

PRESBYTERIAN WOMEN  
IN THE  
CONGREGATION

# The Women's Circles

*Saint James*

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, USA

*"Touching Lives Through Jesus Christ"*

820 Ross Avenue  
Greensboro, NC 27406  
336-273-6658  
[www.stjamespresby.org](http://www.stjamespresby.org)





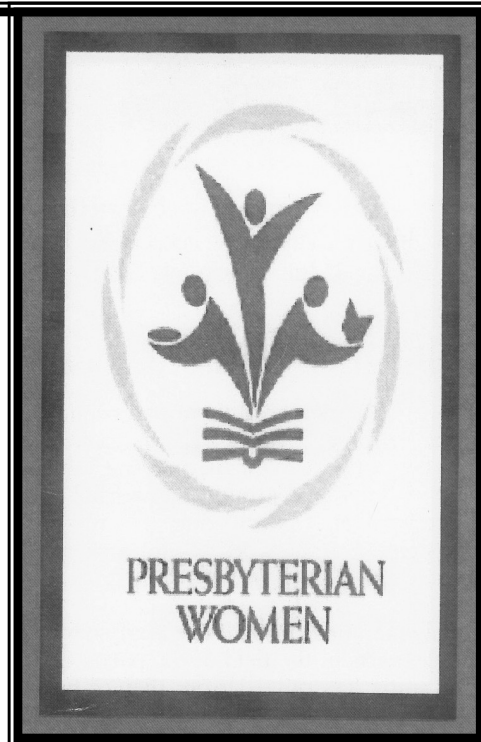


Dr. Nan Manuel

There are many members of Saint James who made contributions to this booklet. However, the vast majority of information was researched and contributed in 2017 by Dr. Nan Manuel for the 150th anniversary of Saint James Presbyterian Church, USA. For that reason, this booklet is dedicated to Dr. Manuel.



February 2023



## The meanings found in the PW symbol using the Presbyterian Women purpose.

### **Forgiven and freed by God in Christ**

Forgiven and freed by grace through faith, the central figures stand in praise.

### **and empowered by the holy Spirit, we commit ourselves**

Rooted in faith, the three women emerge. The outline of the central figure forms across. We are Presbyterian women, engrafted in Christ by the Holy Spirit. It is no longer we who live, but Christ who lives in us.

### **to nurture our faith through Bible study,**

The right figure holds a book to guide her reading, studying, prayers or meditating.

### **to support the mission of the church world,**

The left figure reaches out to care for others, as she shares, nurtures and heals. The circle represents the church worldwide. Where women offer their gifts and talents in the midst of the global community.

### **to work for justice and peace,**

The uplifted arms of the central figure reach out to embrace just peace. The relationship between the three figures depicts lives of wholeness rather than turmoil.

### **and to build an inclusive, caring community of women**

Three women have no distinct features. They represent all women. The shapes around them represent energy, strength, and openness.

### **that strengthens the Presbyterian Church USA**

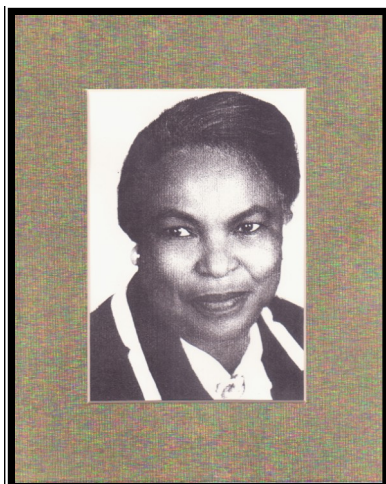
Our name, Presbyterian Women, ties us to our denomination. The Bible resembles the Bible depicted on the PC(USA) Seal.

### **and witnesses to the promise of God's kingdom**

Guided by the PW purpose, Presbyterian Women witness to the reality of God's present realm.

**The Women's Circles**  
of  
*Saint James*  
Presbyterian Church, USA

Sara Barber  
Grace Brown  
Estelle Eaton  
Marie Florance Presbytettes  
Lucy Laney  
Roxie McNair  
Essie B. Meares  
Estelle Miller  
Susan B. Young



Sara Barber

## ***Sara Barber Circle***

Affectionately called “Sara” by all who knew her, Sara Johnson Barber was an extraordinary woman who was a matriarch in the Greensboro community where she was born and lived her entire life. During her lifetime, she affected the community profoundly as a religious and civic leader as well as an educator. She was a woman of great zeal, faith and mission and was committed to the ideals of spiritual growth and development. As a mother and friend, she was a model for many.

As a religious leader, she served Saint James United Presbyterian Church where she remained a loyal and active member all her life. She was a member of the Lucy Laney Circle and of the Presbyterian Women’s organization. She was the pianist for Sunday School, for Vacation Bible School and for the Wednesday Mid-week Prayer Service.

In addition to her work at Saint James, she was active at the Presbytery level. She organized the Central District Women’s group of the Yadkin Presbytery and remained active and faithful in the organization through the years.

As a community, civic and fraternal patron, she was the president of the Greensboro Chapter of Barber-Scotia Alumni Association and an active member of the Magnolia Chapter Order No. 23 of the Eastern Star. She taught school in several cities in North Carolina. We salute Sara Johnson Barber who was a tireless matriarch in her devotion to humanity and to God’s work.





Grace Brown

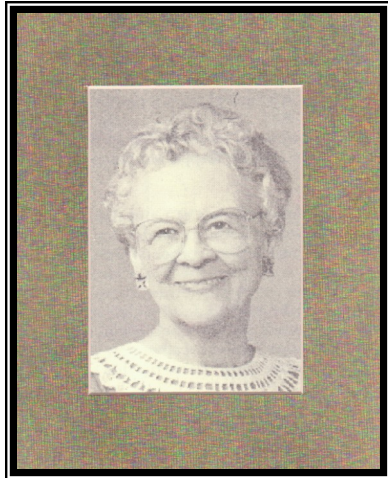
## ***Grace Brown Circle***

The Grace Brown Circle dates from 1974. Two devoted church members, Jackie Armstrong and Rosa Yourse, initiated the formation of the new circle, gathering together six young women whom they had observed to be committed and interested in spiritual growth. They named the circle in honor of the exceptional “Princess” Grace Brown who had given much to her church and her community.

Mrs. Grace Gibbs Brown was born on October 4, 1892, in Tallahassee, FL. Orphaned at age six, young Grace was reared by her cousin, Mrs. Harriet Gibbs Marshall, founder of the Washington, DC Conservatory of Music, where Grace began to study the piano. She pursued studies at Florida A&M College and at NC A&T College. In 1918, she married Chase K. Brown, and shortly thereafter moved to Greensboro where she taught first grade at David D. Jones Elementary School for thirty years. Mrs. Brown also taught private piano lessons for 75 years, holding her annual piano recitals in the sanctuary of Saint James. These recitals were always enthusiastically supported by the community. Important parts of Grace Brown’s life were church, laughter and travel. She was affectionately called Princess Grace and is still remembered for her gracefulness and youthfulness, her charm and beauty, her love of music and dance, and her love of people.

The members of the Grace Brown Circle remain especially mindful of the legacy of Princess Grace Brown by cultivating our creativity and our joie de vivre in all we do as a circle. There are currently 14 members of the Grace Brown Circle. Our special mission project is preparing “Welcome Home Baskets” to the Pathways Family Center. The baskets are provided to homeless families and include items that are necessary as the families move into housing.

Among the original six members was Lovie McBryde, who has served several terms as circle moderator and who continues to be active in the circle, in PWC, and in many ministries of the church. This information was submitted on August 14, 2016.



Estelle Eaton

## ***Estelle Eaton Circle***

Estelle Eaton was born in Clarkton, North Carolina on September 3, 1890 and lived to be 109 years old. Her formal education began in Bladen County and continued at Presbyterian Scotia Seminary known as Barber Scotia College in Concord, North Carolina.

She married Dr. Chester Eaton and reared three children in Winston-Salem. After the children became independent adults, Mrs. Eaton entered Winston-Salem Teachers College, now Winston-Salem State University, where she received an undergraduate degree in 1936. Later, she earned a Master of Arts degree from Columbia University in New York. Mrs. Eaton taught in the Forsyth County Schools, at Tuskegee Institute, at Fayetteville State University, at Elizabeth City State University and at Barber Scotia College.

Mrs. Eaton was a faithful and loyal member of Saint James Presbyterian Church. She served as an Elder and as Moderator of United Presbyterian Women. She founded the Handbell Choir, initiated the Annual Spiritual Emphasis Week and was instrumental in securing a van for Saint James. Mrs. Eaton promoted unity in the Presbyterian churches by worshipping with other Presbyterian churches and by inviting those congregations to worship with Saint James.

Saint James observed September 2, 1990 as Estelle Eaton Day in recognition of her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday and for her faithful service to others. Her life was one of learning, teaching and sharing. At the age of 104, she was featured in the local newsletter as the oldest person enrolled in art classed at GTCC. Some members remember her energy at age 100 as they saw her “running” across the church’s fellowship hall to get the attention of a member. She was energetic to the end, always generous and always gracious. A series of trips took her around the world three times.

The Estelle Eaton Circle has many opportunities to put into practice the mission and goals of Presbyterian Women in the Congregation. It is a wonderful and adventurous journey as the members study together, participate in mission projects, visit the sick and shut-in and share the financial blessings from God. This was the work and vision of Estelle Eaton.





Marie Florance

## ***Marie Florance Presbytettes Circle***

In the 1940s, an organization of young adults was formed at Saint James during the pastorate of Reverend Julius T. Douglas. This organization consisted of both young men and young women. Most were couples. After a while, the men lost interest and the women continued and named the group, the Presbytettes. In the early years, the meetings were held at the church. Bible study was the center of the group's interest. Current events were discussed and special projects were undertaken that emphasized support for the pastor and his family.

In the late 1970s, Mrs. Virginia Alston, a charter member of the Presbytettes and several other women of the church wanted a circle for young girls. They gathered Sandy McBryde (Morrow), Glenda Radcliffe, Lynn Sims, Tracie Purcell (Carlton), Regina McClendon (Ward) and Kim Doggett (Pemberton) to form the Marie Florance Circle. The name of the beloved Marie Florance was chosen because it was felt that the organization should carry the name of a person with great history within Saint James.

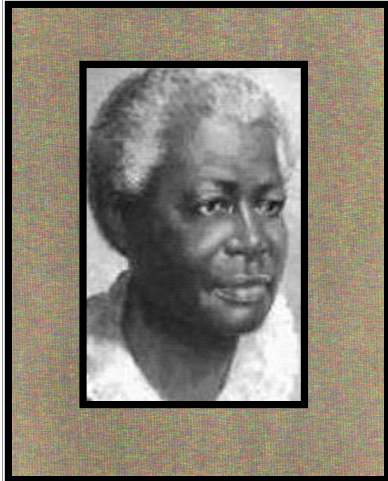
Here is a little information about the person for whom the circle is named. Marie Alexander Florance was born in 1884 in Gastonia, NC. The Alexander family moved to Greensboro in 1904 and immediately joined Saint James. Mrs. Florance dedicated her life to the church. She sang in the Chancel Choir, served as an Elder and was a charter member of the Lucy Laney Circle serving as treasurer. She was a person known for great leadership and love, along with demonstrating the Christian spirit of caring for others. She was such a kind and inspirational elder that it was thought a great honor to name a circle after her. The young women who were the first members of this circle grew up in Saint James. All of them knew Marie Florance so well that she was known to many of them as "Ma Florance". Kim Pemberton who is still a member recalled that one of their fondest memories of Mrs. Florance happened during vacation Bible school.

Mrs. Florance from wherever she was sitting would start singing the following:

Skitter-ma-rink-a-dink-a-dink  
Skitter-ma-rink-a-doo, I love you  
I love you in the morning  
And every afternoon  
I love you in the evening  
And underneath the moon  
Oh, skitter-ma-rink-a-dink-a-dink  
Skitter-ma-rink-a-doo, I love you!

In 1980, all the members of the Marie Florance Circle graduated from high school and went their separate ways - NC A & T, Bennett College, Winston-Salem State University or the military. This brought an abrupt end to the Marie Florance Circle. Mrs. Virginia Alston and the women of the Presbytettes Circle did not want to see the young circle disband and lose the name Marie Florance especially since she was still a vibrant member of the church. Therefore, the Presbytettes Circle took the name Marie Florance and added it to their name. Thus, the Marie Florance Presbytettes came to be. Today, the Marie Florance Presbytettes is still strong and very active in Saint James. The membership spans five generations from aged 11 to 99.





Lucy Laney

## ***Lucy Laney Circle***

The Lucy Laney Circle has the distinction of being the oldest circle in Saint James. It is named for Lucy Laney, an outstanding educator who touched the lives of young women and men through her tireless work as founder of educational institutions for Black Children.

Miss Laney was born in Macon, GA on April 13, 1855. She attended Lewis High School, later named Ballard Normal School. She later attended Atlanta University where she was a member of the first class. At the time of her enrollment, Miss Laney had to endure the thoughts at the time from outsiders that the potential of Blacks might not be worth the effort to educate them. In spite of this, her mission for helping Blacks was strengthened.

Seeing the plight of young Black children, Miss Laney taught in the public schools in a number of cities before starting a private school in the lecture room of Christ Presbyterian Church in Augusta, GA. At the 95<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, Miss Laney described her school and made an effort for assistance, but no funds were appropriated for her. However, she did meet Mrs. F. E. H. Haines whose financial contributions helped tremendously in getting her school off the ground. The school was later named the Haines Normal and Industrial School for its major benefactor.

Miss Laney's philosophy was the idea that "all work is honorable and a glory to the Master." She gave the same importance to sweeping the campus as she did to reading Latin classics. Miss Laney exerted a strong sense of identity on her students long before the rise in the "Black is Beautiful" movement of the fifties and sixties. She would often say to her students, "God made me out of black dirt, and it was good dirt." She enriched the lives of her students by bringing artists to campus like Roland Hayes, Marion Anderson and Richard Harrison.

The Lucy Laney Circle was formed in 1928 in her honor under the leadership of Mrs. Essie B. Meares and Mrs. Roxie McNair. The world lost a great citizen when she died in 1933.

## **Who was Lucy Craft Laney?**

Lucy Craft Laney 1854 – 1933

Lucy Craft Laney was born in Macon in the days of slavery. She was not, however, the child of slaves. Her father was a Presbyterian minister and a skilled carpenter, who had bought his own freedom twenty years before she was born. He had bought his wife's freedom when he married her. Courage and independence were bred into Lucy Laney.

Her early childhood days were spent in the Macon home where her mother worked as a maid for a Miss Campbell, who noticed how much time little Lucy spent with books. Miss Campbell taught her to read at the age of four.

When the Civil War came to an end, her father rang the bells of Washington Avenue Presbyterian Church to celebrate emancipation. The Freedman's Bureau and the American Missionary Association founded a high school for black children in Macon, where the Medical Center now stands. Young Lucy attended it until, at the age of fifteen, she was chosen to enroll in the newly founded Atlanta University, where she was a member of the first graduating class in 1873.

For the next ten years, she taught black children in whatever school facilities she could find in Milledgeville, Savannah, and Augusta. The keynote of her teaching seems to have been a boundless faith in children's ability to learn, combined with the highest expectations of what they should achieve. It was in Augusta that she found the warmest support for her endeavors. Friends from the Presbyterian Church and the Freedman's Bureau persuaded her to start a new school there. She began in the lecture room of Christ Presbyterian Church, at the corner of Telfair and Tenth Streets, with only six children, but soon there were more than two hundred.

No available facility was adequate, and it was imperative that the school have its own buildings and grounds and boarding facilities. In those days the education of black children depended strongly on church affiliations through which support

could be gathered from parts of the country less poverty-stricken than the South. Lucy Laney set out for the Presbyterian General Assembly in Minneapolis, with barely enough money for a one-way railroad ticket. There she found moral support but not money. The Church simply could not afford to fund all of the worthy projects that were requested. But Lucy Laney made a valuable friend in Mrs. F. E. H. Haines, then President of the Women's Department of the Presbyterian Church USA. Mrs. Haines became her advocate and supporter.

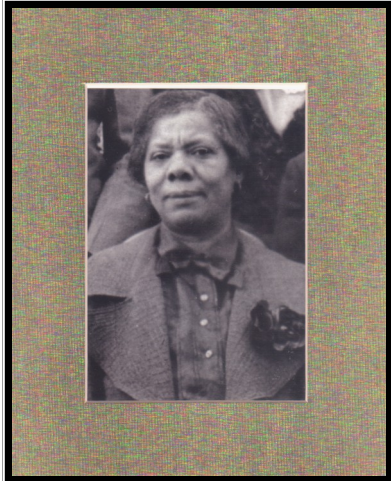
Miss Laney returned to Augusta to charter a new school, the Haines Normal and Industrial School. Local donations enabled her to purchase a site and put up the first building. Then the delayed financial help came from the Church. Striking educational achievements soon followed:

- \* the first kindergarten for black children in Augusta, and one of the first in the South;
- \* the first Nurses' Training Institute for black girls, later to become the Nurses' School of University Hospital;
- \* the first football team from a black high school in Georgia;
- \* a curriculum that combined traditional arts and sciences with job-training and vocational programs;
- \* a total school program so closely tied to community service that no one could fail to see it as an asset.

Lucy Laney had the courage and the moral stature to hold young people accountable to the highest standards and to bring out their best selves. She once said, "God has nothing to make men and women out of but boys and girls."

She is buried on the grounds of the school that now bears her name, on a major Augusta boulevard that also bears her name. Her portrait hangs in the Georgia State Capitol. She is a permanent example to young people of the value of vision, dedication, and commitment to service.

Georgia Women of Achievement  
First Induction Ceremony  
Macon, Georgia  
March 23, 1992



Roxie McNair

## ***Roxie McNair Circle***

Roxie Elizabeth McNair, the daughter of Henry and Charlotte Brooks, was born in Henry County, VA. She was a former educator who taught for eight years at the Holbrook Presbyterian School in Danville, VA.

Miss Roxie Brooks married Dr. Walter Lewis McNair in 1908. The young couple made their home in Greensboro where Dr. McNair owned and operated the McNair Drug Store and Pharmacy. It was the first Black-owned pharmacy in the city.

Mrs. McNair served faithfully for over fifty years at Saint James Presbyterian Church and played many different roles in its history. She was President of the Ladies Missionary Society and Co-organizer of the Lucy Laney Circle with Mrs. Essie B. Meares. She was a member of the Choir and Director of the Daily Vacation Bible School which ran for two weeks of each summer. She saw to it that the older students learned and recited the books of the Bible. The students would recite them together until they were committed to memory. Mrs. McNair was the first woman Elder at Saint James Presbyterian Church, and she participated in the laying of the cornerstone for the present sanctuary on Ross Avenue.

At the higher Presbyterian Church offices, Mrs. McNair served as president of both the Presbyterial and Synodical levels. She played a prominent role in the new programs in which women were beginning to play a more active part in the Presbyterian church.

Mrs. McNair should be remembered as one of the leading ladies of the church. She was always one that was willing to help with new ventures at the church. In the early 1940's when World War II was at its peak and soldiers were traveling through Greensboro in great numbers, a USO Center was established and opened in the basement of the old church on Forbis Street. Mrs. McNair did an excellent job of being in charge of the center. It meant a lot to the service men who needed a place to relax. Since the church was located near the railroad station, it was convenient for them. Many people referred to Mrs. McNair as "a very good woman".

After her husband's death in 1928, Mrs. McNair had the distinction of having all seven of her children finish college. Two of them became Pharmacists. In 1948, she along with three of her sons, reopened the McNair Brother's Drug Store at 900 East Market Street. She was also known to generously give toward the education of other young people.

Her community activities included working with L. Richardson Hospital, Windsor Community Center and the NAACP.

At her death, Reverend Douglas paid her a glowing tribute which was "Mrs. McNair left us a rich and enduring legacy, she lived a Christian life, talked a Christian language, and practiced Christian motherhood".

At this printing, one of descendants of Mrs. Roxie McNair is still a member of Saint James Presbyterian Church. She is Paula McNair-McEachern.

The members of Roxie McNair Circle are proud to honor Mrs. McNair by carrying out our projects of helping others in her name.





Essie B. Meares

## ***Essie B. Meares Circle***

In 1907, Essie B. Meares came to Greensboro as a young bride and recent graduate of Barber Scotia College. She and her husband, William J. Meares, immediately became an integral part of the life of Saint James Presbyterian Church. Over a period of seventy-four years, she gave untiringly of her time and talents in service to her church and community. Her contributions included sixty-four years as a member of the choir serving as soprano soloist and several years as choir director. For eighteen years, she was president of the Yadkin Presbytery during which time she attended three meetings of the General Assembly. She served as superintendent, teacher and treasurer of the Sunday School, director and teacher for the Vacation Bible School and organizer of the Christian Endeavor, a Sunday Evening Service primarily for the youth of the church.

Together with Mrs. Roxie McNair, she organized the Lucy Laney Circle and became its first president. She and Mrs. McNair shared the honor of being the first “**distaff**” members elected as elders of Saint James Presbyterian Church. Their pictures are included in the cornerstone of the present sanctuary edifice.

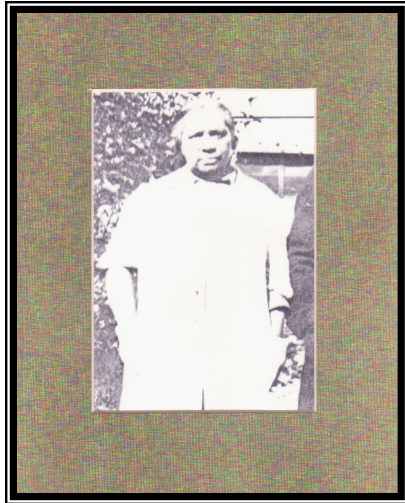
Mrs. Juanita Boone Spaulding, an outstanding worker in her own right, was responsible for the naming of this circle as an expression of admiration and respect for an extremely Christian servant.

The circle supports the parent body, Presbyterian Women in the Congregation, engages in nationally organized Bible study and global mission, and shows abiding concern for the membership faith journey. Membership is open-ended for any Saint James Presbyterian Church female and females from other denominations. Meetings are held on the third Saturday at noon in the months from September through March. The circle’s guiding principle is “The Unity of All Believers”.

*There is no longer Jew or Greek  
There is no longer slave or free,  
There is no longer male and female  
For all of you are one in Christ Jesus.*

Galatians 3:28





Estelle Miller

## ***Estelle Miller Circle***

The Estelle Miller Circle was named for the wife of Dr. Hector Miller, a former pastor of Saint James United Presbyterian Church on Forbis Street. Mrs. Miller was a gracious hostess. Every Sunday after church, she had Open House for members to sit, talk, and eat if they wished to do so. Children were also welcomed to visit. They would have good times in the den with its bay window that overlooked the street.

Dr. and Mrs. Miller were the parents of six children – three daughters, two sons and an adopted son. The daughters attend Bennett College and the sons attend North Carolina A&T University.

Mrs. Miller, along with Mrs. Roxie McNair, started the Bible School for children. Saint James followed this tradition of making Bible School not only for members of Saint James, but also for people from the entire Greensboro community.

At this printing, some members of Mrs. Miller's family are still members of Saint James. They are granddaughter, Marian Quick; great granddaughter, Cecelia Pettis; great grandson, Travis Montague; great great grandchildren, Aaron Veal and Kyndall Dervin.

The circle gives honor to the late Mrs. Aurelia Wiggins who, with love and loyalty, was a dedicated moderator for the circle for many years.





Susan B. Young

## ***Susan B. Young Circle***

The Susan O. Young Circle, affectionately called Circle #9 until officially named, was established in 2008. This circle targeted Presbyterian women juggling careers, children and other family responsibilities. This circle targeted younger women bound together by a common thread, yet desiring to build a stronger bond through Bible study and faith journey.

The circle was named after faithful Saint James member, Susan O. Young. Susan was a devoted mother and wife who managed a professional career and family life. She was an active member of Saint James Presbyterian Church, working with Girl Scouts and other youth ministries. Susan, like several of the circle members, knew the challenges of juggling the duties of having young children while building a name for herself in the work force. She was an inspiration to her family and friends in addition to being well respected in the community. Susan was an advocate for education, knowing that with it you could move mountains. She was fun loving, adored her husband and two sons and enjoyed the simple things centering around them. Susan battled cancer with dignity and grace but lost her fight to this unkind disease in January of 2007. She left a legacy to working wives and mothers that is still felt by circle members today.

Regina Brooks Artis serves as the current Moderator for the Susan B. Young Circle.





This booklet was prepared by Linda Adams, a member of the Sara Barber Circle.