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PRESBYTERIAN HERITAGE

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Students at Lewis & Clark College protesting a new chapel, May 1967.

CONTENTION & RECONCILIATION

THE CONFESSION OF 1967

In the fractious 1960s, objections to the Confession of 1967 ran the theological and political gamut. Presbyterians could agree only that the confession—added to the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.'s constitution during the last Portland General Assembly and later adopted by the reunited denominations of today's Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)—was something entirely new.

Heated disagreement about confessional standards was not. In the late 19th century, proponents of Higher Criticism challenged the doctrines of scriptural inerrancy and double predestination found in the 1647 Westminster Confession. At the 1892 Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. General Assembly—the first assembly held in Portland, Oregon—the Committee on the Revision of the Confession of Faith presented twenty-eight amendments to Westminster that were approved and sent to the presbyteries as distinct overtures. When the presbyteries defeated the amendments, momentum to significantly change Westminster stalled. The 245-year-old confession remained the denomination's sole official faith confession for another 75 years.

(continued on page 4)

Batesville
Mississippi
U.S.A.

VAN EVERA FAMILY PAPERS

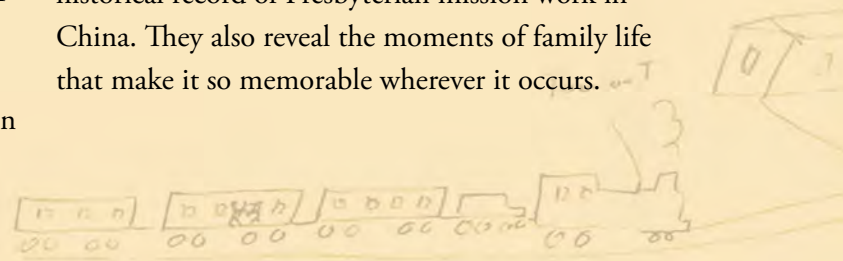
This summer, PHS is opening to researchers the processed papers of the Van Evera Family. Mary Helen Harris, daughter of Louise Van Evera Person, donated 8 cubic feet of materials to the Society documenting her grandparents' nearly 40 years of missionary work in China. Spanning two world wars, the transition from a Republic to a People's Republic, and nine presidential terms, this collection has the sweep of a multigenerational nonfiction epic—one augmented by a trove of correspondence and images.

From 1912 to 1951, Kepler and Pauline Van Evera lived primarily in the city of Hangzhou, 100 miles southwest of Shanghai. The Van Everas wrote about their evangelistic, relief, and child-welfare work, their interactions with native Chinese, and the political and military flashpoints of the day, including the Japanese invasion of China in 1937 and the expulsion of western missionaries in the early 1950s.

AMERICAN PRESBYTERIAN MISSION
HANGCHOW, CHINA

The Van Evera papers feature hundreds of informative letters; Pauline and Kepler, along with their family members in America, were avid correspondents. Bill Brock, PHS Collection Management Archivist, recommends the epistolary papers for their relevance to mission, church, and China historians, as well as the “rich and interesting personal lives” the letters reveal—including the lives of the Van Evera children Carl and Louise from infancy to adulthood.

Summers at the Mokanshan “hill” retreat. Playful drawings from Kepler to Louise. Carl costumed as a mouse for “The Goblin Fair” at the Hangchow American School or, two decades later, wearing the uniform of a U.S. serviceman during an unannounced visit to his parents. The Van Evera papers feature lantern slides, photograph albums, travel diaries, and board reports that enhance the historical record of Presbyterian mission work in China. They also reveal the moments of family life that make it so memorable wherever it occurs.



Cast members of
“The Goblin Fair”
including Louise and
Carl Van Evera,
Hangzhou,
China, 1924.

PRESERVING THE PAST

It's central to everything we do at PHS: preservation.

That means preserving records from every state, personal papers from hundreds of historic church figures, and multimedia materials documenting the Reformed tradition in America and overseas. In the last two years we've made great strides toward protecting the long-term viability of items inside our building by adding a preservation archivist to our staff, beginning a preservation planning process, and securing preservation grant funding from the Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

In 2016, we're also preserving six special items outside our building: the only known terra cotta statues by Alexander Stirling Calder. The statues—depicting early American Presbyterians including Samuel Davies, Marcus Whitman, and John Witherspoon—are being professionally conserved

for the first time in their 118-year history by Materials Conservation Co. Thanks to the generous designated support of individuals and organizations, the six statues will be reinstalled in front of the Society later this year. PHS continues to raise funds toward the full implementation of the Calder Conservation Project.

To contribute or find out more about the project, contact Samantha Piccolo at spiccolo@history.pcusa.org or 215-928-3889.



JOURNAL PREVIEW

In the Spring/Summer issue of *The Journal of Presbyterian History*, Dr. Arlin C. Migliazzo writes about Henrietta Mears, who was raised a Baptist and went on to great renown as a fundamentalist leader at First Presbyterian Church in Hollywood, California. Dr. Aaron Sizer examines the post World-War I “New Era Movement,” a push by the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. to adopt a corporate national structure and pursue greater ecumenical collaborations.

Visit www.history.pcusa.org/journal or call **215.928.3865** to receive *The Journal*.



James Caldwell statue by
A.S. Calder, 1898.

CONTENTION & RECONCILIATION

THE CONFESSION OF 1967 *(continued from page 1)*

In 1957, the Presbytery of Amarillo overtured the General Assembly to update the Westminster Shorter Catechism. With the 1958 union of the United Presbyterian Church of North America and the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., the Committee on a Brief Contemporary Statement of Faith opted to write a new confession outright. Seven years later, that committee presented the 1965 General Assembly in Columbus, Ohio, with a *Book of Confessions*. Containing many of the major confessional documents of the Reformed tradition up through the Barmen Declaration, the book also included a statement that would become the Confession of 1967. By placing a new confession in the framework of its predecessors, the committee argued for the historical and contextual particularity of every confession. Thousands of Presbyterians and their congregations, presbyteries, and synods provided feedback on the statement to the

Committee of Fifteen. Led by Chairman Edward Dowey, the committee would redraft the confession in light of feedback.

The proposed confession called on Presbyterians to “fulfill the work of reconciliation” and elucidated the theme in four sections titled “Reconciliation in Society.” The first reconciliation was a straightforward antidiscrimination message; Presbyterians should “receive and uphold one another as persons in all relationships of life: in employment, housing, education, leisure, marriage, family, church, and the exercise of political rights.” According to Dowey, General Assembly commissioners in Columbus held “passionate debates, public and private, long into the night,” on a range of topics, including interracial marriage. By the Portland assembly two years later, with the Supreme Court set to abolish Virginia’s anti-miscegenation statute, United Presbyterians were

overwhelmingly attuned to the new political realities of the Civil Rights era.

The second reconciliation called on Presbyterians “to practice the forgiveness of enemies and to commend to the nations as practical politics the search for cooperation and peace... even at risk to national security.” Those last five words caused great consternation among national-security Presbyterians, including elder Robert McNamara, the U.S. Secretary of Defense. Against the backdrops of war in Vietnam and the Cold War, the Committee on Bills and Overtures was sharply divided, finally voting down a proposed amendment removing the phrase, 12-11. The floor sustained the committee’s action, and a statement of radical pacifism entered Presbyterian doctrine.

The confession’s third reconciliation, decrying “enslavement by poverty,”



Images of attendees at the Portland General Assembly, May 1967.

encapsulated a desire for simplicity in church affairs in addition to increased support for poverty relief efforts around the world. Calls for simplicity echoed outside the Portland assembly when picketing students at a ceremonial groundbreaking for a new chapel at Lewis & Clark College denounced the new building’s expense, holding up signs reading, “The God of Chartres is Dead,” and “A Chapel Not A Cathedral.” Chairman Dowey would later rebut criticism that the confession’s emphasis on economic reconciliation was socialist in orientation: “If the church truly believes that reconciliation is accomplished, and will be consummated... it need not fear the competition of Marx.”

The conservative group Presbyterians United for Biblical Concerns, organized in 1965, pressed the Committee of Fifteen to uphold traditional views on biblical inerrancy and morality within the confession. Working through regular denominational channels, the PUBC argued for language in

tune with what it called “the moral law as expounded by Jesus Christ to matters of social concern such as the ‘new morality,’ divorce, drunkenness, and delinquency.” In direct response, the committee added the words, “Anarchy in sexual relationships is a symptom of man’s alienation from God, his neighbor, and himself,” to the fourth and final reconciliation. PUBC accepted that edit and ultimately supported passage of the confession in Portland. Other conservative leaders maintained staunch opposition. In May 1966, oilman J. Howard Pew wrote a scathing column in *Reader’s Digest* lambasting the Committee of Fifteen for abandoning inerrancy; he also castigated Presbyterian leadership for failing to obey “the rule of law.” Pew would go on to chair the National Lay Committee and sponsor *The Layman* magazine, standard-bearers of conservative Christianity to this day.

For pure spectacle, the fulminations of theological separatist Carl McIntire took a backseat to no one—not even those students

holding “The God of Chartres is Dead” signs. In Portland, McIntire parked a hearse outside the assembly and delivered a live radio broadcast decrying the denomination’s appeasement of “Red China,” calling McNamara and U.S. Secretary of State Dean Rusk communists, and claiming possession of a list of fellow travelers who ran Portland’s “United Presbyterian coffee house.” Citing the Federal Communication Commission’s Fairness Doctrine, McIntire declined to name names. “My radio station would probably be in great trouble.... I can’t read them to you.”

The year 1967 is widely remembered for the Summer of Love. McIntire’s hearse proclaimed an altogether different slogan, one at odds with the spirit of reconciliation the Confession of 1967 encouraged; the whitewashed words “DEATH OF A CHURCH” covered one side. In a hope-filled counterpoint to that dire statement, commissioners inside the assembly spontaneously sang, “Now Thank We All Our God” after the final, approving vote.



Carl McIntire’s hearse, May 1967.

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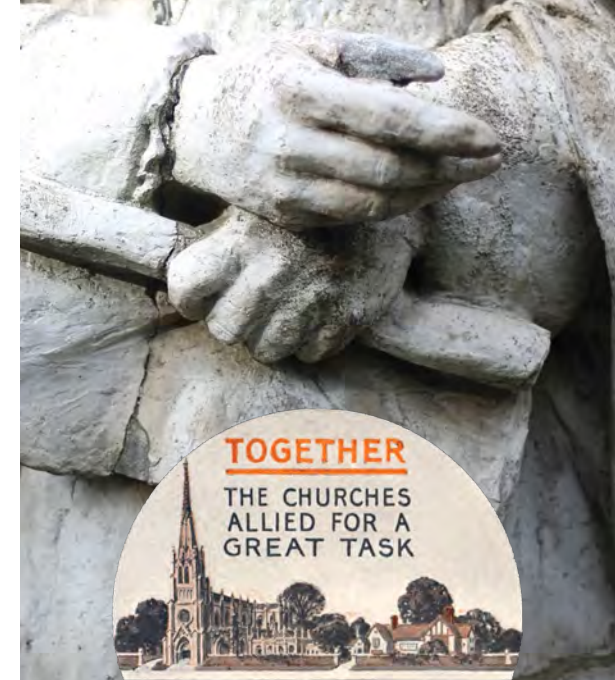
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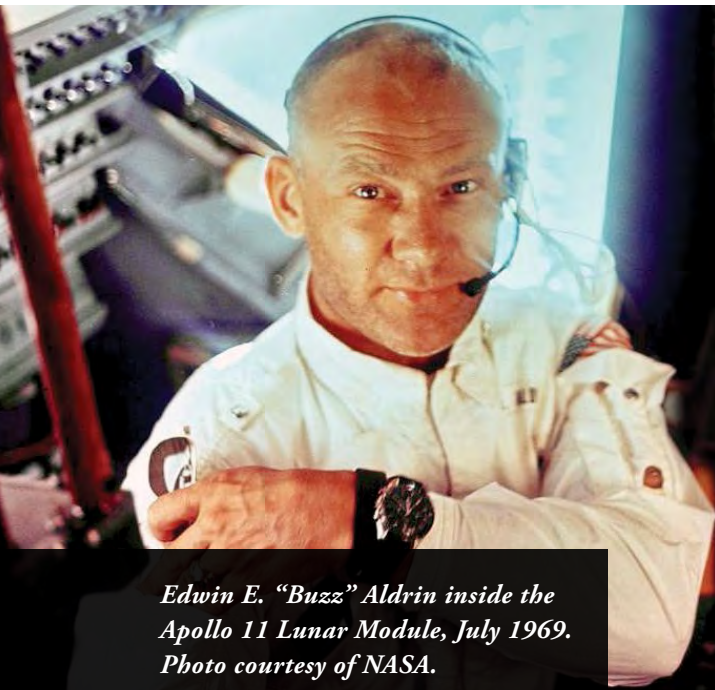
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Edwin E. "Buzz" Aldrin inside the Apollo 11 Lunar Module, July 1969. Photo courtesy of NASA.



HERITAGE SUNDAY

Lunar Communion

May 22, 2016 is Presbyterian Heritage Sunday. This year, learn about elder Buzz Aldrin's communion service on the moon and his continuing connection to Webster Presbyterian Church in Texas. Download the bulletin insert and past inserts:

www.history.pcusa.org/heritage-sunday

Moon photo courtesy of NASA Images.