



Collection Development Policy

Board Approved

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About the Historical Society

Mission, Vision, and Mandate

Our Mission

The mission of the Disciples of Christ Historical Society is to preserve and proclaim the story of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) within the context of the broader Stone-Campbell tradition out of which it grows.

Our Vision

Celebrating our past and telling its hard truths, we seek a church empowered to make history now and thus to shape a future ever more faithful to God's dream of unity and justice for all.

Our Mandate

We are a general ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) with the special mandate to serve all three major streams of the Stone-Campbell movement: the Churches of Christ, the Christian Churches/Churches of Christ, and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). We preserve records and artifacts common to our traditions and foster collaboration and conversation through historical research, publications, and lectures.

Old Stories, New Stories

At the heart of our collecting practice is the sacred work of storytelling. As our mission indicates, we exist "to preserve and proclaim the story of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the broader Stone-Campbell Movement." Storytelling, in the sense we mean it, is not just documenting facts and events, but it is telling a living narrative that is shaped and reshaped by the faith, struggle, and witness of Disciples in the past and today.

Storytelling shapes our collecting practices: we seek materials that help us—and those we serve—tell the story of this movement in all its complexity. We undertake this task with humility and a sense of responsibility, recognizing that collecting and studying history involves choices: what to include, what to leave out. When these choices are made uncritically and without care, they often reflect the perspectives and privileges of those who collect and tell them—historically white and male—while marginalizing or erasing the contributions of others. Disciples history is abundantly more diverse than past narratives have suggested. Our collecting practice must, therefore, be intentional

in elevating underrepresented voices, communities, and ministries, helping us tell the many stories—not just one story—of Disciples.

Storytelling, for us, is not merely documentary work; it is a sacred, even sacramental practice. The stories we preserve and tell weave together the human and divine, bearing witness to the presence and movement of God in the individual and collective lives of Disciples. The stories we tell, therefore, are willing to dwell within paradox, embracing ambiguity and contradiction, holding our unity and diversity together in tension. It is guided in this sense by a spirit of reconciliation, enabling us to embrace contradictions rather than resolve them, to inhabit paradoxes rather than flee from them. Prayer, spiritual practices, and theological reflection must accompany this kind of storytelling.

In this spirit, we actively engage congregations, individuals, regions, and ministries to identify the materials that best express their unique contributions to our shared history. Our collecting practices seek justice and wholeness in pursuing a ministry of faithful remembrance. To preserve these stories with care is to proclaim God's ongoing work in, through, and sometimes in spite of the church.

Covenantal Relationships and Responsibilities

The Historical Society operates within the covenantal polity of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), which emphasizes relationships of mutual accountability and partnership among congregations, regions, and general ministries. For Disciples, covenant is rooted in the new covenant established in Jesus Christ, binding God, the individual believer, and the wider community together in mutual responsibility. Unlike a contract, which centers on individual rights, a covenant emphasizes interdependence, shared resources, and accountability before God.

Covenant is not merely an organizing structure but participation in God's covenant of love, shaping how we carry out our ministry of preserving and sharing the church's story. The Historical Society fulfills its ministry in covenant with these varied expressions of the church, offering support in working with their historical records. We consult with general ministries, regional ministries, and congregations interested in placing non-current records in archival care, providing inventory forms and guidance on assessing the enduring value of historical materials. We also work with expressions of the church that wish to maintain their own historic records by offering preservation, organization, and digitization advice. Ministries that have placed records in our care are welcome to use our reference, research, and digitization services. Above and beyond archival services, our staff is available to advise ministries

conducting oral histories, planning anniversary celebrations, and developing written accounts or multimedia presentations of their history.

The Historical Society does not serve as the records manager or official repository of denominational, regional, or congregational records. In this, we differ from the archival programs of most other mainline Protestant denominations, and our distinctiveness in this regard is rooted in our covenantal polity. While we hope that general, regional, and congregational ministries will contact us prior to disposing of their historical records, all expressions of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) are free to manage their historical records as they wish.

This covenantal framework also positions us to engage across the entirety of the Stone-Campbell Movement, including Disciples congregations, Churches of Christ, and Christian Churches/Churches of Christ, as well as scholars and institutions connected to these traditions.

Purpose and Use of Materials

The collections of the Historical Society are acquired and stewarded for use in academic and avocational research and spiritual formation. We seek to curate a collection that serves the interests and needs of this work. We assess historical materials based on the degree to which they inform us about our past, not on their monetary value. In fact, a “treasure” to us may hold little or no market value.

The curatorial decisions we make tend to support the following uses of the collection:

- *Academic research:* As an institution of higher learning, DCHS routinely assists academic researchers, providing support for rigorous scholarly inquiry across multiple disciplines, including religious studies, history, sociology, and theology, among others. Researchers benefit from interacting with primary sources in the collection, which provide the foundation for original scholarship.
- *Student research:* DCHS supports student researchers by making selected materials from our holdings accessible online for use in coursework, theses, dissertations, and ministry formation. We work with instructors and faculty who teach Stone-Campbell history courses to identify these resources and make them available.
- *Congregational History:* DCHS supports local church historians and ministerial leaders by providing assistance in researching their congregational histories and providing context for those histories within the broader Stone-Campbell Movement. Additionally, we offer consultation on maintaining, organizing, and preserving congregational historical records.

- *Denominational History of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)*: DCHS's collections provide a wealth of information about the formation and development of Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) general and regional ministries. Historical documents and photographs augment the celebration of significant anniversaries and offer insight into ministries' activities that can wisely inform present and future actions.
- *Journalism and Writing*: DCHS maintains a diverse collection of primary sources that provide valuable witness to the events, people, practices, and beliefs that have shaped the Stone-Campbell Movement. For journalists and authors, these first-hand accounts offer unique insights into the past and support research founded in authenticity and accuracy. Engaging directly with these materials deepens historical understanding, reveals nuance, and can inspire new avenues for research and writing.
- *Family History of Missionaries, Clergy, Leaders*: DCHS offers a meaningful experience for family historians seeking to explore the spiritual legacy of their ancestors' mission, clergy, and religious leadership work. Whether through diaries and personal accounts, sermons, or records of missionary endeavors, family historians can gain deeper insight into the lives, faith, and service of their predecessors. These materials provide a greater understanding of their contributions to the Stone-Campbell Movement.
- *Spiritual Exploration*: In the Stone-Campbell movement, the study of history is both an intellectual endeavor and a spiritual discipline. The historical record reveals our forebears' relationships with God and efforts to live and worship as faithful Christian disciples. Through the careful reading of diaries, letters, and ministry records, researchers can deepen their understanding and practice of faith as inheritors of the Stone-Campbell tradition.

By necessity, these same curatorial decisions tend to make our collection less useful for the following activities:

- *Genealogical Research*: We welcome those engaged in genealogical research, but often cannot provide the kinds of records they seek. However, we occasionally can support their research through our biographical reference files. We don't subscribe to genealogical databases, and our library collection does not support genealogical researchers well.
- *Seeking records of baptism, marriage, funeral, or membership*: DCHS has not actively or systematically collected these records. They can sometimes be found in congregational records, but many congregations have not sent those records to DCHS. We actively collect materials that help us understand the distinct contributions or unique identity of a congregation. We work with congregations to identify other repositories, often regional or local historical societies, as well

as college/university/seminary archives and special collections, for donating those records.

- *Beginning the research process*: We are better equipped to serve researchers who have already conducted some library research and have identified people, congregations, and ministries of interest for deeper research. We are more than happy to direct those in the early stages of research toward resources (secondary, published materials, etc.) that can help them develop an archival research strategy.
 - For instance, if you are researching your congregation's history, you might start with published histories in your church library or local community historical society, or information in your congregation's archives about past anniversary celebrations.
 - Or, if you are a student writing a paper, narrow down your topic by conducting research in your college, university, or seminary library. Identify specific people, places, ministries, and organizations for which you seek unique primary sources to inform your research questions.
- *Legal research* - Although some records in our holdings may have legal value, we don't maintain or organize records for legal purposes.

Curation for Our Mission

The Historical Society is a collecting repository that selects records from the denomination and its ministries, as well as personal papers and organizational records associated with the Stone-Campbell movement. Our curatorial approach empowers us to select published and unpublished documents, audio and video recordings, digital media (including websites), films, objects, and photographs that tell stories that inform and inspire the people and ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) within the context of the broader Stone-Campbell tradition.

We are keenly aware, however, that every curatorial approach is susceptible to collecting biases and blind spots. We safeguard against prejudiced collecting by recruiting a diverse Board of Trustees, consulting with and listening to different constituencies of the Stone-Campbell movement, identifying and remedying gaps in our collection, and staying informed of trends in archival collection development at other American religious repositories.

Guiding Principles and Values

Professionalism

The Historical Society identifies professionalism as a guiding principle in its study and stewardship. By professionalism, we mean adherence to the recognized standards of both historical scholarship and archival practice, disciplines that shape the ways we collect, preserve, and interpret the history of the Stone-Campbell Movement.

Our historical work is guided by our vision to tell the honest and whole story of our movement—including both its celebratory moments and its hard truths. To fulfill this commitment, we uphold the highest standards of historical research and interpretation, grounding our work in widely recognized scholarly methodologies, such as those articulated by the American Historical Association’s (AHA) [“Five C’s of Historical Thinking.”](#) Such frameworks ensure our scholarship is intellectually rigorous and deeply contextualized.

We embrace critical historical practice not because it is the only or even superior way of thinking about the past, but because it allows us to faithfully interpret and reinterpret the past without obscuring the complexities and contradictions within our shared history. In this way, thinking critically about history becomes an act of confession, acknowledging that the church, composed of fallible humans, has made mistakes, enacted violence, and practiced exclusion, even as it has also demonstrated moments of grace and profound transformation. By confronting difficult and painful truths, we open ourselves to reconciliation, healing, and a renewed commitment to the pursuit of justice and wholeness within and beyond our church.

Our archival work follows the [Core Values Statement and Code of Ethics](#) of the Society of American Archivists (SAA). These standards guide appraisal, description, preservation, and access, reminding us that archival practice is as much ethical as it is technical, requiring transparency and accountability in the stewardship of records, while maintaining trust with those who create, use, and are represented in our collections. By holding to these values, the Historical Society ensures that the materials entrusted to its care remain reliable and accessible for future generations.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

The Historical Society is committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion by intentionally collecting and prioritizing materials that document the experiences and contributions of historically marginalized and underrepresented

communities within the Stone-Campbell movement, striving to curate a collection that reflects the full diversity of the church we serve.

Reflecting the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)'s historical and theological commitments to unity amidst diversity, we intentionally collect and prioritize materials that document the lived experiences, contributions, voices, and perspectives of historically marginalized and underrepresented groups. This commitment honors the early and ongoing presence of Black congregations, women leaders, immigrant communities, Indigenous, Asian, and Latiné Americans, and LGBTQ+ members within the Stone-Campbell Movement. Recognizing that the logic of white supremacy and the persistence of systemic inequities continue to shape both historical narratives and the archives that preserve them, we seek to broaden representation and support reconciliation, healing, and wholeness in its effort to promote critical historical reflection. We aim to steward an archive that reflects the fullness and diversity of the communities we serve.

This commitment is not merely pragmatic or political, but deeply theological. Christian theology affirms that all people bear the image of God (Imago Dei) and that the differences of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and culture are not barriers to unity but expressions of divine creativity. Just as the Trinity—the very nature of God as three persons in one—embodies unity in diversity, so too do human communities. In this light, diversity is not a problem to be solved but a sacred reality to be embraced. Building and maintaining a repository that reflects this vision affirms that historical study and the collecting that supports it can be acts of justice and healing.

At a time when “diversity, equity, and inclusion” are contested and politicized in broader society, the Historical Society insists on their sacred character. The practice of history is never neutral; it always involves selection and choice. For too long, historical narratives have privileged the voices of the powerful while omitting or minimizing the experiences of the marginalized. By contrast, the biblical witness affirms that God’s story is told through the dispossessed, the immigrant, the imprisoned, and the crucified—those whose voices are too often silenced in official accounts. Our collecting practices seek to carry forward this prophetic tradition of biblical storytelling: to document and preserve the lives, struggles, accomplishments, and contributions of those overlooked by dominant narratives, and in doing so, to bear faithful witness to the God who creates, reconciles, and restores through difference.

Healing and Wholeness

The Historical Society is committed to promoting healing and wholeness by collecting and interpreting materials in ways that reveal overlooked stories,

address historical wounds, practice archival justice, and support the church's calling to be a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world.

We embrace healing and wholeness as guiding principles for our work, drawing inspiration from the founding ideals of the Stone-Campbell Movement. Where early leaders spoke of *restoration* as a return to the faith and practice of the New Testament church, we commit ourselves to the ongoing work of healing—lifting up what has been broken, forgotten, or silenced, and making space for new stories and new life to emerge. Where Disciples have long advocated for *Christian unity*, we claim wholeness as a vision for living faithfully in covenant with one another across divisions of race, gender, culture, and tradition. In doing so, we follow the church's calling to be "a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world."

Our history bears witness to both division and union, fracture and healing. The story of the Stone-Campbell Movement is marked by separations—into three streams, across racial and cultural boundaries, along lines of gender and power—as well as by efforts to seek reconciliation and justice. Preserving this story requires honest attention to wounds as well as to triumphs. We believe that historical and archival work can be healing work: bringing hidden voices into view, honoring those who were excluded, correcting injustices in the historiography, and holding together the multiplicity and complexity of a shared past that can never be reduced to a single story.

As an archive and ministry, the Historical Society seeks to practice what might be called archival justice: preserving materials with care, offering equitable access, collecting diversely, and engaging in storytelling that promotes healing and reconciliation. In this way, our commitment to healing and wholeness is embodied in daily practices of stewardship, description, storytelling, and interpretation. By tending to the brokenness of the past and holding space for its complexity, we hope to contribute to the Spirit's ongoing work of making the church whole.

Intellectual Freedom

The Historical Society upholds intellectual freedom by supporting free inquiry, maintaining equitable access to materials, and refraining from prescribing interpretations of our collections.

Stretching back to our earliest leaders, Alexander Campbell and Barton Stone, Disciples have a long history of prizing free inquiry. We follow the policies articulated in the [American Library Association's Library Bill of Rights](#). Selection and appraisal decisions are based on these convictions and policies as well as the Historical Society's defined collection scope. Access to collection materials is never restricted

because of the beliefs, identities, or affiliations of researchers or our staff. The Historical Society does not prescribe interpretations of materials in our collections.

Access

The Historical Society strives to provide the broadest possible access to its collections while clearly communicating any necessary restrictions with transparency and integrity.

We affirm and extend S. R. Ranganathan's first law of library science to all of our holdings: [Books are for use](#). Access to collection materials is a necessary precondition to their use, and we strive to provide the broadest possible access to our collections. When we cannot make collection materials accessible because of donor-imposed restrictions, fragile physical condition, privacy and confidentiality concerns, or legal concerns, we are transparent about those restrictions and clearly state them in our catalog records and finding aids.

We successfully provide dependable and sustainable access to our collections when we logically sequence our work around *physical, intellectual, and digital access*.

- *Physical access* must come first. Physically locating collection materials, tracking their movement from shelf to research table and back, and handling and storing them with the care they deserve are baseline competencies of collection management. Policies and workflows for the physical management of the collection undergird intellectual and digital access.
- *Intellectual access* comes second. Descriptions of and information about collection materials, maintained and presented in online catalogs, help researchers and staff access collections relevant to their interests and needs. Knowledge of the creators, contents, extent, and formats of collection materials is essential to identifying them and evaluating their suitability.
- *Digital access* comes third. Intellectual access provides the framework for online access to digitized and digital collection materials. Attempting to locate and manage digitized and digital materials outside that framework is inefficient, ineffective, and universally frustrating.

Responsible Stewardship

The Historical Society is committed to preservation and description that meet baseline standards for libraries, archives, and museums.

We are attentive to the physical needs of the collection, including collection housing and handling, the monitoring and upkeep of collection storage facilities, and disaster response planning. We also recognize cataloging, description, and good recordkeeping about our collections as essential elements of preservation.

Responsible stewardship is costly. Proper care for a historical collection requires storage space, climate control, processing and preservation supplies, collection management systems, overhead and flatbed scanners, and trained staff to accession, arrange, describe and catalog, digitize, plan for disaster response, preserve, and provide access to the collection. Though invisible to many stakeholders, the resources and labor necessary to maintain a historical collection constrain the scope and size of every collecting institution.

In the past, our passive collecting led to over-collecting, undermining the Historical Society's efforts to preserve and provide access to the collections entrusted to its care. Responsible stewardship requires staff to turn down some donations and deaccession or withdraw collection materials that are damaged, duplicative, out of our collecting scope, or without enduring historic value.

Resilience

The Historical Society implements ecologically and economically sustainable practices and mitigates risk by developing uncomplicated workflows, embracing flexibility, and fostering relationships with peer institutions and trusted vendors.

As a small, rural organization in West Virginia, we acknowledge its relative precarity. We are especially vulnerable to the turbulence of ecological and economic change. Facing that reality with clarity, we take the security of our physical and digital collections very seriously. We prize collaborative relationships with peer organizations and contract with trusted vendors to help us do what we cannot do alone. We seek sustainable partnerships to further our work, especially in information systems, IT, and digital access and preservation.

We recognize that “ideal” stewardship practices are often resource-intensive and unsustainable. Committing to such standards creates unrealistic expectations and inadvertently places collections at greater risk. Arranging, describing, and preserving at the item level, for example, takes time, diminishes our ability to provide description and access across the entirety of our holdings, and contributes to the backlog of unprocessed material. Perfect preservation environments for each media type within a repository and rigid environmental standards are difficult to maintain; they also contribute to high energy costs and a large carbon footprint.

By foregoing inflexible "gold standard" practices, we take a more adaptive approach that acknowledges the evolving needs of the entire repository. We implement practices today that benefit the future existence of our holdings and our ability to perpetually acclimate to an unpredictable environment.

Service

The Historical Society is both an educational institution and a ministry that serves the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the Stone-Campbell movement, and the scholarly community.

In 1996, upon taking the office of President of the Disciples of Christ Historical Society, Peter Morgan articulated two roles and five areas of sacred trust for the Society. These endured beyond Morgan's presidency and continue to shape our service to the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the Stone-Campbell movement, and the scholarly community.

We are both an educational institution and a ministry. As an educational institution, we hold the documentation of a North American Christian movement and make it available to researchers. As a ministry, we are the church's curator of memories and teller of stories that provoke thought and prayerful reflection, and support the ministries of the church.

In Morgan's words, the five sacred trusts are:

1. to gather, preserve, and make accessible the historical documents of the Stone-Campbell movement.
2. to foster a community of historians who gather for stimulation, support, and critique, and who continue that mutual encouragement through an ongoing network.
3. to bring to the church the witness of history as it prays, as it does theology, and as it works out its mission and destiny.
4. to be a place of hospitality where healing and understanding and community can be encouraged among the branches of the Stone-Campbell movement.
5. to be a place which enriches the Stone-Campbell movement's wider ecumenical witness.

Policy Background and Rationale

Why do we need a policy?

To collect meaningfully: Our collection should serve our mission faithfully and provide a useful context for information seeking. By maintaining collection strengths and addressing collection gaps, we ensure that our collection remains useful to research and faith communities. Meaningful collecting entails both acquiring and letting go of collection materials. Both activities must be carried out with the intentionality and integrity that only a policy can provide.

To steward responsibly: Collecting beyond our physical and financial capacity places unnecessary strain on the collection and the staff caring for it. When we cannot properly care for collection materials, we can neither preserve nor provide access to them.

To be transparent: Transparency builds trust with our donors and with other Stone-Campbell repositories. We also seek transparency to set donor expectations and prevent misunderstandings in donation negotiations.

To support staff decision-making: A collection development policy helps staff make difficult decisions with consistency and confidence. The policy provides criteria by which to assess donated materials and to communicate to donors why their materials are accepted or not accepted into the collection.

Past policies

There is evidence of collection development policies dating back to 1982. A comprehensive set of institutional policies drafted that year addresses library, archival, and audiovisual acquisitions, gifts and exchanges, and agreements for gifts, long-term loans, and temporary loans for microfilming. Around 2006, the Historical Society wrote and adopted a new collection development policy. Other policies may have been in place between 1982 and 2006, but they have not surfaced in our research on past policies.

In both the 1982 and 2006 collection development policies, the scope of collecting is broad.

1982: The Disciples of Christ Historical Society collects two copies of every edition, printing, or production of any title by or about any person or organization related to the Campbell-Stone Movement. (...) Audio/Visual and

archival material is collected and preserved if it is produced by any person or organization related to the Movement.

2006: The general purpose of the Library and Archives of the Disciples of Christ Historical Society will be to seek out, process, preserve, and make available for public and scholarly use materials in various formats documenting and relating to the history, theology, and life of the Stone-Campbell Movement. The collection is to be representative, as far as possible, of the three groups of the Stone-Campbell Movement: the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the Christian Churches/Churches of Christ, and the a cappella Churches of Christ.

This collection development policy seeks to reframe the Historical Society's scope of collecting to ensure that our collection reflects the diversity of the Stone-Campbell tradition to the fullest extent while working within our staffing and financial capacities.

Why this policy? Why now?

At the time of this writing, the Historical Society is in a pivotal moment of institutional reflection. We are currently positioned to consider our mission, values, and the sacred calling to tell our tradition's diverse, complex stories. *With this policy, we mark our movement from reflection into action*, ensuring that our collecting practices are aligned with our core mission.

Historically, our approach to collecting has been ambitious, accepting material with undefined criteria and few limitations. Ambitious policies create space for ambiguity and passive collecting, which we have found to be problematic and unsustainable. It taxes our resources and raises questions about responsibility. In recent years, we have recognized that our covenantal partners—including general ministries, regions, congregations, and other groups across the Stone-Campbell movement—hold differing expectations regarding our collecting practices and roles.

For our collecting practices to be sustainable, they must be rooted in a fundamental understanding of the Society's mission, strengths, and limitations. This policy provides a framework built from our unique context that guides intentional, mission-driven collecting. It enables us to make informed, day-to-day decisions that reflect our values, and it clearly communicates our collection development approach to ourselves, our community of users, and our covenantal partners.

This policy is a living document that the Board of Trustees will review and update every three years. It supersedes all previous Disciples of Christ Historical Society collecting policies.

Policy Creation Process

In September 2024, the Board of Trustees authorized a twelve-month process to develop a new Collection Development Policy for the Disciples of Christ Historical Society and appointed a working group to lead the effort. The group met regularly with the President, Senior Archivist, and members of the archival team, beginning with a review of policies from peer institutions before identifying the principles and values that would guide the Historical Society's collecting practices. In March 2025, the working group presented its progress—including the draft principles, values, and an outline—to the Board, which approved continued work. Over the following six months, the President, Senior Archivist, and working group members drafted the policy. In the course of this work, the Historical Society staff realized that the policy could not address all components of the collection at this time. As a result, this policy focuses exclusively on the archival collections, which include manuscripts and reference files. Collecting criteria for the book, periodical, and pamphlet collections are forthcoming.

In September 2025, the entire Board reviewed, commented on, and approved the policy, effective January 1, 2026.

About the Collection

Brief History

The Disciples of Christ Historical Society collection began not with the founding of an institution but from the calling of a devoted librarian—quietly nurtured in the library of Culver-Stockton College by Claude Spencer, who spent late nights collecting and cataloging the historical documents of the Stone-Campbell Movement. That calling transformed into a mission to create a denominational library and archive for the Disciples of Christ. In 1941, Spencer’s calling and collection was established as the Disciples of Christ Historical Society by the action of the International Convention of the Disciples of Christ. Initially housed at Culver-Stockton, the collection later moved to Nashville, Tennessee, where it was housed in the Thomas W. Phillips Memorial Building. In 2016, the Historical Society relocated to Bethany, West Virginia—the home of one of the Movement’s founders, Alexander Campbell—where it remains today.

While the Historical Society’s collection can today be measured at more than 14,000 linear feet, this significant scope reflects decades of largely passive collecting practices rather than strategic acquisition. For much of its history, the Historical Society accepted nearly all materials offered by congregations, individuals, and organizations. This approach, though rooted in good intentions, resulted in uneven representation of communities across the Stone-Campbell movement and created significant challenges for storage and stewardship. Both in Nashville and now in Bethany, the Society has reached the limits of its available space, straining the capacity of facilities and staff. This collecting policy seeks to address and ultimately remedy these challenges by providing a framework for strategic, mission-based decision-making, ensuring that future acquisitions both reflect the diversity of the movement and remain sustainable within the Historical Society’s mission and resources.

Organization of the Collection

The collection consists of over 14,000 linear feet of material and is divided into several distinct collections.

- *A library collection* that includes books and periodicals about or related to the Stone-Campbell movement.
- *A pamphlet collection* containing booklets, leaflets, brochures, ephemera, and grey literature about the Stone-Campbell movement. Items in this collection are

typically under 50 pages and receive less stringent cataloging than items in the library collection.

- A *manuscript collection* that comprises the majority of the Historical Society's archival holdings. It includes personal papers of clergy, missionaries, and others who contributed to the work and thought of the three primary streams of the Stone-Campbell movement, congregational records, regional ministry records, general ministry records, and records of other organizations that emerged from or supported the Stone-Campbell movement.
- A collection of biographical, congregational, and organizational *reference files* assembled by Historical Society staff. These files are highly variable in their content and may contain archival documents, pamphlets, clippings, ephemera, and photographs.

The manuscript collection, in particular, contains multiple formats. Special format materials found in our collections include architectural drawings, artwork, audio recordings, computer storage units, drawings, films, maps, objects (ceramics, glass, metal, and textiles), paintings, photographic prints, photographic transparencies (negatives and slides), scrapbooks, and video recordings.

We do not have a separate “digital collection” or “microfilm collection.” For administrative, cataloging, and descriptive purposes, materials reformatted for access and preservation remain associated with the collections from which they were drawn.

Our digital repository contains digitized materials from all divisions of our collection and may include digitized materials from other repositories. It is intended to provide access and does not currently have digital preservation capabilities.

Strengths and Gaps

Because only a small percentage of the Historical Society's holdings are cataloged, the staff are not well-positioned to identify either strengths or gaps in the archival collection at this time. However, the Historical Society assumes that its holdings do not represent the full diversity of the Stone-Campbell movement or the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Today, most American archival repositories acknowledge that their past collecting practices preferred documentation of white, male elites. Although we lack the data to prove this is the case for the Disciples of Christ Historical Society, we suspect it is.

The upcoming one-year collection survey (September 2025-August 2026) is a strategic initiative to help us better understand the Historical Society's congregational collections, constituting about 15% of the archival holdings. We anticipate the survey

data will reveal racial, economic, and geographic disparities in congregational collecting that future collecting activities must rectify. Furthermore, as we accession, process, and reprocess personal papers, organizational records, and regional and general ministry records in our day-to-day work, we will develop a better understanding of these collecting areas. When we revisit this policy in 2029, we trust that we will have data to support a more informed assessment of the collection's strengths and gaps.

Collecting Priorities

Historically Underrepresented Disciples

For much of its history, the Historical Society's collecting practices have resulted in an overrepresentation of white voices and experiences, producing a collection that does not adequately represent the diversity of the Stone-Campbell Movement. This imbalance reflects what one historian has called the "spiritual burden of whiteness"—the persistent conflation of whiteness with godliness that has shaped and reshaped American religious life and, at times, our own archives, whether by design or by default. To confront this distortion, we now prioritize materials that document the lives and contributions of historically underrepresented Disciples, with particular emphasis on communities of color, while also giving focused attention to women and gender-diverse persons, and to LGBTQ+ communities. In doing so, we affirm that representation in the collection must not be confused with historical significance, and we commit ourselves to curating a collection that more faithfully embodies the diversity of the church's composition and witness.

Change-Makers, Standard-Bearers, and Thought Leaders

The Historical Society gives priority to collecting the papers and records of people whose influence has significantly shaped the identity, theology, and public witness of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the broader Stone-Campbell Movement. Such figures could be based in seminaries and universities, general and affiliated ministries, regional leadership, congregations, or social justice initiatives, among other contexts. One might wish that every record of every Disciple could be collected and preserved, but such an approach is neither sustainable nor helpful for archivists and researchers seeking to identify materials of historical value. This priority is informed by, and held alongside, our commitment to lifting up historically underrepresented Disciples, recognizing that leadership and change take many forms beyond traditional, visible, or recognized leadership positions.

The Founding and Early Generations

As a collecting institution charged to serve all three major streams of the Stone-Campbell movement, the Historical Society prioritizes the acquisition of materials about the founding and early generations of the movement. Nineteenth-century Stone-Campbell documentation, including the personal papers of movement leaders

and preachers, lay followers of Stone, Campbell, and their successors in the second generation, early Stone-Campbell congregational records, and early mission records to 1890. In addition to the most studied figures of the founding and early generations, we also prioritize materials documenting less studied individuals and groups, especially women and those who are not of Scots-Irish descent.

Christian Unity

One of our collecting priorities is thematic: to document the efforts of Disciples in the cause of Christian unity, particularly through ecumenical organizations such as the Federal Council of Churches (later the National Council of Churches) and the World Council of Churches. Disciples were founding members of both bodies and have consistently provided executive leadership within them. Guided by Barton W. Stone's statement, "Let Christian unity be our polar star," Disciples have exercised an outsized influence in wider ecumenical circles, often disproportionate to the size of the denomination. Preserving this record is essential for understanding the distinctive role of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the broader history of Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox collaboration.

Formation and Development of Denominational Ministries and Organizations

As a General Ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the Historical Society has a special relationship with the denomination's other ministries and organizations, as well as their precursors. We seek records documenting Disciples leadership, decision-making, communications, programs, and the impact of those programs - records that reveal the effects of the activities of the denomination, its ministries, and its organizations. The Historical Society may collect additional records created during significant moments and turning points in leadership and ministry for the Office of the General Minister and President and other General Ministries.

Disciples' Responses to the Present Moment

We aspire to collect evidence of Disciples' responses to each present moment in North America that demands public Christian witness. Such a witness might entail outward and visible signs of compassion, prophetic preaching, non-violent protest, or acts of social justice. To collect documentation of Disciples' witness in real time

requires infrastructure and staff to acquire, preserve, and provide access to digital media (including digitally recorded oral histories and interviews), social media feeds, and websites. We hope to build the capacity for this kind of collecting, but we will require grants or other financial support to realize this goal.

Archival Acquisitions and Accessioning

Adding archival materials to the Historical Society's collection requires two separate activities - acquisition and accession. Acquisition entails seeking and receiving materials that are, in our case, donated. Accessioning is the process by which a repository assumes physical and intellectual custody of the materials, and establishes legal ownership, and, when possible, the intellectual property rights associated with them. During accessioning, the Historical Society rehouses the materials, records essential information about them, and assesses their condition. Once accessioned, the materials are ready for archival processing.

The guidelines below outline the criteria, procedures, and decision-making authority for acquiring and accessioning materials into the Historical Society's manuscript collection. Materials added to the pamphlet collection and reference files are acquired, but not accessioned. Purchases for and donations to the library collection do not fall within the scope of the Archival Acquisitions and Accessioning policy.

Criteria and Considerations

Collecting priorities (see above)

Enduring historic value and research value

1. As a collecting repository, the Historical Society seeks rich and diverse records documenting the history of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the Stone-Campbell movement. Staff evaluate records based on their historical content and potential research use.
2. The Historical Society prefers papers and records that document ministries, programs, and their impact; legal, financial, and administrative records are of less importance because we do not fulfill a records management function for any of the expressions of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).
3. Rich records containing confidential, private, or sensitive information that donors do not wish to make public may be restricted for a defined period, but not indefinitely.
4. The Historical Society may decline records requiring extensive redaction before research use.
5. When evaluating donated materials for acquisition and accessioning, the Historical Society neither considers their monetary value nor offers monetary appraisals.

Languages

1. Although English is the primary language of the Historical Society's collection and its description and cataloging, we welcome records in other languages, particularly when documenting the experiences of underrepresented communities in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). The Historical Society may request the assistance of records donors and the Board of Trustees in appraising and describing materials in non-English languages.
2. General and Regional Ministry records containing foreign language materials are also welcome. The Historical Society requests that ministry staff create English-language inventories or brief descriptions of the contents of boxes and/or folders (whether paper or electronic) whenever possible to ensure accurate description. We do not expect translations of documents donated.

Physical condition

1. In most cases, the Historical Society does not accept collections in poor physical condition.
2. The Historical Society does not accept records damaged by mold, mildew, pests, or water, and/or too physically fragile for safe handling.
 - Exceptions may be made only for documents of significant historical value. Any exceptions require the approval of the President and the Board of Trustees.
 - Historical Society staff may also refer records donors to conservation and remediation vendors that can treat and stabilize damaged records before donation.
3. When an exception is made to accept damaged materials into the collection, the Historical Society appreciates an accompanying donation of funds to conserve the material.
4. Currently, the Historical Society can accept only a limited amount of digital material. In most cases, we strongly prefer to receive paper records to digital copies of paper records. In some cases, donors may be asked to print out electronic copies of born-digital materials for donation.
5. The Historical Society cannot accept electronic records harboring computer viruses. Electronic records requiring migration from obsolete carriers and/or file format migration may not be accepted.

Provenance and identification

1. The Historical Society cannot accept materials without adequate documentation of their sources and subjects. Unidentified photographs and unattributed

documents, audiovisual materials, and objects have little to no enduring historic value.

2. The Historical Society may invite prospective records donors to submit written documentation about materials offered to assist our staff with description and cataloging.

Procedures

1. The Historical Society acquires archival collection materials by donation only.
2. The Historical Society does not accept all materials offered for donation. Our staff reviews and evaluates each donation to determine its suitability for our collection. We may select all, some, or none of the materials offered.
3. When a donation is declined, staff will, when possible, refer the donors to another Stone-Campbell, regional, or local repository that may accept the materials.
4. Records donated to the Historical Society require a signed deed of gift that transfers ownership of the donated materials to the Historical Society and grants us the authority to preserve, describe, and provide access to the donated materials. When applicable, the deed of gift will clearly describe the nature and duration of any donor-imposed restrictions or expectations for redaction placed on the donated materials.
5. The Historical Society strongly prefers that donors transfer their intellectual property interests in the donated materials to the Society. In rare instances, we may allow a records donor to maintain copyright in the donated materials.
6. Unsolicited records donations mailed to the Historical Society will be retained or disposed of at our discretion.
7. The Historical Society does not accept "permanent loans."

Materials Out of Scope

The Disciples of Christ Historical Society no longer collects the following materials:

1. Records and publications of non-HBCU, active Disciples colleges, universities, and seminaries.
2. Employment records and personnel files (note that ministerial credentialing and missionary service files are excluded from this category).

3. Banking and investment records, mortgage and loan records, and payroll records.
4. Most records documenting the acquisition and sale of real estate and the construction and maintenance of buildings.
5. Churches of Christ congregational and organizational records, 1906-present.

Decision-Making

1. Archival staff discuss most potential acquisitions with the President.
2. Donations up to 25 linear feet or 1 GB in extent may be accepted by Historical Society staff.
3. Donations exceeding 25 linear feet or 1 GB require the approval of the President and the Board of Trustees.

Reference File Guidelines

The biographical, congregational, and organizational reference files constitute an important and heavily used collection. Reference files contain selected documents, photographs, and ephemera that provide vital information and highlight the significance of their subjects. They are significantly smaller than the sets of personal papers or institutional records found in the manuscript collection.

When a donation does not meet the criteria of our collecting policy, we encourage donors to select a portion of the materials for inclusion in our reference files. The acquisition process for reference files is streamlined; no deed of gift is required, and reference file materials are not formally accessioned into the collection. Guidelines for reference file donations are as follows:

Biographical

1. Ordination, commissioning, installation, retirement, and/or funeral service bulletins
2. Spiritual statements or autobiographies
3. Most recent CV or resume
4. Biographical sketch, autobiography, and/or obituary*
5. Up to five captioned photographic portraits, event photographs, or snapshots

6. Up to five selected sermons or speeches
7. Up to five articles or clippings by or about the individual
8. Up to five memos, news releases, letters, or other significant documents

Congregational

1. Special occasion bulletins (initial and final worship services, dedication services, significant ecumenical services, anniversary services, ordinations, installations, retirements, etc.)
2. Congregational histories and historical sketches*
3. Up to five church brochures, pamphlets, or fliers
4. Up to five captioned photographs or postcards of church buildings
5. Up to five captioned photographs of members, events, classes, or ministries
6. One captioned photograph of each minister or preacher
7. Up to five articles or clippings about the congregation
8. Up to five memos, news releases, letters, or other significant documents

Organizational

1. Organizational histories and historical sketches*
2. Up to ten pamphlets, brochures, or fliers
3. Invitations to and programs from significant events (opening, dedication, and closing ceremonies, anniversary celebrations, etc.)
4. Up to five captioned photographs of buildings or ministry spaces
5. Up to five captioned photographs of events, ministries, or routine work
6. Up to ten captioned photographs of leadership, staff, and volunteers
7. Up to five captioned photographs of clients served
8. Up to five articles or clippings about the organization
9. Up to five memos, news releases, letters, or other significant documents

* Historical, biographical, and autobiographical writings of greater than 50 pages may be separated from the vertical file and handled as library items.

These guidelines apply to reference file donations made after January 2026; they will not be retroactively applied.

Deaccessioning

Repositories remove archival materials from their holdings through deaccessioning. It is a documented and transparent process in which the repository releases materials from its physical and intellectual custody.

1. The Historical Society considers reappraisal and deaccessioning to be essential collection management activities.
 - Reappraisal, or the evaluation of materials in our holdings, is a rigorous process that may or may not lead to deaccessioning.
 - Deaccessioning helps ensure that our holdings align with our collection development policy and that our stewardship resources are applied to collections that best serve our mission.
2. The Historical Society makes a distinction between deaccessioning and “weeding.”
 - In the Society of American Archivists’ *Guidelines for Reappraisal and Deaccessioning*, weeding is “the process of identifying and removing unwanted materials from a larger body of materials.”
 - Weeding usually occurs when archivists process or reprocess collections and remove folders, sub-series, or entire series from an accessioned archival collection. Most materials weeded are either deemed duplicative or without enduring historic value.
 - Archivists make weeding decisions as part of their day-to-day work, consulting each other and/or the President for advice as needed.
3. The Historical Society also makes a distinction between deaccessioning and “sampling.”
 - The Society of American Archivists’ Dictionary of Archival Terminology defines sampling as “selecting, as part of appraisal [or reappraisal], a portion of a body of records for permanent retention.”
 - Sampling aims to reduce the extent of large collections by retaining a representative or random selection of records. While sampling is most often conducted during initial accessioning and processing, it may also occur during reprocessing or a larger reappraisal project.
 - At the Historical Society, archivists make sampling decisions independently, consulting each other and/or the President for advice as needed.

4. The Historical Society affirms the principles and practices of reappraisal and deaccessioning articulated in the Society of American Archivists' [*Guidelines for Reappraisal and Deaccessioning \(2017\)*](#).
5. The President or any member of the archival staff may recommend archival materials for reappraisal and possible deaccessioning.
 - During reappraisal, archives staff will collaboratively consider an archival collection's content and potential research use, relationships to other archival collections in our holdings and in other repositories, physical condition, and other criteria outlined in the collection development policy.
 - When the archives staff recommends an archival collection for deaccessioning, they will present the collection and deaccessioning rationale to the President for a consultative discussion.
 - The Senior Archivist will present collections recommended for deaccessioning. Authority to deaccession rests with the President and the Board of Trustees Collections Committee. The Collections Committee may refer a deaccessioning decision to the entire Board of Trustees.
6. The Historical Society may dispose of deaccessioned archival collections in the following ways:
 - Return them to the donor or records creator
 - Offer them to another repository or cultural heritage institution
 - Recycle or shred them
 - Bibles in deaccessioned archival collections are returned to the earth through burial.
7. The method of disposition will be selected carefully, ensuring adherence to policies and procedures and avoiding conflicts of interest.

Collection Evaluation & Assessment

With the adoption of this policy, the Historical Society commits to conducting collection assessment activities to ensure we are successfully meeting our collection goals and the needs of researchers. Subject analysis of finding aids and accession records is one method by which we will evaluate our collecting work. Paging slips for physical collection materials requested by researchers, as well as page views and download numbers for born-digital and digitized collection materials, will inform our understanding of the use of our collection. Ideally, these quantitative measures will be complemented by qualitative user studies, surveys, or focus groups.

Policy Review

This policy was approved by the Disciples of Christ Historical Society Board of Trustees on September 19, 2025, effective January 1, 2026. It will be reviewed every three years to ensure that it remains up to date and continues to help staff fulfill the Society's mission.