

# WELS Historical Institute

(2024 Report to the Twelve Districts, p.115)



## **What is the WELS Historical Institute?**

Our Historical Institute is a subsidiary of WELS which does “not receive support from the synod’s operating budget...” but “is governed by a board that is accountable to the synod via the Synodical Council.” As seen in the RTTD, this is the same status as other entities like NPH, WELS Foundation, and WELS Church Extension.

The purpose of the WELS Historical Institute is to serve the synod in preserving, researching, and communicating the history of Christ’s love to and through our church body.

## **WELS 175<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 2025**

The WELS 175<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Committee is chaired by Prof. Joel Otto (also the chairman of the WELS Historical Institute). Two books will be available through NPH to celebrate this milestone: (1) an updated *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans* (Dr. John Brenner) and (2) a full-color pictorial history (Prof. Joel Otto & Pastor John Braun). Articles in other synod publications and online resources will also be available. There is [a color brochure on the convention website with more information](#).

## **Website & Facebook**

A new website was developed since our last district convention. It includes upcoming events, archived issues of the *WELS Historical Institute Journal*, and histories on synod schools, leaders, and events. More information is being added regularly. Visit [welshistoricalinstitute.org](http://welshistoricalinstitute.org)

You can “Like/Follow” WELS Historical Institute on Facebook at [facebook.com/WELSHistoricalInstitute](https://facebook.com/WELSHistoricalInstitute) for

## **Presentations & Events**

WELS Historical Institute hosts various presentations throughout the year. Most are livestreamed or recorded to watch “on demand” anytime. We have been working through the “Our Great Heritage” series on our ministerial education schools. The first two presentations in this series (Michigan Lutheran Seminary & Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary) are available online. This fall, WELS President Mark Schroeder will present on Luther Prep School (and its predecessor preparatory schools).

## **WELS Museum at Salem Landmark Church**

The WHI works on the restoration and preservation of Salem Lutheran Landmark Church, constructed in 1863 and located in Milwaukee near the site of our synod’s founding in 1850. The synod museum, on the lower level of the church, houses more than 1,000 artifacts and pictures from our synod’s past.

Hundreds of artifacts related to the history of WELS and of early German immigration to this area have been restored and are now displayed here. The church building is now a museum, open to tours throughout the year. It is also the venue for an annual presentation series coordinated by the Institute.

## **How can you support the work and mission of the WELS Historical Institute?**

Membership in the WELS Historical Institute is \$40/year (with a slight discount for multiple years). Members receive a subscription to the *WELS Historical Institute Journal* and a newsletter. It’s also a way to support the work of the institute and the preservation of the WELS Museum at Salem Landmark Church in Milwaukee.

Anyone interested in joining the WELS Historical Institute can do so at

<https://welshistoricalinstitute.org/membership/>

---

# WELS Archives

(2024 Report to the Twelve Districts, p.45)

## **The Calling**

The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Archives is the official repository of the permanent records of WELS and its congregations, called workers, and WELS-affiliated ministries. These permanent records are those of significant historical value for the synod and its congregations, and they document all aspects of WELS administration, mission, and ministry. The mission of the archives is to preserve and protect these records and make them available for researchers as well as provide information services to the synod and its called workers and congregations.

## **Serving Congregations and Members**

Mrs. Susan Willems has been the archivist since 2016 when the WELS archives began their move from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary to a dedicated and climate-controlled location at the WELS Center for Mission and Ministry. In 2023, the archivist handled over 140 research requests, scheduled 40 in-person research appointments, and welcomed 23 tour groups to the Visitors Center. During the summer of 2023, an intern was hired from WLS to help grow the digital collection by identifying and scanning hundreds of images in preparation for the 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Cataloging continues for many collections in the archives including the Early Presidential Letter's collections, the Nebraska District collection, and the biographical files collection. Recently all issues of the publication the *Gemeinde-Blatt* were digitized and are available online at the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Essay File.

## **How can you help?**

First, encourage your congregation to keep and maintain their historical documents. If there are items that seem to be in danger of being thrown away, misplaced, or damaged, donate them to the archives for safekeeping. They are stored with other items from the congregation and can always be accessed later. When your congregation has an anniversary service, an installation service, dedication service, or other significant event, two copies submitted to the archives are appreciated for preservation.

*Submitted by Pastor Justin Dauck (WELS Historical Institute Board of Directors)*