



SUN-GAZETTE FILES

The congregation from the Mulberry Street Methodist Church got together for a Sunday School picnic held at Mountain Beach in this photo published on July 23, 1933.

The ladies of Mulberry Street Church

Williamsport
Women



by MARY SIEMINSKI, JANET HURLBERT

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Special to the Sun-Gazette

Throughout history, many positions in churches could not be held by females. But women still felt called to service through their faith, and the women of Mulberry Street Methodist Episcopal Church were an example of how women could enhance life in Williamsport.

In 1935, Anna Blanche Slate compiled the history of the church for its 75th anniversary, including contributions made by women members over the years. The church was established by teachers and students from the coeducational Dickinson Seminary, now Lycoming College, because the only Methodist church in town — Pine Street Methodist Church — had become crowded with parishioners. The Ladies' Aid Society of Mulberry, organized in 1862 with 52 active members, raised money to complete the structure and in one year presented \$712 to the building committee.

Four years after its dedication, the church burned down. The "indomitable spirit of Old Mulberry still lived," Slate said, and women were the optimism that drove the rebuilding.

In the 1920s, Ellen Walker Houseknecht Daugty was the choir

director. Women played the organ and taught Sunday school. Cynthia Willard, daughter of Rev. W. W. Willard, acted as a pastor's assistant without pay for love of the work. Mothers of missionaries, such as Charlotte Slate, Sallie Whiteley, Emma Dugan and Mrs. W.W. Willard, held a special place in church history.

There also were familiar community names like Emma Elizabeth Curtin, Mrs. W. F. Plankenhorn, Mrs. Don M. Larrabee and Vivian Mussina listed in the church roster.

Ada Chambers Bible Class

Religious dedication started at a young age, and when Jennie Rank, Maud Birchard and Mabel Millspaugh graduated from the Sunday School Primary Department at the turn of the 20th century, they wanted a class of their own. The girls started the Wood Violet Class, later becoming the Ada Chambers Bible Class, named after one of their revered teachers.

In November 1924, the monthly church newsletter, "Mulberry," called the Bible class "one of the most influential and active in the city of Williamsport" with "everything worthwhile in Sunday School work." The class had grown to 44 members.

Connection to the world

In 1882, the Woman's Foreign Missionary Auxiliary was formed to engage in world service, with an emphasis on India. In the same year,

Anna Wright founded the Ruby Seal Mission Band. Widowed, Wright had come to the city to live with her daughter. She loved children and thought the Mulberry Street youth should help other children in the world.

The name was chosen because a ruby is beautiful and a "gem of the Orient," said the "Mulberry" newsletter published in March 1924. Girls helped the Girls' School in Calcutta, where a child would be chosen to bear the name "Ruby Seal." Once graduated, another girl would be selected.

The Ruby Seal remained true to the ideals of giving of love, prayers and services for the womanhood of the world and supported the Grenoble Orphanage in France and the Girls' School of Buenos Aires.

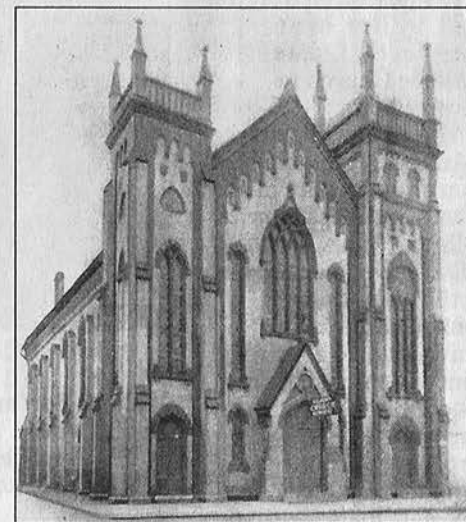
Benevolence at Home

Church women reached out to fellow members and the community for the Woman's Home Missionary Society, organized in 1882. In 1922, women formed the Mystic Circle and was open to women of the congregation who wanted to make the church happier and more efficient.

Founded by Mrs. W.W. Banks, the circle was organized around kindness. Recipients did not know who to thank for gifts or help received because "the real purpose of the Circle was to help make dreams come true," said the newsletter.

In the first two years, the group earned \$1,800 to buy paint, dishes, silverware and kitchen utensils for the church.

In addition to hosting tureen suppers, the Mystic Circle organized dinners for community volunteers — like local scout leaders. Once, the group responded to an emergency request to raise funds to



PHOTOS PROVIDED

Pictured is the Mulberry Street Methodist Episcopal Church, at top, and Anna Blanche Slate, missionary. Slate helped compile the church's history. Photos were provided by the Susquehanna Conference Archives.

send the church's Boy Scout Troop No. 24 to camp, noting that the boys were the "coming men of Mulberry," said the June 1924 newsletter.

In 1924, the Ladies' Aid Society's annual oyster and chicken salad supper had the largest number of people at a single meal at the church. In 1934, the Mystic Circle and the Ladies' Aid Society formed the Woman's Guild.

The stories of the women of Mulberry are remembered through a few slim archival files.

Due to a decline in membership, the congregation merged in 1963 with Market Street Methodist Church to form Wesley Methodist Church. The Mulberry Street building was sold and torn down. However, the women remain an example of everyday kindnesses and services to strengthen one's community.