

Canadian Women and Church Missionary Societies

by Wendy Mitchinson



THREE EARLY BAPTIST
MISSIONARIES: MRS.
D.A. STEELE, PAMELIA
BIGELOW AND MARIA
NORRIS. COURTESY OF
THE ACADIA UNIVERSITY
ARCHIVES.

in the Nineteenth Century:

A Step Towards Independence

Few historians have bothered to examine carefully the way in which the activities of women in the church have changed over time. In the late nineteenth century Canadian women, through their membership in missionary societies, increasingly became a significant force in the major Protestant denominations. This was important. Church groups attracted many women who otherwise would not have joined a woman's organization. The church lent respectability to their efforts and shielded them from public scrutiny. It enabled many women to take their first tentative step outside the domestic sphere. Through missionary societies women learned to manage the problems of organization and administration on a large scale and to become more confident about their own abilities. For some, this led to additional involvement in organizations outside the church. Missionary societies were the largest organizations of Canadian women in the nineteenth century. They were among the first na-

tional women's groups to form and as such were part of what was generally referred to at the time as the "woman's movement."

(i)

Protestant churches offered little challenge or stimulation to women in the early nineteenth century.(1) Although missionary organizations for men existed, women's involvement did not extend beyond the local parish. A few taught Sunday Schools but most joined Dorcas Sewing Circles or Ladies' Aids. These groups provided social contact for women who were not involved in other activities and a means by which they could respond to the immediate, charitable needs of their parish. Their response, however, was more often than not ameliorative. They simply did not have the means, the time, the organization and perhaps the desire to deal with social problems in any methodical way. They appeared content to

be considered the homemakers of the church.(2)

Women were limited to domestic church activity because they had few alternatives. Early in the century the Protestant denominations were only beginning to organize themselves in some permanent form. Their first priority was to reach the settlers of the various British North American colonies, and except for fund raising, this did not require extensive participation by churchmen or churchwomen. Until consolidation of the many independent Protestant churches occurred, large scale commitments requiring lay participation were impossible. Confederation and the expansion of Canada westward provided the needed stimulus; only strong, united churches would have the people and capital necessary to extend their reach into the newly acquired territories.(3)

The examples were many: the Presbyterian Union in 1875, the Methodist Union in 1884, the formation of the Anglican General Synod in 1893 and the first National Baptist Convention in 1900.(4) Consolidation provided these 'national' churches with the strength to expand their missionary endeavours, both domestic and foreign. Increased lay participation became necessary. Male missionary organizations increased their size and responsibility and women's missionary societies developed, offering churchwomen participation in a larger scheme of affairs than had ever been available to them.

Baptist women in the Maritimes were the first to respond. The inspiration came from a young Nova Scotia woman.(5) In 1869, Hannah Norris approached the Foreign Mission Board for permission to go to Burma as a missionary. She had considered her decision carefully. Two things were important to her--faith and helping others. The former was illustrated by her insistence on adult baptism despite having been baptized as a child by the Congregational Church, the latter by her willingness to spend time teaching Micmac Indians in their own language. For a woman such as Hannah, few opportunities existed in the Maritime society of the 1860's. Missionary work would provide her with the opportunity to use her energy and abilities in ways not possible at home.

When the Mission Board refused her request because of lack of funds, she decided to appeal to the American Baptist Board. Before this could take place, a committee from the Baptist Churches in Halifax approached her. It urged her to appeal again to Maritime Baptists, especially to churchwomen.(6) American women's missionary societies (established some years before) had made significant contributions to the missionary cause by supporting overseas missionaries and the expectation that Canadian women might respond in a similar manner was, consequently, not unfounded. Indeed, the result of Hannah's appeal was the organization of Woman's Missionary Aid Societies, the first formed on

18 June 1870 at Canso, Nova Scotia. By the time she left for Burma thirty-two societies had formed and, although she was under the direction of the American Baptist Missionary Board which supervised all Baptist missionaries, the Woman's Aid Societies of the Maritime Provinces guaranteed her support.(7)

The work quickly expanded from this beginning. By 1874 Baptist women had created central boards of Woman's Foreign Missionary Societies for Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island. In 1884 they created the Woman's Baptist Missionary Union of the Maritime Provinces which secured united action on the part of the aid societies and was a vehicle for appropriating its own funds.(8) Mrs. J.W. Manning, president of the union, explained the nature of this considerable accomplishment. "The women at the time when this missionary work was thrust upon us had had no experience in conducting business, speaking in public, or any such work, but we had to learn."(9) And they continued to learn. In 1906 the United Baptist Woman's Missionary Union formed, a result of the union between the Free Baptists of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick and the Baptists of the Maritime Provinces.(10)

Baptist women in other parts of the country soon followed the Maritime example. The Woman's Baptist Foreign Missionary Society of Eastern Ontario and Quebec began in 1876, the Woman's

Baptist Home Missionary Society of Eastern Ontario and Quebec in 1896, the Woman's Baptist Missionary Union of Manitoba and the North West in 1886, and the Woman's Baptist Missionary Union of British Columbia in 1898.(11) The Maritime Baptists, however, remained the most energetic. The eastern community was older and more settled, with time to devote to missionary work. Also the Baptists were more highly concentrated in the Maritimes than elsewhere in Canada.(12)

The growth of these groups was impressive. By 1875, in the Maritimes alone, the number of Woman's Missionary Aid Societies was 92; in 1885, 123; and by 1895, 222.(13) The total amount of money raised in 1885 was \$5000, a remarkable sum considering funds came basically through two cents a week contributions.(14) In 1890 the societies raised \$7000; in 1895, \$9000; and in 1900, \$10,000.(15) These receipts came from collections at meetings, from the mission bands, Sunday Schools and Young People's societies, through donations, the annual collection and the sale of literature, reports and Tidings (the publication of the WBMU).(16) It soon became evident that women's missionary aid societies were significantly different in potential power and influence from the Ladies' Aids. Both were fund raisers but missionary societies expanded women's scope in the church from purely local matters to a wider field encompassed only by the limits a missionary could travel. They

demanded administrative ability and commitment from their membership, for they had assumed the responsibility for all female missionaries and their work among the 'heathen.' In administrative scope and geographical focus, then, the missionary societies had become the most ambitious of any women's group, inside or outside the church.

Unlike Baptist missionary endeavours, the missionary societies of the Presbyterian and Methodist Churches developed through the need of already existing male organizations. Nevertheless, prior to the formation of the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society in 1876 by the General Assembly, Presbyterian women had evidenced some interest in missions.



PHOTO OF MISS L. McCULLY, CANADIAN PRESBYTERIAN MISSIONARY IN KOREA, 1903. Courtesy Helen Lee, MacRae Collection

In 1825 the women of Princetown, P.E.I. organized the first woman's missionary society, the Female Society for Propagating the Gospel and Other Religious Purposes, designed to bring the gospel into isolated communities.(17) In 1868 a group of Belleville women, led by Mrs. L. McClaren, were working for missions. At the same time, Mrs. Smellie of Fergus was interesting women in her community in missionary work.(18) However, not until 1876 was a formal organization created, divided into the Western and Eastern Divisions.(19) Very often male missionaries overseas were not allowed to approach the 'native' women because of the customs of the people.(20) Unless more female missionaries were available, one half the number of people the church was trying to reach would remain isolated from it. The need for more female missionaries put a strain on the already existing male missionary societies and it seemed logical to have the churchwomen assume responsibility for them. The result was the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society.

The Woman's Foreign Missionary Society was concerned with recruitment; its aim, the membership of all churchwomen. Its members believed their work had prior claim over all others and that their organization offered more personal satisfaction than any comparable society. One of their basic concerns was why this was not evident to more women.(21) To stimulate interest in their work, they published a Monthly Letter Leaflet from

1884 to 1897 and later the Foreign Missionary Tidings. They initiated a form of associate membership to appeal to those women unable to join and participate in regular societies. They formed Mission Bands in 1879 but these youth organizations often suffered from competition with the church youth movement in the 1890s.(22) Until then, however, the missionary societies provided one of the few outlets for youth in the church.

The Woman's Foreign Missionary Society was eminently successful. When the secretary of the Foreign Mission Committee wrote explaining there were no funds to send two women missionaries into the field, the secretary of the WFMS pointed out that "we are very thankful to be able to say, that through the abundant blessing of God, they [finances] are in a remarkable prosperous condition."(23) Obviously the society had little difficulty fulfilling its financial commitments. So successful was it that in 1899 the Western Division raised \$45,513 from 21,000 members and the Eastern Division \$11,031 from 5,184 members.(24) The administration of these funds was equally impressive. At the turn of the century the Western Division maintained four missionaries in Honan, seventeen in India and thirty-six missionaries, matrons and teachers in the Canadian North West. The smaller Eastern section supported four missionaries and twelve bible

women in Trinidad, three catechists and one bible woman in Demerare and schools in St. Lucia, native teachers in the New Hebrides and two women missionaries in Korea.

Methodist women became involved in missionary work later than the Baptist and Presbyterian women. Not until 1881 did a woman's missionary society form in the church which later assumed the leadership of the social reform movement referred to as the Social Gospel.

When the General Missionary Society of the Methodist Church first considered creating a woman's missionary society, it had a limited view.(26) The women, however, once they received an official request and sanction were not willing to participate in a limited way. Those interested felt the immediate need for a general society and on April 29, 1881, they decided to organize a Woman's Missionary Society of the Methodist Church.(27)

The determination of these women was met with success. Auxiliaries in 1882 numbered 20 with 900 members, whereas they numbered 946 with 26,741 members in 1906.(28) In 1881 they raised only \$2,916.78; in 1901 they raised \$50,972.58.(29) This money was "derived chiefly from membership fees, voluntary contributions, thank offerings, mite-boxes and legacies, rather than from concerts, teas, etc." The latter sources, although "useful for social purposes," were not considered "reliable

sources of income."(30)

The Church of England was the last of the major Protestant churches to form a woman's missionary society. In 1873 a few churchwomen in Toronto created the Churchwoman's Mission Aid Society to help their brethren in the Diocese of Algoma in response to an appeal made by the Bishop. Although the work was not limited to Algoma, the participation was limited to Toronto.(31) Not until 1885 did seven women approach the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society, itself only formed in 1883, to offer the services of women as an auxiliary.(32) This Woman's Auxiliary, like the Church itself, was based on the diocesan design. Perhaps because each diocese was free to choose its own field of labour, the women of the Church of England did not seem to be as organized as the other Protestant women.(33) They had their letter leaflets and raised money, but their work for missions seemed uneven. They paid for some missionaries and the education of a few individuals, but on the whole their work lacked cohesiveness.(34) One third of the money they raised went into Dorcas work.(35) Members continued to designate their money for specific purposes instead of allowing the central committee this power.(36) The lack of cohesiveness may also have resulted from the provincial orientation and division which plagued the church until the creation of the General Synod.(37) Not until 1911 was the relationship between the Woman's

Auxiliary and the Missionary Society of the church worked out with the acknowledgement that the former was responsible for work among women and children in the foreign field and for helping where needed in Canada.(38) In the early years the Board of Management of the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society felt the women were simply collectors of money, which they certainly had proven themselves to be. In 1895 the society reported that its 11,168 members had raised \$50,155.82 during the previous three years.(39) Such women were obviously willing and able to assume formal responsibility for their work.

The woman's missionary societies of the Protestant churches offered tens of thousands of Canadian women an outlet for their abilities and energies. No other woman's organization worked on such a scale. Unlike charity and benevolent organizations, dependent on the donations and the social influence of their members to raise money, missionary societies largely subsisted on the minimal weekly contributions of their members and what money they could save and raise in addition to this. In 1894-95 the Methodist women raised \$13,015.25 simply from fees. This represented almost one-third of the total \$35,085 raised and, if life memberships and the money from mission bands are included, well over one-half.(40)

These societies attracted large numbers of women. One reason may have been that

membership demanded little commitment of time outside the home. It simply required payment of dues, the sewing of articles for the needy or for sale to raise money and the attendance at meetings when possible. This permitted many women, for whom time was a luxury they could not afford, the possibility of participating. Such activity was respectable. It was performed through the church, usually at the request of male church members and was aimed at women and children. It did not challenge the existing system. Rather, it was an acceptance of it. Foreign missionary societies usually did not become involved in Canadian society. Their efforts concentrated on trying to persuade non-Western nations and peoples to adopt religious values alien to them. The problems such attempts entailed, of course, were not faced by the membership of the missionary societies. They simply provided the money to ensure that others continued the endeavour.

Despite this conservatism, membership in foreign missionary societies provided the many women fortunate enough to have the leisure time to participate in them with the opportunity to develop their abilities in leadership and administration. These women became examples for other women to follow and to be proud of. The missionary societies also altered the public's view of churchwomen from one of caretakers to participants. They were the first large scale women's organization to form and, because their membership was national and their focus inter-

national, the concerns of many Canadian women who joined them widened.

(ii)

Home mission work was not as acceptable to Canadian women as was foreign mission work. It brought them face to face with problems in Canadian society which persisted despite the acceptance by most Canadians of the religious and cultural values which missionary societies believed were to work wonders among heathen people. Solutions to Canadian problems might necessitate reform of accepted values, a challenge which many Canadians were unable to face. As a result, most missionary societies were reluctant to face domestic issues. The Presbyterian was the most reluctant.

The purpose of the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society of the Presbyterian Church in Canada (Western Division) was "through the education and conversion of heathen women and girls, [to] assist in opening to civilization, and its handmaid, Christianity, the dark places of the earth."⁽⁴¹⁾ To accomplish this, its work focused on missions in Central India, China, Trinidad, the New Hebrides and Indian work in Canada.⁽⁴²⁾ Only slowly did Presbyterian women expand their work to include other groups in Canada and only among those separated from their world by culture or colour. They seemed reluctant to involve themselves in or initiate work that brought them closer to the realities of their own society. They con-

sidered home mission work a "radical change." (43) In 1891-92 they adopted a "strongly-worded resolution, authorizing the Board to take what action it deemed best for the suppression of the Opium Traffic and of the shocking traffic in Chinese girls in British Columbia." (44) Other than privately condemning the practice they did little to prevent it. They certainly did not make their views public. In 1893 they refused to join the National Council of Women, a significant pressure group, on the grounds that 'while a 'National Council of Women' might be of benefit to charitable and other societies, it could hardly be so to the Foreign Missionary Societies belonging to the various denominations. Besides, we, as a society, were Auxiliary to the Foreign Mission Committee of our Church and could not, or rather should not, affiliate with the 'National Council of Women.'" (45) Only foreign mission work interested them. Home mission work, which might have brought their interests into line with those of the National Council of Women, was not supported. Some believed they should wait until asked by the Home Mission Committee to assume home mission responsibility. (46) Others believed the usurption of existing male responsibility would have dire effects. In a letter sent to all auxiliaries, Mrs. Shortreed, president of the WFMS, made this clear.

. . . we strongly hold that it [home mission work] is our work as individual members of the Church

and can see no valid reason why women should organize apart from men to carry on that work. It would, we fear, be a great injury to the men of the Church, and to the Church as a whole, if the financial responsibility of the Home Mission work were in any measure thus laid upon the women. The complaint is made even now that too few men are interested in the church: remove further responsibility from them along the line of mission work and there will undoubtedly be a growing indifference on their part to all the interests of the Church. To commit Home Mission work to women, as is proposed, would, we believe, mean financial loss to the Church, as it is the men who have the bulk of the money at their command. If their sense of responsibility be transferred to the women, then, in many cases, their gifts will flow into other channels than those of the church. (47)

Obviously she considered male commitment to the church and the women's groups in it somewhat weak.

Unlike the Presbyterians, Baptist women showed little antagonism to mission work at home. When the Home Mission Board reported a deficit in 1885, the women of the Maritimes quietly took up the challenge of a new field. (48) Until then their work had dealt largely with missions in India; now their concern ex-



DR. KATE MACMILLAN, CANADIAN PRESBYTERIAN MISSIONARY FROM NEW BRUNSWICK.
Courtesy Helen Lee, MacRae Collection.

tended to include the people of the North West, those in isolated Maritime communities and especially the women of French Canada. They believed the latter were "willing prisoners to the fascination of a tyrannical fanaticism" and "bound in the chains of Romanism." (49) To help them was imperative, not only for the well being of their souls, but for the well-being of the Canadian nation. Work among Canadians of non-Anglo-Saxon lineage, then, was motivated, not only by the desire to achieve individual spiritual salvation, but by the belief that such salvation would affect the temporal actions of the converted. This was particularly important with respect to French Canadians. "These people so near us are perishing for lack of the knowledge of God's word and we are under obligation to supply that lack. They are our fellow citizens. God has bound them up in the bundle of national life with us, and the future of our fair Dominion will be affected by our attitude toward this people." (50) Despite this belief, home mission work did not attract a large commitment. In 1890-91 the WBMU granted \$1500 to Canadian missions, compared to \$6000 for foreign, a discrepancy which continued well into the new century. (51)

The Methodists completely embraced home mission work. From its beginning, the woman's missionary society had assumed responsibility for both domestic and foreign work. Its first objectives were to aid the French mission work in

Montreal, the Crosby Home for Indian Girls in Port Simpson, B.C., the McDougall Orphanage in Alberta and to support a lady missionary in Japan. (52) Money raised was equally expended between foreign and home missions, \$15,855 designated for Japan, \$790 for China, \$9388.70 for Indian work, \$4469 for French work, \$1480 for the Chinese home in British Columbia and \$400 for an orphanage in Newfoundland. (53)

The WMS, like the Presbyterian and Baptist societies, appeared to equate home mission work with the evangelization of non-Anglo-Saxons. Although claiming that their object in the French Methodist Institute in Montreal was "not to assail Romanism, nor yet to proselytize, but simply to educate our fellow-countrymen on the basis of an open Bible for all," they rejoiced over conversions and in 1901 reported, "Too large a proportion of Roman Catholic students this year to make the school satisfactory, their undermining influence being felt among the weaker Protestants, whom they are ever on the watch to criticize and lead astray." (54) Nevertheless, compared to other societies the Methodist expended more of its total receipts on home mission work. Moreover, much of the work of its missionaries, among the most highly educated and trained women in Canada, was of a philanthropic, educational, medical as well as evangelical nature. In Japan it had founded boarding schools for girls and had sent at least one female medical missionary to China. (55)

The Methodists' involvement with the 'foreign' people of Canada did not lessen their concern for Canadians of Anglo-Saxon descent. Work among the destitute and the poor in England had been fundamental to Methodism in its early development and this tradition had been carried on in Canada. Because of this experience, Methodist women were seldom reluctant to become involved with domestic problems or to voice an opinion about them. And because of the Methodist recognition of woman's importance in the church, they were not discouraged from doing so. With the exception of the Society of Friends, the Methodist Connection gave most scope to women within the church. John Wesley, himself, had appointed women as teachers, had permitted them to pray in public, to speak out in class meetings and had opened to women all offices of the church excluding the ministry.(56) Beyond this the church would not allow them to go. They could not be delegates at the General Conference and in 1894 that Conference resolved that it did not approve of enlarging woman's sphere.(57) Some Methodist men obviously felt differently. In the 1896 record book of the New Brunswick Woman's Christian Temperance Union, mention is made that the Methodist Conference of Nova Scotia had endorsed woman's suffrage, becoming the first ecclesiastical body in Nova Scotia to do so.(58) The General Conference, itself, raised the topic of suffrage in 1898, although support for it was refused.(59) With such encouragement, however, it is not

surprising that the work of the Methodist women's society appeared more innovative and energetic than that of other existing women's societies. Methodist women had the most freedom to determine what they wanted to do; in turn, they used that freedom to expand their involvement in both religious and secular areas.

Unlike the Presbyterian society, the WMS of the Methodist Church gave hearty support to the National Council of Women.

If this Council can help to bring before all Christian women a correct understanding of the disabilities of women and girls outside the pale of Christianity, so as to hasten the time of their emancipation from physical and spiritual bondage, it will serve a good purpose and deserve the support of every organization of women.(60)

It was also sympathetic to the aims of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union. As early as 1882 the WCTU had asked it to participate in a Floral Festival and share the profits since both societies often had the same members.(61) The Methodists had always been concerned about the problem of alcohol. John Wesley had made the non-use of "spiritous liquor" a prerequisite for Methodist membership.(62) And the belief of the WMS that the use of alcohol hindered missionary work simply reinforced this predilection against liquor. By the 1890s it was willing to make its condemnation public. In 1899 the London Con-

ference voted to send a protest deploring the sale of liquor in army canteens to F.W. Borden, Minister of Militia.(63)

The members of the Woman's Missionary Society did not limit their more secular activities to temperance support. With the women of the other Protestant societies they were concerned about the treatment of Chinese girls in B.C., but unlike them, were willing to "memorialize the Dominion Government to take such steps as shall prevent the importation into British Columbia of Chinese women for immoral purposes."(64) They worried about the effects of cigarette smoking, disapproved the raising of revenue from the liquor and opium trade by the Anglo-Indian government, and in 1896 expressed to the government their horror at the Armenian atrocities.(65) All these concerns followed those of its sister society, the WCTU.

(iii)

Although missionary societies may not appear to be significant in furthering women's involvement in society, they cannot be dismissed. Over time they revealed remarkable persistence in defending their prerogatives as independent entities within the church. Their members learned to develop their capabilities and to become more comfortable and assured about the responsibilities they had accepted.(66)

In 1889 the Board of Domestic and Foreign Missions invited delegates of the Women's Auxiliary of the Church of England to attend a meeting of the Board. When the women learned their officers would be seated on the platform and called upon to speak, they were aghast.(67) Such hesitancy did not last. In 1898, when the Women's Auxiliary was asked to send all its money undesignated to the Domestic and Foreign Mission Board as well as "to canvass every member of the Church who is earning an income to become an annual subscriber to the same Board, the members of the W.A. to collect subscriptions year by year," the ladies rebelled.(68) At the meeting called to discuss the proposal they voted to cease being an auxiliary to the Board and become a separate society. Although they eventually rescinded this resolution, they did ask the Board to allow them to continue their work as before.(69)

Baptist women revealed their independence as early as 1887 when they considered holding their annual meeting "at some other time and place than that of the Convention." They argued, "Our work has so grown that we must occupy much more time than formerly, and must either draw from the Convention proper or not have the full attendance of our women that is desirable."(70) When this occurred in 1896, it established the society as a denominational body, "living by its own independent strength."(71)

Presbyterian women had a difficult time asserting their independence. The men of the church feared that women's activities would draw money away from other projects. In 1876, the British American Presbyterian illustrated this attitude when it advocated women's admission to "such subordinate offices as they fill with advantage." (72) As a consequence, the woman's society did not share in the administration of its work with the Foreign Mission Committee, neither did it make the missionary appointments. (73) Until 1888, the money it raised went to the Foreign Missionary Committee for use on behalf of the WFMS projects, without any publication of detailed estimates or statements of expenditure. (74) Until the end of the century men chaired the public meetings of the woman's society. Surprisingly, this state of dependency was approved by the women; the lack of responsibility was part of the attraction of the society. (75)

As they gained experience, however, these women became more confident and independent. In 1889 they obtained permission to examine the applications of single women who wished to be missionaries and to accompany them before the Committee. (76) They began to keep a watchful eye on the well-being of the female missionaries. On February 21, 1891, the secretary of the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society (Western Division) pointed out to the Missionary Committee what appeared to be sex discrimination.

In . . . the arrangements for the provision of "aged and infirm missionaries, " . . . it is not stated, whether the provision for a single ordained or medical missionary, (male), is the same as that, for a married ordained or medical missionary, (male). If the provision is the same I was requested, by our Board, to call your attention to the fact, that the provision for a missionary or medical missionary, (female) is only half the amount given to the single ordained or medical missionary (male). (77)

The women of the WFMS based their new found confidence on solid accomplishment. They were important to the survival of missionary endeavour and knew it. After all, it was the woman's missionary societies which had helped to liquidate the debt of the foreign missions. (78)

Methodist women, unlike Presbyterian women, met little resistance to their work. This did not mean they had a free rein. Methodism had become increasingly narrow with respect to women in the mid-nineteenth century, a result of the growing respectability of Methodism and its adoption of the artificial restraints of society. (79) Because of this, the impetus for the formation of the Woman's Missionary Society did not come from the women. But once involved, they quickly established control. At the organizational meeting the women discussed their future.

Are we quite sure we are willing to hand over the funds of the Society to the General Committee and have them transact all our financial business, reserving ourselves the right, simply to collect the money and determine what shall be done with it, as they will be very glad to have us do?

. . .

Or shall we strike out on entirely new lines? Assume all the responsibilities ourselves, and take the burden upon our own hearts and heads, which will force us to our knees to seek the wisdom from above which is profitable to direct, and the zeal which will surely accompany knowledge and love. Shall we do our work without salary, and most sincerely ask for the advice and blessing of the Gen. Com. which can be given without money, lay before them very minutely our plans, and desires, and take into the careful, prayerful and unprejudiced consideration all they wish or suggest remembering that they the ministers should thoroughly understand and approve of everything done in connection with our Church work. (80)

By 1886 the WMS was a separate church body capable of holding property. (81)

(iv)

Through missionary societies women were becoming important in the church. This

was significant for the church in the nineteenth century remained a central focus for many Canadian women and was the institution through which most could be reached. Alice Chown, in her remarkable autobiography The Stairway, described the role religion played for her mother.

What she failed to gain in daily, concrete experience she made for herself in her spiritual life. . . . She knew very few books except the Bible; her only reading was her church paper and a few religious works. . . . Her religion was the poetry of her life. (82)

Missionary societies enhanced this role for they provided thousands of Canadian women with an outlet for their energies. Through missionary societies they learned the power of organization. As the WBMU reported in 1888:

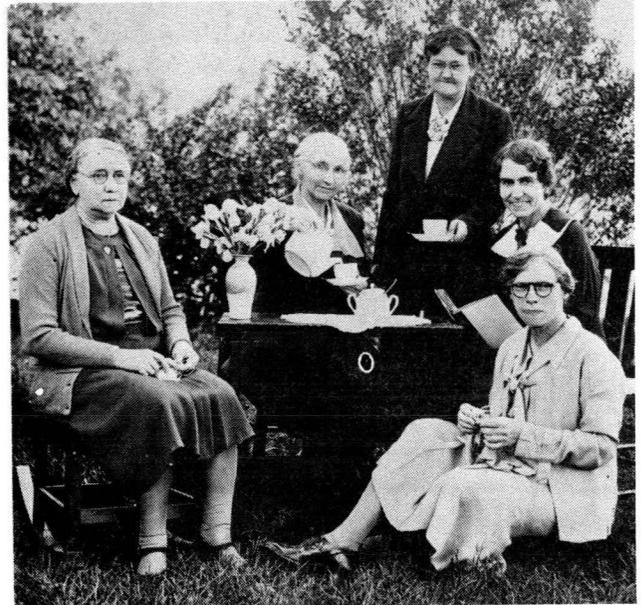
Organization, that with its magic touch has brought every class and age into the ranks of the world's workers, that has crystallized scattered--and consequently futile efforts about grand objects, making of them efficient activities and multiplying them a hundred fold. (83)

By coming together these women were able to accomplish a good deal and by doing so they increased their confidence in their own abilities.

Membership in a missionary society did not necessarily give women experience in administration and public procedure; most

CANADIAN MISSIONARIES AT TEA, SONGJIN, KOREA, 1938. Courtesy Helen Lee, MacRae Collection.

societies were run by a small coterie of women. Nevertheless, even the most peripheral of members were exposed to the way meetings were run and the manner in which the decisions were made. All members learned to be fund-raisers. In addition, because they had organized, their role in the church altered. No longer were women simply housekeepers of the church, but minor administrators; no longer workers for male missionary groups, but almost full partners. Limitations on them, of course, still existed. In none of the churches examined could women be ordained. Yet compared to the role they had played in Ladies' Aids, the work they had accomplished through and the position they had attained in missionary societies was a significant advance.



Missionary societies were not vehicles for social reform, only 'religious' reform. Nevertheless, this was a fundamental kind of reform for Christians believed that conversion, if successful, actually changed the way in which people perceived life. Churchwomen believed this change would affect the temporal condition of people because they believed religion and life style were closely inter-related.

The interplay between religion and life style was of particular importance in their "Woman's work for women." (84) Through Christianity, which they believed recognized women as equal to men, heathen women would be uplifted. The sentiments expressed by Mrs.

Williams, president of the WBMU in 1888, would have been agreed to by all missionary groups.

We work as women, not only because we owe so much to the gospel but because, by virtue of our natures and experiences, woman's need of the gospel, appeals especially to us. 'Tis to our woman's heart that the story of woman's suffering and degradation of hopeless sin-burdened lives, uncheered by "earthly love or heavenly" comes with greatest power and it is from one woman's heart to another that the current of pitying love must flow. (86)

This feeling of sisterhood, however, did not lead them into the women's movement. Compared to what they knew of the pos-

ition of women in the mission fields of such countries as India, Japan and Burma, their own positions appeared envious. They felt no need to question the values of their own society concerning women. On the contrary, they perceived their role in terms of the traditional attributes of duty, service and self-denial. Women were to have "three special gifts and three special powers--the gifts are high and lofty aims, tact and self-forgetful devotion. The powers are influence, endurance and sympathetic tenderness."(87) This unquestioning acceptance of their own lives made it easier for them to become involved in the lives of others, to reform the spiritual and temporal situation of heathen women but not their own. It was easier, too, because they believed that they had a direct command from God to spread His Gospel. They were followers, not initiators. Having the comfort of Christianity, they had the responsibility to help those who did not.

By following God's will they left "the inanities, the superficialities, the conventionalities, of ordinary life . . . and claimed higher culture."(88) The security provided by such a belief cannot be overestimated. It justified their involvement and provided them with a feeling of accomplishment. They had stepped out of their own world into one finer. As one expressed it, "To lose our own personality in some grand idea no matter what is to find life that is truly worth living."(89) Negation of the individual required self-denial.

Only in sacrifice could they be one with Christ. By sublimating their own desires and needs to those of a larger cause, they received enlargement and contentment,(90) a sense of achievement and belonging.

Protestant women's missionary societies satisfied the needs of many women. They appealed to those wanting to be part of a larger cause but not having the time for personal involvement or the desire for individual commitment. They broadened the outlook of many women and introduced them to the power of organization. Although these groups did not seem prepared for direct social action they were prepared to see women become active agents in the church. Ironically, the members of the missionary societies did not consider themselves participants in the woman's movement. Nevertheless, their efforts to establish a place for themselves in the church made them a part of the larger effort to expand woman's role in Canadian society.

NOTES

1. The protestant churches that I am concerned with are the Methodist, the Presbyterian, the Baptist and the Church of England which represented nine tenths of the Protestants in Canada in the late nineteenth century. They also represented just over 50% of the population in 1891.

17.51% of the population were Methodist
15.63% of the population were Presbyterian
13.37% of the population were Church of England
6.29% of the population were Baptist

Statistical Year Book of Canada, 1901, p. 530.
2. Mrs. Mary McKerihen, A Brief History relative to the growth and development of women's associations 1913-1943 (Toronto, 1944), p. 4.
3. S.D. Clark, The Developing Canadian Community (Toronto, 1971), p. 116.

4. J.T. McNeil, The Presbyterian Church in Canada 1875-1925 (Toronto, 1925), p. 17; J.H. Farmer, "Ontario, Quebec, Manitoba and the Northwest" in A.H. Newman (ed.), A Century of Baptist Achievement (Philadelphia, 1901), p. 144.
5. One reason why the Baptist women formed at this time was the developing independence of the Maritime Baptist Church. Until 1866 all contributions from the Maritime Baptists to foreign missions went to the English and American Baptist missions. Not until 1875 did Maritime Baptists create an independent Maritime Missionary Board. Mary Cramp, Retrospects: A History of the Formation and Progress of Women's Missionary Aid Societies of the Maritime Provinces (Halifax, 1893), p. 17.
6. Mary Ingraham, Seventy-Five Years: Historical Sketch of United Baptist Women's Missionary Union in the Maritime Provinces of Canada (Kentville, Nova Scotia, 1948), pp. 8-9.
7. Ibid., p. 10.
8. Ibid., p. 15.
9. Mrs. Beals, Mrs. J.W. Manning (Kentville, N.S., 1932), p. 19.
10. Ingraham, p. 30.
11. For further discussion of Baptist Church history see E.R. Fitch, The Baptists of Canada (Toronto, 1911). In 1888 the Eastern and Western Conventions united to form the Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec. In 1913 the Baptist Foreign Mission Boards of Ontario and Quebec and the Maritimes united to form the Canadian Foreign Mission Board. The president of the United Baptist Woman's Missionary Union (formed in 1907) was a member. Earl Merrick, These Impossible Women. The Story of the United Baptist Woman's Missionary Union of the Atlantic Provinces (Fredericton, 1970), p. 112.
12. Canada, Statistical Record, 1886, p. 45.
13. Cramp, p. 18; Minutes of the Women's Baptist Missionary Union of the Maritime Provinces, 1894-95, p. 89, Acadia University.
14. Cramp, p. 18.
15. Annual Report, Woman's Baptist Missionary Union of the Maritimes, 1890-91, p. 139.
16. Ibid., 1893-94, p. 68.
17. McNeil, pp.140-41.
18. Finding Aid to the Women's Foreign Missionary Society of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, Western Division, Correspondence, p. 1, United Church Archives.
19. The WFMS, Eastern Division, had its origins in the Halifax Woman's Foreign Missionary Society (October 13, 1876). Like its western counterpart, it formed at a time when women could do little in public, not even lead prayer meetings. In 1885 it dropped Halifax from its name. The WFMS, Eastern Division, formed due to an address by Rev. J. Fraser Campbell home on furlough from Central India. He discussed the need for women's participation in missionary work. Jean Forbes, Wide Windows. The Story of the Woman's Missionary Society of the United Church of Canada (United Church of Canada, 1951), p. 6; McNeil, pp.140-41; see also Annual Report, WFMS, Eastern Division, 1901, p. 11-12. Not until 1884 was the first WFMS formed west of Toronto, in Winnipeg. "Fifty Years in Winnipeg," p. 1, Minnie Campbell Papers, Public Archives of Manitoba.
20. Annual Report of the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, Western Division, 1877, p. 7. United Church Archives.
21. Annual Report, WFMS (W.D.), 1896-97, p. 16; see also Annual Report, WFMS (W.D.), 1898-99, p. 48.
22. Ibid., 1891-92, p. 41. The Christian Endeavour movement began in 1896. It was an inter-denominational organization for young people and seldom worked for missions. Alexander Sutherland, Methodism in Canada (London, 1903), p. 277.
23. Letter from L.J. Harvie, secretary WFMS (W.D.) to Rev. R.P. Mackay, secretary Foreign Mission Committee, June 8, 1894. Correspondence, WFMS (W.D.), United Church Archives.
24. National Council of Women, Women of Canada (Montreal, 1900), pp. 305-06.
25. A Committee of the Executive of the 'Twentieth Century Fund', Historic Sketches of the Pioneer Work and the Missionary, Educational and Benevolent Agencies of the Presbyterian Church in Canada (Toronto, 1930), p. 60.
26. Mrs. H.L. Platt, The Story of the Years: History of Woman's Missionary Society of the Methodist Church, Canada 1881-1906 (Toronto, 1908), p. 17.
27. Memoranda found among the papers of the Woman's Missionary Society, Methodist Church, United Church Archives.
28. Elizabeth Strachan, The Story of the Years: History of the Woman's Missionary Society of the Methodist Church, Canada 1906-1916 (Toronto, 1916), pp. 309-310.
29. Annual Report, WMS, 1901-02, p. xxix; Strachan, pp. 309-310.
30. Ibid., 1892-93, p. 21.
31. First Annual Report, Toronto Churchwoman's Mission Aid Society, 1880, p. 3. Anglican Church Archives. Like other missionary groups, the Churchwoman's Mission Aid Society refused to raise money through the "questionable expedients of fairs, bazaars, tea-parties, dramatic entertainments, or any form of lottery." Annual Report, 1881.
32. This idea did not originate with the Canadian women. One of their committee, Mrs. Roberta Tilton, was familiar with the American equivalent. The W.A. Handbook, Education Department of the Church of England in Canada (Toronto, 1951), p. 1, Anglican Archives; Emily Cummings, Our Story 1885-1928 (Toronto, 1928), p. 12.
33. Kate Halson, Story of the Woman's Auxiliary to 1900 (n.d.), p. 1, Anglican Church Archives.
34. Cummings, p. 32.
35. Halson, p. 6.
36. Report of the Triennial Meeting of the Woman's Auxiliary to the Board of the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Church of England in Canada, 1898, p. 25.
37. Cummings, p. 55.
38. Ibid., p. 77.
39. Ibid., p. 47; Report of the Triennial Meeting of the Woman's Auxiliary . . . , 1895.
40. Annual Report, WMS Methodist Church, 1894-95, report of the Corresponding Secretary.
41. Annual Report, WFMS (W.D.), 1880, p. 12.
42. Ibid., 1891-92, p. 18.
43. Ibid., 1889, p. 9. In 1888 the WFMS was willing to help raise funds to support missions to the Jews and Chinese in Canada. Letter to Mr. Cassels, Secretary of Foreign Mission Committee, from the WFMS, September 10, 1888. WFMS (W.D.) Papers, Correspondence.
44. Ibid., 1891-92, p. 10.
45. Ibid., 1893-94, p. 18.
46. Annual Report, WFMS (E.D.), 1902, pp. 9-10.
47. Letter from Mrs. Shortreed to the presidents of various auxiliaries WFMS (W.D.), Correspondence 1902.
48. Annual Report, WBWU Maritimes, 1885-86, pp. 15-16.
49. Ibid., 1891-92, p. 87; 1894-95, pp. 93-94.
50. Ibid., 1894-95, pp. 93-94.
51. Ibid., 1890, p. 14. The division was as follows: \$800 for work in the Northwest, \$100 for Indian work in Manitoba, \$100 for the French mission at Grand Ligne, and \$500 for Maritime missions.

52. Minutebook, WMS Methodist Church, November 8, 1881, p. 8.
53. Annual Report, WMS Methodist Church, 1891, pp. xiv-xv.
54. Platt, p. 92.
55. Annual Report, WMS Methodist Church, 1892-93, pp. 20-23.
56. "Methodism and the New Era," *Canadian Methodist Magazine*, vol. 32, 1890, p. 274.
57. Annual Report, Woman's Christian Temperance Union of Ontario, 1894, p. 52.
58. Annual Report, Woman's Christian Temperance Union of New Brunswick, 1896, p. 22.
59. Minutebook, London Branch, Woman's Missionary Society, Methodist Church, 1898, p. 54.
60. Annual Report, WMS Methodist Church, 1892-93, p. 22.
61. Minutebook, WMS, Centenary Church Hamilton, 3 April 1882; see also Minutebook, London Conference, WMS Methodist Church, 1899, p. 69.
62. Marion Royce, The Contribution of the Methodist Church to Social Welfare in Canada, M.A. (University of Toronto, 1940), p. 147.
63. Minutebook, London Branch, WMS Methodist Church 1899, p. 69.
64. Annual Report, WMS Methodist Church, 1890-91, p. xv.
65. Minutebook, London Branch WMS Methodist Church, 1896, pp. 22-23; Annual Report, WMS Methodist Church, 1892, p. 11.
66. This section substantially disagrees with the accepted interpretation that women in church societies accepted their subordinate position without question. See Christopher Headon, "Women and Organized Religion in mid and late nineteenth century Canada," paper presented at the Canadian Historical Association Annual Meeting, Quebec, 1976.
67. Cummings, p. 28.
68. *Ibid.*, pp. 48-49.
69. *Ibid.*, p. 51.
70. Annual Report, WBMU Maritime Provinces, 1887-1888, p. 26; see also Annual Report, WBMU Maritime Provinces, 1890-91, p. 17.
71. Ingraham, p. 20.
72. McNeil, p. 152.
73. Historic Sketches WFMS . . . , p. 60.
74. Finding Aid, WFMS Presbyterian Church Correspondence p. 3. United Church Archives; Annual Report, WFMS (E.D.) Constitution, 1889, p. 65.
75. Annual Report, WFMS (W.D.), 1881, p. 11.
76. Finding Aid, WFMS, Papers, p. 3; letter from L.J. Harvie, foreign secretary for WFMS (W.D.) to Mr. Cassels, secretary of Foreign Mission Committee, February 21, 1891, WFMS Correspondence.
77. *Ibid.*
78. Annual Report, WFMS (E.D.), 1887, p. 27.
79. "Woman in the Church," *The Christian Guardian* 19 June, 1872; see also *The Christian Guardian* 28 February, 1877, p. 68.
80. Minutes, Centenary Church, Hamilton 12 February 1881, WMS Methodist Church.
81. Annual Report, WMS. Methodist Church, 1886, p. 12.
82. Alice Chown, The Stairway (Boston, 1921), pp. 13-14; see also diary, Elizabeth Smith Shortt, January 18, 1878, University of Waterloo Archives.
83. Annual Report, WBMU Maritime Provinces, 1887-88, p. 24; see also Report, WMS Methodist Church, 1884-85, p. 17.
84. Annual Report, WBMU Maritime Provinces, 1897-98, p. 127.
85. Annual Report, WBMU Maritime Provinces, 1890-91, p. 24; see also Annual Report, WFMS (W.D.), 1878, p. 11; Annual Report, WMS Methodist Church, 1890-91, p. xix; Annual Report, WFMS (E.D.), 1889, p. 12.
86. Merrick, p. 69; Annual Report, WFMS (W.D.) Presbyterian Church, 1878, p. 11; Annual Report, WMS Methodist Church, 1890-91, p. xix.
87. Annual Report, Toronto W.A. Church of England, 1896, p. 15.
88. Isabel Hart, "Woman's Work for Heathen Women," *Canadian Methodist Magazine*, v. 12, 1880, pp. 266-67.
89. Annual Report, WFMS (W.D.), 1889, p. 13.
90. Mrs. L.J. Harvie, "Woman's Work for Woman in Heathen Lands," *Canadian Methodist Magazine*, vol. 18, 1883, p. 53.