

MAKING HISTORY TODAY

TWO PRESBYTERIAN JOURNALISTS

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Presbyterian Historical Society of the Southwest

The motto for the Wounded Warrior Project is “the greatest casualty is being forgotten”. That same sentiment is part of what the Presbyterian Historical Society of the Southwest is about. While the fact is that many, if not most, of us will be forgotten long after our earthly journey is over, we can be inspired in our own lives of discipleship by those who have gone before us.

One vocation in which a couple of Presbyterians in the Southwest excelled and did so with winsomeness and integrity is journalism. If journalism is the first rough draft of history, as some have said, then these two persons were part of ground-breaking history. Both happened to be Texans, but their influence went far beyond their home state.

DeWitt Reddick was born in Savannah, Georgia on July 30, 1904, but his family moved to Fort Worth the following year. Because of family hardships he and his brother began working at the age of five. When his mother died of the Spanish flu in 1918, the two boys were left on their own.

In 1925 Reddick graduated from the University of Texas at Austin with a degree in journalism. In 1928 he earned a Master’s degree in government, and in 1939 he earned his Ph.D. in journalism from the University of Missouri.

In the 1920s he worked as a reporter for the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* and the *Austin American* (later the *Austin American-Statesman*). He also reported part-time for the *Christian Science Monitor*. While he took occasional leaves to teach at other universities (such as Columbia University in 1941), he became a mainstay in the UT-Austin School of Journalism throughout his life. Among those who learned at his feet were Walter Cronkite, Bill Moyers, Liz Carpenter, and Lady Bird Johnson.

In 1928 Reddick joined the University Presbyterian Church in Austin. In 1934 he married Marjorie Alice Bryan with whom he had two children. In 1953 he founded the *Texas Presbyterian*, a monthly newspaper of the Synod of Texas of the Presbyterian Church in the United States. He held various positions, academically, including dean of the School of Communications from which he retired in 1969. He continued to teach, however, and this writer was privileged, as an undergraduate, to take a course from him in 1972. He died August 22, 1980 at the age of 76.

Along with his enthusiasm and wisdom in his chosen field, Reddick’s grace, humility, and gentleness endeared him to those who knew him.

Marj Carpenter was born August 23, 1926 in the south Texas town of Mercedes. After graduating as valedictorian from Mercedes High School in 1943, she went on to graduate Summa Cum Laude with a degree in music from Texas A & I University in Kingsville in 1946. For 28 years Carpenter reported for newspapers in Pesos, Andrews, and Big Spring, all towns in west Texas. She gained national recognition when, as a reporter for *The Pecos Independent*, she helped expose the scandal involving Billie Sol Estes in the 1960s.

She was a member and an elder in First Presbyterian Church in Big Spring. From 1979-1994 Carpenter served as head of the Presbyterian New Service, first in the denomination’s offices in Atlanta, and later in the denomination’s new offices in Louisville, Kentucky. She became a fierce advocate for the Presbyterian Church’s foreign mission efforts, traveling to over 126 countries to visit various mission stations. In 1995 she was elected moderator of the General Assembly of the PC(USA). She died June 13, 2020 in Big Spring at the age of 93. Her mantra was “Mission, Mission, Mission!”

She published two books on Presbyterian mission work: *To the Ends of the Earth* (1995) and *And a Little Farther* (1998). She also wrote two books of her stories about her experiences as a west Texas newspaper reporter: *Ridin’ Fence, Volume 1* (2015) and *Ridin’ Fence, Volume 2* (2016).

There are many who, like DeWitt Reddick and Marj Carpenter, live lives of faithful discipleship to Jesus Christ, whether as journalists or in other vocations. And we are grateful for their examples. The Presbyterian Historical Society of the Southwest encourages its members to seek out such stories in your own congregation’s history and bring them to light, so that others can know them, give thanks for them, and share them.

The Society holds its annual meeting this Friday and Saturday, March 24 and 25, at St. Charles Avenue Presbyterian Church in New Orleans. Anyone who is not a member and who would like a copy of this year's papers may join the Society by making out a check to PHSSW and mailing it to:

Presbyterian Historical Society of the Southwest
5525 Traviston Ct.
Austin, TX 78738.