



The Herald

Presbyterian Heritage Center at Montreat

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Stories from the Storm, The Exhibit



No one expected it to be so bad. After all, Montreat is a mountain town, generally immune from hurricanes. But the rain started on Tuesday afternoon, September 24th, and didn't stop for three solid days.

By the time the hurricane officially hit western NC on Friday morning the 27th, 12 inches of rain had already fallen.

Above: *A still from the exhibit's featured video; Thanks to Priscilla Hayner for providing footage.*

Then Hurricane Helene continued to dump rain and inflict hurricane winds from midnight on, continuing into the late morning. Montreat suffered from three different types of catastrophes: unprecedented flooding, damage from innumerable falling trees, and unpredictable mudslides.

By early afternoon, the sun was out. Montreaters began to emerge, checking out the significant damage to the town and its homes and buildings. People looked dazed seeing the destruction and aftermath--five unpassable bridges across Flat Creek, an office chair sitting incongruously in the middle of Assembly Drive, and nearly everything covered in inches of mud and silt. It wasn't long before people came together to help each other and to help the town recover.

PHC's new exhibit, *Stories from the Storm: Hurricane Helene in Montreat*, vividly captures those experiences in videos, photographs, and quotes.

The exhibit came about as PHC staff asked the question "What is our role in the aftermath, what can we do?"

Beginning with information collected by Montreat College students, PHC Executive Director Anne Chesky and her staff began seeking out additional stories, photos, videos, and artifacts gathered during and after the storm to preserve for future generations. From this rich archive of materials, the PHC created an exhibit centered on the experiences of survivors.

The *Stories from the Storm* exhibit will continue through the fall. Come to add your story or to better understand how the people of Montreat and beyond persevered, helped one another, and survived this "once in a thousand years" storm.

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Collection Spotlight



Road Sign, Assembly Drive and Shenandoah Terrace

This sign was recovered by Montreat resident Mary Standaert on September 27, 2024, tangled with other debris against the new Montreat Town Hall outside the Montreat Gate.

Photograph by Joe Standaert

2025 Distinguished Lecture on the Reformation: Dr. Crystal Downing



Dr. Crystal Downing is the featured speaker for the 2025 Distinguished Lecture on the Reformation, which will be held Friday, October 24 at 7:00pm in Upper Anderson. The title for Dr. Downing's lecture is **"From Wittenberg to Oxford: The Re-formation of C.S. Lewis and Dorothy L. Sayers."**

Many will remember Dr. Downing's presentations at the 2019 C.S. Lewis Symposium and the 2022 Inklings-Plus Conference, both sponsored by the PHC.

Dr. Downing was formerly Co-Director of the Marion E. Wade Center at Wheaton College. The Wade Center is the world's foremost archive for published and unpublished materials by and about C.S. Lewis and many of his colleagues. She also was co-holder of the Marion E. Wade Chair of Christian Thought and Professor of English at Wheaton. Prior to teaching at Wheaton, she was the Distinguished Professor of English and Film Studies at Messiah College in PA.

Dr. Downing is an award-winning author. Her books include *Writing Performances: The Stages of Dorothy L. Sayers*, which received an international award from the Dorothy L. Sayers Society, *How Postmodernism Serves (My) Faith*, *Changing Signs of Truth*, *Salvation from Cinema: The Medium Is the Message*, and *Subversive: Christ, Culture, and the Shocking Dorothy L. Sayers*, which received a starred review from Publishers Weekly.

In addition to her books, Dr. Downing has published more than 90 essays on a wide variety of topics exploring the relationship between Christianity and culture, has delivered nearly 50 juried papers at professional conferences, and has been invited to serve as a keynote speaker at more than 30 conferences in N. America and Europe. She received her PhD in English from the University of California at Santa Barbara.

Dr. Downing had been scheduled to speak at the 2024 Distinguished Lecture, which was postponed due to damage from Hurricane Helene. We are grateful she is able to join us in 2025.

The Distinguished Lecture will be held on Friday, October 24 at 7:00 pm in Upper Anderson in Montreat.

The lecture is free and open to the public.

Become a Founding Member of The Trillium Circle

Friends and supporters of the PHC are invited to become Founding Members of The Trillium Circle, which is now being formed.

The Trillium Circle was created to recognize and promote legacy giving to the PHC. Members of The Trillium Circle are composed of supporters who commit to make a current or legacy gift (such as a bequest in their will) of \$10,000 or more to the PHC Endowment Fund.

Contributions to the PHC Endowment Fund are perpetual gifts, extending beyond the lifetime of the donor, which will provide the PHC with a strong financial foundation and ensure its future for generations to come.

To find out more about The Trillium Circle and receive a brochure about the program, email us at info@phcmontreat.org.



Several new legacy funds have recently been established by generous gifts to the PHC Endowment in memory of:

- Maynard and Lilian Fountain
- Dick Ray
- Jack Sadler
- Bill Sibley

Montreat's Mission History

The story of Presbyterian missionaries is forever woven into the fabric of Montreat history. Montreat has hosted conferences since its founding in 1897. By 1901, when facilities had improved beyond tents to include a modern hotel and a permanent meeting space, a Mission Conference was added at the instigation of Charles Rowland, a wealthy businessman from Athens, Georgia, and one of Montreat's original incorporators.

Rowland had a strong interest in Christian missions. Among the speakers at the first conference were Dr. S. I. Woodbridge, a PCUS missionary to China; and Rev. W. M. Junkin, a PCUS missionary who had established the mission in Korea in 1895. Rowland continued to lead the effort with this conference for the next several years.

In 1906, when income proved inadequate to service the debt of infrastructure development, the incorporating board sold the entirety of Montreat to the PCUS. Despite the struggles of leadership transition, the Mountain Retreat Association (MRA) sponsored four conferences in 1907, including a Mission Conference. For several decades this conference addressed both Home and Foreign missions.

Attendees included new appointees, interested church members, and recently returned missionaries, many of whom led sessions.

By the 1920s, the Mission Conference was the largest of the season. The dual focus on Home and Foreign missions attracted a wide variety of participants. Moreover, this conference gradually became a leadership training event for those involved with mission interpretation in their churches. It also provided an opportunity for new appointees to learn from returning missionaries.

World War II reshaped the work of Christian missions. While denominations continued to send missionaries to Africa as well as to Central and South America, those posted to Asia returned to the United States. Thus, in 1944 many more missionaries than usual attended the Mission Conference. Fourteen appointees also attended. At the closing service, C. Darby Fulton (Executive Director of Foreign Missions) conducted a dedication service for these individuals. This conference and ceremony are considered to be the inaugural Institute for Outgoing Missionaries.



Above: 1954 Linguistics Class, Montreat

Training during this Institute, which gradually expanded from 17 days to seven weeks, went from informal sessions led by returning missionaries to more structured and intentional classes. Language instruction began with the science of language study, a technique recently adopted by the armed forces as an important framework for learning a particular language in a short period of time. Appointees then had additional study in specific languages. The Institute also included lectures on everything from cultural sensitivity to health and well-being.

The largest Institute, with 43 appointees, occurred in 1961. The early 1960s also marked the highest attendance for the World Missions Conference.

Charles Rowland attended in 1963, at age 93, 62 years after organizing the first mission conference. However, this decade saw radical changes in the world which impacted the pattern of Christian mission work. Increasingly, overseas churches established their own relationships with denominations; as a result, the number of missionaries declined. The format of the conference also changed, with increased emphasis on world issues and less on the work of missionaries. Participation declined from a high of nearly 1,500 in the early 1960s to 154 in 1997, the final year for the World Missions Conference.



Above: 1897 Mission Gathering, Charles Rowland (far right)
Left: David Taylor, Executive Secretary for Foreign Missions (far left) and Charles Rowland (2nd from left)

Walter Somerville Retires after 21 Years with the PHC



Above: *Walter and Ruth Ann Somerville*

Four years before the Presbyterian Heritage Center opened its doors in 2008, Walter Somerville was busy working with Dick Ray, Jim Cogswell, Jack Sadler, and numerous others to preserve the presence of the Historical Foundation in Montreat through an organization called the Friends of the Historical Foundation. Though the Foundation was closed in 2006, Walter began working with others to open the PHC in its place.

After 21 years on the job handling the finances, Walter has retired, and he will be missed by the many who crossed paths with him. The good news is that he is still an important part of the Montreat community.

Walter established himself as quite the entertainer at the last two Summer Club picnics sharing stories about his hobbies growing gigantic pumpkins and watching over many guinea fowl. The Somervilles are also award-winning gingerbread house competitors at the historic Grove Park Inn.

Walter's own story is filled with Christian heritage. Both of his grandfathers were deeply involved in the life of the Southern Presbyterian Church. One grandfather, Rev. Walter Somerville, Sr., was a brilliant Davidson College and Union Seminary graduate who could have served anywhere but chose to give outstanding pastoral care to those in rural communities. The other was Dr. L. Nelson Bell, who gave up a professional baseball career to go to China as a medical missionary with his wife, Virginia. His aunt, Ruth Bell, married evangelist Billy Graham. His parents, Virginia Bell Somerville and Rev. Dr. John Somerville, served as missionaries in Korea for 40 years and John served on the PHC board.

Walter grew up next door to Ruth Ann Lee, whom he later married. Her parents were also missionaries. Her father, Dr. Timothy Lee, grew up in what is now North Korea. He escaped in 1947, but never saw or heard from his family again. He became the Southern Presbyterian Church's first Korean-American pastor.

Ruth Ann's parents eventually returned to Korea as missionaries and served for over 30 years. Among Ruth Ann's impressive ancestral line is a man named Lee Sung Hoon who, in 1784, while on a trip to China, became the first Korean convert to Christianity. In 1801, he was beheaded for his faith, becoming one of the first Korean Christian martyrs.

We recognize Walter for his longtime committed service to the PHC and thank him for adding such good will and humor as he interacted with our many loyal supporters and staff. We wish him well and appreciate his efforts to help us preserve the stories from the many Christians who have come before us.

Remembering Jack Sadler (1934 - 2025)

The PHC has lost one of its founders and foremost leaders, the Rev. Dr. R. Jackson (Jack) Sadler.

After the closing of the Presbyterian Historical Foundation in Montreat became inevitable in 2006, Jack joined in founding and opening the PHC. Jack served as Vice President of the PHC for many years and was an active member of the Board of Directors until his last days.

Jack was a graduate of Davidson College and Union Presbyterian Seminary. The last 25 years of his 40-year ministry were spent as Senior Pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Richmond, VA. He also served as Chairperson of both the International Mission for the Presbyterian Church US and the Board of the Christian Children's Fund.

The PHC will forever be grateful for the many contributions Jack made during the first 17 years of its existence. We will miss his wise counsel and great enthusiasm for the PHC and its mission.



On Exhibit Now at the PHC



Stories from the Storm:

Hurricane Helene in Montreat

Featuring stories, images, and videos from Montreat during Helene and in the storm's aftermath, the PHC's *Stories from the Storm* exhibit looks at the impact of the hurricane through the eyes of those who were here.



Missions & Montreat

Missions have been at the heart of Montreat since its inception. The founders envisioned Montreat as both a conference center and a retreat for weary Christian workers. Some of the earliest residents had served as missionaries. The first Mission Conference occurred in 1901. Montreat continued to host the conferences until 1997.



Under the Beech Trees:

Swannanoa Valley Presbyterians

Beginning in the 1700s, Presbyterians were integral in the development of the Swannanoa Valley. Scots-Irish Presbyterian immigrants and home missionaries founded schools, churches, and institutions like the Southern Highland Craft Guild and Black Mountain Home for Children.



John Mack Walker's

Appalachian Wood Carvings

Between 1943 and 1998, Rev. Walker carved 62 sculptures, 30 of which are part of the PHC's exhibit. This series presents Gospel stories in both their mystery and their matter-of-factness. Walker based many of the figures on real people he knew and carved them in 20th-century attire.

Call for "MecDec" Artifact Loans

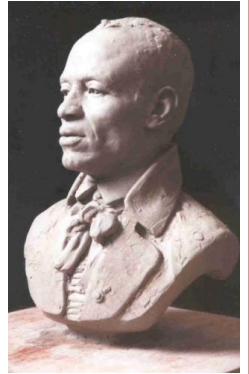


Thanks to a grant from the State of NC, the PHC will be mounting a new exhibit on Presbyterians and the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence. The exhibit has a planned opening date of May 20, 2026 - the 251st anniversary of the (alleged) signing of the "MecDec."

Are you a descendant of one of the signers of the MecDec? We would love to display objects related to your ancestor. We are also interested in loans of Revolutionary War-era artifacts, items from Mecklenburg's early Presbyterian Churches, and "MecDec Day" souvenirs. **Contact us at info@phcmontreat.org.**

Trivia Time!

On December 20, 1778, this man swore an oath of allegiance to enlist to fight with the Patriot forces during the Revolutionary War. After serving three years and being honorably discharged, he studied first at



Washington Academy (now Washington & Lee University) and then at Princeton, likely under the instruction of Dr. John Witherspoon. In 1800, he became the first ordained African-American Presbyterian minister.

He returned south to minister to enslaved people, later opening a school in North Carolina, which educated both free Black and white students, including the sons of many prominent North Carolinians. After Nat Turner's Rebellion in 1831, free Black people were no longer permitted to preach or teach, so he was forced into retirement. He died in 1838.

Email info@phcmontreat.org with your answer to be entered into a prize drawing!

Spring 2025 Trivia Answer

Q. What year did Davy Crockett witness a great flood in Swannanoa?

A. 1791

Extra Credit: What was the name of the woman from Swannanoa who married Davy Crockett in 1815?

A. Elizabeth Patton

Congratulations to Philip Arnold for getting both answers correct and winning the prize drawing.

Contact us at info@phcmontreat.org to claim your prize.



Presbyterian Heritage Center
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Please Support the 2025 Heritage Fund

The Heritage Fund is the annual giving campaign of the Presbyterian Heritage Center. It provides the financial resources for almost all of the PHC's operating budget.

The PHC's programs and activities, including its museum exhibits, educational activities, library, publications, and archive program, are paid for almost entirely by contributions to the Heritage Fund.

The PHC is an independent non-profit and does not receive contributions from any Presbyterian denomination. Virtually all the donors to the Heritage Fund are individuals, like you.

If you are not already a Heritage Fund contributor, please consider becoming one. Your contribution to the Heritage Fund at whatever level is comfortable for you is vitally important and greatly appreciated.

To give to the Heritage Fund:

- Mail a check to the PHC at PO Box 207, Montreat, NC 28757
- Make a tax-free Qualified Charitable Deduction from your IRA
- Donate at www.phcmontreat.org/give or scan the QR code:



Thank you for your generosity and for supporting the Presbyterian Heritage Center through your contribution to the Heritage Fund.

Giving Levels

Heritage Society

☐ \$25,000+

Calvin Society

☐ \$10,000 - \$24,999

Knox Society

☐ \$5,000 - \$9,999

Witherspoon Society

☐ \$2,500 - \$4,999

Tartan Circle

☐ \$1,000 - \$2,499

Kirkin Circle

☐ \$500 - \$999

Celtic Circle

☐ \$100 - \$499

Friends of the PHC

☐ \$1 - \$99