

**The Burke Library Archives, Columbia University Libraries,  
Union Theological Seminary, New York**

William Adams Brown Ecumenical Archives Group

Finding Aid for

**John J. Banninga Papers, 1883 – 1959**



John J. and Mary Banninga, 1915. Source: Helen Vogelsson Banninga, *A Sketch of the Life Work of John J. Banninga, M.A., D.D. in Pasumalai, South India 1901-1942* (Claremont, CA: The College Press, 1961) 4.

Finding Aid prepared by: Leanora Lange, May 2012  
With financial support from the Henry Luce Foundation

**Summary Information**

Creator: John J. Banninga, 1875-1963  
Title: John J. Banninga Papers  
Inclusive dates: 1883 - 1959  
Bulk dates: 1928-1951  
Abstract: American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) Missionary to India. Contains correspondence, reports, memoranda, resolutions, clippings, and other documents related to the creation of the Church of South India (CSI), a union among Anglican, Methodist, and the South India United Churches, as well as personal papers.  
Size: 6 boxes, 3.00 linear feet  
Storage: Onsite storage  
Repository: The Burke Library  
Union Theological Seminary  
3041 Broadway  
New York, NY 10027  
Email: [burkearchives@library.columbia.edu](mailto:burkearchives@library.columbia.edu)

### Administrative Information

- Provenance:** The collection is part of the William Adams Brown Ecumenical Library, which was established in 1945 within Union Theological Seminary's main library to hold ecumenical materials.
- Access:** Archival papers are available to registered readers for consultation by appointment only. Please contact archives staff by email to [burkearchives@library.columbia.edu](mailto:burkearchives@library.columbia.edu), or by postal mail to The Burke Library address on page 1, as far in advance as possible. Burke Library staff is available for inquiries or to request a consultation on archival or special collections research.
- Access Restrictions:** The collection is unrestricted to readers. Certain materials, however, are in a fragile condition, and this may necessitate restriction in handling and copying.
- Preferred Citation:** Item description, William Adams Brown Ecumenical Library Archives: John J. Banninga Papers, series # box #, folder #, The Burke Library at Union Theological Seminary, Columbia University in the City of New York.

### Biography

John J. Banninga was born on December 9, 1875 in Muskegon, Michigan to Jan Banninga and Elizabeth Hekelburg, immigrants from the Netherlands. John graduated from Hope College in 1898 with a Bachelor's degree, and received his Master's degree from Western Theological Seminary in 1901. He later received an honorary D.D. degree from Hope College in 1917.

Banninga married Sophia Maria Damson on August 29, 1901. In December of the same year, the couple went to India as missionaries of the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions (ABCFM) of the Congregational church.

Banninga served as a missionary in India from 1901 until his retirement in 1942, after which he returned to the United States. During his time as a missionary in India, he held a multitude of positions including the Secretary of the American Madura Mission, Secretary and later President of the South India United Church (SIUC), a member and eventual Chairman of the SIUC Committee on Church Union, a member and eventual Secretary of the Joint Committee on Church Union, Principal of the Union Theological Seminary in Pasumalai, Editor of the SIUC *Herald* and the *Church Union News and Views*, and Chairman of the Madura Church Council. He was also a member for the Madras Representative Christian Council, the National Christian Council, the Lindsay Commission, the Continuation Committee on Church Union, and the National Christian Endeavor Union. In all of these positions, he devoted himself to the creation of a Church Union in South India.

The idea of a church union among the SIUC, Anglican, Wesleyan, and Lutheran churches first arose at the Tranquebar Conference in May 1919. Banninga, secretary of the SIUC at the time of Tranquebar, became deeply involved in the negotiations of a church union for many years to come. He wrote numerous letters, articles, and reports on the subject, and presented the cause of the Church Union at the World Conference on Faith and Order at Lausanne in August 1927, which garnered interest in the Church Union from around the world. Points of negotiation

included the equality of ministers, the consecration of bishops, the celebration of communion, and intercommunion.

The SIUC (Presbyterian and Congregationalist), the Church of India, Burma and Ceylon (Anglican), and the Methodist Church in South India officially united to form the Church of South India (CSI) on September 27, 1947 in Madras, South India.

After returning to the United States in 1942, Banninga lived and practiced ministry in Michigan, Florida, and eventually Claremont, California. He kept in contact with colleagues regarding the formation of a Church Union in India during this time. He died in 1963.

#### Sources:

Banninga, Helen Vogelson. *A Sketch of the Life Work of John J. Banninga, M.A., D.D. in Pasumalai, South India 1901-1942*. Claremont, CA: The College Press, 1961.

Draft of a biographical sketch of John J. Banninga. "Rev. John J. Banninga, M.A., D.D., and church Union in S. India." William Adams Brown Ecumenical Archives: John J. Banninga Papers, Series 2, box 4, folder 10. The Burke Library Archives (Columbia University Libraries) at Union Theological Seminary, New York.

Sundkler, B. *Church of South India: The Movement towards Union 1900-1947*. London: Lutterworth Press, 1954.

#### **Collection Scope and Content Note**

The collection is divided into six series:

- **Series 1: Correspondence, 1902 – 1951 (2 boxes, 1.00 lin. ft.)**

This series contains the extensive correspondence kept by Banninga and his colleagues around the world, including church leaders in India, England, Sweden, and the United States. Particularly frequent correspondents include the Bishops of Madras, Dornakal, Bombay, Calcutta, Columbo, Tinnevely, and Gloucester, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Metropolitan of India, J.H. Maclean, W.E. Tomlinson, H. Gulliford, W.J. Noble, W.I. Chamberlain, F.J. Western, J.S.M. Hooper, L. Hodgson, W. Paton, H.V. Martin, M. Warren, J.E.L. Newbigin, F.W. Tomkins, and S. Eddy. The bulk of the letters deal with the creation of the Church Union, although a few discuss other professional and personal matters. These letters contain essential information concerning the stance and arguments of various individuals and denominations involved in the negotiations on the Church Union.

The first section of this series contains correspondence sent both to and from Banninga, organized chronologically. The second section contains correspondence sent neither to nor from Banninga, organized chronologically. In the case that the sender was not known, letters were placed under general correspondence.

- **Series 2: Documents on Church Union History, 1883 – 1951 (2 boxes, 1.00 lin. ft.)**  
This series includes conference statements, reports, proposals, minutes, memoranda, and resolutions related to the Church Union. The documents in this series are arranged chronologically.
- **Series 3: Clippings, 1900 – 1951 (1 box, 0.50 lin. ft.)**  
This series includes all series or periodicals organized chronologically. The bulk of the clippings are from *The Guardian*, *Madras Mail*, *The Christian Century*, *Dnyanodaya*, and *Church Times*.
- **Series 4: Documents on Lay Celebration, 1937 – 1940 (part of 1 box, 0.50 lin. ft.)**  
These documents were separated into their own folder by Banninga, according to a note included from a previous archivist. The documents consist primarily of responses to letters sent by Banninga on the question of allowing laymen to administer communion in the absence of an ordained minister.
- **Series 5: CSI/Lutheran Joint Commission Documents, 1950 – 1959 (part of 1 box, 0.50 lin. ft.)**  
This series contains reports on the meetings of the Church of South India (CSI) with representatives from the Lutheran and Baptist churches to discuss a possible union.
- **Series 6: General Papers, 1912 – 1953 (part of 1 box, 0.50 lin. ft.)**  
This series contains Banninga's organizational notes, his personal memoranda of the events related to World War II from 1941 – 1942, a description of his trip back to the United States in 1942, an exam, and other documents that are neither correspondence nor related to Banninga's work on the Church Union. It also contains notes, drafts, correspondence, and certificates of Bengt Sundkler, a Swedish missionary who wrote the book *Church of South India: The Movement Towards Union, 1900 – 1947*.

### Processing

Metal clips and staples were removed from materials and folded items were flattened. Materials were placed in new acid-free folders and boxes. Newspaper clippings were copied onto acid-free paper. Other acidic items were separated from one another by interleaving with acid-free paper as needed.

The collection was originally processed in 1985 to the item level according to the date on the record. Original order could not be discerned during reprocessing, therefore order was imposed.

### Further Resources

Three related collections that can be found in the Missionary Research Library collection at The Burke Library Archives, Columbia University Libraries, at Union Theological Seminary, New York, are the [William Adams Brown Papers \(MRL 3\)](#), [The American Madura Mission South India Papers \(MRL 3\)](#), and the [American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missionaries Papers \(MRL 12\)](#). The William Adams Brown Papers contain information regarding the Union

Theological Seminary in India and Banninga's collaboration with Brown, while the American Madura Mission South India Papers include Banninga's notes on the history of the mission. The ABCFM Papers include further materials related to American foreign missionaries. If interested in these collections, please contact archives staff at [burkearchives@library.columbia.edu](mailto:burkearchives@library.columbia.edu).

## Contents list

### Series 1: Correspondence, 1902 – 1951

Series	Box	Folder	Contents
			<b>Banninga's Correspondence, 1910 – 1951</b>
1	1	1	1910 – 1921
1	1	2	1922 – 1927
1	1	3	1928
1	1	4	1929
1	1	5	1930
1	1	6	January 1931 – August 1932
1	1	7	September 1932 – December 1932
1	1	8	1933
1	1	9	1934 – 1937
1	1	10	1938
1	1	11	1939
1	1	12	1940 – 1942
1	1	13	1943 – 1945
1	1	14	1946 – 1951
			<b>General Correspondence, 1902 – 1951</b>
1	2	1	1902 – 1927
1	2	2	1928 – 1931
1	2	3	1932
1	2	4	1933
1	2	5	1934
1	2	6	1935 – 1936
1	2	7	1937 – 1941
1	2	8	1942 – 1943
1	2	9	1944 – 1946
1	2	10	1947 – 1951

### Series 2: Documents on Church Union History, 1883 – 1951

2	3	1	1883 – 1919
2	3	2	[1920?] – 1923
2	3	3	1924 – 1925
2	3	4	1926 – 1928
2	3	5	1929
2	3	6	1930
2	3	7	1931 – 1932
2	3	8	January 1933 – February 1933
2	3	9	March 1933 – July 1933
2	3	10	August 1933 – December 1933

**Series 2: Documents on Church Union History, 1883 – 1951 (Cont'd)**

Series	Box	Folder	Contents
2	4	1	1934
2	4	2	1935 – 1936
2	4	3	1937
2	4	4	1938
2	4	5	1939
2	4	6	1940 – 1941
2	4	7	January 1942 – May 1943
2	4	8	June 1943 – December 1944
2	4	9	1945 – 1946
2	4	10	1947
2	4	11	1948 – 1951
2	4	12	[19??]
2	4	13	[194?]

**Series 3: Clippings, 1900 – 1951**

3	5	1	1900 – 1927
3	5	2	1928 – 1930
3	5	3	1931 – 1932
3	5	4	1933 – 1934
3	5	5	1935 – 1937
3	5	6	1938 – 1942
3	5	7	1943 – 1944
3	5	8	January 1945 – June 1947
3	5	9	July 1947 – December 1947
3	5	10	1948 – 1951
3	5	11	[19??]

**Series 4: Documents on Lay Celebration, 1937 – 1940**

4	6	1	1937
4	6	2	1938
4	6	3	1940

**Series 5: CSI/Lutheran Joint Commission Documents, 1950 – 1959**

5	6	4	1950 – 1959
5	6	5	[195?]
5	6	6	[195?]

**Series 6: General Papers, 1912 – 1953**

6	6	7	Banninga's general papers, [1919 – 1945?]
6	6	8	Bengt Sundkler papers, [1912?] – 1953