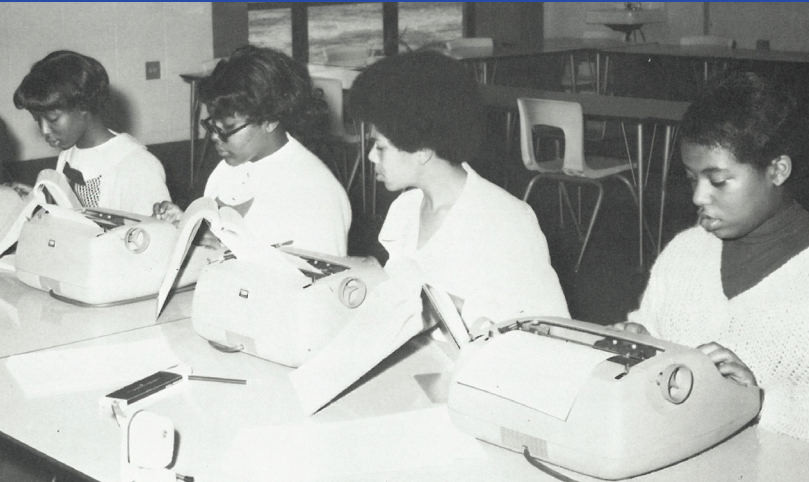




PRESBYTERIAN HERITAGE

Fall 2026 Vol. 38, No. 2



One morning, after her mother combed her hair, she said, "Today you are seven. Do you want to go to Boggs?"



TAKE ME BACK TO BOGGS

THE HISTORY AND IMPACT OF OLD BA

Boggs Academy, a Presbyterian-run boarding school for Black children and youth in Keysville, Georgia, operated from 1906 until 1984. In its 78-year history, Old BA grew from meager beginnings to an institution of acknowledged educational excellence. The Boggs Academy Records at PHS document that history.

Clockwise from top left: Typing class, undated; Still from "7 Years Old and Going to Boggs," Pearl Digital Collections; Brian Middleton and Michele Johnson attend science class, undated; Academic Dean Ida Wells with 8th grade student Sean Jarvis, undated.

(continued on page 5)

NEW ONSITE EXHIBIT AT 425 LOMBARD

The Presbyterian Historical Society's new outdoor exhibit, "Belief in Change: Stories of Religious Activism in the United States," encourages passersby to consider the connection between their spiritual beliefs and personal ethics as it introduces them to faith-driven actions taken by various figures throughout history.

Since the country's beginnings, faith has inspired many Americans to speak out and act against injustice and inequality. Religious people—clergy and congregants alike—have protested, marched, and prayed to make their voices heard on controversial and divisive topics. Then and now, their beliefs compel them to move beyond the pulpit and pews. Their actions, intended to address urgent problems, have roots in the past and look towards a better future.

On display in the front courtyard of 425 Lombard Street now through 2027, "Belief in Change" features stories of individuals across time and space who have advocated for social change from deeply held religious beliefs, from Quaker activist

Benjamin Lay's abolitionist demonstrations of the 1730s to the 2025 demonstrations by clergy outside Chicago's ICE Broadview Detention center.

The exhibit traces a throughline from abolition to the sanctuary movement and considers how religious belief influences views of war and peace. Visitors are encouraged to pick up a piece of chalk and participate in the discussion by sharing their personal perspectives on the large blackboard that has been installed adjacent to the exhibit.

Learn more at pcusa.org/historical-society/history-online/onsite-exhibit





HISTORY

Organized in 1698, the First Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia's original home, known as "Old Buttonwood," was located on Market and Bank streets. Few artifacts exist today relating to this first location, and the Presbyterian Historical Society is honored to be the steward of a few of them: namely, thirty tombstones embedded in the exterior northern wall of our building.

Until 1820, First Presbyterian worshipped at Old Buttonwood and maintained a burial ground there and at a second site near Third Presbyterian Church on Pine Street. In the 1840s, when First Presbyterian was getting ready to sell the lot at Market and Bank Streets, they thus had a burial ground to think of.

Social customs said that the churchyard remains ought to be removed and reinterred elsewhere. And so, between 1847 and 1848, the remains of 1,500 people were removed and reinterred to Laurel Hill Cemetery in West Philadelphia, which had opened a decade earlier in 1836. Simultaneously, the remains of 900 people were reinterred to First Presbyterians' Pine Street cemetery.



EMBEDDED

Families that opted to have their ancestors reinterred at Laurel Hill were not allowed to bring headstones, which was simply unacceptable to a handful of the descendants, who removed theirs, carried them from Bank Street to Pine, and set them against the cemetery's south wall.

In the early 1960s, as part of the city's redevelopment efforts, the row houses that stretched along Tenor and Lombard Street were razed. The United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. then purchased the cleared land along Lombard as a future site for the Presbyterian Historical Society. As construction began on the new building, the south cemetery wall was torn down.

To preserve the forty-three tombstones that had been leaning against that south wall for so very long—each of them now more than 200 years old—the architects decided to embed thirty of them in the northern wall of the PHS building. The remaining thirteen were propped against the western wall of the Old Pine Street cemetery, where they remain to this day.



In memory of Margaret Shields, Wife of John Shields, d. 1795

2026 OUTREACH HIGHLIGHTS



1. Communications Associate McKenna Britton takes photos of an artifact from the museum collection for a social media campaign.
2. Archivist David Staniunas leads a records-keeping training at the Presbyterian Heritage Center in Montreat, NC, in late July.
3. Outreach Specialist Olivia Cacchione brought artifacts and information to Carpenters' Hall for an April 9 panel discussing the legacy of Charles Thomson.

4. The "Religious News Service Covers Civil Rights" traveling exhibit on display at Derry Presbyterian Church in Hershey, PA.
5. In early August, PHS welcomed Spiral Q into the courtyard to co-host a drop-in community art program. The group brought along a few of its paper-mache creations, including this replica of Philly's City Hall!
6. Research Fellowship recipient Randall Stephens browses the card catalog in the Reading Room during an August visit.



TAKE ME BACK TO BOGGS THE HISTORY AND IMPACT OF "OLD BA"

When Dr. Yenwith Whitney, then-President of Boggs Academy, welcomed the Black Presbyterians United Committee to the campus in late October 1978, he emphasized the relationship between the school and the surrounding community, saying that “there is in the community a sense of ownership of Boggs Academy. Presidents come and go, the staff comes and goes and students come and go, but Boggs Academy and the community remain...”

Boggs Academy traces its roots to Rev. John Lawrence Phelps, a native of Georgia, born there in 1866, who was assigned by the Board of Missions for Freedmen to establish a school in the Augusta area. In 1906, Boggs Academy was opened with three boys and four girls enrolled as its first class of pupils. By 1910, instruction to the ninth grade was provided. Mrs. Virginia P. Boggs, serving as corresponding secretary for the Board of Missions for Freedmen, was responsible for obtaining the financial assistance required to construct the first two buildings; Phelps and the school leadership expressed their gratitude by naming the institution in her honor.

Old BA was accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools in 1943, making it the only four-year high school in the immediate area to receive this rating. In the 1950s, the academy's educational focus shifted, and it became a private college preparatory school. This increased the number of out-of-state students enrolled at the school, including some international students. In 1953, a Community House was constructed that consisted of a combination gym, auditorium,

and kitchen. The following year, Adams Hall and Boggs Hall were remodeled, the old boy's dormitory was razed, and the John L. Phelps Administration Building was constructed.

When, in 1958, the Board of Missions for Freedmen made the decision to close Harbison Junior College (Harbison Agricultural and Industrial Institute) in South Carolina, they simultaneously voted to expand Boggs Academy. Students were encouraged to transfer from Harbison to Boggs, as were the faculty. As of September 1958, there were 159 students at Boggs.

Despite this success and the ever-lengthening reach of Boggs' involvement in the Keysville community, by 1970, the academy was one of only four remaining schools of the Board's education program for Black Presbyterians. In 1971, the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. (UPCUSA) transferred ownership of the school to an autonomous Board of Trustees.

A decade later, Boggs was struggling mightily to stay afloat. The March 7, 1983, edition of *The Atlanta Constitution* featured a story by Nathan McCall that asked the question, “End of an era? For 76 years, Georgia's Boggs Academy has enjoyed a proud tradition as a school that meets the special needs of its black students. But now...Boggs may be forced to close.” The Rev. Joseph Donchez, director of

*Duty workers assist in feeding the cows their evening meal, undated, from a brochure found in RG558, Box 6, Folder 24.
Yenwith Whitney (left) attending the BA Centennial Celebration, 2006.
Boggs Academy campus sign, 1960s-1980s, Pearl Digital Collections.*

BOGGS ACADEMY

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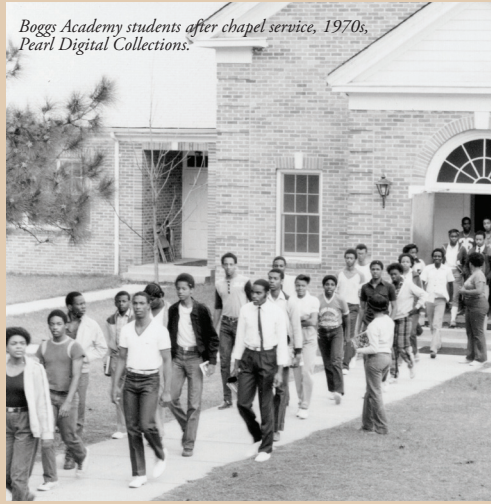
Co-educational. Twenty five years of training boys and girls.

For further information and catalogue address:

Rev. J. L. Phelps, A.M., D.D.
PRINCIPAL

Ad for Boggs Academy from The Boggs Visitor, June 1930.

Boggs Academy students after chapel service, 1970s, Pearl Digital Collections.



John Lawrence Phelps, founder of Boggs Academy, circa 1930.

development at Boggs, told McCall that the year before, the minority education committee of the UPCUSA and the Board of Trustees announced that “declining income and current recessionary times are forcing them to reduce their annual \$200,000 donation...to about \$70,000.”

The school fought against the swell of discouragement. Leadership consistently launched fundraising and development campaigns; articles reporting on Boggs were published in a number of newspapers in the hopes of widening their circle of support. In their efforts to revitalize the school and recuperate some of the financial loss, the leadership team at Boggs decided to reinstitute the school’s animal husbandry and agricultural programs.

Despite these efforts—the fundraising, the national journalism, the development campaigns, the articles in *Ebony* and *Jet* magazines—Boggs Academy closed its doors in 1986, with its last class graduating in 1984.

Though the school is no longer in session, and hasn’t been for decades, its legacy continues on through its alumni, who have since come together to form the Boggs Academy National Alumni Association (BANAA). Each year the Association hosts a Boggs Reunion in Augusta, where the campus of their alma mater has been converted to the Boggs Rural Life Center through an agreement called, “A Covenant Between Boggs Rural Life Center, Inc. and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).” The mission of the center is to promote and preserve Boggs Academy’s true history through its commitment to education, agriculture and agrarian arts.

Learn more about the Boggs Rural Life Center in Keysville, Georgia, at lifeatboggs.org. Boggs alumni interested in the BANAA can learn more at boggs-academy.com.



Seven years old and going to Boggs is a 1937 promotional film about Boggs Academy produced by the PCUSA Board of National Missions. The full eleven-minute film has been digitized, and is available to view in Pearl, the Society’s online repository.



Scan to watch



I'm really grateful for the work that everyone here has been doing. The staff have been really helpful, getting various authorizations without me even prompting, and trying to make it as much of a productive and fruitful experience as possible.

2024 Research Fellow Luca Azuma
Origins and Development of LGBTQ+ Christianity

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WAYMARKS PREVIEW

The Fall/Winter 2026 issue of *Waymarks: Presbyterian and Reformed History for Today* features a forum on Presbyterianism, slavery, and race. In addition, Dr. Kimberly R. Wagner considers how liberal theological views and just war preaching come together historically, focusing on Rev. Rockwell Harmon Potter and World War I.



To subscribe to *Waymarks*,
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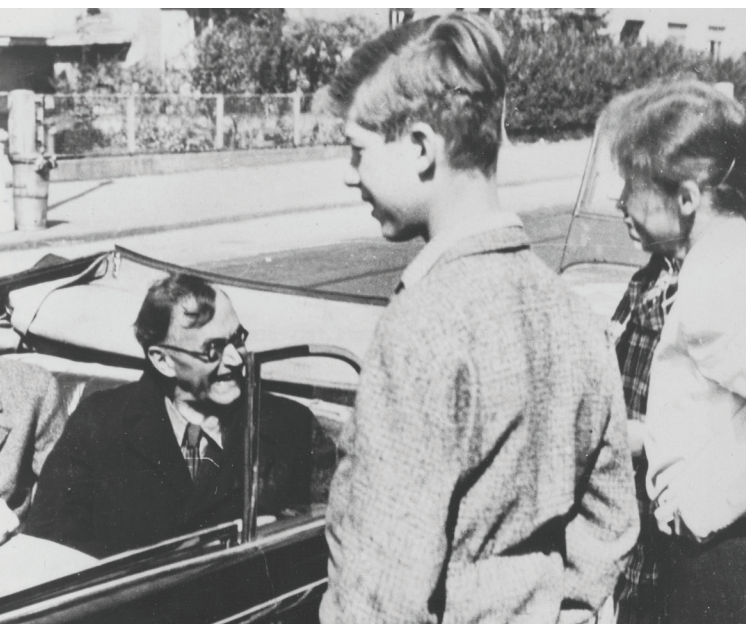
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OCTOBER 25: REFORMATION SUNDAY

In 1934, representatives of Germany's Protestant churches gathered in Wuppertal, Barmen, and wrote a letter to the German people on the unity of the church and its freedom in Jesus Christ. The Theological Declaration of Barmen, drafted by theologians Karl Barth and Hans Asmussen, is in the Book of Confessions, one of only three additions to the book made in the 20th century. We remember this modest text because of its situation – it accused the official church of Nazi Germany, the *Reichskirche*, of error.

Dr. Karl Barth on his first visit to Germany since his 1935 expulsion by order of Adolf Hitler, 1945, Religious News Service Photograph Collection.

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PHS MATTERS

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