THE PRESENT STATE OF UNITED METHODIST HISTORICAL STUDY

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I could not help thinking yesterday when Dick Heitzenrater was speaking, that if he took us through the 1730's with John Wesley in Georgia, and Dr. Outler is going to speak tomorrow on the future, that leaves me to address everything in between! Dr. Baker began his paper by commenting on the difficulty of the charge given him. As you will see, I have chosen to begin my impossibly broad topic more widely and to narrow it as I go along.

It is now some five years since the celebration of the Bicentennial of American Methodism. United Methodist historians, while basking in the unaccustomed popularity of history in 1984, reflected on both the significance of this historical awareness and the "state of the art" at the Bicentennial. Russell E. Richey pondered the "distinctly apologetical tone" of Methodist history (that is, its legitimizing purposes) and suggested that the burden placed by the denomination on the contemporary historian was "that of making Methodism United, of dramatizing inclusion."¹ Kenneth E. Rowe, in the January, 1984 issue of Methodist History, stated boldly the challenge of "rethinking Methodist history":

Major interpretations need to be reexamined and revised; schemes for inclusion of blacks, Asians, Hispanics, Native Americans, and non-United Methodist denominations, in addition to women, need to be designed and implemented. The story needs to be seen in the light of the larger Protestant and American experience as well. New approaches and methodologies need to be modeled and tested. Previously unexamined sources must be discovered and studied. Uncharted aspects of the tradition need to be described and interpreted.²

Rowe went on to stress the important contribution that "truly competent and inclusive history"³ could make to the self-understanding of The United Methodist Church. "Above all," he concluded, "this means a more lay-oriented, locally-rooted approach to all our history writing. The time has come to redress the balance and rediscover and celebrate the rich diversity of the Methodist family—then and now."⁴ Five years later, what can we conclude about the state of United Methodist historical study?

¹The Drew Gateway, Win./Spr., 1984, Review Essay, 133-34.
²Methodist History, January, 1984, 94.
³Ibid., 98.
⁴Ibid.
There are plenty of signs that historical interest and awareness have not dwindled in the intervening years, but instead may have taken root in more profound and lasting ways. In the academic world, perhaps the single most important development has been the formation of the Wesleyan Studies Group in the American Academy of Religion. Begun about 1981, first as a round table discussion, then as a Consultation, and finally as a Group for five years, the Wesleyan Studies Group has just been reviewed by the Program Committee of the AAR and authorized to continue for another five-year term. It has provided a much needed forum for scholarly discussion and contact. Particularly exciting is the way this Wesleyan Studies Group has brought together scholars from the broader Methodist/Wesleyan family of denominations who see themselves as claiming the Wesleyan tradition. Here, as in few other places until now, United Methodist scholars can meet with scholars from the evangelical and holiness side of the family to explore, contest, perhaps correct the reading of the tradition. Attendance at these sessions has been encouraging and interest is high.

In the church there are important indications of the health of United Methodist historical study. Foremost in our awareness this week of course is the new Historical Society of our church (with a membership already of over 1100), and the liveliness symbolized by this first Historical Convocation. Together they make clear the continuing grassroots interest in our history. Supportive and promising are the leadership of the General Commission on Archives and History, the research possibilities of the Archives Center on the campus of Drew University, the generally high quality of historical inquiry and scholarship evident in *Methodist History*, beginning this fall its 28th year of publication, and the role of the *Historian's Digest* in providing a much needed network for sharing information of historical interest.

Other aspects of the church's life have contributed to the importance and viability of the church's historical enterprise. The Study Commissions on Doctrine, Mission, and Ministry which reported to the last General Conference have stimulated historical inquiry by appealing to our heritage and tradition. The Advisory Committee on United Methodist Studies, chaired by Bob Kohler of the Division of Ordained Ministry, has consistently pressed for a higher level of historical knowledge and skills to be a fundamental part of the preparation of persons for ministry in our denomination. Our own Publishing House has demonstrated a renewed interest in the publication of scholarly works in all areas of Wesleyan and United Methodist studies; the new Kingswood Books imprint begun on a trial basis in 1984 and now established with its own Editorial Advisory Board and panel of international Editorial Consultants is a good example. One of the first volumes published under the Kingswood Books imprint was *Rethinking Methodist History*, a volume of papers presented
at the Bicentennial Historical Consultation held at Drew University in April, 1983, and representing some of the cutting edge scholarship in United Methodist historical studies in North America.

Not to be overlooked are some of the tools available to working historians now, including bibliographies and recent reprints. In terms of guides to the literature, it is even more true now than it was in 1984 that "Methodist historians have never had it so good."

Especially important are Kenneth E. Rowe's *Methodist Union Catalog: Pre-1976 Imprints*, which describes the holdings of print materials (books, theses, and pamphlets) on Methodist subjects of over 200 libraries in North America and abroad. The first volume was published by Scarecrow Press in 1975; at the time of this lecture, Volume 7 was at the publisher. John and Lyda Batsel's *Union List of United Methodist Serials 1773-1973* identifies and locates over 2000 United Methodist periodicals, and Homer L. Calkin is at work on a *Catalog of Methodist Archival and Manuscript Collections* to be worldwide in scope and published in several sections, the first of which are already available. Together these three projects will provide for present and future historians invaluable access to the resources necessary for research and writing in United Methodist (eventually world Methodist) history.

In addressing the present state of United Methodist historical study this afternoon, I want to begin to narrow the topic somewhat by asking about progress toward a more inclusive history writing. (Because my lecture will be followed immediately by the panel exploring "Ethnic History Today," I will not attempt to address issues related to ethnic history. Suffice it to say at this point that we await the publication of the four ethnic history volumes with great excitement and anticipation.)

A major element of any new history of the Methodist movement and family of denominations in North America must be the story of its women. In the context of what we have claimed about the state of United Methodist historical study in general, what can we report about the recovery of women's history?

It has been over ten years now since the United Methodist Church launched a women's history project at the national level. A petition from the Women's Division to the 1976 General Conference read as follows:

The United Methodist Commission on Archives and History shall appoint a special committee to research and publish a history of the contribution of women to The United Methodist Church, making certain that the material is racially and ethnically inclusive.6

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6 Quoted in Theressa Hoover, *With Unveiled Face: Centennial Reflections on Women and Men in the Community of the Church* (New York: Women's Division, General Board of Global Ministries, The United Methodist Church, 1983), 57.
In response to the mandate of General Conference, Hilah F. Thomas was hired as the first coordinator of the project, and a Women's History Project Committee was formed, chaired by Norma Taylor Mitchell. The result of these early efforts was the exciting and groundbreaking "Women in New Worlds" Conference held in Cincinnati, Ohio, February 1-3, 1980. Attended by some 400 registrants, it was the first national conference on church women's history of any major church tradition. No one who attended that conference will forget the sense of empowerment and hope for a new future that resulted from that claiming of our heritage. Fortunately for all who care about rethinking Methodist history, two volumes of papers from that conference were published by Abingdon Press under the same title, *Women in New Worlds*, the first in 1981 and the second the following year. They have now become part of the standard bibliography for revamped United Methodist history courses in our theological schools and elsewhere. Equally significant, they have served as a catalyst for the recovery of women's history at the grass roots. As Russ Richey understood and aptly put it in his 1984 bicentennial review essay, "They invite women at every level in Methodism to remember."\(^7\)

The determined commitment to a Women's History Project in spite of the painful struggle for adequate funding resulted in the employment of a new coordinator in spring of 1983, Carolyn DeSwarte Gifford. Inspired by the "Women in New Worlds" conference, the bicentennial attention to history, and the leadership from Carolyn's office, women in our church were encouraged to research and write the history of women in their own annual conferences. Among the earliest were the histories of Holston women, women in north Georgia, and women in West Virginia. Similar efforts are currently underway, as occasional notices in the *Historian's Digest* reveal. In June of 1985, the Women's History Project sponsored an important conference on the recovery of Methodist women's history at the grassroots, at the Archives and History Center on the Drew University campus. Susan Eltscher, who became Director of Women's and Ethnic History in June of 1987, continues to facilitate, help train, and support the recovery and preservation of women's history at every level.

In this attempt to assess where we are in American (United) Methodist historical study, it is important to acknowledge, however briefly, some of the major resources and tools available for the recovery of women's history. When I began teaching United Methodist history at Iliff in 1975, the only book on the story of women in the predecessor denominations of The United Methodist Church was Elaine Magalis' *Conduct Becoming to a Woman*, published through the Women's Division in 1973 and now out of print. It was a critical pioneering effort.

\(^7\)Drew Gateway, Win./Spr., 1984, 136.
I want here also to pay tribute to the instrumental role of the Women's Division, and particularly Barbara Campbell, in preserving the history of women in mission in our church. Students of United Methodist history should be aware of the series of small but important volumes published in the 1970s and 1980s by the Women's Division, including Campbell's *United Methodist Women: In the Middle of Tomorrow; To a Higher Glory*, the history of women in mission in the Central Jurisdiction from 1940-1968; Thelma Stevens' *Legacy for the Future*, the history of Christian Social Relations in the Woman's Division in the same period; Theresa Hoover's *With Unveiled Face*, which explores the recent history of the Women's Division and UMW, and *This Is Our Song*, by Ann Fagan, the story of employed women in the United Methodist tradition. Mention should also be made of the earlier work by Audrie E. Reber on the Women's Society of World Service of the EUB Church entitled *Women United for Mission*, published in 1969. Since 1981, Hilah F. Thomas has been a consultant for the Women's Division Oral History Project.

In terms of indispensable tools for doing women's history, particularly noteworthy are Kenneth E. Rowe's bibliography *Methodist Women: A guide to the Literature*, published in 1980, and the 36-volume reprint series published by Garland Press and edited by Carolyn DeSwarte Gifford on "Women in American Protestant Religion, 1800-1930." This reprint series makes accessible rare volumes like John O. Foster's *Life and Labors of Mrs. Maggie Newton Van Cott*, the first woman licensed to preach in the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States; the *Autobiography of Lydia Sexton*, the early United Brethren preacher; the *Autobiography of Amanda Berry Smith*, the famous black revivalist; and the *Life and Letters of Laura A. Haygood*, the well known and loved Southern Methodist missionary to China. There are also several anthologies edited by Gifford on major facets of Methodist women's history such as the struggles for lay and clergy rights, and the role of the 19th century Methodist itinerant preacher's wife.

At the "Women in New Worlds" conference in 1980, Kathryn Kish Sklar presented a major address, subsequently published in the first *Women in New Worlds* volume, which described five major stages of history writing about American women and religion. I hope many of you have read it; it was entitled "The Last Fifteen Years." I still find it useful, and I want to summarize it briefly in order to set my own current work in context.

Stated in a very abbreviated way, the stages Sklar identified were:

1) From the beginning of the historical profession in the 1880s, to the mid-1960s: "pre-history," that is, preceding the development of women's history as we know it. For the most part, works in this first stage piled up facts about women with no conceptual framework for interpretation.

2) In the latter part of the 1960s, the "birth and infancy" of the field. This second stage of women's history introduced both female and feminist
perspectives on the past. For example, Barbara Welter's articles, "The Cult of True Womanhood," published in 1966, both focused on female experience and adopted a feminist perspective in asking questions about the limiting circumstances of women's lives.

3) The "adolescent" stage of rapid growth, which emerged in the 1970s. As Sklar put it, "Now scholars paid less attention to the question, How did religion and society oppress women? and more to, How did women benefit, personally and socially, from their religious beliefs?" One of the most important concepts suggested in this third stage was that of a "female culture," that is, a cultural experience peculiar to women.

4) The "mature" stage, "recently emerged" in the early 1980's in which new methods began to be used to explore the diversity of women's experience in terms of the effects of class, community, ethnicity, and race. Sklar was convinced that historical writing about women and religion for the foreseeable future would probably combine the approaches of stages three and four.

5) Within the next decade, Sklar concluded, we might expect the development of a new fifth stage of historical analysis, a much needed period of synthesis and larger interpretation.

It has been ten years (this coming February) since the "Women in New Worlds" conference. It is a tribute to the work that has been done these past ten years that I am currently attempting to research and write a comprehensive history of women in the American Methodist movement and family of denominations. This is by no means a solo venture. Like much of women's history, it is more corporate in nature. It is dependent on pioneers, on the work of both secular and religious historians of women, on the new social history, on the feminist movement itself, and on dialogue with all those who, in their own work, are seeking to map a new American Methodist history (Carolyn Gifford, Dick Heitzenrater, Russ Richey, Ken Rowe, and my colleague in Denver, Will Gravely, to name just a few).

It is not that a comprehensive history of women in our tradition is ready to be written. As Ken Rowe is fond of telling me by way of encouragement in this bold venture, we cannot wait for all the pieces of that history to be fully documented. We need an interim piece, a beginning effort at describing and interpreting the larger picture into which the growing number of monographic and smaller studies fit. My attention is to make this history racially inclusive, inclusive of the history of women in the predecessor bodies of The United Methodist Church as well as suggestive of women's history in the broader American Methodist family of denominations, and representative of the rich diversity of women's experience across the country (west as well as east), and over the two plus centuries of our history in this country. Obviously it will have to be highly

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selective and interpretive. I hope it will be faithful to what we are begin­ning to know about Methodist women’s history, and encouraging of fur­ther efforts. Above all, like the women themselves, I want it to be useful to all those committed to a new, more inclusive United Methodist history.

I am entitling my book *Grace Sufficient: A History of Women in American Methodism*, because that phrase from 2 Cor. 12:9: “My grace is sufficient for you” is so suggestive both of the constricting circumstances and struggles of these women’s lives and an important clue to understanding what has empowered and sustained them. Carolyn Gifford urged in 1985 that we needed to pay more attention to the religious lives of Methodist women who became the founders of women’s organizations in the 1870s and 1880s. She had a “hunch” that their shared religious ex­periences and sense of spiritual kinship were the clue to their subsequent dedication to mission work and social reform to which they believed God had called them. She suggested that historians might profitably explore the informal networks among women nurtured through channels like camp meetings and sustained through letter writing, visits, and women’s organizations at the local level.⁹

Similarly, in the bicentennial article to which I have already referred, Ken Rowe stressed the importance of looking to new sources for Methodist history, particularly to the diaries and autobiographies of lay women and men in order to understand more about popular piety, about the religious lives of ordinary Methodist people.

For the remainder of my time this afternoon, I want to share with you some of what I have learned in the past six months or so of research on women’s history in the United Methodist tradition. Please understand that what you are hearing are only my first tentative formulations. I still need to refine them in the light of other scholarship, and to connect them to other parts of the total picture. In other words, this is only the begin­ning. It should also be explained that I began my research with the areas of Methodist women’s history I thought we knew least about: the pre­Civil War years, really the first century (1760s-1860s), and the later twen­tieth century.

Let me try to sum up my major discoveries thus far in three main points:

1) I am looking at what might be called the “pious memoirs” of women born, for the most part, between 1790 and 1830. These constitute a genre of nineteenth century religious writings, usually consisting of a short biography by the compiler, and extracts from the spiritual diaries and letters of the subject. They were intended for the edification of the

reader (the Sunday School scholar, for example) and usually carried the message: "You can do it too!" What is most striking about these women's memoirs is the way the "grace sufficient" theme seems to be central to their religious understanding and experience.

2) One of the surprises of my research thus far has been to discover that the preaching and spiritual leadership of women occurred much earlier and were apparently much more widespread than I (or other scholars) had previously suspected. It is clear that there were women preachers among the Methodist denominations in this country by the early nineteenth century. Women were experiencing a call to preach the gospel and some of them were becoming travelling preachers (not, of course, ordained) as early as the 1810s and 1820s.

3) The third discovery is harder to state precisely than the first two. One of the favorite mottoes of Thelma Stevens, for nearly three decades the leader of the Department of Christian Social Relations of the former Woman's Division, was "All action is local." I am finding that to understand and appreciate the real significance of the women's missionary organizations in helping to train women for leadership in the whole church (and indeed, in more public life as well), it is necessary to look at the strategic linkage between the national leadership and the working of other organizations on all structural levels of the church.

I want to talk briefly about each of these points, a bit more extensively perhaps about the first because it is so fundamental for everything else.

The term "grace sufficient" appears frequently in these women's diaries and letters, autobiographies and biographies, particularly with regard to two major areas of their experience, affliction and vocation. It also comes close to being a summation of their understanding of Christian living. The pattern seems to have been set by exemplary women like Hester Ann Rogers (1756-1794), wife of one of John Wesley's early Methodist preachers, whose spiritual autobiography and letters were widely read by Methodist women in early nineteenth century America. During a severe illness in which she was unsure whether she would live or die, Rogers wrote: "If I lived, I might lose what I now enjoyed of the love of God; and perhaps be one day a dishonour to his cause. But I said, Lord, they grace is ever sufficient; thou art as able to keep me a thousand years as one day!"

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10 Ann Taves (School of Theology at Claremont) has been doing comparative studies of the published memoirs of women from different religious traditions in order to evaluate the thesis about evangelical religion and the empowerment of women with regard to these two key areas of women's experience.

11 An Account of the Experience of Hester Ann Rogers; and her Funeral Sermon, by Rev. Dr. Coke. To which are added her Spiritual Letters. Revised by the editors (New York: Carlton & Phillips, 1856), 38.
When she struggled with spiritual temptations, Rogers reflected, "Those precious words, 'My grace is sufficient for thee,' shall stand firm as the pillars of heaven: and when the enemy would tell me—In such and such a trial thou wilt be entangled and overcome, I tell him, My Lord hath promised strength equal to my day,' and all his darts are instantly repelled."\(^{12}\)

Remember that these women lived in the constant presence of death, whether the ever-present possibility of death in childbirth, or the frequent loss of a child, or even a spouse. In Consecrated Talents, the life of Mrs. Mary W. Mason (1791-1868) written by her daughter, Elizabeth Mason North, there are many quotes from Mary Mason's own diaries and letters. With regard to what she calls her "bodily distress," she writes: "I found his grace, as heretofore, more than sufficient. I think the Lord does not bestow premature or unnecessary grace. All we can expect is grace equal to our day." Or, rejoicing at the birth of a child, she records in her diary, "Glory to his holy name for grace sufficient for our day."\(^{13}\) Those present with Laura Haygood at her deathbed in China mentioned the motto hanging on the wall near her bed. It read: "As thy days, so shall thy strength be."

On a recent trip to the United Methodist Archives and History Center at Drew, I discovered a little gem entitled Walking with Jesus, by Mrs. Sarah Keeler Eames (1931-1864). It consists of the correspondence between Miss Sallie Keeler (later Mrs. Eames) and Miss Susan F. (Susie) Hatch between 1857 and 1864, almost entirely on the subject of holy living. The two women met at a camp meeting in 1857 when Miss Keeler was led to a "still more complete consecration to God." As Sarah Keeler describes perfect love, it is moment by moment dependence on divine grace; it is, if you will, "grace sufficient." Sallie writes to her friend Susie Hatch that she wants to be little and unknown. Yet, in spite of herself, she is always looking into the future, wondering how she can surmount this orthattrial, instead of "claiming that precious promise, 'My Grace is sufficient for thee.' " On learning of the death of her only brother, she writes to her friend, "the Lord has given me grace sufficient for the day." After Sarah's marriage to Brother Eames, the correspondence from her side slackens somewhat, and we find the poignant expression of friend Susan Hatch's loneliness, and concern for the spiritual welfare of her dear friend. The last letter is from Susan Hatch to Brother Eames on hearing of Sarah's death at age 33: "My God's grace prove sufficient for you in this hour of deepest trial."\(^{14}\)

\(^{12}\)Ibid., 190.  
\(^{13}\)Elizabeth Mason North, Consecrated Talents: or, The Life of Mrs. Mary W. Mason (New York: Carlton and Lanahan, 1870; Garland Reprint, 1987), pp. 93-4, 122.  
\(^{14}\)Walking with Jesus: as illustrated in the Life, Correspondence and Death of Mrs. Sarah Eames, ed. by Rev. S. H. Platt, A.M. (New Haven, Conn.: Publ. by her Husband, Harris Eames, 1876), pp. 43, 64, 186.
The examples could be multiplied. In her autobiography *Life Sketches* (1877), Methodist Episcopal local preacher Almira Losee (1825-?) describes the struggle of women like herself on the matter of praying aloud or exhorting in public meetings. That they overcome their hesitance and sense of inadequacy is the result only of inner Divine urging. They do it because of their love for souls and their clear conviction that God requires it of them. Losee is typical also of the women seeking holiness who report that "the tempter" says to them, you will be unable to live a holy life; what if you should lose the evidence? Again, the sense of unworthiness is outweighted only by the constant assurance and sense of trust in the sufficiency of grace. Such an expressive phrase! It is at once indicative of a deep sense of personal inadequacy (so typically female and so revealing of the constricting circumstances of women's lives) and at the same time so theologically profound.

I want to use two illustrations of women as traveling preachers in early nineteenth century America: Jarena Lee, the first female preacher of the first African Methodist Episcopal Church, and Fanny Newell, wife of an itinerant Methodist Episcopal preacher in the New England Conference. Jarena Lee was born in Cape May, New Jersey, in 1783, to free but impoverished parents. She was converted at age 21 under the preaching of Rev. Richard Allen, minister of Bethel AME Church in Philadelphia. About 1811, she apparently first felt a call to preach the gospel and went to see Richard Allen. He told her he had no objection to women holding prayer meetings or exhorting the congregation after the sermon, but the rules of Methodism "did not call for women preachers." In 1811, she married Rev. Joseph Lee, pastor of a black church in Snow Hill, New Jersey, six miles from Philadelphia. Within six years, death took five members of her family, including her husband. She was left with two infant children, ages two years and six months. She moved back to Philadelphia and Bethel Church after Lee's death. By this time, the African Methodist Episcopal Church was officially organized as an independent black denomination, and Richard Allen had been named its first Bishop.

One day at a service in Bethel Church, a minister began preaching but seemed to have lost the spirit. Jarena Lee sprang to her feet "as by an altogether supernatural impulse" and began exhorting. When she sat down, it was with fear that she would be expelled. Bishop Allen instead stood up and related to the congregation that she had asked his permission to preach eight years earlier. Now he expressed the judgment that she was as called to preach as any of the preachers present. Soon after, Jarena Lee began her itinerant preaching career, first in the Philadelphia area, later from upper New York state to Maryland and as far west as Ohio. In one year in the 1820s, she claimed to have traveled over 2000 miles and preached over 175 sermons. She often traveled on foot and spoke to large congregations, both black and white. When possible, she traveled
with "a Sister," that is another woman evangelist. She was completely dependent upon the hospitality of those to whom she went as a preacher. While on these journeys, she left her child with Bishop Allen and his family. She published her own spiritual autobiography in 1836 and in 1849. The shorter version has recently been published in *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century*, edited by William L. Andrews (Indiana University Press, 1986). The longer and later version appears in *Spiritual Narratives*, one of the volumes of the Schomburg Library of Nineteenth Century Black Writers. It was published in 1988 (Oxford University Press), with an introduction by Sue E. Houchins. In explaining why she used the 1849 text, Houchins wrote: "It is my contention that the travelbook quality of the autobiography emphasizes the theme of the woman preacher's literal search for a locus from which to speak."15 Jarena Lee summed up her itinerant preaching efforts with the phrase, "It is better to wear out than rust out." In 1851, the AME General Conference defeated by a large majority a resolution to give women a license to preach.

Fanny Butterfield was born in Sidney, Maine in 1793, and converted at age 15 under the preaching of Methodist itinerant Henry Martin. The following year, that is in 1809, she first called to preach the gospel. In a dream after Brother Martin's death she was told by a messenger to take on his mantle. In 1810, she married Ebenezer F. Newell, and traveled with him around his circuits in Vermont and Maine. The formative experience of her life occurred, however, in 1811 when she almost died a few days after the birth of her first child. She had what we would now call a near death experience, in which she was taken up into heaven and met Christ. He greeted her with the words, "Fanny, you must not come yet; thou shalt not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord to the children of men. Go back to yonder earth."16

She had always been in frail health. In 1818, her husband volunteered to go to St. Croix, at the eastern edge of Maine, near the New Brunswick border. She was reluctant to go. As she wrote in her diary, "I have a comfortable place to live in, and my children are with me and tender; and to think of launching out again ... to face the storms, and plunge through mud and snow in those wild regions. . . . I am ready to say, Have me excused, I cannot go." Her husband went off alone, but Fanny soon began to feel "the afflictions of my mind exceedingly heavy." She remembered Christ's words to her in the vision, "Fanny, go back." When her husband came back for her she went out to greet him with the words, "You have come back for help, have you not?" He answered, "Woman's help." She

15 Notes to the Introduction, xli. Quotes from Jarena Lee's *Religious Experience and Journal* (1849) are on 11, 17, 97.

16 *Diary of Fanny Newell; with a sketch of Her Life, and an Introduction by a Member of the New England Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 4th ed.* (Boston: Charles H. Peirce, 1848), 176.
wrote in her diary, "He does not bid me stop travelling yet. Here am I, Lord, send me to the ends of the earth." Fanny left her children with friends and accompanied her husband on the long, difficult trip by sailing vessel to frontier outposts that had been settled only eight years earlier. She died of consumption (tuberculosis) several years later, at age thirty.

Jarena Lee and Fanny Newell had strikingly similar experiences of a call to preach the gospel. In dreams each woman saw herself preaching to large multitudes; yet they felt their call as a terrible cross for a poor female to bear. Jarena Lee was almost relieved when told that Methodists did not call for women preaching. At times Fanny Newell thought of joining the Quakers because they allowed women preaching. Neither woman had spiritual peace except in striving to do what the Lord required of her. As they expressed it, when they shrank from taking up the cross, they were pierced through with many sorrows. Jarena Lee was fully persuaded that she was called by God to labor in his vineyard. If not, she said, how could he consistently bear testimony in favor of the labors of "his poor coloured female instrument" in awakening and converting sinners? After one of her preaching dreams, Fanny Newell wrote in her diary, "Could I preach as well awake as when asleep, I should think 'woe is me, if I preach not the Gospel,' — and even now, if I were a man I should be willing to go and preach Jesus . . . My mind is led to view Jesus as the only Savior, and he is every way sufficient to save a helpless soul who trusts in him for grace, and receives power daily to conquer every foe." These women and others like them were empowered and authorized by God to do what the church and society told them not to do: not to speak in church; not to play a public role of religious leadership. Divine grace was sufficient to overcome what they called a "manfearing spirit."

In her book With Unveiled Face, Theressa Hoover describes what she sees as unique about United Methodist Women and the Women's Division. One of the eight hallmarks to which she points is the following: "Our organization is strategically linked from the local church through several intermediate levels up to a major national board of the general church." From the beginnings of organized Methodist women, this strategic linkage between the local and national level through several intermediate levels has been a source of strength, empowerment, and effectiveness. In her 1985 article on "Sisterhoods of Service and Reform," Carolyn Gifford reminded historians that the organizational style of the WCTU (linked at every level from local, to district, to state, to the national Union), usually credited to the genius of Frances E. Willard, may well have been borrowed from the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, which preceded it by five years.

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17 Ibid., 198-201.  
18 1836 ed., 37.  
19 Diary, 134.  
20 Theressa Hoover, With Unveiled Face, 10.
In my research to this point, I have worked in the libraries and archives of Duke University, Drew University (at the UM Archives and History Center), and the United Methodist theological schools at Claremont, Garrett-Evangelical, and Iliff. One of the things that has struck me is the incredible richness and diversity of women's lives at the local level. In studying the early history of the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, for example, it is helpful to look at the histories of the New York Branch, and the Pacific Branch, and the Topeka Branch (to which Colorado Methodist women belonged). Just last week, Thelma Boeder showed me in her office two volumes entitled the Quarterly Review of the Minneapolis Branch of the WFMS (1894-1926). This reality, of course, greatly complicates the life of a historian like myself who is attempting to do comprehensive and synthetic history. Thus far the solution seems to be a judicious balance between the national and the local, between the universal and the stubborn complexity of the particular.

One of my doctoral students, Alice Knotts, has just completed a dissertation on the Methodist women's campaign for Southern civil rights, 1940 to 1968. Although its focus is on the national leadership from the Department of Christian Social Relations, headed by Thelma Stevens, the whole thrust of the dissertation is the step-by-step process by which the Woman's Division of the Board of Missions of The Methodist Church led church women at every level to reject segregation in both church and society and to accept civil rights as "our responsibility."

Perhaps the greatest value of They Went Out Not Knowing, the encyclopedia of one hundred women in mission published by the Women's Division to celebrate the Centennial of organized Methodist women, was the opportunity it gave for women in each annual conference to nominate the women they thought deserved to be known across the whole church. In the closing keynote address at the "Women in New Worlds" conference in 1980, historian Donald G. Mathews lifted up a central theme: women's history is everyone's history. Why? Not to assign guilt, nor to look for the contributions of women to the history we already know. As Mathews put it, "the significance of women's history is that the injection of women into our historical consciousness demands a rewriting of everyone's history." The same could, of course, be said about all those who have been part of our lost memory, who tell us something about ourselves that we did not know. In other words, bringing some hitherto unseen part of past reality into visibility changes both our history and our self-understanding. The time has come to rediscover and celebrate the rich diversity of who we have been as United Methodist people. We seek a new past for the sake of a more just and hopeful future, in obedience to that God who makes all things new.