

The Women's Missionary Society Of The AME Church: Over A Century Of Commitment And Service

"[Afro-American Methodists...are anxious] to think for themselves,...to talk for themselves,...to act for themselves; [and to] support from their substance, however scanty, the ministration of the Word which they receive."

—Rev. Benjamin T. Tanner

THESE words are especially applicable to the valiant group of women who bear the proud title of the Women's Missionary Society of the A.M.E. Church.

The first missionary activities among the women began with the organizing in 1824 of the Dorcas Society by Richard Allen, founder and first Bishop of the A.M.E. Church. The women worked together until 1827, caring for the ministers who were helping to establish the A.M.E. Church.

The second missionary adventure was initiated by Sarah Allen, wife of Richard Allen. She organized the Daughters of Conference in 1827.

Women's Parent Mite Missionary Society

IN the *Christian Recorder* of February 19, 1874, an open letter was addressed to the Bishops' wives by the editor, Rev. Benjamin T. Tanner:

After much consideration of prayer, I address you as representatives of the church.... Among other things that are said, the question is asked 'what are the women of our church doing?' No complaint of the past. Faithfully did they do their work providence laid before them, but what of the present?.... Will you not, my dear Sisters, lead off in the organization of a Missionary Society of the A.M.E. Church?"



Dr. Wilhelmina Lawrence, President

After a thoughtful and fruitful consideration of the suggestion, a call was made for the first meeting on May 8, 1874 at the home of Rev. James A. Handy, 16th Street near M Street, N.W., Washington, D.C.

At a meeting on August 11, 1874 in Philadelphia, the Women's Parent Mite Missionary Society was fully organized.

For twenty-one years, under eight presidents, the women worked in this organization. The society fostered the work in Haiti, Santo Domingo, West Africa, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Bar-

bados, Virgin Islands, Trinidad and Jamaica (B.W.I.)

Women's Home and Foreign Missionary Society

IN September 1893, a delegation of ladies asked permission of Bishop Henry McNeal Turner to organize a Connectional Missionary Society. In May 1896, the General Conference approved of and legalized the organization. It was renamed "The Women's Home and Foreign Missionary Society of the

A.M.E. Church." The function of the organization was to support and supervise the work in South Africa and help the mission preachers and churches at home. The president, Mrs. Lucy Hughes (1923-1943), was able to do an effective work.

Only two of the bishops' wives, who worked in both societies, are still living: Mrs. David Henry Sims (Mayme) and Mrs. D. Ward Nichols (Kay Bailey).

The Merger

THE WOMEN'S MISSIONARY SOCIETY (W.M.S.) was organized in 1944 at the General Conference in Philadelphia. It is a merger of the two older Connectional Missionary organizations: the Women's Parent Mite Missionary Society, organized in 1874, and the Women's Home and Foreign Missionary Society, organized in 1896.

The Women's Missionary Society as presently structured, is an international organization, representing 800,000 Black women from the continental United States; Canada; South, West, Central and Southern Africa; the Caribbean Islands; South America; and London, England.

Mrs. Lucy Hughes, last president of the Women's Home and Foreign Missionary Society, was elected the first president of the merged society. Mrs. Christine Smith, last president of the Women's Parent Mite Society, was elected the first general secretary. Mrs. Hughes later sustained a painful automobile accident and her great spirit passed. Dr. Anne E. Heath was elevated to the presidency and, because of her invaluable experience, contributed much to the development of the Women's Mis-

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"Pulling Ourselves Up By Our Own Bootstraps"...A Series