The Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. (PCUSA) was the first Protestant denomination in the United States to organize a missions committee at the national level. In 1802, the General Assembly appointed seven members to the initial Standing Committee of Missions, four clergy and three lay persons. The success of the committee and the subsequent growth in mission work led the PCUSA to change the standing committee to a more permanent Board of Missions in 1815 and to organize a separate Board of Foreign Missions in 1837. An 1838 resolution passed by the General Assembly stated “that it has always been the duty of the church to make known the gospel to all the world....”

Before the end of the nineteenth century, the PCUSA had organized mission stations in Africa, Brazil, China, Columbia, India, Iran, Iraq, Japan, Korea, Philippines, Syria, and Thailand. Other Presbyterian denominations were not far behind. In 1844, the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church instituted its first missionary efforts in Syria and by 1852, the Associate Presbyterian Church had set up mission work in India. Also in 1852, the Board of Missions for the Cumberland Presbyterian Church launched its foreign mission work, although board missionaries began working with Native American populations much earlier.

While the Woman’s Foreign Missionary Society, the oldest and largest of the women’s boards, dedicated to the cause of foreign missions, was not organized in Philadelphia until 1870, women served as missionaries much earlier as evidenced by the images below. During the past 300 years, the church’s commitment to teach, heal, and evangelize took its servants, both men and women, to many mission fields throughout the world.
Lillias Stirling Horton Underwood, MD (1851-1921) served as a mission doctor in Korea from 1888 to 1921.

PCUS medical missionary Dr. Mattie Ingold Tate on a mission trip with Korean “Bible women” and a servant carrying their bedding, ca. 1910. (RG 2121)

Bertha Irvin (b. 1868) and Korean teachers, n.d. (RG 223-7-21)
“Missionary Map of China (Presbyterian).” New York: Woman’s Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., ca. 1920.

PCUSA missionary Aimee Millican (1884-1974) and Chinese women (showing bound feet), ca. 1910s. (RG 199)

“Go-Preach’ We start for the mountainous region of Lai Yuan.” Missionary Florence Logan (b. 1897) on the right, holding the donkey’s bridle. Photograph taken in front of the Presbyterian Mission Compound gate in Paotingfu. (RG 241)

Lay missionary Jane Lea Goheen (1886–1977) riding on a camel in India, 1912. (RG 222-1-36)

Dr. Laura Lang (1911– ) conducting her midwifery class at the India Memorial Hospital, Fatehgarh, U.P. (RG 223-3-15)
In 1894, Minnehaha Finney (1867-1965) was appointed by the Women’s Board of Missions of the United Presbyterian Church in North America to the Egypt Mission and served over forty years in Egypt until her retirement in 1937.

“A district missionary from the United Presbyterian Church of North America distributing Gospel portions and Christian literature after a village meeting. (MS postcard collection, Eg 98am)”}

“Dr. Kellersberger tells children about leprosy medications, c. 1950.” (RG 756)

Lydia Belle Walker Good (1856–1924), with a women’s group in front of church at Gaboon, West Africa, about 1909. (RG 223-2-17)