The Ladies Societies

Ragnhild M. Bairnsfather, July 2021

It is not an exaggeration to say that our church was largely built on the backs of the women. Lucinda Mason was the founding "mother" and was president of the Ladies' Social Circle that was organized December 7, 1877. Its purpose was "to promote an acquaintance among its members and to raise funds for the benefit of the church." At that time, the group had thirty-nine members. In November and December of their first year, they held suppers, a "Grand Concert," a maple sugar party, a strawberry festival, and other entertainments. The money they raised went to the pastor's salary ($1,000 in 1883), the coal and gas bills, and debt on the furnace. In 1891, they devised a plan to pay off the debt of the new organ by giving out "barrels" into which people were to put in one cent a day. They also contributed proceeds from a fair and entertainment, said to be the finest ever given in the town. (*The Story of Methodism in Winchester, Mass. from 1872 to 1897.* Prepared for the Silver Anniversary April 25, 1897. Sara A. Emerson, editor; p. 29-30.)

The ladies continued to provide needed funds for wide-ranging purposes. The society in 1922 was called the Ladies Aid Society. The members pledged $5,000 toward the building fund and assumed payment of $15 a week to the current expense account. A junior choir was organized in 1932 and its thirty-five members were given robes by the churchwomen. Winifred Nicholas delivered her poem at a Quarterly Conference in 1936, which read, in part:

We've got an organ in the church – very finest in the land,
It's got a thousand pipes or more, its melody is grand
And when we sit in cushioned pews, and hear the master play,
It carries us to realms of bliss unnumbered miles away.
It cost a cool three thousand, and it stood the hardest test;
We'll pay a thousand on it – the Ladies' Aid the rest.
They'll give a hundred socials, cantatas, too, and teas,
They'll bake a thousand angel cakes, and tons of cream they'll freeze.
They'll beg and scrape and toil and sweat for seven years or more,
And then they'll start all o'er again for a carpet on the floor.
No; it isn't just like digging out the money from your vest,
When the Ladies' Aid gets busy and says, "We'll pay the rest."

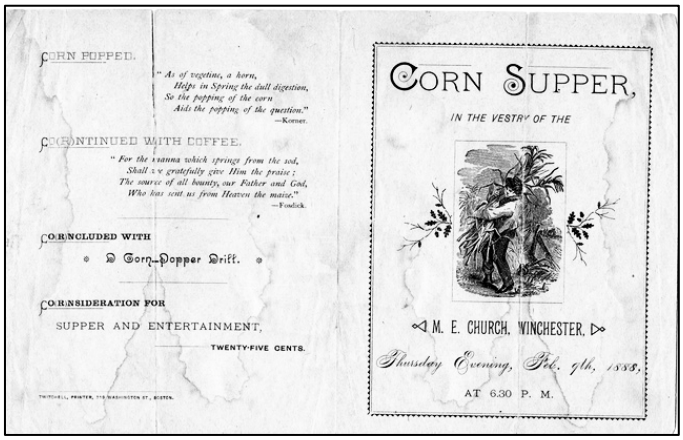
There were two missionary societies – Woman's Home Missionary Society founded October 1885 with Lucinda Mason as president, and the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society (WFMS) organized the same year. In its first year, the Woman's Home Missionary Society sent boxes of books to "Industrial Homes" (vocational schools) in Savannah, Ga. and Holly Springs, Mississippi. Closer to home, supplies and money were donated to the "Immigrant's Home" in East Boston and the Medical Mission in the North End.

The Woman's Foreign Missionary Society in 1915 and 1916 concentrated on studying issues of Christianity in India, Burma, China, Korea, and Japan. At an 1889 meeting, twenty women were present. They voted to send barrels of clothing, books, and paper to the Nooksachk Indians in Alaska. The collection taken was $1.64. It was said that "no heathen country on the face of the globe practice such terrible evils as Alaska." (*WFMS Journal*). At the meeting in February 1890, Mrs. Daggett gave a talk about her visit to the Nooksachk Indians. The collection of $.43 covered her expenses.

At a meeting in 1892, the ladies were to take "beehives" (probably beehive banks like that pictured, right) to fill to help pay the debt on the Deaconess Emigrants Home in East Boston that was a former liquor saloon. Each lady took a beehive to collect as much money as possible. Anyone who got less that $1 was to be called a drone. At the end of the drive, the beehives were collected and the amount was $13.15. There were no drones!

Beehive bank, photo from Ebay

Other ways the ladies raised money included an apple pie and gingerbread social, and a corn supper (see the program, below). They sold homemade candy and aprons, and held cake and ice cream events. They sponsored a hurdy gurdy music performance. In 1899 they held a "Washington Evening" at which two members dressed as George and Martha Washington and nearly everyone dressed in costume and wore powdered hair. Entertainment was singing "old fashioned" songs and a spelling match.


CORN POPPED.

" As of vegetine, a horn,
Helps in Spring the dull digestion,
So the popping of the corn
Aids the popping of the question."
—Korner.

CO(R)NTINUED WITH COFFEE.

" For the manna which springs from the sod,
Shall we gratefully give Him the praise;
The source of all bounty, our Father and God,
Who has sent us from Heaven the maize."
—Fosdick.

CO(R)NCLUDED WITH

A Corn-Popper Drill.

CO(R)NSIDERATION FOR

SUPPER AND ENTERTAINMENT,

TWENTY-FIVE CENTS.

TWITCHELL, PRINTER, 318 WASHINGTON ST., BOSTON.

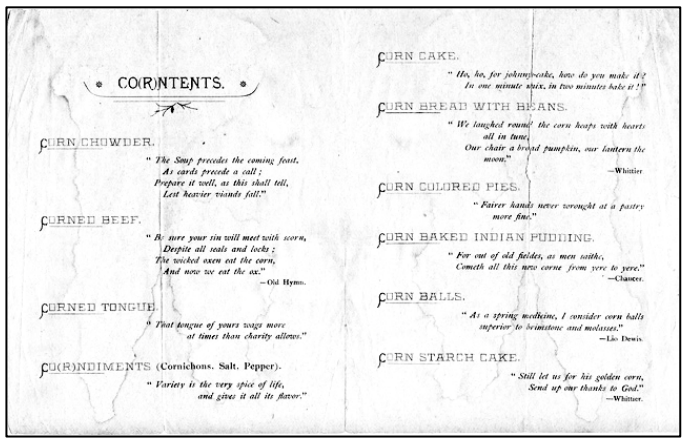
CORN SUPPER,

IN THE VESTRY OF THE

M. E. CHURCH, WINCHESTER.

Thursday Evening, Feb. 9th, 1888,

AT 6.30 P. M.


CO(R)NTENTS.

CORN CHOWDER.
" The Soup precedes the coming feast,
As cards precede a call;
Prepare it well, as this shall tell,
Lest heavier visands fall."

CORNED BEEF.
" Be sure your tin will meet with scorn,
Despite all seals and locks;
The wicked oxen eat the corn,
And now we eat the ox."
—Old Hymn.

CORNED TONGUE.
" That tongue of yours wags more
at times than charity allows."

CO(R)NDIMENTS (Cornichons. Salt. Pepper).
" Variety is the very spice of life,
and gives it all its flavor."

CORN CAKE.
" Ho, ho, for johnnycake, how do you make it?
In one minute quix, in two minutes bake it!"

CORN BREAD WITH BEANS.
" We laughed round the corn heaps with hearts
all in tune,
Our chair a broad pumpkin, our lantern the
moon."
—Whittier

CORN COLORED PIES.
" Fairer hands never wrought at a pastry
more fine."

CORN BAKED INDIAN PUDDING.
" For out of old fieldes, as men writhe,
Cometh all this new corne from yere to yere."
—Chaucer.

CORN BALLS.
" As a spring medicine, I consider corn balls
superior to brimstone and molasses."
—Lic. Dewis.

CORN STARCH CAKE.
" Still let us for his golden corn,
Send up our thanks to God."
—Whittier.

At a meeting in 1915, Winnifred Crawford read a leaflet entitled, "Driving out the drink devil." The Women's Christian Temperance Union was active in Winchester. Their February 1915 meeting, held in the vestry of the Congregational Church, was devoted to a quiz prepared by the national headquarters. The object was "to state in concrete form the arguments, pro and con, for national prohibition." A very pleasant social was held the week before at which half an hour was spent "in practicing the rally cries and songs which are used at the conventions. These socials are now an established feature of the work and are very enjoyable." (*Winchester Star*, February 19, 1915, p.4)

In 1939 the Woman's Society of Christian Service was organized. By 1957 there were six circles with a total membership of 101. Their annual report for 1957 states they raised and contributed $1,213 toward the church's 1956/57 budget. Mission fund donations were sent to India, Rolling Ridge, Morgan Memorial, Cooper Community and Mrs. Krishan in India. (Minutes, treasurer's reports and programs for various years of these societies are held at Boston University School of Theology Archives, should one be inclined to read them.)