

THE FIRST WOMEN OF THEOLOGY

The Methodist Woman's Foreign
Missionary Society Windows

Methodist Woman's Foreign Missionary Society Windows



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Woman's Foreign Missionary Society

The windows installed in the Boston University School of Theology Library celebrate the lives of the women who founded the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society, on the stormy day of March 23, 1869, to send women as missionaries. Under the slogan "Woman's Work for Woman," Methodist women sent women to minister to other women and children around the world. The first country in which they employed indigenous "Bible women" and sent women missionaries was India. Other countries that soon benefited from the Society's work included China, Japan, Korea, Mexico, Angola, and Argentina. Some of the women were wives of faculty of the newly formed Boston Theological Institute, or former students of its predecessor schools. Soon the seminary became the founding school of Boston University, chartered by the state legislature the same day in 1869 that the WFMS elected its first officers and authorized the sending of its first missionary.

Tremont Street Methodist Episcopal Church



Tremont Street Methodist Episcopal Church was located at 740 Tremont Street in Boston, Massachusetts. It was built in 1862, based on a design by architect Hammatt Billings. Around the corner

from the state house, members of the church included founders of Boston University and other public leaders.

To celebrate the important work of the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society, Founders' windows were installed in 1889. The rest of the stained-glass windows were installed in 1942 to celebrate other important leaders in the women's missionary movement, including those who founded Deaconess Hospital in Boston. Tremont Street Methodist Church remained a Methodist congregation until the 1970s. During the 1970s, the New Hope Baptist Church, an African American congregation, purchased the building and worshipped there until 2011. In 2000, the church was designated an official United Methodist Historical Site, based upon the founding of the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society at the site, combined with the subsequent installation of the stained-glass windows. In 2004 the church was designated as a Heritage Landmark of the United Methodist Church.

In 2011, the church was purchased by a developer and transformed into condominiums. The windows were removed and some of them were saved through collaboration among the Boston University School of Theology, New England Conference Commission on Archives and History, New England United Methodist Historical Society, and the New England Conference United Methodist Women.



In 2019, to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society, eight of the windows were permanently installed at the Boston University School of Theology Library. The

windows chosen for display commemorated women with historical ties to Boston University and to the New England Annual Conference, whose archives are located in the School of Theology library. Four other windows are permanently installed in other locations.

More information about the Tremont Methodist Church can be obtained by visiting the Boston University School of Theology Library Archives page devoted to [New England Church Records](#) collections. The library is the repository for the New England Annual Conference Commission on Archives and History records and books.

The Windows

In 1889, the first two commemorative, stained glass windows were installed in the Tremont Street Methodist Church. The two windows celebrated the eight women founders of the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society. They were placed at the back of the sanctuary over the Tremont St. entrance.

Many years later in 1942, Miss Clementina Butler and Rev. Azariah Reimer decided to install additional windows in the church. They held the mutual hope that the stained-glass windows would "preach" to visitors the story of the many women and men that were part of the Tremont Street Methodist Episcopal Church who had an impact on the city of Boston and the world. On March 23, 1942, Rev. Reimer told the story through a sermon about the windows and the legacy of those featured in them. More of Rev. Reimer's sermons are preserved in the New England Annual Conference Archives.

The Women in The Windows

The Founder's Windows

The first windows to be installed, in 1889, listed the names of the eight women who voted to establish the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society. In the tradition of that day, the women were all identified by the names or initials of their husbands. Recent research, however, has uncovered the full names of the women:



Mrs. Rev. Dr. Butler
Clementina Rowe

Mrs. Lewis Flanders
Eliza Montague

Mrs. Thomas Kingsbury
Frances Ellen Henshaw

Mrs. Wm. B. Merrill
Mary Bradford Dyer

Mrs. Rev. E. Parker
Lois Lee Stiles

Mrs. Thomas Rich
Maria Little Taylor

Mrs. O.T. Taylor
Rebecca A. M. Spear

Mrs. H. J. Stoddard
Mary Adelaide Phillips

The initial impetus to organize the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society came from Mrs. Lois Parker, who along with her husband, had been a missionary in India for some nine years when they returned to the United States on furlough in 1868 due to health problems. Lois and Edwin were both from St. Johnsbury, Vermont. **Lois Lee Stiles** was born in 1834 and attended the Newbury Seminary (the Vermont Conference School) along with Edwin. They eventually married and then attended the General Methodist Biblical Institute in Concord, NH, in preparation for going into the mission field. The Parkers thus both attended two of the predecessor schools of the Boston University School of Theology.



After the WFMS was organized, the Parkers returned to India and lived out their lives there. In 1900 Edwin was elected Bishop of India but died in 1901. Lois, however, lived until 1925, the last of the original eight founding women to die.



Mrs. Thomas A. Rich was elected as the first Treasurer of the WFMS. She was born **Maria Little Taylor** in New York City in 1829. In 1854, she married Thomas A. Rich of Boston, who is described in the 1870 census as a “fish and salt dealer,” while the 1880 Census describes him as being with the Fish Commission. He was a nephew of Isaac Rich, one of the founders of Boston University. Mrs. Rich held her position as Treasurer for ten years and saw the annual budget of the WFMS rise from

\$2,000 to more than one-half million in 1904 before her death in 1905. The first general executive committee meeting of the WFMS was held in her parlor.

Mrs. O.T. Taylor was born **Rebecca A. M. Spear** c. 1828. She married Orange T. Taylor, a well-known dry goods merchant. The only reference to her in newspapers was a notice in late 1869 that she was supporting a Christmas Fair to raise funds for the construction of a building for the Boston Young Men’s Christian Association. She was the first of the women to die — in 1893.

Mrs. H. J. Stoddard was the most difficult of the women to identify. She was born **Mary Adelaide Phillips** c. 1833. In 1853, she married Henry J. Stoddard, who was identified in census records as a “clerk,” a “restorator,” and a “painter.” She is the only one among the women who seems clearly to have been from a working-class background. In the 1880 census, she is described as having consumption (TB). There are no references in local papers to her having been involved in activities outside of the church. Maybe she had health problems, or her economic circumstances may have prevented her participation. She died in 1914.



Clementina Rowe was born in Ireland in 1820 and met her husband there before they were married in the United States in 1855. They were the pioneer American Methodist missionaries to India and served there for nine years before returning home to the U.S. Eventually, the Butlers went to Mexico to start the Methodist mission there, along with their son John, a graduate of the Boston University School of Theology. She was the third to last of the founders to die – in 1913.



Mrs. Lewis Flanders heard a missionary sermon that Dr. Butler preached to stimulate missionary organization by Boston Methodists. She determined to do something about the needs of women overseas. She organized and presided over the meeting on March 23 that launched the WFMS. She was born **Eliza Montague**, in England, in 1819. There she married John Tucker. She eventually immigrated to the United States as a widow, and here married Lewis

Flanders, a “truckman,” who apparently owned his own company, Lewis Flanders & Co. She was elected one of the original vice-presidents of the WFMS, and she offered up to \$500 to start a periodical for the Society. She also served as a vice-president of the Boston Young Woman’s Christian Association, leaving \$100 to both the WFMS and the YWCA in her will at the time of her death in 1900.



Mrs. Thomas Kingsbury was active in the Society throughout her life. Born **Frances Ellen Henshaw**, in 1824, she was descended from William Henshaw, a member of the Provincial Congress in 1774 who served as an officer in the Revolutionary War. In 1858 she married Thomas Kingsbury, who was described in census records as a “grain dealer.” Mrs. Kingsbury was also involved in other benevolent organizations. In 1895 a

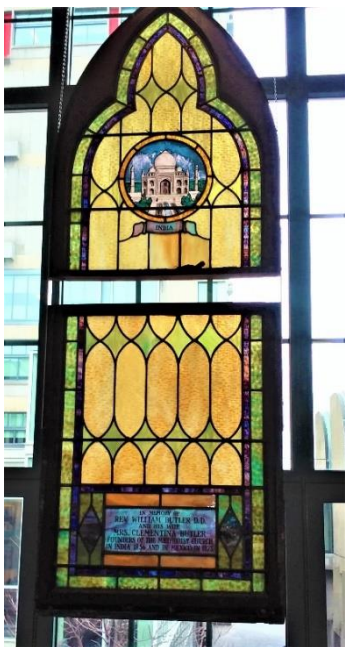
November article in the *Boston Globe* noted that she had a table at the annual fair for the Massachusetts Indian Association. She died in 1905 in California, “one of the most devoted friends of the work.”



Mrs. William B. Merrill was elected as one of the original managers of the WFMS. She was born **Mary Bradford Dyer**, a direct lineal descendant of Governor Bradford of Colonial times. Both of her parents descended from the original Plymouth Colony. In 1853, she married William B. Merrill, who was a director and a partner in the Downer Kerosene & Oil Company – a well-known and very successful international

trade company in Boston at the time. Like several of the other women, she was also involved in other benevolent organizations, including the New England Hospital for Women and Children, the Floating Hospital in Brookline, and the Animal Rescue League. She died in 1911 and left \$500 in her will to the Tremont Street MEC WFMS.

Rev. William and Mrs. Clementina Butler



Rev. William and Clementina Butler were the first missionaries to bring American Methodism to India. Their stained-glass window contains the medallion featuring the Taj Mahal of Agra, an iconic landmark in India.

William and Clementina Butler were originally from Ireland. Butler immigrated in 1850 and Clementina soon followed. They were married in 1854. Just two years later, in 1856, the couple sailed to India to bring the Wesleyan movement to the people of India. They helped homeless and struggling people, especially girls, in India. Upon returning to the United States, Clementina spoke to groups of women about the work that needed to be done in India, while William spoke from the pulpit urging more support for missionaries. It was one of these stirring sermons delivered in 1869, at the Tremont Street Church, at the urging of Mrs. Lois Parker, who had just returned from India with her husband, the Rev. Edwin Parker, that sowed the seeds for the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society. In March 1869, the society would be founded by Clementina Butler, Lois Parker, and

Rev. William Butler **Local New England Preacher**

Before traveling to India with his wife, Rev. William Butler served local, Methodist Episcopal Churches in the following New England cities:

1850 Williamsburg, MA
1851-1852 Shelburne Falls, MA
1853 Westfield, MA
1854-1855 Lynn, MA, Common Street

After the Butlers returned from the mission field, Rev. Butler served at

1866 Chelsea, MA, Walnut Street Church
1868 Boston, MA, Dorchester Street
Melrose, MA



other interested female members of the Tremont Street and area Methodist churches.

Dr. Dana Robert, Truman Collins Professor of World Christianity and History of Mission, and Director of the Center for Global Christianity and Mission at, Boston University School of Theology, reflects on the details of the Butlers' missionary work:

“After 1854 when Alexander Duff spoke at General Conference, the Methodist Church decided to send missionaries to India. The volunteers who found the mission were the Butlers. Unfortunately, the Butlers went at the time of the anti-imperialist uprising and had to flee for their lives. They were shocked by the bodies of women in the Ganges River and determined to start educating girls in order to save them. Mrs. Butler was joined in this

desire by other women missionaries, including Mrs. Lois Parker, who with her husband Edwin, had attended the Concord Biblical Institute prior to sailing for India. They were on the same ship as future bishop, James Thoburn. Mrs. Butler, Mrs. Parker, and others then met in March 1869 to found what became the WFMS. Rev. Butler taught Sanskrit and India missions at the School of Theology soon after its founding.”

Read more about the Butlers and other mission-related people and topics on the [History of Missiology](#) website hosted by the Center for Global Christianity and Mission.

Mrs. Bishop Osmon Baker

Little is known about Mrs. Bishop Osmon Baker. We know that her first name was Mehitabel. She was born in Lempster, NH, in 1811 and taught alongside Osmon Baker at Newbury Biblical Institute. They were married on July 24, 1834. She was a bright woman who expressed progressive views about the work her husband did as a minister, professor, dean of the Methodist General Biblical Institute in Concord, NH, and Bishop of the General Conference in 1852.

Her letters can be found in the [Boston University School of Theology Archives](#) in the Bishop Osman Baker Collection.

Dr. Robert speaks to Mehitable's impact:

"Mrs. Mehitable Baker, wife of the dean of the Methodist General Biblical Institute, was elected first president of the New England Branch of the WFMS. The women adopted a branch system i.e., decentralized branches that collaborated to send missionaries. She taught at the Newbury Biblical Institute, the predecessor institution to the Methodist General Biblical Institute, among other claims to fame."

The medallion, depicting a flying dove above the cross, bears the inscription: "Unto the uttermost part of the earth."

Harriet Merrick Warren



Mrs. Harriet Merrick Warren is remembered in her stained-glass window with the medallion featuring a quill and paper reading, "Write for these words are true, and faithful," as she was the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society's first Corresponding Secretary and Editor of the Society's journal, *Heathen Woman's Friend* later renamed, *Woman's Missionary Friend*. She edited the journal until her death in 1893.

Harriet Merrick was born in Wilbraham, MA the daughter of a preacher and prominent member of Hampden County, John M. Merrick. Her father was a trustee of Wilbraham Academy where Dr. William Fairfield Warren, Harriet's husband, attended school. Education was very important to the Merrick family. It is not surprising that Harriet pursued multiple advanced degrees and was able to speak several languages.

She married William F. Warren in 1861. William and Harriet Warren spent years in Germany, learning about the ways they educated students in that country. Dr. William F. Warren served as Missions-Anstalt for the Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church. He brought many of the ideas, principles, and practices he was exposed to in Germany back to the Methodist General Biblical Institute in Concord, New Hampshire, where he taught. In 1867, the

Biblical Institute moved to Boston, MA. In 1869, William F. Warren was part of the group of men who founded, funded, and chartered Boston University. He was selected to be its first president and the first dean of its School of Theology.



While William was launching a university, Harriet was busy writing and advocating for women. She held executive positions on committees within the New England Annual Conference and in groups beyond the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society, including the General Executive Committee of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Dr. Dana Robert heralds her as major leader of "woman's work for woman" in her 1996 publication, *American Women in Mission: A Social History of Their Thought and Practice*: "When the women organized themselves, they founded a journal to keep contact among the branches and to promote their work. At the same time that the women were founding the missionary society, men were moving the Concord Biblical Institute to Boston to found Boston University, led by the School of Theology. Tapped to be first president was the missionary William Warren. His wife Harriet became first editor of the journal *Heathen Woman's Friend*, which she edited until her death in 1893. The journal always showed a profit.

Mrs. Warren also was part of the team of women who appealed to the mission board to allow the existence of the national WFMS. She also helped found the New England Conservatory."

You can view the papers of William Fairfield Warren at Boston University Howard Gottlieb Archival Research Center. Some of Harriet's papers are part of this archival collection. Contact the

Howard Gottlieb Archival Research Center to make an appointment to view these primary resources.

Isabella Thoburn



Isabella Thoburn was the first missionary sent overseas by the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society. She went to India and focused on improving educational opportunities for women in Lucknow, India. In 1871, she began a girls' school in Lucknow and then a boarding school in Lal Bagh estate. During the 1880s, she returned to the United States, lecturing about her mission work and teaching in Chicago at Chicago Training School for City, Home, and Foreign Missions. Later she returned to India to do more work in the mission field. In 1903, she

found Lucknow Women's College, later renamed in her honor, Isabella Thoburn College.

Dr. Robert relates the impact the New England and Philadelphia branches had on Isabella Thoburn's work. "The New England Branch organized itself to send money for Bible women, and with the Philadelphia Branch to send two missionaries: Miss Thoburn (to join her brother James, as an educational missionary from New England), and Clara Swain, a medical doctor from Philadelphia. Thoburn founded what became the first college for women in Asia." While on furlough in Boston, Miss Thoburn founded the Methodist women's deaconess school that eventually merged into Boston University.

The medallion on her window depicts the Greek lamp on a Bible bears the inscription, "The Entrance of Thy Word Giveth Light".

Learn more about Isabella Thoburn in this biography that can be found in our [Research Collection](#).

Miss Clementina Butler



Clementina Butler, daughter of the Rev. William Butler and Clementina Butler, is commemorated in her stained-glass window with the official seal of Mexico, featuring the eagle destroying a serpent. Her parents are honored in another window in this exhibition.

Clementina and her brother, John, served as some of the first Methodist missionaries to Mexico. Both children were influenced by an 1873 revival that took place at the Boston University School of Theology. Famed missionary and future Bishop of Africa William Taylor spearheaded the revival, convincing students from Boston University to launch the mission to Mexico, as well as to other parts of the world.



Clementina was the driving force behind the installation of the stained-glass windows in the Tremont Street church in 1942. She co-founded the Committee on Christian Literature for Women and Children in Mission Fields in 1912. Clementina wrote missionary literature for women. She chaired the American Ramabai Association, to support the work of the famous Indian woman educator, Pandita Ramabai, who founded a famous school for child widows, led

a group of women in translating the Bible into a popular Marathi version, and launched a pioneer pentecostal revival. This Bible is preserved in the School of Theology Library's [Research Collection](#).

Dr. Robert expands on Clementina Butler's impact,

“After her return she was incredibly important on the home front, as chairwoman of the Ramabai society (to support the work of Pandita Ramabai), as a Co-founder of the Committee on Christian Literature for Women and Children, and national leader of women, and in New England Methodism in the early 20th century.”

Deaconess Mary Lunn and the Watkins Deaconess Window



In addition to the windows that were installed in the Tremont Street MEC honoring the founders and the early missionaries of the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society, there were also two windows honoring the founders and staff of the New England Deaconess Association and Hospital. The window honoring Mary Lunn also hangs in the library at Boston University School of Theology.

Mary Lunn is immortalized in the stained-glass window with a medallion featuring the seal of the New England Deaconess Hospital. She was the first superintendent of the New England Deaconess Training School, securing the properties near Shawmut and Massachusetts Avenue in 1889, to provide the space for the training school and the hospital. In 1918, the school became part of the Boston University School of Religious Education and Social Service. That school, in turn, became the School of Social Work, and the teaching of religious outreach merged into the School of Theology.

Mary was born in Racine, Wisconsin in 1854 to two local preachers in the Methodist Episcopal Church. During her formative years, she was a Sunday School teacher. She also immersed herself in all aspects of work within the Christian Church. She began training for deaconess work while in Wisconsin around 1888. Moving to Boston, she soon became superintendent of the New England Deaconess Training



School. Mary would stay in this post, dedicated to the cause of educating deaconesses and comforting the sick in Boston's South End, for twelve years. She went to work for two years in New York and then California, where she became superintendent of the Los Angeles Deaconess Home.

Dr. Robert provides some interesting context, highlighting the significance of Mary Lunn's work,

"Opposition to the deaconess school by male STH students was fierce, and they objected to its all-female character. The New England Deaconess Training School later merged into BU in 1918, when it became the School of Religious Education and Social Service (SRE). The women at the deaconess school, and later SRE, were the first large body of women alums who can technically be seen as part of STH, including the first African American women at STH. In 1890, the only women enrolled at STH were designated as 'special students.' Many more women went to the Deaconess



Training School. Harriet Warren was one of the founding trustees of the home and training school. In 1896, they and other Methodists, founded Deaconess Hospital, later named the Beth-Israel Deaconess Hospital."

The Window honoring the organization of the New England Deaconess Association currently hangs in the chapel of the Deaconess Abundant Life Community in Concord, MA, the successor to the original Deaconess Home which was located around the corner from the Tremont Street MEC on Massachusetts Avenue. The Deaconesses held many of their activities and services at the Tremont Street Church.

The medallion for the Corwin window is the Alpha and Omega symbol and the inscription reads: "Come unto Me All You That Labor and are Heavy Laden." The designation on the bottom of the

window reads, “In memory of Rev. T. Corwin Watkins, D.D., The First Corresponding Secretary of the New England Deaconess Association and his wife, Emma Hadley Watkins, Co-Founder of the Deaconess Work in Boston.” They were credited with raising a large amount of money for the Deaconess Association at the time of its founding in 1896.

Experience more of the history of the New England Deaconess movement in the [New England Annual Conference Commission on Archives and History Collection](#).

Dr. Clara Swain and the Philadelphia Unit Windows



Two additional windows saved from the former Tremont Street MEC have Philadelphia connections: the window dedicated to Dr. Clara Swain and the window which was located in the sanctuary originally purchased by the Philadelphia Unit of the WFMS. Those windows were claimed by members of the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference of the United Methodist Church and are currently being displayed in [First United Methodist](#)

[Church in Lancaster, PA.](#)

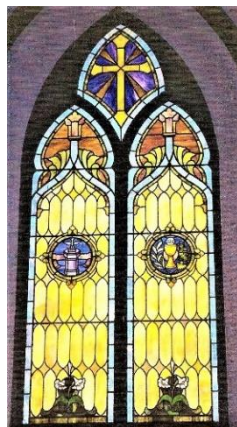
Dr. Clara Swain was born in Elmira, NY, in 1834. She eventually attended the Women’s Medical College in Philadelphia, graduating in 1869, with the idea that she might like to go to India as a medical missionary if such an opportunity arose. The Board of the Medical College was considering sending her there when she heard that there was an opportunity to go to India under the auspices of her own denomination, the Methodist Episcopal Church, through the newly organized Woman’s Foreign Missionary Society. She chose to follow that route and became the first female medical missionary to ever serve in a foreign country. She served in India until 1895, establishing the first ever hospital for women in that country.

The medallion depicts a coiled serpent on the rod of Moses, bearing the inscription, “Moved with Compassion She Healed their Sick.”

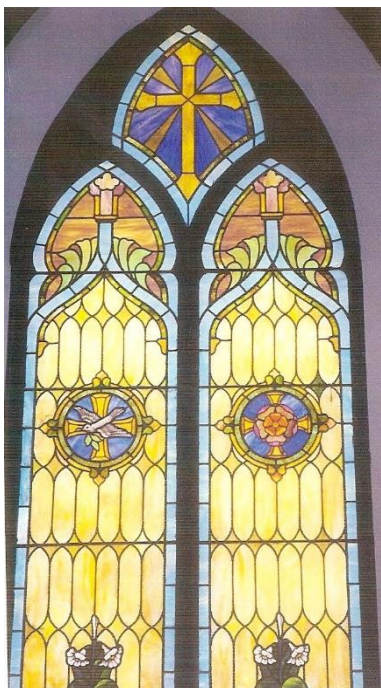
The medallions on the Philadelphia Branch window are the baptismal font and the chalice, depicting following Christ in the

sacraments, with the words, “Baptize all Nations,” and “Do This in Remembrance of me,” at the bottom.

The Clara Swain window now hangs in the Appenzeller Chapel at **First UMC of Lancaster**. Click on this [link](#) to see a video about the window. Both windows are now on display at First United Methodist Church in Lancaster, PA.



Baltimore Branch Window



The final stained-glass window to have been saved from the Tremont Street Church was claimed in 2021 by the **United Methodist Historical Society of the Baltimore-Washington Conference** and is the window originally purchased by the Baltimore Branch of the WFMS. The medallions are a dove with an olive branch and a full-blown rose, depicting peace and good will to all, with the words at the bottom, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you.”

This window is permanently displayed in the Asbury Room at the **Lovely Lane Museum** in Baltimore, MD.

Additional Resources

New England Annual Conference Archives, Boston University, School of Theology, <https://www.bu.edu/sthlibrary/archives/neccah/>.

History of Missiology, Center for Global Christianity and Mission, Boston University School of Theology, <https://www.bu.edu/missiology/>

Howard Gottlieb Archival Research Center, Mugar Memorial Library, Boston University, <http://www.bu.edu/archives>.

The Bible in Marathi, Boston University School of Theology Research Collections.

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