

Radical Woman in a Classic Town: Frances Willard of Evanston

Chapter 2: Willard Learns to Lead: “My Own Methodist Hive”



Figure 1, Willard and her students, Pittsburgh Female College, circa 1864

After graduation, Willard took teaching jobs in small schools in Evanston and Chicago, the North-Western Female College, the Pittsburgh Female College, and, as preceptress, at the Genesee Wesleyan Seminary in New York (later Syracuse University). By 1864 Willard was well enough known in Evanston to be named the Corresponding Secretary of the American Methodist Ladies Centenary Association, which was working to raise money for a new dormitory for Garrett Biblical Institute. Although the Association, like other such organizations, was run by men, women gained

significant leadership experience from their participation. The campaign was a success; Heck Hall (named for Methodist Barbara Heck) opened in 1866 on the site now occupied by the Charles Deering Library.

The women who were Willard’s neighbors and friends--faculty wives, ministers’ wives--provided Willard with many inspiring examples of womanly activism. Willard listed in her book *A Classic Town* the names of noted reformers (including advocates of woman suffrage) who came to speak at the First Methodist Church.

From 1869-71, Willard accompanied a friend traveling through Europe and the Middle East. On her return, the women of the First Methodist Church asked her to speak about her experiences in missionary countries. Despite her fears of speaking before a group, the talk went so well that she gave it again before other groups of churchwomen. Then the bishop asked her to speak before an audience of women and men. She later wrote that “from that time dates my public work.”



"Evanston is remarkable in nothing if not in the ability, individuality and enterprise of its women."
 —Frances Willard, *A Classic Town*



Emily Huntington Miller (1833-1913)

Writer of children's stories, involved in the founding of the Evanston College for Ladies, Dean of Women at Northwestern, and one of several Evanston women who met during the summer of 1874 to found the WCTU. Willard noted of Miller that "under the gentlest womanly exterior she has an intellect of far-reaching liberality and a heart as brave as that of a commodore."



Elizabeth Marcy (1821-1911), right

Wife of NU interim president and geology professor Oliver Marcy, and a neighbor of the Willards on Chicago Avenue. Marcy was a member and local leader in the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), the Woman's Home Missionary Society, and the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society, and founded a social settlement, the Elizabeth Marcy Home, in Chicago's Bohemian District. Willard described her as a "remarkable woman, full of originality in thought and expression, and known throughout Methodism as a writer in verse and prose, and as a speaker who can make even a prosy theme poetic."



Mary Bannister Willard (1841-1912), circa 1888

A friend from the days of the North Western Female College, who later married Frances Willard's brother, she was active in the movement to establish kindergartens, opening one in Evanston in 1889. She (along with her sister-in-law) published the *Chicago Post* and later edited the *Union Signal*, the WCTU's weekly newspaper. She moved to Berlin to open the American Home School for Girls in 1886.

Evanston's First Methodist Church



Willard friends' and neighbors' lives centered around the First Methodist Church. Willard benefited from the sermons of the ministers, and from the support and examples set by the Methodist women she met—both older and of her own generation.

Figure 2, The Old First Methodist Church, circa 1871



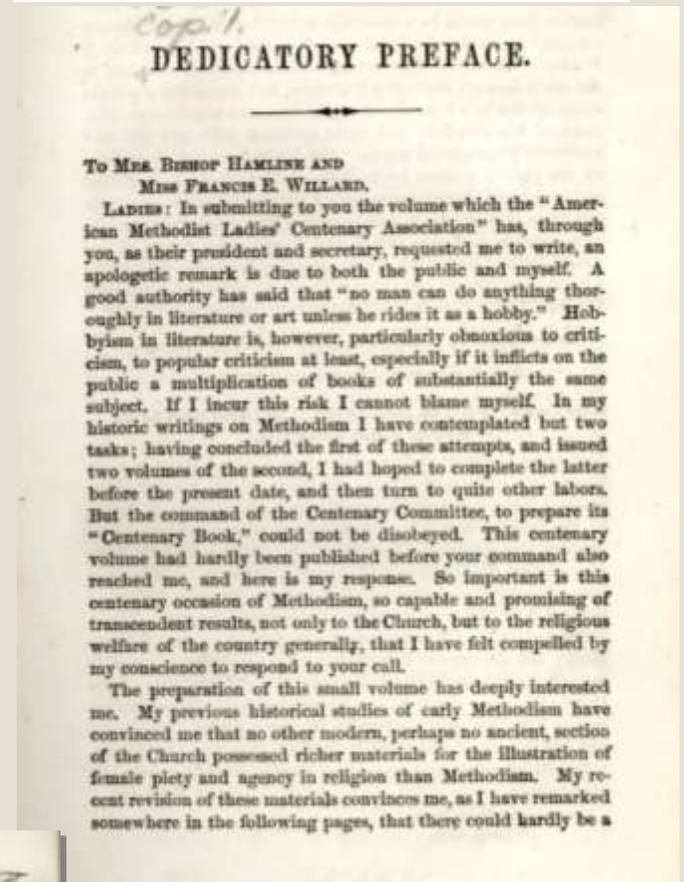
Figure 3, The second First Methodist Church, circa 1875

The American Methodist Ladies Centenary Association: Building a Dormitory-and a leader



Figure 4, Heck Hall, circa 1874

Figure 5, Women of Methodism, 1867



World Traveler

Figure 6, Willard's Diary, Vol 33 (November 9-December 25, 1869)



Sources of Items and Photographs



Figure 1

The Pittsburgh Female College was a Methodist secondary school. In all her teaching posts, Willard was an inspiring and memorable teacher who watched over her students' moral and educational progress.

Photograph (modern copy) on loan from the Frances Willard Memorial Library and Archives

Remarkable Women of Evanston (Emily Huntington Miller, Elizabeth Marcy, and Mary Bannister Willard): All three women were involved in the Women's Temperance Alliance, the fore-runner to the WCTU, and later in the WCTU itself (Marcy and Mary B. Willard were presidents of the Evanston Union). They are among the many Evanston women described in *A Classic Town*.

All photographs from the Northwestern University Archives' Photograph Collection

Figure 2

The church stood at the corner of Church Street and Orrington Avenue (where the Evanston Public Library is now), right around the corner from the Willard home on Chicago Avenue, from 1856-1872.

Photograph from Northwestern University Archives' Photograph Collection

Figure 3

The new church was built at Church and Hinman between 1870 and 1874. It stood until 1909.

Photograph from Northwestern University Archives' Photograph Collection

Figure 4

The new dormitory for the Garrett Biblical Institute, built in 1866, was funded by subscriptions raised by the American Methodist Ladies Centenary Association, with Willard as corresponding secretary. Her letter-writing campaign expanded her circle of acquaintances and resulted in \$30,000 in subscriptions. Heck Hall housed Garrett's students-- known as the Bibs--until it burned down in 1914.

Northwestern University Archives' Photograph Collection

Figure 5

This book was commissioned by the American Methodist Ladies Centenary Association as a gift in return for pledges. Willard's successful fund-raising (despite her avowed lack of accounting skills) brought recognition from outside her local area when she was one of two dedicatees (the other was the Bishop's wife) acknowledged in the preface of the history.

From United Library/ Garrett

Figure 6

Willard, a diarist by nature, kept exhaustive journals (about 20 small volumes) of her travels, documenting events and conversations, and recording detailed impressions of what she saw. She was able to draw upon these experiences for her first public speaking efforts—and they remained vivid for her during the rest of her life. Transcriptions of Willard's journals are held in the NU Archives, and are excerpted in *Writing Out My Heart*, by Carolyn DeSwarte Gifford.

The original volumes are held in the Frances Willard Memorial Library and Archives

Journal volume on loan from the Frances Willard Memorial Library and Archives