



Free Methodist Historical Society

Newsletter

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RELOCATING THE MARSTON HISTORICAL CENTER & FM ARCHIVE

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Board of Administration
Acts to Sell World
Ministries Center Facility

Last summer the Free Methodist Board of Administration (BOA) overwhelmingly voted to sell the World Ministries Center at 770 N High School Rd, Indianapolis and relocate in the Indianapolis area. It considered three critical factors in this process and decision. First, an increase in real estate prices (debt free ownership of our current property). Second, cultural and workplace shifts arising from the pandemic. Third, realities of the facility (square footage and future maintenance expenses). We will continue to exist alongside the operations of the World Ministries Center and fulfill our calling to serve the local and global church, due in large part to your faithfulness over the years!

Mission fidelity today requires knowledge of Free Methodist heritage. The church needs two fixed points in time — the present and the point of origin (1860) — in order to project faithfully into the future. One way the FMC has maintained mission fidelity is by locating the Marston Historical Center

and archive within the World Ministries Center as mandated by the 1964 General Conference. Since the center was formally established in 1969, its location has moved from Winona Lake to Indianapolis with the rest of the World Ministries Center in 1990.

The museum display area, Zahniser Chapel, Hugh A. White Library and FM Archive in memory of Evelyn Marston Mottweiler have undergone significant improvement over the past few years, fueled by YOUR help! We want to assure you that we will be able to incorporate all of this into our new space. We believe the BOA and Board of Bishops seek to be good stewards and that this move will help all of us steward our resources well.

Before summer's end we anticipate getting settled in the new location. We will let you know when we are ready for guests at 5235 Decatur Blvd., Indianapolis. Please send all mail to the address noted at left. Thank YOU for how you have supported the ongoing work of the Marston Historical Center over the years.

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MEMBER?

Call, write, email
or go to
[give.fmcusa.org/
givemarston](http://give.fmcusa.org/givemarston)

TAKE NOTE!



Our new
address:

**PO Box 51710
Indianapolis, IN 46251**

The Mission of the Free Methodist Historical Society is to preserve Free Methodist heritage and transmit it faithfully to each generation in order to assist the Free Methodist Church in fulfilling its mission.



SARAH ANNE GRANT

PIONEERING FREE METHODIST EVANGELIST AND DOCTOR

By Dr. Christy Mesaros Winckles

The question of women's ordination to the position of elder was at the forefront of issues discussed at the 1890 and 1894 General Conferences. Several women attended both conferences as delegates. One of them, Sarah Anne Grant, represented the Northern Indiana Conference. Her life offers a fascinating portrait of a woman functioning in two public roles unusual for women at the time. In both, she had to make her own space to serve as she felt called.

Sarah Anne Grant, also sometimes listed as Anna Grant, was an active Free Methodist evangelist in Northern Indiana and Iowa. After 1890 she and her family moved to Iowa, then Oklahoma and finally San Diego, Calif., where she stayed active in ministry until a few months before her death in 1916. Her story reveals a complex, dedicated Christian leader and has been pieced together through fragments -- newspaper clippings, census records, ministry reports, annual conference minutes and family stories.

According to family stories, Grant approached her husband, John, in the late 1860s or early 1870s with some surprising news: She felt called by God to become a doctor. They already had two children, but John was supportive so she left him home to tend their farm and family while she studied medicine. At this time in American history, female doctors were rare and faced numerous professional hurdles. Many medical schools wouldn't accept them, leading to the founding of the Female Medical College of Pennsylvania in 1850 so women could receive training and hands-on experience. State medical societies didn't accept them, and many patients were scared to go to them. Local papers were filled with derisive stories, both fictional and credible, scolding female physicians. Female evangelists faced similar social rejection, and the fact that Grant went on to become not only a doctor but a Free Methodist evangelist across four states is impressive.

Sarah's family notes that upon her return from medical training she faced ridicule; only women and children wanted to see her for medical attention. However, after helping an Indiana town (most likely northwest Indiana, where she served as an evangelist) deal with a contagion that was killing children, she gained more acceptance as a physician. Still, she faced social backlash and regularly used only her initials when writing prescriptions to ensure pharmacists

would fill them for her patients. She grew numerous medicinal herbs to prevent dealing with them as much as possible.

It is unclear where Grant did her medical training. There were a few institutions that granted medical degrees to women in the Midwest. Case Western Reserve Medical School was among the earliest. The University of Iowa was another early adopter of coeducational curriculum, admitting women into their medical college in 1855. Indiana had several medical schools she may have attended, including Fort Wayne Medical College and the Indiana College of Medicine and Midwifery. Graduation records from that time period are difficult to find, particularly in Indiana, as many folded at the turn of the 20th century.

It's also possible she did not attend medical school and instead trained under a sympathetic male doctor, which was also a common practice. Quaker physicians were particularly sympathetic to women desiring to enter medicine but struggling to gain adequate training. (R. Abram's book *Send us a lady physician: Women doctors in America 1835-1920* details part of the story of early women in the field.)

Grant's story as it relates to the Free Methodist Church begins when the Northern Indiana Conference sent her as a delegate to the 1890 General Conference. While there is no speech recorded from her, she voted in favor of women's ordination. Her regular ministry updates to the denominational magazine, *The Free Methodist*, show her primarily preaching in the northeast portion of the state (Whitley, Steuben, Allen, Noble, De Kalb and Legrange counties).

There is no Mr. Grant listed in Northern Indiana Conference reports during these same years. So her spouse clearly is not an elder in the FMC. However, her August 21, 1894, ministry report contains the phrase "we reached," noting that her work in the re-

gion had been ongoing for a few years. She uses the phrase “our work” in the same report. Is she speaking about the entire group of Free Methodists working in the region or her own ministry with a spouse in tow?

Grant’s husband, John, was an entrepreneur and farmer. His support of her ministry and medical career is impressive. Together they had 12 children, two who died in infancy, and he took on childcare responsibilities as she traveled to preach or practice medicine. In the early 1890s, the family moved from Indiana to Ida Grove, Iowa, where John owned a farm and Anna continued to minister with the FMC.

In one article, Anna notes she traveled 50 miles over open prairie to attend camp meetings in the Sioux Falls District. Her use of “we” may imply the entire family went along. She is mentioned again in an 1895 ministry update for her help at a series of March revival meetings in Danbury, Iowa.

In November 1897 she sends a report from Aurelia, in the northwestern edge of Iowa, where she held a week-long revival service at the invitation of the community. Not everyone there wanted the services, as it was a busy time of the year. But after holding a vote asking how many wanted the holiness experience to continue, the response was overwhelming. Grant notes that in a week six individuals had experienced either the “blessing or the pardon of purity” as men repented from tobacco and women from their vanity. “I find hungry souls everywhere. They are as a sheep without a shepherd, and this doctrine and experience of holiness is as foreign as though it came from heaven lately.” She concludes her report hopeful to organize a Free Methodist class in Aurelia before leaving and urges other Free Methodists to follow her, as she was the only one working in the area.

Grant was mentioned again in 1898 as assisting in a series of tabernacle meetings in her hometown of Ida Grove. In 1901, the family joined a large group of Free Methodists who moved to the new Oklahoma territory. An October 1900 letter from C.E. Harroun in *The Free Methodist* encouraged fellow Free Methodists to join the group moving to Comanche, Apache and Kiowa country. The Oklahoma Historical Society has records noting that John Grant filed a homestead claim in tribal-ceded lands in 1901.

By 1903 the family had settled in Granite, Oklahoma and was operating a hotel. In March of that year, W.G. Hammer visited them and sent an update

to *The Free Methodist*. At that time, Granite had 1,500 residents, several large mercantiles, four churches, and according to Hammer, the largest public school building in the state. He noted the Grant family’s philosophy of taking evangelistic work with them wherever they moved, and that the Oklahoma Conference



1894 Free Methodist General Conference, Greenville, Illinois

had already responded to three requests from them to come and hold meetings in Granite. He explained that Free Methodists were already in the second week of revival services at Cumberland Presbyterian Church, where many were converting or experiencing sanctification. Grant actively encouraged residents to attend and continued the meetings after they left.

While Grant appears to have remained active as an evangelist in each move, she is not listed in the Iowa or Oklahoma Annual Conference reports during those years. She’s listed in 1890 and 1891 as a licensed evangelist in Northern Indiana, but doesn’t appear again in conference reports until 1912 in Southern California, where she was appointed for a year as pastor of the San Diego FMC.

Perhaps she did not keep up her license, which would have required her to undergo periodic review. She was active in the denomination everywhere she moved, so that doesn’t seem likely. It’s also possible people are missing from annual conference reports which were not always as easily kept up. Is it possible other women were preaching in the denomination but were never recorded as evangelists?

As we see through Grant’s narrative, these women are important not only in Free Methodist history, but also for understanding the larger social narratives of 19th century women’s history. Their stories represent the struggles women faced as they fought for social acceptance of their professions.

Dr. Christy Mesaros-Winckles’ article draws on her upcoming book (2023) on the 1890 and 1894 General Conference discussions of women’s ordination and early Free Methodist women evangelists. Follow her writing at freemethodistfeminist.com.

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BOOK REVIEW

Priscilla Grace Thompson. *Following God to the Heart of Africa: How God Fulfilled the Dreams of a Little Girl to Become a Missionary Nurse*. Independently published. 2020. Pp. 264 ISBN: 979-8616051875.

The writer, Priscilla Thompson, takes the reader through many experiences of a missionary nurse in central Africa — an on-the-field romance and marriage and the stresses imposed by that part of Africa during a period of dynamic political change. Expelled, evacuated, bounced from one country to another punctuated the events of missionary service, as a wife and mother and primarily as a dedicated missionary nurse-midwife. It is very much an “interior” book as Priscilla relives a catalog of struggles and responses to daunting challenges.

The travel stories are hair-raising — mountain roads and collapsing bridges over rivers. There is a chapter on “All Creatures Great and Small: Fleas, Bedbugs, Snakes and Geckos” and one on the cholera epidemic with amazing revivals to life for patients.

Priscilla includes stories of husband Nate, a mechanic

and builder and a creative problem-solver for all things broken or loose, as well as a tireless and creative support for her ministry. And her children, adaptable and open to all the new experiences, plus the anxieties of parents with children traveling to schools in northern Congo or Kenya on the missionary aviation Cessnas.

I should say something about the author. Besides being an extremely competent nurse and midwife, she is also a sensitive and gifted writer, a poet and musician and possessor of a wry sense of humor that puts things in perspective. (I speak personally because our missionary service overlapped, and I performed their wedding. Nate installed the wonderful winch on the front of my Land Rover.)

Underlying all the stories and experiences, Priscilla testifies to an amazing immediacy with God, with a sense of His call and His awareness of all that was going on in their lives.

Taken as a whole this is an amazing catalog of missionary experience in a fascinating part of the world and an extremely personal testimony. Africa is Africa; it provides special challenges and tests aplenty. It gives unusual exposure to God’s care and interventions, and it seems, the more Africa changes the more it is the same.

— Bishop Emeritus Gerald Bates

