



# PRESBYTERIAN HERITAGE

Fall 2019 / Vol. 32, No. 2

*Children and pastors  
listen to field worker  
and seminary  
student Peggy Ruth,  
Harlem, NY, 1948.*



## Faith Reframed

### THE RNS DIGITIZATION PROJECT

During the first half of the twentieth century, Americans experienced a communication revolution. Mass-circulated newspapers and magazines, as well as radio broadcasts and motion picture newsreels, greatly increased the amount and scope of news available. The Religious News Service (RNS) stepped into this new journalistic environment in 1934, promising to distribute “reliable and bias-free” religious news to media outlets across the United States. RNS photographs and press releases covered Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Eastern Orthodox, and other religious experiences in the United States and around the world.

The Presbyterian Historical Society acquired the RNS collection in 1984, 600 cubic feet of material including over 60,000 photographs dating from 1945 through 1982. Images in the collection compellingly document efforts to rebuild post-war Europe and Japan; the growth of interfaith youth organizations in the 1950s and 1960s; protest movements about civil rights, feminism, the Vietnam War, and abortion; and religious practices around the world—from small-town America to Africa and Asia.

*(continued on page 4)*

# HIGHLIGHT REEL: SUMMER REWIND AND FAST-FORWARD TO FALL

July was an especially memorable month at PHS. In addition to setting an all-time record for in-house researchers, we saw our Director of Programs and Services Nancy Taylor become Acting Executive Director, Ernest Higginbotham begin his term as Board Chair, and a new Archives Technician join our team.

From July to September we hosted three intriguing talks by PHS researchers: Ira Dworkin on the history of African American engagement with the Congo, where William Sheppard and Alonzo and Althea Edmiston served as PCUS missionaries; Julia Flynn Siler on her recent *New York Times* Editor's Choice book, *The White Devil's Daughters: The Women Who Fought Slavery in San Francisco's*

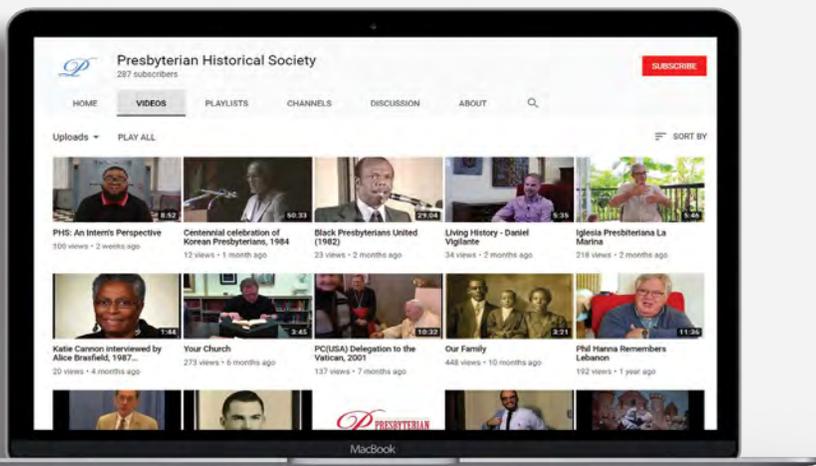
*Chinatown*, which tells the story of the PCUSA-funded Cameron House; and Crystal Sanders on the early days of Head Start in Mississippi, a program that received financial and planning support from the UPCUSA.

Missed those talks? Watch highlights on our YouTube channel along with historic and PHS-produced videos—including a mini-documentary by “Building Knowledge & Breaking Barriers” intern Marcus Baldwin, a centennial celebration of Korean Presbyterians from the 1984 General Assembly, and oral history interviews with African American church leaders and LGBTQIA+ Presbyterians. Visit Pearl for more digitized film and oral histories:

[www.history.pcusa.org/Pearl](http://www.history.pcusa.org/Pearl)

October means changing leaves and arriving applications for our Heritage Preservation Grants program, where small and historic PC(USA) congregations apply to receive free digitization services. Check out our video showcasing La Iglesia Presbiteriana of Rincón, Puerto Rico—one of five winners last year: [www.history.pcusa.org/HPG](http://www.history.pcusa.org/HPG)

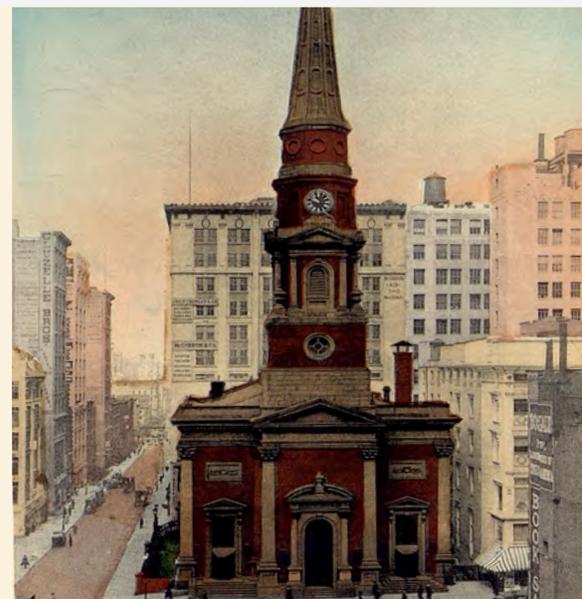
HPG applications are due October 31, four days after Reformation Sunday 2019.



## JOURNAL PREVIEW

In the Fall/Winter 2019 issue of *The Journal of Presbyterian History*, Dr. Bruce Bandler examines events surrounding the Presbyterian schism of 1741 and Dr. Bradley J. Longfield looks at the Fundamentalist-Modernist conflict through the lens of Brick Presbyterian Church in New York City and pastor William P. Merrill.

Call 215.928.3865 to receive *The Journal* or visit our website: [www.history.pcusa.org/journal](http://www.history.pcusa.org/journal)



# RNS Photographs

AT THE PRESBYTERIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY



View all 493 images from the Religious  
News Service pilot project:  
[www.history.pcusa.org/rns](http://www.history.pcusa.org/rns)

## FAITH REFRAMED *(continued from page 1)*



PHS has long wanted to bring these images to a wider audience, but the sheer size of the collection proved daunting. Last year, thanks to a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, we launched a planning project to prioritize images for digitization. Working with a panel of historians and journalism scholars, as well as a photograph conservator and copyright attorney, we developed a three-part rating system to apply to each RNS image that notes historical significance, physical condition, and amount of caption information available. Thinking about what makes an image historically significant and then boiling that down to a ranking from 1 to 5 was particularly exciting and challenging work.

NEH funding also allowed us to carry out a pilot project to test the rating system and our new process for scanning, describing, and displaying the highest-rated images online. Two PHS archivists, Nancy Taylor and Natalie Shilstut, rated 1,315 photos from boxes across the five-decade scope of the collection and the PHS digitization team then scanned 493

photographs alongside accompanying captions, press releases, and clippings. All of those scans are now available for public exploration through PHS's digital archive, Pearl: [www.history.pcusa.org/rns](http://www.history.pcusa.org/rns)

Much of what we learned through the RNS digitization project speaks to innovative aspects of archival practice, including how archives will collect, preserve, and share history in the future. In the coming months, we will publish a project white paper and discuss the results at a professional conference. We will also pursue funding to continue digitizing and rehousing images from the RNS Photograph Collection.

Whether documenting Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, or Eastern Orthodox perspectives, the RNS images tell the story of a rapidly changing world in which religious belief and faith-based action shaped human experience. They show us glimpses of the world we live in today.

**Learn more about the RNS digitization project at:**  
[www.history.pcusa.org/rnspilotproject](http://www.history.pcusa.org/rnspilotproject)

### **PHS Archives Technicians Allison Davis and Cecilia Figliuolo digitized the pilot project images. Here are some of Allison's insights into their work:**

"The scanned textual resources—press releases, newspaper clippings, and correspondence—provide researchers with historical context about the photos. A 1980 image from New York City of (1) Raoul Wallenberg Day, a Swedish holiday honoring a man who dedicated his life to saving Jewish people in Nazi-occupied Hungary, is paired in Pearl with a 1956 interview with Abraham Kalinski in Stockholm.

"Three frequently recurring subjects are refugees, such as a second 1980 image showing (2) Cuban migrants settling in Florida with help from the Southern Baptist Church; the global response to communism; and social reformers and protests. A third 1980 photo—quite the year!—of (3) 25,000 marchers advocating for the Equal Rights Amendment in Chicago is an especially powerful crowd scene.

"The RNS collection shows four decades of interaction between religion and society around the world, as well as church and state in conversation in the U.S.A. I wonder what (4) President Johnson discussed with his spiritual adviser and friend, Billy Graham, in 1964.

"Mixed in with weighty news coverage are photos that made Cecilia and me smile, including a subgenre of nuns doing 'everyday' things—(5) shooting bows and arrows in 1955 or coaching pee-pee football. A favorite image of ours is (6) three clergymen blessing animals at the 1965 World's Fair. A pastor, a monk, and a rabbi—no joke!"

## VITAL CONNECTIONAL SUPPORT

The Presbyterian Historical Society is *the* place to find countless stories of Presbyterians changing the world. Whether you experience our world-class collections that encompass 500 years of history first-hand, or explore our archives virtually using 21st century tools and technology, you will discover life-giving accounts of faith, courage, and strength, as well as the deep commitment to service and justice that helped shape our country and our world.

When you give to the PHS Annual Fund, you provide essential support for and increased access to our programs and services. Whether seeking assistance from our professional archivists, reading *The Journal of Presbyterian History*, viewing collections through Pearl, or following our blogs and social media, thousands across the globe are able to connect the hopes and dreams of past Presbyterians to the world we live in today.

We are a connectional Church and a connectional people—interdependent and intertwined—with a common belief to act with justice and to serve and love one another. Your continued generosity is vital support for all who rely on our unique archival services. Please give to the **PHS Annual Fund**. No gift is too small and *every one* makes a difference!

**Online:** [www.history.pcusa.org/give](http://www.history.pcusa.org/give) | **Phone:** 215-928-3865 | **Mail:** Development Office (See address on back)

## QUESTIONS, ANSWERS, AND COLLECTIONS

In 2001, shortly after the PC(USA) General Assembly voted to maintain a ban on ordaining openly gay pastors, Daniel Vigilante asked Pam Byers, Executive Director of the Covenant Network of Presbyterians, a simple question: “Why should I stay in the PC(USA)?”

Vigilante, a gay student at Princeton Theological Seminary, had crossed the country for a gathering of the Covenant Network, a leading group in the struggle for full inclusion of LGBTQIA+ Presbyterians in the life of the Church.

Byers’ response convinced Vigilante to stay in the denomination: “Things are going to change,” she said. “I don’t know when, but they are going to change. I hope you’re a part of it.”

Daniel—now Rev. Vigilante—shared this story during a recent oral history interview for our Pam Byers Memorial Collecting Initiative. Like PHS’s other featured collecting initiative in 2019, “African American Leaders & Congregations,” the LGBTQIA+ History project is providing Presbyterians from across the theological spectrum a chance to contribute records, personal papers, and recorded testimony about the contemporary history that shaped their lives inside and outside the Church.



Through the stories of Presbyterians such as Daniel Vigilante and Corine Cannon, matriarch of the prominent African American Presbyterian Cannon family, PHS’s collecting initiatives are complementing our ongoing work to collect from congregations, mid councils, national church offices, and missionary families. From January to June 2019 we brought in 174 groups of material, including original records of 86 active and historic PC(USA) congregations from 17 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. The recent interviews we recorded in Philadelphia, Chicago, Rochester, Atlanta, Princeton, Rincón, and Minneapolis give voice to the PC(USA)’s diverse and yet collective history.

Watch highlights from recent interviews on the **PHS YouTube channel**. Have materials for our collections? Email us: [refdesk@history.pcusa.org](mailto:refdesk@history.pcusa.org)



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## Book of Confessions

Study Edition  
*Revised*

*Now Including the  
Confession of Belhar*

## REFORMATION SUNDAY: OCTOBER 27

Presbyterians have long used confessions of faith to speak to God, the Church, and the world but never adopted one confession as a final statement. Download this year's free church bulletin insert for use on Reformation Sunday: "One Christ, Many Confessions: Theology from Zurich to Belhar"

[www.history.pcusa.org/rs](http://www.history.pcusa.org/rs)