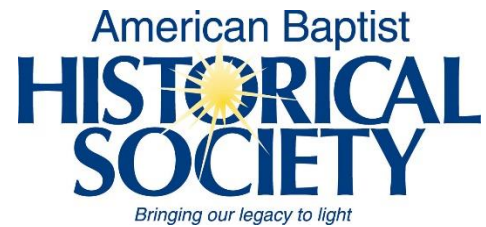


November 2020 Executive Report to the Board of General Ministries, sitting as the American Baptist Historical Society



An Unprecedented Year:

The year 2020 has been like no other. ABHS staff worked from home for three months beginning mid-March. As one might imagine, this limited the work we could do, to projects requiring no access to our archival materials and limited access to electronic files. Paradoxically, the limitations experienced while working from home spurred ideas and creativity, and brought the necessity of our digital project clearly into focus.

Digital Archives Project

This year we made great progress in getting some of our historic library into the [WorldCat](#) online library catalog. That work entailed hiring a rare book cataloger part-time for 6 months – she was able to catalog about 350 of our oldest, rarest items – as well as purchasing cataloging tools and subscribing to OCLC. It is exciting to be able to look in WorldCat and see some ABHS holdings. Of the 2,368 ABHS-held items cataloged, 1,139 have fewer than 20 copies showing in WorldCat. That means that many of our materials are quite rare.

During our working-from-home time, staff updated records for original church records holdings. This catalog is now accessible in ArchivesSpace.

Outreach:

With travel and gatherings restricted, meetings, conferences, and speaking engagements were cancelled. Without these opportunities to promote ABHS and develop relationships in person, other forms of outreach like our quarterly newsletter, birthday cards, social media, and phone calls have become the primary means of connecting with supporters. In July we had an article published in *The Christian Citizen* (published by ABHMS).

Staff brainstormed ideas for internet-based volunteer work, including crowd-sourcing transcriptions of archived documents. We put a pilot transcription project online in May and have had about a dozen people work on it.

Throughout September we presented a series of webinars to assist people who are either responsible for their congregation's or their region's archives, or who are organizing their personal papers, the latter likely intended for donation to ABHS. The sessions went well, and webinar recordings are available for viewing on demand.

Funding and Fundraising:

ABHS applied for a Payroll Protection Plan loan (available under the CARES act) and received \$66,547. The ABCUSA treasurer and accounting staff were invaluable to that process. We await instructions on how to convert that loan to a grant.

In January we applied for a grant from CLIR in the amount of \$50,000, to digitize some of the audiotape collection. Our proposal was not selected for funding; we will revise and re-submit the proposal in 2021.

When the National Endowment for the Humanities announced a grant competition funded by monies provided through the CARES Act, we quickly prepared a detailed \$130,000 proposal for digitizing manuscript (handwritten) documents that could then be transcribed, making them searchable. Sadly, our proposal was not selected for funding. The NEH funding was for one grant cycle only so there is no opportunity to re-submit that proposal.

As of October 13, 120 donors have contributed \$26,165 to the 2020 Annual Fund. If you are among those who contribute to the ministry of ABHS, **thank you very much!** Our ministry wouldn't be possible without your support.

Down the Road:

If anything, the constrictions of this year have shown how imperative it is that the treasures held in ABHS archives be accessible off-site. We are planning for equipment purchases in the coming 2 years that will further our digital preservation capacities. These include a freezer for film preservation, and audio-video digital conversion equipment.

The coming year will bring more changes and challenges. ABHS Office Manager, Jan Winfield, will retire at the end of this year. Jan's service to ABHS over the past 9 years has been invaluable. Archivist Jill Sweetapple has also given her notice and will be leaving ABHS at the end of this year. In the 3 years that she has been with us, Jill has processed dozens of collections and expanded our online catalog to show the vast majority of ABHS's archival collections. Her work, too, has been invaluable. These two transitions in personnel taking place simultaneously will cause some interruption in our work.

It remains a blessing and a privilege to serve the American Baptist Historical Society.

Respectfully submitted,
Priscilla Eppinger, Executive Director