2-1-1982

The East Asian Missionary Papers at the United Church of Canada Archives, Victoria College, University of Toronto

Bruce R. Lawrie
The modern Protestant missionary movement coincided with the rise to world hegemony of two English speaking nations, Great Britain and the United States. The enthusiasm of this movement to realize the "evangelization of the world in this generation" was evident not only in Britain and the United States but in smaller, younger, nations such as Canada.

By and large, Canadian involvement centered around two major denominations, the Methodist Church and the Presbyterians. Their activities gave birth to three separate China missions (two Presbyterian and one large Methodist) and one each in Japan (Methodist) and Korea (Presbyterian). These missionary endeavors, which lasted on an average of fifty years, yielded a wealth of important correspondence. These papers provide an in-depth account of the missionaries' activities in the fields of medicine, education, and evangelization. More importantly, perhaps, the correspondence tells us a great deal about the complexities stemming from East-West cultural and philosophical interchange. The revelations of various missionaries, either in the form of private diaries or unedited letters to the home base, are invaluable in this regard. The bulk of this material is at present preserved at the United Church of Canada Archives (UCCA).

Since 1953, when the United Church of Canada appointed its first full-time archivist-historian, the UCCA has been connected with Victoria College, University of Toronto. In 1972 crowded conditions within the basement of Victoria College's Pratt Library, due to a burgeoning collection, forced the Archives to relocate within the Birge-Carnegie library situated on the Victoria campus. Funding for the operation of the Archives is shared primarily by the United Church and Victoria College; private donations are a further source of income.

The Far Eastern Collection represents a significant proportion of the Archives' rather large overall holdings. The East Asian material consists mainly of Presbyterian, and Methodist (both pre-1925), and United Church correspondence (post-1925). There are also several collections of personal papers of individual missionaries.

In order to understand this collection more clearly it should be pointed out that the United Church of Canada was formed in 1925 through an amalgamation of Presbyterians, Methodists, and a small body of Congregationalists. Consequently, East Asian mission material before 1925 falls under either Methodist or Presbyterian headings while post-1925 correspondence is filed under the United Church of Canada. By and large, the missions inaugurated before 1925 were carried on unchanged by the United Church after this date.

The importance of the East Asian collection is heightened by the fact that the overwhelming proportion of the overall Canadian missionary enterprise in Asia
was dominated by the Methodists, the Presbyterians, and the later United Church. In China, for example, three of the four Canadian Protestant missions were carried out by these denominations. The Presbyterians operated the South China Mission in Kwangtung Province from 1902 to 1925 and the North China Mission in Honan Province from 1887 to 1925. The Methodist enterprise was centered in Szechwan, West China, from 1891 to 1925. In Japan, the Methodists functioned from 1873 to 1925, and the Korean Mission, under the auspices of the Presbyterians, was carried on between 1898 and 1925. The United Church continued the China missions until the early 1950's and the Japan and Korean endeavors until the 1960's.

The Collection in General

Generally speaking, the work of the Protestant missionaries was divided into evangelistic, educational, and medical work, and wherever possible the papers at the UCCA have been arranged accordingly. While the bulk of the material relates to the activities of male missionaries, some correspondence is available detailing the work of female missionaries, under the auspices of the various Women's Missionary Societies. Other significant sources relating to East Asia are: the mammoth biographical collection, which includes information on almost every former East Asian missionary; the photograph collection, which totals nearly 35,000 photographs covering the era 1885-1949; the numerous missionary yearbooks, journals, and magazines; and the various "special collections", some of which are described below.

Special Collections

The West China Union University papers. One of the most important endeavors of the Canadian Methodist missionaries in West China was the initiation, in 1910, of the West China Union University (WCUU). Although it was an inter-denominational enterprise, the WCUU was spearheaded and dominated by the Canadian Methodists. The WCUU made a significant contribution to the development of modern China through the establishment of a Medical School in 1915, and Schools of Dentistry and Pharmacy in 1920. The latter two, both under the direction of Canadians, were the first of their kind in West China. The WCUU is now known as the Szechwan Medical College. It is regarded as a key institution serving as a nationally renowned teaching university.

This collection contains about 15 cubic ft. of correspondence dealing with the founding and operation of the WCUU, and details the educational activities carried out within the various departments of the university. A large portion of the material also outlines the difficulties faced by the directors of the university in light of the anti-Christian movement prevalent at this time.

The Margaret H. Brown Papers. Margaret H. Brown went to Honan, North China, in 1916 under the auspices of the Women's Missionary Society of the Presbyterian Church in Canada. She established a girl's school in 1917 and a school for women in 1921. In 1929 she was appointed to the staff of the Christian Literature Society at Shanghai, where she worked as an editor. In 1932 she founded The Women's Star, a magazine for newly literate Chinese women, and was editor until 1941. After her return to Canada in 1955, she authored an unpublished four-volume definitive history of the Honan Mission.
The Margaret Brown papers portray a dedicated and complex, if conservative and unyielding, 19th-century figure operating in the midst of a rapidly changing 20th-century China.

The E.W. Wallace papers. The rather large collection of Dr. E. W. Wallace focuses primarily on his work in China as the preeminent educator of the Canadian Methodists in Szechwan. Dr. Wallace was in China from 1906 to 1929 and later served as the fourth Chancellor and President of Victoria College, University of Toronto, from 1930 until his death in 1940.

The China material in the Wallace collection is composed of letters in which he details his reaction to Chinese society and politics. There are also numerous diaries and addresses to educational and student assemblies in China which reflect the philosophy of this Columbia-trained "Deweyite" scholar.

Value of the East Asian Collection

The East Asian collection at the UCCA would be of inestimable value to advanced researchers in the fields of history and social science. For example, this vast correspondence could be utilized to carry out any number of projects which fall under the rubric of social and intellectual history or comparative studies.

The considerable merits of this archival collection have been recently demonstrated in a newly published work, entitled Rebel Out of China, by Professor S. Endicott of York University in Toronto. In the preparation of this biography of his father, the controversial James Endicott, Professor Endicott made extensive use of the UCCA sources. The result is a well-documented case study of a Canadian China missionary.

Operation of the Archives

The UCCA is highly organized and efficiently operated under the direction of the head archivist-historian, Rev. Glenn Lucas. Rev. Lucas and his supporting staff have produced finding aids for each of the collections housed in the archives. These guides serve as a "table of contents" for the collection and, as such, save the researcher valuable time by allowing him or her to bypass material which is quite obviously unrelated to the topic at hand. In addition to the preparation of the finding aids the efficient and helpful staff members are well acquainted with the archival material, and often bring to light obscure sources which the researcher may have overlooked.

Thus, a large relevant collection and its efficient organization and operation combine to make the UCCA an effective and valuable research resource.  

Notes

1. Aside from a small Anglican mission in China's Honan province and individual Canadian members of the larger China Inland Mission (CIM), the Presbyterians and Methodists comprised the bulk of non-Roman Catholic
missionaries in East Asia. The Canadian Roman Catholic contingent in East Asia tended to be, on the whole, relatively small.

2. The personal papers are primarily related to the China missionaries.

3. All material in the archives is measured according to cubic feet. The approximate volume of East Asian related material at the UCCA can be broken down as follows:

- China related material - Approx. 130 cu. ft.
- Japan " " - Approx. 60 cu. ft.
- Korea " " - Approx. 45 cu. ft.

4. Following is a selected list of other archival holdings related to East Asia.

a) Presbyterian Church in Canada. Christian Literature Society - 1900-1925. The papers relate to the Shanghai-based Society for the Diffusion of Christian Literature and General Knowledge. Canadian Presbyterian work in this regard was carried out by Dr. Donald MacGillvray of the Honan Mission. The collection contains information on the social significance of the translation of Western texts into Chinese.

b) Presbyterian Church in Canada. Mission to Chinese Labor Corps in France (1917-1919). A small but very interesting and important collection relating to the development of James Yen's "1000 character program" and Mass Education methods among illiterate laborers. Certain pedagogical methods used here were later employed, with some success, by Yen and his disciples in China.

c) Methodist Church in Canada. Young People's Forward Movement for Missions (1895-1925). This collection focuses on the recruitment of missionaries from the home base and, in addition, illustrates the impact of returning missionaries, or those on furlough, on Canadian society.


e) Methodist Church in Canada. WMS Papers 1918-1925.

f) United Church of Canada. WMS Collections for China, Japan, and Korea from 1925 to the termination date of the various missions.

All of the collections in (d), (e) and (f) describe the work of Canadian women missionaries in East Asia, especially in the area of education.

g) United Church of Canada. WMS Scholarship Dept. Correspondence 1926-1962. These papers contain some excellent information on the women sponsored or funded by the WMS of the United Church of Canada to study in North American post-secondary institutions.


5. Drs. A.W. Lindsay and E. N. Meuser headed the Dental College and School of Pharmacy respectively.

6. The United Church of Canada. Archives are normally open for use Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. No information concerning holiday schedules is at present available; those planning to travel to Toronto to use these archives should make inquiries concerning the availability of the archives on specific dates.