



ARCHIVES *Advocate*

Northeast Regional Archives • Evangelical Lutheran Church in America • Vol. 10 No. 1, Winter 2025-26

Ancestry.com Update – Scanning is Complete!

by Sheila Joy, Archivist

In the archival world, it can be hard to complete a project. With so many moving parts and unpredictable timelines, reaching an actual conclusion is often far and few between. That is why our staff is excited to announce that we have reached a huge milestone with the Ancestry digitization project...the scanning portion is now complete! When we started this project back in October 2022, I did not anticipate it would take over three years to complete. As the project became larger and longer than we initially planned, it was broken into two phases. Phase one includes material that was scanned prior to October 2024, while phase two includes material that was scanned after October 2024, including microfilmed records. Digitized images from phase one are currently accessible to researchers by visiting us in-person (with advance appointment) or through our long-distance research services. Active ELCA congregations that participated in the project have also begun to receive copies of their digitized records. Sometime in 2026, the digitized records will start appearing on Ancestry.com's database, where they will also be fully searchable. At that time, we will also get access to the searchable database for in-person researchers. We will also be able to create password-protected online access for dues-paying members of the Lutheran Archives Center. Stay tuned for more information! We are excited to share updates as this exciting project continues.

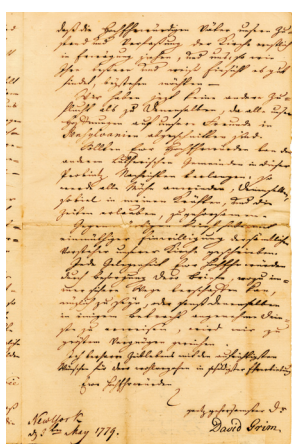
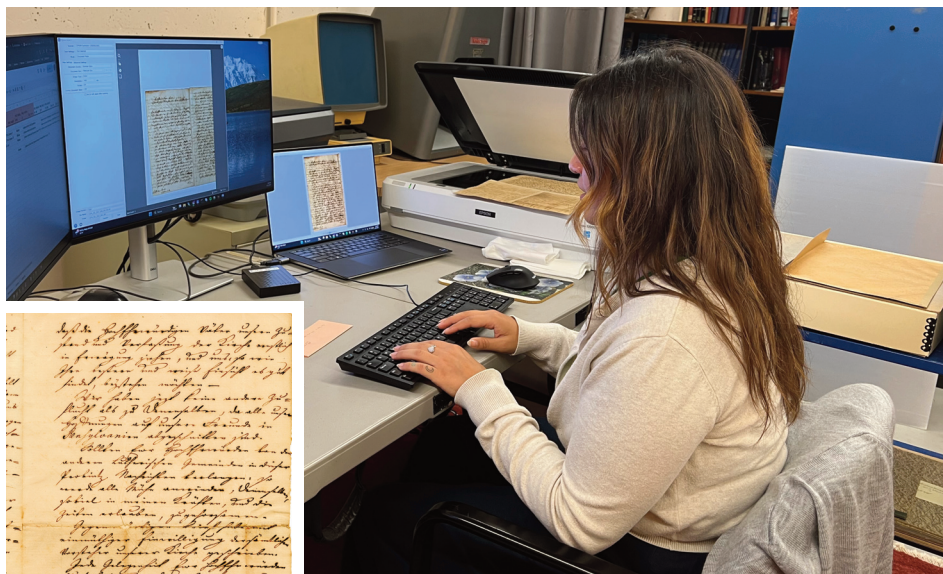


Here, a binder of church records is digitized by Ancestry.com in our library one page at a time, using an overhead camera and lights.

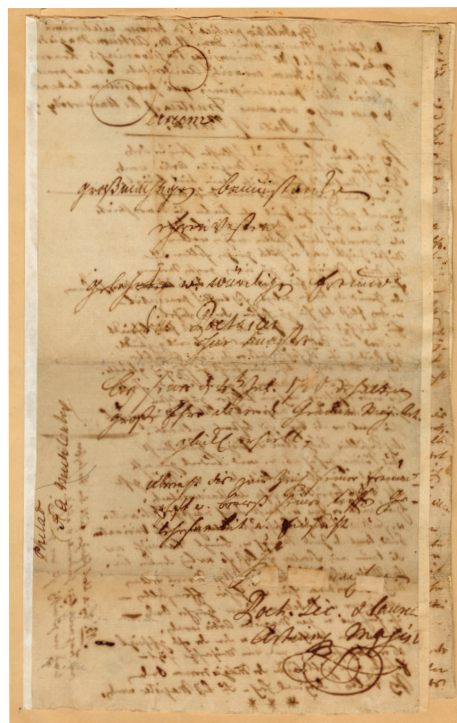
The Revolutionary City Portal: Providing Digital Access to Historic Documents

by Sheila Joy, Archivist

The Lutheran Archives Center is excited to announce that we are part of another digitization project, in collaboration with the American Philosophical Society, known as *The Revolutionary City: A Portal to the Nation's Founding*. We first learned about the “Rev City Portal” at a conference attended by our director, Lisa Minardi, and myself in 2024. Lisa then contacted the APS to see if they would be interested in including some of our records, which led to an on-site visit by their staff, who were highly impressed by all that we had to offer and agreed to add us to the portal. The project is twofold: APS is working with institutions to scan Revolutionary War era documents as well as providing an online platform to store and share the images with the public. The Rev City Portal then serves as a central hub for students, educators,



Sabrina Bocanegra, Head of Digital Access at the American Philosophical Society, works on scanning a 1779 letter from David Grim to Friedrich Wilhelm Pasche in our research library.



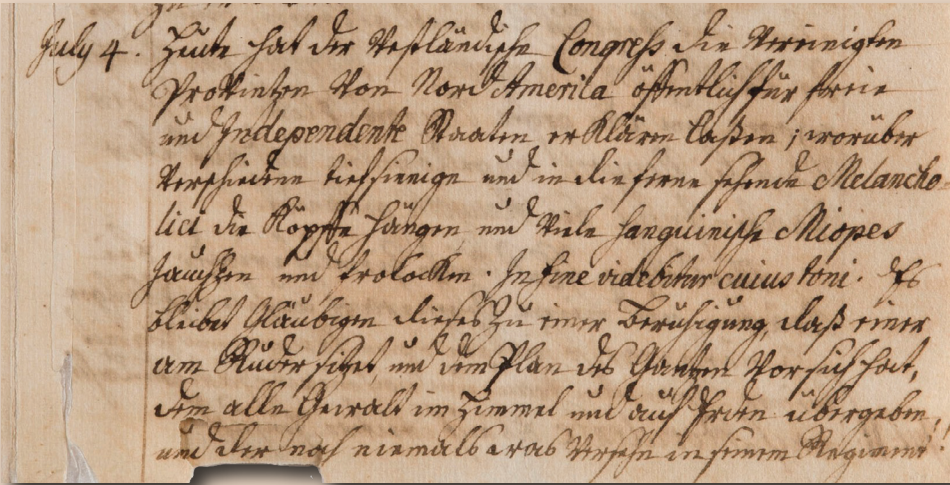
This essay was written by Frederick Muhlenberg while he was a student in Halle, Germany.

scholars, and the public to access primary source documents from the Philadelphia area during the American Revolution. We will be including documents from prominent Lutheran figures such as Henry Muhlenberg, Justus Christian Heinrich Helmuth, and Henry Keppel along with records from historic Philadelphia congregations such as St. Michael's & Zion and St. Michael's Lutheran Church, Germantown. The APS's Head of Digital Access, Sabrina Bocanegra, is scanning our documents on-site in our research library. Some of our material has already been added to the Rev City Portal and can be accessed online at TheRevolutionaryCity.org and then searching “Lutheran” or related keywords.

To prepare us for the launch of the portal, this past summer both myself and our assistant archivist, Haley Wrye, attended a workshop at the APS. We met alongside other project partners to discuss ways to improve the website and plans for its growth in honor of the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence in 2026. In October 2025, in honor of National Archives Month, we also attended a transcription workshop called the *Revolutionary Transcribe-a-thon* to help transcribe documents from the portal. We enjoyed transcribing manuscripts relating to the topic “Waging the War” and got to transcribe one of our own documents—an eight-page essay written by Frederick Muhlenberg during his time as a student in Halle, Germany.

We look forward to having more of our collections digitized and available to researchers in 2026 and beyond!

FROM THE DIRECTOR



Detail of the July 4, 1776, entry from Henry Muhlenberg's journals.



Portrait miniature of Henry Muhlenberg. Collection of a descendant, on loan to Historic Trappe.

Dear readers,

The Lutheran Archives Center is busier than ever, as the articles in this newsletter attest. We are particularly excited about the conclusion of the massive Ancestry.com digitization project and eager for the launch of our records in their searchable database in 2026. In conjunction with this, we will also be launching a membership program so that dues-paying members of the Lutheran Archives Center will be able to search our records on Ancestry.com. Stay tuned for more details! As you can also see from these articles, we are making great progress on processing the archival records of both recently closed congregations and decades' worth of backlogged material. This vital work helps to both preserve these materials in proper archival housing and to make them accessible to researchers. It also frees up some space (albeit limited) in our vault, which is a growing concern. With fifteen or more congregations now closing every year within Region 7 and sending their records to us for long-term preservation, it is only a matter of time until we run out of space. Various options are being investigated so that we can make a sound plan for future growth.

Looking ahead to the U.S. Semiquincentennial or "America 250" in 2026, we are excited to announce that many documents and artifacts from our collection will be included in the exhibition *Window to Revolution: Pennsylvania Germans and the War for Independence*. Organized by Historic Trappe's Center for Pennsylvania German Studies, this exhibit will tell powerful stories of the Revolutionary War-era experience in the Philadelphia area. The highlight of the exhibit will be pages from our manuscript journals of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, which chronicle in detail everything from the signing of the Declaration of Independence to the impact of the war on the homefront. These journals will also be the basis for an updated installation in the Muhlenberg House museum, which will reflect the refugee crisis that swept the countryside during the British occupation of Philadelphia from 1777–78. The Muhlenbergs hosted over thirty family members at peak during the war, who sought refuge in Trappe to escape crises in Philadelphia and New York. These exciting programs will launch in April 2026 along with the grand opening of the Speaker's House, home of Frederick Muhlenberg, after 25 years of restoration. We look forward to offering a special field trip for supporters of the Lutheran Archives to gather and enjoy these new experiences.

Your financial support is more vital than ever before to help us preserve Lutheran history and sustain our momentum into 2026. We rely on your generosity to help fund the essential work of archival processing and the purchase of archival supplies. Please consider making a generous donation to support the Lutheran Archives Center, either online at LutheranArchives.org or in the enclosed envelope.

Sincerely,

Lisa Minardi

Lisa Minardi
Executive Director

Thank you for your support!

Processing Updates & Hosting an Intern

by Sheila Joy, Archivist

This past year has been a productive one in terms of processing backlog, cataloging collections into our PastPerfect database, and creating detailed finding aids. Processing assistant Nicole Hudson has cataloged over 3,500 library books that are now accessible to researchers on our PastPerfect database, accessible via a link on our website. With the completion of cataloging the backlogged library books, Nicole is now processing church collections and creating finding aids that are also available on our website.

We are also hosting an archival intern, Jena Lui, who recently graduated from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign with a master's degree in Library and Information Systems. Jena has processed and created a finding aid for the Lutheran Church of Our Saviour, Philadelphia, and is currently processing a collection from Peace/Friedens Lutheran Church, Philadelphia.

With assistance from volunteer Ian Clements, we are also in the process of accessioning backlogged church collections that have sat on the shelves of our vault for years, their contents



Processing archivist Nicole Hudson labels folders of records from Immanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church, Philadelphia. Organized in 1911, Immanuel was located on the corner of Cottman and Palmetto Streets in the Burholme neighborhood. It closed in 2018.



Archival intern Jena Lui processes the records of Peace/Friedens Lutheran Church, organized in 1897 and formerly located at Clearfield and Helen Streets in Kensington, Philadelphia. It closed in 1997.

unknown, as more urgent needs were addressed. Ian has worked on re-boxing and creating box-level inventories of these collections, focusing first on New Jersey and Upstate New York record groups. After a collection is reboxed and inventoried, I catalog them into our

database, allowing them to be accessible prior to undertaking the more detailed processing work, which requires a considerable amount of staff time. This triage method allows us to provide increased access to collections that have been virtually undiscoverable until now.

Welcome Haley Wrye, Assistant Archivist

We would like to introduce a new staff member here at the archives: Haley Wrye, who joined our team as the assistant archivist earlier this year. Haley is a graduate of the University of Central Florida with dual bachelor degrees in Hospitality Management and Early American History. She also completed a prestigious summer fellowship at Historic Deerfield, where she researched the life of Revolutionary War general Elisha Porter of Hadley, Massachusetts. Previously Haley worked as an assistant curator and curatorial intern for Historic Trappe, where she helped catalog artifacts and process archival collections. Haley began working at the Lutheran Archives in February 2025 and has already helped to process many collections including the completion of St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Allentown, PA. She is currently working on processing the vast archival records of St. Michael's and Zion Lutheran Church in Philadelphia, which were transferred to the Lutheran Archives from the Old Zion congregation in 2024. Additionally, Haley is helping out with research and genealogy requests, creating content for social media, and helping to oversee the ongoing digitization work by Ancestry.com and the American Philosophical Society. In her spare time, Haley enjoys hiking, cooking, and catching up on her favorite TV shows.



Haley Wrye

St. Michael's & Zion Collection Update

by Haley Wrye,
Assistant Archivist

This summer, I began processing the vast collection of records from the St. Michael's & Zion Lutheran congregation in Philadelphia. Now known as Old Zion, this was once the largest and most significant German Lutheran congregation in colonial America. Some of its most notable pastors include Henry Melchior Muhlenberg (1711–1787), John Christopher Kuntze (1744–1807), Justus Christian Heinrich Helmuth (1745–1825), and John Frederick Schmidt (1746–1812). The congregation began as St. Michael's, in a church erected in 1743 at 5th Street and Appletree Alley. After quickly outgrowing this structure, Zion was built starting in 1766 at 4th and Cherry Streets. Completed in 1769, Zion was one of the largest buildings in North America, let alone Philadelphia. Due to its large seating capacity, it was used for both Benjamin Franklin and George Washington's memorial services. During the American Revolution, Zion was used by British troops as a hospital during their occupation of Philadelphia in 1777–78. On December 26, 1796, a devastating fire gutted the building, including an organ



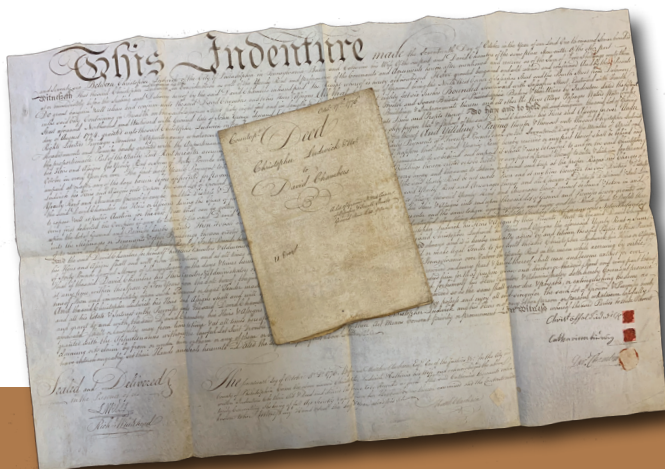
On these pages of the "Black Book," begun in 1792, are the signatures of St. Michael's & Zion members starting with Frederick Augustus Muhlenberg as president of the congregation.

recently built by David Tannenberg. The only part of the building that remained after the devastating fire was the brick walls. After being rebuilt, the building stood until 1869 when it was demolished.

I am so happy to be able to process this historic congregation's archival collection and have already found many interesting documents including colonial-era deeds and indentures signed by notable Philadelphia residents such as Christopher Ludwick (a German baker who served in the Revolution), James Ash (sheriff of Philadelphia), and Francis Hopkinson (signer of the Declaration of Independence). The collection also includes the congregation's original charter signed by Thomas Paine, nine financial account books ranging from 1769 to 1806 (containing expenses, income and donations to the Church) and the "Schwarze Buch" or Black Book which

contains the church's constitution and was signed by members starting in 1792 and continuing up until 1966. Notable signatures in the Black Book include those of brothers Peter and Frederick Muhlenberg.

The Old Zion collection itself is quite large (currently more than four dozen bankers boxes, three oversized boxes, and five document cases) and I am working diligently to ensure that each item is properly processed and a detailed description is entered into the finding aid. There are also several boxes worth of textiles and objects that will also be processed and entered into the finding aid. Working with this collection has and will continue to be extremely rewarding, especially with America's 250th right around the corner. I am learning so much, not only about Old Zion's history, but about life, culture, and the individuals who once lived and worshiped in Philadelphia. I am excited for all of the researchers, genealogists, and material culture enthusiasts who will be able to access these records once the finding aid is completed in spring 2026. Furthermore, I am also excited that many of Old Zion's records were also scanned for the Ancestry.com project and will soon be available online for those unable to come see them in person.



These deeds and indentures are signed by Christopher Ludwick, a German immigrant who served as the superintendent of bakers for the Continental Army during the American Revolution.

**Lutheran Archives Center
at Philadelphia**

7301 Germantown Avenue
Philadelphia, PA 19119-1794
215-248-6383
LutheranArchives.org
info@lutheranarchives.org



Newsletter of the
Lutheran Archives Center
at Philadelphia

Vol. 10 No. 1, Winter 2025-26

Lutheran Archives Center
AT PHILADELPHIA

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Rev. Dr. J. Francis Watson, President
Rev. Carl D. Shankweiler, Vice President
Mitchell Robinson, Secretary
Rev. Dr. L. George Detweiler, Treasurer

AFFILIATED DIRECTORS

Rev. Laura K. Daly, Upstate NY Synod
Rev. Dr. L. George Detweiler, Southeastern PA Synod
Rev. Dr. Maria Erling, United Lutheran Seminary
Robert T. Flynn, United Lutheran Seminary
Open, Metro NY Synod
Mitchell Robinson, New England Synod
Rev. Carl D. Shankweiler, Northeastern PA Synod
Open, Slovak-Zion Synod
Rev. Dr. J. Francis Watson, NJ Synod

DIRECTORS AT-LARGE

James Beidler
Rev. Ian Clements
Lindsay Clinton
Rev. Nelson Quiñones

DIRECTORS EMERITUS

Rev. Richard Baumann
Rev. Virginia M. Biniek
Rev. David Genszler
Mary Redline

EX-OFFICIO DIRECTORS

Rev. R. Guy Erwin, Ph.D., United Lutheran Seminary

STAFF

Lisa Minardi, Executive Director
E-mail: director@lutheranarchives.org
Sheila Joy, Archivist
E-mail: archivist@lutheranarchives.org
Haley Wrye, Assistant Archivist
E-mail: haley@lutheranarchives.org
Nicole Hudson, Processing Archivist
E-mail: info@lutheranarchives.org

Non Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Southeastern, PA
Permit # 146

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

As we look towards the end of one year and anticipate the beginning of a new year, we can reflect on our blessings. At the Lutheran Archives Center at Philadelphia, we are grateful for many opportunities this past year: to serve as the repository of the archives from closed congregations and ministries in ELCA Region 7; to support our region's synods by maintaining the records of Synod Assemblies and deceased clergy; to work with some of our living historic congregations to preserve their heritage; to partner with Ancestry.com in digitizing our archival records and for the ability to extend the digitization project to many living congregations throughout our region; to celebrate the Lutheran contributions to the founding of this country for the U.S. Semiquincentennial; to assist researchers looking to expand their knowledge of their family stories; and finally, we are grateful for the support we have received from our many generous donors throughout the year. As president of the Archives board, I also offer the gratitude of our entire board to our hardworking staff who have kept the day-to-day activity of this regional ministry going throughout 2025. If you have not done so before, I invite you to call and arrange a visit to your regional archives – you may be surprised at all the amazing things you can discover here!

J. Francis Watson
President of the Board