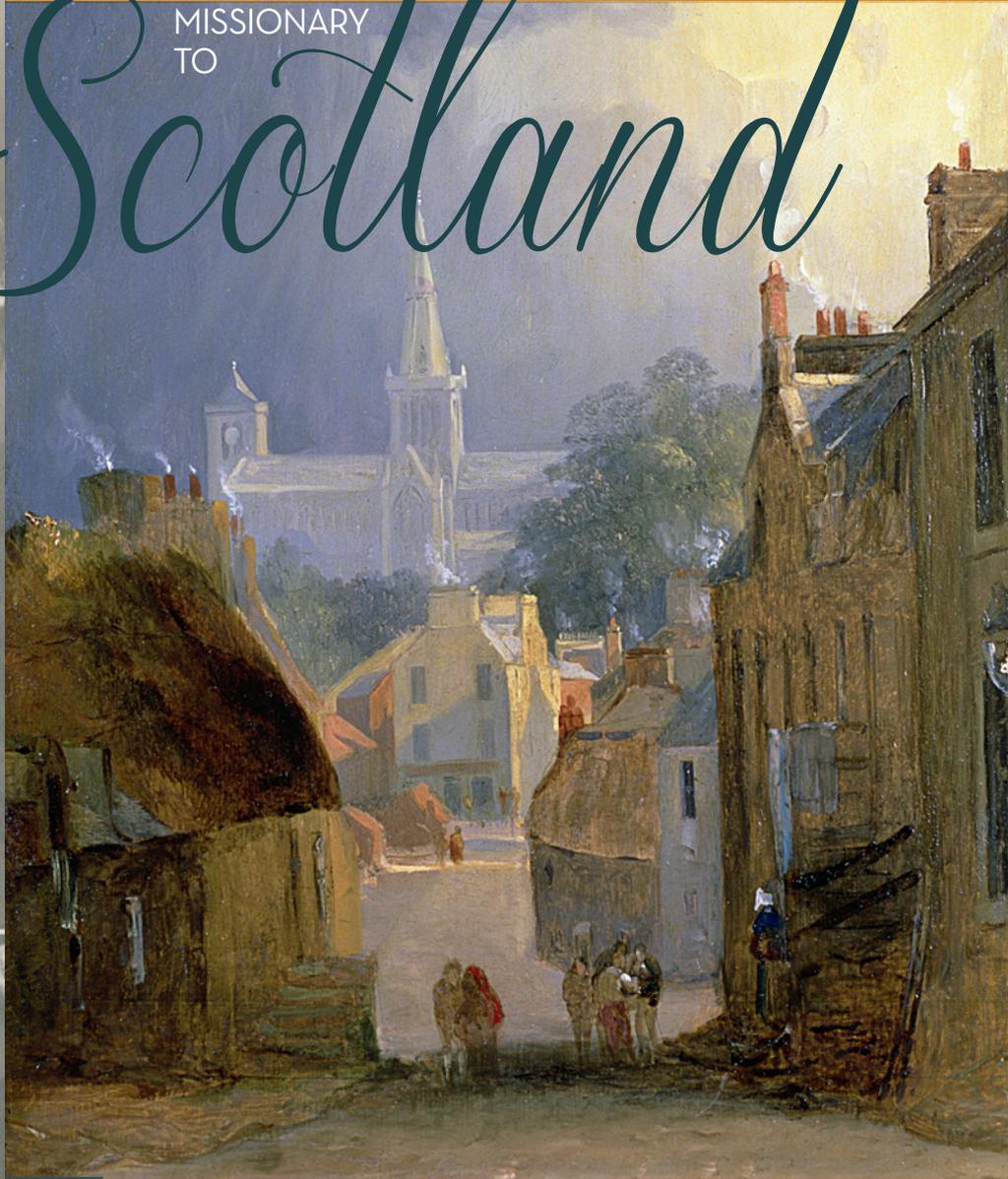


JOSEPHINE BOOTH, SISTER MISSIONARY TO

Scotland



Missionaries serving in the British Mission, circa 1899. Josephine Booth (right) is sitting next to Eliza Chipman, one of her missionary companions.



JOSEPHINE BOOTH WAS THE SEVENTH SINGLE SISTER MISSIONARY. SHE SERVED AS AN AMBASSADOR FOR BOTH THE CHURCH AND MORMON WOMEN.

By Matthew S. McBride
Church History Department

On January 13, 1901, Sister Josephine Booth and her companion visited yet another home and offered a man a “Mormon tract.” The man, referring to the Church’s past practice of plural marriage, remarked smugly, “My goodness, woman, I’m too much married already.” Josephine wrote in her journal that since the man “looked ill-treated,” she decided not to lecture him about marriage.¹

Josephine Booth was a pioneer sister missionary, one of the first single sister missionaries called. She served in Glasgow, Scotland, from 1899 to 1901, and in her journal she recorded challenges she faced acting as an ambassador not only for the Church but specifically for Mormon women.

A “Lady Missionary”

The First Presidency authorized the calling of the first sister missionaries in March 1898.² Several mission presidents had asked for sister missionaries in order to help break down deep prejudices against the Church. One popular perception held that Mormon women were mindless polygamous slaves and that the elders were in England to secretly recruit plural wives.

By their presence and teaching, Josephine and her companions exemplified Mormon womanhood and helped refute these claims. People were often surprised to meet a poised, articulate “lady missionary.” Josephine said she felt others “at a distance eyeing us as though we were creatures belonging to another sphere.” When she spoke at meetings, people sometimes “came in off the street to see a Mormon woman.”³

Josephine wrote that one “stately looking” woman “was very curious to see some real live Mormons, [so] she came to have a look at us.” The

conversation went well, and Josephine wrote that the woman “seemed very friendly and said she wished her boy could see us, as he was quite opposed to our people.”⁴

A Greater Voice

The sisters were assigned neighborhoods to canvas door-to-door, distributing tracts, or pamphlets. In a typical month Josephine would give out 600 to 700 tracts and have gospel conversations with about 30 individuals or families. She often wrote of being exhausted spiritually and physically by her work. Yet after a successful conversation she would feel “quite happy, as I always do when I find some one willing to listen.”⁵

The missionaries typically “met many frowns and few smiles” while tracting. Cold moments of rejection led Josephine to write despairingly, “This is a cold hard-hearted world.”⁶ However, she rejoiced in the small gains she made as she worked with investigators. She and her companion taught the gospel to a Mrs. Milne and



her daughters. “Mr. Milne,” Josephine wrote, “although extremely bitter against our people at first, has sufficiently thawed out to shake hands very heartily and say, ‘How is our missionary girl to day?’” She then wrote, “Our girl smiled her very best smile and inwardly wished that . . . the warmth of the gospel might send away the frost altogether.”⁷

In addition to the rigors of tracting, early sisters were frequently called upon to speak at street meetings. Josephine wrote of one early experience: “Went to a street meeting. Had an attentive crowd but after the meeting was over, a fellow jumped into the ring and opposed us.”⁸ These confrontations taught Josephine and the other missionaries how to better articulate and defend their beliefs.

Josephine also frequently spoke at

larger, more formal gatherings, typically on Sundays. Over time she gained confidence as a speaker. She was invited several times to St. George’s in the Fields—a large place of worship belonging to the Church of Scotland—to speak to a youth temperance organization called the Band of Hope. She was introduced as a “‘Mormon’ missionary girl from Utah” and spoke on general religious and moral topics such as honesty.⁹



Josephine Booth, just prior to her departure as a missionary

1850

1860

1870

1880

1850s

In England, Scotland, and Wales:

Many Latter-day Saint women took part in **TRACTING SOCIETIES** and held monthly meetings to map out districts and report on their successes. It was said that these women circulated half a million tracts authored by Orson Pratt.

“[The sisters’ distribution of tracts] made them preachers, in a way; and they carried their sermons to the homes of rich and poor, to be read at the fireside by those who, but for this, never would have gone to hear an elder preach.”

—EDWARD W. TULLIDGE¹



1883

The Church began to buy tracts and have members in the British Mission distribute them.



In 1851 the president of the London Conference, Eli B. Kelsey, reported on a plan to distribute thousands of tracts that members had purchased.

1851

LOUISA BARNES PRATT

accompanied her husband, Addison Pratt, who had been called to preach the gospel in the Pacific. Louisa taught Tahitian children on the island of Tubuai from 1851 to 1852.



1865

MILDRED RANDALL was set apart in 1865 to travel with her husband to Hawaii, where she served as a teacher. In 1873, she became the first woman to depart on a mission without her husband when she returned to Hawaii to teach for three years.



After her first speech, several women congratulated her on her remarks and invited her to speak at charity meetings. She concluded her entry for that day, “I got so excited over it all that I couldn’t sleep.”¹⁰

The Highs and Lows

The pages of Josephine’s journal are alive with intricate descriptions of local churches, museums, markets, factories, and theater productions. She and the other missionaries took every opportunity to participate in important events, visit historic sites, and adopt local customs.

There were also dreadful moments. Josephine wrote of a confrontation she had with a drunken man who got “quite sociable” with her. She screamed and ran as he chased her “amid many roars of laughter.” That night, she

wrote, “I dreamed of drunken men and persecuted Mormons.”¹¹ On another occasion, she and Sister Eliza Chipman felt prompted to hire a private car to take them home in order to avoid a man who had been following them.¹² The sisters also endured a flea infestation in their apartment. She recorded, “I come out [of] my ‘retirement’ about three times every night to continue my flea hunts. Talk about Stanley in the wilds of Africa hunting lions. He will never know what ‘diligent hunting’ is till he hunts fleas.”

Her Fellow Laborers

Josephine served with two companions: first Eliza Chipman and then Emily Penfold. She typically got along well with them, though like most missionaries, they had moments of frustration with each



Center of photograph: The first single sister missionaries in the history of the restored Church, Lucy Jane Brimhall and Amanda Inez Knight. They served in the British Mission starting in April 1898.

BELOW, RIGHT, MAP © ALISTAIR SCOTT/THINKSTOCK

1890

To learn more about early sister missionaries, visit lds.org/go/sistersE815.

ELIZABETH McCUNE traveled with her family to England in February 1897. While there she sang at street meetings and held the elders’ hats while they preached, but she felt a desire to preach herself.

1897
FEBRUARY



ELIZABETH McCUNE was invited to speak at a Church conference in London and made a favorable impression.



“If a number of bright and intelligent women were called on missions to England, the results would be excellent.”
—ELDER JOSEPH W. McMURRIN (1858–1932) of the Seventy³

To watch a video about **ELIZABETH McCUNE** and the first sister missionaries, go to lds.org/go/mccuneE815.



Convinced that Elizabeth’s presence and words had been the “means of allaying much prejudice,” **ELDER JOSEPH W. McMURRIN** of the European Mission presidency wrote the First Presidency, requesting sister missionaries.²



other. While looking for an address, Sister Chipman once told Josephine that she “would pity us if you were to be our guide.” When Sister Chipman got them lost along the way, Josephine retorted that she “did not think that it would have been much worse if I had been leading.” In her journal she confided, “It is hard to fight against the world and the girl I live with.”¹³

She also made friends with the elders. At the time, elders and sisters did many things together: ate meals, went sightseeing, attended social functions, preached, folded and distributed tracts, and accompanied each other to meetings. Because there were no policies or precedents explaining how elders and sisters should interact, they learned as they went along.

At a branch meeting in November 1900, one of the members in Glasgow complained that the elders were “dangling around after the sisters.” Though she was “astounded at the awful accusation”¹⁴ and felt neither she nor the elders had done anything wrong, she understood the importance of maintaining the trust of the members.

A few days later, she “gave the boys a talk.” She was “afraid we were too light minded” and “didn’t want us by any act of ours to retard the work.” In spite of the elders’ protestations, she insisted, “We must be more serious. Not that we have done any thing wrong—but—well, we must work more, think more, and pray more.”¹⁵

This talk helped put their relationship on a more formal footing. But

Whenever I had the pleasure of listening to one of [the lady missionaries] bear testimony to the truth of the Gospel, and talk of their Utah sisters, and defend the women of Mormondom, I felt their words were far more convincing than anything that could be said by the men. . . . I believe there is room for a good many sisters to do effective missionary service.”

—ELDER JOSEPH W. McMURRIN (1858–1932) of the Seventy, “Lady Missionaries,” *Young Woman’s Journal*, December 1904, 539–40.



1898

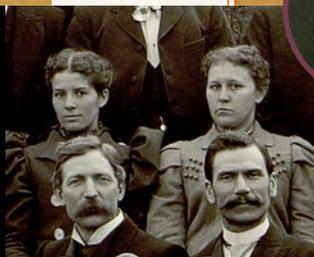
1898
APRIL 1

1899 JOSEPHINE BOOTH,
seventh single sister missionary,
served in Glasgow, Scotland.

Below: Women serving in the Eastern States Mission in 1915.



“It has been decided to call some of our wise and prudent women into the missionary field.”—PRESIDENT GEORGE Q. CANNON (1827–1901), First Counselor in the First Presidency⁴



“The lady missionary is no longer an experiment, but an unqualified success.”
—ELDER FRANCIS M. LYMAN (1840–1916) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles⁵



LUCY JANE BRIMHALL and AMANDA INEZ KNIGHT were set apart to be the first single female proselyting missionaries in the history of the Church.



1902

27

women went on missions.

1918

As the number of male missionaries decreased due to military service, 38 percent of all missionaries were women.

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the good-humored elders did not let her lecture go without a response. They visited the sisters' apartment a few days later, "sat down, and each taking a bible from their pocket began to read." They also brought a book called *How to Behave*, and "there they sat as solemn as two owls." "It was so funny," recorded Josephine, "that I fairly roared."¹⁶

A New Path

As Josephine's mission drew to a close, the mission presidency assigned her to visit branches throughout Europe as an example of the good work that sister missionaries were doing. Following Josephine's talk in Denmark, a member recognized the impact she had on those in attendance and said, "Sister Booth the Lord is pleased with your work. . . .

Your testimony has been borne in power."

Reflecting on her service as a missionary, Josephine, like some missionaries, struggled with feelings of inadequacy, but she overcame them with the Lord's support. "In [God's] mercy he forgives and loves me, because I want to be his daughter in very deed."¹⁷

Josephine may not have fully realized her impact on the world and the Church, but the efforts of Josephine Booth and dozens of other pioneering "lady missionaries" blazed a new trail, marking the way for today's sisters. ■

NOTES

1. Josephine D. Booth (Woodruff), Jan. 13, 1901, Journal, 1899–1901, Church History Library, Salt Lake City. Punctuation modernized. Subsequent references to this journal are by date only.
2. See George Q. Cannon, in "Biographical Sketches: Jennie Brimhall and Inez Knight," *Young Woman's Journal*, June 1898, 245.

3. May 19, 1901.
4. Dec. 15, 1899.
5. Oct. 15, 1900.
6. Nov. 28, 1899.
7. Oct. 4, 1900.
8. Aug. 11, 1899.
9. "Josephine D. Booth," in Andrew Jenson, ed. *Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia*, 4 vols. (1901–36), 1:504.
10. Oct. 17, 1900.
11. Aug. 12, 1899.
12. Dec. 17, 1899.
13. Nov. 30, 1899.
14. Nov. 12, 1900.
15. Nov. 26, 1900.
16. Nov. 28, 1900.
17. May 26, 1901.

TIME LINE NOTES

1. Edward W. Tullidge, *The Women of Mormondom* (1877), 276.
2. See Matthew S. McBride, "I Could Have Gone into Every House": Elizabeth McCune Helped Pave the Way for Sister Missionaries," history.lds.org.
3. Joseph W. McMurrin, in McBride, "I Could Have Gone into Every House."
4. George Q. Cannon, in "Biographical Sketches: Jennie Brimhall and Inez Knight," *Young Woman's Journal*, June 1898, 245.
5. Francis M. Lyman, in Lydia D. Alder, "Thoughts on Missionary Work," *Woman's Exponent*, Aug. 1, 1901, 22.
6. Thomas S. Monson, "Welcome to Conference," *Ensign*, Nov. 2012, 5.

1920

1950

2000

2010

2020

1945

1964

The age requirement for sister missionaries fell to 21.

1971

The mission length for sisters dropped to 18 months.

2012
OCTOBER



"I am pleased to announce that able, worthy young women who have the desire to serve may be recommended for missionary service beginning at age 19, instead of age 21." —PRESIDENT THOMAS S. MONSON⁶

MORE THAN
22,000
sister missionaries were serving at the end of 2014.

The year 1945 marked a time when the number of sister missionaries exceeded the number of elders.

With the outbreak of World War II, several missions shut down and many elders returned home.



During the mid-1900s, FAREWELL TESTIMONIALS were often held for missionaries about to enter the field. If on a weeknight, these events might even include dancing afterward. (Above: Farewell testimonial program for Evelyn May Taylor, called to the Northern California Mission in 1946.)



PHOTOGRAPH OF PROGRAM COURTESY OF ARDIS PARSHALL