

Collection Number:

Collection Title: Marj Carpenter, Moderator of the PCUSA

This is a finding aid. It is a description of archival material held in the Presbyterian Heritage Center at Montreat. Unless otherwise noted, the materials described below are physically available in our reading room, and not digitally available through the World Wide Web.

Collection Overview

Size: 2 banker boxes and 1 document box

Abstract: This collection contains personal and professional correspondence, church bulletins, a letter from the Chaplain of the US Senate, Billy Graham's sermon when he received the Congressional Medal of Honor, certificate, citations, memorabilia, photos, postcards, copy of The Pyongyang Times and a Korean publication, Mission updates and News Bulletins.

Creator: Marj Carpenter

Language: English

Information for Users

Restrictions to Access

No restrictions. Open for research.

Restrictions to Use

No usage restrictions.

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Preferred Citation[Identification of item]

Marj Carpenter Collection, Presbyterian Heritage Center in Montreat

Acquisitions Information

Gift of Whom: Marj Carpenter

Additional Descriptive Resources

A copy of the original finding aid for this collection is filed in each box.

Sensitive Materials Statement

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individuals represented in this collection without the consent of those individuals may have legal ramifications (e.g., a cause of action under common law for invasion of privacy may arise if facts concerning an individual's private life are published that would be deemed highly offensive to a reasonable person) for which the Presbyterian Heritage Center at Montreat, NC, assumes no responsibility.

Biographical Information

Ruling Elder Marj Carpenter, the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)'s 207th General Assembly (1995), a tireless supporter and interpreter of mission and for 15 years director of the Presbyterian News Service, died Saturday in Big Spring, Texas, following a long illness. She was 93.

"In many ways, Marj Carpenter was a pioneer," said the Rev. Dr. J. Herbert Nelson, II, Stated Clerk of the General Assembly of the PC(USA). "Having served as moderator, she was committed to meeting with churches and our ecumenical partners both domestically and abroad. As news director of the Presbyterian News Service, she shared the stories of our work and ministry to the world and set the standard for other religious journalists to follow. Her contributions to the PC(USA) will long be remembered."

"She was an outstanding moderator of the General Assembly, a witness without parallel to God's call for us to be a missionary people, and one of the most powerful missionary advocates for justice that God has given to the PC(USA)," said the Rev. Dr. Cliff Kirkpatrick, Stated Clerk Emeritus of the General Assembly of the PC(USA). "I give thanks to God to have shared much of this journey with Marj and rejoice that this great saint of the Church is now part of the Church Triumphant."

"Marj was truly one of a kind. She had a true-life story for every occasion, and they all came together with an overflowing love for Christ and for this community known as the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)," Kirkpatrick said. "We will miss Marj and the unique way that she could make the mission of Christ come alive in powerful ways."

"From the moment Marj invited me to join her at the Presbyterian News Service in the summer of 1988, my life changed forever," said the Rev. Jerry Van Marter, who ran the denominational news service after Carpenter retired. "No one knew or embodied the PC(USA) more than Marj and I have been blessed beyond measure by her mentorship and friendship for these 30+ years."

"She also greatly expanded my vocabulary of cuss words," Van Marter said. "The PC(USA) will forever be in her debt."

Carpenter was a longtime journalist before coming to work for the Presbyterian News Service. In 1962, she helped break the Billie Sol Estes oilfield scandal while reporting for the Pecos (Texas) Independent and Enterprise. During the investigation and trials that followed, she contributed reporting to Life, Time, Fortune, The New York Times, The New York Herald Tribune, the Dallas Morning News, the Associated Press and numerous Texas newspapers. Her work earned her and two colleagues a Pulitzer Prize nomination.

In the midst of reporting the scandal, Carpenter had a snake thrown at her car and her office firebombed. A number of bomb threats were phoned in.

Carpenter landed her first reporting job at age 15 with the Mercedes Enterprise. One of her early assignments was a press conference with the first lady, Eleanor Roosevelt. Carpenter eventually interviewed seven U.S. presidents.

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At age 16 she enrolled at Texas A&I University, where she graduated magna cum laude with a degree in music. After marrying following the end of World War II, Carpenter taught for several years, eventually moving to Pecos. When her husband died at an early age, Carpenter quickly became a familiar sight around West Texas as she trooped around with one or all three of her children in tow.

Eventually she made her way to the Big Spring Herald, where her column “Riding Fence” was popular among locals. In 1979 she left Big Spring for Atlanta to run the news service for the Presbyterian Church in the United States, staying on in 1983 following reunion between the northern and southern churches. In all she led the newsroom operation for 16 General Assemblies and worked on the reporting staff for the World Alliance of Reformed Churches General Council in Ottawa, Canada; the World Council of Churches Assemblies in Vancouver (1984) and Canberra, Australia (1991); and the Caribbean and North American Area Council of WARC, meeting in Havana, Cuba.

The late George Cornell of the Associated Press, the dean of American religion writers, called Carpenter “the best of the religion hacks.”

She won more than 150 writing awards, including the 2007-08 David Steele Distinguished Writing Award bestowed by the Presbyterian Writers Guild.

Over the course of her work in denominational offices, which included several years doing global mission interpretation, she visited nearly 600 mission stations in 130 countries. The Rev. José Luis Casal, former director of Presbyterian World Mission, said via Facebook he has fond memories of the years when he was presbytery executive at Tres Rios Presbytery, where she was “a supporter, good friend and a real example,” even later in life.

“During the last 10 years she used a walker and never missed a presbytery meeting,” Casal said. “Even with a walker, she came with the presbytery to Costa Rica on a mission trip. We were painting a couple of churches and she was the ‘storyteller,’ sharing stories about mission while we were working. Unforgettable! To God be the glory for her life!”

Carpenter’s two books on Presbyterian mission, “To the Ends of the Earth: Mission Stories from Around the World” and “And A Little Bit Farther,” were top sellers for the Presbyterian Publishing Corporation. She also authored a long-running humor column for the Presbyterian Outlook.

In 1995, months after her “retirement,” she was elected moderator of the 207th General Assembly on the first ballot. “As many of you already know, I am painfully, sinfully proud of being a Presbyterian,” she told commissioners in her acceptance speech. “I am proud of being part of this wonderful, diverse, intelligent, educated, concerned and loving Christian family that we call Presbyterian.”

She is survived by two children, JimBob and Carolyn. (From Presbyterian Outlook, June 14, 2020)

Subject Headings for Collection

Presbyterian Church in the United States
Moderator of the PCUSA
Marj Carpenter Moderator of the PCUSA

Scope and Content 1985-1999

Content List

Box 1

Photocopy of Scrapbook file

- Folder 1 Fact sheet about Marj Carpenter
- Folder 2 Church Bulletins 1995
- Folder 3 Church Bulletins 1996 Jan-Mar
- Folder 4 Church Bulletins 1996 April-Dec
- Folder 5 Church Bulletins 1997
- Folder 5a. Church Bulletins 1998
- Folder 6 Church Bulletins – no dates
- Folder 7 News articles
- Folder 8 Personal Correspondence 1990-1994
- Folder 9 Personal Correspondence 1995 May-June-July
- Folder 10 Personal Correspondence 1995 Aug-Sept
- Folder 11 Personal Correspondence 1995 Oct-Nov-Dec
- Folder 12 Personal Correspondence 1996 Jan-May
- Folder 13 Personal Correspondence 1996 June-Nov
- Folder 14 Personal Correspondence 1997-1999
- Folder 15 Personal Correspondence undated
- Folder 16 Personal Correspondence undated
- Folder 17 Personal Correspondence undated
- Folder 18 Professional Correspondence 1994-1995
- Folder 19 Professional Correspondence 1996 Jan-Feb
- Folder 20 Professional Correspondence 1996 Mar-April
- Folder 21 Professional Correspondence 1996 May-June
- Folder 22 Professional Correspondence 1996 July-Sept
- Folder 23 Professional Correspondence 1996 Oct-Dec

Box 2

- Folder 24 Professional Correspondence 1997
- Folder 25 Professional Correspondence undated
- Folder 26 Letter from the Office of the Chaplain of the US Senate
 - Billy Graham's Sermon upon receiving the Congressional Medal Of Honor
 - Picture of Marj Carpenter
- Folder 27 Certificates, Citations
 - "3 Minutes with Marj"
- Folder 28 "Thoughts about the 207th General Assemble" by Marj Carpenter
- Folder 29 Memorabilia
- Folder 30-Folder 35a. Miscellaneous papers
- Folder 36 News clippings
- Folder 37 Publications
- Folder 38 "Cuba" by Marj Carpenter
- Folder 39 "In the beginning..." by Marj Carpenter
- Folder 40 Moderatorial Reflections 1995-1998

PHOTOS

- Envelope 1 Puerto Rico 1994,1995
- Envelope 2 Seely Lake, MT, Glacier Presbytery 1995
R. Wyatt-Synod of the Rock Mt.-Doug Kelly EP Glacier
- Envelope 3 Photos-color/B&W- no names- dated 1995
- Envelope 4 Miscellaneous pictures
10-20-95 Epworth By the Sea – Johnalee
Dr. Joe Rigsby-Woodlawn P.C.
Al Wells-Woodlawn P.C.
July 1996 “The Portuguese Pastor greets Marj Carpenter”
Oct 1995 Onida South Dakota-May & Ida Oltmanns
Aug 1996 Mike Robinson, Marj & ?
Peggy, ?, Louise and Bob Williams
- Envelope 5 Miscellaneous pictures
Cocoa Beach 1997
Montreat July 1995
South Jax Feb 7, 1993
Old Stone P.C., Leesburg, WVA, June 16, 1996
Kingsville, TX
Missouri City, TX
Laguna Feb. 3, 1997
First P.C. , 2nd oldest in Old Southwest
Going to Capri
Mods wife, Bosuia, Celia, Delia
- Envelope 6 Color photos-some are dated (1996) & identified
- Envelope 7 Postcards-Puerto Rico, Texas, Kentucky
- Envelope 8 Photo-no ID, location, date
- Envelope 9 Photo-Marj & ?
- Envelope 11 Guatemala Assemble
- Envelope 12 Marj with Jessie Flowers, Bellaire P.C., Houston, TX 4-13-96 Homecoming Queen
- Envelope 13 Luke & Pat Cosby, Kingsport TN
- Envelope 14 Marjorie Collier Carpenter, Tex A & I, Class of 1946
- Envelope 15 Marj, the Moderator at the Writer’s Guild, July 1, 1996, Albuquerque, N.Mexico
- Envelope 16 The Fowler Family, Buca, Izmir, Turkiye
- Envelope 17 Nancy Miller (Mrs. Robert) and Moderator Marj Carpenter
- Envelope 18 Venezuela
- Envelope 19 P.W. Gathering 10.20-10.22.95, Synod of South Atlantic Epworth By the Sea, St. Simons Island, GA
1. Epworth By the Sea, St Simons Island, GA Oct 21, 1995
2. Epworth By the Sea, St. Simons Island GA Oct 20, 1995 Friday 6.45pm
- Envelope 20 All these photos were together in a small album, no are dated. No one is Identified but one photo is of “Former Moderator John Fife and Marj”

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- Envelope 21 Participants in Moderator Marj Carpenter's discussion on mission and Presbyterian goals. Some people are identified, but no dates
- Envelope 22 World travels with Marj
Jamaica 1985 – Louisville
Australia
California 1996
Indianapolis
Seoul
Santa Fe
Brazil
China
Wisconsin
- Envelope 23 Photos are in order as in the photo album
People/place not identified
- Envelope 24 July 1995
These photos appear to be taken when Marj was elected Moderator
- Envelope 25 General Assembly Council (John Dietrich rear center)
- Envelope 26 207th General Assemble PCUSA, Cincinnati, July 1995
- Envelope 27 3-color photos 8-29-95 Korea?

Copy of "The Pyongyang Times" and a Korean publication

- Envelope 29 2 large envelopes of pictures of Marj's journey during her time as Moderator.
Most of the pictures are not named or dated.

Certificate from the State of Texas on becoming the Moderator

Box 3 Mission Updates, News Bulletins

Folders #1-#6