

Uniting Church South Australia Historical Society

1. Introduction

As an agency of the SA Synod the UCSA Historical Society has two main objectives: encouraging members to celebrate those who founded, inspired and sustained congregations in their life and mission and ensuring that historical records, documents and resources are kept safe and accessible in the future.

We carry our history with us to understand who we are. Congregations are always living and serving through times of transition and past experiences, present encounters and future possibilities are at work in our minds. By reflecting on our history, we affirm and discover what we have learnt and achieved. These insights then become the foundations we build on. Change will come, we know that, and affirming the past is not about nostalgia but understanding how congregations have discovered purpose and direction.

1.1 Honouring founders and contributors to the life and mission of the church in South Australia

The Society has three main ways to address this objective. Our 2024-26 program has included various formats including on site meetings, June AGMs, conferences and forums. 2025 events included an all-day bus tour to Meningie and Raukkan. The 2026 program features on-line Zoom meetings, an Open Day at the History Centre in April, an exhibition at Scots church during SA's History Festival and a bus tour to Strathalbyn.

Members look forward to reading the quarterly newsletter that includes news items, valuable articles about congregations and those who are remembered for their inspiring and diverse ministries. Seven editions from September 2024 to March 2026 included well researched articles and biographies of Gordon Davidson, Ann Roberts, Mary Ann Aldersely, Errol Chinner and Kate Cocks. Tributes have also been recorded to those who have supported and encouraged members to take church history seriously; Charles Biggs, Gowan Armstrong, Glen Edwards, Norah Norris, Joan Lodge and Joy Dunning. The history of congregations illustrates the way social trends have implications for both church and community life. Stories recorded have included Henley Beach, Whyalla, Burnside, All Saints Plympton, Seaton, Elizabeth, Oodnadatta, Western Link and several southern churches including Christies Beach, Noarlunga and Seaford. Thank you to authors and those who have contributed insights for this ongoing work.

1.2 Access to History Records

In 2027 we will be celebrating 50 years since the formation of the Uniting Church in Australia. On 22 June 1977, 216 members of the Inaugural Assembly met at the Wesley Centre Pitt St Sydney and

resolved to form the new church. A jubilee year is a time to reflect on the past, be thankful and learn from our experience of being on the way to a promised end with both its ups and downs!

Congregations, Presbyteries, Synods and the Assembly are planning events to commemorate and remind us of those whose gifts and commitment led to founding of an Australian church committed to covenanting, justice and mission. One date is already set as the UCA's 18th Assembly will meet at the Adelaide Town Hall from the 8 July 2027.

Anniversaries are a time to discover and find inspiration from those who were called to lead the church into a new day. The UCSA Historical Society is able to assist members and congregations to discover more about those who were called to serve over 50 years ago. Biographies, photos, articles and other records are available to inform and encourage us today.

Members of the society are also active in supporting events organised by the UCA National History Society. Five SA members presented papers at the October 2025 conference held in Canberra. Others are involved in the May annual history conference organised by the SA Church History Network. The theme for 2026 is "The Changing Shape of Christianity in South Australia 1945-2000" and 14 papers will be presented on the day.

1.3 Ensuring that records, documents and resources are kept secure and accessible

The Society manages the storage and preservation of historical records and serves to ensure they are accessible to those aiming to research local, family and church history. This responsibility has been one of our major challenges over the past 20 months as congregations come to value the significance of this service.

History Centre staff and volunteers undertake many tasks in relation to sorting and storing donated material including books and records. Updating indexes and maintaining an inventory of items is important for those who enquire and undertake research. Thank you to volunteers from Genealogy SA who assist by scanning records for easy access. Other tasks have involved working to relocate equipment, furniture and materials in the refurbished areas.

After more than 25 years on site at the 100-year former redbrick church building at 44A East Ave Black Forest, we have undertaken improvements and essential upgrade work. Renovations have included access ramp to a new south side entrance that leads to a welcoming reception and display area. Floor reinforcement in the main hall has made it possible to install a second compactus unit to provide additional working area and storage space. Two former vestry rooms are now comfortable work rooms for sorting incoming records and meetings. The cost of this work was almost \$170,000 and architect, builders and Synod Property services were very helpful, positive and ensured the work was finished on time.

2. Generous legacy of Colin Watson

In our planning and upgrade work, Council members were reminded again of the generous legacy of Colin Watson, that that made these improvements possible. South Australian churches benefit from Colin's bequest, and we have one room named after Colin who was a member of the Parkside West

Methodist Church and Unley pharmacist. In the past year additional income has been received from a second property and membership fees continue to be a vital part of our income.

3. Council, Staff and Volunteers

All the above tasks and achievements would not be possible without the gifts of time and energy of volunteers and staff. Twelve members of the council meet six times a year and current officers are:

Rev. Dr Dean Eland, President

Rev. David Houston, Deputy President

Rev. Leanne Davis, Secretary

Robert Backhouse, Treasurer

Council members: Gaye Brown, Pat Button, Val Canty, Andrew Clarke, Darryl Dyson,

Judy Eland, Rosemary Hocking and Dr Don Hopgood.

Part-time staff and volunteers work at the History Centre, 44A East Ave Black Forest, which is open on Wednesday from 1.00 to 4.00pm for enquiries and to drop off records. Rosemary Hocking is the Records Manager and Rev. Leanne Davis is Promotions, Communications and Administrative Officer. Val Canty and Gaye Brown are History Centre Managers, and Alice Hammer serves as the SA Synod Archivist and Records Officer.

Annual or life membership of the society is open to individuals and congregations. Annual membership fee is \$20, and life membership is \$250. Currently we have 86 members (this includes 13 organisations and congregations as members).

The society's monthly "What's On Update", quarterly newsletter, Facebook and web site will keep you up to date with stories and events. The website includes access to "On This Day" a 365-day calendar of turning point events, including celebrating foundation stones, the opening and closing of buildings. These events are also shared each day on our Facebook page. Interest in our Facebook page is growing and includes new insights and records for our collection.

Our website: <https://historicalsociety.unitingchurch.org.au>

On This Day calendar of celebrations and commemorations:

<https://historicalsociety.unitingchurch.org.au/on-this-day/>

Our Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/UCAHistoricalSocietySA>

As we plan ahead for the next two years 2027-2028, we are conscious that anniversary events are significant moments for many. We hope and pray that members of the Uniting Church in SA will find encouragement as we celebrate the past and be inspired to plan for the future.

Rev. Dr Dean Eland

President – UC(SA) Historical Society

6 April 2026



The Uniting Church in Australia
Synod of South Australia