

ARCHIVIST MINISTRY - INTRODUCTION

The Parish Archivist role at St. Paul's was filled this year, through the appointment of this writer, by Father Don Davidson. The story of our past is written on the walls and windows of our historic building, and documented in an extensive collection of photographs, documents, and artifacts which were left to our care for the benefit of the parish and the community at large. Through the years, these historical treasures have been collected, organized, safeguarded, and preserved by good stewards who came before us. The work today, continues in that tradition and is intended to ensure that our story will be preserved to be told for generations to come, just as it has been since the founding of the parish 183 years ago this month.



THE GIFT OF OUR HISTORY

Unlike the tangible assets and items that we can see, read, count, and handle, the story of our past lives only in the writings of those who came before and the memories and stories that we share with others. The history of our community is inextricably linked to the stories of St. Paul's members throughout the ages. St. Paul's was founded and nurtured by those who settled in the wilderness west, workers, farmers, millers, merchants, lumbermen, carriage makers, and automobile pioneers. Our task, as stewards of our tangible and intangible past, is to recognize the abundant gift of our history; and put that gift to their best and highest use, through the preservation and telling of our storied past.

ARCHIVAL PRIORITIES - 2023

Opening Doors - The earliest archival work has been ongoing for many years, through the study, care, and involvement of parishioners who collected and saved documents, those who organized and led church tours, and those who helped to preserve and tell our story in the community. The value of their contribution, welcoming guests and telling the story cannot possibly be overstated, as those stories and tours may well contribute to the first impression and appreciation of those who enter our historic building.

Welcoming Neighbors - The 150th anniversary of our 'new' church building provided a vehicle for us to reach out and renew historically significant relationships with individuals and institutions throughout our community. Early outreach efforts were almost always undertaken with an initial call and invitation to community members to visit for a private tour of our historic space. Without exception, these dozens of visits have given way to new or renewed relationships and enthusiastic partnerships with cultural and educational institutions, local non-profits, historical societies, and law enforcement agencies.

Along the way, initial cold calls and private tours led to opportunities for us to welcome the Genesee County Historical Society into our space for their regular monthly meetings, and we've shared our Barth Hall dining room with the local Genealogical Society at the venue for their annual dinner.

ST. PAUL'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH - 2023 PARISH ARCHIVIST REPORT

Sharing Gifts - The storage and physical preservation of fragile documents was taken on as an early priority. In consultation with the Canonical Archivist of the Episcopal Church of America, and by motion of the vestry, St. Paul's entered into a custodial agreement with the University of Michigan-Flint, Francis Willson Thomson Library, Genesee County Collections Center, for the storage, conservation, preservation, digitization, and academic access to our earliest Sacramental records. Although St. Paul's is canonically obligated to retain legal 'ownership' of these records, our deposit agreement ensures that these fragile and deteriorating documents will be cared for and stored in an appropriately secure and environmentally stable archival setting.

Building Community - One of the institutions first engaged through a private tour in 2020, was the Sloan Museum of Discovery, the county's premier historical museum. Coinciding with the major redesign and rebuilding of Sloan's physical plant, was the development of a 'Community Exhibit Space', to be co-curated by the Sloan and various community partners. St. Paul's has been blessed and is fortunate to be the first community organization to utilize the new exhibit space as another opportunity to tell the story of our community's past, through the stories of our earliest parishioners and leaders.

NEW/ONGOING PROJECTS

In addition to the ongoing work, addressed in the priorities above, a small team of parishioners (in consultation with the archivist from University of Michigan - Flint) has initiated a careful review and examination of our historically significant documents, books, photos, and artifacts that remain in our possession. Our hope is to complete an accurate inventory of these materials, again in consultation and with assistance from the UM-Flint Archivist.

Our storage vault, although physically secure and reasonably protected from fire, is not climate controlled. Sadly, some of our most historically significant documents and bibles are severely damaged due to inappropriate environmental storage conditions. It is our hope to identify these and other 'at risk' items, and prioritize them for conservation and preservation where possible, and identify appropriate storage options for these treasures.

The archival team is also working to help share the story of our past, within our walls and among our parishioners. The hope is to help each other to recognize the story of our past as an asset, a gift to be cared for and shared, with the intent to engage the wider community in the work as good stewards of our shared history. As the parish approaches the 150th anniversary of our first service in this building, we hope to collect stories, update brochures, and prepare exhibits to bring the stories of our past to life. We have much to learn from these stories, and good stewardship of our past requires that we use it to our best purposes today. As the saying goes, the history of St. Paul's, from our earliest days, certainly repeats itself... or at least rhymes across the years.

2022 PROJECT TEAM

Many thanks to team members, Joyce Leroue and Jane Bingham. If you would like to learn more about our project, collaborative community work, or becoming a tour docent, please contact Walt.