

Guide to the Charles Buchanan and Marie W. Copher Papers

1825-2005



Published for the African American Methodist Heritage Center By
General Commission on Archives and History of The United Methodist Church, Madison, New Jersey
P.O. Box 127, Madison, NJ 07940
2018-09-25

Charles Buchanan and Marie W. Copher Papers

1825-2005

7.78 cubic feet

aamc.ms.gcch5708

The purpose of this finding aid is to help you understand the nature of this collection and to assist you in the retrieval of material from this collection. The following pages contain a brief biographical history of the person, or persons, who created or collected these papers, followed by a general description of the collection in the scope and content note. If more detailed information is warranted then series descriptions also appear. The container listing appears last and is the listing of material in each box, or container, of this collection. To request material you need to turn to the container listing section. It is essentially a listing of file folders, or artifact items, in the collection. Each folder, or item, has a call number associated with it. Each folder also lists the inclusive dates of the material in the folder. On the material request form list both the call number and the folder, or item, title. Use a different line for each folder, or item, requested. When your request sheet is complete, or full, bring it to the archivist and the material will be retrieved.

Charles Buchanan Copher (1913-2003), United Methodist minister and Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Scholar, was born to Tabitha Shelton and Henry L. Copher of Troy, Missouri, on March 3, 1913. At an early age Copher displayed a remarkable intellect which became self-evident when named Valedictorian of his elementary school graduation class. Four years later he would graduate from Summer High School as Salutatorian.

Copher's abiding love of learning continued at Stowe Teachers College in St. Louis, Missouri. After his freshman year he transferred to Clark College, Atlanta, where he graduated with a B. A. degree in 1938. During this time in his life there came a call to the ministry. This, in turn, led Copher to enroll in Gammon Theological Seminary culminating with a Bachelor of Divinity degree in 1939. After graduating from Gammon he earned a theological degree from Oberlin Graduate School of Theology. Copher went on to earn a Ph.D. in Biblical Literature and Languages at the Boston University Graduate School in 1947. He continued doing additional graduate level work in post doctorate programs at New York University and University of Chicago Divinity School.

History primarily remembers Charles Copher as a cutting edge scholar but he was also a successful pastor. Most of his appointments to local churches happened during graduate school years. When attending Oberlin the bishop appointed him to the Rust Methodist Church in 1939. Two years later Copher changed pulpits as pastor of the Eleventh Street (now Asbury) Methodist Church in Columbus, Ohio. The following year Copher moved to Boston where he became the pastor of Fourth Methodist Church (now Union) until 1948.

His ministry included work within the larger structure of United Methodism. The high point of this work came as the second Black Methodist to serve as a Judicial Council member from 1968 to 1984. The council is the denomination's highest court. Sometimes it is referred to as United Methodism's Supreme Court which is an appropriate comparison.

Copher left the pastorate to begin an illustrative academic teaching career at his alma mater, Gammon Theological Seminary. The seminary would later become part of the Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC) consortium. By virtue of his tenured position at Gammon allowed Copher to teach at Clark College as a visiting instructor (1948-1953). Copher's skills as a respected educator and beloved by his students allowed him to rise to the rank of a full professor for Biblical Studies and Languages (1958-1978). His administrative talents were also recognized at ITC through his positions as Dean of Instruction (1959-1972) and Vice President of Academic Affairs (1972-1978). Copher retired from ITC in 1978. ITC honored his life work by creating the Charles B. Copher Annual Faculty Lectures.



Copher's cutting edge study on Black presence in the Bible drew from a plethora of scholarly sources as well as applying literary critical and contextual studies to Ancient sacred texts. The study quickly became Copher's signature contribution to the field which would transform Biblical and Theological studies. The fruit of his research appeared in various print mediums such as religious journals, encyclopedia articles and books. United Methodist focused writings appeared in serials such as the Central Christian Advocate, devotional literature and Sunday School materials. The topic also made him an in-demand speaker ranging from national gatherings such as Black Methodist for Church Renewal to seminars in local churches.

Perhaps his most enduring legacy resides in the warm memories of his former students. This illustrates how he did more than just teach the Bible but also had a profound effect on their chosen career paths within the church.

Charles Buchanan Copher died on August 15, 2003. His funeral service was held at the First United Methodist Church, Hyattsville, Maryland. Copher is buried in Harmony Memorial Park, Landover, Maryland.

Marie W. Copher (1914-2012), United Methodist Lay Women, was born in Franklin, Georgia, on July 28, 1914 to Johnnie W. and Grace V. White. After graduating high school Copher went on to earn degrees from Clark College (B.A. 1952), Boston University's School of Education (Ed.M. 1953) and the University of Michigan (M.S.W. 1969). Her career in social work primarily focused on the welfare of families, especially children, women, and for a time college students which is evidenced in her various professional positions.

Early in Copher's career she became a woman's counselor at Clark College. From there she moved onto Spelman College to accept the position Assistant Dean of Women. After leaving Spelman, Copher began working in various offices dealing with adoption and foster care in the State of Georgia's various social services administrations. She started working in the Fulton County Department of Family and Child Services and ended her career as the Supervisor of State Adoption Service and Interstate Compact on Placement of Children. Copher retired in 1982.

Another aspect of her professional life includes writing related articles on family social work and adoptions. Copher served in various leadership positions within the profession on various organizations and panels. Examples would include panels on adoption, develop curriculums to train staff who works on special need's adoptions and a member of a Steering Committee of Region IV Adoption Resource Center.

Copher's other passion was active leadership participation within the United Methodist Church. Marie was a delegate to various General, Jurisdictional, and Annual conferences. Other denominational positions include serving as a director for the Board of Missions and elected membership in both the General Board of Pensions and General Commission on Archives and History (GCAH). Copher also served as president for United Methodist Women (UMW) as well as chairperson for the North Georgia Annual Conference UMW. On the local level Copher served in leadership positions for both the Ariel Bowen UMC and Murphy Harpst Family Children Services. Ecumenical work included being a delegate to a World Methodist Conference meeting and the World Federation of Methodist Women. Church Women United, an ecumenical group which included many United Methodist members, would also elect her to the office of President.

United Methodist history became another passion for her as evident in serving on GCAH, North Georgia Annual Conference UMW and the local church boards. Perhaps her crowning event in this area was the collecting, writing and publication of "The Journey, United Methodist Women in North Georgia, 1878-1983." True to her leadership style Copher unselfishly gave credit to all who collaborated on the project amongst her North Georgia UMW peers.

Copher married Dr. Charles Buchanan Copher on May 24, 1939. They would be together for sixty-four years until his death in 2003. Death overtook Marie Copher on May 16, 2012 in Mitchellville, Maryland. She is buried next to her husband at the Harmony Memorial Park, Landover, Maryland.



The Charles Buchanan and Marie W. Copher papers document the life and ministry of this United Methodist power couple. Here we see the role of education played in their early development and later occupational careers. Ministries in the form of service through a variety of ways defined their personal and professional lives. Both provided key leadership roles in every organization or ministry throughout their lives. A glimpse into their personal lives and affection for each other is manifested throughout the collection in various ways.

Collection arrangement consists of two series: Charles Copher and Marie Copher. The Marie Copher series documents her early life, education, professional life and church work throughout the United Methodist connection. Certificates, diplomas and correspondence attest to her successes in education and social work with a focus on work in the State of Georgia. Here the researcher will find documents on her rise as a leader in children and family social work which impacted changes in policies on both local and state levels. There is documentation of her work as a leader in three United Methodist general agencies as well as a delegate to General, Jurisdiction and Annual Conferences. There are records related to her ecumenical work beyond her time with United Methodist Women. For those who have an interest in Methodist women's work in the North Georgia Annual Conference during her adult life time will find much in the way of research value. But it was her keen interest in women church history that eventually led to the publication of "The Journey, United Methodist Women in North Georgia, 1878-1983". The collection contains working documents prior to the book's publication. Copher's photograph files primarily document friends and family events. There are times when her images' overlaps Charles photograph files. It is recommended that the researcher check all photograph files in the collection when searching for an image. Marie's artifacts document both her church efforts plus higher education work. The pocket appointment books are post retirement and offer a small glimpse of life.

The Charles Copher series is the larger of the two series. The Office Files is the largest subseries that contains a number of records from his professional life as an educator and speaker on the topic of African American Biblical Studies. In fact, these records document how Copher became the premier authority on Africans in the Bible which propelled him to the forefront of Biblical Studies in the mid-twentieth century. Also included are manuscripts, lecture notes, sermons, and published articles ranging from the Central Christian Advocate where he was a regular contributor to professional publications. Charles, like his wife Marie, served throughout the denomination including being the first African American to serve on the UMC Judicial Council as noted in the History Note. Unfortunately, Judicial Council documentation is primarily found in group photographs. Finally there are records from his work at Gammon Theological Seminary and the Interdenominational Theological Center

The Artifacts subseries is primarily composed of higher education ephemera along with awards and plaques recognizing Copher's contribution to various denominational churches in the form of lecture series. The Audio and Audio Visual subseries illuminate his role as leader, speaker and teacher including participation in the Black Methodists for Church Renewal caucus. There are other recorded presentations in the subseries as well. Lastly, the Annual Appointment Books and Planners subseries contain a near complete run of Copher's pocket appointment books starting with his professional beginnings and ending well into his retirement years.

Arrangement

Material has been arranged in the following manner.

Charles Copher

Office Files.

Annual Appointment Books and Planners.

Audio and Audio Visuals.



Artifacts.

Marie Copher.

Related Material

Microfilm Edition of the Mission Biographical Reference Files

Access Restrictions

There are no restrictions regarding this collection.

Use Access

Detailed use restrictions relating to our collections can be requested from the office of the archivist at the General Commission on Archives and History. Photocopying is handled by the staff and may be limited in certain instances. Before using any material for publication from this collection a formal request for permission to publish is expected and required.

Preferred Citation

When citing material from this collection please use the following format: Direct reference to the item or its file folder, Charles Buchanan and Marie W. Copher Papers, African American Methodist Heritage Center - GCAH, Madison, New Jersey. Do not make use of the item's call number as that is not a stable descriptor

Index Terms

Subject Terms

African American Methodists
Biblical scholars
Children-Institutional care
Church work-Audio-visual aids
Race relations-Religious aspects
Social justice
Theological seminaries, Methodist
Women clergy
Women in church work

Geographic Terms

Georgia
Massachusetts
Ohio
Virginia

Subject Names - Person

Bethune, Mary McLeod
Blyden, Edward
Gammon, Elijah H.

Subject Names - Corporate Bodies

Methodist Church
Methodist Episcopal Church
United Methodist Church (U.S.)



Genre Terms

Articles
Artifacts
Audio-visual materials
Audiocassettes
Biographies
Books
Bulletins
Church bulletins
Clippings
Correspondence
Degrees, Academic
Diplomas
Histories
Marriage certificates
Photographs
Scrapbooks

Occupation Terms

Biblical Scholar
Minister
Social Worker

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2411-6-2:4	Articles - Other Authors`	1970
2411-6-2:6	Bibliography of Works by Charles B. Copher	1965-1970
2411-6-2:5	Bethune, Mary McLeod	1983
2411-6-2:7	Biblical Perspectives on Black Theology	1970-1992
2411-6-2:8	Bigness of Little Things	Undated
2411-6-2:9	Biographical Material on Copher	1972-1998
2411-6-2:10	Black Authors - 18, 19, and 20th Centuries	1983
2411-6-2:11	Black Bibliography	1981-1987
2411-6-2:12	Black Doctors Bible	1931-1992
2411-6-2:13	Black History	1978
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2411-6-3:8	Copher	1954-1981
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2411-6-4:16	Lecture and Course Objectives Syllabus	1992-1993
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2411-6-5:6	North Georgia Annual Conference	1909-1979



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2411-6-5:10	1930s Photographs	1936-1938
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2411-6-7:1	Term Assignment	1914-1969
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2411-6-7:3	TOGETHER, Christian Advocate	1961-1962
2411-6-7:4	Typescript and Handwritten Notes - Folder 1	1993
2411-6-7:5	Typescript and Handwritten Notes - Folder 2	1993-1997
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2411-6-7:9	Visual Aids	Undated
2411-6-7:10	Williams, Larry: GREAT QUEENS OF ETHIOPIA	1984
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2411-6-1:1	Appointment Books and Planners 1950-1959	1950-1959
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Audio and Audio Visuals



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2413-3-1:3	Cassette: Three Thousand Years Of Biblical Interpretation As It Pertains To Black People	1990
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2413-3-1:6	Cassette: Naaman's Problem And Ours - Dr. Miles Jones	1988
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2413-3-1:13	Cassette: Changing The World Through Prayer	1998
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2413-3-1:16	Cassette: Searching For The Lost	1999
2413-3-1:17	VHS Cassette: Three Thousand Years Of Biblical Interpretation With Reference To Black People	Undated
2413-3-1:18	VHS Cassette: Sumner High School 59th Class Reunion	1990
2413-3-1:19	VHS Cassette: Dr. Charles B. Copher	2000
2413-3-1:20	VHS Cassette: Biblical Institute For Social Change - First National Convocation - June 20-21	1991
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Artifacts

Call Number	Folder Title	Date(s)
2413-3-2:1	Mortarboard Cap and Tassel	Undated
2413-3-2:2	Mortarboard Cap and Tassel	Undated
2413-3-2:3	Mortarboard Cap and Tassel	Undated
2413-3-2:4	Academic Tassels	Undated
2413-3-5:1	Plaque: Friendship Baptist Church Singles Ministry - Black History Speaker	1991
2413-3-5:2	Plaque: City of Buffalo Common Council	1994
2413-3-5:3	Plaque: Zion Baptist Church and Friends	1991
2413-3-5:4	Plaque: The Word of Truth Christian Center - Distinguished Service Award	Undated

Marie Copher

Call Number	Folder Title	Date(s)
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2411-7-2:2	Appointment Books and Planners	1962-1973
2411-7-2:3	Ariel Bower - Personal Readings	1925-1998
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2411-7-2:6	Autobiographical	1958-2003
2411-7-2:7	Bishop Matthew and Ethel Clair	1927-1964
2411-7-2:8	Breakfast Committee	1995-1998
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2411-7-2:11	Church Women United	1914-1997



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Call Number	Folder Title	Date(s)
2411-7-2:12	Church Women United Slide Presentation	1986
2411-7-2:13	Civil Rights/ Integration Issue	1940-1969
2411-7-2:14	Clergy Women	1969-1996
2411-7-2:15	Clippings	1967-2005
2411-7-3:1	Cooper Community Center, Boston	1948-1949
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2411-7-3:3	Georgia Conference on Social Welfare	1998-1999
2411-7-3:4	Georgia Methodism	Undated
2411-7-3:5	Guest Books	1967-2003
2411-7-3:6	Historical South	1973-2000
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2411-7-4:6	Installation Services for Methodist Women	1997
2411-7-4:7	Miscellaneous Documents	1973-1992
2411-7-4:8	National Association of Black Socialist Workers	1995
2411-7-4:9	North Georgia Annual Conference - Folder 1	1963-2001
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2411-7-4:11	North Georgia Annual Conference - Folder 3	1998-2000
2411-7-4:12	North Georgia History	1935-1992
2411-7-5:1	North Georgia Annual Conference - United Methodist Women	1962-2001
2411-7-5:2	Oral History Documents - Women's Division	1987
2411-7-5:3	A PAST TO REMEMBER, A FUTURE TO MOLD by Talitha Martin	Undated
2411-7-5:4	Photographs	1942-1953
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2411-7-5:10	A STORY NOT YET OVER - Chapter VIII Rough Draft	1901-1964
2411-7-5:11	University of Michigan	1969
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2411-7-5:13	United Methodist Women - Publications	1996-2002
2411-7-6:1	United Methodist Women	1986-1992
2411-7-6:2	Wesley Woods Research	1986-2004
2411-7-6:3	Vashti Research	1920-1933
2411-7-6:4	Who's Who Among Students	1951-1952
2411-7-6:5	Women in Mission: Living and Giving Faithfully	2003
2411-7-6:6	WOMEN IN THE GEORGIA LEGISLATOR by Peggy Childs	1983
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2411-7-6:8	Workshop: How to Write a Local Church History	1982-1995
2411-7-6:9	Workshop: Recovery of United Methodist Women's History	1962-1985
2411-7-6:10	World Federation of Methodist Women	1979-1984
2411-7-6:11	World Federation of Methodist Women - Photographs	1986
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2413-3-3:4	Oversize Photographs	Undated
2413-3-4:1	Oversize Certificates and Diploma	1936-1939

