

# NEWSLETTER

## Save the Date!

### What

Lutheran Historical Society of the Mid-Atlantic

### Annual Program and Meeting!

“New from the Archives: Stories to Inspire a Public Witness”

### A Two-Day Event!

### When:

Friday, February 27, 2026  
An Archives Workshop Day

Saturday, February 28, 2026  
9:30 AM – 2:30 PM

### Where:

United Lutheran Seminary,  
Gettysburg Campus

### Who:

### Saturday Sessions:

Victoria Larson,  
“Lutheran Laywoman Maude McDaniel”

Daniel Smail  
“William Passavant”

Victoria Jesswein,  
“Digital Access to Archives”

Boxed lunches to be provided.

Overnight room accommodations for the two days  
will be available.

Lunch and room registrations will open in January.

## Stay Tuned for More Details!

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

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### SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- *Church property in Capon Bridge, WV?*
- *Wentz Prize paper on the traumas of the LCMS*
- *St. Paul/Biglerville Prize on Broadcast Ministries*
- *Surge in church attendance leads to challenges in Church History studies*
- *Membership renewal reminder*
- *Members encouraged to consider a Life Membership to LHSMA*
- *Region 8 Archives: St. John’s Evangelical Lutheran Church, Espy, PA*

## President's Corner - Winter 2025

The author of the unexpected email explained that he has been transiting across one of my church properties,



"Laurel Chapel Evangelical Church, Capon Bridge,

WV," for several years and would now like to formalize a right of way. I replied, "We don't have a church property in Capon Bridge."

I have been in my synod for 31 years, and I had never heard of Laurel Chapel before that email. I had not come across it in any synod history, and I do not recall hearing it mentioned in any conversation. A quest now lay before me, a quest motivated by three things: the quondam park ranger's desire to be helpful, historical curiosity, and the fear that the synod might actually own a derelict church building.

Where to look first? On the synod's bookshelves, we have the synod convention/assembly proceedings going back to 1914's Third Annual Convention of the West Virginia Synod. A quick check of the statistics (that lists every

synod congregation) yielded nothing. Spot checking proceedings through the decades, a process that required reviewing the proceedings of the LCA's Western Pennsylvania-West Virginia Synod because the Pre-ULCA and ULCA West Virginia Synod got merged with territory to the north in the formation of the LCA, also yielded nothing. The first proceedings of the ELCA's WV-WMD Synod yielded nothing as well.

In the meantime, the inquirer sent me the address of the church. The satellite images on Google Maps confirmed that there was a structure at the address and what might be a cemetery. Searching for churches and cemeteries near the little community known as Millbrook (the unincorporated area where the church sits), I found "St. James Methodist Church Cemetery" on 'Find-A-Grave' at the same map coordinates. I contact the UMC District Superintendent and ask, "Do you have a church in Millbrook?" His answer was much like mine

(after I explained where Millbrook was): "Not that I know of, but let me connect you with one of our members in the area who knows the local history better than I do." She tells me that there is a Methodist Church in Capon Bridge but not one in Millbrook.

*I have to figure out whether my synod has inherited this property (whether we want to or not).*

In searching local histories, I found an 1897 publication, *History of Hampshire County West Virginia from Its Earliest*

*Settlement to the Present* by Hu Maxwell and H. L. Swisher, which states, under the section on Lutherans, "St. James, formerly known as Laurel Chapel, was organized in 1866."

Checking the government parcel maps (which are helpfully online), I discovered the owner of the property is listed as *Laurel Chapel Evangelical Lutheran Church Trustees*.

At this point, I have independent corroborating evidence that there was a Lutheran Church in Millbrook,

*(Continued on page 3)*

### LHSMA 2025 - 2026 Board of Directors

#### Board Members

Matthew Riegel  
*President*  
Paul Tomkiel  
*Vice President*

John Deeben  
*Secretary*  
Lee Knepp  
*Treasurer*

Victoria Jesswein  
*Archivist/Historian*  
Stephen Herr  
*President Emeritus*

Jon Diefenthaler  
Maria Erling  
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Kristi Keller

Louise Meledin  
Mark Oldenburg  
Jeffrey Pannebaker  
Sean Titus

#### Board Emeritus

Susan Hill

## President's Corner, cont.

*(Continued from page 2)*

and I have one source that resolves the naming issue somewhat. It is possible the structure changed hands at some time, but the current owners, according to the government, are ostensibly Lutheran. Why isn't this congregation listed in the proceedings of my synod?

I'm going to leave you with that question. What hypotheses would you have to test in the next research step? Where would you go next as a researcher?

So far, I have consulted synodical convention proceedings, civil government records, maps, a late-nineteenth century history, a judicatory leader, and two elder members of two

different denominations who live in the area under investigation. In the course of the investigation, I have found conflicting information and attempted to adjudicate it. My driving question is: Who owns this building? As there is every possibility that the trustees of Laurel Chapel Evangelical Lutheran Church are long dead, I am dealing with something akin to a provenance problem because I have to figure out whether my synod has inherited this property (whether we want to or not). We'll continue the hunt in the next issue.

*The Rt. Rev.*

*Matthew Lynn Riegel, S.T.M., President*

*Lutheran Historical  
Society of the Mid-Atlantic*

*West Virginia Western Maryland Synod, ELCA*

*304-680-5388; riegel@wv-wmd.org*

*<http://WV-WMD.org>*

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## 2025 Wentz Prize Winner

*By Kristi Keller*

The Lutheran Historical Society of the Mid Atlantic is proud to announce that the winner of the 2025 Wentz prize in the post-graduate category goes to Rev. Dr. Jon Diefenthaler for his paper, "Missouri's Twin Traumas I. Stephen Crisis." This paper was the first of two papers published by the *Lutheran Quarterly* on the traumas of the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod (LCMS). Under the leadership of Martin Stephan, Saxon Lutherans migrated to the St. Louis area in 1839. Shortly after this migration, there were issues with Martin Stephan due to his financial indiscretions, sexual misconduct, and false teachings. This paper discusses how Stephan's misconduct led to issues within the church at that time and there are continuing consequences from this crisis even to this day for the LCMS. This article along with the second article on the Seminex crisis, a trauma that served to reinforce the effects of the Stephan crisis, can be found at the *Lutheran Quarterly* web page under the current issue (<https://www.lutheranquarterly.org/?p=5142>) and is currently available to everyone.

Dr. Jon Diefenthaler is a president (bishop) emeritus of the Southeastern District –LCMS, having served in that office from 2003 to 2012. Prior to this, he served on the faculty of Concordia Theological Seminary, Springfield, Illinois (now Ft. Wayne), as pastor of Bethany-Trinity Lutheran Church, Waynesboro, VA, and Our Savior Lutheran Church in Laurel, MD. Since his retirement as an LCMS bishop, he has served as an adjunct professor at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. Diefenthaler also has been a member of the board of directors for the Lutheran Historical Conference as well as the Lutheran Historical Society of the Mid-Atlantic. He received his PhD in American Religious History under Sidney Mead from the University of Iowa. His doctoral dissertation focused on the relationship between church and world (Christ and culture) in life and career of the American Protestant theologian H. Richard Niebuhr that has resulted in the publication of two scholarly volumes.

## *LHSMA Announces the 2025 St. Paul/Biglerville Prize Winner!*

The Lutheran Historical Society of the Mid-Atlantic is pleased to announce the St. Paul/Biglerville Prize has been awarded to Kirk D. Farney for *Ministers of a New Medium: Broadcasting Theology in the Radio Ministries of Fulton J. Sheen and Walter A. Maier* (InterVarsity Press, 2022). The work has also been named Best Major Publication by Concordia Historical Institute.

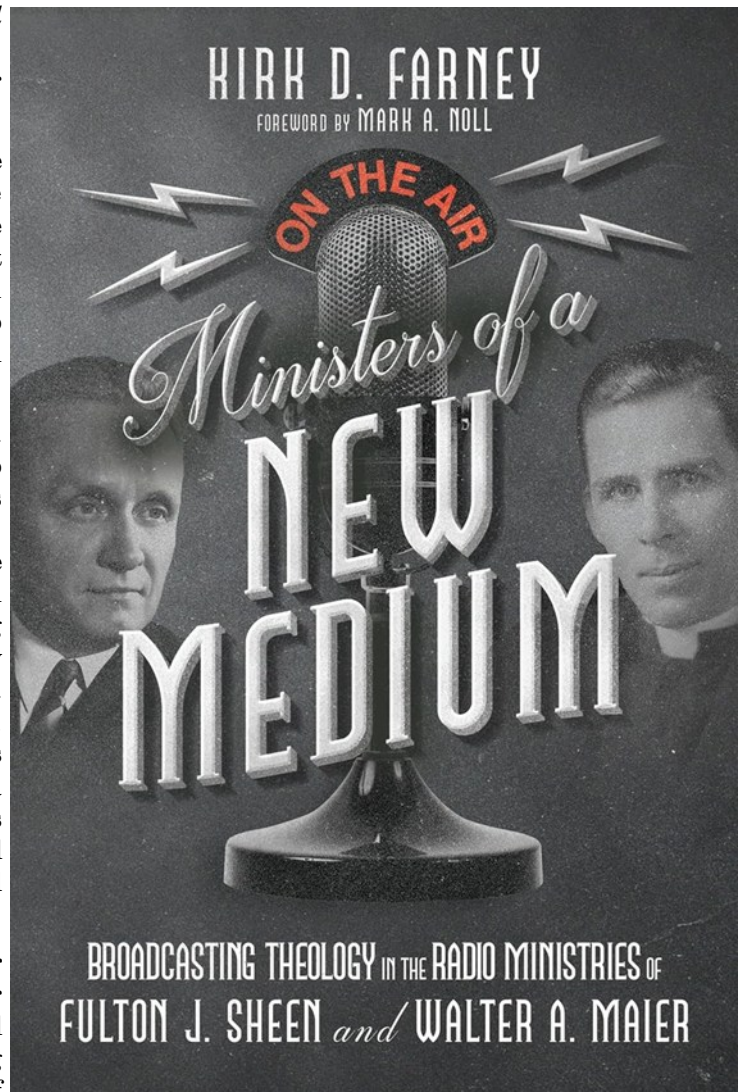
During the anxiety-laden period from the Great Depression through World War II to the Cold War, Americans found a welcome escape in the new medium of radio. Throughout radio's "Golden Age," religious broadcasting in particular contributed significantly to American culture. Yet its historic role often has been overlooked.

In *Ministers of a New Medium*, Kirk D. Farney explores the work of two groundbreaking leaders in religious broadcasting: Fulton J. Sheen and Walter A. Maier. These clergymen and professors - one a Catholic priest, the other a Lutheran minister - each led the way in combining substantive theology and emerging technology to spread the gospel over the airwaves. Through weekly nationwide broadcasts, Maier's *The Lutheran Hour* and Sheen's *Catholic Hour* attracted listeners across a spectrum of denominational and religious affiliations, establishing their hosts - and Christian radio itself - as cultural and religious forces to be reckoned with.

Farney examines how Sheen and Maier used their exceptional erudition, their sensitivity to the times, their powerful communication skills, and their unwavering Christian conviction, all for the purpose of calling the souls of listeners and the soul of a nation to repentance and godliness. Their combination of talents also brought their respective denominations, Roman Catholicism and Missouri Synod Lutheranism, from the periphery of the American religious landscape to a much greater level of recognition and acceptance. With careful attention to both the theological content and the cultural influence of these masters of a new medium, Farney's study sheds new light on the history of media and Christianity in the United States.

The author, Kirk D. Farney (PhD, University of Notre Dame), is vice president for advancement, vocation, and alumni engagement and a member of the history faculty at Wheaton College (Illinois).

The Lutheran Historical Society of the Mid-Atlantic awards the St. Paul/Biglerville Prize every two to three years for a work of mature scholarship in the field of American Lutheran church history. The award carries a \$5000 cash prize. The prize was last awarded in 2021 to the Rev. Matthew Borrasso for *The Art of Exegesis: The Life and work of Martin Hans Franzmann* (WIPF & Stock, 2019).





# **Lutheran Historical Society** **Of the Mid-Atlantic**

## **Application for Membership/Membership Renewal**

*(Please submit this Annual Membership Renewal form.)*

(Please print or write clearly. Thank you!)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Congregation (*if applicable*): Please list name, town, and denomination.

\_\_\_\_\_

I desire membership in LHSMA as a \_\_\_\_ New Member or as a \_\_\_\_ Renewal.

Date of application: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ \$250 Life Membership for an individual or institution

\_\_\_\_ \$ 20 Annual Membership for an individual or institution

(Annual membership is for a calendar year.)

\_\_\_\_ I wish to give a donation to the society (see below for details). Amount \$ \_\_\_\_\_

I am interested in the following:

\_\_\_\_ Research

\_\_\_\_ Reading

\_\_\_\_ Publishing

\_\_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

*Financial gifts to further the work of the Society are always welcome and greatly appreciated. Such gifts may be mailed to LHSMA, in care of the treasurer, Lee Knepp, at the address below. LHSMA is a 501C-3 organization and your gift is tax deductible as permitted by law.*

Please complete this form and your check made payable to LHSMA. Mail to:

Lee Knepp, LHSMA  
P.O. Box 76  
McClure, PA 17841

# *On the Future of Church History, Part I*

by Rev. Dr. Ken A. Grant

**Editor's Note:** *The Rev. Dr. Ken A. Grant is a 1991 graduate of Gettysburg Lutheran Theological Seminary and received his PhD in Church History at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. He currently serves as pastor of Genesis Lutheran Church in Detroit, Michigan, and, since 2015, as Adjunct Professor of History and Religious Studies at the University of Detroit Mercy. Dr. Grant provided this white paper on the future of church history at the invitation of LHSMA President, Bishop Matthew Riegel. This is the first of a three-part serialization of his paper.*

The bubble that was twentieth century Christianity in America, with its attendant surge in church building and regular participation, has finally and fully burst, and we are now confronted with uncertainty, concern, and questions about next steps. The problem facing the future of Church History studies in the North American context is neither dissimilar, nor unconnected, to this new reality confronting Christianity in North America.

In addition to the surge in church attendance and participation, the twentieth century American Christianity bubble created a swell of interest in studying every aspect of the faith and the church, including church history. The sheer numbers of people filling pews and entering seminary provided a critical mass of interest in exploring the field. The larger number of people entering the field, in turn, created an environment for the cultivation of a richly talented crop of church historians who produced thought-provoking explorations on a myriad of topics, and who, likewise, provided dynamic educational opportunities for both undergraduate and graduate students. Seminaries and divinity schools produced a significant number of scholars who were both gifted historians and excellent teachers. It stands to reason, then, that a reemergence of teaching excellence is central to finding a way out of the post-bubble wilderness.

However, to create and sustain an environment to develop those high-quality historians and church history teachers is difficult. The bursting bubble has the church scrambling to understand its new situation. In this scrambling to find stable ground, a clear understanding of the long history of the church, which would provide potential avenues for moving forward, is rarely contemplated, let alone seriously considered. Instead, church leaders, clergy and lay, frantically seek remedies that are unmoored from the kind of historical understanding that would more accurately describe the current situation as a reversion to the mean, and not a new catastrophic reality. Therein lies the problem, a church with declining numbers generates fewer historians; fewer historians mean relying less on historical solutions that would undoubtedly inform and serve our decision making toward stabilization of both church and academy.

In addition to the limited number of church historians entering the field, the collapse of the humanities in higher education and partisan politics informing academic hiring further harms the future of church history. There is a suspect administrative belief in higher education that all subject areas should have a market-driven utility. Because history tends to be viewed too narrowly the field's utility is not readily seen by administrators who only see the dollars generated by science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields. Scholars in history, and in the whole of the humanities, do not generate grants equal to those found in STEM fields, and thus are viewed as being unproductive, irrelevant, or simply not useful. Administrators have been hollowing out the humanities in their quest to make their universities more financially stable for decades -- the cost of that quest has become all too apparent.

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## Future of Church History, cont.

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Further, the partisan assault on the role and content of history curriculum does not help and likely serves to shatter the nerves of already skittish deans and provosts when it comes to allocating resources for departmental hires. Why risk serious backlash from those who see everything through the lens of partisan politics by hiring and supporting history faculty whose research and teaching generates headlines?

Likewise, the same market driven utility factor seen in our universities and colleges has crept insidiously into our seminaries as each seminary attempts to discern what is most 'practical' for a seminary education. In the face of the bubble bursting, seemingly without understanding what this means or how to work within our new situation, seminary administrators and churchwide adjudicatory bodies resort to trying to solve the problem by listening to those who believe that seminary is, for all intents and purposes, a part-time trade school, and not a foundation for ordained or consecrated ministry that requires a commitment to full-time education and formation.



## *Membership Renewal Due*

Dear Lutheran Historical Society of the Mid-Atlantic Members and Friends:

This is your friendly reminder that membership renewals for 2026 are now due. Payment of annual dues (\$20 per household or institution) is requested between January 1 and March 31, 2026; however, we accept new members anytime! Please feel free to use the membership form in this issue to renew or join.

For those members who have already renewed, we send you a very big **THANK YOU!!**

Don't want the hassle of remembering annual dues? Then we encourage you to consider a one-time payment of \$250 for a **LIFE MEMBERSHIP!** Both annual and LIFE memberships provide important financial support for the essential activities of the Society, including our annual meeting, scholarly programs, awarding of the Wentz and Biglerville prizes for worthy Lutheran scholarship and publications, recognition of historic Lutheran sites, and Congregational Heritage Workshops, to name a few.

Friends, if you are not a member or have received a complimentary or trial membership, we encourage you to **COME JOIN US!** We are very happy to welcome you! LHSMA is very appreciative of the involvement and support of our current members, and we are always eager to greet new members!

*Friendly  
Reminder*

Lutheran Historical Society of the Mid-Atlantic

61 Seminary Ridge  
Gettysburg, PA 17325

Email: [info@lutheranhistoricalsociety.com](mailto:info@lutheranhistoricalsociety.com)  
Web: [www.lutheranhistoricalsociety.com](http://www.lutheranhistoricalsociety.com)

*“Preserving, documenting,  
and sharing the history of  
Lutherans and Lutheranism in  
the Mid-Atlantic and  
surrounding areas.”*

**We're on the Web!**

[lutheranhistoricalsociety.com](http://lutheranhistoricalsociety.com)

**Lutheran Historical  
Society of the  
Mid-Atlantic Newsletter**

ISSN 1049-6424

The Lutheran Historical Society of the Mid-Atlantic, in the interest of the preservation and cultivation of Lutheran history in Central and Western Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware, West Virginia, and the Metropolitan Washington, D.C. area issues this newsletter two to three times a year.

Notes of announcements, projects, historical celebrations, genealogical concerns, notes of church or Synodical activities, and notes from other historical societies are solicited.

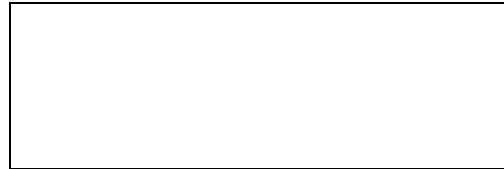
**Address corrections are helpful.**

**Send replies via email to:**

**Matthew Riegel**

**[info@lutheranhistoricalsociety.com](mailto:info@lutheranhistoricalsociety.com)**

**Subject: LHS Newsletter**



VOLUME 36, NUMBER 3

**From the Region 8 Archives**

Among the diverse holdings of the ELCA Region 8 Archives at the A.R. Wentz Library, Gettysburg Campus, United Lutheran Seminary, are noncurrent records of Lutheran congregations, including historical records of disbanded congregations from five Region 8 Synods, including Alleghany, Delaware-Maryland, Lower Susquehanna, Metropolitan Washington, DC, and Upper Susquehanna Synod. In this issue, we highlight the records of the following congregation:

**ST. JOHN'S EVANGELICAL  
LUTHERAN CHURCH,  
ESPY, COLUMBIA COUNTY, PA**

(Upper Susquehanna Synod)

- Benevolence Records 1921-1935
- Brotherhood Class Minutes 1940-1948
- Ladies Aid Society Minutes 1897-1926
- Minutes
  - o 1896-1912
  - o 1912-1930
  - o 1954
  - o 1959-1960
  - o 1961
- Parish Registers
  - o 1847-1909
  - o 1909-1916
  - o 1910-1950

For more information, researchers should consult the guidelines to Research Inquiries for the Region 8 Archives Collections on the United Lutheran Seminary website at <https://library.uls.edu/Archives/policies>.