"SHE DILIGENTLY FOLLOWED EVERY GOOD WORK":
MARY MASON AND THE NEW YORK FEMALE MISSIONARY SOCIETY

SUSAN E. WARRICK

In the Sleepy Hollow Cemetery in Tarrytown, New York, a gravestone is inscribed, "Mary W., Relict of Rev. Thomas Mason, died January 23, 1868, aged 76 years and 6 months. She founded the first Methodist Sunday School in New York and several charitable societies to whose interests she devoted 50 years of her life. She brought up children, she lodged strangers, she relieved the afflicted, she diligently followed every good work." Anyone who researches the history of charitable work in antebellum New York City will find Mary Mason among the leadership of such organizations as the Female Assistance Society, the Asylum for Lying-In-Women, and the Female Benevolent Society. She was a founder of the Sunday school movement in New York City, taught at the Five Points Mission, and for more than thirty years ran a day school in her home. She is also remembered as a founder and director of the New York Female Missionary Society of The Methodist Episcopal Church, and it is this activity that invites our attention in this paper.¹

Mary W. Morgan grew up in Philadelphia, where she graduated from the Young Ladies' Academy at the age of 17, prepared to be a teacher. At about that time, her paternal uncle, a Wesleyan preacher, emigrated to Philadelphia, and "took a most affectionate interest in Mary's spiritual welfare."² Her conversion soon followed, to her parents' distress. They had groomed her for the world of genteel society, and her Methodist rejection of parties, pretty dresses, and fine jewelry confused and angered them.

After some months of family tension, Mary Morgan accepted an invitation to teach at a new Society of Friends school for girls in New York. She left home on April 1, 1810, three months shy of her nineteenth birthday. It is perhaps some indication of Mary Morgan's strength of character that she travelled alone to her new home. For a Philadelphian in 1810,

¹I have been interested in Mary Mason, the New York Female Missionary Society, and the Liberian mission for several years, and I am particularly grateful to the General Commission on Archives and History for a six week study leave in 1994 which allowed me to pursue this interest fulltime.
²Elizabeth Mason North, Consecrated Talents: or, the Life of Mrs. Mary W. Mason (New York: Carlton & Lanahan), 14. Elizabeth Mason North was Mary Mason's daughter.
New York was still a small town, but it had the chaotic energy of a place on the move. Commerce was king, and the port of New York was fast becoming the American center of international trade.

New York was also beginning to experiment with organized charity. In a city and at a time when public welfare was a private responsibility, the poor, the ill, and the elderly were totally dependent upon the benevolence of right-minded women and men. Among the best known New York philanthropists were Isabella Graham and Joanna Bethune, mother and daughter, whose work would have been well-known to the young Mary Morgan.

Morgan joined the John Street Methodist Episcopal Church soon after her arrival in New York. There, in the female prayer meetings and band and class meetings, she learned to speak publicly about her spiritual life. She recorded a typical experience in her diary for December 30, 1813: "In the evening met a few of my sisters in Jesus in a band-meeting. . . . At the close of the meeting I trembled for fear of the cross of praying aloud; but hoped I would be excused, being the youngest and least experienced in the company. But the Lord disappointed me, for I was called upon to pray; and never do I remember to have had so powerful a spirit of prayer lent me as at this time."³

These experiences at church and the daily responsibility for some 300 pupils at the Friends' School gave Mary Morgan confidence in herself and her abilities. That confidence, combined with her innate energy and initiative, made her a natural leader. In a setting like New York in the Jacksonian period, as a loyal Methodist, and with the example of women like Bethune and Graham before her, Morgan inevitably poured her energies into works of charity and benevolence.

Mary Morgan's life-long concerns were education and women's needs. Her first organized benevolent effort was a spontaneous reaction to the needs of destitute women in her neighborhood: "November 8, 1813: This day the Lord has graciously owned my labors, with a couple more of my sisters, in forming a little society for the religious instruction and temporal relief of poor sick women. We met each other in the street, and found that our minds had been individually directed to the same thing."⁴ The women named their group the Female Assistance Society. Morgan was elected its secretary and remained an active member for nearly 50 years.

Better known to Methodists is her involvement in the Sunday school movement. Mary Morgan's contemporaries credited her with founding the first Methodist Sunday school in New York. As early as 1812, she began

³*Consecrated Talents*, 62. Mary Morgan's spiritual growth and her Methodist outlook were no doubt reinforced by the arrival of her uncle John Morgan and his family in New York in 1812. This uncle had been the agent of her conversion; she lived with the Morgan family until her marriage and maintained a close relationship with them all her life.

⁴*Consecrated Talents*, 59.
offering spiritual instruction on Sunday mornings in her classroom at the Friends' School. In 1815, women of several denominations, led by Joanna Bethune, formed the New York Female Sunday School Union, inspired by the movement's success in England. Morgan was the only Methodist to attend the organizing meeting, and agreed to promote the Union in the city's Methodist congregations. As a result of her efforts, a regular Methodist Sunday school opened in November 1815, and Mary Morgan was the school's female superintendent.

In April 1817, she married the Rev. Thomas Mason, a South Carolinian who had been appointed Assistant Book Agent of the Methodist Book Concern at the 1816 General Conference. The Masons had ten children; four girls and five boys lived to adulthood. She left the Friends' School in 1818 when pregnant with her first child, but soon opened a private school in her home, which she continued for 34 years. This school, with as many as 60 students at any one time, was an important source of income, particularly after she was widowed in 1843.

Having broadly sketched the circumstances of Mary Mason's life, let us now examine her involvement in the missions movement, where she combined her concerns for education and women's issues in a Methodist context.

**The Missions Movement and the Female Society**

To a significant degree, leadership of the Methodist Episcopal Church by 1820 lay in the New York Annual Conference. The Book Concern moved to New York from Philadelphia in 1804, and became closely tied to the New York preachers. Thomas Mason's election as Assistant Book Agent in 1816 was an important career move that put him in the church's inner circle.

The story of the formation of the Methodist Missionary Society has been told many times. Briefly outlined, word of John Stewart's success as an independent missionary among the Wyandotts of Ohio spread across the church, and interested persons in several annual conferences urged that some sort of formal support be given to this work. At that time, the preachers of the New York Conference met weekly, along with the book agents, editors, and visitors from other conferences. At one of these meetings in 1818, the group resolved to organize a Bible and Missionary Society for the Methodist Episcopal Church. A committee wrote a constitution, which was first approved by the Preachers' Meeting and then presented to a public meeting at the Forsyth Street Church on the evening of April 5, 1819. The Society's constitution closely linked the missionary and publishing interests of the church. Article 13 provided that the Society should be established wherever the Book Concern was located, and that the book agents should be the Society's treasurers. This connection was further strengthened when Thomas Mason, book agent, was elected the Missionary Society's corresponding secretary.
Two days after the constitution was approved at the public meeting, the Board of Managers met for the first time. Joshua Soule moved that "the females attached to the Methodist congregations be invited to form a Society auxiliary to this." His invitation surely came as no surprise to the leading churchwomen of New York, for they were the wives, daughters, and sisters of this new society's founders. They had participated in dinner table conversations and Sunday morning discussions about the plan for a missionary society, had attended the public meeting on April 5, and were ready to play their part in this new venture.\(^5\)

The organizing meeting of the New York Female Missionary Society was held on Mary Mason's 28th birthday, July 5, 1819, at the Wesleyan Seminary on Forsyth Street. The meeting was chaired by Nathan Bangs, a vice-president of the Parent Society.\(^6\) One of the first orders of business was the election of officers. Mary Mason was elected First Directress, a natural choice, for she had earned a reputation for effective leadership through her charitable and educational work, and her husband's positions with the Book Concern and the Parent Society certainly did not diminish her prestige.

Mary Mason's first public task as Directress was to issue an address to the "female members and friends of the Methodist Episcopal Church." She urged women not to "deny the small subscription this institution solicits, to extend the bare necessities of life to our dear brethren who are spending their strength and wasting their health in traversing dreary mountains and pathless forests to carry the glad tidings of free salvation to the scattered inhabitants of the wilderness .... We are not called to the more arduous employments of active life; we are exempted from the toils and cares of official stations in the Church; but God has, nevertheless, required of us that our all should be devoted to his service."\(^7\)

The Female Society's object was "to assist the several Annual Conferences more effectually to extend their missionary labors throughout the United States and elsewhere."\(^8\) Where "elsewhere" might be was as yet undetermined in 1819. The auxiliaries' primary duty was to raise money for the Parent Society, usually in the form of memberships.\(^9\) The latter

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5 Twenty-eight women constituted the founding membership of the New York Female Missionary Society. Of the 15 married women, nine had husbands on the Board of Managers of the "Parent Society," and four of the single women were daughters or sisters of Managers.  
6 Auxiliaries commonly referred to the denominational Missionary Society as the Parent Society, and I will follow that practice for the sake of clarity. I will also use the shorthand "Female Society" for the New York Female Missionary Society.  
7 Quoted in Consecrated Talents, 83–84.  
8 Constitution of the Female Missionary Society of New-York, Auxiliary to the Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, as printed in its 1848 annual report.  
9 Annual membership in the Female Society was $1 and lifetime memberships were $10. In 1819, the Female Society raised $137.29, a significant portion of the Parent Society's $800 income for its first year. Total receipts grew with membership. I do not have a complete
were often given to honor pastors, relatives, and friends. The first list of life members I have found is for 1848; many of the women named are the wives and daughters of bishops and leading clergy. In some ways, the membership lists are a “who’s who” of female Methodism, suggesting that membership in the Female Society was not only popular, but socially correct. One also sees Mary Mason’s social network in action: her daughters, daughters-in-law, granddaughters, cousins, and friends are all to be found on the life membership list.

A network of mission-minded women grew through the 1820s as the Female Society promoted the formation of women’s societies in other locations. Female Associations were soon formed in Albany and Boston, followed by dozens of others over the next few years. These auxiliaries usually were not conference-wide, but rather were localized in cities, circuits, and local churches. Some were auxiliaries to the Parent Society; others were organized as auxiliaries to the Female Society or another auxiliary. As women moved from place to place, they joined or organized new auxiliaries, strengthening the network.

This was certainly true of Mary Mason during several years away from New York. From 1825 to 1832, Thomas Mason held pastorates in New Castle and Newburgh in the Hudson Valley, then up the Hudson River to Troy, where he was presiding elder of the Troy District. The family’s removal from New York came a few months after the death of their youngest child, two-year-old Anna. The appointment to upstate New York forced the family to leave behind poignant reminders of Anna’s life and death, but allowed them to make a fresh start in a new place. By the fall of 1825, Mary was pregnant with her fifth child, and three more children were born during the years in the Hudson Valley.

The years out of New York were busy ones. Thomas Mason travelled his preaching circuits, away from home for weeks at a time. Mary Mason organized Sunday schools, taught day school, was a Sunday school superintendent, and organized juvenile and female missionary society auxiliaries. She also successfully maintained her New York connections to family, friends, and benevolent endeavors. This would have been much more difficult a generation earlier, but improvements in transportation and communication in the 1820s, particularly on the rivers and canals, meant that it only took a few days for letters to travel between Troy and New York, and people travelled easily up and down the Hudson. In fact, record, but contributions apparently peaked in the late 1840s, when amounts totalled as much as $670 per year. The 1861 annual report stated that the Society had raised $20,000 since its founding.

10 Her mother recorded in her diary that “my lovely little Anna” was “an uncommonly pleasant and interesting child; I did not know how to give her up.” Consecrated Talents, 113. Anna was the only one of all ten children to die when a child, although Mary and a second Anna died in childbirth as young women, and at least one son, Benjamin, died before his mother.
the New York Annual Conference met every second year in Troy. The Masons, although no longer city dwellers, had not moved far from the heart of denominational leadership.

During these years, despite Mary Mason's absence from New York, she continued to lead the Female Society, and under her direction, the Society began developing relationships with specific missions and missionaries. They began with the largest Methodist mission of the 1820s, that of James B. Finley and the Wyandotts of Ohio. Finley records in his *History of the Wyandott Mission* that he corresponded regularly with the Parent Society and its auxiliaries, reporting on the mission's progress. In September 1825 he received a letter from Susan Lamplin, secretary of the New York Female Missionary Society. She told him that the Society had chosen to commemorate the centenary of John Wesley's ordination (September 19, 1725) by collecting 256 books "to assist in forming a circulating library among the Wyandott Indians, with whom you have so successfully labored. The affecting accounts we have repeatedly heard respecting their obedience to the faith, have very much interested us in their behalf; and we desire they will regard this present as a token of our Christian affection for them." Along with the books, the Society sent a copy of its regulations for circulating libraries and 1000 library cards.

The books were sent in the fall of 1825. The following January, Wyandott leaders wrote to the Female Society reporting the library's safe arrival. Later that spring, Nathan Bangs, treasurer of the Parent Society, invited Finley to the annual meeting of the Female Missionary Society in July. On July 5, Finley, two Wyandott chiefs (Between-the-Logs and Mononcue), and their interpreter (Mr. Brown) began the ten day trip from Upper Sandusky, Ohio, to New York City by way of horseback, steamboat, and the year-old Erie Canal.

Just before heading down the Hudson to New York, the group spent the weekend with Thomas and Mary Mason, where Finley records they were "received with great cordiality." The family had just moved to Newburgh following Thomas Mason's appointment to the church there, and Mary Mason had just given birth to her fifth child or was in the last stages of that pregnancy. One can imagine the unsettled state of the household, but Mary Mason's biography simply comments on the benefits of the

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11 James B. Finley, *History of the Wyandott Mission, at Upper Sandusky, Ohio: under the Direction of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (Wright and Swormstedt, 1840), 309; see also the 1826 annual report of the Missionary Society, 20.

12 Finley's wording of Bangs invitation is ambiguous, and leads the reader to assume that Finley was invited to the anniversary of the Parent Society. However, the Parent Society met in May and did not report any appearance by Finley. In addition, an analysis of Finley's travel schedule clearly indicates that he made the trip in July. See James B. Finley, *Life Among the Indians, or, Personal Reminiscences and Historical Incidents Illustrative of Indian Life and Character* (Cincinnati: Methodist Book Concern, 1857), 467–468.
visit, which gave a “fresh impetus” to the Masons’ interest in the missionary cause.¹³

Finley’s arrival in New York with the Wyandott chiefs caused a sensation. They were mobbed by curious New Yorkers and spoke to great congregations in the city’s churches. On July 24, they attended the anniversary of the Female Missionary Society, held at the John Street Church. The meeting was well attended by the male and female leadership of the church and reported in great detail in the church and secular press. The Female Society and its First Directress were well pleased with the meeting, the Society’s first real venture into the public sphere. The women had moved beyond simply raising money for the Parent Society to a more personal, active involvement with the missions they supported.

In June 1832, the Masons returned to New York City following Thomas Mason’s re-election by General Conference as Assistant Book Agent. Cholera struck New York that summer, to devastating effect. Thousands fled to the relative safety of the countryside north of Greenwich Village, but the Masons remained in the city. They could not afford to relocate twice within a few weeks. Mary, now 40 years old, was either in the last stages of pregnancy or had just delivered a baby, Jane Amelia. By late 1832 there were seven children in the family, the eldest 14 years old.¹⁴

Thomas became ill with the cholera in early July. Though seriously ill for several weeks, he had recovered sufficiently by the fall to help oversee the construction of a larger home for the Book Concern on Mulberry Street. The early 1830s were a boom time in New York, and the Book Concern was one of hundreds of businesses building bigger, better offices. New York was a city on the move, figuratively and literally. Greenwich Village, a pastoral refuge from the city in the 1820s, was by the 1830s a suburb well on its way to becoming a city neighborhood. After the new Book Concern opened on Mulberry Street in October 1833, the Masons moved north along with it, eventually building a home at 12 Second Street, considered far uptown in the 1830s. Mary Mason lived here for the rest of her life.

By 1832, New York was the center of commerce for the New World. Immigrants, mostly from Ireland and Germany, crowded its streets. Business boomed, but city services, such as they were, could not keep pace with a population that tripled from 1820 to 1845. Observers commented on the city’s dirt, noise, and confusion. A British visitor in 1835 noted “the hurry-scurry of the Broadway and Wall Street,” with their “driving, jostling, and elbowing. Add to this the crashing noises of rapid omnibuses,

¹³History of the Wyandott Mission, 345; Consecrated Talents, 117. The baby’s name was Anna; Mason’s biography does not give her exact birthdate.

¹⁴It is unclear whether the baby was born before or after the move to New York.
flying in all directions . . . and we have a jumble of sights and sounds easy to understand but hard to describe." A prosperous middle class lived increasingly separate from the poor who became more desperate as the decade passed, especially after a great fire in 1835 and the financial Panic of 1837 brought several years of economic depression.15

Mary Mason’s charitable work intensified; she helped found and direct the efforts of several benevolent institutions and agencies through the 1830s. The family joined the newly organized Green Street Methodist Episcopal Church, where she became Sunday school superintendent. She also opened a school in her home with as many as 60 pupils at a time and hosted a female prayer meeting on Monday evenings. All of this activity did not diminish her role in the New York Female Missionary Society, and with her return to New York, she could provide more hands-on leadership. The timing was providential, for in the 1830s the Female Society found a new mission to support.

**A Mission to Liberia**

Between 1820 and 1830, some 1420 free black Americans and emancipated slaves emigrated to Liberia, a tiny colony on the west coast of Africa. Liberian settlement was enthusiastically supported by many Methodist leaders who saw in Liberia not only a solution to the problem of slavery, but also a foothold for missions into the vast, unknown African interior.

Many of the colonists were Methodists, and from the earliest days of settlement the American Colonization Society and the colonists themselves repeatedly expressed Liberia’s need for Methodist pastors. In 1824, the General Conference decided that when there was enough money in the Missionary Society treasury, the bishops should select a missionary for Liberia. By the following January (1825), the Society’s Board of Managers informed the bishops that there was indeed enough money in the treasury and asked them to appoint a missionary.

There the matter lay until 1830, when the Society again asked the bishops to appoint a missionary. Apparently there was no response, so in 1831 the Board asked again. In April 1831, Bishop Elijah Hedding told the Board of Managers that the bishops were having great difficulty locating a suitable man for the mission. Finally, in 1832, Melville Cox was deemed suitable, despite the fact that his health was nearly destroyed by tuberculosis. He sailed for Liberia from Norfolk, Virginia in November 1832.

Cox went to Liberia as a missionary of the Parent Society, but his travelling expenses and support on the mission field were raised by the

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Young Men’s Foreign Missionary Society of New York, an auxiliary of the Parent Society. Another group of laymen, the Young Men’s Foreign Missionary Society of Boston, issued a call for workers to assist Cox in the new mission. Rufus Spaulding and Samuel Wright and their wives responded, as did Miss Sophronia Farrington. A committee of the Boston Society reported that “she was anxious to go to Liberia under the patronage of this society and that her character was very fair.”16 She sailed with the Spauldings and Wrights on November 5, 1833, from Hampton Roads, Virginia, the first single woman to serve as a missionary in the United Methodist tradition.

The story of these first few missionaries to Liberia is quickly told. Melville Cox survived just a few months after his arrival, but lived long enough to lay a foundation for his successors. Phoebe and Samuel Wright died shortly after landing in Monrovia on January 1, 1834, and on May 17 the Spauldings sailed for home, their own health nearly destroyed. All were victims of malaria, called the African fever. Sophronia Farrington refused to leave the mission despite her own illness and stayed alone for some weeks until reinforcements arrived.17 The Young Men’s Foreign Missionary Society of Boston now found itself with just one missionary, herself seriously ill. It asked the Parent Society to assume responsibility for Farrington’s financial support. As far as can be determined, neither of the young men’s societies (in Boston or New York) ever assumed direct responsibility for a missionary again.

The illness and death of these first missionaries was discouraging, but their sacrifices excited the church’s pity and admiration and inspired others to follow in their steps. Over the next 30 years the first generation of female foreign missionaries, fewer than twenty in all, came forward one by one to offer themselves on the missionary altar. Much of their support, financial, emotional, and psychological, was provided by the female missionary societies.

The New York Female Missionary Society was one of the earliest supporters of missions to Liberia. In 1831, before anyone had heard of Melville Cox, the Female Society gave $100 to the Parent Society for the


17On March 5, 1834, Farrington wrote that “I have absolutely refused to go. . . . I laid my life on the altar on leaving America, and I am willing that it should remain there. The hand which led me to New England, and from there here, will sever the silver cord at the most proper time; and till then death can have no power.” The letter was published in church newspapers and is the best known part of Farrington’s story. She finally left Liberia in April 1835 and returned to teaching in her home state of New York. In August 1836 she wrote to the Board of Managers of the Missionary Society, offering herself for Liberia again. She was accepted, but nothing came of it. She was married at age 50 to Mr. George Cone, and died in Utica, New York, on April 13, 1880.
planned Liberian mission. Mary Mason's own interest in Liberia was not limited to the work of the Female Society. In December 1834, she helped organize the “Female Society of the City of New-York for the Support of Schools in Africa,” and was named to its Executive Committee. Early the next year, she and her husband formed a Juvenile Missionary Society at the Greene Street Church. Its main focus was Africa. At least three of the Mason children were active in the Society. While not abandoning any other charitable interests, Mary Mason clearly felt that the time was right to put her considerable energies into support for Liberia.

Ann Wilkins

Another who responded to Liberia's call was a school teacher named Ann Wilkins. In 1834, she wrote to the Missionary Society's Board of Managers offering herself as a teacher of youth in Liberia. The Board voted to consider her application, but no action was ever taken.\(^\text{18}\) Two years later, she attended a camp meeting in Sing Sing, New York, where John Seys, the mission superintendent, pleaded for Liberia. In a famous incident, Ann Wilkins put a note in the collection plate which read, "A sister who has but little money at command gives that little cheerfully, and is willing to give her life as a female teacher if she is wanted." This time, the Board took action, and on June 15, 1837, two days before her 31st birthday, Ann Wilkins sailed to Liberia on the Charlotte Harper.

Ann Wilkins would be remembered for her longevity on the mission field if for nothing else. In the 1830s and 40s, there were few missionaries who did not succumb to the effects of African fever. Many died after a few months. Many others were forced to return to the United States after a year or two. Ann Wilkins, by contrast, served a remarkable 19 years in Liberia. She is best known for the girls' school she established at Millsburgh, north of Monrovia on the St. Paul's River, but her most important contribution may be in demonstrating that a single woman could be an effective missionary, even in a deadly climate.

Like the other missionaries and teachers, Ann Wilkins was employed by the Parent Society, which in turn relied on the auxiliaries for the necessary funds.\(^\text{19}\) As we have already seen in the case of the Wynadott mission, though, the connection between missionaries and auxiliaries could

\(^{18}\)Minutes of the Board of Managers, Missionary Society, Methodist Episcopal Church, September 17, 1834. In the archives of the General Commission on Archives and History, The United Methodist Church.

\(^{19}\)Wilkins' yearly salary was usually $300. The average salary for other teachers, both male and female, was $250. The mission superintendent received about $1000 and other missionaries (i.e. ordained clergy) about $800.

The New York Female Missionary Society supported and corresponded with missionaries in Oregon and on the American frontier as well as in Liberia, but the Liberian mission seems to have been the Society's special concern.
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go far beyond the simple collection and distribution of funds once a year. This was particularly true of the relationship of Ann Wilkins, Mary Mason, and the New York Female Missionary Society. For nearly 20 years, Mason and the Society served Ann Wilkins as lobbyists, confidantes, outfitters, and advisors.

Wilkins first taught in the White Plains Manual Labor School. She soon decided, however, that there was a great need for a school for girls, which she determined to open. In August 1839, she wrote on the subject to Mary Mason:

I never had a more agreeable employment in my life... than I had in the White Plains Manual Labor School... But while I was there I saw reasons why it is not best to keep the boys & girls all in one house, and I formed the plan of a similar institution for girls by themselves to be located on the opposite side of the river in the town of Millsburgh... I mentioned my plan to Rev. Brother Seys and likewise my thoughts of writing to friends in America for help; he told me to do so. I have already written to some, I now take the liberty of asking your 'liberal mind' that is always 'devising liberal things' to cast about & see what can be done in the circle of your activity for this cause. Surely if you could see things as I have seen them you would think it an important cause. 20

The Female Society did not respond to the letter for nearly a year, nor did the Parent Society take any action. The reasons for the delay are not clear, but probably reflected the fact that the letter arrived just as the Missionary Society was preparing to send a large party of missionaries to Oregon. In addition, the Mission Rooms and the Book Concern moved to new quarters on Mulberry Street in 1839, causing a certain amount of administrative disruption. 21

In April 1840, Wilkins sent some samples of writing to Mary Mason from her students at the school in White Plains and reminded Mason that "I wrote you nearly a year ago." The reminder worked, and Mason replied on July 18: "In a former letter, my dear sister, you spoke of a plan for a separate school for girls. I highly approve of the idea, and hope it may be brought about. I spoke to some of the Managers of the Parent Board about it, and they observed it would be best for Brother Seys to make an estimate of what the expense would probably be, and propose some plan for it. I think the Female Missionary Societies would very readily cooperate if they had a defined object." Although Wilkins had spoken to her superintendent about her idea early the previous year, John Seys had not yet formally requested an appropriation from the Parent Society.

20 Ann Wilkins to Mary Mason, August 10, 1839; Missionary Correspondence Files, General Board of Global Ministries, The United Methodist Church; also in North, The Story of the New York Branch, 22.
21 The Book Concern had been destroyed by fire in December 1836. Rebuilding began almost immediately, but with the onset of the Panic of 1837, the work slowed. It was three years before the new building was completed.
Mason, a seasoned veteran of church politics, knew that such a step was necessary before the project could move forward.22

During the weeks that Mason’s letter travelled to Africa, the General Conference met in Baltimore and re-elected Thomas Mason Book Agent. Soon after, disaster struck the Mason family. Thomas Mason was charged with immorality and tried before a committee of the New York Annual Conference. He was found guilty and suspended from all official church standing. On September 29, 1840 he resigned as Treasurer of the Missionary Society. The next spring, he was expelled from the New York Annual Conference. The effect of this blow on the family can readily be imagined, although surviving documents do not give us any window into Mary Mason’s thoughts and feelings during this time.23 For our purposes here, it is important to note that her standing as a leading churchwoman in New York was apparently unaffected by her husband’s fall from grace.

On July 1, 1841, Ann Wilkins arrived in New York after a six-week voyage from Africa. She made the trip for her health and in order to more forcefully present the case for her school. She may well have grown rather impatient with the lack of response to her two-year-old request for assistance. John Seys, the Liberian mission’s superintendent, arrived in New York with her and, as she reported to Mary Mason, “he told me, go on and do all I can for the school . . . and I might tell the people that he would sanction what I do for the promotion of that cause.” The Female Society held a special meeting soon after her arrival, and the women turned their energies to promoting the Millsburgh school. Wilkins settled in with her mother in Cold Spring, New York, and from there travelled through the Hudson Valley, holding “female meetings” and collecting money for her school. In early September she wrote Mary Mason that the “lay brethren” of Poughkeepsie were in favor of holding a public missionary meeting on behalf of the school, but had told her that “it would give weight and influence to the measure, and enable me to proceed with a great deal more confidence, and them likewise, if the Parent Board should give it their sanction.”24

22 Ann Wilkins to Mary Mason, April 22, 1840; Missionary Correspondence Files, General Board of Global Ministries, The United Methodist Church. Mary Mason to Ann Wilkins, July 18, 1840, in Consecrated Talents, 148–149.

23 The only contemporary reference I have found to these events is in a letter from Charles C. North (future husband of the Masons’ daughter Elizabeth) to his family, October 1841: “Poor Lib Mason, how heavy her task must be to take charge of that school and bear the brunt of her father’s disgrace.” In Creighton Lacy, Frank Mason North; His Social and Ecumenical Mission (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1967), 21. Sorrow was added to disgrace in October 1841 with the death of the eldest Mason child, 23 year old Mary. Her infant daughter died a few weeks later.

24 Ann Wilkins to Mary Mason, July 13 and September 10, 1841; Missionary Correspondence Files, General Board of Global Ministries, The United Methodist Church.
Wilkins immediately wrote to the Parent Society's Board of Managers, which read the letter at its September 14 meeting. Once again she proposed "an effort to raise money among her own sex, towards supporting a school for native female children." This is the first reference to the Millsburgh school in the Board minutes. Two weeks later, the Board authorized Wilkins to hold meetings and raise money "towards the expense of educating native females in Africa under the direction of this Board." 25

By December, Ann Wilkins was ready to return to Africa, but she did not leave before making sure that her female school was properly authorized. She arrived in Monrovia in March 1842 and soon moved to Millsburgh. Meanwhile, the Female Society in New York and a Female Education Society in Philadelphia were busy lobbying the Parent Society's Board of Managers. Letters from both groups "in relation to the building of a school house in Africa" were read at the Board's March meeting. In June, the Board voted to inform "the ladies of the New York Female Missionary Society . . . that the Board have full confidence that the proposed manual labor school for native African females, will speedily go into operation; the same having been committed to the discretion of the Superintendent of the Liberia mission; and that if they will pay over to our Treasurer, the funds collected for the purpose of sustaining it, they shall be so appropriated." 26

The school had gone into operation more speedily than the Board realized, for Ann Wilkins had already begun teaching in Millsburgh by the time the Board passed its resolution. On June 20, she reported to Mary Mason that she was "keeping house and teaching school in Millsburgh." She intended that the pupils of the Millsburgh school should be native girls rather than colonists' children, but her plans were initially frustrated. She wrote that the "great difficulty in the way of obtaining female scholars more than male, lies in the fact of their being contracted for, for wives at a very early age." She asked, "What are the Ladies doing for the school? I hope they still keep it in mind, and not only think, but act in favour of it. And what are the Auxiliaries doing? Have you heard anything from them?" 27

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25 Minutes, Board of Managers, Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, September 14 and October 1, 1841; Archives of the General Board of Global Ministries, The United Methodist Church.

26 Minutes, Board of Managers, Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, December 10, 1841; March 16, 1842; June 17, 1842. The letter from Philadelphia was written by Mrs. Rachel Blanding, January 28, 1842. The letter from the New York Female Society was signed by Mary Mason and R. W. Barrett and dated March 13, 1842. Letter from Charles Pitman to Mary Mason, June 21, 1842, Missionary Correspondence Files, General Board of Global Ministries, The United Methodist Church.

27 Ann Wilkins to Mary Mason, June 20, 1842; Missionary Correspondence Files, General Board of Global Ministries, The United Methodist Church.
The following April (1843) Mary Mason outlined just what the ladies were doing for the school. They had prepared a shipment of goods for the school: books, classroom supplies, and clothing. They had responded to her concern about obtaining native girls for her school by appointing a committee to speak to the Parent Board, and, Mason wrote, "I believe, in consequence of our application, they addressed a request to Brother Chase [the mission Superintendent] to place the girls which were in Brother Wilson's school under your care. Has this been done? and have you now under your care some girls who are fitting for teachers? I hope you will write explicity and freely, and with perfect confidence to me. Our Board have their hearts set on a Female Manual Labor School in Africa, and I think will use every means in their power to bring it about." 

The surviving correspondence of Ann Wilkins and Mary Mason is both fascinating and frustrating. One tries to read between the lines, to gain some understanding of these women's personalities and their relationship. Mason was the elder by fifteen years, and her letters often had a maternal tone. She frequently encouraged Wilkins to write freely and frankly, knowing perhaps that Wilkins might be rather circumspect in her letters to the Parent Society. She always assured Wilkins of the Female Society's affection, support, and desire to help, as in a letter written on October 26, 1845:

And now, my dear sister, let me affectionately inquire, how are you getting on in your responsible station? ... We are very much interested in all your movements. Do not fail to write us at every opportunity. You can effect more by your letters than would many missionary addresses. Do not fear to be too circumstantial; you may trust our prudence in publishing; but we want to know the true state of the missions in Africa. ... Let us know if you want anything to assist you in your labors, and your wants shall be met as far as we are able. And ever remember, my dear sister, in all your toil and discouragements, you have a sympathizing band of sisters in New York, who are ever praying for you, and are deeply interested in all the concerns you, and ready at all times to assist you in word and deed. 

It is also clear that Mason felt that the Female Society should function as the missionary's advocate before the Parent Society's Board of Managers, as illustrated in the Society's efforts toward locating native girls for the Millsburgh school. The Female Society also responded to the very practical needs of the Millsburgh school with shipments of supplies ranging from textbooks and clothing to a cookstove, garden seeds, and bricks and mortar. In January 1846, Wilkins wrote the Parent Society's Board

28Mary Mason to Ann Wilkins, April 12, 1843, Consecrated Talents, 153. The Missionary Society's Board of Managers minutes for December 21, 1842 record that a letter about the Manual Labor School for Girls was received by the Board from the New York Female Missionary Society. Brother Wilson was a colonist and member of the Liberia Annual Conference who taught at a mission school.

29Mary Mason to Ann Wilkins, October 26, 1845; in Consecrated Talents, 165; and in The Story of the New York Branch, 19.
of Managers outlining the need for repair and expansion of the mission house and school room. When the Board did not respond, Wilkins wrote to Mary Mason, who brought the need before the Female Society at its May Board meeting. The necessary funds were raised by those in attendance, and Mason presented the money and another letter of request from Wilkins to the Parent Society's Board in September. The Board read Wilkins' letter, and took action "in reference to the condition of the School House at Millsburgh. Corresponding Secretary is to write to [the Superintendent] and authorize him to make necessary repairs." By March 1847, workmen were constructing a brick building for the school in Millsburgh. Mary Mason reported to Ann Wilkins in November that "we have pressed the subject of the rebuilding of your house on the parent Board until I think we have made arrangements to have it done."\textsuperscript{30}

The Female Society again came to Ann Wilkins' assistance in 1846, when a young woman named Laura Brush volunteered to go to Liberia. After lengthy discussion, the Board of Managers, frightened by the missionaries' mortality rates, determined not to accept Brush's application. At its very next meeting, however, the Board authorized her appointment as Ann Wilkins' assistant. This change in Laura Brush's fortunes was due to impassioned lobbying by Mary Mason and the Female Society. Mason reported to Ann Wilkins, "We had more difficulty than we expected in getting [the Board's] consent to send Sister Brush as your assistant. Some talked as though it was certain death to send a white female to Africa; but we contended that you and Sister Stocker had lived and been useful there; and that if the Lord called Sister Brush to go, he could take care of her there as well as in New York."\textsuperscript{31}

Conclusion

Ann Wilkins taught in her school for another decade, finally retiring in 1856 at the age of 50. She returned to the U.S., her health broken, and died in November 1857. Mary Mason was with her the day she died.

\textsuperscript{30}Minutes, Board of Managers, Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, September 16, 1846; Mary Mason to Ann Wilkins, November 25, 1846; in \textit{Consecrated Talents}, 171.

\textsuperscript{31}Minutes, Board of Managers, Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, October 9 and November 18, 1846; Mary Mason to Ann Wilkins, November 25-27, 1846, \textit{Consecrated Talents}, 171-172. Laura Brush worked with Ann Wilkins in Millsburgh until forced by ill health to leave Liberia in 1849. She later went to California and taught in a mission school there. The \textit{Missionary Advocate} reported in September 1859 that she wished to return to Liberia, but no action was ever taken.

Mrs. Stocker was the former Lydia Ann Beers, who had also offered herself for the Liberian mission at the Sing Sing camp meeting and sailed with Ann Wilkins. She married a Methodist missionary, William Stocker, in 1839; he died soon after, and in 1845 she married Albert Bushnell, a missionary of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. Together they served with the ABCFM in Gaboon, West Africa, where she died in 1850.
Mason, then 66 years old, remained in relatively good health, but over the next few years she gradually withdrew from public life and domestic responsibilities, living alternately with two of her daughters. She died in January 1868 at the age of 76.

The New York Female Missionary Society ceased to exist in 1861. Its annual report for that year offered an explanation for its decline: "Almost all our founders, with the earliest donors and subscribers, have passed away. . . Now each church is desirous to report a large missionary collection; every Sunday-school is anxious to excel in their contributions. This accounts for our diminished receipts." The Society was in a sense swallowed up by growing denominational support for the foreign missions movement. On a more personal level, the Society did not rebound from Ann Wilkins' death and Mary Mason's retirement.

However, the Society's influence was far-reaching in subtle but important ways. Mary Mason and the New York Female Missionary Society demonstrated women's effectiveness as fund-raisers, lobbyists, and organizers. From its beginnings raising money for the Missionary Society, the Female Society grew into a forceful advocate for women in mission. It supported female missionaries and encouraged a developing network of local and regional women's missionary organizations. It was this network that prepared Methodist women for a broader involvement in missions.

The year after Mary Mason's death, on March 22, 1869, eight women braved a storm to meet at the Tremont Street Church in Boston, where they organized the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society of The Methodist Episcopal Church to send single women to the mission field. While its purpose was both more specific and more far-reaching than the Female Society's fifty years before, the WFMS was the direct descendent of those women who had organized in 1819 "to assist the Annual Conferences more effectually to extend their missionary labors." Fittingly, several managers of the new society's New York Branch were former managers of the New York Female Missionary Society. They included Elizabeth Mason North, Mary Mason's daughter and mother of Frank Mason North, who would in a later era serve the movement his grandmother loved as the corresponding secretary of the Methodist Board of Foreign Missions.

Mary Mason's active life reflects her active age; both were energetic, enthusiastic, and confident. She mobilized women, men, and children to organize for mission, education, and benevolence. She stands as one of the pioneers of the Methodist missions movement, and the inscription on her gravestone is indeed an appropriate epitaph: "She brought up children, she lodged strangers, she relieved the afflicted, she diligently followed every good work."

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32 Consecrated Talents, 279.