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Women's Role in the History of the World Student Christian Federation, 1895-1945

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WORLD STUDENT CHRISTIAN FEDERATION,
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WOMEN'S ROLE IN THE HISTORY OF THE
WORLD STUDENT CHRISTIAN FEDERATION,
1895-1945

an essay commissioned to commemorate the
centennial of the founding of the WSCF

by

Johanna M. Selles

NEW HAVEN, CONNECTICUT

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Preface

The founders of the Federation created something new in the university world. We accept international student organizations as if they had always existed, but the Federation for many years stood alone. We accept the mingling of students from different Christian confessions and denominations, as if that were a natural outcome of Christianity, but the Federation struck out on a comparatively untrodden ecumenical path, and continually broke new ground....The Federation was an experiment in Christian fellowship which worked and which through many crises grew in depth and range.

Robert C. Mackie ¹

The World Student Christian Federation was created in 1895 to fulfill its founders' vision of an international student Christian movement that would encourage and coordinate the work of existing national student Christian movements, as well as stimulate the formation of unified student movements in countries where they did not exist. Advances in transportation and communication at the end of the nineteenth century made realization of this vision feasible for the first time. The formation of the WSCF was a radical step toward ecumenical cooperation at a time when no other worldwide, non-Roman Catholic Christian agency based on independent national organizations existed. From its purely Protestant origins it expanded its membership in 1911 to include Orthodox Christians.

It was John R. Mott who conceived the idea of a federation of student Christian movements. As he wrote in his 1920 work *The World's Student Christian Federation, Origin, Achievements, Forecast*:

Previous efforts had been confined largely to trying to effect [a world-wide union of Christian students] in the name of and through the agency of the Y.M.C.A. Instead of attempting to organize the Christian students under any one name and according to any one plan or organization, it would be better to encourage the Christian students in each country to develop national Christian movements of their own, adapted in name, organization and activity to their own particular genius and character, and then to link these together in some simple and yet effective Federation.

¹From the introduction to Ruth Rouse, *World's Student Christian Federation: a History of the First Thirty Years* (London: SCM Press, 1948), pp. 12,13.

After much planning, the WSCF was founded in 1895 at the biennial "Scandinavian Students' Meeting with Christian Programme" in Vadstena, Sweden. The founders of the WSCF were John R. Mott and Luther Wishard from the U.S., John Rutter Williamson from Scotland, Johannes Siemsen of Germany, Karl Fries of Sweden, and Martin Eckhoff of Norway.

Meeting in the attic of the medieval castle where the Scandinavian students' meeting was being held, these six representatives of national student Christian movements voted to form a Federation with the following aims:

1. To unite student Christian movements or organizations throughout the world.
2. To collect information regarding the religious conditions of the students of all lands.
3. To promote the following lines of activity:
 - (a) To lead students to become disciples of Jesus Christ as only Saviour and as God.
 - (b) To deepen the spiritual life of students.
 - (c) To enlist students in the work of extending the Kingdom of Christ throughout the whole world.²

The work of the Federation was carried out through conferences and committee meetings, publications, exchanges of literature, and visits to national movements by its secretaries and agents. The Federation served as a training ground for many individuals who later became prominent in the worldwide life of the church, including Bishop Azariah of India, Bishop Honda of Japan, T.Z. Koo of China, Nathan Soderblom of Sweden, J.H. Oldham and William Temple of Great Britain, John R. Mott, and Willem A. Visser 't Hooft.



Founders of the WSCF

²Rouse, p. 62.

The WSCF has played the role of international interpreter and mediator for national student Christian movements through decades of changing issues and goals. Documentation in its early archival records provides insight into the development of Christian work among students, as well as into the social and political situations that were the context for this development. Of particular interest are materials documenting the situation in Germany before, during, and after World War I, and reports of hardships amidst famine and revolution in Russia during the 1920s.

During the first twenty years of its existence, the WSCF focused its energies on the formation and stabilization of national student movements, calling students to the Christian faith and the evangelization of the world. The First World War and its aftermath changed the emphases of the Federation as social problems, international relations, and the issues of pacifism and war came to the foreground. In 1920 the WSCF founded European Student Relief, a vast program of social service to thousands of students, which lasted for five years.

In commemoration of the centennial of the founding of the World Student Christian Federation, the Yale Divinity School Library mounted an exhibit of materials taken from the Archives of the WSCF held at the library. These archives include 140 linear feet of letters, reports, pamphlets, and other papers dating from 1875 to 1972. The WSCF records held at Yale were collected primarily under the supervision of John R. Mott and represent the official archives of the WSCF from 1895 to 1925. More recent archives of the World Student Christian Federation are housed at the World Council of Churches library in Geneva.

Because the WSCF was a federation of student movements, its archives contain records documenting not only its own administrative history but also the origins, policies, and activities of local and national student Christian groups in many different countries. Since the WSCF also sought to collect material documenting the context of student Christian work in various countries, its archives contain pamphlet and report material from a wide range of organizations and institutions. These materials provide invaluable documentation of social and political conditions throughout the world during the time period 1895 to 1925.

Numerous other archival record groups at the Divinity Library complement the documentation provided by the WSCF archives. The archives of organizations such as the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, the YMCA - Student Division, and the Student Christian Movement

in New England, and personal papers of individuals such as John R. Mott, Robert Wilder, and Clarence P. Shedd combine to provide a valuable picture of the origins and development of Christian work among students in the United States and worldwide.

Also in commemoration of the WSCF centennial, the Yale Divinity School Library has commissioned a paper relating to an aspect of Federation history that is well documented in its extensive archives. Johanna Selles, who received her doctorate from the University of Toronto in 1993, has been a fixture in the Special Collections reading room during her tenure as a Research Fellow at YDS. It is our hope that her paper will spark interest in the vast resources available in the WSCF archives.

Martha Lund Smalley
Curator of the Day Missions Library

"Women's Role in the History of the World Student Christian Federation, 1895-1945"

Johanna M. Selles

In recognition of the centennial of the founding of the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF), this paper will explore a relatively undocumented aspect of the Federation's history, the role of women in the organization. Case studies of Ruth Rouse, Elizabeth Clarke, and Michi Kawai will illustrate ways in which women were crucial players in Federation activities.

The three women under consideration were single women for whom work in connection with the WSCF and its constituent members offered significant latitude of movement and influence. It should be noted that evaluation of the role of women in nineteenth and twentieth century voluntary movements must also take into account the subtle influence of women who were spouses of movement leaders, a role that allowed them considerable influence without threatening social norms. Mrs. Luther Wishard, for example, accompanied her husband on tours for the YWCA between 1889-93. Leila Mott, a graduate of Wooster College, often accompanied John R. Mott on his world tours and directed her interest to the needs of women students. She served on the National YWCA Board in New York and spoke at numerous women's colleges and conferences.³

The official record of voluntary organizations has tended, until recently, to overlook the role of women. This is certainly true for the history of the founding of the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions (SVM). Although the origins of the SVM are generally traced to Robert Wilder and a band of volunteers at Princeton who founded the SVM at Mount Hermon in 1886, this meeting was preceded by the Mount Holyoke Missionary Association, established in 1878 by Marian Holbrook, who

³ Nancy Boyd, *Emissaries. The Overseas Work of the American YWCA 1895-1970* (New York: The Woman's Press, 1986), pp. 17-18.

later became a missionary to China and Japan. Another important member of the Mt. Holyoke group was Grace Wilder, who exerted an important influence on her brother Robert Wilder and helped him to formulate the vision that resulted in the organization of the SVM.

According to Ruth Rouse, first women's secretary of the World Student Christian Federation, and its historian, women students were in the Federation from the very beginning.⁵ There were, however, national differences in the way that women's work evolved. Furthermore, the presence of women in the student Christian movements did not necessarily mean that they had access to decision making power. These differences in leadership and autonomy need to be examined on both the national and international levels for the WSCF and its members.

Three models of affiliation of national women's movements existed in the first decade of the WSCF. There were women's movements in the United States and India, for example, that were distinctly separate from the men's movements, led by separate committees. Holland, Great Britain, and Scandinavia were organized with united men's and women's movements, so that women were on equal terms with the men. Australia's student movement also united the women's and men's movements, but the men had exclusive control over the management.⁶ Rouse felt that the ideal federation model was joint work, but she realized that in some countries the women's work had to be nurtured separately, until men's and women's student work could be combined.

Constituent members of the WSCF in the United States included the YMCA, YWCA, and SVM. The first college YWCA was established in 1873 at Illinois State Normal University and the success of the American YWCA movement is evident from the fact that between 1873 and 1889, 142 college YWCAs were established. Luther Wishard, one of the founders of the collegiate YWCA, had

⁴ See Thomas Russell, "Can the Story Be Told Without Them? The Role of Women in the Student Volunteer Movement," *Missiology: an International Review* 17, 2 (April 1989): pp. 159-73.

⁵ Ruth Rouse, *The World's Student Christian Federation. A History of the First Thirty Years* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1948), p. 99.

⁶ Wilmina Rowland, "The Contribution of Ruth Rouse to the WSCF," M.A. thesis, Yale University, 1937, p. 129.

been under pressure from the men's branch to establish a separate movement for women, since they did not want to have a joint movement in the YMCA. The separate YWCA grew steadily and in 1894 a World YWCA was formed with branches in India, China, and Japan.⁷

In Britain the student Christian movement was a coeducational movement of men and women with local branches. As in America there were for many years distinct, though overlapping, movements for general student Christian work and for missions-related activity. According to Rouse, the British Student Volunteer Missionary Union (SVMU), similar to the American SVM, allowed women students to join, and among its early members were a number of medical students from Edinburgh, Glasgow, and London. The Inter-University Christian Union (formed in 1893 and later known as the British College Christian Union) had two women travelling secretaries by 1894. In 1895 women representatives were added to the Committees of the SVMU and the British College Christian Union, and Ruth Rouse became the editor of the *Student Volunteer*.

Despite differences in national organizations, women workers in the WSCF shared certain commonalities. The women represented an educated and generally white, middle class group, eager to use their learning in religiously inspired service on the international stage. Higher education gave these women skills, confidence, and a desire to enlarge the scope of their vocational choices and life path. Certainly, as Ruth Brouwer observes in her work on women missionaries, a calling could free a young woman to a level of adventure and experience not available in the traditional life course of a middle class woman.⁸

The American YWCA employed executive officers called "secretaries", a model also applied by the WSCF for its workers. The nature of the position soon led to the creation of training schools such as the International Association School (1895-6) and the Institute at Chicago (1904-6). A more permanent training school was established in New York in 1907, which offered a one year post-graduate course for rural, industrial, foreign, or student work, as well as a two year course for those who planned to become religious work directors. This training included a creative mix of Biblical

⁷ Rouse, *The WSCF*, p. 100.

⁸ Ruth Brouwer, *New Women for God* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990).

foundations, women's biography, Asian religions, community living, business administration, piano, and public speaking.

A considerable amount of overlap existed between voluntary associations; many women were drawn to YWCA work after having been influenced by the Student Volunteer Movement, for example. The combination of training and practical experience for secretaries in the YWCA, SVM, and WSCF provided a professionalization in the areas of social service and international relations.

As noted above, the national movements did not all agree on the role of women in the WSCF. At the Williamstown meeting of the WSCF General Committee in 1897, the question of women's membership was raised and it was decided that each national movement would continue to define its own relationship to women students. Since the General Committee of the WSCF restricted its representation to two male representatives from each movement at this time, decision making power was clearly in male hands ⁹

Meanwhile, women's national student movements throughout the world were growing steadily. Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa joined the Federation in 1897 with women students, the Intercollegiate YWCA of North America entered in 1898, at the same time that women students' unions were forming in Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and Finland. The Intercollegiate YWCA of Canada joined in 1902, the student department of the YWCA of India and Ceylon in 1909, and Japan in 1911. Presumably, the notion of affiliation in a world movement with international purpose and religious vision carried a strong appeal to university students.

John Mott had urged in 1902 that the Federation appoint a secretary in charge of women students; he convinced Grace Dodge (later President of the American YWCA) to underwrite Ruth Rouse's salary for this purpose, which she did until her death in 1914. Rouse's official appointment did not take place until 1905, when, at the Zeist Conference, she was named the Secretary for Work among Women Students with a Women's Cooperating Committee to advise and help her.

The meeting at Zeist was attended by thirty-two women from fifteen different countries; the women only attended four sessions of the men's meetings, convening by themselves the rest of the time. By 1907, participating national movements were allowed one woman representative, in addition to the

⁹ Rouse, *The WSCF*, p. 100.

two men, which the constitution had originally allowed on the General Committee. The Women's Cooperating Committee was replaced by the Women's Sub-Committee, and this in turn was dissolved in 1920.¹⁰

I

This paper examines three women secretaries in the WSCF, in order to provide a preliminary study of their contributions. These three women - Ruth Rouse, Elizabeth Clarke, and Michi Kawai - represented three member nations in the Federation: England, United States, and Japan, respectively.



Ruth Rouse (1872-1956), first women's secretary of the WSCF, was born in England. She attended Notting Hill High School and then studied science for a year at Bedford College, London. Her university studies were completed at Girton College, Cambridge. Rouse experienced a personal conversion at the age of eighteen and when she was twenty-two, joined the Church of England. Her mother was Scottish Baptist and her father belonged to the Plymouth Brethren, although some of his family were also Evangelical Anglicans. Agnes de Selincourt, a classmate from Notting Hill, was a close friend and great influence. De Selincourt had been converted through a mission led by the Rev. E.A. Stuart, a leader in the Evangelical movement.

When Robert Wilder, leader of the American SVM, visited Cambridge, Agnes de Selincourt signed the SVMU card, expressing her desire to become a missionary.¹¹ Rouse also signed the Student Volunteer declaration while at Girton. After completing college, Rouse and de Selincourt brought several independent organizations from various women's colleges into affiliation with the British

¹⁰ Rouse, *The WSCF*, p. 103. See also, Rowland.

¹¹ For a history of the SVM, see Clarence P. Shedd, "Some Early Student Religious Societies and the Intercollegiate Beginnings of the SCM 1858-1900," Ph.D. thesis, Yale University, 1932.

College Christian Union. In 1894 Rouse attended the Keswick Conference, a convention with close ties to the British YMCA, and there she met John R. Mott and Robert Speer, both leaders in the American SVM.

Rouse was offered the position of women's travelling secretary in the British SVMU for 1894-5. She declined the offer, partly because her family was dubious about the post, and partly because she wanted to study Sanskrit at the British Museum in preparation for missionary work in India. In 1894 Rouse and de Selincourt formulated plans for the prospective Missionary Settlement for University Women in Bombay. They proposed to apply the settlement idea to missions, and to place Christian university graduates from the West in the educational centers of India to reach future women doctors, lawyers, and teachers.¹²

The pull of student Christian work was strong enough to postpone Rouse's India plans for a few years. In 1895 she was appointed editor of the British *Student Volunteer*. As such, she was a member of the SVMU and BCCU executive committees, and throughout 1896-1897 she served as a secretary for both these organizations. Rouse made a pioneering visit to Scandinavian countries in 1897. The visit of a foreign woman or woman secretary was an unusual event. Rouse found a tremendous ignorance of missions and apathy among students. In Uppsala she noted that few women were interested in missions or Christian associations, considering them "an introduction of American business-like proceedings into Christian matters."¹³ The Finnish University of Helsingfors (Helsinki) had 215 women students in 1897. Rouse organized a women's student Christian union there with twenty-five members.

Rouse made a striking figure as she began to tour university campuses in many countries. According to one acquaintance, her tall, elegant appearance presented quite a contrast to the women missionaries of those days. Her poise, education, and credentials served her well in her work in the women's colleges, because "most heads of women's colleges then were definitely extremely afraid of religious enthusiasm and outwardly at any rate did not seem in any way to identify themselves with

¹² Rowland, "The Contribution," pp. 1-55.

¹³ Rowland, "The Contribution," p. 84.

religion at all."¹⁴ Rouse apparently overcame their suspicions and showed great skill at gaining access to the colleges and choosing people to follow up her work.

Rouse had planned to go to Bombay in the fall of 1897, but Mott invited her to tour the United States and Canada, as a SVM secretary. She visited at least one hundred colleges while there, helped to organize women's delegations to the quadrennial Student Volunteer Convention in Cleveland in 1898, and attended summer conferences and conventions of the YWCA.¹⁵ She found that the YWCA was less widespread than the YMCA. In both Canada and the United States, missions-related work was the weakest aspect of the Y program.¹⁶ In her travels, Rouse found the small denominational college somewhat disconcerting, "with its all-pervasive religious atmosphere."¹⁷ She felt she could better understand the state universities than the small religious colleges, but eventually she learned to value them too, since "they prepared me for work to come in American mission colleges and schools throughout the East and in South Africa, founded by graduates of these colleges, and carrying on their spirit and traditions."¹⁸ She helped to expand the intercollegiate work in the cities and to increase the awareness of women's college associations to the work of the YWCA. At the time, the College YWCA was not yet established in colleges such as Vassar, Wellesley, Smith, and Bryn Mawr, and she used her contacts with the SVM to interest these schools in the work of the YWCA. Rouse also used her influence to win the interest of many affluent American women by presenting them with a vision of internationalism exemplified in the work of the YWCA. Grace Dodge, who was involved in the Women's Labor Council, the Working Girl's Society, and a founder of Columbia Teachers' College,

¹⁴ Mrs. A. G. Fraser, quoted in W. Rowland, "The Contribution," p. 73.

¹⁵ In Canada she visited both ladies' colleges as well as the major universities such as McGill University, Montreal, Queen's, University of Toronto, Trinity College, Victoria University, and McMaster University.

¹⁶ Rowland, "The Contribution," pp. 91-4.

¹⁷ Rouse, *The WSCF*, pp. 117-8.

¹⁸ Rouse, *The WSCF*, p. 118.

was brought into the YWCA through contact with Rouse, and became its first national president.¹⁹ Rouse also greatly strengthened the missions-related work in the colleges during her visit to America. She yielded to the request of the Intercollegiate YWCA to work for them for one more year from 1898-99.

Rouse worked in India for the Missionary Settlement for University Women from December 1899 until December 1901. Her time was divided between studying the Gujarat language, settlement work, and student work. In Bombay she assisted another worker, Mary Dobson, in visiting Parsi women, who were quite advanced educationally. She began to organize camps and conferences in India; the first was held in the Punjab in 1900, attended by seventy girls representing thirteen schools and colleges. Rouse expressed the desire to continue the missionary work until a generation of native born student secretaries would take it over. Her work was curtailed by ill health and she was forced to return home to recover.

Rouse's health did not allow her to return to India, so she began travelling for the Federation in 1903 and accepted a permanent appointment in 1905. In preparation for her work as Federation secretary, Rouse had spent two months at Halle, Germany, studying German and doing Federation work, which resulted in the beginning of a Student Christian Movement among German women (CVSF). In 1905 Rouse did pioneering work in France, encouraging Madame Pannier, the wife of Rev. Pannier, General Secretary of the Protestant Students in Paris, to start an association with women students. As a result of these efforts an Association of French Women students was organized in 1908.²⁰

¹⁹ For a biographical sketch of Dodge, see Boyd, *Emissaries*, p. 17; for a discussion of the influence of Rouse on American upper class women, see Rowland, "The Contribution," p. 100.

²⁰ For more information on the French student movement (FFEC), see, for example, Boxes 139-53, WSCF Archives, YDS. Two noteworthy women secretaries were Lizzie Meyer who served the FFEC from about 1911-14 (Box 151-1109) and Suzanne de Dietrich (Box 150-1104; 149-1095). De Dietrich was vice-chair of the WSCF until 1932 and a member of the Executive Committee until 1935. From 1930-7, she was also a member of the Executive Committee of the World's YWCA. Her publications include *Cinquante ans d'histoire de la Fédération universelle des associations chrétiennes d'étudiants 1895-1945* (Paris: Editions du Semeur, 1947) and *Rediscovering the Bible: Bible Study in the World's Student Christian Federation* (Geneva: WSCF, 1942).

Rouse spent three months in Asia in 1907 and attended the Student Christian Conference in Tokyo. During her four months of travel in Australia and New Zealand, in 1908, she found herself "cast for the unusual role of a determined feminist." Men were in complete charge of the movement, to the extent that they also were the travelling secretaries who visited the girls' boarding schools. By the time Rouse left, a woman travelling secretary had been appointed, and five women were put on the committee of the Australian Student Christian Union.²¹

In 1909 Rouse gave most of her time to student work in Great Britain, Russia, Switzerland, Germany, and several Scandinavian countries. The Federation decided to hold the 1911 General Conference in Constantinople, a move that indicated the desire of the Federation to make contact with the Eastern Orthodox church and other branches of the Christian church. This conference marked the historic beginnings of the Federation's move towards ecumenism. Ruth Rouse was once again a pioneer and helper in this field, since her appreciative understanding of the Orthodox beliefs, which she had gained in Russia, gave her a useful basis for understanding.

A group of women secretaries including Rouse, Grace Saunders, Constance Grant, and a Russian student named Miss Lanievsky, visited Bulgaria and Serbia. As a result of this visit, a student group in Sofia called Grace Saunders to a position of women's secretary in order to start a foyer near the university. Between 1911 and 1913, Rouse travelled in Northeast and Central Europe, Canada, and through Austria and Hungary. Rouse gained an appreciation for the special needs of Jewish students because she observed that anti-Semitism was very strong. Budapest University was the largest of Hungary's three universities, with 12,000 students, of which 150 were women, and half of those were Jewish. She started a Bible circle that was composed of Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Jewish women. She also created a reawakened interest among Protestant Reformed church women in Hungary. At the WSCF Lake Mohonk Conference in New York, 1912, many representatives from both Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches in Europe attended for the first time and Rouse's travels and contacts in these countries were part of this widening of the Federation's circle.²²

²¹ Rouse, *The WSCF*, p. 119.

²² Rowland, "The Contribution," p. 145.

Rouse spent four months in Canada in 1912 and her observations on women's work provide a fascinating commentary on Canadian university life from a British perspective. Despite friendly relations between men and women on a social level, she observed a division between "the men's world and the women's world; their social, philanthropic, and religious organizations (including the YWCA/YMCA) are always separate...and women's opinions and contributions to work are discounted to a curious extent." Canadian women in 1912, she felt, were growing in their awareness of social and political matters, but they lacked concern for the women's movement. Women students had a practical approach to religion, with more interest in the application of religion than in philosophy or theology.²³



Ruth Rouse with Russian students

The work that Rouse did in Russia provided a unique chapter in the Federation's history. Russian students were very political and there were many secret revolutionary societies. Students had a great hatred for the Eastern Orthodox church and especially for the priests, who were seen as monarchist and oppressive. In St. Petersburg, Rouse had helped start a small Bible circle during her visit in 1903. On her return in 1905, she was surprised to see that the hall was filled with students on the evening of her lecture. The first part of her speech took the form of a lecture, without hymns or prayers, but the latter part was more evangelistic. Students walked out or laughed during this aspect of her talk. Russian students were very suspicious, accusing her of being a spy, a pioneer for the Salvation Army, and a freemason.²⁴

In Moscow, Rouse drew an audience of one thousand students. She obtained a room in the middle of the student quarter and with the help of her interpreter, who was a Red Cross nurse, Rouse had various formal and informal meetings with students. After one of her talks, a Russian woman medical student rose and addressed the audience for fifteen minutes, "attacking Christianity violently

²³ Rowland, "The Contribution," p. 200.

²⁴ Rowland, "The Contribution," p. 158.

and pouring scorn on the idea that, as Christianity in two thousand years has not solved its problems, any group of students (such as the Federation) could not hope to do so."²⁵ Rouse continued courageously to address hostile audiences and to meet privately with women students.

Rouse was very involved in war work during World War I and continued to travel despite the war.²⁶ She was wounded while on speaking tour and required three operations. The needs of refugee students were so acute that Rouse gave two-thirds of her time to European student relief. She worked with the Overseas Department of the American YWCA, which was very active in opening hostels for women students. In 1914 Rouse resigned from the Federation and again submitted her resignation at Beatenberg due to family circumstances. Her resignation was not accepted but a post was created for her, called the Secretary to the Executive Committee, which meant, in fact, that she was General Secretary, since Mott had resigned in 1920. Finally in 1924 at High Leigh, Rouse resigned and became Education Secretary of the Missionary Council of the Church Assembly. Rouse died in England in 1956, having made a splendid contribution to the work of the Federation throughout the world.

II

Rouse clearly understood the needs of women students, and those needs were particularly acute in Switzerland. When Rouse had visited the universities there in 1906, she found that most students were bitterly opposed to Christianity. Outreach to these students was urgent and the Geneva committee had appealed to the WSCF at Zeist in 1905 for help.²⁷ Switzerland became an urgent field of work for the WSCF, particularly among the foreign students who lived in extreme isolation and poverty. Central to the WSCF work was the establishment of foyers, an arrangement of home life intended to meet the

²⁵ Rowland, "The Contribution," p. 160.

²⁶ For a description of the war work see, Ruth Rouse, *Rebuilding Europe. The Student Chapter in Post-War Reconstruction* (London: Student Christian Movement, 1925); *The Federation in the World War 1914-18* (Geneva: WSCF, 1940). See also, Rouse, *The WSCF*, especially chapter XVII.

²⁷ Rowland, "The Contribution," p 212.

social, physical, and moral needs of foreign students as well as those needs that were more distinctly spiritual. The foyers offered various social services including subsidized meals and tea, practical training, employment bureau, housing service, and referrals to medical professionals, who would provide free or subsidized services to refugees. In addition, social events such as Christmas parties, Bible studies, and discussion groups attempted to meet the spiritual needs of a diverse student body.

While travelling in South Africa in 1906, Rouse had met a young American, Elizabeth Clarke, who was a graduate of Bryn Mawr and a former student at the University of Zurich. When Rouse met her, Clarke was teaching at the Huguenot College in Stellenbosch, South Africa; she was fluent in French, German, and Italian and expressed a deep interest in the foreign student situation in Switzerland.²⁸ Clarke went on to play a key role in the Swiss student movement, and her correspondence reveals the complexity of the Federation's work, particularly in wartime.

Clarke was assisted in the Swiss work by several women secretaries who came from England, America, Australia, New Zealand, and Switzerland. Winifred Sedgewick, an English woman studying at the University of Geneva in 1905-6, completed a preliminary investigation into conditions at the university. Three male students and Sedgewick invited the university to a local brasserie to a talk on "Our Faith." They were met with ridicule and argument but the event marked the beginning of a vital student movement in Switzerland. Another important figure in the Swiss movement was Renée Warnery, the only Swiss medical student in Lausanne in 1905-6.²⁹

When Clarke became involved in the Swiss movement, she first established residence in Zurich in 1907 and then moved to Geneva in 1908. She gathered a group of women students in the fall of 1909 and they affiliated with the men's student Christian Association. They rented a room near the university where the women could drop in between lectures and enjoy a fire, and a warm cup of tea or coffee. In January 1910 the center moved into a larger room called the "Foyer des Etudiants" with a clearly stated

²⁸ For information on the work of Elizabeth Clarke in Switzerland, see, for example, Box 164-1171; 164-1172; 164-1173; 164-1176, WSCF Archives, YDS.

²⁹ For information on the work of Warnery for the Federation, see Box 168-1196, WSCF Archives, YDS. Warnery became a student volunteer, and later became a Medical Missionary under the Basel Missionary Society in India. She eventually joined the Roman Catholic Church.

Christian purpose. The work grew and Clarke gained an assistant, Constance Grant, a New Zealander, who was studying in Geneva and living with her mother and sister. The foyer movement caught on to the extent that in 1910 one opened in Lausanne, followed one year later by foyers in Zurich, Bern, and Neuchatel. These foyers were run by women such as Annette Tritton, Florence Holden, Marguerite Locher, and Renée Warnery, who created programs to meet student's basic needs for shelter, food, and employment, in addition to Bible study and discussion groups.

In 1910, 82 percent of the Swiss university student body were foreign students from thirty-two countries. At Berne University in 1911, for example, there were 1750 matriculated students of which 960 were Swiss, 300 were Russian, and of the Russians, 160 were women.³⁰ At Geneva, Swiss comprised only 118 of the 1700 matriculated students. The Swiss students were generally Protestant in heritage, but chose to remain detached from religious matters, since they did not want to be seen as "momiers" or pietists. These Swiss students were affluent, involved in sports and social pursuits, and usually belonged to one of three patriotic student societies. There were 200 German students and 80 Swiss German students at Geneva, who were also predominantly Protestant. The Germans tended to be in law or medicine, and had a reputation for engaging in little or no study. The majority of the German Swiss were women who came to Geneva to learn French. Many of these students considered orthodox Christianity too authoritarian and were only mildly interested in religious life. Russian students numbered between 700 and 800 at Geneva. The tuition in Switzerland was relatively low and there were no admission quotas based on religion, as in the Russian universities, which restricted Jewish students to two percent of the total enrollment. There were also 172 Bulgarian students who were very patriotic and politically oriented. Armenians numbered between thirty and forty students and most belonged to their own patriotic society. Many of the Armenian students had been educated in English and American mission schools, with some exposure to Christianity. Among the faculty of the University of Geneva, most of the seventy professors were nominally Protestant, with only three or four exceptions, who were either Catholic or Jewish. The overwhelming attitude of the Protestant, but largely agnostic, faculty was

³⁰ Prof. Dr. P. Gruner, "Conditions and Needs at Berne University," unpublished report, January 1911, Box 169-1205, WSCF Archives, YDS.

to regard religion as a private matter, and therefore to accept no responsibility for students outside of class.³¹

Russian students were the largest group in the Swiss universities. Some Russian women attended Swiss schools as a result of educational policy in their homeland. In the late 1850s and early 1860s, they had been allowed to attend courses at home, but after 1864 this was no longer permitted. They had to rely on special women's courses, until 1872, when women in St. Petersburg were allowed to attend a special medical course, designed to keep them from going to "foreign universities such as Zurich where they might fall under the influence of political exiles."³² German women, disallowed from certification as physicians from their universities, were also attracted to the University of Zurich, which had begun admitting women to regular study in the 1860s. Swiss universities gradually gained a reputation for political radicalism and immorality, which meant that Swiss nationals were discouraged from attendance.

The atmosphere of religious skepticism, agnosticism, and liberal thinking facing WSCF workers in Switzerland would have provided sufficient challenge without the added burden of chaos engendered by World War I. In September 1914 Clarke described the suffering among foreign students:

Most of them are living in very uncomfortable rooms, up five flights of stairs, when they are not sleeping on straw. Many are living on one meal a day, with the addition of a cup of milk or coffee in the morning. If this is so now, what will the winter be, with the additional problem of suffering from cold. I know, personally, of more suicides than I would like to count: the press censor has kept all reference to these out of the papers, for fear of starting a "suicide-epidemic."³³

³¹ Eberhard Phildius, "Report on the religious conditions of students and Professors of Geneva University," unpublished report, undated, [1911?], Box 169-1205, WSCF Archives, YDS.

³² James Albisetti, *Schooling German Girls and Women. Secondary and Higher Education in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 130. The degree did not allow them to be fully certified as physicians, but gave them status as "learned midwives." Nevertheless, Albisetti notes that when one adds these students to the hundreds studying medicine in Western Europe, it is clear that Russia offered the most progressive climate for the higher education of women during this period.

³³ Clarke to Mott, 10 September 1914, Box 164-1171, WSCF Archives, YDS.

In addition to these practical issues that needed immediate remedies, Clarke worried about the unity of the Swiss student movement. German Swiss sentiment was largely allied with Germany, whereas French Switzerland sided with France, and these separate loyalties threatened to divide the student movement.³⁴ The combination of worries affected Clarke's health, and she declined an invitation to meet with Mott in Paris, because she was so tired that she "was constantly in dread of a breakdown."³⁵

During a visit to Austria to survey conditions among students there, Clarke was stopped twice by the police in Innsbruck on suspicion of being an English spy. She noted that hundreds of Polish students, many of whom were women, had fled to Vienna after the closure of Cracow and Lemberg Universities. In Budapest she observed that the men's and women's student work was strictly separate, but both movements were flourishing. The Prague student association offered six weekly Bible groups, but it had also been severely affected by the war and the loss of members drafted to the front.³⁶

In a letter responding to financial assistance from Mott, Clarke explained how she had distributed the money. Fifty dollars had been donated to the student movement in Vienna to pay the salary of a Mademoiselle Tosio, a Polish girl, daughter of a Protestant pastor at Warsaw, who was herself a refugee, working to meet the needs of the many other Polish women refugees. Clarke used the remainder of the money to buy food, lodging, fuel, furniture. Although some refugees had been repatriated, Clarke noted an increase in Russian refugees who needed boarding places. She begged Mott for more financial help to pay for food and medicine, overshoes, and even postage stamps, because some of the students were literally penniless. One refugee woman had no soap with which to wash, and on that account missed an appointment with Clarke, because she was ashamed to leave her room. She lived in an unheated room with only bread and milk to eat. Clarke gave her soap, ten portions of soup, a quart of fuel, and a pair of new overshoes. The ability to provide such practical assistance was presumably some compensation for the anxieties of her work in wartime Switzerland.

³⁴ Clarke to Mott, 10 September 1914, Box 164-1171, WSCF Archives, YDS.

³⁵ Clarke to Mott, 31 October 1914, Box 164-1171, WSCF Archives, YDS.

³⁶ Clarke, "Memorandum on Visit to Austria," unpublished report, 1914, Box 164-1171, WSCF Archives, YDS.

In December 1916, while Clarke was in New York, Mott asked whether she would return to Switzerland to do more relief work. She replied that she found her relationship to the Federation too vague and indefinite and felt hampered by the fact that she had no official recognition as a Federation secretary, as a secretary of the Swiss National Committee, or as a local secretary. This vague relationship was not functional because "I was merely a vague nobody; and one cannot continue to be that in war-time, when every individual is challenged at every point. One is either an accredited representative of some organization, or one is a private person. There is no middle ground possible now."³⁷ Clarke felt that she could not work for the Federation unless they offered her a long term position for a few years, which would also provide her with financial security.

Yet the student work exerted a powerful attraction; only a day later, Clarke again wrote Mott suggesting that she return to Switzerland to meet the urgent needs of refugee women. She offered her services to the Federation and suggested that a grant of at least three thousand dollars would meet the needs of foreign women students in Switzerland.³⁸ Clarke outlined recommendations for student work in Switzerland, including cooperative restaurants and self support projects.³⁹ Mott replied with the promise of three thousand dollars for refugee relief and a one year contract for Clarke to represent the International YMCA.⁴⁰

On her return to Switzerland in 1917, conditions continued to worsen as flour, butter, rice, and sugar were very scarce in Switzerland and coal was unavailable for private homes.⁴¹ Clarke suffered bronchitis twice in her unheated apartment in Lausanne. After another relapse, her doctor

³⁷ Clarke to Mott, 14 December 1916, Box 164-1172, WSCF Archives, YDS.

³⁸ Clarke to Mott, 15 December 1916, Box 164-1172, WSCF Archives, YDS.

³⁹ Clarke to Mott, 17 December 1916, Box 164-1172, WSCF Archives, YDS.

⁴⁰ Clarke to Mott, 23 December 1916, Box 164-1172, WSCF Archives, YDS.

⁴¹ Clarke to Mott, 13 April 1916, Box 164-1172, WSCF Archives, YDS.

"resorted to drastic measures and burned my back in fifty-two places, by actual count, blistering being the remedy à la mode over here at present."⁴² Despite this cure, Clarke recovered and returned to work.

Clarke established a cooperative housekeeping in the Geneva foyer, which served two meals for needy students for twenty-two cents. After displaying an initial reluctance to engage in work other than teaching, student workers gradually accepted the necessity of preparing and serving the food. The economic situation resulting from the war was breaking down student prejudice against manual labor.⁴³ The inhabitants of the foyer apartment in Geneva included three Bulgarian women, one Serbian, two Russian Jewesses, a Swiss, and a Polish student. Marguerite Wohlers, director of the foyer, did her best to make a family out of this diverse group of women students. The foyer also offered a *bureau de travail*, which counselled students in search of work. Some of the work projects carried out under the auspices of the foyer included the decoration and production of bread bags, typing, mending, copying, production of Polish dolls made by an art student in Paris, and embroidered blouses created by a consumptive Russian student in Davos.

Clarke organized a work party to a local farm; the crew included an Egyptian man, two Russian women doctors, one Serbian medical student, one Polish student, and a Russian Jew studying medicine. The hostess, a Madame van Berchem, made the students participate in morning prayers, followed by work such as chopping wood and harvesting vegetables. After working all day, the students either cleaned beans or went into the salon and listened to music. Clarke continued to be challenged by crises such as that at the University of Geneva in 1917, when 150 refugee students, mainly Serbian and Russian, had been without food for forty-eight hours. The day that Clarke was notified of the situation, one of the students committed suicide by throwing herself into the Rhone River.⁴⁴

On September 26, 1918, Clarke submitted her resignation to Mott. Her sense of responsibility for the Swiss situation did not end, however, as a letter written aboard a ship returning to North

⁴² Clarke to friends, August 1917, Box 164-1172, WSCF Archives, YDS.

⁴³ Extract from a letter from Clarke for the Women's Sub-Committee, 1 November 1917, Box 164-1172, WSCF Papers, YDS.

⁴⁴ Clarke to Mott, November 1917, Box 164-1172, WSCF Archives, YDS.

America demonstrates. She urged Mott to send the refugees second hand clothes and shoes. Several women doctors, who had recently graduated, for four years had owned only one coat and skirt.⁴⁵ Clarke was not away from the field for long; in 1919 she travelled to England, Belgium, and Czechoslovakia, and then returned to Switzerland to complete a survey on student conditions. Clarke's work for the Federation lasted approximately twelve years and was marked by several significant contributions, including the pioneering of the successful foyer movement.

III

Michi Kawai (1877-1953) served as Secretary of the Student YWCA in Japan, and Chairman of the Women's Subcommittee of the Federation.⁴⁶ Kawai came from a long line of Shinto priests and was herself a convert to Christianity.⁴⁷ She attended the Hokkusei Girls' School in Sapporo in approximately 1890, a school run by an American, Sarah Smith. After completing her studies, she moved to Otaru to help another American teacher, Clara Rose, start a school. After this experience, she returned to Miss Smith's school as a teacher. Kawai met Ume Tsuda who had studied at Bryn Mawr, taught at the Tokyo Normal College for Women, and eventually founded her own private school. Tsuda had organized a scholarship for other Japanese women to attend Bryn Mawr and Kawai was one of the recipients.

Armed with some pieces of a Western wardrobe and her kimonos, Kawai sailed for America in 1898. Her initial studies were undertaken at a preparatory school called Ivy House, in Pennsylvania. She completed the college entrance exams, and entered the freshman class at Bryn Mawr in the fall of 1900. She attended the YWCA conference at Silver Bay in 1902 and found the cooperation between women students amazing. In the summer of 1903, she accompanied a former German teacher from Ivy

⁴⁵ Clarke to Mott, 5 December 1918, Box 164-1173, WSCF Archives, YDS.

⁴⁶ For the Michi Kawai papers in the WSCF collection, see, Box 228-1784; 228-1785. For her autobiography, see Michi Kawai, *My Lantern* (Japan, privately published, 1939); and *Sliding Doors* (Tokyo, Japan: Keisen-Jo-Gaku-En, 1950).

⁴⁷ Rouse, *The WSCF*, p. 170.

House on a tour of Europe. After six years' absence, Kawai returned to Japan to teach English, History, and translation at Ume Tsuda's school.



Michi Kawai at Bryn Mawr

After Kawai had been teaching for six months, Caroline Macdonald arrived in Japan from Canada to organize the National YWCA. Macdonald persuaded Kawai to help her in this task, so Kawai began by bringing girls from her school to Macdonald's house for a Bible class, while Macdonald started classes in literature and advanced English Bible for those who had studied abroad.⁴⁸

Girls from the Japanese provinces were flocking to the cities for advanced study. According to Ruth Rouse, this migration was an effect of the Russian-Japanese war, during which many Japanese men had lost their lives. Parents felt since there were fewer husbands available, daughters needed to go to the cities to pursue an education and find a livelihood. There were apparently 10,000 such girls in Tokyo, who had been used to very strict supervision at home, and had little idea how to survive in the city.⁴⁹ The Ministry of Education, the Tokyo committee, and the National YWCA raised funds for a dormitory. At the first YWCA conference, which Kawai helped to organize, one hundred girls from twenty Christian schools attended. The WSCF conference was held in Tokyo in 1907 and provided Kawai with the chance to meet or renew acquaintance with Ruth Rouse, Bertha Condé, and Harriet Taylor from the United States, and Hermine Baart de la Faille, women's secretary for Germany. Contacts made at this meeting resulted in an invitation to visit England and Germany to observe the student work there and to attend a World Conference of the YWCA in Germany in 1910.

⁴⁸ For information on Caroline Macdonald's work in Japan, see Box 228-1786, 228-1878, 228-1879, WSCF Archives, YDS.

⁴⁹ Rouse, *The WSCF*, p. 122.

Kawai's reports of her tour in 1910 provide some excellent perspectives on student movements in different countries. Her intense interest in women's higher education was nourished by her visit to English institutions, such as Royal Holloway College, Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford, Girton College, Cambridge, in addition to Birmingham and Leeds.

In Paris, Kawai noted that the association members were extremely interested in the social life in other countries. She felt that the Protestant churches needed to reach out to working girls who did not have a place to spend their Sundays. She travelled on to Neuchatel, Switzerland, where she was struck by such notable features as the politeness of students, the lack of apparent poverty, the old fountains in the streets, and the chocolate. Kawai addressed foreign women students at the Lausanne Christian Union on the subject "The Ideal Womanhood of East and West." She travelled on to Geneva and found it very "frenchy," with some students dressed very fashionably and some "wretchedly." The hospitality provided at the Geneva foyer by Miss Constance Grant, her sister, and a Miss Evans left a great impression, particularly the tea "served in true English style with a spotless white table cloth for cups and saucers...."⁵⁰

When she arrived in Strasbourg, she was met by Hermine Baart de la Faille, a Dutch national, who was secretary to the German student movement, and a Methodist pastor, Herr Mann. On a visit to one of the largest girl's schools in the city, Kawai noted the unusual appearance of the teachers with their white caps and deaconess uniforms. When she spoke in the evening in a small concert hall, she noted a man in a military uniform guarding the door. She observed: "I felt rather queer to be guarded by a policeman, but later I was told that he was a janitor. This made me realise that I was in Germany where every official employ  glittered in brass buttons."⁵¹

During her visit to Leiden, The Netherlands, she attended church and noted that wooden stools with fire were placed to warm their feet, a ticket had to be purchased for the seat, and collection bags were continually passed around during the service. She was impressed with the patience of the Dutch people, because after one of her talks which lasted over one hour, they showed no fatigue and were,

⁵⁰ Michi Kawai, Report 1910, 5, Box 228-1784, WSCF Archives, YDS.

⁵¹ Michi Kawai, "Report to the Officers and Executive Committee of the WSCF and the World's YWCA, 1910," Box 228-1784, WSCF Archives, YDS.

in fact, eager to continue. In an informal meeting, students questioned why Christianity inspired so much interest in Japan, when many Western people turned to the East for a new religion. She also addressed students at the University of Utrecht and the University of Amsterdam. One of the students took her to her parents' home situated on a canal with a superb view. Kawai found the Mayjis family very hospitable, and described with humor how the parents showed their goodness in every move; even the family dog was so good that he insisted on sitting on her skirt.

Kawai's honesty and humor served her well at a lecture in Delft, The Netherlands, when she arrived at the hall and found it was filled almost exclusively with male students. She thought to herself, "Just imagine, an Eastern woman to talk to Western men-students!" Her speech was quickly revised, with a brief mention of the education of women, and then a rapid shift of topic, "for I had some things to tell to the sons of Adam as well as to the daughters of Eve." Japanese male students, she observed, would never have tolerated any Japanese woman speaking to them in the way she did there.⁵²

After the European tour, Kawai attended the Canadian YWCA conference at Elgin House, Lake Muskoka, Ontario. She met relatives of Caroline Macdonald and also Emma Kaufman. Kaufman was the daughter of an affluent Canadian rubber manufacturer, who worked for three decades as a volunteer secretary and donated most of her wealth to the Tokyo YWCA. During six months in the fall of 1910, Macdonald spoke at colleges throughout the United States, on behalf of the National YMCA.

On her way to attend the National YWCA Training School in New York in 1915, Kawai toured California to investigate living conditions among Asian immigrant women. After this tour, Kawai made a point of speaking with prospective emigrants in Japan to prepare them for American customs, until, as she wrote, the Exclusion Act of 1924 eliminated the necessity of such training.⁵³

After a year at the National YWCA Training School in New York, Kawai returned to Japan, quit teaching, and became a full-time secretary of the YWCA. In 1920 she attended the Biennial Convention of the YWCA at Cleveland, and travelled on to Switzerland for an executive meeting of the World's YWCA. While there, Kawai heard Carrie Chapman Catt, leader of the National American

⁵² Kawai, "Report," 21 March 1910, Box 228-1783, WSCF Archives, YDS.

⁵³ Kawai, *My Lantern*, p. 143.

Suffrage Association, speak at the International Suffrage League meetings in Geneva. She attended Union Theological Seminary in New York for a few months but was called home in February 1921 in order to attend to the serious illness of her mother, who subsequently died in 1922.

In 1923, after a disastrous earthquake in Japan, the Chinese YWCA was the first to send relief. In order to repay this act of friendship, Kawai agreed to attend the first Chinese national YWCA convention in Hangzhou, despite the tremendous responsibility she faced to administer relief.⁵⁴

Kawai again travelled to America in 1926 and was struck by the changed, liberal attitude of Christians toward evangelism, missions, the church, and even the Christian faith itself. While in Europe, the American National YWCA asked her to help with their friendship program, with the result that she became a temporary travelling secretary. In 1929 Kawai opened her own school in Tokyo, named the Keisen Girls' School and she later started the Keisen Agro-Horticultural College in 1944. For Kawai, it was the fulfillment of a long cherished dream, nourished by her contacts with higher education in various countries and her work for the WSCF.

Ruth Rouse, Elizabeth Clarke, and Michi Kawai were women who exhibited excellent leadership qualities; they helped to pioneer new programs that expanded the mandate of the Federation far beyond its original aspirations. Their letters and reports in the WSCF archives provide substantial documentation not only of their work but also of the status of women throughout the world during the first part of this century.

⁵⁴ Michi Kawai to Mrs. Waldegrave, President of the World's YWCA, 17 October 1923, Box 228-1783, WSCF Archives, YDS.

