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Evelyn Chapel to House John Wesley Letter

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Evelyn Chapel to House John Wesley Letter

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – Illinois Wesleyan University’s Evelyn Chapel (1301 N. Park St., Bloomington) will soon welcome the addition of a valuable and unique artifact: a letter written by John Wesley, founder of the Methodist church and the man for whom the University is named.

The letter, dated Aug. 15, 1766, came to the University by way of a donation from the Rev. and Mrs. Ron and Doris Bogart of Bloomington. Bogart, a member of the Illinois Great Rivers Conference and Methodist Church, has previously exhibited Wesleyana relics on the IWU campus. Over the summer, Bogart contacted University Librarian Karen Schmidt to offer the University the final piece of his personal collection of John Wesley items.

“He felt that it would be well placed here, with our historic connection to the Methodist church, and that we would value and care for it,” said Schmidt. “The letter is remarkably well preserved, and reading it gives you a glimpse into a different time and way of communicating.”

Addressed to a Mrs. Elizabeth Woodhouse on its accompanying envelope, the Wesley letter encourages its recipient in her Christian endeavors and expresses an opinion of the itinerant minister John Standring. This particular letter has not been found in former publications of John Wesley material.

The letter will be displayed in the Chapel along with a portrait of Wesley as a direct connection to the Methodist beginnings of Illinois Wesleyan.

“His whole theology was about intellectual understanding as well as emotional or experiential connection, so head and heart,” said University Chaplain Hope Luckie of Wesley.

“The records of the Methodist conference that governed this region reflect the idea of education being an important thing—and an education at this institution was open and available to everyone, regardless of religion,” said Meg Miner, University archivist and special collections librarian.

Along with the letter, the University acquired a small frame purported to hold a lock of John Wesley’s hair. Luckie plans to have the letter and portrait on display by December.

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