

# NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 37, NUMBER 1

SPRING 2026

## News from the Archives:

### *A Two-Day Conference of the Lutheran Historical Society of the Mid-Atlantic*

*By Victoria Jesswein*

On February 27–28, coinciding with the 227<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Samuel Simon Schmucker's birth, the Wentz Library hosted the annual meeting of the Lutheran Historical Society of the Mid-Atlantic, bringing together archivists, clergy, students, and historians for a weekend of learning and conversation centered on Lutheran history and archival research.

The gathering began on Friday afternoon with an archives workshop led by Associate Archivist Victoria Jesswein. The session introduced participants to the fundamentals of archival work, beginning with a discussion of what archival materials are and why they matter in a church context. They emphasized how church records intersect with civil and social history, demonstrating that congregational records offer insight not only into ecclesiastical life but also into broader cultural developments.

Participants were introduced to basic skills in archival research and proper handling of materials. Jesswein explained the purpose of archival housing materials, such as acid-free boxes and folders, and reviewed best practices for working with fragile documents. Attendees learned when gloves are necessary, why pencils are required instead of pens, and why researchers examine

one item at a time in order to preserve original order. Jesswein also provided instruction on how to navigate a finding aid, explaining the intellectual organization of collections and giving advice on searching with key words and tags.

The workshop concluded with hands-on exercises that allowed participants to engage directly with archival materials. Attendees were divided into three groups, each assigned an artifact to examine. They were asked to describe their observations, consider what could be learned from the item, and identify any gaps or missing information. One group found the baptismal record for one of Schmucker's children in which the mother's name was recorded incorrectly, crossed out, and replaced with a correction. Participants discussed possible explanations, suggesting it could have been a simple copying error, but also considered how such discrepancies might affect the reliability of other records. Other groups noted that baptismal sponsors were often the parents themselves, as separate godparents were uncommon at the time. Participants discussed how records typically omitted the mother's maiden name, creating challenges for genealogical research and illustrating the limitations of the historical record.

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## SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- *Congregational records offer insight into broader cultural developments*
- *Undertakers are one of the best sources for local history*
- *Part of the adventure that is history is the chase*
- *An unexpected role of tobacco in supporting Lutheran institutions*
- *Spring Meeting participants explored best practices for maintaining digital records*
- *Barrier to engagement with church history is not interest, but access*

## President's Corner - Spring 2026

Last issue, I told you of a call I received regarding a church property, Laurel Chapel (near Capon Bridge,



WV), that the caller said belonged to the West Virginia-Western

Maryland Synod. If you will remember, I had never heard of this church before, and I was pretty sure that my synod was not the owner. Still, it had happened before in my synod that we were in fact the owners of a church property we had not known about. I related to you the first steps of my investigation, promising to take the story up in this issue.

My driving question: Who owns this building? My documentary question: Why does this church not appear in any of my synod's proceedings?

I also posed two questions for you, my readers: What hypotheses would you have to test in the next research step? Where would you go

next as a researcher?

I'm not sure how you answered the questions I posed to you, but I can tell you my next steps: I drove to the site. In the midst of my other duties, I found myself in the general area and detoured to the spot indicated on the maps. Sometimes you have

to put your own eyes on the situation, and sometimes there are clues in the material history (be it a tool, work of art, or a building). The

building was several miles down a dead-end valley road. It was easy to sport once I had arrived: wood-frame construction common to the late 19th and early 20th century for our region. The windows were shuttered. The building was in need of a paint job. The roof, however, was metal and of apparently recent vintage. The door was padlocked. There were no signs or notices. I had hoped there would be a sign or some other notice with the name and contact information for a responsible person. There

was no mailbox, so the idea of sending a letter was out. I considered posting my own note on the door (something to the effect, "If you find this, call me"), but I knew that rain would destroy it quickly. There were no signs of recent entry into the building, so sliding a note under the door would do no good.

The one thing that gave me some hope was the cemetery. If there is a cemetery, there are usually burials. My next stop was the local funeral home. Burials usually involve undertakers, and undertakers know who to contact about cemeteries – they usually know all the local dirt as well, and most of that dirt is historical. I've found undertakers to be one of the best sources for local history. Unfortunately, the senior partner of the local funeral home was out of town, and his subordinate, being new, was unfamiliar with the cemetery and the church. I would have to wait for a call back.

As property ownership was my major concern, I decided my next stop should be the county courthouse, the

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### LHSMa 2025 - 2026 Board of Directors

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Susan Hill

## President's Corner, cont.

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place where deeds are kept. Continuing down US-50 I stopped for an excellent meal at a roadside restaurant – yes, I got the liver & onions – before settling into the Koolwink Motel for the night. The Koolwink's history goes back to 1936, but the current rooms were built in 1960s (and they pretty much maintain the '60s vibe). The next day, I got to the County Clerk's Office right after it opened. A tremendously helpful staffer led me down into the vault, retrieving the appropriate hand-written deed books. She sat with me as I attempted to decipher the handwriting. While we were bent over the books, the County clerk arrived and asked what we were working on. As soon as the staffer said, "We're looking at the deed for Laurel Chapel in Millbrook," the clerk said, "That's Steve's church." The staffer exclaimed, "Oh, he's the nicest man." Within a few minutes, I had Steve's phone number and address.

I called Steve, left a message with his daughter as he was out feeding the steers, and settled in for lunch to await a call back. Steve

got back to me, saying that I was welcome to visit. A good hour followed in his living room as he filled me in on the history of the church and life in the community, including how the school bus driver would keep shovels in the bus during the winter and would have the boys get out and clear snow drifts so that they could get to school.

Well, there is a lot to tell at this point, and I've run out of room. I haven't answered the key questions yet, but part of the adventure that is history is the chase. In the course of chasing down information about one thing, we often stumble into others. I'll admit too that it is fun to be out in the field, and if the story at this point teaches us anything, it might be that the serendipitous encounter can show us the path. Let's see where that path takes us (and what interesting byways we might take along the royal road). Til 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*

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<http://WV-WMD.org>

## Spring Program Recap, cont.

*(Continued from page 1)*

On Saturday, the main program included two presentations. The first was by Rev. Dr. Daniel Smail, ULS alumnus and pastor of Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Glenshaw, PA. Rev. Smail kicked off the Saturday morning session with an engaging presentation on William Passavant, the Weyman family, and the unexpected role of tobacco in supporting Lutheran institutions. Focusing on the intersection of industry, philanthropy, and faith, Rev. Smail explored how tobacco wealth played a crucial role in financing significant church initiatives. George Weyman, the inventor of Copenhagen smokeless tobacco, first

opened his shop in downtown Pittsburgh in 1822, not knowing his enterprise would become the world's leading producer of smokeless tobacco products. George's son, Frank Weyman, took over the tobacco business from his father. An active member of his church, his vast wealth helped fund First Lutheran Church in downtown Pittsburgh, securing William Passavant as pastor during a challenging period for urban congregations. Additionally, Weyman anonymously financed the Krauth Library in Philadelphia, an architectural masterpiece at the time.

The second presentation was by Rev. Victoria Larson, a graduate of United Lutheran Seminary and PhD candidate at Duke University Divinity School. Rev. Larson gave a

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**ANNUAL  
MEETING**

## Spring Program, cont.

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presentation about Maude Aurand McDaniel, a Lutheran laywoman and one of the seminary's early female graduates. McDaniel earned a Master of Arts in Christian Sociology in 1953 under the direction of Dr. Bertha Paulssen. The same year, she married the Rev. Lee McDaniel, who served as a military chaplain and later pastor at St. John's Lutheran in Cumberland, MD.

McDaniel maintained a journal for most of her life, contributed regularly to newspaper columns, and authored theological articles and books. Her family donated her papers to the ULS archives, including approximately fifty notebooks of daily journal entries, providing an invaluable resource for understanding both early female graduates and the role of laypeople in the life of the church.

Larson's presentation emphasized how McDaniel's biblical interpretation as a laywoman intersected with broader conversations about biblical study in American Lutheranism and highlighted how her contributions have been historically underappreciated. Attendees also gained additional insights from McDaniel's children, who were present on Saturday morning and shared personal reflections on her life and work.

During the lunch break, Bishops Herr and Riegel distributed copies of the recently published *Schmucker at 225: What He Thought and What He Wrought*, a collected volume of papers originally presented at the 2024 "Schmucker at 225" program. The papers explore Schmucker's impact, controversies, and legacy within American Lutheranism.

After lunch, Jesswein led a session on digital access to archives. They discussed the significant benefits of digital collections, including remote and simultaneous access and protecting fragile originals from physical handling. Digital versions can also be manipulated for better readability and can be made machine-readable. However, digitization also involves considerable challenges and expenses, including not only the scanners and cameras to produce high quality images, but also significant staff time for quality control, metadata control, and uploading. The session also addressed ongoing issues like long-term digital storage, format migration through ever-changing technology, and concerns around copyright. The discussion concluded with participants exploring best practices for how churches should manage and maintain their digital archives effectively.

The conference ended with the business meeting of LHSMA, where new board members were elected and ideas for the next program were solicited.





# **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 II

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 second of a three-part serialization of his paper.*

This attempt at creating 'practical' curricula encourages those who are in positions of leadership to privilege a piecemeal approach to education, lurching from one new hip and trendy idea to the next. Not surprisingly, a deep dive into the history of the church, or for that matter a deeper exploration of scripture, theology, liturgy, ecclesiology, spirituality, polity, etc., rarely surfaces as the 'new' idea to embrace and, in fact, there is a dangerous undercurrent of dismissiveness towards expertise in such fields. Articulating a critique of the church is necessary for the church to discern how best to live out its call, and that critique carries far more weight if it is grounded in something as essential as where the church has come from. Critique of the church in this new age is incomplete and potentially unfaithful if there's no knowledge of how the church has responded to significant change in the past – this is not the first time a bubble has burst in the long cyclical history of Christianity.

How then do we reverse the trend of the seemingly waning interest in church history, especially in light of the fact that while seminaries, and far too many clergy, have little appetite for church history because of a perceived lack of utility, the broader population still buy books, watch YouTube videos and listen to podcasts about history, some of which are the most popular podcasts outside of the field of contemporary politics. The podcast, 'The Rest is History', averages eleven million downloads per month, with 45,000 paying subscribers; importantly, seventy percent (70%) of their listeners are under the age of forty. Dan Carlin's 'Hardcore History' podcast (a long-form podcast that usually clocks in at three to six hours per episode), receives, on average, 700,000 listeners per episode. Even the light entertainment history podcast/BBC Radio 4 show, 'You're Dead to Me', hosted by Greg Jenner, receives, on average, 500,000 listeners per episode. Why are these history YouTubers and podcasts so popular? Because they are engaging, smart, funny, willing to explore tangents to mull big questions, and rarely dumb down their subject matter. The most popular podcasts and YouTube channels have an important common practice; the hosts, guests, and producers, do something invaluable; not only are they excellent teachers, but also, they treat their subjects and listeners with respect. People respond to their enthusiasm, interest, and expertise because they are hungry for well-researched, engagingly presented material.

Thus, the barrier to engagement with church history isn't interest, it's access. With the contraction of the seminaries, and their shift away from a high commitment focus on weighty historical, theological, scriptural, or liturgical ideas to a lower student commitment utilitarian curriculum that seeks to get them out of the classroom and into the parish as quickly as possible, we cannot look to them

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## Future of Church History, cont.

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in the near term as a potential solution. Looking to regional church bodies to provide access has been mostly underwhelming in presenting anything that is even remotely redolent of theology or scriptural studies, let alone church history. Unless a major milestone like the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation, or, to a lesser extent, the 1700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Council of Nicaea marks the calendar, regional bodies have avoided the field altogether, because they too have accepted the flawed practicality or utilitarian argument.

Hence, to reinvigorate the field of church history, local church bodies and historical societies must pick up the slack by providing more opportunities for people to access enthusiastic, quality teaching with well-researched, engaging material that respects both the history itself and the audience; this is the first step to developing a healthier population of church historians. Developing a grassroots, local-level access point gathers people with a shared interest in church history and provides a place for them to share their enthusiasm with knowledgeable scholars and one another.



## *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!!**

*Friendly  
Reminder*

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!

Lutheran Historical Society of the Mid-Atlantic

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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.

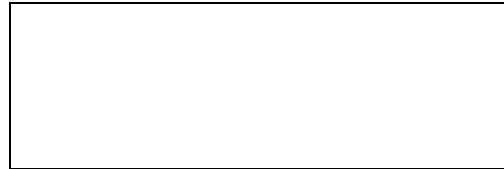
**Address corrections are helpful.**

**Send replies via email to:**

**Matthew Riegel**

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

**Subject: LHS Newsletter**



VOLUME 37, NUMBER 1

**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:

**GEESEYTOWN LUTHERAN CHURCH,  
GEESEYTOWN, PA**

(Alleghany Synod)

- Building Committee Minutes 1882-1885
- Constitution and Charter 1885
- Council Minutes
  - 1884-1894
  - 1894-1921
  - 1921-1930
  - 1931-1933
  - 1933-1955
  - 1956-1967
- Parish Registers
  - 1886-1923
  - 1924-1949
  - 1949-1961
- Sunday School Minutes
  - 1883-1885
  - 1888-1889

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/region8>