1903 valedictorian remembered through University archives display

Spring Arbor University caught a glimpse of history last semester when the University Archives, located in the White Library, displayed a Spring Arbor Seminary graduation dress from 1903 during the Fall 2010 semester. The two-piece dress, along with diploma, photographs, and a copy of the Valedictorian speech were artifacts of Jennie Walls Hamilton, the only person to graduate from the Seminary in 1903. Valerie Trexler, retired SAU adjunct professor, granddaughter of Hamilton, donated this treasure to the SAU Archives. Trexler’s husband, Fred Trexler, is a retired SAU professor of physics.

Hamilton’s parents both died while she was in her teen years and her aunt sent her to Spring Arbor Seminary to earn a teaching degree. Her valedictory address was titled “The Ministry of Difficulties.”

She married Rev. R.H. Hamilton in 1905. Hamilton had spent his boyhood in pioneer Free Methodist parsonages.

According to Trexler, “The young couple began a lifetime ministry of pastoring, evangelism, and Free Methodist church planting. Together Jennie and Henry built their first two churches and parsonages plus a barn at Estevan and Weyburn, Saskatchewan, Canada.” They started many other churches in the Saskatchewan/Manitoba region, where he served as district superintendent for six years. During this time, they raised 11 children, including one adopted daughter.

When they moved to Ontario in 1934, Jennie assisted Henry with more pastorates, also supporting him in his roles as district superintendent, denominational board member, and Free Methodist evangelist. She helped him found the church publication Free Methodist Herald, which he edited for its first 25 years of circulation.

Hamilton was quietly promoted to heaven on Nov. 29, 1963.

The dress was discovered in Trexler’s great aunt’s basement and had some water damage. Thanks to a grant received by White Library, the dress was restored and is now housed in University Archives, where it is properly temperature and humidity controlled.

Jason Yates, an archival student assistant and a 2010 graduate of Spring Arbor University, said, “The primary objective of the Spring Arbor University Archives is to collect, preserve, and make available records, manuscripts, artifacts and other collectable items of lasting importance that accurately document the history of Spring Arbor University.”

The University is always interested in the collection of materials relating to Spring Arbor University’s history. Contact Susan Panak ‘10, university archivist, at susan.panak@arbor.edu to inquire.

David Buchanan ‘03 joined SAU as interactive Web and social media strategist in June 2010. He produces many of the University’s video pieces and leads social media initiatives. His expertise in social media strategy has helped the University achieve a greater presence in the emerging field.

He is also founder of Coefficient Media, a Web and new media production company based in Jackson. Buchanan feels called to lead Christians in understanding and embracing the use of emerging technology for ministry and personal spiritual growth. Along with publishing a variety of weekly online news video programs, Buchanan organizes and speaks at technology conferences around the Midwest.

Buchanan and his wife, Rachel (Ryder ‘03), live in Jackson.