Presbyterian Church in the USA

Women's Board of Home Mission Records, 1866-1958



Filmed from the holdings of the Presbyterian Historical Society

Primary Source Media



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INTRODUCTION TO THE COLLECTION

The records of the Women's Board of Home Missions of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), or PCUSA, offer a wide range of documents primarily concerned with the church's missions to Native Americans, immigrants, African Americans, and those in America's rural areas, particularly the South. The Women's Board of Home Missions was also interested in work for young people of the church and in the temperance movement. The documents in this collection will be of interest to scholars studying the social roles played by members of the PCUSA in trying to solve some of the country's most difficult problems. Particularly, in the years prior to the establishment of government programs to assist people in need, American churches played a crucial role in assisting the needy. As one of the larger mainstream Protestant churches, the PCUSA was active in many parts of the country and drew its support from churchwomen in many states. Scholars interested in the role of American women in public affairs in the years before women were supposed to play such roles will find these materials a rich source of information.

Many Presbyterian women in the late nineteenth century were not content to confine themselves to the traditional feminine role of home and family and sought an outlet for their talents in socially acceptable "church work." Foreign mission work had long attracted many churchwomen, who in 1877, with the support of the Reverend Sheldon Jackson, a missionary to Alaska, convinced the PCUSA General Assembly to establish the Women's Executive Committee for Home Missions. Originally created to care for missionaries who served as teachers in the church's mission schools in the American Southwest and West, the committee later expanded its work to include missions to Mormons in Utah and to Hispanics in Puerto Rico and Cuba, as well as to poor people in the Appalachians. In 1923 the PCUSA Woman's Board of Home Missions became part of the Board of National Missions.

This collection includes the minutes of meetings, financial records, correspondence, and publications from the 1870s to the 1950s, and it is a treasure trove for researchers in many fields. For example, the changing attitudes toward Native American schools and cultures are evident in the board's policies toward them. Additionally, the mission board's work among freedmen in the South during Reconstruction and after provides an interesting perspective on that aspect of American history. Other mission work was done among European immigrants in the eastern cities, and with Asian immigrant populations in the West. Mormons attracted special attention in Utah. After the beginning of the twentieth century, the board expanded its work to include Spanish-speaking populations in the Caribbean and Latin America.

Youth groups and other organizations serving young people were another major concern. By the beginning of the twentieth century, churchwomen were very concerned with young people's work. Board documents note in 1915 that the church had been publishing "Sabbath school" literature for seventy-seven years and their Young People's Department had been publishing its own literature for eight years with the aim of "broadening the education of Young People." The church also hoped to "inspire Young People to definite and practical Christian Service," particularly "along missionary lines."

Like most churchwomen's organizations of the late nineteenth century, the PCUSA Women's Board of Home Missions also devoted time and money to the temperance movement. Although not the primary concern of the board, this collection includes numerous files of correspondence to and from other churches on this subject and with the Women's Christian Temperance Union.

Extensive correspondence from various parts of the country describes how churchwomen organized themselves into presbyterials, the women's groups of the Presbyterian church. Generally, these records relate only to the East, the upper Midwest, and the West, because the Presbyterian church had split into northern and southern churches over the issue of slavery. However, there is some information on a few southern groups, such as those in North Carolina, Tennessee, and Florida.

Many of the papers in this collection deal with the operations of the board—committee and meeting reports, programs, budgets and special financial issues such as scholarships, as well as publications. The minutes of the organizing meeting of the board, held in May 1878 in Pittsburgh, are a part of the collection, so the entire history of the board can be traced. In its early years, the board tried to define its place within the institutional structure of the church. Its exact relationship vis-à-vis the Ladies Board of Missions had to be determined, as did its funding relative to that of other missionary agencies of the church. Board members had to decide where they fit into the church's Sunday school programs, Christian Endeavor groups, Westminster Guilds, Young People's meetings, and other church groups. They wanted their work to become known throughout the church, so they were particularly concerned that many churches had no trained leaders who could discuss the needs of home missions. As a result, the board launched an advertising campaign to publicize its leadership conferences throughout the country.

As the work of the board increased, monthly meetings were held between October and July, along with annual meetings of the board and, of course, the General Assembly of the church. Echoing future statements from some of her church sisters, one woman reported in 1915 that she had to give up some of her mission-related duties because her husband had "rebelled."

Among the many issues to be worked out was the transfer of property from local committees to the national one. It was agreed that the Sundays closest to Thanksgiving and Washington's Birthday were to be designated mission Sundays and the collections from Sunday schools on those days were to be given to the board.

As with any volunteer organization, there were frequent difficulties with unqualified helpers. Over the years, the women struggled with local treasurers who had no understanding of bookkeeping. One board member suggested it was useless to argue with local treasurers who insisted they had "sent the money to New York"; she reported that she simply asked for the check number and confirmation from the bank that the check had cleared. Perhaps most trying was the local treasurer who had served for twenty-five years and had only twice submitted a correct financial report.

At the board's first meeting, the women decided they would be "devoted to the evangelization of our own land." Their aim was to be national in character with a centralized board to oversee and organize the work of the various local mission boards. They also planned to distribute boxes of

clothing collected for missionary work and to publish leaflets and pamphlets describing the organization and its methods of home mission work. The board clearly indicated that its goal was to "introduce the gospel into the darkened homes and hearts among the Mormons, Mexicans, Indians, freedmen, and elsewhere."

Like all Protestants involved in mission work, the PCUSA Women's Board of Home Missions was interested in compiling statistics to demonstrate the success of their work. Citing just three of the many statistics they compiled reveals the extent of their reach: in 1894 they operated 123 schools in the United States and its territories; the same year they reported that eighty-five churches had grown directly or indirectly from their work; and in 1910 they had an annual budget of \$602,000.

This collection includes all the minutes of the board's General Council, as well as minutes of board conferences with the PCUSA's Board of Foreign Missions. For example, included in the collection is the 308-page bound report of the Executive Session of the Annual Meeting held in Louisville, Kentucky, in May 1912. Minutes of all the other meetings of the board are also included in the collection.

Because the board recruited so many teachers for their schools, in the 1880s it developed a handbook detailing expectations and qualifications, along with a list of clothing the teachers would require. Both are invaluable sources for those interested in the work American women did in the pre-World War I period. Those who wanted to teach needed to met four basic requirements. (1) They needed to be members of the Presbyterian or Dutch Reformed churches. (2) They needed appropriate education, which usually meant graduation from a normal school and demonstrated ability as a teacher. (3) They had to be in good health and have strength for the work, which meant a certificate from a qualified medical doctor. (4) Prospective teachers also needed to be adaptable to mission work because "the school is intended by the Board of Home Missions as a wedge for the entrance of the gospel." If a woman wanted to work as a matron or a secretary at a school, she had to meet all the above-listed requirements except the teaching credentials.

The district superintendent of the board sometimes went on recruiting trips across the country to seek out women who were willing to teach at mission schools. Such recruiting drives became more common after the board discovered that some unsuitable teachers had arrived at distant posts in the West. One was described as "uncouth in her manners, untidy in domestic manners, and uncultivated generally as to unfit her for the work." Despite the board's misgivings, she was reassigned to a school where the superintendent thought she would do the least damage, and she was still there several years later.

Teachers received a salary of \$450 per year, paid every three months after the board received the teacher's quarterly report. Teachers in Alaska and the Caribbean were paid higher salaries. Usually, the teacher was the school's sole employee, so she was responsible for paying the rent for the building, buying fuel for the stove, purchasing all curricular materials, collecting tuition from students and dispensing scholarships as they were available and needed, and handling all other business of operating the school. These expenses had to be detailed, and were reimbursed with the teacher's salary. If the teacher recruited a large number of students, she might earn an additional \$50

per year. The board had a superintendent of schools, usually a man, who had to be consulted on textbooks and methods of instruction and made suggestions for the running of the schools.

If a teacher left the job before serving three years, except for medical reasons, she was expected to return her travel expenses to the board. After three years, the teacher was entitled to a vacation "in the East," and the board paid her train fare one way. If the teacher had served five years, the board paid her fare both ways.

Scholars studying women's clothing will be interested in the list the board provided detailing what the women would need at their new posts. Because these were middle-class women, most with teaching degrees, one can assume that their clothing was typical of their social class. The list set forth the following: a "good strong walking dress," a "grey flannel dress or equivalent," "two gingham or good calico dresses," a "strong underskirt or Balmoral," a "water proof cloak or Ulster," as well as "three pairs of strong shoes," three suits of underwear, and two to three sets of flannel underwear. One woman commented that it was "about the same things" one needed at home, specifying the need for "plenty of good warm flannel—good substantial underwear."

Scholars researching the policies of the U.S. government toward Native Americans and the role of churches in educating them will find this collection a treasure trove. The files also contain directories of schools and stations, along with lists of those serving as teachers, most of whom were women. There are also many files containing the personal correspondence of missionaries who served throughout the United States, some in areas termed "Indian territory" at the time the mission schools were established. The desire of the government and the churches to "civilize" and Christianize the Native Americans is evident in the policies they pursued. Many of the mission teachers wrote of Indian children who were orphaned and sent to the mission schools for care and education. One file describes two girls sent from Indian territory to attend Maryville College in Maryville, Tennessee, in 1881; they were typical in that they soon adapted to the dominant culture as they pursued their education. Those who worked among the Native American population in Utah found their work complicated by the local Mormon population and the practice of polygamy.

The board also supported mission work in the eastern American cities, particularly among immigrant groups. By the late nineteenth century, the church had women working with Italians, Bohemians, Hungarians, and Slavs. Others worked with immigrants from Puerto Rico and Cuba, poor whites in Appalachia, and African Americans in the South.

Some of the files reveal how specific problems were handled by the church. For example, one extensive file from the 1920s describes a church dependent who was determined to be slightly mentally disabled. The young woman's mother was dead and her father, an ordained clergyman, was mentally ill and confined to an institution. The file details the decision to place the woman in a private institution at church expense, and includes a psychological assessment of her abilities. Interestingly, the file contains a letter written by the young woman, indicating a level of literacy far beyond what would be regarded as mentally disabled. In short, the file provides a detailed account of how such a problem was handled—something one would not expect to find among mission materials.

Another file concerns a complaint lodged after the closing of a Native American school in Oklahoma. The writer alleges that the school director was wasting money by purchasing supplies, including bedding, from distant companies, instead of supporting local companies. The committee, however, determined the director's actions to be acceptable because the mission had combined its supply orders with those of other schools and was thus able to obtain a quantity discount.

The board also had an extensive publishing program with many maps, pamphlets, and brochures concerning donations to the missions, devotionals, and general interest topics. Titles include *Marcus Whitman*, *Native Missionaries in Alaska*, *Tucson School for Pimas and Papagoes*, *Are Mormons Christians?* and *Mountain Whites*.

As a whole, this collection is an invaluable source of information on the work of middle-class American women in the closing years of the nineteenth century and in the twentieth century. Their concerns with the social improvement of various groups of people whom they had determined were in need of help is vividly recorded in these papers. Some letters describe problems that twenty-first-century women will, unfortunately, find all too familiar: husbands jealous of their wives' work, male-dominated church hierarchies reluctant to give women a say in church business, and cultural norms stipulating that women confine themselves to "women's work." Yet even with these constraints, these records reveal a group of strong women who through their church work made a lasting difference on the lives of the people they sought to help.

Kathleen L. Lodwick Professor of History Pennsylvania State University/Lehigh Valley

ADMINISTRATIVE HISTORY

In response to the urging of Sheldon Jackson and various prominent Presbyterian women, the 99th General Assembly (PCUSA) (1877) organized the Woman's Executive Committee of Home Missions. The initial purpose of the Committee was to provide schools and teachers for the mission fields in the western and southwestern US. The Committee supported missionaries among the Mormons in Utah and among the Native American and Spanish-speaking peoples of the southwest. Eventually, this work was extended to Alaska, Puerto Rico, Cuba and the Appalachians.

In addition to carrying out field work, the Woman's Committee published many pamphlets and leaflets, a missionary magazine entitled <u>Home Mission Monthly</u>, and an annual "Prayer Calendar," which eventually merged with the foreign missionary yearbook to become the <u>Yearbook of Prayer</u>. In 1897, the Committee's name was changed to Woman's Board of Home Missions.

In 1915 the Woman's Board incorporated; at this point it ceased to be a subsidiary of the Board of Home Missions. In 1923 the Woman's Board merged with seven other boards and agencies of the church to create one unified Board of National Missions, and its work was divided between two units of the new Board. Publications were taken over by the Unit of Education and Publicity, and work with the schools and hospitals in Alaska and the United States became the responsibility of the Unit of Educational and Medical Work.

Katharine Bennett, president of the Woman's Board at the time of the merger, became the first vice-president of the BNM. She also chaired the Woman's Committee of the BNM, which was comprised of the BNM's female members and was created to give the women continued jurisdiction over what had been their work for over fifty years. The Woman's Board continued to function as a holding corporation until the 1958 reunion of the PCUSA and the UPCNA.

EDITORIAL NOTE

Scope and Content Note

This collection includes minutes, reports, correspondence, financial records and publications of the Woman's Executive Committee/Woman's Board of Home Missions, 1866-1924.

The collection is arranged as follows:

SERIES 1: CORPORATE RECORDS, 1870-1946

Administrative Structure

Formation

Incorporation

Reorganization

Correspondence

Presbyterian Boards and Agencies

Presbyterian Women's Organizations

Other Agencies

Mission Work of the WECHM/WBHM

SERIES 2: MINUTES, 1878-1958

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Notes to Researchers

Record Groups 48, 51, and 105 were combined and reprocessed with material from the library to form this collection (Record Group 305). For conservation reasons, the volumes in RG 48 were disbound and the pages placed within acid-free folders.

As the official change from the Woman's Board to the Board of National Missions did not take effect until late in the year of 1923, there are a few items in this collection dated 1924 that relate to work which went on during the previous year. Although the Women's Board continued to exist after the reorganization, the body that oversaw the day-to-day mission work was the Woman's Committee of the BNM. Those records will be found in RG 305.1. Post-1923 records in this collection, such as the minutes in Series 2, are the records of the Woman's Board as a legal entity rather than a mission board.

A card file index to the 1888-1913 correspondence (organized chronologically) is available in the library. Researchers are advised to contact the Presbyterian Historical Society for access to this index.

Related collections from the Presbyterian Historical Society include:

RG 239	Sheldon Jackson Collection
RG 301.8	BNM, Unit of Schools and Hospitals/ Dept of Educational and Medical Work Records
RG 305.1	BNM, Woman's Committee Records
RG 48	Collection processed: 1969 Milton Kenin, Records Researcher
	Finding Aid prepared: 1983 Frederick J. Heuser, Jr., Archivist
RG 51	Collection processed: October 1969 Nancy Tuten, Assistant Records Researcher
	Collection revised and finding aid created: March 1977 Jane Ramsay, Assistant Records Researcher
RG 105	Collection processed and container list prepared: 1974 Jane Ramsay, Assistant Records Researcher

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project would not have been possible without assistance from many individuals. Primary Source Media (PSM) wishes to thank the Presbyterian Historical Society, where the original collection resides. Credit should be given to Margery N. Sly, Deputy Executive Director of the Presbyterian Historical Society for her support and invaluable advice. PSM also wishes to thank Kathleen L. Lodwick, Professor of History from Pennsylvania State University and Lehigh Valley for writing a comprehensive introduction to the collection. Finally, PSM acknowledges members of its staff: Olga Virakhovskaya, acquisitions editor, who assumed the responsibility for publication of the microfilm edition, Myra McGettigan, who served with dedication as manufacturing project manager, and Kimberly White, for her dedication to the smooth running of the project.

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 - 18 Ayer, E.C–Utah
 - 19 Bartlett, Nellie--Utah, 1880-81
 - Bartlett, P.M. and Mrs--Tennessee, 1881-83
 - 21 Bentley, A.W-New Mexico

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- Bentley, S.A–New Mexico, 1881
 - 23 Best, Kate--Utah, 1880-81
 - 24 Brown, Clemmie--Iowa, 1880-81
 - Bryan, R.W.D–New Mexico, 1882
 - 26 Canning, Grace--Utah, 1880

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- 15 27 Constant, Nellie--Indian Territory (Seminoles), 1881
 - 28 Corrales, Sue Perea–New Mexico, 1879
 - 29 Cort, Arthur–Utah, 1880

Cort, Mary–see Smalley, Mary (below)

- 30 Cort, W.C-Utah, 1880-81
- 31 Coyner, J.M–Utah, 1880-81
- 32 Crowell, Mary–Utah, 1880-81
- 33 Dickey, Virginia--Utah, 1880-81
- 34 Dunbar, M.J-Alaska, 1880
- Ealy, Mary–New Mexico, 1879-81
- 36 Farrand, Carrie–Iowa, Utah, Idaho, 1880-81
- Hall, Timothy--Indian Territory (Muscogee), 1881
- 38 Hammaker, Jennie–New Mexico, 1880
- 39 Harris, Mary--New Mexico, 1881
- 40 Higgins, Mary--Colorado, 1881
- 41 Kingsley, Ada--Utah, 1881
- 42 Knowles, J.F--Utah, 1880-81
- 43 Lauderdale, Frances--New Mexico, 1880
- 44 Leonard, George--Utah, 1881
- 45 Leonard, Lottie--Utah, 1881
- 46 Lewis, May--Utah, 1881
- 47 Martin, George--Utah, 1880-81
- 48 Martin, J.W-Idaho, 1880
- 49 McDonald, Ella--Utah, 1881
- McFarland, Amanda–Alaska, 1880-81
- McKean, Annie–Utah, 1880-81
- 52 McMillan, D.J-District Superintendent of Home Missions (Utah), 1880-82
- 53 McMullin, Sallie–Utah, 1880-81
- McNeice, Robert–Utah, 1879-81
- Moore, Mary--Utah
- Munger, Eugenia–Utah, 1880-81
- Noble, Anna--Idaho, Utah, 1880-81
- Nutting, Carrie--Utah, 1881-82
- 59 Parks, C.M-Utah, 1880-81
- 60 Perkins, J.D. and Mrs--Arizona, 1880-81
- Phillips, H.N–New Mexico, 1880-81
- 62 Pierce, Clara--Utah, 1881
- 63 Rea, S.C-Utah, 1880-81
- 64 Scovel, Marcia–Utah, 1880-81

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	66	Shearer, J.S-New Mexico, 1881-82
	67	Shields, J.M-New Mexico, 1880-81
	68	Shields, LoraNew Mexico, 1880-81
	69	Smalley, Mary–Iowa, Utah, 1880-81
	70	Smith, ElizabethNew Mexico, 1880-81
		Sorenson, Sallie-see McMullin, Sallie (above)
	71	Stevenson, R. AnnaUtah, 1881
	72	Stoddard, J–Indian Territory (Muscogee), 1881
	73	Taylor, Charles and MrsNew Mexico, Arizona, 1880-81
	74	Verbeck, Salome–New Mexico, 1880-81
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15	75	Voris, Mattie–Utah, 1880-82
	76	Welsh, M.EIdaho, 1879-80
	77	Wheeler, P.H–Utah, 1881
	78	Willard, Mrs. EugeneAlaska, 1882
	79	Williams, GeorgeIndian Territory (Nebraska), 1881
	80	Wood, Mariette-New Mexico, 1881
	81	Woodruff, AmeliaUtah, 1880
	82	Work, Laura BUtah, 1880-81
	83	Young, AliceUtah, 1880
	84	Young, Mrs. S. HallAlaska, 1882
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15	87	M. Langdon, 1879-81
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27 1 Catalogue of Publications, 1897-1898

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- 3-7 Teachers, 1891-96
- 8-16 Teachers and Missionaries, 1896-1905
- 17 Schedule of Teachers, 1905-06
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- 24-25 Directory of Schools and Stations, 1911-13
- 26 List of Workers, 1912-13
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28 1-10 List of Commissioned Workers, 1914-24

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- 11 1899
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- 29 1 The Experience of Chilcat George, 1900
 - 2 Kahtlian: A Chief of the Raven Tribe, 1906
 - 3 Ka-Ta-Da, 1906
 - 4 A Life Worth While: Mrs. A.R. McFarland
 - 5 A Native Missionary in Alaska, 1901
 - 6 Questions on Alaska, 1900, 1903
 - Rev. Sheldon Jackson, DD: Progressive Missionary, 1911
 - 8 The Schoolhouse Farthest West; St. Lawrence Island, 1910
 - 9 Sheldon Jackson: Pioneer in the New West, 1898, 1905
 - The Sheldon Jackson School, Sitka, 1910
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- 38 Pen Pictures from Our New Mexican Field, 1912
- 39 Pictures from Our New Mexican Mission Field, 1902

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40 Preparing for Life--Sketch of Santa Fe Boarding Schools, 1911

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29 41 Betty's Trip to Porto Rico, 1914 42 Carmita Goes to School, 1909 43 Finding the Truth in Porto Rico, 1909-10 44 Home Missions Schools Map Talk--Porto Rico and Cuba, 1906, 1910 45 Map Studies on Porto Rico; Star 49 and Supplement, 1910

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30	6	For Guidance of Christian Endeavorers
	7	Handbook for Presbyterial and Synodical Workers, 1895
	8	How It GrewStory of Woman's Organization, 1942
	9	How to Interest Children in Missions, 1912
	10	Manual for Executive Officers, 1916
	11	Missions Mapped and Budgeted, 1921-23
	12	Origin and Development of the WBHM, 1912
	13	The School Work of the Board of Home Missions
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	15	Woman's Board of Home MissionsA Definition
	16	Woman's Board of Home MissionsA Short History, ca.1923
	17	Woman's Missionary Societies vs. General Claims on the Church
	18	Woman's Synodical Committees of Home Missions, 1900
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30	19	All the Day Long: A Service of Praise, 1912
	20	5 Points of a Star Missionary Society, 1910
	21	A Home Missionary Sermon
	22	Intelligent Advancement, 1905
	23	Our Greatest National Inheritance
	24	Presbyterian Pioneers7 Denominational Lessons, 1908-09
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