

“In the Hands of the Ladies”: The Founding, and Foundering, of Women’s Work for Women In Nagasaki, 1875–1880

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In her seminal study, American Women in Mission: A Social History of Their Thought and Practice, Dana L. Robert takes note of the relative paucity of “raw and uncharted” sources of the women’s missionary movement in the nineteenth century. She also notes that she had to take “depth soundings” of women’s work in the mission fields, and, that in the case of Protestants in the nineteenth century, she centered her work around the women of the Congregational church, and the Methodist Episcopal church. Further, geographically, at least in Asia, she, like most mission historians, concentrated on women’s work in China and India.¹ Along with other historians at the first, ground-breaking conference devoted to the subject of “Women and American Religion”, convened at the University of Chicago in 2003,² Roberts called for many more monographs, both denominationally and geographically, in order to facilitate a complete picture of the American women missionary movement. This paper is part of my own contribution to that effort, in that it is an ongoing, gendered, look at Reformed Church in America missionary women in Japan.³

The Reformed Church was one of the last major denominations to form a denominational women’s board, despite the long interest and leader-

ship of Reformed Church women in the missionary enterprise. Congregational women had led the way in independent women's work, in 1868, forming an autonomous Woman's Board of Missions, and had been quickly followed by the Methodists in 1869, the Presbyterians in 1870, and the Baptists in 1871. The women of the Reformed Church, however, were not invited to organize a separate auxiliary board until 1875. Before this, the Reformed Church's lack of support for women in missionary work did not pass unremarked upon by its women members, who had demonstrated an interest in missions since at least 1834, and who had supported the Woman's Union Missionary Society with great faithfulness after its inception in 1861. In 1925, Mrs. William Chamberlain suggested, only partly in jest, that one reason for the delay was that while the "mills of the gods grind slowly ...the mills of the Dutch gods grind slowest of all."⁴ She might have added that the mills ground faster after competition from the mill of the women's interdenominational gods. Mary Kidder's quick appointment as an assistant missionary to Japan had been a reaction to the plans of the Woman's Union Mission Society to begin a school in that country. The Woman's Board of Foreign Missions of the Reformed Church in America also owed its formation, in part, to the existence of the Woman's Union Missionary Society, or at least to John Ferris' increasing dislike of that society's existence and his envy of its success on the mission field in Yokohama.⁵ Despite his apprehension, a Woman's Board, firmly subordinate to Synod's Board, must have seemed the best method of avoiding the work of the WUMS, and of regaining the support of the Reformed Church women who had supported, especially financially, that society after its organization in 1861. If Reformed women were to go abroad as missionaries, they should go under the authority and control of the Reformed Church and its officers. Official histories of the Reformed mission boards stress the financial

loss that accrued to the work of the Reformed Church, in Japan. Little of this was pleasing to John Ferris. He was especially irritated by the credit and publicity the WUMS received in the United States. He complained to Henry Stout that,

Everything in Yokohama, except Miss Kidder's school, has been put under the Woman's Missionary Union, and is presented in their Annual Report as the result of their efforts. We have nothing left, we have only what may be done by yourself and wife in Nagasaki, and Miss Kidder's school in Yokohama.⁶

By 1873, despite the evidence and desires of his own missionaries in Yokohama, Japan, an irate John Ferris had given a gendered twist to the whole idea of denominationalism, as was apparent in his private correspondence with Henry Stout in Nagasaki.

We wish you to work with your church, and for a Reformed Church in Japan...Just work for your own church, and look to it for help. We will do what we can for you...The idea that denominationalism is in the way of progress of Christianity is helped by no one, except the Woman's Missionary Union. There is no foundation for their belief and assertion.⁷

Ferris was ready to recall Mr. Ballagh, in part because he believed that Ballagh was "truckling" to Mrs. Pruyn and her fellow workers on the issue of inter-denominational work in Japan.⁸ Ferris's animus toward the WUMS women of Yokohama was so great that he ignored any information tendered by "Mrs. Pruyn and party", irately claiming that "the experience of all the Missionary Boards in this country is that the pres-

ence of women employed by the Women's Missionary Union...is eminently undesirable, and its work put in jeopardy by that organization."⁹ Ferris summarily discounted warnings from the WUMS that Guido Verbeck's cousin, Charles Wolff, was unsuited to missionary work, characterizing their correspondence with acquaintances in the United States as an attempt to "injure this Board amongst the Reformed Churches".¹⁰ Nonetheless, his friend and confidant, Henry Stout, missionary to Nagasaki, would later confirm the suspicions of the women, confiding privately to Dr. Ferris that while in Nagasaki, Wolff had set a bad example toward keeping the Sabbath, and "it is remarked that he drinks too much".¹¹ Meanwhile, in 1873, Stout, whom Ferris had counted as his ally against the missionaries in the Yokohama station, contributed to his dismay with hints that other women, possibly from the WUMS, might be the ones to open work in Nagasaki, if no Reformed women or funds were available.¹²

By 1874, Ferris had concluded that "the experience of all the Missionary Boards in the country is, that the presence of women employed by the Women's Missionary Union, on their fields, is eminently undesirable, and its work put in jeopardy by the organization."¹³ Further, in a statement that denied the women the status of missionaries, and attributed their success to others, he expressed his hope that the Board would

...never again be brought to work with the Woman's Union Missionary Society, an association that has been a plague to all of the Missionary Boards, and that for the assistance it receives from missionaries would accomplish nothing.¹⁴

It was probably not coincidental, then, that in June 1874, the General

Synod of the Reformed Church finally called for the formation of a Woman's Missionary auxiliary, a step it had heretofore stoutly resisted. John Ferris was instrumental in the final acquiescence to the idea of a Woman's Board, and he attended, and took the minutes of its first meeting, on January 7, 1875. Until his retirement, he was generally present at, and presided over, the meetings of the Woman's Board and its Executive Committee sessions. By such means, Ferris and the Synodical Board impressed upon the women of their church the fact that their organization was an auxiliary to the parent board, and not an autonomous society, such as those founded by the Congregationalist and the Methodist women.

Following the example of the Presbyterian Church (North), little power was granted to the women's auxiliary. Initially, the purpose of the association, as stated in its constitution in 1875, was to "aid the Board of Foreign Missions in the Reformed Church in America by promoting its work among the women and children of heathen lands." By this, the Synod's Board had in mind chiefly the raising of funds to support existing work of Synod's missionaries like Mary Kidder, not the fielding of new missionaries. And raise funds they did, following the tried and true methods of other denominational women, and the WUMS, before them. Reformed churchwomen formed dues-paying missionary societies, held bazaars, fairs, missionary teas, supported special projects and students in missionary schools, and sponsored special offerings for missionary work.

The basis of the women's organization was the missionary society within the individual church. Each new member of a woman's society paid annual dues of one dollar, or, if they wished, they could receive a life mem-

bership for a payment of twenty five dollars at one time. The energetic managers of the Board did not confine their proselytizing zeal to married women. Younger, unmarried women were encouraged to form Mission Bands; each band had the responsibility of providing twenty dollars a year to the Woman's Board. Individual members of mission bands paid twenty five cents per year. Children were likewise included in fundraising drives. Mission Circles were established for the children of the church, generally young girls, and each circle was pledged to deliver at least five dollars a year to the Woman's Board of Foreign Missions. The mission societies, bands, and circles sent their money to the Woman's Board, which had its headquarters in New York City. During the first decade of its existence, the women of the Woman's Board of Foreign Missions had contributed over seventy five thousand dollars to the missionary work of the church.¹⁵

By 1885, the Woman's Board had at least one hundred and sixty five societies as members, phenomenal growth given that they had started with only nineteen societies in 1875. The late formation of the Board guaranteed that it was able to be built upon a core of missionary societies already in existence. At least eight Reformed churches had women's societies before the formation of a Woman's Board. Owasco Outlet, in New York had a women's missionary society in 1870, and counted as members of its parish Caroline Adriance, Mary Kidder, Elizabeth Brown, and Stella Hequemborg. Marian Verbeck, a convert from Catholicism, joined the Owasco Outlet church before she and her husband Guido Verbeck sailed for Japan in 1859. All of these women tried to become missionaries in Japan, either as single women or as wives of missionaries. The First Reformed Church of New Brunswick, New Jersey, had organized a society in 1825, and the women of the Reformed

Church in Bedminster, New York, formed one some time between the years of 1825 and 1835. In 1837, Mrs. Phoebe G. Clowe had organized a society in the Glenville, New York Reformed Church. More societies formed in the years immediately preceding the formation of the Woman's Board, and many of the women from these churches were instrumental in organizing and running the Woman's Board during its first years. Before the formation of the Woman's Board, these church-based societies had contributed their funds either to their pastor, who donated them to the Synod's Board, or had sent direct contributions to the women missionaries already on the field. Their work, like most Woman's Work for Woman, was personal and intimate. Societies supported individual missionaries, and expected detailed reports of work on the field, so that they might feel that they were a personal part of the mission. Mary Kidder and Emma Witbeck, both instrumental in establishing Ferris Seminary in Yokohama, had devoted a fair amount of their correspondence to thanking individuals and societies for specific contributions to the work of the school. The formation of the Woman's Board routinized and regularized the collection of such funds, and centralized their distribution.

Control of the purse strings eventually led to greater autonomy for the Woman's Board. By the time of the women's first Annual Report, in 1876, the women were able to point to their constitution, which permitted them to "receive and disburse all money which shall be contributed to this society...in the appointment of missionaries supported by this organization, and in fixing their locations and salaries." Despite the hopes of the Synod's Board that the women would merely collect funds and turn them over to the parent board, the constitution of the Woman's Board granted the women the right to determine where Reformed

women missionaries would work, and what their salary would be. In short order, they would take charge of interviewing and appointing new women workers for the field, all, of course, “subject to the approval of the (Synod’s) Board.”

In 1876, one year after its organization, the Woman’s Board joined patriotic with evangelical concerns, and proposed a special offering of \$5000 from Reformed women, in honor of the centennial anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. The money was to be used to build a school in Nagasaki, and to support two teachers for a year in that school. Within the year, the Centennial Offering, as it was called, had reached the sum of \$2578, thanks to a substantial gift from the wealthy Mrs. Jonathon Sturgess, President of the Woman’s Board.¹⁶

In their eagerness to begin a work of their own, the Managers of the Woman’s Board had proposed the immediate purchase of a lot and the erection of a building in Nagasaki, but the men of Synod’s Board convinced them to look for the two teachers first. On November 9th, 1876, they advertised in the Christian Intelligencer, but received only four responses from Reformed women. It was not until 1878 that two sisters, Elizabeth T. and Mary J. Farrington, of Newburgh and then Fishkill, New York, were selected as the women to open work for women and girls in Nagasaki, analogous to that already being accomplished in Yokohama, under the care of Mary E. Kidder (Miller), whose work had originally been supported by the Synod’s Board.¹⁷ Nagasaki was to be the entire responsibility of the Woman’s Board. However, despite the Board’s high hopes, the financial backing of the society’s women and the teaching experience of the Farringtons, a girls’ school in Nagasaki would not become a reality for more than seven years. The Farringtons

themselves would remain in Japan less than a year. Their short stay, and bitter experience in Japan, was deeply discouraging to the Woman's Board and as a result of the Farrington's experiences in Nagasaki, relations between the newly formed Woman's Board, the Synod's Board, and especially its missionary in Nagasaki, Henry Stout, would remain strained for years. The incident in Nagasaki was illustrative of many of the difficulties which affected the work of the Reformed Church's Woman's Board: the difficulty in recruiting young women to mission work; the often unrealistic expectations of the middle class women who embarked on missionary work; opposition to educational work for girls at the supposed cost to "men's" work, specifically theological training for young men; strains within a mission station; and lastly, the lack of a woman with the power and tenacity of vision which Mary E. Kidder had evinced in Yokohama.

Mary and Elizabeth Farrington arrived in Nagasaki in 1878, at the initial behest of Henry Stout. For nine years, Stout and his wife had tried to build up the nucleus of a school, but with the births of her two children, and the onset of what would be a life-long struggle with invalidism, Elizabeth Stout was increasingly unable to undertake missionary work. In 1869, Henry Stout had passed up a chance for Mary Kidder's assistance because, at the time, he did not feel that it was advisable for a single lady to come to that city.¹⁸ Because of the fierce persecution of Christians in the Kyushu region during the sixteenth century, and the subsequent wariness, distrust and hostility toward the long illegal Christian teachings, Nagasaki had the reputation of being the most difficult mission station in Japan. By the 1870's, the powerful Reformed Church figure in Nagasaki was Henry Stout, and throughout the years, his difficulties in getting along with fellow missionaries would add to

the problems of women's work in Nagasaki.

By 1872, however, Stout had decided that unmarried women teachers were needed in Nagasaki, despite the official persecution of Japanese Christians in the Urakami district. The Tokugawa ban on Christianity would finally be lifted in 1873 as a result of international protests over the Urakami persecutions. Meanwhile, Stout had talked to an official about the prospects of women's education in Nagasaki, and he believed that the idea had been met with favor. The Christian religion was not especially desired by Japanese officials, but the trappings of western style civilization and education were, at least in 1872. Furthermore, by November, 1872, when Stout appealed to Ferris, some members of the Iwakura Mission had been in the West for nearly a year, studying fields such as banking, industrial policy, constitutional theory and law, science, and not the least, education. Numerous young men were in western schools. In addition, five young girls, including Tsuda Umeko, had accompanied the mission as far as the United States in order to study in American schools. Like almost all of the missionaries in Japan, Henry Stout knew of these young women, and he assessed the nominal chances for the success of such a plan. He, like most missionaries, believed that "Japanese women are to be educated, and it is a thousand times better for them to be educated here than abroad"¹⁹. Stout did not need to add that they should be educated by missionaries. "Now we want ladies here, and two are better than one", he told Dr. Ferris.²⁰

Given the strained financial condition of the Synod's Mission Board, Stout was told to wait, which he did, although not with the greatest grace. Periodically, as Mary Kidder was doing in Yokohama, Stout baited the Board with news of the plans of the Roman Catholics in Na-

gasaki, and the success of “native schools” in that city, bemoaning the fact that a golden opportunity for women was slipping into other hands. On May 13, 1873, Stout noted that his wife’s health in the summer months would oblige her to stop classes, leaving the only teacher of girls in the city a “Roman Catholic lady”. He does not say whether she was the wife of a merchant, or a teaching sister. On November 12, 1873, Stout informed Dr. Ferris that the Methodists were planning a girls’ school in the area, and that the “natives” were starting several schools for girls.

When he heard of the possibility that a woman’s missionary society might be established in the Reformed Church, he rejoiced, and indeed, the very first business meeting of that newly formed society, in June, 1875, met with a request from Henry Stout for two ladies in Nagasaki.²¹ In what must have been a fierce provocation for John Ferris, Stout’s appeal was seconded by one from Mrs. Pruyn, of the WUMS. Nonetheless, despite Ferris’ distaste for the WUMS, Mrs. Pruyn’s name was well known, and her work was respected by many of the Reformed church women who had contributed to her support in earlier years. This no doubt accounted for the inclusion of her appeal in the Annual Report of the Woman’s Board to its constituent societies, in spite of Ferris’ own opinions. The women’s Centennial Offering was a success, as we have seen, and in 1878, Henry Stout was finally notified that the teachers he had requested for six long years were finally on their way, and that he was to do all he could to help them.

By 1878, however, circumstances in Nagasaki had changed. Henry Stout was no longer sure the Reformed Mission should sustain the work of two girls’ schools, and since Mary Kidder’s school in Yokohama was

firmly established, with building and students, perhaps Nagasaki was not the place for a second girls' school. Stout and his family were due for a furlough and the Board had not designated any one to take his place during his absence from Nagasaki. In his opinion, the two "ladies" would not be a suitable substitute. After all of his agitation to get women missionaries in Nagasaki, Stout wrote Dr. Ferris,

I don't know whether I am glad, or sorry, to hear that ladies are to be sent to establish a school. If the Board can send help to supplement their work, I shall certainly be very glad, but if not, I see no cause for rejoicing, but rather for increased sorrow...I suppose then, they are to be left in charge of the mission. Now if I were to express my own feelings ... I should beg that those ladies not be sent, to be left in such a plight. Of course, I don't know what kind of metal they are made of, but unless of much better temper than those who represent the mission at present, not to speak of the effect upon the work, upon the workers, it would be most disastrous. I shrink from the contemplation of these young women, dealing with the Church members. They are good men, and desirous of doing right, but children in Christ, who need not so much a sister's gentle persuasion, but a father's firm hand sometimes. I should say it would be better for the Woman's Board to bear all the disappointment, and chagrin of abandonment of their first and most cherished plans, now, than to commence work here, under the circumstances proposed. ²²

It was Stout's contention that the Board should place a priority on finding a replacement family for the Stouts, to later count as a reinforce-

ment to the station after his return. This larger force was necessary for what he believed should be the main work of the Reformed Church in Nagasaki: the establishment of a theological school for young Japanese Christian men in Kyushu. A school for girls, and women to run it, were a secondary consideration, and only to be undertaken once what he considered the primary work in Nagasaki was assured.²³

However, Stout found no support for his opinions. The rest of the Japan Mission, based in Yokohama and Tokyo, was not persuaded that a men's theological school was necessary in Nagasaki, and the Synod's Board did not have the funds available to erect one, even had there been consensus among the Mission on the matter. Furthermore, the Woman's Board had the final resources to begin the school he had requested six years earlier, and were determined to begin.

Despite Stout's pessimistic outlook on the chances of the women's work, Dr. Ferris informed him that the Executive Committee expected him to "do what you can to accommodate these young ladies and to aid them in beginning their work and to make their introduction to Japan a pleasant one."²⁴ He reminded Stout that the school in Nagasaki, if not the mission as a whole, was

exclusively the project of the Woman's Board. It was desirable in the highest degree and for every reason that the management should be exclusively in the hands of the ladies so that they should have all the pride and pleasure of carrying out such a project.²⁵

Henry Stout's vision of a mission organized with himself firmly in

charge, and the women assistant missionaries occupying a dependent position, did not accord with Ferris's paternalistically expressed desire to let the women believe that they were in charge, and to preempt any support Reformed women at home might give women missionaries of the WUMS.

Elizabeth and Mary Farrington began teaching during the monsoons of September, 1878. Shortly after their arrival, Stout wrote the Board that they were "very pleasant" and that they "possessed qualities which should make them successful missionaries."²⁶ Nonetheless, despite these initial words of assurance, problems arose almost immediately. As in Yokohama, the first priority was housing. While the Farringtons, and the Women's Board, had counted on the sisters living with the Stouts, as Mary Kidder had done in 1869 with the family of Samuel Brown, in Niigata, and later in Yokohama, Stout informed them, and the Board, that his house of four rooms was inadequate for a family of four and two boarders. Foreign style housing was in short supply in Nagasaki. Therefore, he had earlier decided to have the Farringtons live in a separate building, while a fifth floor was, slowly, added to his own house.²⁷ On arrival, therefore, the Farrington sisters lived, in the second story of a little house, whose description resembles a Japanese storehouse, in Stout's yard. As the Rev. L. H. Gulick, MD, agent for the American Bible Service for China and Japan later wrote:

...I am satisfied that the Misses Farrington, were on the whole, in quite as healthy quarters...as they would have been in Mr. Stout's main residence...It is a more than usually well built Japanese structure, with solid mud walls, well plastered with lime inside and out, and with a good sound roof, projecting

nearly two feet over the walls. It is certainly not a very elegant residence, but its second story is dry and elevated above the miasmas of the ground and with a beautiful view of the harbor and hills, and it is a better house than many missionary to Japan as occupied for months and years together. I should, of course, have hoped that the ladies would before long have had larger and better apartments, but as they were not to be had at first, there was reason for thankfulness that they had so good a temporary home.²⁸

James Amerman, Secretary of the Japan Mission further described the building to the Board:

...I examined the house which was occupied by the Misses Farrington. This is a two story building about 20 x 30 feet, with plaster walls and tile roof – hall 6 ft. wide...and ceilings each 8 ft. Stair steep in Japanese fashion, lower hall has stone pavement. There are six rooms which can easily be made into four. Some are in Japanese style. The windows are really the worst feature in the house and they can easily be doctored. The house is in good repair for a house of its kind, but the servants quarters in the rear are sadly out of order and will have to be rebuilt for any use. The house is not a palace. It is not a house fit for the home of a missionary, but it is better than some that more than one missionary has been compelled to live in for months after coming to Tokyo. It is a better house in many respect than that we lived in for 10 months when we moved to Tokyo, and it can easily be put in order for a few month's, or even a year's residence.²⁹

The Farringtons were not so thankful as Dr. Gulick, although they said little at the time, and they did not last a year in the house, or in Nagasaki. Only two months after her arrival, the health of the older sister, Elizabeth Farrington, began to deteriorate. By December, she seldom left her room, and became ill even with one visitor. She was “unable to endure anything”, and was despondent at the thought of all hope of being a missionary gone.³⁰ Although they had arrived with the money to erect a school building, and thus alleviate their housing problem, they soon found that Elizabeth’s failing health added to a vociferous debate within the Japan Mission on the viability of continuing the work in Nagasaki, and had led to a resolution at the Mission Meeting that building be delayed.

While the Japan Mission opposed Stout’s idea of a men’s theological school in Nagasaki, the men were not convinced that another girls’ school in the Mission was desirable, if that were to be the only work ongoing in Nagasaki. Some of the missionaries argued that the money from the Woman’s Board could be better used for the education of boys. For example, on September 4th, 1877, even before the Woman’s Board missionaries left for Japan, James Amerman had complained in a private letter to the board over the

overwhelming preponderance of the provision which is making in various missions for the education of girls, and the absolute neglect of ...boys unless they propose to study for the ministry.³¹

By January, 1879, both sisters had returned to Yokohama, and were living with the Mary Kidder Miller and her husband, at Ferris Seminary,

while Elizabeth was under a doctor's care. She rallied during the spring, and there were hopes that might be able to stay, but by June, her complaint was diagnosed by the doctor as "a female complaint", and he advised her to go home and enter an institution specializing in the care of such cases.³² Meanwhile, the illness and depression of the older sister was affecting the younger, according to Henry Stout.³³ Stout wrote E. Rothesay Miller, that he feared that the younger sister was studying too hard, neglecting her own health, and was adversely affected by the decision to send her sister home. He expected Mary's health to soon fail, although Synod's Board, not on scene, but under pressure from the Woman's Board to ensure the success of the women's work, thought that Mr. and Mrs. Stout were taking "too gloomy a view of the matter."³⁴ The complaint that women assistant missionaries risked their health through intensive language studies was not uncommon, and echoed earlier worries that women were too physically weak for collegiate level education. Throughout the nineteenth century, male missionaries to Japan were taken to task if they did not quickly master the language, while female missionaries were urged to go slowly, and conserve their strength. In the Farringtons' case, the younger sister, Mary, was diagnosed by suffering from "incipient phlistis" of the right lung, and was also ordered home by the doctor.³⁵ In this double failure of health, the Farringtons were the first of a number of unmarried women missionaries to Japan who would have to leave the field because of lung problems or other illnesses, although Japan was generally considered one of the easier mission fields in terms of health.

Both sisters left Japan on June 28, 1879, only ten months after their arrival. James Amerman, Secretary of the Mission, duly commended their effort, and expressed the mission's sorrow at their departure, and the

“suspension & perhaps relinquishment” of the Woman’s Board’s work in Nagasaki. He suggested that “further particulars” would “best be learned from the ladies” when they returned.³⁶ And so they were, although the sisters did not report them directly to Synod’s Board.

Once back among their friends and supporters at home, faced with the loss of their health, their careers, their dreams, and those dreams of the Woman’s Board, the sisters reconsidered their stay in Nagasaki. As a result they “accused Rev. and Mrs. Stout of bad treatment – and they think they were sent away from Yokohama with insufficient cause.”³⁷ They were the first to make such a complaint of working with the Stouts, but they would not be the last. Meanwhile, in October, 1879, four months after they returned to America, members of the Japan Mission heard of a “movement on foot to vindicate the character of the Misses Farrington.”³⁸ By November, the pastor of their church, Asher Anderson, had written to James Amerman, as well as to missionaries of another denomination, to Dr. Gulick of the American Bible Service, and, most scandalously, to the minds of the Mission, Mr. Tomegawa, one of the “native helpers” or Japanese pastor, in the Reformed Mission in Nagasaki.³⁹ Pastor Anderson’s letters raised questions as to the relationship between the Stouts and the Farrington sisters.⁴⁰ Then the Woman’s Board took up their cause.

The Woman’s Board may have been predisposed to wonder about their treatment by the Stouts. In 1877, in an incident highlighting the gap between missionaries on the field, and romantic ideas from the “ladies” at home about the needs of the “heathen”, Henry Stout had written a blunt letter back to America, taking the new Woman’s Board to task about the contents of a missionary box sent to Nagasaki by the “Ladies

Missionary Society". He acknowledged that his letter would be "annoying to read". Nonetheless, he wished to go on record that he had paid ten dollars freighting charges for unasked for gifts which included, among other things, a nearly forty year old copy of a "Christian Parlor Book", newspapers, and a nursery lamp. He thought a society of Christian women ought to know the truth, which was that their offerings of cast - off bedclothes, rotten with age, and rags, and worn out clothing were never "to be any of use whatever to us."⁴¹ No doubt he spoke the truth, but it had probably not won him any friends in the woman's societies, or among the Woman's Board members themselves. Stout had written another ⁴²brusque in November, 1878, to Dr. Ferris, specifically about the Farrington sisters, in which he asserted

that these young ladies are both of them, mentally and physically weak. They have some fine qualities, and I have no doubt the younger, with care and with some good strong person to lean upon, would become useful as a teacher in a school. But nothing more can be expected.⁴³

Whatever the cause, their local pastor and the Woman's Board took the part of the Farrington sisters. The sisters were concerned with their vindication not only for the sake of their honor, but also because they needed a clear name to find another job in order to support themselves. In fact, the elder sister, Elizabeth, had asked the Mission before she left, to allow it to seem as though she left only to accompany her ailing sister. The mission secretary had refused.⁴⁴ Nonetheless, once back in America, the Farrington sisters did find their health sufficient to return to teaching, and the Woman's Board publicized this fact in their Annual Report, noting that that the "younger sister was well enough upon her

return to teach all the winter of 1879–80, and that the older sister had also resumed teaching.

Given their ability to function once back at home, the sisters argued that their health had broken because the house in which they lived was inadequate to their status.⁴⁵ Pastor Anderson had written thus in a letter to a Mr. and Mrs. Horve, who had instructed the younger woman, Mary, in music in Tokyo. However, Mr. Horve, far from supporting the young women, immediately to Mr. Stout, and allowed as how he thought that “instead of their having to refer out here, that they have a clear case against the board for sending them out to do work that they were unfitted for, as far as health and experience went.”⁴⁶ Despite differences between various missionaries in Japan, the Stouts were firmly supported by the Japan Mission as well. Missionaries on the field in Japan refuted the allegation of ill-treatment, as eventually did Synod’s Board, which conducted the investigation into their charges. In January, 1880, Synod’s Board passed a resolution that “after many conferences and this full investigation, the Com. Respectfully report: – That in their judgment, there is no reason for further action of this Board.”⁴⁷

The matter was closed, the Stout’s vindicated, and the Farringtons remained in New York where they had found work. The Woman’s Board’s records of the case are not extant, but it seems clear that the Reformed women were not particularly pleased with the conclusion of the men of the Synod’s Board. In the WBFM Annual Report for that year, the Woman’s Board informed its constituents of the failure in Nagasaki, because

“the house...in which the school was held was unsuitable for the purpose

and the elder Miss Farrington became ill, compelling the two sisters to return home in 1879, to their own great disappointment and that of the Woman's Board." ⁴⁸

In the opinion of the Woman's Board, the Farringtons had been inadequately housed. Reformed Woman's Work for Woman in Nagasaki was temporarily suspended, and Henry Stout was aware of the ill-feelings towards himself. It was three and a half years before he saw any indications that "the 'unpleasantness' of a few years ago is to be disregarded, and perhaps forgotten. The working force of the Church is again to be united in an effort to prosecute the work of the Lord in this field."⁴⁹ Disregarded, perhaps, but not at all forgotten. In the official fifty year celebratory history of the Woman's Board, the departure of the Farrington's was once again attributed to the inadequate building in which they lived.⁵⁰ Meanwhile, during the years of estrangement, the Woman's Board instead concentrated on beginning a boarding school in Madanapalle, India; and a Bible school in Amoy, China. In addition, they supported the girls schools in Vellore, India; and Amoy, which had all been initially established under the aegis of the Synod's Board.

After the collapse of the hopes in Nagasaki, the Woman's Board would for a number of years concentrate any energies in Japan on building up a teachers corps for the Yokohama school, whose full support they assumed in 1880. Work in Nagasaki would have to wait. Other women, and men, missionaries would face struggles with Henry Stout, and many would either leave for Yokohama, evangelical work in the countryside, or quit altogether. Furthermore, the school eventually established by the Woman's Board in Nagasaki, in the mid-1880's, never won the emotional, or financial, support given by the women's societies to

Ferris Seminary. In Nagasaki, the opportunity for educational work for women, a hallmark of missionary work in Japan, was more than a decade behind the work in Yokohama. By the time it recommenced under the auspices of the Woman's Board, many of the more adventurous and independent women missionaries involved would yearn for, and achieve, involvement in more direct Christian work in the field of evangelism.

¹ Dana L. Robert, American Women in Mission: A Social History of Their Thought and Practice, part of a series edited by Wilbert R. Shenk, The Modern Mission Era, 1792–1992, An Appraisal, Mercer University Press, Macon, Georgia, pp. xvii–xxii.

² I was fortunate enough to be given a grant in order to attend this conference, in October, 2003.

³ Pamela Lee Novick, “Good Wives and Wise Mothers: Some Missionary Wives in Nineteenth Century Japan”, in Akita Minoru Sensei Kinen Ronshu, November, 1995, pp. 189–221; Novick, “‘So long dependent upon myself’: Mary E. Kidder and the Beginnings of Unmarried Women’s Missionary Work in Japan”, Kiyo, vol. 30, 1997 pp. 77–100; and Novick, “Leila Winn, Mary Brokaw, and Mary Deyo: Missionaries to Japan”, Fiftieth Anniversary of Keisen English Department Memorial Book, Heisei 9, pp. 255–281

⁴ Mrs. W. I. Chamberlain, Fifty Years in Foreign Fields, Woman's Board of Foreign Missions of the Reformed Church in America, 1925, New York, p. 6

⁵ Novick, “So Long Dependent Upon Myself”, pp. 83–84

⁶ YAH, volume 120, p. 17 undated 1873 letter of J. M. Ferris to Henry Stout, undated

⁷ *loc.cit*

⁸ *loc.cit*

⁹ *loc.cit*

¹⁰ *loc.cit*

¹¹ In a letter to Ferris, of May 15, 1875, Stout noted that after four years in the country, Wolfe knew virtually no Japanese, lacked originality, could not inspire his pupils, and in short, was “of no practical use to the mission”.

¹² Letter of Henry Stout to J. M. Ferris, dated May 13, 1873

¹³ YAH, vol. 120, p. 25 letter of J. M. Ferris to Henry Stout

¹⁴ *loc.cit*

¹⁵ Information gleaned from the first ten Annual Reports of the Woman’s Board, filed with the Synod’s Board of Missions of the Reformed Church in America, at the Gardner–Sage Archives, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey. The complete records of the Woman’s Board cannot be found, and are believed to have been destroyed by a fire in a warehouse during the 1950’s.

¹⁶ Second Annual Report of the Woman’s Auxiliary Board of Missions of the Reformed Church in America

¹⁷ The Farringtons were the only two sisters sent in tandem by the Board to Japan, until 1914, when Evelyn and Janet Oltmans, daughters of long time missionary Albert Oltmans, returned as missionaries themselves to their birthplace.

¹⁸ Letter of Henry Stout, dated March 31, 1869

¹⁹ YAH, letter from Henry Stout, dated November 14, 1872

²⁰ *loc.cit.*

²¹ First Annual Report of the Woman’s Auxiliary Board of Missions of the Reformed Church in America

²² *loc.cit.*

²³ Letter of Henry Stout to J. M. Ferris, dated March 26th, 1878

²⁴ YAH, vol. 120, p. 88, undated letter of J. M. Ferris to Henry Stout

²⁵ *loc.cit.*

²⁶ Letter of Henry Stout to J. M.Ferris, dated October 17, 1878

²⁷ Letter of Henry Stout to J. M. Ferris, dated May 31, 1878

²⁸ Letter of Dr. Gulick to the Reformed Board of Foreign Missions, dated December 20, 1879

²⁹ Letter of James Amerman, North Japan Mission, to Dr. Cobb, December 18, 1879

³⁰ Letter of Henry Stout to Mrs. J. H. Polhemus of the Woman's Board, dated December 5, 1879

³¹ Letter of James Amerman to Synod's Board, dated September 4, 1877

³² YAH, Vol. 53, p. 57, handwritten copy of a letter from Stuart Eldridge, MD, Yokohama, Japan to Rev. J. L. Amerman, Yokohama, dated June 18, 1879. In the 19th century, "woman's complaints" included everything from actual uterine disease to depression or hysteria. Women were advised to undertake treatments at water spas, which involved long periods of enforced rest and sensory deprivation.

³³ Letter of Henry Stout to Mrs. J. H. Polhemus, of the Woman's Board, dated December 5, 1879

³⁴ Letter of Henry Stout to E. R. Miller, dated December 8th, 1878

³⁵ YAH, vol. 53, handwritten copy of a letter from J.C. Hepburn, M.D., Yokohama, dated June 18, 1879

³⁶ Letter from James Amerman to the Board, dated 28 June, 1879

³⁷ Letter of J. M. Ferris to J. L. Amerman, dated November 6, 1879

³⁸ Letter of J. L. Amerman to J. M. Ferris, dated October 29, 1879

³⁹ Pastor Tomegawa's daughter would later become the devoted companion and co-worker of Sara Couch, a Reformed Church missionary who spent more than fifty years in Japan, choosing to remain during WWII, even though interned as an enemy alien. Sara Couch would eventually die in the Tomegawa home, after end of the war.

- ⁴⁰ Letter of J. M. Ferris to J. L. Amerman, dated November 6, 1879
- ⁴¹ Letter of Henry Stout to Miss Ward, dated January 5, 1877
- ⁴² Letter of Henry Stout to Dr. Ferris, dated November, 1878, and alluded to in a letter from J. L. Amerman to J. M. Ferris, dated October 29, 1879
- ⁴³ *loc.cit.*
- ⁴⁴ Letter of J. L. Amerman to J. M. Ferris, dated October 1879. A note in the Sixth Annual Report of the Woman's Board of Foreign Missions of the Reformed Church in America reported that the "younger sister was well enough upon her return to teach all the winter of 1879-80, and that the older sister had also resumed teaching.
- ⁴⁵ Letter from Henry Stout to J. M. Ferris, dated October 31, 1879
- ⁴⁶ Quoted in *loc.cit.*
- ⁴⁷ YAH, vol. 53, pl 105, Resolution adopted by the Board, January 14, 1880.
- ⁴⁸ Sixth Annual Report of the Woman's Board of Foreign Missions of the Reformed Church in America
- ⁴⁹ Letter of Henry Stout to J. M. Ferris, dated June 15, 1883
- ⁵⁰ Mrs. W. I. Chamberlain, Fifty Years in Foreign Fields, Woman's Board of Foreign Missions of the Reformed Church in America, 1925, New York, p. 12