" Application Form	11
<b>Forms:</b> "Friends of the Archive" Membership Form	12

## Looking Toward 150 Years of the Detroit Conference: By the Numbers

Detroit Conference growth continued for another two decades. Conference Minutes reveal the following membership numbers:

1956: over 160,000

1966: over 189,000

During the next decade, however, the situation began to change and the numerical decline began:

1976: 160,142

1986: 128,540

1996: 110,128

Today, the Detroit Conference contains fewer than 104,000 members (2005 DAC Minutes, STAT 22).

The United Methodist Church has approximately 8.2 million members.

Nationwide the UMC has also experienced decline. Last year the UMC lost approximately 71,000 members. Other “mainline” Protestants

are experiencing declining membership as well. The 2.3 million Presbyterian Church has lost nearly 90,000 members in

the past two years. Meanwhile, other Christian groups experience an upsurge in membership. One such denomination is the Seventh Day Adventist Church which grew by 153,000, reaching the one million mark for the first time.

*Why are members drawn away? What are they seeking that they can not find in the confines of their local United Methodist Church?*

How are we to explain this transformation? Why are members drawn away? What are they seeking that they can not find in the confines of their local

United Methodist Church? A certain type of religious experience? A certain type of cultural experience? A certain sense of community? This is not a decline in American

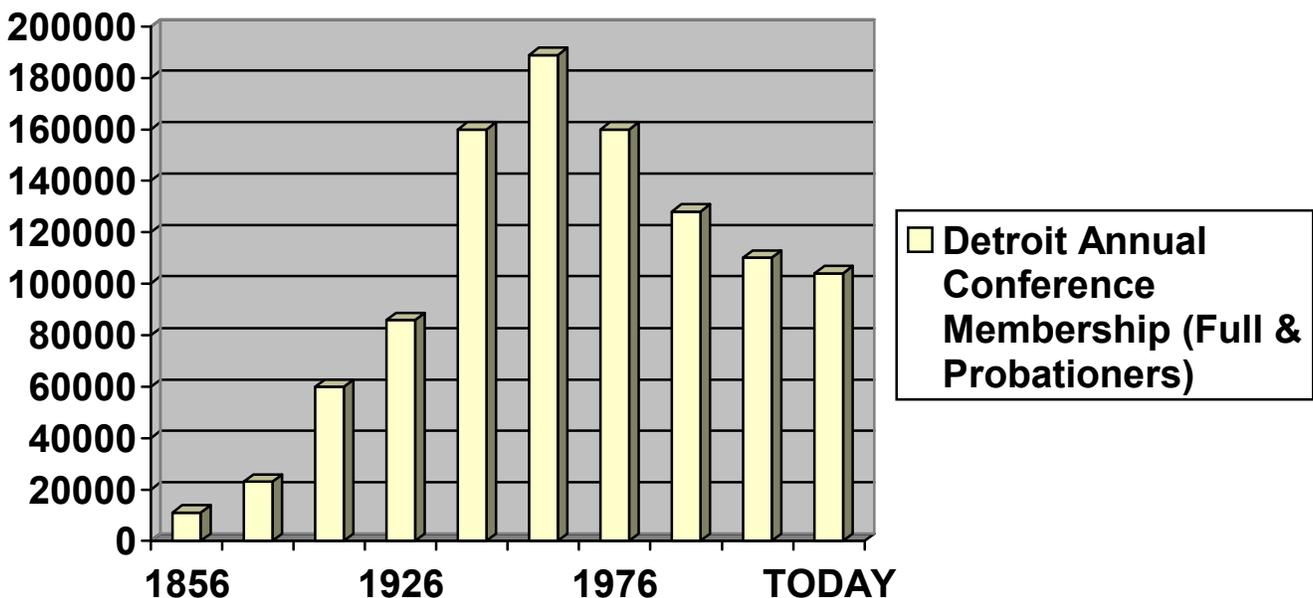
Christianity—for, while Methodists and Presbyterians experienced a drop in membership, Pentecostals, Seventh-day Adventists, and others have seen tremendous growth. We also see the growth of high-profile evangelical mega churches, often built around a

charismatic leader, dynamic worship setting, powerful sermons, large paid staff, and savvy business model.

This numerical record leads to many questions which the United Methodist Church must urgently wrestle with today. For possible answers see: R. Richey, W. Lawrence, D. Campbell, eds. (1999) *Questions for the Twenty-First Century Church* (United Methodism and American Culture Series). Another interesting viewpoint can be found in Tony Campolo (2004) *Speaking My Mind*.

[Sources: *The Christian Century*, August 9, 2005, p. 15; *Detroit Annual Conference Minutes*; *Michigan Christian Advocate*, May 28, 1887, p. 1; Feb. 2, 1895, p. 1; Dec. 17, 1887, p. 1; Sept. 12, 1891; July 20, 1907, p. 1].

### Membership Graph (Years: 1856, 1876, 1906, 1926, 1956, 1966, 1976, 1986, 1996, & Today)



## The Railroad and a Witness to History: Rev. Elisha E. Caster on the Road

By  
Matthew T. Herbst

In the Spring 2005 edition of the *Historical Messenger* I published an article based on material found in the small personal journal (roughly 3.5 by 8 inches when closed) kept by Detroit Conference Pastor Elisha Ezra Caster (1835-1914). The journal chronicled three journeys: his trip to the East Coast (Nova Scotia, Boston) in 1884, to the West Coast (San Francisco, Oregon, Seattle) in 1890, and to Europe, Egypt, and the Holy Land in 1891.

As noted in the previous article: "Rev. Caster had spent a lifetime in ministry in Michigan, beginning in 1857 when he was 22 and retiring as a septuagenarian in 1907. He served churches throughout the state [in Middleburg, Owosso, Corunna, Bay City, Marquette, Flint, Detroit, Romeo, Saginaw, Fenton, Howell, and Chelsea] and was Presiding Elder (now Superintendent) of the Bay City (now Saginaw) District. After retirement, he kept active with preaching and speaking engagements scheduled almost up to the very moment of his death on March 22, 1914.

He was greatly sought after as a preacher and speaker. He had a gift for holding an audience captivated by his eloquence and for painting the most vivid images with his words. One newspaper recorded that he "has the happy and remarkable trait of seeing everything and remembering all

he sees, and is able to describe it in a taking manner." Another reported that Rev.



Rev. E.E. Caster and Family

Caster "talks fluently and with all the ease and grace possible, with just enough spice and wit to make it lively all along. [He] probably has more calls for lectures than any other

Washington State.

The advent of the transcontinental railroad in American History was one of the great industrial accomplishments of the 19th Century. By the end of the Civil



minister in MI."

The Spring article focused on Rev. Caster's trip to Europe and the Holy Land in 1891 with his colleague Rev. E.W. Ryan. For this article, I would like to highlight one small portion of his 1890 trip to the western United States that he

took with his son Wilbur. The portion under discussion is his return trip by rail from

Railway Act. The transcontinental railroad became a reality in 1869 when the Central Pacific building east from CA met the Union Pacific heading west from Omaha at Promontory Summit, Utah. Other lines soon followed. By 1893 there were five transcontinental lines in service and over 72,000 miles of rail west of the Mississippi. Americans were connected from New York to San Francisco and with Michigan sitting in the midst, Rev. Caster took advantage of this technology for his trips both to the East and West.

On his return, Rev. Caster set out from Seattle on a steamer for Tacoma. Seattle, he declared, "is wonderful in growth, but is not pretty—the ground is terribly uneven." (The uneven ground can be observed by tourists today walking in beautiful downtown Seattle).

Rev. Caster boarded a train on the Northern Pacific line from Tacoma which was its western terminus. He was bound for St Paul, MN. The journey took four days. St. Paul, he described, was "one of the prettiest and cleanest cities in our country."

The Northern Pacific Line, completed in 1883, connected the Northwest and the Upper Midwest from Washington state to Duluth, MN. (See map on page 5).

*Continued on Page 4*

## The Railroad and a Witness to History: Rev. Elisha E. Caster on the Road

While on route, Rev. Caster noted the beauty of the Washington State scenery—

Wars of the Post-Civil War era. The railroad boom spurred the settlement of

between 1850 and 1890 and their land constantly encroached upon, reduced, and even taken away. In 1881, nearly 156 million acres were in Indian hands, by 1900 there was less than 78 million. By 1886, nearly a quarter million Native Americans were confined on 187 reservations, increasingly dependent upon Federal support for food and other necessities.

tragedy, one Sioux warrior remarked: “They [the whites] made us many promises, more than I can remember, but they never kept but one: they promised to take our land and they took it.”



Miles City in the 19th Cent.

rivers, valleys, mountains. It was in Montana (which had then been a state for less than one year) that the trip offered some thoroughly unexpected incidents.

The diary entry on Tuesday, June 10 reads: “In Montana we ran for many miles along side of the Clarks Fork river, a very large and fine stream with plenty of Norway Pines along its course. Further on we passed through an extensive Indian Reservation where we saw many of the Natives. At one point we passed over an iron bridge that is 220 ft. high. Near Miles City we saw U.S. troops which had first been sent there to quell an Indian outbreak...”



Sioux Leader Sitting Bull, killed in 1890, just before the massacre at Wounded Knee

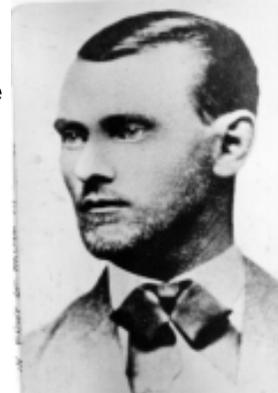
the Great Plains which had till then been known as "Great American Desert" that rested between the Rockies and the Mississippi. The Homestead Act of 1862 made 160 acres of land readily available to all who were willing to work it. The population of the West exploded from 1.4 million in 1860 to 8.5 million by 1890.

Railroads, settlers, and other factors combined to destroy the herds of buffalo that had dominated the plains. Once tens of millions of bison roamed the plains. By 1883, only 200 were left. The impact of the railroads, white settlement, and the destruc-

tion of the buffalo was devastating for Native Americans who witnessed their own population cut by half

The destruction of Indian autonomy, traditional way of life, and their compulsory settlement on reservations drew many to a new religious movement known as the Ghost Dance in which they hoped to usher in a glorious new day for indigenous peoples and an end to white dominance.

In the Summer of 1890, the Ghost Dance movement had spread to the Sioux. The U.S. Government responded by sending additional troops to secure the area. On December 15, Sioux leader Sitting Bull was killed while authorities tried to arrest him and two weeks later, on December 29, several hundred Sioux, including women and children, were killed or wounded at Wounded Knee, marking the end of the Indian Wars. Reflecting on this great



Jesse James

train robbery which began in 1866 and continued through the 19th and into the early 20th Century. Some of those associated with this crime have entered American folklore: Jesse James and the James Gang in the 1870s and 1880s, Butch Cassidy and



Butch Cassidy

his Wild Bunch in the 1890s and early 20th Century. Rev. Caster experienced a taste of this on route to St. Paul. His diary continues: “...and a little farther along passed the spot where the train which preceded us was “held up” and robbed...”

*Continued on Page 5*

## The Railroad and a Witness to History: Rev. Elisha E. Caster on the Road

by three highwaymen, one of whom had been taken and was put onto our train chained to a sheriff... It was reported that the robbers secured \$6,000."

While the technology of the railroad connected the American nation, it also was an opportunity for mischief. The cost and frustration of this type of crime was felt by many Americans. Editor James H. Potts of the *Michigan Christian Advocate* expressed his own frustration with this crime in the state of Michigan: "The desperadoes of the country are now exhibiting their cunning in the robbery of express cars on the railroad trains. In Indiana a few days ago

they thus secured large booty, and again, more recently, in upper Michigan. Winchester rifles, dynamite and bravado are their weapons. Trainmen, express messengers and passengers are alike powerless to prevent the violence and thievery of these armed bandits. Who are they? Whence came they? Where do they conceal themselves? How can men band

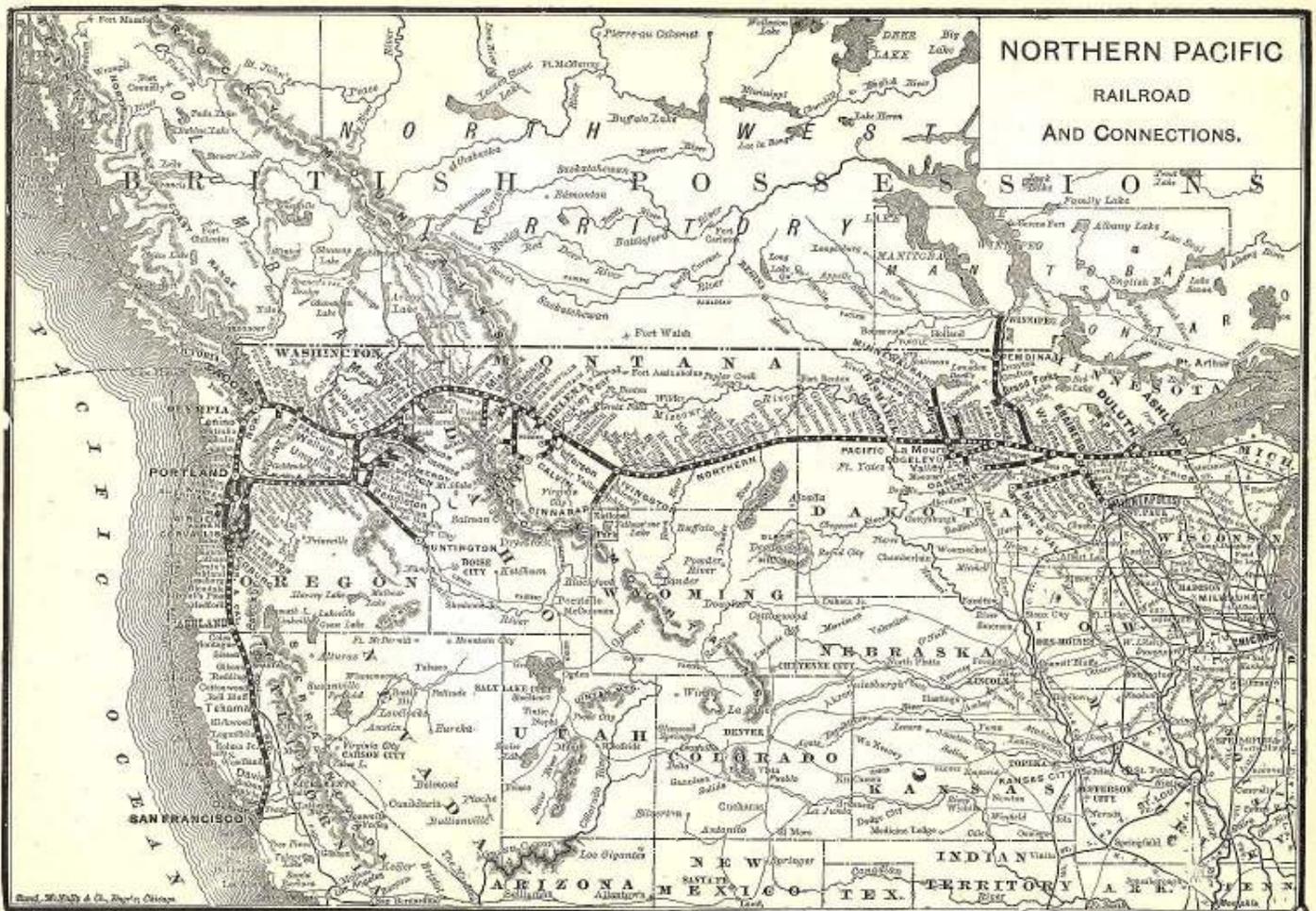


Rev. Caster's Journal

themselves together in companies of from five to twenty, pass from place to place, select without detection, or even awakening suspicion, the best points for attack, and then having stopped their train and secured their cash, elude the quick pursuit? Have they secret abodes in caves or cliffs or forests or swamps? Do they live in cities, in dark alleys, in upper rooms of tenement houses, or

unsuspected on the best streets? What is the remedy for such a species of diabolism? Must every train be accompanied by an armed escort, or must the public stop traveling? Unless some method is devised for frustrating the schemes of these miscreants, banks will be chary in transmitting funds from city to city, and the express companies will hesitate to accept large consignments. It is certain that great sums of money should be more carefully guarded in transition...

*Continued on Page 6*



## The Railroad and a Witness to History: Rev. Elisha E. Caster on the Road

from place to place, or else safes should be invented which neither messengers can unlock, thieves carry off, nor dynamite explode. Blessed is nothing when train robbers are near.”

Fortunately, Rev. Potts was soon relieved. Shortly after writing his editorial, most of the Michigan gang was arrested and a portion of the money recovered. “Let Indian emulate Michigan,”

he declared, “hunt down those thieves.” [Source: *Michigan Christian Advocate*, September 23, 1893, p. 1]

After a great trek from Michigan to San Francisco, up the West Coast to Seattle, Rev. Caster was back home. On Thursday, June 19, Rev. Caster wrote this trip’s final entry in his journal: “I now record my

gratitude to my Heavenly Father for kindly preserving my family during my absence of 6 weeks and for graciously protecting myself and my son Wilbur in a journey of about 8,000 miles. We have seen many wonderful sights. Have not met with a single mishap or missed a single connection of Trains or boats. Have seen some sections of country that are fine and much that is just the opposite.

On the whole I return to my home better pleased with Michigan than ever before.”

*“On the whole  
I return to my home  
better pleased  
with Michigan  
than ever before.”*

*-Rev. E.E. Caster,  
June 19, 1890*

## The Methodist War on American Fiction, 1865-1914

By Matthew T. Herbst

In 1908, *Michigan Christian Advocate* (MCA) Editor James H. Potts reiterated a point that he had made for over three decades: “The deterioration of the moral nature is one of the pernicious effects of novel reading.” Editor Potts and many other Methodists believed that the country’s best literary days were past. Yet, the writers that emerged in the years between the Civil War and World War I (1865-1914) are among the most celebrated in American literature: Mark Twain, Bret Harte, Ambrose Bierce, William Dean Howells, Henry James, Stephen Crane, Kate Chopin, Frank Norris, Jack London, Edith Wharton, etc. Before the arrival of the popular cultural juggernauts of the cinema and radio, the novel stood among the forefront of entertainment options luring Americans during their personal time. The Methodist Episcopal Church, alarmed by its rising influ-

ence, initiated a campaign against the novel, believing it to be a veritable struggle for the soul of America. Fiction was easily available through inexpensive dime-novels as well as in literary periodicals and pulp fiction magazines to feed an eager public. The volume of this literature was simply enormous. In 1895 alone, 1400 new novels were printed in the United States. Instead of buying, many Americans turned to their public libraries where, by 1900, works of fiction accounted for 75% of books circulated.

The novel’s literary hold on the American mind became a source of concern to the Methodist Episcopal Church which viewed it as a threat to American character for the novelist’s influence, it was argued, weakened that of the preacher’s in shaping American lives. This influ-

ence, Methodists believed, resulted in a decline in Bible reading and a waning of Christian virtue as the grasp of the church loosened on the lives of Americans. This was not an esoteric theological conflict, but one of the most practical and urgent concerns. Novels, they argued, morally corrupted readers, resulting in crime and disorder in American communities. Novels and youth were a volatile mix with crime being “the inevitable result of permitting the young mind to feed on such unwholesome food...” (MCA, 1/13/1894)

The printing and sale of this literature was perceived by Methodists as a “crime worse than the opium-trade forced upon China, or the liquor traffic in Africa.” For the evidence was “clear:” “[a]lmost all the boys

brought before criminal courts ascribe their downfall to impure reading.” (4/13/07)

Moreover, novel reading led youth to form criminal gangs and perpetrate crimes of violence. In 1885 the Detroit Conference declared that this literature’s “pernicious character and tendency...is to the mind and morals of the innocent and unsuspecting what slow poison is to the body. It makes a pretense of love for truth, purity and honor, but aims a deathblow at them all and carries with it a suppressed contempt for the proprieties and purities of behavior prescribed by good society. Like an infection in the air, the unthinking are poisoned before they are aware of its presence.” The modern novel, as a perceived root cause of crime, was therefore a fundamental threat to American society.

*Continued on Page 9*

## A Note from the Archivist: Thank You

The effect of the devastating flood of June 2004 remains with us as the reorganizing and restoration continues.

Yet, I am happy to report that the Archive is open for business and I have helped several researchers on-site as well as answered many requests through 2005 (though there still is a backlog). Restoring the Archive is a slow, methodical process, but it moves ahead.

Our effort was greatly helped by the "Friends of the Archive" who donated their time and hard work on August 4 and 5 for arranging and shelving books, sorting and filing newsletters, organizing Conference Journals, and providing helpful suggestions and ideas. For their tireless effort and dedication I want to say **"THANK YOU"** for the

tremendous help that was provided by:

- Meri Schoof**
- Sharon Scott**
- Jeanne Thomas**
- Fran Williams**
- Diana Spitnale Miller**

Since May 2004, I have been greatly honored to serve as the Detroit Conference's Archivist and

Historian and have worked not only for the restoration of the Archive, but also to move it forward.

I have been delighted to find that the redesigned and expanded *Historical Messenger* has been so well received. As our most important means of connecting with our local churches

and our friends across the Conference, it is important to offer a newsletter that is both pleasing to the eye as well as informative. I have also expanded our internet resources available on-line

and published several articles on Detroit Conference history. I have maintained our positive

collaboration with the Shipman Library and Adrian College staff and faculty.

purpose of strengthening our communities and helping others.



The aftermath of the flood of June, 2004. Approximately 20% of our material was damaged.



Many books, including historic Bibles, were damaged or destroyed; fortunately, more were saved and replacements were also donated to the Archive.



The Detroit Conference Archive is located in the basement of the Shipman Library at Adrian College

Librarians Noelle Keller and David Cruse are invaluable partners for any future archivist. It has been a pleasure to work with them and the rest of the Shipman staff. I have truly appreciated the support of Diana Spitnale Miller, Chair of the Detroit Conference Commission on Archives and History, and that of the "Friends of the Archive," especially Jeanne Thomas and Sharon Scott. They have been mentors and supports to me through all the challenging times and unmistakably demonstrated by their actions how much they care about the history of our Conference and the preservation of its historical records.

I myself have more than an intellectual interest in the UMC, serving also as Director of Education at First United Methodist Church of Howell where I work with a strong and talented pastor (Rev. Chuck Jacobs) and nurturing staff. I am also thankful for the opportunity to work with other churches and Conference staff (like Terry Gladstone) for the

Therefore, it is difficult to announce that my wife and I along with our newborn baby will be relocating to CA where we will once again be together with family. I will continue my academic and ministry work there, but will greatly miss my experience here with the Detroit Conference.

As always, I will continue my study of the United Methodist Church and its antecedents and remain willing to help with historical projects, now from afar. Please contact me if you have an questions or comments @:

pfminister@aol.com

If you might be interested in the position of Archivist/ Historian, please contact:

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## Jurisdiction History and Archives meet in Wisconsin

By Diana Spitnale Miller,  
Chair of the Detroit  
Conference Commission on  
Archives and History

The Annual Meeting of the North Central Jurisdiction Commission on Archives and History met in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, July 11-14, at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Attending from Detroit Conference were Diana Spitnale Miller, Caro, chair of the Detroit Conference Commission on Archives and History, Phyllis Carr, Ironwood, secretary of the Detroit Conference CAH, Linda Schramm, Vice -Chair of Commissions and Historical Societies Section of the Historical Society of the United Methodist Church, and Lucile Ogden, Port Huron.

The opening worship at Kenwood United Methodist Church included greetings from Bishop Linda Lee, former Bishop of Detroit Conference.

Speakers during the four day event included Dr. James Stein, Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary, who spoke about the United Brethren Church beginnings, schisms and mergers; Rev. Anthony Farina of Milwaukee, who talked about early Evangelical Work among the Italians in Milwaukee; Rev. Theresa "Little Eagle" Oyle-Sayles, Pastor of

Oakdale UMC, Grand Rapids, MI, who spoke about the Native American presence in the UMC; and



Rev. Velma Gallaher Smith, pastor at Milwaukee Central UMC, who discussed the Central Jurisdiction of the Methodist Church.

During one of the business meeting times we were able to express appreciation to Charles Yrigoyen, retiring General Secretary of the General Commission on Archives and History, who was in attendance.

surrounded by a cemetery now run by the local township. It has fallen into disrepair and is being renovated for use by the township.

Then we went to Cambridge to visit the Willerup United Methodist Church. It claims to be the First Scandinavian Methodist Church in the world. Its early members took Methodism back to Sweden. We were served a Scandinavian lunch.

We next visited Old World Wisconsin, a museum project similar to Greenfield Village. We visited the Pleasant Ridge United Brethren church which had been moved from its original site. It was a church that was racially integrated from its beginning. Pleasant Ridge was home to persons who had served in the Civil War and received land grants in Wisconsin. We heard a presentation on the times of the church by a history interpreter in period dress speaking as if it were that time.

On Wednesday we visited the Northcott Neighborhood House, an institution sponsored by the General Board of Global Ministries through the Women's Division. Then we went to the United Methodist Historical Museum which is housed in the first Evangelical Association church in Wisconsin. It sits on the property of an existing United Methodist Church.



Willerup United Methodist Church in Cambridge, WI

### Historical Tours

On Tuesday we took a tour of historical places in Wisconsin. We visited the small Rutland Church which was the first United Brethren church in Wisconsin. It is



Willerup United Methodist Church in Cambridge, WI

*Did you know that Methodism reached Scandinavia via Wisconsin?*



Old World Wisconsin Living History Museum in Eagle, WI

## The Methodist War on American Fiction, 1865-1914 (Continued from Page 6)

It was also believed that novel reading led to mental illness for “much of the insanity of the age is attributable to pernicious reading habits.” (3/18/05) Moreover, it served—Methodists argued—as a drug to intoxicate Americans and keep them from engaging in moral social action: “The novel-reader becomes a kind of slave of his habit, crowding his mind with exciting tales one after the other...and he lives and dies in a pitiable state of novel-drunkenness.” (2/13/86)

The novel was also charged with being anti-Christian and undermining American “family values.” Potts declared that nearly every recent novel had “either contained a studied sentiment hostile to evangelical religion or a studied silence upon the subject when a positive world needed to be spoken.”

(5/5/01) The rising divorce rate in American society was a great concern to the ME Church and it suspected that the modern novel was a cause for in them was found an antithetical picture of the ideal family structure. Since the social, moral, and mental health danger was so great, Editor Potts believed it was his duty to castigate a young boy on a train whom he witnessed reading a dime-novel, fearing for the damage he was doing not only to his personal and spiritual health, but also to the well-being of the nation.

Many Methodist leaders, like Editor Potts, condemned the current literary age, arguing that

America’s great writers (like Irving and Cooper) were all dead and gone. Others, however, expressed a more balanced and optimistic view. Dr. J.W. Mendenhall, editor of the *Methodist Review*, argued that a new approach was needed for the novel was simply too popular to eliminate it. He called for ministers to read fiction and serve as literary guides for the American public. To help pastors, the *Methodist Review* regularly published articles on novels and authors. Dr. Mendenhall also published a guide that ranked literature in seven categories of morality—ranging from those books which bolstered high morality to those that denigrated it. Among the American novelists who made the top cut was Edward Eggleston whose *The Circuit Rider* (1874) depicted the hard life of the frontier Methodist minister in early 19<sup>th</sup> century Ohio (and a bit of Michigan). [This is Michigan Methodism’s first appearance in fiction.]

Methodism appeared in other novels in the period, including E.W. Howe’s *The Story of a Country Town* (1883) and Harold Frederic’s *The Damnation of Theron Ware* (1896), one of the great 19<sup>th</sup> century American novels. Another author with Methodist ties was Stephen Crane, the son of a Methodist minister, whose brief but dazzling career left us a small, though remarkable, corpus, including *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895). It appeared to more than a few, including Mendenhall,

that American fiction was getting better with each passing decade. Moreover, it was acknowledged that reading novels actually helped the pastor in his duties by improving the minister’s mastery of the English language in his spoken and written word. By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Rev. Thomas J. Gregg could declare that the novel was so important that “the preacher must study literature.” In addition to the benefit to his pastoral duties, it also “broadened and deepened the sympathies of all men...” (7/24/09) Novel reading, then, helped readers in their duty as Christians and as Americans. By 1904, Methodist Professor Henry Van Dyke of Princeton University argued that the novel was *necessary* to faith.

This progressive and open-minded spirit was embodied in the impressive life and ministry of Lynn Harold Hough (1877-1971). He served variously as Pastor in New York, Baltimore, Montreal, and Detroit (Central Methodist, 1920s), President of Northwestern University, and Professor and Dean at Drew Theological Seminary. Throughout this journey, Dr. Hough was a prolific author and a champion of the value of literature for Christians. Literature was necessary for the Christian student for it broadened one’s outlook and offered the reader a deeper understanding of the world. Hough himself exemplified this Christian Humanism in his social concerns and his notable tolerance. The study of literature, he argued, prepares the

Christian for engagement of the world’s needs. Here the novel was recognized not as an escapist drug, but as a stimulant of the social good. Rev. Hough marked a new age for Methodism and literature. It was also a period that witnessed another cultural shift that diminished the overall place of the novel in the pantheon of American entertainment. Its high profile in the Methodist dialogue declined by WW I when its relative influence in American popular culture gave way to new forms of media, namely the cinema and later radio, which now began to draw Methodist attention. By 1914 there were nearly 13,000 movie houses in the country and *The MCA* recognized that movies “have gained a superlative advantage over any other class of instructors or entertainers in influencing the young mind...” Daily movie ticket sales soon reached ten million. Fittingly, then, the movie now became perceived as a cause of crime, disorder, “moral hurt and mental perversion.” (6/13/14) The 1920s witnessed the birth of commercial radio broadcasting and in the next decade nearly every American family owned a radio. As the attention of the ME Church was directed to new—far more popular—challenges, it appeared that the day of the “threat” of the novel had passed. [For more on this subject, see my forthcoming study “‘The Moral Hurt of Novel Reading:’ Methodism and American Fiction, 1865-1914.”]

## **The Detroit Annual Conference on Capital Punishment, 1866**

*This is an excerpt from the 11th Meeting of the Detroit Annual Conference held in Hudson, MI, September 5-10, 1866. Bishop Edward R. Ames presided and Elijah H. Pilcher was the Principal Secretary.*

Whereas, The late war has exercised a most disastrous influence upon public morality, particularly in increasing intemperance, diminishing the regard for law and the sense of the sanctity of human life, which are the foundations of social and personal security; and

Whereas, Crimes of every kind, and murders of the most atrocious character, are greatly on the increase; therefore,

1. *Resolved*, That it is the judgment of the Detroit Annual Conference of the M.E. Church, that the only scriptural and reasonable safeguard against premeditated murder is the capital punishment of the perpetrator.
2. *Resolved*, That this resolution be published in the minutes.

(Signed)	J.M Buckley
	J.S. Smart
	B.F. Cocker
	O. Whitmore
	J. Russel

## **The Detroit Annual Conference on National Disarmament, 1890**

*This is an excerpt from the 35th Meeting of the Detroit Annual Conference held in Alpena, MI, September 18-23, 1890. Bishop Edward G. Andrews presided and William Dawe was the Conference Secretary.*

National Disarmament Committee

The committee to which was referred an Overture of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, and a form of petition from the same and respecting the same subject of national disarming and arbitration in place of war, respectfully report:

We are convinced that the reduction of the enormous size of the armies of European and other nations would tend to peace, and to the peaceful arbitration of differences among those nations. When a combative man keeps a gun in his hand or a revolver on his person he is more apt to shoot some one than if he were not armed. The nation that has immense standing armies is more apt to declare or accept war than if it has space for meditation pending the increase of its forces to a fighting basis. Thousands of soldiers are made familiar with war by constant readiness for the same, and through desire of glory in the profession they have been led to cultivate.

We antedate the day when all nations will refer their differences to Arbiters, and when particularly Christian nations shall illustrate the spirit of the Prince of peace in their refusal to engage in horrible war until every resource other than war is tried. We heartily join with our Presbyterian brethren in their petition to the rulers of the various nations to reduce their war forces and consent to arbitrate their political differences. We recommend that the President of the Conference be authorized to appoint a delegate to a World's Peace Congress, to be held at a time and place to be determined in the future.

-Arthur Edwards, W.W. Ramsay, L.R. Fiske, *Committee*

## Church History of the Year Award Application Form

### Detroit Annual Conference Commission on Archives and History

**Deadline: December 15, 2005**

To be considered for the Detroit Conference "Church History of the Year Award," simply fill out this form and submit it to the Archivist at the address listed below, with your most recent history. Questions and other inquires may also be sent to the Archivist.

#### 1. Church Information

Name of Church:

Address:

Phone Number:

Email:

Church website (if any):

Contact Person:

Contact Phone Number/Email:

2. Format of History (circle one):    Print        Video (DVD/VHS)    Website    Other\_\_\_\_\_

3. When was this history compiled:

4. Submit Application Form and History to:

Diana Spitnale Miller, Chair, Commission on Archives and History  
208 W. Burnside St., Caro, MI 48723-1501 / ddmiller@centurytel.net

### ***MCA* Editor James H. Potts on Gun Control in Michigan**

The following is an editorial by Editor James H. Potts of the *Michigan Christian Advocate* published in the *MCA* on October 7, 1911 (page 1).

"A revolver fatality at Marshall recently, in which a boy of fifteen lost his life at the hands of his sister of thirteen, makes it certain that henceforth the revolver will be banished from that sorrowing Michigan home.

But why shouldn't revolvers be banished from all homes? What good are they? Why should any upright person want one of them? What noble purpose have they ever served, or ever will serve? Murders and accidents rather than the conservation of life, are to be set down to the bad record of revolvers.

It is a matter for encouragement that some people are waking up to the folly of having revolvers in either the pocket or the house. There are laws against the carrying of concealed



James Henry Potts

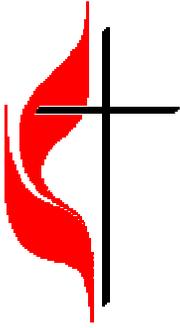
weapons, and the great state of New York has just enacted a law against the possession of

revolvers, concealed or not.

Under this New York law any person who has a revolver in his possession is liable to be found guilty of a misdemeanor and fined. No revolver can be sold or given away, the only thing to do with it is to knock it to pieces and throw the pieces away.

This is said to be the most drastic law for the suppression of dangerous weapons that has ever been enacted. It is now in New York a misdemeanor to merely have a revolver in the home and a felony to carry one in a public place...

It is our belief that this New York law, or something equally drastic, would be a good law for Michigan and other states."



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### Friends of the Archive Membership Form Detroit Annual Conference Archive

“The Friends of the Archive” is a non-profit group that supports the Archive and the mission of maintaining and preserving the history and historical material of the Detroit Conference. Members receive the Archive Newsletter, *Historical Messenger*, and related material. Members also seek to publish material of interest to the Detroit Conference and its churches. Please join us in helping to preserve our past!

#### 1. Membership Information

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(Congratulations to **Rev. John G. Park** of Flint on becoming the most recent Lifetime Member!)

#### 3. Submit Form and Payment (checks payable to “Friends of the Archive”) to:

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