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United
Methodist
Women
FAITH · HOPE · LOVE IN ACTION

**United Methodist
Women's History:
Voices Lost and Found**

*Celebrating the 150th
Anniversary of the UMW*

SELECTED CONFERENCE PAPERS PRESENTED MAY 28-30, 2015



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Cover: In preparation for the 150th anniversary of the United Methodist Women in 2019, Methodist Theological School in Ohio hosted a conference on its campus in Delaware, Ohio.

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METHODIST HISTORY

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Methodist History

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GUEST EDITOR'S NOTE

In 2012, when the American Academy of Religion was meeting in Chicago, Harriett Jane Olsen gathered a group of scholars together for dinner to talk about a plan. As United Methodist Women (UMW) approached the 150th anniversary of the organization of its first antecedent (the Woman's Foreign Mission Society) the time seemed right to promote the writing of the history of UMW. The group that gathered that evening proposed several ideas. What resulted from this conversation was a conference held in 2015 at Methodist Theological School in Ohio called "United Methodist Women's History: Voices Lost and Found."

Keynote speaker Dana Robert set the tone for the conference by claiming that the history of women is intrinsic to the history of Methodism, so it is not possible to understand the history of Methodism without understanding the history of Methodist women. The dearth of history written about United Methodist Women and its predecessor bodies is a grave loss for Methodist history. This idea energized those who attended the conference, and this special issue of *Methodist History* is a step toward correcting the lack of attention to United Methodist Women's History.

This issue contains Robert's keynote address along with plenary presentations by Ellen Blue and Priscilla Pope-Levison. Robert relates forgotten stories of women that exemplify core characteristics of Methodism. Blue reflects on how and why women have been bracketed out of history, and she highlights the difficulty of historical recovery with examples from her own work. Pope-Levison shows how the Woman's Home Missionary Society and deaconesses used the concept that mothering was women's sphere and role to justify women's work in mission. Their acceptance of this gendered idea expanded women's service in some ways and limited women's roles in others.

The theme of domesticity as women's sphere comes out in other conference papers published in this issue. K. Kale Yu writes about how the rhetoric of a mother's role in the Christian home used by women missionaries in Korea allowed new Christian women to challenge gender roles of their culture. Andrew Klumpp shows how pastors' wives once served beside their husbands on the prairie in Iowa. The contribution of pastors' wives became more restricted to the home as Victorian values about women's roles spread to the prairie.

Douglas D. Tzan explores the practices of fundraising for mission in the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society. The use of bazaars or church fairs to raise money is so common now in UMW that it may be surprising to know it was once controversial. Such activities were seen by some to threaten the

holiness that was at the heart of Methodism.

Lacey Warner and Barbara Campbell expand knowledge of key figures in United Methodist Women's history. In writing about Isabel (Belle) Harris Bennett, Warner shows the impact she had on the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Bennett worked for opportunities for women to be in ministry and for the training to equip them. Her work and example inspired other women to serve. Barbara E. Campbell recounts the work of Mabel K. Howell. Although an educator, author, church administrator, and mission leader, her contribution to United Methodist Women is not well known. This essay presents the facts that can help readers begin to know her.

Ulrike Schuler and Paul Chilcote also present history that is largely unacknowledged. They tell about missionaries in continental Europe (Bulgaria and Italy) and note the need for different mission strategies in different contexts. Indigenous women were especially important to this strategic mission.

This special issue makes available work that has already been done for a conference in order to call attention to the ongoing work in preserving and interpreting United Methodist Women's History. Even this special issue contains no article that examines the Evangelical United Brethren roots of UMW. All facets of UMW's history need to be researched. As Dana Robert reminds us, this history is not just about an organization of women but is United Methodist history. Knowing these stories matters for United Methodist self-understanding. The organizers of the conference which give us these papers hope they inspire new research in this area to highlight history that needs to be told.

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