Women of Methodism

An Honors Thesis (ID 499)

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Introduction

From the beginnings of Christianity, women as well as men, were permitted, indeed encouraged, to dedicate themselves wholly to God. However, unlike their male counterparts, women "worked out their soul's salvation" without the official sanctions of the church until very recent times. Being the outsiders, the ladies did what they could when they could, while steadfastly pushing against the constraints that society had placed upon them.

With the establishment of Methodist societies in and around London in 1739, women found a natural home for their faith and their desire to serve the God preached by the fiery John Wesley. Since that time, women have been the vital thread running throughout the fabric of Methodism. The female preachers, denied ordination and vastly unrecognized have been the woof -- the very texture of this great piece of cloth. The women who pieced the quilts, baked the pies, nursed the sick, cared for the orphans, sewed curtains for the church windows, fried chicken to raise money to pay the pastors, churned the ice cream for the socials that built the churches and taught the "heathens" were the warp that held the fabric of faith together.

Some of these women triumphed, others lived meanly and miserably, yet all sought to please their God and serve the Methodist faith they espoused. The intensely personal relationship with God experienced by John Wesley and edified by him and his cohorts drew women into the ranks
of those seeking newer and deeper forms of worship. Only the reflected
glory of their sons and husbands allows us to know many of these ladies.
Others we discover passionately following the men they believed in, and
follow they did, crossing the sea to found the church in America,
Hawaii, China, and all around the globe. Crossing the mountains, the
wildernesses and the deserts, they spread the gospel into the frontier.
But a few valiantly climbed their own mountains, some crossed the waste-
lands of uncertainty, and became strong leaders for Christ. A signi-
ficant number turned the very soil of existence up to the sunlight and
threw away the stones that impeded the growth of the seeds of faith they
were planting. All left their age and time vastly changed because of
the scope and range of their commitment to the religious life of
Methodism.
The Pioneers

Susanna Wesley was the archtypical mother. A genteel cultured woman, she was an inspired teacher for all of her nineteen children. John was the 15th child and Charles, his fellow worker for Christ and a great hymn writer in his own right, was the last. The beautiful and intelligent daughter of Dr. Samuel Annesley, a Church of England minister, Susanna had theology in her blood and having received an exceptional education she developed the strong character that kept her sons from clinging to her petticoats.

Her marriage to Samuel Wesley taxed her spiritual and physical resources. Being neither a bad man nor a bad husband, he suffered from an "uneasy" temper and was constantly at "war" with his parishioners. In addition, the family was always poverty-stricken and the parson mismanaged what little funds they did have.

This exceptional mother, never relaxed the domestic and educational disciplines that would fit her children for a cultured world.

On the day that each reached the age of five, serious lessons lasting for six hours began...the very first day they were expected to learn the alphabet...daughters as well as sons became proficient in Latin and Greek.

However, the most important thing this marvelous woman put into the hearts and souls of her children was a passionate love for God and a thirst for pleasing Him whatever the task He placed before them. Because of this woman, "...it is no exaggeration to say that Methodism is the lengthened shadow of a woman."
An example of these hardy souls is Grace Murray, a widow who nursed John Wesley back to health when he had fallen grievously ill. An early convert to Methodism, she later rode horseback as a female itinerant and was quite successful and popular due to her bombastic preaching. The common view of the circuit rider with the Bible in the saddle bag, the hat pulled down tightly against the sun, and the rain cape shielding against the storm omits the fact that many of them, enduring the same hardships, wore skirts! Because of her kindly nursing and fervent piety, John Wesley decided after careful consideration "that Heaven had prepared her to be an Help meet for him and proposed."

Charles Wesley, fearing that a marriage such as this would cause dissension within Methodism, reacted violently. He argued with John to no avail. He then showered Grace with reproaches and facilitated a marriage between her and John Bennet, a contemporary of the Wesleys. The Bennets continued their work on behalf of the budding religion.

Mary Ann Evans Lewes (1819-1880), using the pen name of George Eliot, fell under the influence of evangelism as taught by the Wesley brothers, popularly called "Methodism." The young girl studiously searched the scriptures and diligently practiced the soul-searching that was the major duty and occupation of the early adherents of the evangelical view. Soon Mary Ann's entire family joined the Methodist Church of England and she too became a member by confession of faith along with her sister Elizabeth. Her book, *Adam Bede*, has as its heroine Dinah Evans, a preacher of heroic proportions. Her Sermon on the Green expresses her talents and beautiful character. Eliot's hand of genius portrayed her almost angelic character truthfully, for although she is
the leading character in a work of fiction, there is much evidence that
Dinah Evans was in truth the wife of Seth Evans, a relative of Mary Ann
Evans herself. Whether real or fictitious, this woman is a vivid repre-
sentation of what did occur in the England of that time. Eliot describes
her in vivid detail:

Her early childhood was consecrated to religion; and
when Wesley's travels and labors had raised up throughout
the land, Societies in the social worship of which women
were allowed to share, her rare natural talents found an
appropriate sphere of usefulness which no other denomination
except Quakerism then afforded. She preached in cottages
and sometimes in the open air...she assisted in an extra-
ordinary degree in laying the foundations of the church in
many benighted districts...a constant visitor to the abodes
of the poor and wretched, to prisons and almshouses; she,
penetrated into the dens of crime and infamy, the charms of
benign presence and speech securing her not only protection
but welcome among the most brutal men. She even followed
the penitent murderer to the gallows...Dinah Evans repre­
dented in her gentle but ardent nature, the best traits of both
Quakerism and Methodism. 4

George Eliot later left the Methodist church but through her books she has
left a lasting and lovely portrait of early Methodism.

Barbara Ruckle Heck (1734-1804), often described as a lady of
action, was the person who planted Methodist meetings in America and
Canada. Barbara's parents were German protestants driven from their
homeland by the French Catholic king. As a refugee in Ireland, Barbara
never felt at home, but upon her marriage to Paul Heck, they, along with
her cousin Philip Embury, emigrated to America. The thing she missed the
most from her former life was the Methodist class meetings. After five
years, her brother and some former friends came from Ireland. She went
to visit the new comers one day and was enraged:

Finding a party playing cards in the house of her
brother, Barbara Heck, after destroying the cards, went
to the dwelling of her cousin Philip Embury, told him
what she had done and appealed to him to begin to preach. S

I cannot preach" protested Philip "I have neither meeting house nor congregation." "That's no excuse. I will find the congregation and you will find the meeting house. This very room will do to begin with" said the fired-up Barbara. "Where's your Bible? Read it. Be ready to preach as soon as I get back." 6

With such "encouragement," Embury preached the first Methodist sermon in New York City. The class meetings grew and larger quarters were needed. The men, being cautious, were reluctant to break the law against building any churches except those of the Church of England. Again, the peppery Barbara swept aside all arguments including those concerning the lack of finances. A plain building was constructed with a fireplace and a chimney so that it bore little resemblance to a house of worship. On that site, the John Street Church still stands in New York City, surrounded by the skyscrapers of the financial district.

When the Revolutionary War began, the Hecks sailed to Canada where Philip's son, Samuel Embury, became the leader of the first Methodist class meetings near the St. Lawrence River, held in Barbara Heck's parlor. With her woman's faith and vision, Barbara Heck was responsible for the first permanent Methodist structure in America.

Sadly neglected by the men who wrote history, the Countess of Huntingdon, Selina Hastings (1707-1791) was the leader of the Calvinistic Methodists. Abel Stevens called her "a mere adornment for Methodist men." 7 Although she was a great patroness of the Wesleys and George Whitefield, her greatest impact was as a leader and organizer. She was the central director of sixty chapels with many itinerants and ministers and advocated a sound education for the servants of the Lord and preachers of
his word. To this end, she founded a theological school in Trevecca, South Wales. This school was of utmost importance to the wealthy countess: "She was more than a patroness, she was an overseer who required rigorous training and high standards for her sponsorship."\(^8\)

Her concern for the spread of the church and its mission in the New World extended to Georgia where she tried valiantly to open a school at Bethesda which would educate both males and females. As she was a British citizen, the newly formed government of America was reluctant to allow her ownership of lands in Georgia, even for the purpose of mission work to the Indians. Despite appeals to George Washington and several governors, she was not successful. Her petitions for Bethesda college were still pending at the time of her death; they were further maligned by the poor management of her managers.

Instrumental in the work of attempting to convert the aristocracy of England and encouraging them to aid the poor, the Countess also held women's prayer meetings.

She held special meetings for women and soon was leading a female network. Selina Hastings then initiated an unusual activity for women of her time: She sponsored a missionary group to Wales consisting of select bands of like-minded women and proven evangelists, the first of many excursions she and her friends undertook.\(^9\)

In her mid-years, the Countess was able to significantly alter the course of the fledgling Methodism and was the initiator of the connectional system that is still the backbone of the Methodist religion. Continuing her work through widowhood and her later years, this remarkable woman is being rediscovered by today's historians and honored for her leadership, organizational skills and her importance as, "a transitional figure connecting the Old World and the New World."\(^10\)

Isabella Marshall Graham (1742-1814) pioneered women's societies in the early nineteenth century; she is best known for her letter exhorting
young ladies to become volunteer teachers in the schools she was founding for poor inner-city children.

Alas! Alas! is there no help? no preventive? Yes there is! Behold the angelic band: hail ye virtuous daughters! worthy of your virtuous mothers! come forward and tread in their steps! Snatch these little innocents from the whirling vortex; bring them to a place of safety; teach them to know their Father, God; tell them of their Saviour's love;...mark to them the example He set...and by teaching them to read; enable them to retrace all your instructions, when their eyes see you no more.11

With the aid of her daughter, Joanna Graham Bethune (1770-1860), she founded the Society for the Relief of Poor Widows with Small Children in 1797. In 1806, they formed the Orphan Asylum Society. After her mother's death, Joanna opened the first of her infant schools based upon her strong Christian commitment. The Sunday school programs we now employ were the brainchild of this woman, truly her mother's daughter.

The first female professor of theology in a Methodist seminary, Garrett Biblical Institute, was Georgia Harkness (1891-1974). Believing strongly in the ministry of the laity, she encouraged a daily prayer life and social activism. "She pioneered in calling the church to advocacy of racial justice, ecumenism, world peace, and nuclear disarmament."12

Teaching theology both at Garrett and at the Pacific School of Religion, she was the only woman in a field totally dominated by men. Her literary output was tremendous; she wrote a total of thirty-six books and countless articles. The year 1947 found her honored to be named one of the ten most outstanding Methodists in America.

Although Miss Harkness taught and wrote with diligence, she maintained a balanced life of lay work, social work, and a deep inner life. She attended Friends retreats and studied mysticism under the Quaker
Rufus Jones. One of the hymns she wrote, "Hope of the World," is included in the Methodist hymnal. In addition, she looked upon herself and her high status with humility and humor. She described a dinner held during the meeting of Northern California-Western Nevada Council of Churches:

An Episcopal bishop presided, a minister of the Assembly of God sat at his right. A Salvation Army band and an operatic tenor provided the music, a Negro Baptist gave the invocation, and a Missouri Synod Lutheran pronounced the benediction "and--beg pardon St. Paul--a woman theologian gave the address."13

Georgia was not a systematic theologian; she wrote overviews of general topics—faith, religion, and knowledge. Because she was writing for the laity, she kept her works simple and easy to read. She believed in both science and religion, but was critical of either when it did not fulfill the truths it claimed. She explained:

True religion has but two functions or goals: to make men better and to make men stronger. Keenness of moral vision, and strength to meet the storms and battles of life—these have been the dual gifts of religion.14

The legacy Georgia Harkness has left to the future generations of Methodist women is that she went through many doors as the first and only woman at that time to do so, and she entered virtually alone, with no feminine colleagues. Judged by today's standards, her efforts might not seem to be strong enough/radical enough, yet she did accomplish many things that no other women had before her.

Margaret Henricksen, widowed at forty-two in 1943, turned to the church—both to give and receive—solace. Being given seven nearly-deserted churches in Maine, she quickly dispelled that "the ministry is strictly for males."15
In 1967 Bishop James K. Matthews of Boston made her the first woman district superintendent in the church, placing her in charge of the Bangor District. She served ably until forced to retire due to injuries she suffered in an automobile accident.

The first woman elected as bishop of any major Christian denomination was Marjorie Matthews (1916- ). The episcopal leader of the Wisconsin area, she is presently the only female bishop in the world. "Sometimes I feel like a national monument because I'm the first."16

A divorced woman, Bishop Matthews, has had a difficult journey to reach the position she now holds. At fifty-one she earned a B.A. degree and followed that with a theological degree and a doctorate. While obtaining her education, she served rural churches in Florida, Michigan and New York. She was the second woman the denomination named district superintendent and when questioned about what she would do if elected bishop she replied she would do what she could.

Of her role as the first female bishop she says, "I believe that God is interested in people who want to be used rather than interested in their sex. We also need to repent our early beginnings that excluded women."17
The Missionaries

Methodism, being an English religion, was of necessity, a missionary church. It soon overflowed the boundaries of the motherland and followed the colonists to America. From there it spread throughout the frontier and the circuit riders spawned in England now rode through all of America. The earliest missions were to the heathen Indians, the Negroes, the South, and the Oregon Territory. This movement was followed by home missions to the inner-city poor and was quickly followed by foreign missions.

The first Methodist woman's missionary organization came into being in 1819: The New York Female Missionary and Bible Society. The directress is unnamed in spite of the fact that the group did not disband until 1861. This group was quickly followed by the Ladies Missionary Society of Cincinnati which was outstanding in foreign and domestic mission work.

The earliest missionary whose name is known in America is the wife of Jason Lee, the man sent to the Oregon territory.

In January 1837 a third group of missionaries sailed from Boston and arrived in September of the same year. One of them became the wife of Jason Lee...Mrs. Jason Lee wrote joyously that the cattle would mean milk and butter for all.1 We finally learn that her first name was Anna when Jason asked if he could leave to go across country although the birth of her first child was eminent. "Like a good Methodist preacher's wife, Anna put his mind at rest. 'If you think it your duty to go, go, for I did not marry you to hinder you but rather to aid in the performance of your duty.'" 2 The good lady died in childbirth and her son died a few days later. Before Lee returned home, he heard of a fine young woman, Lucy Thompson, who had made
a plea for mission in her valedictory address. He married her; they returned to Oregon along with the tombstone for Anna. This gap in history virtually calls out for the writing of "Herstory."

In the book, *Women's Foreign Missionary Society*, under the heading China, the names Miss Beulah Woolston and Miss Sarah Woolston appear. Both were appointed in 1858 to Foochow and both show the home address of Trenton, New Jersey. Beulah died October 24, 1886 in Trenton. Sarah transferred from the Parent Board in 1871 and resigned after twenty-five years of service. Their names did not show up in any other resource.

The earliest officially recorded foreign missionary is Isabella Thoburn of Delaware, Ohio, (1840-1901) who was sent to India in 1869 as a teacher. She was accompanied by Clara A. Swain, M.D. The inclusion of women on the foreign mission field was necessitated by the fact that male missionaries could not work with the native women and children for cultural reasons. At home, such a matter was not a problem so the first missionary work did not include women except as the wives of missionaries.

Isabella, joining her brother James, opened a school for girls that later became a college which is still in operation today; the school is named for her. In thirty-one years she only returned to America three times; however these trips were not for rest and relaxation. Her primary effort was to raise money for the school; she challenged young women to become deaconesses; she helped organize Christ's Hospital in Cincinnati, serving as its superintendent until it was firmly established. Miss Thoburn died of cholera after a very short illness. The motto she chose for her school, "We receive to give" was true of her life; all she received she gave to others.
Lucy Rider Meyer founded the second deaconess movement in America patterned after one established in Germany in 1836. Her order flourished while the Lutheran one foundered and failed because of her wisdom in undergirding her movement with a strong female support-system that bound her deaconesses to the women in the local churches. The professional deaconess movement survives to this very day offering young unmarried women a living and meaningful work to do for the Lord. The initial effort to start such a group was opposed on the grounds that if women were allowed to become professional mission workers, they next would desire the ministry and the episcopacy.

The first group of five sent forth from the fledgling Scarritt College were described as "happy...consummate homemakers, patient, resourceful, adaptable, persistent, courageous, generous with their money and ever working beyond the call of duty." 4

The Chicago Training school of Miss Meyer stressed the role of motherhood as being the center of the work. Lucy Rider Meyer described the work of deaconesses in this manner:

The world wants mothering. Mother-love has its part to do in winning the world for Christ as well as father-wisdom and guidance. The deaconess movement puts the mother into the Church. It supplies the feminine element so greatly needed in the Protestant Church, and thus is rooted deep in the very heart of humanity's needs.

The opening of settlement houses in the larger cities stressed the rescue-type mission work that still goes on today. The building of these homes was supported by lay women all over Methodism with the establishment of the Nickel Fund and the Do-Without-Band. This call to sisterhood bound the women to one another not only financially, but spiritually as well.
The role of deaconess was a liberating one for women:

She does not just read the Bible to poor sick women and pat the heads of dirty-faced children...there is nothing a woman can do in the line of Christian work that a deaconess may not do. Her field is as large as the work of woman, and the need of that work.  

The American Methodist deaconesses were permitted, in the name of motherhood, to reach out to women in distress. And the world was changed.

Lucy Webb Hayes, also known as Mrs. Reutherford B. Hayes, was the first president of the Woman's Home Missionary Society formed in 1800. A woman of strong convictions she refused to serve liquor during her stay in the White House; she was dubbed by the press as Lemonade Lucy.

Mrs. Hayes had become interested in helping Negro women in the south and the society immediately began to build schools for them. Later schools for Indians and the mountain people in Kentucky were constructed as well as industrial schools and deaconess training schools. "We wanted schools and evangelistic agencies everywhere in the United States and its territories." Mrs. Hayes was greatly loved and appreciated in her day and was instrumental in starting this important work.

In the year 1901, Miss Anna E. Hall, the first black graduate deaconess, was sent to Liberia where she served for twenty-four years. She found that in her work in Monrovia and the surrounding area she was in her own words, "everything to the people: farmer, teacher, preacher, doctor, dentist, nurse and evangelist."

Liberia honored her in 1956 for her devotion to its people and the Liberian mission station was named for her in 1952. The Gammon Theological Seminary in Atlanta calls its married student housing the
Anna E. Hall apartments. Black deaconesses served as "extensions" of their local pastors as did their white sisters. All were attractively garbed in long black dresses with large white collars, but care was taken to distinguish them from the Roman sisters.

The first missionary to the Pawnees arrived in what is now Oklahoma and Kansas in July of 1885. Frances L. Gaddis, accompanied by her fourteen year old son settled on a little farm and struggled for two years to gain a foothold in the unfamiliar culture. Her most successful endeavor was a sewing class consisting of eighty Pawnee women. This was followed quickly by a Sunday School, recreation programs for the children and worship services. A church was formed in 1887 with twenty-seven members, three of whom were tribal chiefs. When the need arose, she also served as the medical authority.

In 1888 she went to Pawhuska, the Osage Agency. There, in her home she began a school and a mission; fifteen girls were enrolled the first year. Her ill health necessitated her retirement in 1890. Her successor, Emma Clark began her work with the Poncas, well known for their gambling, drunkeness, polygamy, and immodesty. She was profoundly shocked; however she persevered and nursed the sick, taught the children and buried the dead. In the Woman's Home Missionary Society's annual report her work was described: "The heathen rites were actually suspended, and the dusky warriors stood in silence when the fair young girl knelt in their midst and pleaded for the blessing of the God of nations!"9 By 1929 the mission had become a substantial community.

Mary Reed in 1884 had volunteered for missionary service in India. When her health deteriorated dangerously, she was forced to return home.
Six years later an unusual spot appeared on her cheek as well as a sore, painful area on her right hand. A shocking diagnosis of leprosy resulted in her saying, "we are perplexed, but not in despair, cast down but not destroyed." From the conviction that she had the disease she decided to dedicate the rest of her life as a missionary to lepers. She returned to India serving the Chanday Heights, Leper Home for fifty years as its director. A question surrounds the fact of whether she truly suffered from the dreaded disease or not. Nevertheless, there has never been a question about her dedication.

A unique type of mission service was that performed by Miss Edith Smith whom the Woman's Home Missionary Society sent to the Naval base at Portsmouth, New Hampshire. As a deaconess, she assisted the local Methodist pastor in a ministry to the sailors and marines in the hospital and prison of the Navy Yard. This effort started during WWI continued thru the 1940's with Miss Smith doing her simple tasks with extraordinary results, the entire time.

Her program included visiting; distributing Bibles, magazines, candy, fruits, jellies and flowers. In addition, she ran errands, wrote letters, played the piano and taught Sunday School. "Hard-bitten veterans and young lads welcomed her ministries. To some, she was a 'breath of spring,' to others, 'her presence was a benediction from above.'

Her cheerfulness and friendliness was of special benefit to the families who either resided in the area or were visiting the sick or imprisoned. To them she was a "ministering angel."

These ladies carried out the words of their Master: "I was a stranger, and ye took me in;...I was sick and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me."
The Social Reformers

The thread of social reform was and is as much a part of Methodism as has been the missionary. Since its inception, when Wesley went to the coal fields of England. When the new Methodists stepped onto the American shores they attacked the institution of slavery and immediately began taking in black members and using black preachers. Finding its root in the social gospel of Jesus, the social reform movement remains alive and well in Methodism today.

Two of the most illustrious of this group are Harriet Tubman (1821-1913) and Isabella (better known as Sojourner Truth) (1797-1883) both of these black women are noted for their efforts in leading their people from their slave-status to freedom in the northern states and Canada.

Sojourner Truth who rejected her slave name, Isabella, spoke of the Methodist church as the place where she felt a warmth and a sense of home that she found no where else. The most famous black female religious figure in antebellum America, she gained her freedom in 1827 she went around the country preaching of a loving and kind God.

She talked to God as familiarly as if He had been a creature like herself; and a thousand times more so, than if she had been in the presence of some earthly potentate...she felt as if God was under obligation to her, much more than she was to Him.¹

Later her view of God changed:

She became instantly conscious of her great sin in forgetting her almighty friend...she plainly saw there was no place, not even in hell, where He was not: and where could she flee?²

Finally her conversion experience was completed.

"I know you--who are you?"...It is Jesus. "Yes," she responded, "it is Jesus."³
She found Him to be her true friend, altogether lovely, and with this assurance she set out to tell the world about Him and the plight of her people.

Tubman, known as the Black Moses, was the conductor of the underground railroad which led over 300 slaves to freedom. Her grand-niece Alice Brickler told the television audience of her famous aunt:

When Aunt Harriet was gathering passengers for the underground railroad, she would go through the fields while the slaves were working, singing a coded song, "There's a Campmeeting here tonight." After singing the entire song as her aunt before her had done, Mrs. Brickler commented of her aunt, "I felt God's glory in her, she had God's spirit."

This fearless, pistol-packing fighter for freedom was ultimately able to bring her own parents out of slavery to live in the North with her. It has been said of her, that her physical strength was as great as her courage and her spirit. Reportedly, a slave-catcher who had trapped her was knocked cold by a neatly-given blow to the chin. She credited her lack of fear to the firm conviction that Christ was with her every step of the way.

Francis Willard (1839-1898) is noted as the American temperance leader and reformer. A graduate of Northwestern Female College, she later became the president of that institution and the dean of women at Northwestern University which she helped found. In 1874, she aided in the organization of the Women's Christian Temperance Union and became its president in 1879. Refused admittance as a lay delegate to the Methodist General Conference of 1888, she added the cause of woman suffrage in church as well as state to her agenda.

Her mother's early advice, "Go thru every door you find open," enabled her to accomplish many things heretofore thought impossible for
Meeting Dwight L. Moody, she was asked to conduct his meetings for women in the Chicago tabernacle. "For she was a born preacher; all her addresses suggest the attitude of the pastor to his flock rather than that of the more impersonal lecturer." The famous statue of her in Washington, D.C. is called The Woman Behind the Pulpit. Yet despite her success with Moody, (nine thousand women came to hear her speak the very first night), she felt restrained in her work.

In the late 1890's having just finished an address on the alcoholic liquor trade, a large belligerent saloon keeper confronted her and told her to mind her own business.

"I am minding my own business," she replied, "men, women and children are my business because they are God's business. Anything that tramples on them, degrades them, and brings poverty, disease and shame to them, is the business of God their father, and of God's church. You mind the Devil's business and yours, and I will mind God business and mine!"

She tended to her business and God's for over 50 years. A bust of her resides in the Hall of Fame, New York City. Much of the federal legislation she had sponsored finally became a reality after her death in 1898. The cause she brought before the American public still remains as one of the major emphasis of the modern Methodist Church.

Coming fast on the heels of the Temperance movement and inspired by the strength and managerial abilities of Frances Willard and her sisterhood, the push for woman's suffrage leapt into being.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902), co-worker and friend of Susan
B. Anthony was dedicated to women's rights pushing for sufferage and women's ordination in Methodism. In 1898, under her leadership a committee of female scholars published the Woman's Bible.

They believed that the Bible continued to have appressive power over women and they sought, in part, to "translate, transpose and transfigure this mournful object of piety into an exalted dignified personage, worthy of our worship." The resulting publication proved to be controversial and vastly unpopular much as the newly translated lectionary is at the present time.

For this woman and her contemporaries social reform became their religion and the very basis of their faith. Elizabeth described how they felt:

Every energy of her soul is centered upon the needs of the world. To her work is worship...has done the good given her to do, and thus in the darkest hours has been sustained by an unflattering faith in the final perfection of all things. Her belief is not orthodox, but it is religious--based on the high and severe moralities.

Her work was far reaching and although she never lived to see it, the ordination of women as well as sufferage resulted from the work she and her friends had done.

Mary McLeod Bethune (1875-1955) wanted to learn to read but, being born a slave reading was not for one of her status. A teacher looking for students pleaded with her father to allow her, his fifteenth child, to attend. She learned quickly and taught her neighbors all she had learned. In four short years, she graduated. The same teacher was instrumental in obtaining the funds so that she could enter the Scotia Academy in North Carolina and the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago. After graduation she committed herself to being a missionary in her own country. After her marriage she moved to Dayton, Florida, where
despite the lack of money and opposition of the Ku Klux Klan she opened
a school with five little girls.

School began on October 3, 1904. The girls sang
"Leaning on the everlasting arms" and said the twenty-third psalm, Mrs. Bethune wrote on the chalkboard "Be
an artist in all you do." The school grew rapidly and more space was needed. Mary bought "Hell's
Hole" the local dump and found contributors for the building she named
Faith Hall. It had been built by faith. Eventually her little school
became the Bethune-Cookman College; the school gained international
reknown.

Mrs. Bethune's last will and testament included a set of price-
less gifts.

"I leave you Love," she wrote to all Americans. "I
leave you Hope...I leave you the Challenge of Developing
Confidence in One Another...I leave you a Racial Dignity...
I leave you a desire to live Harmoniously with your Fellow-
man...I leave you, finally, a Responsibility to our young
people."

The advisor to five presidents, a personal friend of Eleanor
Roosevelt, and eighteen foot bronze statue was erected on the ninety-nineth
anniversary of her birth in Washington, D.C.; the first such
statue ever put up on public land to honor a black person.

Miss Theressa Hoover served as field worker for the Woman's
Division of Christian Service from 1948-1958. A graduate of Philander
Smith College and New York University, in 1968 Miss Hoover became the
associate general secretary (chief executive officer) of the Women's
Division of the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries, a position
she still holds. This office gives her an influence in the Christian
world equalled by few black women before her.
Her experience as a field worker, the seven years spent on the staff of Christian Social Relations and the three years she served as assistant general secretary of the Division's Section of Program and Education for Christian Mission, left her as the natural choice as the top United Methodist staff woman.

The Rev. Peggy Hutchinson of the Tuscan Metropolitan Ministry operates a modern-day underground railroad for Central American refugees. For the television audience she related the event that propelled her to refugee advocacy.

"I realized that these people were running for their lives when I began helping a Salvadoran mother and her seven children. While in Salvador the father had been killed and dismembered by government soldiers and the mother was raped by soldiers while her children watched. Fearing the death squads, the family was on the run for four years. When I realized what they had endured, I knew that the risks I was taking were nothing compared to theirs. I had to stand up against my government and follow the laws of God." 12

Women all over this land are engaged in the fight against child pornography, family abuse, the nuclear threat and all the other social problems facing this world.
The Preachers

The first of a long line of women determined to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ for their Methodist faith was Sarah Crosby. She was officially sanctioned to preach by the venerable John Wesley. Her hard work was equalled by her enthusiasm and grit. True to the code of the circuit rider, nothing stopped her as evidenced by the figures quoted by Abel Stevens. "In one year she rode 960 miles, held 220 public meetings, and 600 select meetings."¹ She certainly disproved the myth that women weren't suited for the hardships of a circuit rider.

In 1869, Margaret Newton VanCott (1830-1914) became the first woman licensed to preach in the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States. When her daughter died and her husband became ill, Maggie converted to Methodism. A strong woman, she undertook to run the family business but as her devotion grew she transplanted her energies to religion. When she began attending prayer meetings she felt compelled to speak to the all-male meeting. While distributing tracts to the destitute she began preaching to them with phenomenal results. Accepting preaching invitations that again culminated with success, she applied for an Exhorter's License in 1868 and a Local Preacher's License in 1869. In 1880 when women began to press for ordination, her license was revoked. She continued preaching until 1902.

One pastor opposing her said that women must be discouraged from filling the pulpit for if one were expecting a child she might give birth, right there while preaching. Another worried lest the woman might forget her bread in the oven, she would have to leave off from exhorting the gospel and rescue her bread.
Things got so bad that a ruling was made that only the pastor of a church was the only one who could be admitted to its pulpit.

Denied acceptance by the Methodists, Maggie never sought ordination from any other denomination although she preached in any church where she was welcomed. She preached in private homes, at open air meetings, and in public places. Her style and charisma was noted by one who watched her during a revival.

It is amazing to see her bring people to the altar. She sets the meeting going and then flits all over the house, here and there, in pew or aisle, entreating, warning, praying, yet a lady always.²

VanCott was instrumental for adding thousands to the Methodist membership roles.

During one twelve month period from early 1871 to early 1872, an excerpt from her journal notes that she had seen 3,085 seeking at the altar the Saviour's love...of this number I have been privileged to extend the right hand of love and welcome on probation in the Methodist Episcopal Church to 1,113 souls.³

Her strong presence, fiery dedication to the Lord, and her worthiness of character set the stage for the argument concerning the ordination of women.

A mere twenty years later, Anna Oliver (1840-1892) and Anna Howard Shaw were both actively seeking ordination and full clergy rights. Having graduated with honors with a Masters Degree from a New York College, Anna later became the first woman in America to earn a bachelor of divinity degree from a Methodist seminary (Boston, 1876). With her license to preach, she served congregations in New Jersey and New York. With the aid and support of her New York parish she sought ordination at the 1880 General Conference. Her petition was refused as was that of Anna Shaw.
Both continued their work serving as powerful models for the women coming after them. It was to take seventy-five more years before full clergy rights were granted to women.

Some authorities claim that Anna Shaw was ordained in 1880 and it is clear that she did serve pastorates for seven years. She earned a medical degree and resigned her religious connections to pursue the cause of women's sufferage. It has also been reported that her alleged ordination was found to be invalid.

Amanda Berry Smith (1837-1902) was born to slave parents who earned the freedom of themselves and five of their thirteen children. After the death of her two husbands, she announced she had received a call from God and began evangelizing. In 1878 she left for England where she remained for twenty months as a traveling evangelist. Refused sanctions as either a pastor or missionary by the AME church she nevertheless went to India with a friend and served nineteen months, later she served in Liberia for eight years. For the entire twelve years she was out of the country she was supported by the Methodist Episcopal Church.

Returning to America she devoted the remainder of her life to the Amanda Smith Orphan's Home for Colored Children in Harvey, Illinois, a suburb of Illinois. She remained deeply concerned about the education work she had started in India and Africa during her time there.

Could she preach? "James Thoburn, Methodist Episcopal bishop testified he learned more of actual value to him as a preacher from Amanda Smith than from any other person."4

On May 23, 1874, at a meeting held at the Pleasant View Church near New Albany, Indiana, Maggie Thompson (1848-1924) was granted a
quarterly conference license to preach. Thompson served for the next fourteen years as an evangelist. At the session of the Indiana Annual Conference held in 1876 her name was presented along with the names of nine men to the Committee on Applicants. The report of the conference stated:

Your committee on applicants having examined Sister Maggie Thompson find her clear and satisfactory on all points of doctrine as proposed to applicants in our Discipline. We recommend that she receive a letter of commendation as a worthy Christian sister and a profitable laborer in the vineyard of the Lord to be signed by the Bishop of this conference.

In 1877 she married John Elliot, a minister in the Indiana Conference and after twelve years they moved to Illinois due to Maggie Elliot's transfer to the Central Illinois Conference.

At the 1889 General Conference of the United Brethren Church ordination for women was approved. The first woman ordained by them was Ella Niswonger (1865-1944), a native of Ohio and one of the first graduates of Union Biblical Seminary. Maggie Thompson Elliot was ordained in 1890 in the Central Illinois Conference. By 1901 ninety-seven women had received ordination.

Minnie Walls Noblett (1888-1969) was ordained in 1928 at the University Heights U.S. Church by Bishop H. H. Fout of Indiana. Her husband, Loren Noblett, received ordination at the same ceremony and they went forth sharing pastorates in southern Indiana. They met at Indiana Central College where both were teaching; she taught Bible, French, German and Latin.

Minnie's father, Elder Jacob H. Walls, and uncle organized more United Brethren Churches in the southern part of the state than any other
ministers. She was the mother of three children; Alma O'Dell married to a Presbyterian clergyman, Loren a retired school teacher, and C. Robert a teacher and Methodist minister who followed his parents in serving the church at Scottsburg.

During World War I, Minnie did Moody Bible missionary work in New York City and taught at the Alma White School in New Jersey. Ever active in the field of literature and poetry, Minnie remained a teacher until shortly before she retired from preaching in 1954.

A handsome woman with a stern appearance that belied the softness of her real nature, Minnie took life very seriously as did her father before her. Her son reported that, "she was dedicated to the Lord from childhood and was an old style Evangelistic preacher." Her husband at the age of ninety-six is the oldest surviving clergyman in the South Indiana Conference.

The History of the North Indiana Conference lists in its Class of 1956 Ellen Studley as the first woman admitted under the new 1956 'General Conference Action'. She was ordained as a Deacon that year. That same year, M. L. Fisher and Lura Milligan are pictured and included as Ministerial Members of the Conference. Lura Milligan was appointed to Antioch-Zoar, but the appointments of Ellen and M. L. Fisher were not available. Lura Milligan was listed as serving churches since 1938.

Miss Ellen Studley was ordained in 1958 by Bishop Richard C. Raines in Winona Lake, Indiana. She had served as a missionary school principal in China from 1924 to 1951 and was at the time of her ordination serving as executive secretary of the Chinese Student and Alumni Services in Chicago. This work kept her in touch with the more than 2,000 Chinese living and studying in the Midwest.
Miss Studley, who was interned by the Japanese as a prisoner of war for six months in 1944, held a masters degree from Boston University and was completing work for a bachelor of divinity degree from Union Theological Seminary. She was a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of DePauw.

Leontine Kelly is regarded by many as a very viable candidate to the Episcopacy in 1984. As Bishop Matthews will be retiring it is widely thought that Methodism needs another woman bishop. If she is so elected she will be only the second woman bishop and the first black woman bishop in the world. A graduate of Virginia Union University and Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, Ms. Kelly's entrance into the ministry followed her career as a public school teacher. She is presently serving as pastor of the Asbury-Church Hill United Methodist Church in Richmond, Virginia.

Preaching was in her life as a child:

"I grew up listening to great preaching...I had the opportunity to listen weekly to the illustrative story-preaching of my father and to spend several summers with my evangelistic, 'walk-about' preaching brother DeWitt."7

She was privileged to hear Dr. Benjamin Mays, president of Morehouse College in Atlanta, and Dr. Howard Thurman. As a child in Cincinnati she listened to Marcus Garvey speak, and her Aunt Mamie, "Madam DeMeana," was a top official in the Garvey organization.

As a young girl her father heard her speak before a girl's youth group and told her, "Girl, you keep still when you speak. You are trying to preach."8 She married a Methodist minister and became a lay speaker. When her husband died she was asked to assume the leadership of his church, Galilee United Methodist in Edwardsville, Virginia. While teaching a class on "The Inner Life", she felt her own personal call
to the ministry of Jesus Christ. She started on her journey. "It was pure joy."\textsuperscript{9}

The congregation of Riverside United Methodist Church in Indianapolis did not know their new minister would be a woman. But, with her very first prayer and her very first sermon she won them over. They say of her "she really takes time with the children...she doesn't get upset. She takes it one day at a time."\textsuperscript{10}

Rev. V. K. Allen-Brown is a member of a clergy couple. Her husband, Rev. Ronald Brown serves the Forest Manor United Methodist Church, and she wants to be more than a clergy wife. The couple met as students at Livingston College and both enrolled at Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, New Jersey where they married in 1978 and transferred from the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church to the United Methodist. Vanessa is completing the final ten hours of a counseling degree from Butler University.

They help one another with their charges but hers is in the West District and his is in the Northeast District and they like it like that for each have different things to offer congregations. Vanessa's grandparents live with them and they are expecting a baby. The extended family gives her a chance to use illustrations of both young and old in her sermons.

In February of 1984 there were 1,456 clergywomen in America, 15 women district superintendents and one lady bishop. Of these 145 are ethnic pastors.
Conclusion

There is a story that is told of a pagan Roman official who, upon viewing the Christian women and the way that they reacted when placed under persecution and adversity, said of them, "What women these Christians have." Likewise, the men on the road to Emmaus reported, "/some women of our company amazed us." (Luke 24:22). In the same manner it, can be said of the women of Methodism that they too have made such an impact upon the world that it has been struck with amazement. Surely some of these same women have even amazed themselves.

Whether they struggled alone or were conjoined on a venture, there was a consanguinity that undergirded all their efforts; it was their love of God and their dedication to the Methodist faith they espoused.

Often these women, such as the missionaries, found themselves in a place no one had ever been before, and fighting battles that were totally foreign to them. The ingenuity, energy and creativity evidenced by these women was astonishing particularly to the men who thought the task either to be impossible or too difficult for a female. Some were destroyed by the fray, unheralded and unknown. Others were victorious and widely acclaimed. Many were appreciated by their families and churches; all sought to find favour in the eyes of their Lord.

Patterning themselves after the women of the Bible, such as those found by Paul in Europe--Lydia and Priscilla, they formed a sisterhood that was to become the foundation not only of the early Christian church but of Methodism itself.

Tens of thousands of churches have been built upon the foundation of the work of women like Barbara Heck, Sojourner Truth and Georgia
Harkness. The spirits of women such as Maggie Van Cott and Isabella Thoburn have been the glue that held the brick and timbers of the churches and their congregations together. The very souls of these wonderful, invigorating and maddening women were the inspiration that turned millions from their paths of sorrow to look to God. The word soul in all of the modern languages is a feminine word. This hardly seems erroneous. For the soul of the church has been its women. Truly Methodism has its full share of amazing women.
Footnotes

The Pioneers


9. Ibid., page 166.

10. Ibid., page 175.


13. Ibid., pages 341-342.


17. Ibid.
The Missionaries


2. Ibid., page 166.


6. Ibid., page 335.


12. Ibid., page 288.

The Social Reformers


2. Ibid., page 26.

3. Ibid., page 27.


6. Ibid. page 87.


9. Ibid., page 296.


11. Luccock, Endless Line of Splendor. page 93.


The Preachers


3. Ibid., page 315.


8. Ibid., page 70.

9. Ibid., page 71.

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