

## Augustana Women in World Missions

Marie Benson  
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Rachel Conrad Wahlberg made a statement at Breaking Open the Jar, the 25th anniversary celebration of the ordination of Women in the ELCA in Minneapolis, August, 1995, which I have always remembered and carried with me. When Rachel was young she said that she would like to be ordained but her parents counseled her, You can be a missionary to Africa or you can teach Bible in the schools, but to be ordained is out of the question.

I called Rachel last week in her Austin, TX, home. Now in her early 80s she told me that for her to say that in her adolescence to her parents was like a Catholic nun saying, I want to be the Pope!

I remembered Rachel's comment in 1995 because I have been a missionary as have many of you here in the group. Augustana Lutheran Church was a patriarchal society. We have attended all of the AHA gatherings. While I have loved every minute of these occasions and often call them a Prelude to Paradise I have come away each time wondering whether there were any women in Augustana beside Emmy Evald. And who used all of that money she raised for the mission field?

When I came into a position of input for our interest groups for this gathering I determined that we need to tell the story of women as missionaries in the Augustana Lutheran Church. There were two groups of women missionaries—single and married. A few of them went from one role to the other. Personally I was never a single woman missionary, in fact, I never called myself a missionary as I served 33 years in Tanzania.

I was a missionary's wife. When we came here to retire almost 12 years ago it dawned on me that I had the right to call myself a missionary.

### *First missionary to India*

The first woman missionary to serve was the wife of ABC, Rev. Augustus B. Carlson, who is listed as the first Augustana missionary. He was born in Sweden as I trust his wife was. He was commissioned June 24, 1878, in Philadelphia and reached India January 23, 1879. He died there March 29, 1882. His wife survived him and she served as a parish worker in Utah before returning to Sweden where she married and spent her remaining years. That was Mrs. ABC, first Augustana woman missionary, no first name, no maiden name.

However, on advice received from Arland Hultgren at the symposium to discuss the interest group papers, June 27, 2004, I looked up ABC in Augustana Ministerium. There it states that Augustus B. Carlson married Hilda Lindskog on May 31, 1878. This was a fortnight before ABC's ordination on June 16, 1878, and his commissioning June 24, 1878, for going to India.

The only single woman missionary to serve in the nineteenth century apparently was Charlotte Swensson who went to India in 1895. She died also in Rajahmundry in the 20th century, in 1908. Many women served in India but we will fast

forward in our afternoon session when Mary Lindell will be with us and can speak of what she did as missionary in India at the end of Augustanas work in India.

### *China*

So we come into the 20th century and the buzz word is China for missions.

My good friend, Alice Lindbeck Gottneid, and I often spoke of her parents' work in China, but only when I was researching this piece of history did I realize that Sister Magda Hallquist, Alices mother, was the second single woman missionary to go to China following Sister Ingeborg Nystul. Both had studied at Bethesda Deaconess Institute, Ingeborg went in 1906 and Magda in 1910 and both worked until 1949 in China. Magda married fellow missionary John W. Lindbeck.

Between 1920 and 1923 ten single women missionaries went to China and two who were famous for their long service were Ethel Akins and Minnie Tack.

As there is another interest group devoted to the Augustana Synods China Mission concurrently with this session I will not dwell on these ten women. Of those ten Miss Anna F. Olson, who went to China in 1920, was the last Augustana missionary to come out of communist China, retiring in 1951.

### *China to Tanganyika to Tanzania*

Perhaps Dr. Viola Fischer who went to China in 1929 is a good transition for the transition from China to Africa. After 20 years in China, 1930-1950, Dr. Fischer, the first Augustana woman doctor, went to Tanganyika where she worked for ten years, until 1961. She was one of many missionaries who headed west from China to Africa.

Work had begun in Tanganyika, East Africa, by the pioneer missionaries, Ralph and Gertrude Hult in 1919. There followed several women missionaries in the early 1920s with medical expertise:

Selma Swanson, first medical missionary to Iramba, 1923

Dr. Bertha Anderson, first medical doctor to Iramba-Turu, 1924

Elveda Bonander Reusch, medical missionary, 1924-1927 when she married Dr. Richard Reusch.

In recent years I was told by an MK (missionary kid), now an octogenarian herself, that the medical missionary women felt covetousness, perhaps jealousy, when Elveda was chosen to be the wife of Richard! Unclaimed blessings perhaps?

Margaret Samuelson Tessberg served as a nurse also in the 1930s and her daughter, Charlotte Stanley, is with us today.. There were many women missionaries in Tanzania including:

Vivian "Auntie Bing" Gulleen 1938-1978 teaching and evangelistic work

Mabel Larson 1944-1978, teaching at Ilboru Secondary School, Makumira Theological College

Velura Kinnan 1941-1969, Sunday School work

Della Brown 1952-1978, Sunday School work and Bible School teaching

Alice Turnbladh 1949-1976, nurse tutor at Kiomboi Hospital, living in Alexandria, MN

These are a few of the many who served and they worked in many roles beside what is given above.

They are the saints you learned about in your Junior Mission Band. Lillian Danielson and the many families on the Zamzam were recognized in interest groups at the Gathering in Lindsborg two years ago.

Late last century, not so long ago, missionary women who served in the Iramba-Turu area, the former Augustana Mission field, now the Central Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, determined to write a book. They named it *Touched by the African Soul*. Sixty two women wrote stories for the book

Augustana began work in Japan, in Latin America, in British North Borneo in 1950 and we will hear from some of the women who worked in those areas who are here with us.

Emmy Evald and her women cohorts began world missions for the Augustana Lutheran Church. The egg money of many mothers never traveled farther than when the Women's Missionary Society dispatched missionaries on their way around the world

This gives you an overview of what happened in the 125 years since Mrs. ABC, with the maiden name of Hilda Lindskog, first reached India in 1878.

Besides Charlotte Stanley, daughter of Missionary Margaret Samuelson, thirteen women spoke of their work as Augustana missionaries between the two sessions offered of this interest group:

*Served in Japan:*

Eloise Dale

Miriam Olson

Lois Setterholm

*Served in Tanzania:*

Carley Engwall

Joyce Lund

Juliet Anderson Moris

Esther Oberg

Lois Fisher Okerstrom, also Ethiopia

Helen Koester Pedersen

Audrey Swenson

*Served in India*

Mary Lindell

*Served in Latin America*

Carol Leaf Nelson, Uruguay

*Served in British North Borneo, now Sabah, Malaysia*

Rhoda Smith Nelson

*Resources Used for This Essay:*

*Foundation for Tomorrow: A Century of Progress in Augustana World Missions* by S. Hjalmar Swanson, 1960.

*The Augustana Ministerium, 1850-1962: A Study of the Careers of the 2,504 Pastors of the Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Synod/Church* by Conrad Bergendoff, 1980.

*Touched by the African Soul*, compiled by Gloria Cunningham and Lois Okerstrom, edited by Lois Okerstrom, Helen Erickson, and Martha Fosse, 1998; available from Quiet Waters Press, Bolivar, Missouri.