

Synod '24



Uniting Church SA Historical Society

1. Introduction

The Council of the UCSA Historical Society has met on seven occasions since the 2023 AGM. Members of the Council are the Rev Dr Dean Eland President, Rev David Houston Deputy President, Robert Backhouse Treasurer and Gaye Brown, Pat Button, Val Canty, Darryl Dyson, Judy Eland, Rosemary Hocking and Dr Don Hopgood. Membership bylaws of the Council require a minimum of 10 and a maximum of 16 members.

The Council has two main responsibilities: encouraging and supporting congregations and agencies to tell their story and ensuring that archival records are secure and accessible. Our collection of documents has grown over the past 14 months as churches and agencies deposit minutes and newsletters for safekeeping. The brochure, "Dealing with Historical Records" describes the Assembly's archival policy, the role of Synods and UC history societies.

<https://historicalsociety.unitingchurch.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Dealing-with-Historical-Records.pdf>

1.1 Challenges, Collaboration and Innovation

This year's History Festival has raised awareness of the challenges we have in common with other SA history groups. In March the History Trust of SA surveyed a wide range of agencies as part of their "South Australian Stories Initiative (SASSI)". The survey affirmed the extensive and diverse forms of research being undertaken across the state. Insights include the importance of encouraging and recruiting volunteers and finding ways to involve younger generations. Survey recommendations include finding ways to 'join the dots' between organisations, enthusiasts, local, family and institutional histories and to encourage the depth and breadth of research and storytelling state-wide.

At the closing session of the Festival on 31 May, positive comments were shared about the importance of collaboration and affirming what has been achieved. Several speakers claimed that SA's festival is the world's largest in terms of numbers and events. We were also encouraged by the launch of a new edition of "The Wakefield Companion to South Australian History" (792 pages!). No other Australian state has this resource to draw on.

These statewide insights have affirmed our priorities that include research, publications, grants to provide resources for anniversary occasions and public events and participation of congregations in SAs History Festival in May. The society is committed to assist those who are sharing insights that arise from the long-time ministry of local congregations and agencies in SA. The festival also demonstrates that there are new and creative ways to share our history and the church's continuing

ministry in the neighborhood. The City of Unley for example produced a digital Front Yard Slide Shows program that is a storytelling project inviting residents to make a slide show about the history of their house. Since 2022, a growing collection of short films has been made that reveal untold stories about the past and the present. In 2024 one site on the accessible web site included photos and comment about the former Unley Methodist church on King Willam Rd.

Yes, we are looking back but research is not a nostalgic exercise but an opportunity to understand how we have arrived at this point, what there is to celebrate and discover how our past has implications for the future.

1.2 Telling our Story

1.2.1

The UCSAHS has an ongoing commitment to encourage and support those who are finding ways to share their story. Feature articles in the quarterly newsletter have included reflections on the influence of SA families. The October 2023 edition shared two stories of the Kiek family, Winifred and Edward. The December/January 2024 edition includes the story of the 1922 mission evangelist Aimee Semple McPherson, and the March 2024 edition included the history of the Covenanting Relationship between the UAICC and UCA. The June 2024 edition feature article is titled "In the Praise of God" A gathered story about the One-Hundred-year contribution of the George William Chinner family to South Australian Methodist Church Music and Hymnody. The September edition includes a feature article on the life of Senator Davidson, a tribute to Charles Biggs and new insights about the early years of the church in Whyalla.

Other shorter articles included reflections on the About Face reunion and a tribute for the long-time commitment of Jim Everett who was author, enthusiast and advisor about the history of Methodism in SA. We also expressed our appreciation to Malcolm Wilson who retired as Synod liaison advisor in November.

We appreciated the interest shown by the Moderator, Rev Peter Morel, former moderators, Dr Don Hopgood, Dr Deidre Palmer and Rev Sue Eilis who were guests at the AGM in June. In a Q&A session they shared insights into what they discovered about congregations at anniversaries and special occasions. Synod officers, Rev Sue Page and Alice Hammer are our contact with the state library archive collection and these records include baptismal, marriage and funeral registers and church council minutes.

1.2.2

Our web page continues to be updated; links have been arranged to ensure current information can be accessed via the home page. Links include FAQs (e.g. how do I find baptismal records and a section, "On this Day" that assists readers to identify and add personal and family comments associated with congregations across the state. <https://historicalsociety.unitingchurch.org.au/on-this-day/>

365 days a year information is also accessible through Facebook and includes daily entries from our photo collection, history booklets, anniversary events including laying of foundation stones, opening services, commemoration plaques and artefacts <https://www.facebook.com/UCAHistoricalSocietySA/>

A series of UCSAHS lectures about SA church history are now digitised and can be downloaded from the national UCA history collection, Illuminate <https://illuminate.recollect.net.au/>

The 365 days a year information is also accessible through Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/UCAHistoricalSocietySA/> This work began as a 365-day calendar on the web site and provides daily entries including items from our collection of photos, covers of history booklets and artefacts including trowels used in laying foundation stones. The Facebook page has been active for 12 months and has over 200 followers.

1.2.3

Financial assistance in 2024 have supported the newly formed SA Church History Network and a successful 4 May conference on the theme, "Paradise of Dissent Revisited" involved 100 participants and 19 papers were shared from across almost all mainline SA church traditions. Grants also assisted society members to attend the fourth UC National History conference held in Darwin in August on the theme, "Truth Telling: From Colonising to Covenanting". The conference program included the 150th anniversary of the Darwin Memorial congregation, 100 years of the former Methodist Mission at Milingimbi and a visit to Nungalingya College who were celebrating 50 years as community and ministry educators.

The society grants program encourages research and storytelling and this year publications have included the book, "Congregational/Uniting Church Henley Beach 1883-2023. A comprehensive history of the church from its beginnings until today", David Hilliard's 2004 publication, "One Faith, Many Voices: essays in South Australian Church History" and "Growing Up-Reaching Out: Forty Years Christ Church Uniting Wayville 1983-2023" by Lorriane Powers.

1.2.4

Staff and volunteers at the History Centre continue to receive enquiries, conduct research and produce indexes of records including ministers, lay leaders and congregations. Ongoing research, sorting and storage of records by regular Wednesday volunteers ensures that documents and relevant information will be accessible in years to come. Volunteers from Genealogy SA continue to digitize onsite records, and this service now provides easy access for those researching local history.

1.2.5

Staff priorities include cataloguing books to be added to the collection, updating indexes used in historical research (including adding details to the minister's database), adding to the inventory of items held in the History Centre, and assisting with general research for public enquiries. One index example is the James Haslam's 1836-1886 "History of Wesleyan Methodism in South Australia".

2. Property Upgrade

Plans for property upgrade include floor reinforcement for an additional compactus unit, storage, new south side entrance with ramp access and structural work to provide working space for sorting. Synod has approved this work at an estimated cost of \$150,000 and property services are assisting with the tendering process that is underway. During this work it is likely that access to the history centre at 44A East Ave Black Forest will be restricted and information about these limitations will be noted on the web site.

Rev Dr Dean Eland

President, Uniting Church South Australia Historical Society

10 October 2024



The Uniting Church in Australia
Synod of South Australia