

Disciples of Christ Historical Society

General Board Report
GB-2610



Introduction — Who We Are

The Disciples of Christ Historical Society (DCHS) is the leading repository of Disciples and Stone-Campbell Movement materials. Our mission is to preserve and proclaim the story of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) within the broader context of the Stone-Campbell tradition from which it emerges. As a general ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), we are uniquely tasked with serving all three major streams of the movement: the Churches of Christ, the Christian Churches/Churches of Christ, and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

For 85 years, DCHS has safeguarded the documentary history and story of this movement—preserving congregational records, personal papers, institutional archives, rare books, photographs, and artifacts that together tell the story of our shared tradition. The collection now spans more than two centuries and nearly three miles of boxes lined up end to end. It is the largest and most comprehensive archive of Stone-Campbell materials in the world.

We believe that by studying our past—including both its achievements and its failures—the church is empowered to live more faithfully in the present and into the future.

In a season of uncertainty in our world and the church, we are committed to preserving the integrity of the church's historical record, expanding access to that record for congregations and scholars, and ensuring that the full diversity and complexity of our movement is documented and shared.

Some of Our Recent Work and Accomplishments

A New Approach to Collecting Disciples History

We are pleased to share the adoption of a new Collection Development Policy for the Historical Society—a document that guides how and why we collect historical materials.

At its heart, this policy is about storytelling. As our mission affirms, the Historical Society exists “to preserve and proclaim the story of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) within the context of the broader Stone-Campbell tradition.” This policy reorients our collecting practices toward that mission in service to researchers and the church.

Since 1941, we have faithfully received materials offered by congregations, pastors, laypeople, regions, and ministries as an act of trust. That generosity built a remarkable collection that has served the church for more than eight decades. Yet over time, the scale and nature of donations have changed. Increasing numbers of congregations are closing, and we now receive large, unprocessed bodies of material that require significant expertise, space, and resources to steward responsibly. What once functioned well as a passive collecting model has become unsustainable in the current denominational context.

Recognizing this, the Board of Trustees initiated a year-long process to develop a new Collection Development Policy, adopted in September 2025 and effective January 1, 2026. The policy marks an intentional shift—from passive collecting to active, mission-driven curation. It provides shared criteria for decision-making, clarifies expectations for donors, and ensures that materials entrusted to us can be preserved and made accessible for generations to come.

Importantly, this shift also reflects a more proactive posture. Rather than simply receiving what is sent to us, we are now engaging congregations, regions, and ministry partners in conversations about their historical materials—helping them discern what should be preserved, how it should be organized, and how it can best serve the church’s collective memory.

To support this work, the Board established a new Collections Committee to oversee implementation and conduct regular review of the collection’s curation. Together, these changes strengthen our ability to steward Disciples history sustainably and with integrity.

Expanding Access

A major milestone in expanding access this year was the debut of *Spencer*, our new online archival catalog, launched at the 2025 General Assembly.

Built on the ArchivesSpace platform—an archival information management system used by more than 500 repositories worldwide—*Spencer* provides researchers with searchable access to information about the nearly 15,000 linear feet of personal papers, congregational records, regional ministry records, and general ministry records housed at DCHS. Like a library catalog, *Spencer* is a descriptive database that includes finding aids detailing the creator, dates, size, and contents of individual collections.

Named in honor of Claude E. Spencer (1898–1979), the librarian and curator who helped establish the Historical Society, the catalog represents a significant advancement in making our collections discoverable. Already, more than 160 finding aids and thousands of reference files are available online, and this number will increase substantially through our ongoing Collection Survey project. While *Spencer* does not yet contain digitized materials, it provides the descriptive framework upon which our digital collections will be built (more below), ensuring that future digital content can be accessed within its proper historical context.

Our digital footprint continues to expand. In the past year alone, digitized historical resources were downloaded more than 11,000 times by researchers across 282 institutions worldwide, including universities, seminaries, and congregations in over 100 countries. These numbers reflect the growing global reach of our ministry.

DCHS recently adopted JSTOR Digital Stewardship Services as the unified home for our digital collections. As a Tier 3 charter partner, we will help shape the next generation of digital stewardship tools and practices. Through this partnership, DCHS will gain access to JSTOR Seeklight, an AI-assisted collections processing tool designed to increase archival description capacity, and will transition our existing digital collections into an integrated platform that supports long-term preservation through Portico and expanded discovery pathways, including distribution through JSTOR.

DCHS is the first historical society and denominational archives to join the charter program. This partnership strengthens our ability to expand access responsibly and integrate emerging technologies thoughtfully.

Facilities Expansion

Construction on the Campbell Library is underway, and the project is moving forward as planned. We anticipate completion in late spring or early summer this year. This new addition marks a significant investment in preserving and studying the founding generation of the Stone-Campbell Movement.

The Campbell Library will house the most extensive collection of early materials related to Alexander Campbell, Thomas Campbell, and the early leaders of the movement. Designed with inspiration from Campbell's original study—which we recently restored—the new facility brings together archival preservation, public history, and future-facing digital access.

The upper level of the library will feature interactive exhibits, where visitors will be able to engage the historical context of the early Disciples.

The lower level will provide state-of-the-art archival storage in climate-controlled compact shelving, ensuring long-term preservation at the highest professional standards. The facility will also include new staff offices and a dedicated digitization lab, providing the infrastructure for expanded digital access.

This construction is part of the larger Campbell Papers Project. The project envisions not only secure preservation but also the eventual digitization of the papers of Alexander and Thomas Campbell, making them accessible to researchers and churches digitally.

At the 2025 General Assembly, we formally launched the Restore & Renew capital campaign with the announcement of a \$1.5 million lead gift from Bethany Christian Church in Houston. That transformative gift moved us beyond the halfway point of our \$3 million goal at launch. The campaign is funding the construction of the Campbell Library, endowing a program and position for archival justice, and restoring the Campbell Study.

We look forward to welcoming visitors into this new space, where preservation, interpretation, and digital access will come together to illuminate early Disciples history.

Looking Ahead

Much of the year ahead will involve developing the work already underway. The initiatives described above—our new collecting policy, the Campbell Library construction, expanded digital infrastructure, and strengthened archival capacity—are long-term commitments for the Historical Society. In 2026, our focus will be on continuing and expanding these efforts.

A central component of this upcoming work is implementing our new approach to collecting Disciples history. We are excited to engage more actively with congregations and ministry partners to identify materials that tell their stories and ensure they are preserved and made accessible for research. This more proactive posture positions DCHS to partner with churches and ministry partners, preserving and sharing the story of the church in all its diversity—across congregations, regions, ministries, and historically underrepresented communities.

To further this work, the Historical Society has received grant funding for the “DCHS Hidden Collections Processing Project,” a 2026 summer internship that will focus on processing materials related to historically underrepresented communities and ministries within the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). This initiative directly supports our commitment to documenting underrepresented voices and making them accessible for future scholarship.

We also look forward to expanding digital access through our partnership with JSTOR Digital Stewardship Services. Over the coming year, we will continue building the infrastructure for a unified digital repository and anticipate unveiling an expanded digital platform toward the end of 2026. This next phase of our digital strategy will significantly enhance discoverability and allow for broad-yet-responsible access to Disciples history.

In addition, we look forward to completing the acquisition of Campbell materials from Bethany College. Together with the Campbell holdings we already steward, this acquisition will bring us close to a comprehensive collection of the papers of Alexander Campbell and related founding-generation materials. This strengthens our ability to preserve and eventually digitize these foundational documents for the church and the broader scholarly community.

Finally, we look ahead to celebrating a significant anniversary in the movement's history. On Saturday, August 8, 2026, we will gather at Cane Ridge in Kentucky to mark the 225th anniversary of the Cane Ridge Revival—one of the most significant events in American religious history and a birthplace for the Stone-Campbell movement. As we approach this anniversary, we are intentionally turning our attention toward the Stone side of the Stone-Campbell story in 2026. The anniversary provides an opportunity not only to celebrate and remember, but also to reflect historically and theologically on Cane Ridge, Barton W. Stone, *The Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery* (1804), and their ongoing influence on the movement. We invite the church to join us in faithful remembrance of Cane Ridge in August!

TL;DR

An accomplishment from 2025

In 2025, we made significant progress in expanding access to the DCHS collection. The launch of Spencer, our new online archival catalog, marked a major step forward in making our holdings discoverable to researchers and congregations. At the same time, we began building a more integrated and interactive digital repository through our partnership with JSTOR Digital Stewardship Services. Accessibility is a central priority for the Historical Society, and this year we strengthened both the descriptive framework and the digital infrastructure necessary to share Disciples history more broadly.

A Hope for 2026

A hope for 2026 is that we fully realize the promise of our new approach to collecting Disciples history. By shifting from passive collecting to active, mission-driven curation, we are positioning ourselves to engage more intentionally with congregations and ministry partners as they share their materials with us. This represents an exciting new chapter for the Historical Society—one that will allow us to tell the story of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in all its diversity and complexity.

Challenges Ahead

As outlined above, we are implementing several new systems—digital platforms, cataloging infrastructure, and policy frameworks—that will significantly strengthen our work. At the same time, balancing multiple implementations can be a challenge. We invite your prayers as we continue implementing these systems thoughtfully and sustainably in the year(s) ahead.

A Story of Collaboration

We celebrate our partnership with Bethany Christian Church in Houston in support of the new Campbell Library. Their leadership gift launched the Restore & Renew campaign and represents a meaningful “Bethany to Bethany” connection, which will benefit the whole church.

What We Hope You Will Take Back to Your Congregation

We hope you will share with your congregation that the Historical Society wants to be in active conversation with you about your history. We are eager to partner with congregations and ministries to help identify and preserve the materials that tell your stories. Please reach out. Your congregation’s history is part of the larger story of Disciples we want to preserve and share.