

“We Desire Everything Illustrating the History of Methodism That We Can Procure”: Examining the Methodist Collections at Drew University¹

by Christopher J. Anderson

ABSTRACT: The Methodist Collections at Drew University (Madison, NJ) are among the largest and most influential anywhere. The present essay provides a thoroughly documented overview of the genesis and ongoing development of these collections, from the mid-nineteenth century until the present. Particular attention is given to three major expansions (The George Osborn Collection, The Ezra Squire Tipple Collection, the incorporation of the General Commission on Archives and History Collection), which together have helped make the collections at Drew as important to researchers as they are today.

INTRODUCTION

In an essay in *Managing Archives and Archival Institutions*, authors James Gregory Bradsher and Michele F. Pacifico claim, “A nation’s archives contribute greatly to the creation of the national identity, the national consciousness, and the national heritage. That same sense of identity is enhanced by a business archives, a college archives, or a church archives.”² A second work, by the Society of American Archivists, titled *Describing Archives*, declares, “Archival collections are the natural result of the activities of individuals and organizations and serve as the recorded memory thereof.”³ Similarly, collecting and archiving materials related to the history of the Methodist movement ensures the capture of the collective historical identity of Methodists around the world, especially when properly preserved and protected.

THE PROLIFERATION OF METHODIST SOURCES AND LITERATURE

These repositories of Methodist materials would not exist in their current state apart from the creative endeavors of both individuals and church entities. European Methodists arrived in North America during the mid-18th century. The movement expanded throughout Canada and the American colonies, growing at an exponential rate following the Revolutionary War. In the saddlebags of Methodist circuit riders Bibles, hymnbooks, and church law manuals (e.g., *Doctrines and Discipline of The Methodist Episcopal Church*) by the thousands arrived in the hands and homes of the followers of Wesley. These primary resource documents were created by and distributed to the adherents of several Methodist-affiliated denominations, ranging from the Methodist Protestant Church to The African Methodist Episcopal Church to The Methodist Episcopal Church. Print materials and cultural artifacts were produced and distributed with several results in mind: to document the history and development of the Methodist tradition, to broadcast denominational missionary endeavors, and to promote each particular

¹ The title of the essay is taken from Samuel G. Ayres, *Drew Theological Seminary Library, Second Printed Report, List of Accessions, with Donors’ Names, June 1, 1895 – June 1, 1896* (Madison, NJ: Drew University, 1896).

² James Gregory Bradsher and Michele F. Pacifico, “History of Archives Administration,” in *Managing Archives and Archival Institutions*, James Gregory Bradsher, ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), 32.

³ Society of American Archivists, *Describing Archives: A Content Standard* (Chicago: The Society of American Archivists, 2007), xi.

Christopher J. Anderson is Methodist Librarian and Coordinator of Special Collections, Drew University, Madison, New Jersey.

brand of Methodism to the American people. These documents were also meant to be collected and preserved, in order to prolong the memory of Methodism for future generations and to provide researchers with primary source information.

METHODIST RESOURCES AT DREW: SOME HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Drew Theological Seminary was established in 1867 by The Methodist Episcopal Church. Since the founding of Drew, the library and archival staffs of both Drew University and the General Commission on Archives and History for The United Methodist Church have collected, preserved, and made available its collections of Wesleyana and Methodistica to students, researchers, and genealogists from around the world. Wall Street magnate Daniel Drew, a wealthy Methodist who made his fortune in the cattle, railroad, and steamboat industries, desired to share his wealth with The Methodist Episcopal Church by giving several hundred thousand dollars to purchase land and a library for the denominational school in rural Madison, New Jersey. At the opening celebration of the seminary, newly installed president John McClintock announced that Drew had given \$25,000 toward the development of a library collection, earmarking several thousand dollars for the purchase of books in Europe. Nearly 5,000 volumes were purchased, shipped to Madison, and stored in several designated “library” rooms in the large mansion (now Mead Hall) on the campus of Drew.

On May 19, 1875, Daniel P. Kidder, Professor of Practical Theology and Librarian at Drew Theological Seminary, began his library annual report, “In an institution like this, the influences and agency of a well-selected library must ever be considered as of peculiar importance. Books are the accumulated and accumulating knowledge of the world.”⁴ Kidder’s report to the Board of Trustees, written only eight years after the founding of the school, projected the future course of collection development for Drew Theological Seminary. The present essay charts the historical development of the Methodist collections at Drew from the founding of the school in 1867 to the more recent collaboration between Drew and the General Commission on Archives and History for The United Methodist Church (GCAH).

Drew also became the central repository for published materials produced by The Methodist Episcopal Church. For American Methodists the new library at Drew would become “a depository of all the records of Methodism which we desire to hand down to future generations, the depository of all its history, the historical center of Methodism.”⁵ As the official school for training ministers for The Methodist Episcopal Church, the seminary received materials from the collections of the Missionary Society and the Methodist Book Concern, both located in nearby New York City. These donations helped form the base of a growing library, which by 1880 had reached close to 20,000 volumes.

SOME MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS IN THE GROWTH OF METHODIST RESOURCES AT DREW

The present essay arises from the author’s detailed examination of the annual reports of Drew library directors, the histories of Drew University and Drew Theological School, and additional documentation from The United

⁴ Daniel P. Kidder, “Librarian’s Report, 1875,” Library Records, Folder 1, Drew University Archives, Drew University, Madison, New Jersey, USA.

⁵ Ezra Squire Tipple, *Drew Theological Seminary* (New York: Methodist Book Concern, 1917), 224.

Methodist Church. In the course of this research, the author identified three particularly significant periods of acquisition and collaboration that resulted in the current state of the Methodist collections at Drew University:

- the purchase and donation in 1880 of the George Osborn Collection from England. Anderson Fowler, a wealthy American Methodist layperson, bought the collection, which included manuscript letters, first edition books, and the original death mask of John Wesley, from Osborn.
- the purchase and donation of Methodist materials between 1905 and 1935 by Drew President Ezra Squire Tipple. His collection included several dozen original John and Charles Wesley manuscript letters, first edition Methodist-related tomes, rare periodicals, portraiture, and porcelain busts.
- the arrival in 1982 of the Methodist collection of the General Commission on Archives and History for The United Methodist Church. The arrival of GCAH established the Methodist Center, officially named the United Methodist Archives and History Center at Drew University, as the largest collection of its kind anywhere in the world.

THE GEORGE OSBORN COLLECTION

In 1879, American Bishop John F. Hurst of The Methodist Episcopal Church visited Dr. George Osborn, professor at the Theological Institution of the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Richmond, England. Osborn was an avid collector of manuscript letters and publications related to John and Charles Wesley, including materials exploring the history and theology of the Methodist movement in Europe. Hurst returned to the United States with a fuller appreciation of Osborn's vast collection, and entered into negotiations with wealthy American Methodist layperson Anderson Fowler. Fowler agreed to purchase the Osborn materials and donate the collection to the Drew Library. In recognition of this significant historical donation, the Board of Trustees designated the materials the "Fowler Collection of Methodist Literature."⁶

George Osborn was a second-generation British Methodist, with several ministerial appointments throughout England including Liverpool, Manchester, and London. His parents had been Methodist class leaders for over twenty years and his father, also George Osborn, served as a steward in the Rochester circuit.⁷ The son, George, was a founder of the Evangelical Alliance and served for many years as the secretary of the foreign missions society. He was eventually elected president of the Conference and later appointed professor at the Theological Institution of the Wesleyan Methodist Church.⁸

On July 1, 1880, the New York-based Methodist periodical *Christian Advocate* described Osborn's vast collection including original manuscript letters of John and Charles Wesley, personal diaries of significant Methodists, books, engravings, and an assortment of additional material culture. These items included volumes such as the *Collected Works of John Wesley*, the *Poetical Works of John and Charles Wesley*, and sermons by British Methodist clergy. The collection also contained a large assortment of pamphlets and anti-Methodist literature. Two interesting items

⁶ "Important Literary Gift to the Drew Theological Seminary," *Christian Advocate* (New York), July 1, 1880, 424.

⁷ George Osborn, "Memoir of the Late Mr. George Osborn, of Rochester: By His Eldest Son," *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* (October 1839), 784-803.

⁸ *Minutes of Several Conversations at the One Hundred and Forty-Eighth Yearly Conference of the People Called Methodists, in the Connexion established by the Late Rev. John Wesley, A.M., begun in Nottingham, on Tuesday, July 21st, 1891* (London: Wesleyan-Methodist Book-Room, 2, Castle Street, City Road; sold at 66, Paternoster Row, 1891), 33-37.

included a 17th-century work of Cicero in four volumes with a 1721 autograph of John Wesley on the title page of the second volume. The newspaper article claimed that this signature was one of the earliest autographs of the Methodist founder. Perhaps most intriguing was the acquisition of the original death mask of John Wesley. The mask had been placed on Wesley's face shortly after his death in March 1791 in order to capture his facial features for perpetuity. The mask arrived at Drew in 1880 in a shipment that included the other collected works of the George Osborn Collection.⁹

THE EZRA SQUIRE TIPPLE COLLECTION

During the early 20th century a series of significant acquisitions purchased and donated by Dr. Ezra Squire Tipple arrived at Drew Theological Seminary. Reverend Tipple was a minister, author, and school administrator. Born in 1861, Tipple attended Syracuse University as an undergraduate where he later received his Ph.D. In 1887, he finished his Bachelor of Divinity degree at Drew Theological Seminary and entered ministry for The Methodist Episcopal Church. Known as an eloquent preacher, he served several parishes throughout the United States. In 1905, Tipple returned to Drew as Professor of Practical Theology and in 1912 was installed as the fifth president of the seminary.¹⁰

Tipple was an avid collector and purchaser of British Methodist materials for the Drew Library. During his tenure as school president, Tipple claimed, "The Methodist Church will have at Drew the greatest university of religion on the American continent."¹¹ This claim was particularly accurate regarding the seminary's growing collection of Methodist library and archival materials. Between 1905 and 1935, Tipple purchased several hundred original manuscripts, first-edition rare books, busts, paintings, engravings, and medallions. By 1925, Tipple had in hand more than fifty manuscript letters and several dozen busts of John Wesley alone.¹²

Original paper receipts from booksellers such as Maggs Bros. and Law, Foulsham & Cole of England document the exact prices paid by Tipple for unique and difficult-to-find letters, books, and porcelain busts. One particular Maggs Bros. receipt from March 16, 1921, identifies several John Wesley letters purchased by Tipple ranging in cost from £3 to £5. On October 17, 1936, Ezra Squire Tipple died. At his December 21 memorial service in New York City, family friend and Methodist minister James R. Joy proclaimed, "Probably there exists nowhere else in private hands a collection comprising so many nuggets – autograph letters of Wesley and Asbury, paintings, engravings, portraits or busts of the founders – as he assembled through long years of indefatigable quest."¹³

Of the several hundred items purchased and donated to Drew, two in particular highlight the Tipple Methodist Collection. These are a rare original copy of the Enoch Wood porcelain bust of John Wesley and the last known manuscript letter written by the founder of the Methodist movement. Enoch Wood was a well-known British

⁹ *Christian Advocate* (New York), July 1, 1880, 424.

¹⁰ Nolan B. Harmon, ed. "Ezra Squire Tipple," *The Encyclopedia of World Methodism*, Volume II (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1974), 2349.

¹¹ Cunningham, *University in the Forest: The Story of Drew University*, 159.

¹² *Christian Advocate* (New York), January 8, 1925.

¹³ James R. Joy, "Man of Letters," in *Ezra Squier Tipple: Christian Gentleman, a Record of the Affection of His Friends and Colleagues* (Madison, NJ: Drew University, 1937), 11-12.

potter and creator of sculptures.¹⁴ Wesley had been familiar with Wood's work and sat for him at five hour-long sessions in Burslem, England, in 1781 or 1784. Wesley had modeled for several artists during his lifetime but was particularly impressed with the handicraft of Wood. Wesley confirmed how impressed he was with Wood's work, claiming, of all other works, Wood's was "much the best" even if "it was much too gloomy for me."¹⁵ The likeness even included the representation of a scar on Wesley's forehead received earlier in life at the hands of an unruly mob on one of his many preaching excursions.¹⁶

A second Tipple item purchased and donated to Drew was a letter from John Wesley to William Wilberforce dated February 24, 1791. This well-worn document is the last known letter written by Wesley, and it had remained in the Wilberforce family for nearly 140 years. On July 6, 1931, Tipple purchased the letter at a Sotheby's auction in London, England. Drew's president entered into a bidding war with a least one local buyer, and eventually paid two hundred guineas (approximately £1,000) for the letter.¹⁷ In the document Wesley encouraged his abolitionist friend Wilberforce to continue the quest for the end of slavery in Great Britain. Wesley was also particularly critical of slavery in America, calling the institution "the vilest that ever saw the sun." Today the letter is housed at the United Methodist Archives and History Center at Drew and is one of the most prized possessions of the Drew Methodist Library Collection.

THE GENERAL COMMISSION ON ARCHIVES AND HISTORY COLLECTION

By the fall of 1982 the new facility on the campus of Drew University housed one of the largest collections of Methodist-related material in the world. The collection had been enlarged with the arrival of several tractor trailers from the World Methodist Museum in Lake Junaluska, North Carolina. The new archival home for The United Methodist Church was a climate-controlled special collections library and archives facility, housing both the Methodist collections of Drew University and the General Commission on Archives and History. The repository contains several thousand linear feet of material and over 50,000 print and microform resources, including books, periodicals, and newspapers. The collection is the largest of its kind in the United States and is arguably the largest collection on global Methodism in the world.

In 1968, the Evangelical United Brethren Church and The Methodist Church merged to create The United Methodist Church. The formation of the new denomination required an official repository to house the United Brethren, Evangelical Church, and Methodist materials that had been collected since the 18th century. The merger resulted in the creation of a new church agency called the General Commission on Archives and History. The commission had housed its collection at Lake Junaluska from 1968 to 1982. The possibility of locating GCAH in an academic setting had percolated in the minds of Methodist leaders throughout the 1970s. These considerations led administrators of The United Methodist Church to reach out to several institutions including Scarritt College in Nashville, Duke University in Durham, North Carolina, and Drew University in Madison, New Jersey.

¹⁴ Arthur D. Cummings, *A Portrait in Pottery* (London: The Epworth Press, 1962), 14-19. One of Wood's earliest pieces, a Coat of Arms of the Wood family, was completed at the age of eleven. This piece is currently housed at the British Museum in London. Wood was trained at the Bell Works of Josiah Wedgwood and became a master potter at the age of 24.

¹⁵ Ibid, 19. There is debate on the exact dating of Wesley's sitting. Some accounts place Wesley with Wood in 1781 and others place them together in Wood's studio in 1784.

¹⁶ Lavere Webster, "John Wesley Art of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," *Worship Arts* (January-February, 1994), 10.

¹⁷ John Telford, "Two Notable Wesley Letters," *The Methodist Recorder*, July 16, 1931. See also Ezra Squier Tipple, "Some Unpublished Letters of John Wesley," *The Christian Advocate* (New York), October 8, 1931, 1219-1220.

In 1978, commission members of GCAH selected Drew University as the new home for the national archives of The United Methodist Church. Drew's administration promised to raise funds for the construction of a new state-of-the-art archival facility to house both GCAH material and Drew's historic Methodist collection. In October 1980, a groundbreaking ceremony was held and included United Methodist Church bishops, clergy, and laity, as well as Drew University administration, faculty, staff, and students. Using the same symbolic shovel that parted the ground for the construction of the Rose Library in 1938, GCAH and Drew staff dug into campus soil, initiating a two-year building project culminating in the construction of the United Methodist Archives and History Center at Drew University. The cost of the construction of the Center was set at \$2.75 million. The dimensions of the facility were drawn up at 33,000 square feet with 300,000 cubic feet of storage in 27 rooms and vaults throughout the complex.

In the fall of 1982, the building opened to much fanfare locally and throughout the constituency of The United Methodist Church. The purpose of the Center was to combine under one roof the collections of Drew and the GCAH. This new center was meant to attract a range of individuals, from local church historians and laypersons to researchers and professors from around the world. Dr. Kenneth E. Rowe, former Methodist Librarian and Professor of Church History at Drew Theological School, was instrumental in negotiations concerning the arrival of the material from North Carolina. According to documentation related to the construction of the Center, Rowe lightheartedly called the building a "people sandwich" with the upper and lower levels of the building containing the research library and archival materials owned by both Drew and GCAH. In the middle of the "sandwich" were the people and the offices for the staff of Drew and GCAH as well as a reading room stocked with the latest reference materials, museum spaces, and a media room.¹⁸

The GCAH brought several thousand cubic feet of material to Drew. These materials included Methodist-related board and agency records, the papers of former bishops, several hundred thousand photographs, and slide shows of missionary presence around the world, as well as copies of Methodist motion pictures and television programs. The move of GCAH to Drew also brought several specialists in archival practice and academic reference to campus. Items of particular interest include the original manuscript General Conference minutes, memorials, and petitions dating back to 1800. These primary documents highlight the day-to-day business and ministerial activities of the Church and compliment the more formal published volumes of the same general sessions. Thus, one can read original handwritten petitions written in ink and pencil from the 1832 and 1844 General Conferences positioning the church for and against the institution of slavery. These pieces of paper include the marked-up scribbles and marginalia from committee work which never made the final printed edition.

Over 250,000 photographs related to missionary and local church work highlight a second major GCAH collection. These images provide historic snapshots of the visual culture of global Methodism and provide researchers with clues concerning how Methodists framed themselves and their ministries before the camera. A third addition was the several thousand volumes of annual conference reports from The Methodist Episcopal Church; The Methodist Episcopal Church, South; The Methodist Protestant Church, The Methodist Church, and The United Methodist Church. These published documents represent the recorded minutes of annual conference meetings dating from

¹⁸ "Features of Archives Building," Memo, November 20, 1981, Relocation/Drew University, Correspondence and Related Events (Madison, NJ: General Commission on Archives and History, 1978-1982), Folder 1.

the late 18th century and provide researchers and genealogists with original and published records of the Methodist movement. For genealogists the listings of ministers and their places of appointment provide a detailed sketch of the movements and locations of family members connected with the Wesleyan tradition.

CONCLUSION

For nearly 150 years, Drew University has collected the books, manuscripts, busts, artwork, and material culture related to the rich history of global Methodism. Three particular additions, the George Osborn Collection, the Ezra Squire Tipple Collection, and the arrival of the General Commission on Archives and History Collection, substantially increased the size and extent of the library and archives. Students at Drew and scholars from around the world use the materials housed in the United Methodist History and Archives Center for course assignments, scholarly journal articles, and book projects. The arrival of GCAH in 1982 created a unique collaborative arrangement between Drew and The United Methodist Church. The joint arrangement now represents one of the largest collections of Methodistica and Wesleyana in the world.

