

**Adventism and Adventist History: Sesquicentennial Reflections
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**Build It and They Will Come:
Adventist Archives Are Magnets to Historical Sources**

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Piecing together Adventist history is by necessity a collaborative endeavor. As primary sources emerge, there is a need for a concerted effort to ensure their preservation, accessibility and incorporation into an existing historical framework. Adventist archives are positioned to play a vital role in that process.

With just ten years of operation, the Adventist Heritage Center at Southwestern Adventist University is a case study in how even small archival facilities can contribute to gathering sources, making them available and promoting their integration into the fabric of Adventist history.

The obvious contribution of this type of denominational archive is, of course, to the history of the parent institution. With Southwestern celebrating 120 years of history this year, for example, there has been a surge of requests for photographs, records and articles about the history of the university and the relevant broader contexts of Adventist and American history.

Keene Industrial Academy opened on January 7, 1914. The historical landmarks on the path to today's Southwestern Adventist University are not unlike that of other denominational higher education campuses in North America. It had a decidedly humble beginning. Three teachers, 56 students, one repurposed building. In words believed to be from an early graduate, "the school was founded in poverty, supported by toil, sanctified by prayer."

The school's founders planned its opening amid the Panic of 1893, the worst economic depression experienced in the nation until then. The downturn, caused by the bursting of a railroad bubble, temporarily hampered the growth that was typical of the American Gilded Age. In Dallas, until then the hub of Adventist activity in the state, banks and industries failed. Cotton, the mainstay of the region's rural economy, dropped deeply in price.

I suppose that while it may have seem unreasonable to set up a school in such a negative economic environment, it was a buyer's market nonetheless. Once the purchase of a large tract of land in the vicinity of Cleburne was ratified by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, and effectively made by local church leaders, a migration wave was set off.

With dogged determination and a vision for the education of the next generation, Adventist families started moving to the area that would eventually become Keene months before the school opened. Pitching tents as makeshift quarters and logging the once heavily treed sliver of the Texas oak woods and prairies, the Adventist settlement started to take shape.

The Academy rode a wave of ensuing prosperity. Rapid growth in enrollment, staff and facilities during its first decade of existence led to its turning into Southwestern Junior College in 1916. However, challenges loomed in the horizon. The following decades would see America involved in two world wars that included military drafts, a period of accelerated urbanization and secularization, and an even greater economic depression.

The school emerged from the first half of the 20th century battered but poised to expand its academic programs. By 1963 Southwestern started offering four-year college degrees. The school's name changed to Southwestern Union College. Steady progress accompanied the next few years, but a concern over surplus capacity in Adventist higher education in North America once threatened a possible closure or consolidation with another campus. Local opposition was strong. In the words of then Southwestern Union Conference President Ben Leach, anyone pursuing that idea in higher church hierarchy would have had to fight him and others "right down to the last tumbleweed."

Expansion and growth continued. By the early 1990s Southwestern was offering graduate-level degrees, and in 1995 the name changed yet again from the 1977 designation of Southwestern Adventist College to Southwestern Adventist University. Enrollment peaked at the turn the century and athletic programs thrived. Today, Southwestern remains the only four-year college in Texas' Johnson County. It is notable for its highly diverse student body, its comparable affordability, and a remarkable dinosaur excavation research project in the Lance Formation of eastern Wyoming.

Putting together this kind of narrative is a natural function of an archival facility such as Southwestern's. In addition, by virtue of their very existence denominational archives like this one are also magnets to historical sources that enrich and add layers to Adventist historiography. Beyond records from early church adherents in Texas, such as John Rust or Henry Dortch, which as Karl Wilcox will argue later today help us link micro and macro history, Southwestern's Adventist Heritage Center also draws in sources outside the Adventist realm.

In one such case, a senior lecturer at the University of London recently drew our attention to a serendipitous visit prominent American literary historian and essayist William Garrott Brown paid to Keene at the turn of the 20th century, and his subsequent

report in the Boston Evening Transcript. Brown's insightful account provides a glimpse into how Adventists at the time related to evolving social values—a rather relevant topic today.

Scouting Texas for hints of the development of social values, William Garrott Brown was amazed at the sight of Keene. Wherever his eyes turned, there was evidence of a hard working community with high values. Young and at the peak of his career, Brown had gotten an education at Harvard, and written several books, including well-received biographies of Andrew Jackson and Stephen A. Douglas. His tour of the South for the Boston Evening Transcript had started in Virginia. Near the end of the tour, a railroad stop at Cleburne included a seemingly unscheduled ride around Keene.

“The Adventists have been here, I believe, only six or seven years,” Brown reported in 1904, “but all about the little village are the marks of a vigorous, intelligent, successful industry.” Somehow the sight of cleared land, thoroughly cultivated fields, and modest but sturdy structures managed to leave a lasting good impression of the Adventists. “A thriftier little community I never saw. And all is the work of people whose chief aim in this world is to be ready to leave it at a moment's notice,” he quipped. “Their faces showed not merely intelligence, but culture,” he added. In his eyes, Keene was an archetype of the evolving work values of the American South at the turn of the century, and he could not help wondering what the relationship was between the industriousness and the religion of that community.

In tandem with the opening of its Adventist Heritage Center, Southwestern inaugurated an Ellen G. White Research Center ten years ago. Parallel to the White Estate's commitment to release electronic access to the full collection of Ellen White's letters and manuscripts in 2015, Southwestern's Research Center has been developing an electronic version of the index to Ellen White's letters and manuscripts.

This index, comprised of topical, biographical and addressee components, is believed to have been created in the 1930s, with additions since. At the time, the index undoubtedly represented an improvement over Marian Davis' scrapbooks, and perhaps it evolved from the work of Ellen White's most prominent assistant. While it may appear a little too late to care about an obscure bibliographic resource heretofore only available in card catalogs, it is my sense that with the launch of a web version of the topical index to Ellen White's letters and manuscripts over a year ago, we have begun to fill a gap in online resources on Adventist history. We do not expect these indexes to get the level of use that the upcoming full-text release will probably get, but I am confident that for students and scholars, they will remain useful access points to Ellen White's literary corpus.

Thus by gathering and preserving relevant historical records from both denominational and external sources, as well as by contributing to the improvement of access to such records, all denominational archival facilities, even small ones, remain vital to Adventist historiography.