

United Presbyterian Church of North America

Women's Missionary Magazine and Missionary Horizons



Part 1: Women's Missionary Magazine
Part 2: Missionary Horizons

*Filmed from the holdings of the
Presbyterian Historical Society*

Primary Source Media



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ISBN: 978-1-57803-383-7

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Printed and bound in the
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INTRODUCTION TO THE COLLECTION

The *Women's Missionary Magazine* of the United Presbyterian Church of North America (1887–1953) and its successor periodical, *Missionary Horizons* (1953–1958), provide researchers with a treasure trove of information about the work of the women of this church in missionary fields both at home and throughout the world. A mainstream Protestant church, the United Presbyterian Church of North America was located primarily in western Pennsylvania and Ohio, and eventually became part of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, before many companies became global and sent their employees to live in various countries, missionaries were the only foreigners who lived for long periods in countries other than their own. Indeed, some missionaries spent their entire adult lives abroad, save for furloughs in the United States. Because missionaries were supported by folks in the churches at home, they were expected to write letters and articles for church periodicals, which would keep those supporters informed about the work in which they were engaged. Although missionaries experienced the cultures of the countries where they resided only as outsiders, and most understood little about the inner workings of those societies, they were, in many instances, the only voices describing those cultures to people at home. Certainly the level of understanding depended on how long the missionary had been in the field, the individual's open-mindedness and receptiveness to the culture, and the skill the person had with the local language. Then, too, there was always the dichotomy between painting a bleak picture of the lives of the native peoples in the desire to gain more contributions and painting a rosy picture to illustrate the successes the missionaries were enjoying.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, American women had few outlets for their intellectual and creative energies, but the churches were one very respectable place where women could take leadership roles, particularly in the missionary societies. After male missionaries, usually in the company of their wives, went to foreign lands, they soon discovered they had little access to the local women. Because wives were busy with their households and children, many missionary societies began recruiting single women who could serve as teachers in the schools the missionaries founded for girls, and as nurses and doctors who could treat indigenous women without violating local mores concerning interaction between genders. In many cases, the women who headed the missionary societies, both at mission headquarters and in the local churches, were married women, often with children, who had no personal opportunity to serve in the mission field, but who could make their contributions to the larger mission effort through this work. Generally speaking, these were middle-class women, often with at least a high school education, but some must certainly have been college graduates, as were many of their sisters who served in the mission fields.

Women's Missionary Magazine contained articles about the United Presbyterian Church of North America's missions in Africa, India, China, Latin America, and the Middle East. It also contained articles about the church's missions to various groups in the United States, primarily in Appalachia, among African Americans, and among Native Americans. Most of the articles were short and emphasized social and cultural issues among the peoples the missionaries were serving, as well as the progress the missionaries were making with their schools and hospitals or clinics. Many of the early issues feature biographies of women who were missionaries or were in training to take up that work. These biographies indicate what was typical of most mainstream Protestant single women missionaries; namely, they were most likely college graduates, which put them in a tiny minority of American women of their day. Although it has been stated many

times that missionaries generally were from small Midwestern towns, this can only be partly substantiated, as many were from families who had recently immigrated to America and others belonged to families that, like the rest of the country, were gradually moving westward. However, since the United Presbyterian Church of North America was a denomination with a limited geographic distribution in Ohio and western Pennsylvania, most of its missionary recruits did come from that area.

Included in most issues of *Women's Missionary Magazine* were articles on projects for children to interest them in supporting missions. Many of these articles were focused on acquainting children in Sunday schools and Bible schools with mission work, particularly as it related to children in far-off lands. Some of the articles described games that were popular among the children in the countries where the missionaries worked. Always, young readers were encouraged to collect their pennies to donate to missionary causes to help needy children.

Many issues also contained suggestions for fundraising activities to be used by the churches to support the missions. These included rummage sales, bake sales, teas, and garden parties, as well as Christmas bazaars, thus providing a picture of the social life of the churches during this period. Also included in the magazine were periodic financial reports and minutes of meetings of the mission boards. The details of how women conducted the work of their missions at a time when many thought a woman's place was in the home are revealing. It was within the context of church missions that these women joined with others of their wider church body in their efforts to gather the resources to support their missions. This was a socially acceptable way for women to express themselves and at the same time have direct contact with their sisters who had ventured to more remote parts of the United States or to foreign countries to pursue careers as missionaries. Few Protestant churches ordained women, except in limited roles as deacons, in the years that the missionary movement was at its height, but as leaders in the women's missionary movement, ambitious individuals could achieve leadership positions and have a tremendous impact on the work.

Because missionaries were among the first Americans who lived abroad among peoples with cultures different from their own, they did not have the advantage of anthropological studies to inform them of the situations they would encounter. Indeed, many open-minded and highly observant missionaries actually became pioneers in the field of anthropology as they sought to explain the cultures and religions they encountered to readers at home. Life on the mission field was not easy. First, missionaries had to learn the local language in both written and spoken form, acquaint themselves with local customs, and try to integrate into the existing indigenous communities as well as the local mission community. Many missionaries were unable to adapt to life in foreign climes, many saw their health break down, and many had to return home even before their first regular furlough, usually after seven to ten years in the field. The cultural isolation of the mission compound, where one was daily forced into work and social life with people who shared one's religious affiliation but sometimes little else, was extremely difficult and caused many to suffer mental breakdowns and be sent home.

When women missionaries wrote about their work for church periodicals, among the many topics they addressed were the difficulties that local women faced. These included child betrothals and marriage, bride prices, bodily mutilation such as foot binding in China, child and spousal abuse, dangerous childbirth practices, concubinage, lack of education and medical care, and forced suicide at the death of one's husband. It was to remedy such conditions that the women missionaries devoted themselves, believing that to serve the local women was the most effective way of introducing them to Christianity. Indeed, many believed that converting a

woman meant converting a family, although this certainly did not apply in many patriarchal societies. In the mission schools and hospitals, students and patients were told Bible stories while being educated and cured, and many who first heard of Christianity in this way later converted to the foreigners' religion.

Mission schools often attracted the very poor, particularly if they offered free tuition, food, or clothing. Generally, missionaries did not like to offer free services, and mission boards expected the schools to be self-supporting, with only the missionaries' salaries being paid by the home board. Yet, in most cases, schools had to offer some financial incentives when they were first opened to entice students to attend. As mission schools became established, they generally sought to attract girls from the middle or upper classes who could afford to pay their own costs, but most offered scholarships to talented poor girls and to girls from Christian families. In many countries, non-Christian families permitted their daughters to attend mission-run boarding schools in part because their policies aimed at protecting the girls' virtue were so strict. Many mission girls' schools refused to permit men on the school grounds, making exceptions only for mission employees and relatives of the schoolgirls who were required to accompany the girls home whenever there was a vacation. Indeed, some studies indicate that in many cases girls sent to mission schools were those holding awkward places in extended, blended, or broken families—such as a teenage girl suddenly orphaned and sent to live with relatives whose only children were teenage boys. It was in the mission schools that these young women were first introduced to Western ideas of science, physical education, home economics, social work, and so forth, as well as the possibilities of careers for themselves.

Hospitals, too, were seen as a good setting to preach the Gospel, particularly to inpatients. Like mission schools, mission hospitals were expected to be self-supporting, with mission boards providing only start-up funds for buildings and major pieces of equipment and paying the salaries of foreign employees.

Christian missions in many countries often became havens for abused or displaced women who came to the attention of the missionaries, who offered them employment out of compassion. Although denounced as “rice Christians” by some who saw these women, and sometimes men, as opportunists, they were in fact often simply seeking to improve their lives, and in some cases to save them. The discarded or abused woman who sought employment as, say, a cook or housekeeper for missionaries could be assured of a safe place to live, usually with a room of her own, regular duties, a not overly long workday, and a regularly paid salary that she could keep instead of being required to hand it over to a husband or mother-in-law or senior wife. She could even look forward to a day each week when only minimal work was required. If the missionaries also wanted the women they employed to attend church services, how many jobs could one find where one was required to sit quietly for several hours a week? Who was to say what was in the individual's mind during those times, but sitting was certainly not hard labor. If some of these women converted, it was perhaps because they saw how their lives had improved in the employ of the foreign missionaries.

The reader of *Women's Missionary Magazine* will benefit from many articles on such topics. Some of the issues, such as those dealing with relations between Christians and Muslims, are amazingly contemporary, even though they were written a century ago. Those who have studied mission history in archives and periodicals know that such materials contain much information that does not specifically relate to what most people think of as religious or church work. Indeed, *Women's Missionary Magazine* reveals much to interest scholars in many fields. An intriguing aspect of this periodical is how one can trace the changing attitudes of white Americans toward

African Americans, although those who wrote the articles likely did not have this topic in mind. Beginning during Reconstruction, the magazine included articles about colleges and various programs for African Americans, but it was not until about the 1940s that pictures of black faculty members at the colleges appeared. At the same time, photographs of black women who were on various church committees also were published, sometimes on the same page as pictures of white women. As the years passed, African American and white women began to appear in the same pictures, not just in parallel ones.

Additionally, researchers could use *Women's Missionary Magazine* to trace women's fashions over the decades; the women pictured were certainly members of the middle class and presumably wore clothes appropriate for their social set, not the high fashions found in periodicals focusing specifically on fashion. The floor-length, long-sleeved dresses with bustles and huge flowered hats one sees in the early issues change into less-full skirts and then shorter and shorter ones. Clothes become more comfortable and hats become smaller, until the hats are dispensed with altogether. One can even follow how nurses' uniforms changed over the decades simply by studying the photographs presented in the magazines. Likewise, the clothing of women in other countries and among American minority groups is also documented. Other topics include how women raised and controlled vast sums of money, and what kinds of disputes the women had with the male hierarchy of the church over their work, and how they resolved them.

Yet another example of the breadth of the periodical is revealed in articles that pertain to Native Americans. Because the Presbyterian Church was very active in establishing schools and churches for Native Americans, these records would be invaluable for scholars interested in, say, the Navajo or the Apache. The pictures alone would make this collection a must for any scholarly library with an interest in Native Americans. During the mission heyday, home missions were generally considered the less-desirable place to serve, with exotic foreign countries attracting the best and brightest of the missionary recruits. But for those who could not qualify for foreign missions either for health reasons or because they could not move so far away from loved ones, the home missions were an acceptable alternative to foreign missions and were certainly much safer places to live.

Much has been written about the cultural imperialism practiced by Christian missionaries in previous centuries, but one must remember that in the context of the time and cultures in which the Anglo-American missionaries lived, they truly believed they were doing God's work when they decided to introduce their religion, educational ideas, philosophies, and medical practices to other people abroad or to minority groups at home. It is impossible to determine how many people served as Protestant missionaries to foreign lands, not to mention those who served the home missions, but I have estimated that at least 50,000 individuals served in China alone during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which would certainly put the worldwide number somewhere near 100,000 over a period of two centuries.

Women's Missionary Magazine is unique because, although most mainline churches had women's periodicals, each had its own field of interest; its periodicals reflected those areas, and the materials and pictures they contain cannot be found anywhere else. *Women's Missionary Magazine* offers a view of those societies as experienced by missionaries during the heyday of the Protestant missionary movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

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EDITORIAL NOTE

Organization and Format

This collection contains two parts:

Part 1: *Women's Missionary Magazine* (Volumes 1-66, August 1887-August 1953)

The *Women's Missionary Magazine* began publication in August 1887 under the auspices of the Women's General Missionary Society of the United Presbyterian Church of North America. In September 1953, the magazine changed the name to *Missionary Horizons*.

Part 2: *Missionary Horizons* (Volumes 67-71, September 1953-December 1958)

Previously called *Women's Missionary Magazine*. Retained the volume numbering sequence after the title change from volume 67 through 71. In 1958, the United Presbyterian Church of North America merged with the Presbyterian Church in the USA to form the United Presbyterian Church in the USA. *Missionary Horizons* merged with the PCUSA periodical, *Outreach*, to form *Concern*, first published in January 1959.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project would not have been possible without assistance from many individuals. Primary Source Media (PSM) wishes to thank 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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Part 2: *Missionary Horizons*

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