The Legacy of Lottie Moon

Catherine B. Allen

Like many other missionaries, Lottie Moon left a legacy that paved the way for succeeding generations. But unlike any other missionary, Miss Moon left a legacy that largely paid the way for the growth of the largest missionary force of any evangelical or Protestant denomination.

When she died in 1912 after nearly forty years in China, she left an estate of approximately $250 and a battered trunk of personal effects. She also left a shining name, a spotless record, and a sterling idea for fund-raising. The Woman's Missionary Union (WMU) of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) shaped these legacies into the most magnetic collection plate in mission history.

The Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for Foreign Missions is the largest source of funding for the SBC's overseas missions, involving almost four thousand missionaries. By 1992 the cumulative total of the offering was nearly $1.3 billion. With more than $80 million raised in the 1992 collection, the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering is thought to be the largest annual offering collected by Christians.

After a century of intensive scrutiny by researchers, four-foot three-inch Lottie Moon continues to stand tall in estimation. She has become a cultural icon with wide name recognition in the southern United States. Southern Baptists have taken her name around the world, with Baptists in many countries contributing to the offering bearing Lottie's name.

Best Educated Woman of the South

The Lottie Moon story always begins with a touch of nostalgia for old Virginia. Charlotte Digges Moon was born in December 1840 near Scottsville, Albemarle County, Virginia. She grew up on the “Road of the Presidents” at a family estate called Viewmont. Her maternal uncle, Dr. James Barclay, bought the nearby Monticello mansion after Thomas Jefferson died. Then as one of the early followers of Alexander Campbell, in 1850 he went to Jerusalem as the first missionary of the Disciples of Christ.

As a child, “Lottie” (as she was known) earned a reputation for mischief and intelligence. She was initially hostile to the religion of her devout Baptist parents, pillars of the Scottsville Baptist Church. She may have been influenced more by a highly independent older sister, Orianna. Orianna Moon went away to study at Troy Female Seminary in New York, caught the early winds of the feminist movement, and was one of the first two southern women to earn medical degrees. Orianna graduated from Female Medical College of Pennsylvania in 1857.

Lottie's childhood seemed similarly marked with higher intellect and greater potential than society would allow her to exercise. After studying with tutors on the plantation, she was sent for formal schooling at the Baptist-related girls institute, which became Hollins College, near Roanoke, Virginia.

By the time she graduated from Hollins, Virginia Baptists had organized a woman’s college that was to be equivalent in quality to the males-only University of Virginia. Lottie enrolled in this new school in Charlottesville, known as Albermarle Female Institute, in 1857. Her professors included Crawford Howell Toy, who later became the fifth faculty member of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He would be branded a heretic and banished to distinction as Harvard University's professor of Semitic languages. Toy and Moon maintained a friendship, and they may have come to the point of an engagement by 1881, but the specifics of their private lives cannot now be documented. Under Toy's tutelage, Lottie studied Greek, Hebrew, and Latin. She became fluent in Spanish and French. In 1861, just as the guns of Civil War were beginning to sound, Lottie and four other young women were awarded master of arts degrees. These were thought to be the first masters degrees awarded women of the South or in the South.

Lottie took away from school a new life and vision as a Christian. During a student revival in 1858, she went to a prayer meeting to scoff but left to pray all night. John A. Broadus, who soon became one of the founders of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, was then pastor of the Charlottesville Baptist Church. He baptized Lottie and years later claimed that she was the best educated and most cultured woman in the South.

Apparently a sense of calling to foreign missions came early in Lottie’s life as a Christian. John Broadus was noted for his compelling appeals for college ministerial students to serve on foreign fields. Several of Lottie’s Charlottesville friends agreed to go. Broadus would not have thought to direct the invitation to missions toward Lottie. Southern Baptists at the time had appointed only one unmarried woman as a missionary and had vowed never to do it again. To fulfill any such calling in the 1860s, she would have had to marry a missionary. But when Crawford Toy was ordained to go to Japan in 1860, he did not choose a wife to go with him.

Whatever Lottie’s (or Toy’s) dreams might have been, the Civil War interrupted. She rode out the war at Viewmont, teaching a beloved baby sister named Edmonia and occasionally assisting Dr. Orianna Moon as she tended wounded soldiers in Charlottesville. Lottie’s wartime exploits were not as infamous as those of two glamorous cousins, Virginia and Charlotte Moon, who served as flirtatious Confederate spies in Ohio.

The Moon family’s fortunes were forever lost, and the children scattered to earn their own living. For Lottie this situation perhaps afforded more opportunity than she would have enjoyed before the war. By September 1866 she was on the faculty

With more than $80 million raised in 1992, the annual Lottie Moon Offering for Foreign Missions is the largest of its kind.

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Responding to a Higher Calling
Although highly regarded as a teacher and church worker, Lottie was struggling to answer a higher calling. She was apparently the author of articles suggesting deaconess jobs in which women could serve as city missionaries. Through connections with Lottie’s cousins, Moon and Safford moved to Cartersville, Georgia, in 1871. For two years they operated a school for girls and took active leadership in their respective churches. At the same time, the woman’s missionary movement was gaining momentum in the South. In 1871-72, a group of Baltimore Baptist women began to press the SBC Foreign Mission Board to appoint women missionaries and to encourage the organization of women support groups. The Baltimore women fostered branches in South Carolina and other states. The instant financial strength of new women’s groups brought new life to the near-bankrupt Baptist mission board. The door suddenly opened for unmarried women to become missionaries.

With support from South Carolina women, Lula Whilden was permitted in 1872 to accompany her married sister and brother-in-law to China. Catching news of Whilden’s plans, Edmonia Moon instantly volunteered to pay her own passage to China. Edmonia had become active in a student missionary society at the Richmond Female Institute (forerunner of Westhampton College of the University of Richmond). She corresponded with Martha Foster Crawford, a pioneer Baptist woman missionary in China. Martha and her irascible husband, Tarleton Perry Crawford, had invited Edmonia to come to China as their assistant. So in a two-week flurry in April 1872, Edmonia

Southern Baptists at the time had appointed only one unmarried woman as a missionary and had vowed never to do it again.

Moon had applied, been appointed, packed, and departed for China. Baptist women of Richmond had organized to guarantee her support.

From the moment Edmonia set foot in China, colleagues stamped her as too young, nervous, and spoiled to succeed as a missionary. Hearing of her older, accomplished sister, they joined in the chorus of pleas for Lottie Moon to come to China. A missionary sermon by the Baptist pastor in Cartersville decided the issue. In 1873, A. C. Safford was appointed by Southern Presbyterians and Lottie Moon was appointed by Southern Baptists to missionary service in China.
Moon and Safford parted company in Shanghai. Safford’s field would be Soochow, where she had a distinguished career at the forefront of the “woman’s work for woman” movement. She was the founding editor of the formative periodical *Woman’s Work in China.*

Moon sailed on to Shantung Province. Entering through the treaty port of Chefoo, she traveled overland by mule litter to Tengchow, where she made her home until death in 1912. Tengchow had been the headquarters of Southern Baptist missionary work in Shantung since 1861, but within the year of Lottie Moon’s arrival it was still suffering active hostility from unwelcoming townspeople. Northern Presbyterians also had a mission there but were more strongly headquartered in Chefoo.

For the next forty years, Lottie seldom migrated far from Tengchow. There were rare trips to Shanghai. There was a happy period of sixteen months in 1900-1901 when she retreated to Fukuoka, Japan, during the Boxer Rebellion. In 1876 Edmonia suffered an alarming breakdown and had to be escorted back to Virginia. Lottie had only two other trips to the United States. During furloughs in 1892-93 and 1903-4, Lottie Moon spoke of Tengchow as home.

Moon’s assignment in China was “women’s work.” This title denoted two philosophies that shaped her ministry and her world. First was the missionary strategy known as “woman’s mission to woman.” Second was the staunchly defended prohibition against women seeming to teach, preach, or exercise authority over men.

William Carey, the Baptist pioneer in India, recognized in 1796 that evangelization of women would require attention “different from, and far beyond, what men can or will bestow.” Baptist missionaries he requested, however, were reluctant to send the unmarried female missionaries he requested.

Techniques of women’s work had been advanced in North China by Martha Foster Crawford, who was married but had no children, and by Sallie Landrum Holmes, whose husband died in Virginia, leaving her a baby son. Having gotten to China under protection of their husbands, Crawford and Holmes actively cultivated their own sphere of influence. These intrepid women won their way into homes, created essential literature, and carved out a women’s ministry before the Moon sisters arrived. While Edmonia clung sickly to schoolteaching in Tengchow, Lottie caught the courage and creativity of Crawford and Holmes.

The missionaries as a group were committed to the plan of conducting schools for girls. Under the guise of education, the missionaries fought against culture and custom to give women the freedom to become and live as Christians. While learning the Chinese language, Lottie was given supervision of a girls school associated with Holmes. She accepted schoolteaching as an avenue of ministry she could certainly manage, but schoolteaching was not her objective. Prior to sailing in 1873, she had written: “Could a Christian woman possibly desire higher honor than to be permitted to go from house to house and tell of a savior to those who have never heard his name? We could not conceive a life which would more thoroughly satisfy the mind and heart of a true follower of the Lord Jesus.”

So Lottie took every opportunity to learn the ropes of personal evangelism. Often the women left the schools in charge of Chinese teachers while they itinerated village to village. Trips sometimes brought them home to their own beds at night. With increasing frequency, however, the women took provisions for camping out along the way in the rude shelters for muleteers called “inns.” Gradually they gained the hospitality of rough peasant homes. The women traveled by donkey or mule, often escorted by a Chinese Christian man or couple. The senior woman missionary would preach to women (and whatever men eavesdropped), and Lottie would drill children in Bible stories and hymns, teaching in the open air.

Colleagues quickly pronounced Lottie a true missionary and praised her grasp of language and custom. She proved herself wise enough to tiptoe between two warring colleagues: T. P. Crawford and James Boardman Hartwell. She kept up good correspondence with the Foreign Mission Board, participating in the slow dialogue that shaped mission policy. She maintained fruitful communication with a growing circuit of women’s missionary societies that organized in support of her, especially in Georgia and Virginia.

During the years 1873-85, when her work was officially that of girls’ schoolteacher, Lottie’s greatest victories were personal. First, she gained an excellent command of Chinese that coworkers envied. She developed almost an obsession for honoring Chinese customs unless they were blatantly incompatible with Christianity.

Second, she disciplined herself to survive physically and emotionally while living in primitive circumstances with the lower-class Chinese people. She learned to endure scrutiny and commentary by curious people who did not consider her human and gave her no privacy. She conquered fears of people who continually reviled her as “Devil Woman,” she stayed courageous in the face of death threats, and she kept her poise in confrontations with soldiers. She came to accept the “real drudgery” of mission life. She ennobled her view of the harsh realities by remembering that the Chinese peasants were living a simple existence with which the man Jesus would have been personally familiar.

She diligently exercised, sought a clean and balanced diet, and rested regularly. She obtained a steady supply of reading materials in French and English. She transformed her Tengchow house to a Virginia miniature where missionary guests loved to relax. She took cleanliness and all possible precautions along with her when living in vermin-infested, pig-sty conditions as she traveled among the villages. When smallpox vaccinations and other vaccines became available, she was the first to take advantage of them.

### Outlasting Colleagues and Controversy

Both Baptists and Presbyterians regarded Shantung as a killing place. Ability to survive was a major accomplishment when measured against the experience of most coworkers. Mrs. Holmes burned out by 1881 and returned to the United States to try to salvage a sane existence for her son. T. P. Crawford was subject to various fits and paralyses, which sorely tried his colleagues,
and Martha Crawford several times was forced to retreat for health's sake. J. B. Hartwell outlived three wives and survived poor health himself by long sojourns elsewhere. Other early missionaries in Shantung, both Baptist and Presbyterian, suffered serious disabilities and death. Of those Baptists who arrived in Shantung during her first twenty years of service, only Lottie remained unbroken in body and spirit.

Another major development in Lottie's early China days surely contributed to her survival. This development occurred along spiritual fronts. She remembered that she had heard God's calling to China "as clear as a bell." After Edmonia's breakdown and departure, she filled her human loneliness with the Divine Presence. She daily studied the Bible in Hebrew and Greek. She read devotional materials from the Holiness movement and diligently read Thomas à Kempis's *On the Imitation of Christ*. Some called her a mystic, for her daily routines revealed that she was taking into account the personal presence of Christ. A favorite quotation was "Lord Jesus, thou art home and friend and fatherland to me."

With emotional discipline she tried to live at peace with all—Chinese and missionary. This was difficult, since T. P. Crawford and J. B. Hartwell's feud grew into lawsuits and rumored murder plots that continued even after Hartwell left the field for a time. Then Crawford confronted the entire Southern Baptist mission system, making unauthorized trips through the homeland encouraging schism. Out of his own thwarted battles with the Foreign Mission Board, he adopted the belief that such boards were unscriptural. He began to promote the idea that Southern Baptist churches should send out their missionaries directly.

Controversy surrounding Crawford made Lottie consider and modify her own thoughts. She tended to agree with Crawford's contention that foreign mission money should not be paid out to Chinese assistants and should not be spent on church buildings. She never agreed with his opinion that the Baptist schools should be closed and vigorously opposed his plot to close down his wife's school while she was absent for medical treatment. However, she did come for a while to view schools as a waste of her own time and called them the greatest folly of missions.

As Crawford became more dictatorial about the methods of newly arrived young coworkers, she became more permissive, willing to allow each missionary to seek his or her own strategy and theology. In communication with A. C. Safford, she stayed abreast of the latest thinking about how best to evangelize women and improve their plight in society. She adopted the custom of wearing a form of native clothing.

Nothing in mission policy or strategy ruffled her equanimity except for threatened trespasses on her freedom and autonomy as an equal partner. An implied infringement on the dignity of unmarried women missionaries made her fire off a resignation to the Foreign Mission Board in 1885. Her anger was met by calming explanations, and she stayed on.

Her crisis in personal discipline came in 1881-85. Just past her fortieth birthday, she was said by T. P. Crawford to be planning to return to the States to marry Crawford Toy, who had been hired in 1879 from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary because of his views about biblical inspiration. At the time, only T. P. Crawford and Moon were on the field, all other colleagues, including Martha Crawford, having been felled by illnesses. Seeing T. P. Crawford's irrational behavior, Lottie may have felt the necessity of sticking by her work. A wedding never took place. Some felt that Lottie had studied Toy's views and rejected him and them. However, she ardently tried to prevent the resignation of a young missionary colleague whose theological views matched Toy's. To a young person who once asked if she had ever been in love, she said, "Yes, but God had first claim on my life and since the two conflicted, there could be no question about the result."

Lottie Moon entered a period of restlessness related to the growing controversy between Crawford and the Foreign Mission Board and also related to the growing agitation about the role of women in Southern Baptist life. Through letters, she and Martha Crawford encouraged the developments toward formation of the Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union from 1883 until formal organization occurred in 1888. As if to flee from unpleasantness, she gave herself with greater consecration to direct evangelism.

**Pioneering in Inland China**

A new leaf in her ministry was started in 1885, when she moved to Pingtu, approximately 120 miles from Tengchow. This area had been explored by some younger colleagues and was thought promising. While Crawford was making a controversial tour through the United States to expound his divisive views, she made her move. With only reluctant consent of coworkers, she took her own brief survey trip in autumn 1885, traveling for four grueling days into the interior. In December she moved to Pingtu with a caravan of provisions and settled into rented rooms in the city. She was thought in her own times to be the first woman of any mission to establish an inland mission station by herself.

Lottie's tactic in Pingtu was to live quietly and acceptably among the people until they befriended her and invited her into their homes. She taught the women and children in the accustomed personal way. To placate any Americans who might criticize her for abandoning her assigned job as a schoolteacher, she wrote that she was still a teacher, but her school was mobile, following her from house to house.

For the next seven years, Pingtu was her primary base of work, although she maintained her home in Tengchow and retreated there occasionally. Not only did she work in Pingtu City, but also in surrounding villages, particularly one called Shaling. In Pingtu, she was beyond protection of treaty and foreign intervention on which coastal missionaries relied. In fact, when the American government tried to intervene in behalf of Americans during a 1887 skirmish in Tengchow, she fled not to the waiting warship but to Pingtu. She seldom heard any language spoken but Chinese and seldom had contacts with Westerners. Only rarely did a male colleague journey out to Pingtu to check on her well-being.

Her practice in Shaling village was repeated in a circuit of tiny rural outposts around Pingtu. She simply lived among the people as teacher and friend. She sat on a stone or pile of straw at the threshing floor of the village and chatted with the women as they came to prepare their grains. Or she crawled upon the warm brick bed with women who invited her to their homes. She taught rudimentary reading, Bible truths, and hymns.

As the only resident Christian in Pingtu, she found herself unavoidably teaching men as well as women and children. She reported this habit very casually but carefully in letters to America, knowing that she was committing a serious breach of Baptist etiquette. Her reports sought to shame American pastors for abdicating their duties to a woman. She reported that, while packing for her overdue furlough in the United States, a delegation of men from Shaling tracked her down in Tengchow to beg her to return to the village.
It was in the throes of isolated self-sacrifice in Pingtu that she wrote a letter that was to change the course of Southern Baptist history. The Pingtu field was too responsive to abandon and she decided not to leave it until more missionaries came to relieve her. She wrote to encourage Southern Baptist women to organize and end the hand-to-mouth patterns of mission support. Writing on September 16, 1887, she suggested that the women should take an offering at Christmastime, thus to obtain funds with which to send more women missionaries to Pingtu.

This letter helped to swing the tide in favor of organizing the Woman's Missionary Union, Auxiliary to Southern Baptist Convention, on May 11, 1888. By October the women had put Miss Moon's idea into operation. They issued offering envelopes calling for a Christmas offering for Pingtu, China. Hoping for $2,000 to send two helpers to Miss Moon, they in fact cleared more than $3,000, and three women were soon on their way to China.

Still Lottie would not leave until the new recruits were trained. After the arrival of Fannie Knight, the first new missionary, sufficient converts had been won to form the first Baptist church of Pingtu region, in Shaling village, and the third church in North China. A church was constituted in September 1889, with Miss Knight as one of the members. Knight moved into Moon's place as the resident missionary of Pingtu.

In the meantime, with the younger male missionaries suffering stress of adjustment, Moon became virtually the pastor of one of the earlier churches near Tengchow. A new outpost had been claimed in the city of Hwansien (today Huangxien), but the young missionaries were frightened and sick, and she had to tend them. Though very busy in her role as senior missionary of the area, she continued to journey to Pingtu to encourage the new believers. A storm of persecution against the new church was so fierce that missionaries were forced out of the area. Refusing to call on the power of the United States government to protect the converts (as other missionaries often did), she could do little for the persecuted believers but send them messages of comfort.

Busy in productive work with converts and new missionary recruits, she tried to keep herself above the worsening conflict between T. P. Crawford and the Foreign Mission Board. In 1889 Crawford was taken off the board's missionary list, although Martha Crawford was retained until she sent in her own very reluctant resignation. Crawford's group by this time had taken the name Gospel Mission Movement. Churches in the United States were beginning to drop their involvement in the Southern Baptist Convention's cooperative mission work. Crawford urged his colleagues in North China to join him in work that was not under control of the SBC. Many of the younger missionaries, including Fannie Knight, did resign. They moved off to the western end of Shantung, taking much home and field support with them.

Lottie Moon tried to make peace. She announced her intention to keep up friendly cooperation with the renegades. She expressed her agreement with some of the Gospel Mission group's field philosophies. In fact, she refused to use any mission money to build a church building for Shaling, instead helping the local believers to build their own.12 But Lottie Moon remained loyal to the Foreign Mission Board.

It was in this state of severe controversy that the exhausted woman finally took her furlough, after sixteen unrelied years in China. She arrived in Virginia with chronic headaches. She made very few public appearances but did consent to attend the WMU convention of 1893. The Gospel Mission controversy dogged her heels. H. A. Tupper, embattled secretary of the Foreign Mission Board, sought her consultation. She strongly objected when she learned of the board's plans to return J. B. Hartwell to the field, as senior man in the place of his old nemesis, Crawford. She begged to be transferred to Japan because "life would not be living" in China. One of Tupper's last acts before resigning in sorrow from the Foreign Mission Board's top post was to beg Lottie to return to China and to accept Hartwell. "I doubt if the Board has had a missionary more esteemed than yourself... If I had but one request in this world to make of you, my sister, it would be that, if possible, you keep in harmony as far as possible with the Board that honors you more than you know."

She returned to Tengchow with a different status and different approach to work. Her seniority and her heroism were undisputed. She made up her mind to cooperate with Hartwell, but she did not break her communications with Martha Crawford and the young missionaries who had cast in their lot with the Gospel Mission group.

Reaping the Harvest

The early seed-sowing years were now yielding a great harvest. New missionaries constantly arrived. In answer to an appeal she made during furlough, the first Southern Baptist missionary hospital was opened in 1900, in Hwansien, when the first practicing missionary nurse and doctor arrived. Other hospitals soon opened in Laichow and Pingtu. The humble schools of early years now grew into higher-level institutions. A theological seminary was begun.

Her daily duties as a missionary fell into three categories, with little change from 1894 until her death in 1912. She resumed management of schools, up to six at one time, for both boys and girls. She invested much time in guiding new missionaries, who relied heavily upon her. And she gave herself increasingly in personal ministries to the Chinese people.

Strangely, she never returned to Pingtu. Pingtu quickly became the most productive mission field of Southern Baptist experience until recent times. A young Confucian scholar whom Lottie had taught, named Li Show Ting, became the leading native evangelist. Baptisms in the area exceeded five hundred a year, and it was said years later than Pastor Li had baptized more than ten thousand people. Although Pastor Li and others never forgot Lottie's role in inaugurating the work in Pingtu, she never again spoke of it. Male missionaries came in to administer baptisms and perform pastoral roles. Lottie allowed them to take full credit. About the time of Lottie's death, there were thirty-two churches in the area.

She continued making day trips to nearby villages for evangelistic teaching until she was at last welcomed into the Tengchow city homes of the upper class, who had so long spurned the missionaries. Her converts and friends from Pingtu and other regions came to her. On her compound, called The Little Cross Roads house, she had extensive guest quarters. The rooms were constantly full, especially of women who came to her for personal training. At times the classes were more or less formalized, as she trained women for evangelistic work. But gradually, after her furlough in 1903-4, the students were replaced by the poor and homeless who needed basic human care.

While other missionaries fled, she weathered the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-5 at her home, despite being bombed. Her intention was to give courage to the Chinese. With the deaths of the Crawfords, most of the missionaries who had affiliated with the Gospel Mission group were coming back into the Foreign
Mission Board’s fold by 1909. Lottie urged the board to welcome them home and led her coworkers to make room for them.

In 1909, news came that sister Edmonia had committed suicide. She began to dread the specter of furlough or retirement in a land that was no longer home. The more she felt cut off from the United States, the more emotional investment she made in the neediest people of Tengchow. As the Chinese Revolution developed in 1911, she tried to maintain nonpartisan ministries to the wounded and was discovered in Hwangsien running the Baptist hospital while other missionaries joined a flood of refugees.

Despite the increased support fostered by the WMU, the Foreign Mission Board slipped into debt. Now instead of the personal, chatty letters she was accustomed to receive from the board headquarters, she was receiving mass-produced form letters threatening retrenchment. Lottie responded on a very personal level to the near-hysteria from the Southern Baptist homeland regarding the foreign mission debt. She began to give proceeds from the small annuity left at the death of Edmonia to the board’s debt-payment fund. In China, drought and famine began to add human misery to the revolution. She heard reports of suffering among the Pingtu Christians. So she took her annuity proceeds to meet the needs closest to hand. Amid the gloom of 1911, she took a decisive step by gathering the leading Christian women of Shantung province. In her parlor, they organized the Woman’s Missionary Union of North China, for support of women evangelists.

Pay the Price

By 1912, Lottie Moon was occupying Tengchow almost alone. J. B. Hartwell and family were in Hwangsien, with the theological seminary, when death claimed him. Younger missionaries were concentrating on Hwangsien, Chefoo, Pingtu, Laichow, and Tsingtao (Qingdao), where Baptists had extensive institutions and growing congregations. So her colleagues did not realize until late fall that Miss Moon had sunk into physical and emotional collapse. Nurse Jessie Pettigrew was called from Hwangsien to Tengchow. She found what was described as a carbuncle eating into the base of Moon’s skull. She was horrified at the loss of weight and the depression she readily observed. Pettigrew bundled Moon off to Hwangsien. There the missionaries realized that she had ceased to eat, in order to assure food for her Chinese sisters in her compound. She was obsessed with the thought that the children of missionaries were starving to death. Malnutrition was advanced, and the young missionaries wanted to conceal Moon’s mental state from the Chinese.

She was sent on to Laichow, but the doctor there, one of her favorites, could not turn back the horror Miss Moon was privately facing. He sent her on to the next station, Pingtu. There in a splendid medical compound near her old house, the missionaries decided that she must return to America. Keeping Moon’s distress as quiet as possible, Dr. T. O. Hearn took her to the nearest port, Tsingtao. It was arranged that nurse Cynthia Miller would accompany her.

On Christmas Eve 1912, as the ship was in the harbor of Kobe, Japan, Lottie Moon died. In the hours before death, her mind had cleared. She had sipped some grape juice and expressed appreciation for her care. After prayer and hymns, she dozed, then smiled, lifted her hands in the customary form of Chinese greeting, and exhaled quietly.

The ship’s captain, who attributed her death to melancholia and senility, arranged for her cremation in Yokohama. Her ashes were mailed to the Foreign Mission Board in Richmond, Virginia. The family ultimately buried them in Crewe, Virginia, home of her one remaining sister-in-law.

Then began the more famous phase of Lottie Moon’s immortality. Cynthia Miller faithfully retold the circumstances of Lottie Moon’s death. Leaders of the WMU were appalled as they heard how Miss Moon had weighed only fifty pounds at death. They conducted memorial services for her and pledged themselves to lift the debt of the Foreign Mission Board in the Christmas offering of 1913 as a memorial to Miss Moon. In various ways the women pledged to retell her story until indifference to missions was conquered.

Lottie’s death brought forth many commendations and many lamentations from her friends. The young missionaries assessed her career not in terms of evangelization, women’s work, or schoolteaching—all of which seemed incidental to them. They saw Lottie as one performing social or human needs ministries for the Chinese and diplomacy for the missionaries. She was called a statesman, a queen, and “the best man among our missionaries.” One missionary wrote, “The most remarkable thing was that she was in the middle of a lifelong feud between two colleagues and throughout she remained the friend of both families.”

The Christmas Offering for Foreign Missions has been collected every year since the first one in 1888. Lottie herself had suggested that it be enlarged to include not only Pingtu, not only her work, not only China, but also Japan and all the world.

In 1918, the retired first executive secretary of WMU, Annie Armstrong, broke her silence on WMU matters with a proposal to strengthen the offering. Miss Armstrong proposed that the Christmas offering henceforth bear the name Lottie Moon Christmas Offering. In the mid-1920s, WMU leaders made an extensive investigative effort, asking eyewitnesses to write recollections of Lottie Moon, and they commissioned Una Roberts Lawrence to write a full biography, which was published in 1927. Ever since, the Lottie Moon story has been retold and rewritten to typify the sacrifice required of missionary and supporter. A contemporary missionary of another denomination, watching the growing fame of Lottie, is reputed to have said, “If I had known the old girl was going to become so famous, I would have paid more attention to her.” Some of her coworkers cautioned that Miss Moon would not have approved of the adulation. The story has attracted not only funds but personnel to the mission cause. Beginning with Dr. T. W. Ayers in 1900, dozens of missionaries have testified that they responded to God’s call to missions after reading about Lottie Moon.

The Lottie Moon story was retold in a different way in China. The Christians in Shantung immediately began collecting money to erect a monument in her honor. This was a form of appreciation accorded to few others. For instance, Martha Foster Crawford (but not her husband) was memorialized on a plaque inside the

During the revolution of 1911 Lottie ran the Baptist hospital while her fellow missionaries joined a flood of refugees.
Tengchow Baptist Church. William H. Sears, first pastor of the Pingtgu Baptist Church, was honored by a tablet detailing his biography.

The monument to Lottie Moon was different. It was set inside the walled yard of Tengchow Baptist Church in 1915. It was a simple shaft bearing her name in Chinese characters and a brief explanation that she was an American missionary. The inscription spoke not of her evangelistic work, not of her schoolteaching, and certainly not of her powers of persuasion in the United States. It simply said, “How she loved us.”

In 1985-86, Baptists from the United States were able to return for the first time in thirty-five years to Tengchow. The first ones, visiting unofficially, could see that the Tengchow church building was still standing behind its locked wall. The second delegation was able to walk inside. Part of the building was in use as a clinic, but most of the auditorium was standing in dusty neglect. The visitors saw the plaque honoring Martha Foster Crawford inside. Outside, they found the monument to Lottie Moon lying on its side under a pile of rubble, as if buried for protection. One word of the inscription had been obliterated: “American.” The word “missionary” and the words about her love for the Chinese remained.

Notes


2. Unless otherwise noted, sources for this article may be found in Catherine B. Allen, The New Lottie Moon Story (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1980). A condensed version in Spanish was published in 1992 by the Woman’s Missionary Union.


5. “Shantung” Province is today usually transliterated as “Shandong.” “Chefoo” is known in modern Chinese nomenclature as “Yantai.” “Tengchow” is now known as “Penglai.”


10. Quoted by Una Roberts Lawrence, Lottie Moon (Nashville: Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1927).

11. Recent visits to Pingtgu located the house and found it to be still in active use. Open meetings of the Pingtgu city church were resumed in 1989.

12. The first Westerners to seek out the Shaling Christians in the post-Mao era visited the village in 1987. The grandson of the first convert, Dan Ho Bang, was visited. The church building, which had been a simple native-style shelter, had fallen down, but the benches had been preserved in local homes. Local Christians were maintaining worship in their homes.


15. By 1989, more than seven hundred Southern Baptist tourists had visited Penglai (as Tengchow was then called) and Pingtgu in tours sponsored by the WMU. Because of interest shown by Americans, local authorities repaired the Penglai/Tengchow church building and reset the Lottie Moon monument. Christians from the community began to return to the church building, and the congregation was re-formed with a woman as pastor by early 1989. In Pingtgu, the church building, which had been used as a meeting hall, was returned for use by the Christians. The hospital building, on the compound where Lottie was cared for at the end, was being reclaimed from overgrowth and was partially restored. Through a joint venture between U.S. Christians and the local authorities, a medical training program was begun in 1992. One of the researchers in the first WMU-sponsored tour returned to China in 1992 as a coworker to the Chinese Christians.

Bibliographic Notes

Lottie Moon wrote many letters, many of which were published in the Foreign Mission Journal of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board. She was also often published in the Baptist newspapers of Virginia, Kentucky, Georgia, and occasionally other states. Despite real skill in written expression, she wrote no books or pamphlets. A request from the WMU for a “bright little tract” drove her to adamant refusal. Her only formal article, published in Woman’s Work in China, November 1881, concerned the rights and roles of unmarried women missionaries.

An amazing number of letters were saved by her correspondents—family, women’s missionary circles, and others. These have been collected into two main repositories: the Jenkins Library and Archives of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, Richmond, Virginia, and another at the Hunt Library and Archives of Woman’s Missionary Union, Auxiliary to Southern Baptist Convention, Birmingham, Alabama. Both of these archival collections contain much collateral data about Moon. The WMU collections focus on Christmas offering promotion, pamphlets, and biographical studies. Most of these retell the 1927 biography, Lottie Moon, by Una Roberts Lawrence. Also they draw on the eyewitness tracts produced by those who knew her: Mrs. J. M. Gaston, Dr. T. W. Ayers, Mrs. C. W. Pruitt, Mrs. W. W. Adams, and Dr. W. W. Adams. Another useful source is the pamphlet Heavenly Book Visitor, by Eliza Broadus, a contemporary who was the daughter of the one who baptized Lottie. The complete research files for The New Lottie Moon Story by Catherine B. Allen are held by the WMU Archives. The Foreign Mission Board archives are rich in extensive letter files from all North China missionaries during the Moon era. There are displays concerning Moon.

The original manuscript for Lottie Moon (1927) and some interview notes by Una Roberts Lawrence are at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Library, Louisville, Kentucky. The library also has a Lottie Moon historical room containing Moon’s desk and a portrait.

Helpful references to Moon, her family, and her coworkers are found at the Historical Foundation of the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches, Montreat, North Carolina; at the Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and at the Disciples of Christ Historical Society, Nashville, Tennessee.
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