

**“MABEL K. HOWELL: A MODERN APOSTLE”
1873-1957**

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Mabel Katharine Howell was an early twentieth-century educator, author, church administrator and influential mission leader in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Although directly involved with key leaders of the woman’s missionary societies, bishops and Board of Missions executives for sixty years she is *not* popularly remembered. She *is* mentioned and/or quoted by numerous church historians.

Her first teaching position after graduation from Cornell University in 1896 was in Richmond, Kentucky. There she met Belle Harris Bennett, already a well-known leader in both the home and foreign woman’s missionary societies. Miss Bennett was 20 years her senior but their friendship and close working relationship continued until Belle’s death in 1922. Miss Howell wrote, “She, [Bennett], became for me as a young woman, life’s greatest inspiration.”¹

Howell’s family information is limited to obituaries, census reports and Howell’s incomplete reference in, “The Service Motive.” She was born in South Orange, New Jersey, November 23, 1873, the daughter of John and Katharine Smith Howell, the second of seven children. She made no reference to her childhood. She died May 19, 1957, in Asheville, North Carolina and was buried with her parents and sister Helen in the family plot in Forest Hill Cemetery, Morganton, North Carolina.²

Mabel K. Howell was a well-educated woman. Nothing is known of her elementary or high school years. Her PhD from Cornell included specializations in history and economics. She earned an MA from the Chicago University School of Theology. She completed two sociology courses at Chicago University, plus short-term studies at the New York School of Philanthropy, Columbia University and the New York School of Social Work.³ She taught Latin and History at the Madison, Kentucky, Institute for

¹ Mabel K. Howell, “Belle Harris Bennett – A Missionary Statesman - The Greatest Woman Southern Methodism Produced,” written following Bennett’s death in 1922 (Howell Papers, Laskey Library, Scarritt-Bennett Center, Nashville, TN).

² Howell, *The Service Motive, A Survey of a Half-Century of Scarritt College Alumni in Lands Abroad, 1892-1942*, unpublished manuscript (Laskey Library, Scarritt-Bennett Center, Nashville, TN). Siblings were Blanche, Edgar, Harry, Helen, Chester and Maurice. Obituary data and census reports were partial; none listed all seven children. Blanche was a missionary in Brazil of the Woman’s Board of Foreign Missions.

³ Best sources: Scarritt Bible Training School Year Books of 1912-1913, 7; *Scarritt College Catalog*, 1935-1936, 6; Howell, *Motive*, 85.

four years; and was teaching Latin in 1902 at the Asheville, North Carolina, Female Academy when invited to teach sociology at the Scarritt Bible and Training School for Missionaries and Other Christian Workers, in Kansas City, Missouri.

The story of the Scarritt Bible and Training School (SBTS) reflects the vision, life work and missionary passion of Belle Harris Bennett, Maria Layng Gibson and Mabel K. Howell. Established in 1892 by the Woman's Board of (Foreign) Missions (WFMS) to train young single women for foreign missionary service, it later assumed deaconess training for the Woman's Home Missionary Society (WMHS).

Belle Bennett, considered a founder of "Scarritt," travelled throughout the church securing funding as an "agent" of the WFMS. From 1892 and until her death in 1922, she was a member and vice president of Scarritt's Board of Trustees.

Maria Layng Gibson, principal of "Scarritt" at its founding, was an active member of the Woman's Board of (Foreign) Missions and became national president in 1906. She and Bennett had worked together for a decade when Bennett's influence brought Miss Howell to Missouri.

Mabel K. Howell was a faculty member at SBTS from 1902-1918; and at Scarritt College for Christian Workers from 1926-1943, with an additional two-year special assignment.

Belle Bennett became president of the Woman's Parsonage and Home Mission Society (later Woman's Home Missionary Society - WHMS.) It had responsibilities for building and furnishing parsonages in the United States and "for otherwise aiding the cause of Christ." In 1901, the WHMS asked the Scarritt Trustees for the privilege of placing a teacher of sociology and home missions on their faculty. After approval the Training School opened a Department of Sociology with Mabel K. Howell as instructor. Her salary was \$750 annually.

The WHMS petitioned the 1902 General Conference to establish the Office of Deaconess in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. It was approved, and in an unexpected action, administration of the Office was assigned to them. "Scarritt," with its already established Department of City Work, became the official training school for deaconesses as well as foreign missionaries.⁴

Thus began Miss Howell's forty-three year relationships as teacher, and with Board of Missions executives, with missionaries, deaconesses, mission agencies, bishops and world leaders. It was the genesis of a unique bond among Misses Bennett, Gibson and Howell. Alice Cobb, in "Yes Lord,

⁴ See accounts by Robert W. Sledge, *Five Dollars and Myself: The History of Mission of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1845-1939* (New York: General Board of Global Ministries, 2005), 50; Noreen Dunn (Tatum), *Crown of Service: the Story of Women's Work in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1878-1940* (Nashville, TN: Parthenon Press for Board of Missions, Women's Division of Christian Service, 1960), 32; John Patrick McDowell, *The Social Gospel in the South: The Woman's Home Missionary Society Movement in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1886-1939* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1982), 23.

I'll Do It" described it: "Belle Harris Bennett in concert with the Woman's Board of Foreign Missions conceived and birthed the Training School; Maria Layng Gibson, its first principal, nurtured the school for more than twenty-five productive years; and Mabel K. Howell set the stage for the making of Scarritt College."⁵

Sociology was a newly developing academic field in 1902 when Howell arrived at SBTS. Before undertaking any teaching, she requested and was granted 1902-1903 as a time to investigate this pioneering field. She visited most of the prominent seminaries and "found it all a very depressing experience. Religious institutions not only did not carry courses in her field, but they failed to recognize its importance for ministers." She visited Hull House and Chicago Commons, and resided for several months at the Jacob Riss Settlement in the Hebrew section of New York City.

Howell found academic help at the University of Chicago Department of Sociology, opened in 1892, the third in the United States at that time. She took courses with Dr. Charles Henderson and Dr. George Vincent. She concluded her best help was in the places where practice accompanied theory but found only twenty-five books deemed suitable for Scarritt's sociology library.⁶ She designed the curriculum that established a Department of Sociology. The 1903 Yearbook named her Sociology Professor with four courses: "Sociological Studies and the Gospel and Epistles," "The Family," "Problems of Poverty and Crime" and "The Church and Social Service."

The 1904 Yearbook stated the Department's purpose: "to teach students to investigate for themselves the present day social conditions in our country and especially in our cities." Misses Elizabeth Billingsley and Howell are named teachers in the Department of Church History and Missions. Sociology courses were: "Problems of American Society," "Poverty and Charities," "Crime and Its Punishment" and "The Church and Social Service." Howell also taught in the Department of Industries.⁷

Seminaries were not the only religious institutions that failed to give credence to sociology. Some at Scarritt had uncertainties as well. Sociology was an "unreligious" subject that could not have a place in the "religious" curriculum. It was given a separate time block in the afternoon. Years later Miss Gibson reflected on these misgivings: "Sociology had not yet been adopted by the leading theological schools of the country. Indeed, Christian leaders had not yet come to a vision of social redemption. They persisted in the sole emphasis on individual salvation and regarded the new ideas of changing environment as a worldly idea and dangerous to the evangelistic objective."⁸

Howell also recalled an invitation to speak at an (unnamed) Annual

⁵ Alice Cobb, *Yes, Lord, I'll Do It! Scarritt's Century of Service*, Scarritt College, Nashville, TN, 1987, vii, 23.

⁶ Cobb, 25-26; Howell, *Motive*, 85.

⁷ SBTS 1903 Year Book, 7, 25; SBTS 1904 Year Book, 23, 24, 26.

⁸ Maria Layng Gibson and Estelle Haskins, *Memories of Scarritt* (Nashville, TN: Cokebury, 1928), 148.

Conference. The presiding bishop introduced her saying, “We are to have as our next speaker, Miss Mabel K. Howell, who will talk on the subject of: ‘The Church and Social Service.’” Then he added, “I have never read a book on sociology in my life and I hope I never will. We will now hear Miss Howell.” She added, “[I] will not forget with what enthusiasm the young pastors demanded the address be published.”⁹

Historian Robert W. Sledge declared that despite early misgivings of her work a century later it was said, “[she] began to lead Scarritt, eventually the Woman’s Home Board, and still later the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, itself, into social work among the underprivileged in the South.” One obituary stated, “She was one of the first to realize the importance of social work in the field of missions.”¹⁰

The early 1900s saw a mass influx of immigrants from European countries, a changing understanding of “charity vs. social service” and the growth of the settlement house movement. Both the Home and Foreign Societies were influenced by these forces. By the 1912-1913 academic year Howell was teaching six courses which included “Problems of American Society,” “Scientific Philanthropy” and “The Inspection of Social Agencies.”¹¹

A significant Howell innovation was making field work a valid academic course with the Department of Sociology as the supervisor. In cooperation with the WHMS students researched community needs and helped establish a Day Nursery among Mexican and Italian families in Kansas City’s North End. When the Campbell St. Church burned and was temporarily relocated, students worked with its leaders “in developing the institutional features of future work.”¹²

Virginia E. Brereton in a 1981 article, “Preparing Women for the Lord’s Work,” said, “she [Howell] gathered ideas for her post by visiting the best known settlement houses and institutional churches in the nation. Drawing upon these experiences, Howell’s classes studied social problems and discussed the church’s role in their solution. Under the influence of an active department of sociology, Scarritt expanded the early informal practical work to more closely supervised field work.”¹³

The WHMS 1908 annual meeting created a “Committee on Social and Industrial Conditions” to study social conditions obtaining to our land and

⁹ Cobb, *Yes, Lord*, quoting Howell’s *Motive*, 26; Mary Agnes Dougherty, *My Calling to Fulfill, Deaconesses of the United Methodist Tradition*, Women’s Division, General Board of Global Ministries, 1997, 172. *The Scarritt Voice*, (Spring, 1949), identified the Bishop as Warren Akin Chandler.

¹⁰ Robert W. Sledge, *Five Dollars and Myself: The History of Mission of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1845-1939* (New York: General Board of Global Ministries, 2005), 350; *The Methodist Woman* (November, 1957), 50.

¹¹ SBTS Year Book, 1912-1913, 32; Howell, *Motive*, 90.

¹² Cobb, *Yes, Lord*, 27; Noreen Dunn Tatum, *Crown of Service: The Story of Women’s Work in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1878-1940* (New York: Parthenon Press, 1960), 278; SBTS Year Book, 1912-1913, 32; Howell, *Motive*, 90.

¹³ Virginia L. Brereton, Article published In *Women in New Worlds* 9 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1981), 187-188.

the most successful philanthropy methods in use. Howell, an associate member, was named chairperson to facilitate cooperation. The 1910 newly created Woman’s Missionary Council (WMC) named Howell an “Honorary Member” and assigned her to its “Committee on Social Service” and the “Committee on City Missions and Deaconess Work.”¹⁴ The Committee on Social and Industrial Conditions repeatedly renamed, became the root of the WMC Bureau of Christian Social Relations. Howell was named Bureau Superintendent in 1916.¹⁵

Howell engaged in activities beyond classroom and committee. In 1903, she began contributing articles to *Our Homes*, the magazine of the WHMS; and later wrote for *The Missionary Voice*, *World Outlook* and *The Methodist Woman magazines*. Her first article was “Deaconesses and Home Making;” her last in 1943 was “Colonies of the Kingdom.”¹⁶

She made her first trip abroad in 1910, accompanying Belle Bennett, a delegate to the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh. Later she travelled with her in Asia; and in 1928 visited South America.

Scarritt faced a financial crisis in 1915 when a financial officer embezzled \$146,000. As Bennett and the Board struggled to secure needed funds; it resulted in cancelled scholarships; reduced course offerings; and enrollment dropped. After a new president was named Howell resigned and in 1918 was elected by General Conference to be Administrative Secretary of the Board of Missions Oriental Fields in charge of WMC work in China, Japan, and Korea.

Council Staff were ex-officio voting members of the Council. Howell became a member of eight committees in addition to her Asia tasks. Assignments included recruitment of deaconesses and missionaries, literature production and finance. In 1919, she was named to the Council’s Executive Committee. In her eight years as Council secretary, she was involved with the recruitment, selection, orientation and placement of 34 new missionaries to China, Japan and Korea.

It was established policy for Administrative Secretaries to accompany the Council president on international visits.¹⁷ An outgrowth of her first China visit was the 1924 creation of the Woman’s Union Christian Medical College in Shanghai. It required annual trips to New York to secure support of other denominational woman’s societies. The Hospital’s Clinic building was named for Bennett; the medical students’ dormitory, a gift from the Council, honored Howell. More than 25 years later, as a member of the Woman’s

¹⁴ The Woman’s Missionary Council (WMC) was a forced merger of the Woman’s Home and Foreign Societies by the 1910 General Conference. The formerly independent Societies became a unit of the Board of Missions. Belle Bennett, president of the Home Society since 1896, was elected president of the Council.

¹⁵ Mary Noreen Dunn, *Women and Home Missions* (Nashville, TN: Cokesbury, 1936), 74-75; Howell, *Motive*, 97, 98.

¹⁶ A total of 35 articles have been identified in addition to her two books written between 1903-1957.

¹⁷ Mabel K. Howell, *Women and the Kingdom: Fifty Years of Kingdom Building by the Women of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. 1878-1928* (Nashville, TN: Cokesbury, 1928), 83.

Division of Christian Service, she was named to the Board of the Medical School.¹⁸

The WHMS and the Council strongly supported the settlement house movement and initiated projects named Wesley House or Bethlehem Centers. Bennett visualized these centers serving a great need in Asia and during her 1919 Korea trip strongly urged the establishment of socio-evangelistic centers in Songdo, Seoul and Wonsan. Howell supervised the opening of Tai Wha Christian Community Center in Seoul in 1921, which continues today as a large multi-service center. Other centers opened in Chulwon and Choonchum.

A third Council emphasis was establishing kindergartens in Japan. Howell later recalled her struggle to find trained U.S. workers, but recalling this later said that “The Kindergarten in Japan is an independent institution of *distinctive character*. It is unrelated to other educational processes. They are a vital evangelizing force; hundreds of homes have been won to Christ through kindergarten children.”¹⁹

Howell worked cooperatively with Board of Missions General Secretary W. W. Pinson. In 1916, he initiated the Centenary Movement in celebration of the founding of the Methodist Missionary Society. Carried out cooperatively with other branches of Methodism, he chaired the joint group. His goal was to secure \$35,000,000 for southern Methodist missions. Belle Bennett was the only woman named to the Joint Commission; later Howell was named to the “Centenary Committee of 100” charged with securing and allocating funds for China, Japan, and Korea.

Reporting to the Council in 1919 Howell wrote, “Economically one wonders how we could have gotten along without it [Centenary Fund] in China The Centenary was divinely timed to meet an economic crisis. Spiritually, the Movement has been a great blessing to missions.” The Council had received upwards of two million dollars for its work.²⁰

In 1918, finances were not the only Training School concern. Expansion Plans could not be accomplished within the present school structures. Dr. Edmond F. Cook was named president; Gibson continued as principal. The WMC appointed a “Committee to Make a Survey of Educational Institutions” with the stated purpose “to survey leading educational institutions in the South with a view to determining where the best educational facility and the most favorable terms of affiliation might be secured for Scarritt Bible and Training School.” Howell was one of five committee members.²¹ The School relocated to Nashville, Tennessee, in 1923 as Scarritt College for

¹⁸ Mrs. R. W. MacDonell, *Belle Harris Bennett, Her Life Work* (Nashville, TN: The Woman’s Section of the Board of Missions, 1928), 175, 187, 226; Tatum, *Crown of Service*, 1, 4, 5; and Mary O’ Daniel, “Mabel K. Howell Hall Dedicated,” in *Missionary Voice* (April, 1928), 29.

¹⁹ Howell, *Women and the Kingdom*, 156; Tatum, 134, 140-141, 143. At Methodist union in 1940 the Council was supporting 30 kindergartens with an enrollment of 12,000.

²⁰ MacDonnell, 157-158; Tatum, 340; WMC 1919 Report, 39; the WMC 31st Annual Report indicated Centenary income through 1927; the largest offerings were in 1920-1923.

²¹ Cobb, *Yes, Lord*, 33; Tatum, 310; Howell, *Motive*, 117..

Christian Workers.

Miss Bennett's failing health was evident during the March, 1922, Memphis Council meeting. Members, and especially Bennett, were struggling with yet another proposed reorganization of the Board of Missions with serious implications for the Council. She was unable to attend General Conference and died July 2, 1922. Howell's grief was profound remembering the twenty years they had been co-workers sharing many difficult circumstances. She shared her remembrances in a ten-page article written after Bennett's death, "A Missionary Statesman. The Greatest Woman Southern Methodism Produced."²² Following Bennett's death, the WMC named Howell to three special Council committees: "The Belle Bennett Memorial," "Bennett Legacy" and "Scarritt Lectureships."

The Board of Missions participated in the 1925 Foreign Missions Convention in Washington, DC, attended by approximately 8,000 persons, 3,400 representing thirty-two foreign mission boards and societies in the U.S. and Canada. President Calvin Coolidge delivered the opening address. National and international missionary leaders attended, including Dr. Walter Lambuth, Dr. E. Stanley Jones, Dr. John R. Mott, and Toyohiko Kagawa. Howell, a member of the W. W. Pinson delegation, was one of five presenters on the theme "Christ: The Salvation of the Problems of the World."²³

The worst elements of the feared reorganization of the Board of Missions were not approved. A compromise was reached. Four years later (1926) the Board was again reorganized by General Conference; staff positions were realigned and reduced. The two women whose staff positions were pending had equal tenure. Howell was moved to become secretary of the new Department of Education and Promotion because of her versatility and early experience.

She left the Board to accept appointment as Professor of Foreign Missions at Scarritt College. At her retirement, Dr. J. Minton Batten, Vanderbilt University professor, recalled college staff were thrilled at the news of her return, "She had already attained nation-wide recognition as an authority on the history, theory and administration of missionary work."²⁴

Scarritt was a new world when Howell returned in 1926. She had been deeply involved in the woman's missionary societies and the SBTS for twenty-five years, but the Training School for single women located in Kansas City had become a co-ed College in Nashville, Tennessee, adjacent to Peabody College and Vanderbilt University. While the Belle Bennett Memorial buildings were under construction, the college occupied multiple neighborhood structures built as family homes. The year after Howell rejoined the faculty, she was saddened by the death of her long time co-worker, Maria Layng Gibson who in 1921 had been named President Emeritus by

²² Howell, "Statesman."

²³ A full text of all speeches was published in 1925 as a part of the Convention report.

²⁴ Tatum, *Crown of Service*, 157; WMC Journal, 1926-1927, 65; *Scarritt College Voice* (Spring, 1949), 4.

President Dr. Jesse L. Cuninggim.

In May, 1926, the Scarritt's Department of Foreign Missions had eight courses. As Council staff, Howell had already been a "special instructor" for "Missionary Organization and Administration." That fall the Department had twelve courses; and her continuing interest in sociology is evident in the course, "Social Backgrounds of Mission Fields."

Howell's Council travel in Asia provided invaluable insights and contacts which enriched her teaching. Associations with Board of Missions colleagues provided information on mission work in Europe, Africa and South America. She believed two groups of students needed a thorough understanding of the foreign mission task: those planning to give their lives to foreign missionary service and those who had responsibility at home for promoting foreign missions.²⁵

As the Council celebrated its 50 year-history in 1928 Howell accepted two Jubilee assignments: writing the history of the Society and travelling to Brazil as a "Jubilee Messenger." Her book, *Women and The Kingdom*, was described as "a most valuable book to every Methodist library for its accurate, authoritative records of [Council] events and institutions." The Preface stated, "To the Scarritt Students taking my course on 'The Modern Missionary Movement' in 1926, I am deeply indebted for painstaking research of original sources."²⁶

The Brazil trip's purpose was to strengthen relationships between the societies at home and abroad. The Council also created a "Distinguished Service Roll" of 100 women who had given significant leadership through the years. It included Bennett, Gibson and Howell.

Following actions of the 1928 General Conference of the MEC; 1930 General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South; and the 1930 Korean Annual Conferences, a Joint Commission was created with the following purpose: "to formulate a basis of union, to call an Autonomous Conference in Korea, and to perform such other acts as may be necessary in the organization of the Methodist Church in Korea." Each U.S. church named five "commissioners;" Howell was one of the five from the southern church.²⁷

She sailed to Korea in September, 1930, with several new missionaries and worked with other commissioners through the end of the year. The new Korean Church constitution included provision for the ordination of women and a special provision for the ordination of missionaries. Howell's influence cannot be documented, but she had supported suffrage and laity rights for women during the 1920s, and the Council's 1930 General Conference petition for clergy rights for women. The Korea trip included time in Japan.²⁸

Scarritt's concern for international relations led to the establishment

²⁵ Howell, *Motive*, 147; *Scarritt College Catalog* 4.2 (March, 1927).

²⁶ Howell, *Women and the Kingdom*, 8.

²⁷ Sledge, *Five Dollars*, 386; 47; fn 8.

²⁸ *Missionary Voice* (March, 1931), 30; pp 16-17; 35-49.

of Nashville’s International Club in 1932.²⁹ It was an outgrowth of the Department of Missions. Howell was the first president. Over 140 persons representing twenty countries attended the first meeting. It was a city-wide club to promote international friendship and the study of international relations.

In the early 1930s, Scarritt’s Department of Missions curriculum expanded with the establishment of the Crossville [Tennessee] Rural Center³⁰ on a 420-acre farm. The Department of Home Missions and Sociology had earlier originated the emphasis. “Crossville” was to be a place where missionary candidates had supervised opportunities for block fieldwork and internships

That same year the WMC established a Committee on Rural Development. In 1934, the General Conference authorized a Rural Commission with Council representation and in 1936, Howell became the chairperson of each. Their “Joint Plan of Rural Cooperation” involving multiple agencies was lodged at the Rural Center. One of her courses was “Experiments in Village and Rural Construction.” At retirement in 1943, Howell accepted a two-year appointment from Scarritt president Dr. Hugh C. Stuntz, as Director of the Crossville Rural Center. The Center’s Library was named in her honor at her “final” retirement in 1949.

Howell’s status changed in 1926 but Council membership continued. By 1930, she held membership on three committees plus the Council’s Executive Committee. The next quadrennium she was additionally assigned to four special committees. She chaired “The Committee on Rural Development.” Council work was in addition to her teaching schedule but by mid-decade she was teaching eight courses annually. Scarritt would become known as a center for training educators, but the origins were with Howell’s decades-earlier courses, such as, “Objectives, Materials and Methods of Christian Education.”³¹

As plans for the Methodist church union evolved in the late 1930s, Howell was named to the Council’s Ad Interim Committee to help draft plans for the new Woman’s Division of Christian Service (WDCS) of The Methodist Church. At the time of her death, Board of Missions president Bishop Arthur J. Moore, recalled, “The Plans for the Board of Missions of The Methodist Church were structured largely by the thinking and planning of Miss Howell.”³²

In April, 1940, as the Council³³ concluded its work, Howell was assigned several continuing tasks: 1) Member of the Committee to write the Council’s history, 1878-1940; 2) Secretary of the (Scarritt) Room of Remembrance and Bennett-Gibson Lectureship Committees; 3) Council representative to

²⁹ Cobb, *Yes, Lord*, 51; Scarritt *Bulletins*, Feb, 1932, #1, 19; Feb., 1933, #2, 6.

³⁰ Howell, *Motive*, 168; Scarritt *Voice* (Spring, undated), “Youth Must Lead;” Tatum, 296; 350, 353-354; Scarritt *Voice* (Spring, 1949), 6; Knotts, *Fellowship of Love* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1996), 79.

³¹ WMC Journal, 1930-1931, 1934-1935; Scarritt College Catalog; 1936-1937, 44-46.

³² Bulletin, St. Paul’s Methodist Church, Asheville, NC November 10, 1957.

³³ WMC 31st Annual Report (April, 1940), 8, 9, 13-15, 20.

the 1940 Foreign Missions Conference; and 4) Committee member “to investigate and make corrections” in the *1940 Book of Discipline* to address Council concerns.

The new Methodist Board of Missions (and WDCS) was organized in July, 1940. Howell was elected to her third membership on a national woman’s mission agency. She was assigned to both the WDCS and the Division of Foreign Missions. Based on her Council experience she was named to the WDCS Executive Committee; the Department of Work in Foreign Fields, four sub-committees; and both the WDCS and Board Committees on Missionary Personnel.³⁴

Miss Howell was 70 years old in 1943 when she retired from teaching at Scarritt College, having already accepted a two-year assignment at the Crossville Rural Center. She was feted during the 1944 Commencements season with multiple accolades and activities: named Professor Emeritus; honored with a “Family Dinner” and featured in the student publication.³⁵

Faculty associates said of her, “All who know Miss Mabel K. Howell respect her well-balanced judgment. They soon learn to share her optimistic enthusiasm for the tasks at hand; few people have matched Miss Howell in her masterly ability to coordinate reason, enthusiasm and will power. Her academic records at Cornell University and the University of Chicago are unique; hers is an insatiable intellectual curiosity. Church boards make constant use of the wealth of the information which she has mastered and she is rated as one of the leading world authorities on her chosen fields of Missions.”

As she was leaving Nashville in 1949, for her “final” retirement, there were additional awards and recognitions. *The Scarritt Voice* carried multiple colleague tributes. A nephew of Dr. Nathan Scarritt, whose gift had made possible the founding of the SBTS attended the celebrations. The Alumni Association established the Mabel K. Howell Chair of Missions “as an expression of high esteem” with a goal of \$125,000.

The 1949 retirement celebrations took note of more than academic achievement. There were stories of her “driving a rattletrap of an ancient automobile.” “Students and faculty prayed thankfully” when she came home safely because it was her intent “to trust the Lord and stay in the middle of the road.” They “rejoiced prayerfully” when the car caught fire and burned with no casualties. Former student Helen Mandelbaum recalled, “She was a terrible driver, but a wonderful teacher.”

Another story was about a game-winning homerun! You can almost hear the chuckle in Dr. J. Minton Batten’s voice, “In her first game at Scarritt she came to bat when the faculty was in dire straits. No king of swat ever looked over a crucial baseball situation with more determination or better results. Miss Howell gave a mighty swing which produced a home run that ultimately won the game. Fidelity to fact of history requires an additional

³⁴ Board of Missions Organizational Meeting, July, 1940; WDCS 1st Annual Report, 1940-1941.

³⁵ *Scarritt College Voice* (Fall, 1944); *Alumni Chimes* (August, 1950).

statement that she did not know that a home run hitter was expected to run the bases, but fellow faculty members escorted her along the base paths and the run was safely scored."

The origins of "The Service Motive: A Survey of a Half-Century of Scarritt College Alumni in Lands Abroad, 1892-1942," remain a mystery! It is an unpublished, three volumes, 897-page typed document. Volume one, "The Service Motive," at almost 200 pages is the history of the Training School/College. It is well documented with personal and official records and includes Howell's limited biographical data. Two other volumes are personal stories and biographies of former students, organized and reported by country and categories of work.

Dr. Alice Cobb, former Scarritt faculty, visited Howell several months before her death. She recalled: "[Howell] held in her hands her just completed monumental work, an 897-page history of Scarritt's first fifty years with life stories of several hundred alumnae. Physically frail but wonderfully alive she recalled with joy her long life so full of study and purpose, struggle and accomplishments, with friends in every corner of the world, and the warm personal memories of most of those corners."³⁶

Brooks-Howell Home, a retirement complex in Asheville, North Carolina, was established by the WDCS in November, 1957. The name recognizes two well-known mission leaders: Laura Jean Brooks (Methodist Episcopal Church) and Mabel K. Howell (Methodist Episcopal Church, South). Earlier that year a WDCS "delegation" visited Howell to tell her the new Home would bear her name. Soon afterwards she was visited by a church-member friend, Margaret Stewart. Over a half-century later, Margaret recalled, "she [Howell] was very excited and bubbly and told me all about their visit." Then Miss Howell added, "But I can't tell anybody; it's a secret." Howell died before the Home was dedicated.³⁷ Her portrait appears in the Lobby with that of Mrs. Frank G. Brooks.

Scarritt President Dr. Hugh C. Stuntz in reviewing her life-long accomplishments, said, "I take great pleasure in saluting Mabel K. Howell as one of the great modern apostles of the Cause of Christ."³⁸

³⁶ Cobb, 24-25. Scarritt-Bennett Center Research Library contains two complete copies, plus correspondence and raw data on which it is based.

³⁷ Author's conversations with Mrs. Stewart and Ms. Helen Mandelbaum in 2012.

³⁸ *Scarritt College Voice* (Spring, 1949), 4-7.