Origins—The Woman’s Missionary Society of the Pacific Coast, 1870-1892

Gum Moon Women’s Residence and Asian Women Resource Center at 940 Washington Street has a long and colorful historical connection to San Francisco’s Chinatown. Its origins date to July, 1870, when Reverend Otis Gibson, founder of the Methodist Episcopal Church’s “Chinese Domestic Mission” in 1868 and missionary in Foochow, China from 1855-1865, advertised a meeting to bring together San Francisco Methodist women who might be interested in working with the women of Chinatown.

Otis Gibson, 1826-1889
Eliza Chamberlin Gibson, 1830-1916


Over the years, Chinese women had occasionally been brought to the Ladies Protection and Relief Society at Geary and Franklin Streets through the help of a
policeman or “through the kind offices of Mr. Loomis,” a Presbyterian minister.² Reverend Gibson, his wife Eliza, and others knew about these Chinese prostitutes and little mui tsai (girls in debt bondage), for from time to time newspapers ran stories about them. The Gibsons wanted to offer some sort of help to Chinese women who had been forced into lives of prostitution,³ or to those girls who had been physically abused by their owners. An informal survey by Mrs. Caroline Hubbell Cole, a former Presbyterian missionary to China⁴ suggested that some Chinese women and girls might be willing to risk escape from prostitution and physical abuse if they knew there was a place just for them; a place that offered them the possibility of a different life.⁵ So it was that a month later, in August, 1870, twelve San Francisco women responded to Otis Gibson’s call. The Woman’s Missionary Society of the Pacific Coast grew out of that August meeting.⁶ The Society’s goal, as simply stated in its second article formed that day, was “to elevate and save heathen women, especially those on these shores, and to raise funds for this work.”⁷

As a direct result of the meeting, a “Female Department” was opened on Christmas Day, 1870, housed on the third floor of the newly dedicated Methodist Episcopal Church’s Chinese Domestic Mission building at 916 Washington Street. Due to the two-year fundraising efforts of Otis Gibson, the $31,000 building was entirely debt free. However, the building’s third floor would sit empty for ten months while the Methodist women experimented with various ways to gain the trust of Chinatown’s women.

Along with a “Female Department” to aid abused Chinese girls and women, Otis Gibson planned to start “Sabbath Schools” and English language evening schools throughout California, a Chinese college in San Francisco to train Chinese men as
Christian leaders who would return to China and establish churches, and a Chinese language newspaper. Although Gibson’s grandiose plans never fully materialized, the completed building was designed with rental rooms in the daylight basement; a chapel on the main floor; classrooms on the second floor, where classes in English and scientific subjects would be taught; and a top floor devoted to the planned female department. The Gibson family flat adjoined the building on the west side.⁸

The Methodist women’s work in Chinatown was thus founded four years prior to the establishment of the Presbyterian Church’s Occidental Board of Foreign Missions (now known as Donaldina Cameron House). However, the latter is much better known to historians of early San Francisco. This is primarily due to Donaldina Cameron’s forty-three years of rescue work for the Chinatown Presbyterian Home (1895-1938). And because the Presbyterian records have been more accessible to scholars than those of the Methodist Home, the secondary literature devoted to the Presbyterian Occidental Board is extensive in comparison with the Methodist women’s work.⁹ Over the years, the Presbyterian Occidental Home at 920 Clay Street received more Chinese women and girls per year than the Methodist Home,¹⁰ but during the height of their parallel rescue work (roughly 1890 to 1910), the Methodist Home seems to have found its way into San Francisco newspaper headlines at least as much, if not more often than the Presbyterian Home. Yet, no history of the Methodist women’s work has been written—beyond the “in house” accounts occasionally found in addendums to annual reports and the anniversary celebrations of women’s missionary societies.¹¹

Although the Methodist women’s work was closely aligned with the Chinese Domestic Mission and, like it, was under the jurisdiction of the California Conference of
the Methodist Episcopal Church, its funding was always kept separate from the Domestic Mission. And the women were careful to distinguish themselves from the former. But there were, of course, important connections between the two organizations. First, the wives of the first three superintendents (Reverend Otis Gibson [1868-1885], Reverend Frederick J. Masters [1886-1899], and Reverend Freeman Bovard [1899-1900]), held important positions on the WMSPC Board (after 1893, the “Oriental Bureau” of the Woman’s Home Missionary Society). Beginning in 1875, Eliza Gibson was listed as a “missionary” under the Chinese Domestic Mission (in subsequent years this is corrected to “assistant missionary”) and she was the corresponding secretary for the WMSPC for many years—at least as early as 1881. While there are relatively few records that mention Mary E. Masters’ official positions in the Chinese Domestic Mission or the WMSPC/WHMS Oriental Bureau, she apparently wrote some of the annual reports for the WSMPC and later helped write two short histories of the Oriental Home. Sallie Bovard, on the other hand, was Secretary of the Oriental Bureau from 1903-1907, shortly after her husband had been Superintendent of the Pacific Coast Chinese Mission. On a related note, Mrs. Ida Hull, teacher in the Home for almost twenty years beginning in 1891, married in 1901 the recently widowed, former pastor of the Chinese Methodist Church, Reverend Ho Fan Chan.

A second point of connection between the Chinese Domestic Mission and the WMSPC/WHMS Oriental Bureau was the roles Rev. Gibson and Rev. Masters played in the rescue strategies of the Women’s Rescue Asylum. For example, Rev. Otis Gibson was often the contact person for the police and courts after the “rescues” of Chinese women and girls, while Rev. Frederick Masters actually went with the Methodist women
when they responded to the calls of women and girls seeking to get out of debt bondage. A third point of connection between the two Methodist groups is the simple fact that for the first thirty years of their existence they shared the same building. And apparently the WMSPC/WHMS Oriental Bureau never paid the Chinese Domestic Mission a penny in rent. But despite these informal, familial relationships between the two Methodist groups working in Chinatown, it is significant that neither Eliza Gibson nor Mary E. Masters was ever president of the WMSPC/WHMS Oriental Bureau.


Soon after the Woman’s Missionary Society of the Pacific Coast was organized in August, 1870, it sought to join the MEC Womans’ Foreign Missionary Society, which
had been founded in Boston in 1869. However, that Society refused to admit the west coast women, since San Francisco was located in the United States. In the estimation of the MECWFMS, no missionary work done within the boundaries of the United States could legitimately be called “foreign.” And no protestations to the contrary could convince the MECWFMS that the California Methodist women’s proposed work among the Chinese on the Pacific Coast was truly “foreign.” So having been turned away from the one Methodist women’s organization that they thought would help them, the WMSPC remained an independent auxiliary to the MEC General Missionary Society until 1893—although brief accounts of the women’s work are occasionally found in MECMS annual reports as late as 1905.

The Methodist women’s first attempts to reach out to Chinatown’s women and girls in the early months of 1871 were deemed failures. They tried education programs and home visitation, but neither was successful. But the women’s hopes were recharged on the night of October 21 when an African American man brought a young, distraught Chinese woman to the police station. The Methodist women were finally about to receive their first “inmate,” as they would later call the occupants of the third floor “Female Department.” And the account of Jin Ho’s rescue would become the foundational story of the Methodist women’s work in Chinatown; to be reworked and retold in all later histories of the WMSPC/WHMS Oriental Bureau. Reverend Gibson was the first to write down “her” story:

. . . [A] note was sent by Captain A. Clark, of the Police Station, asking me to call at the station to see a Chinese woman, who refused to talk with Chinamen, but intimated that she wished to see a missionary, or “Jesus
man. I answered the call, and found a poor wretched, stupid, forlorn looking woman—an apology for a human being, who gave her name as Jin Ho, and simply said, “Don’t take me back to Jackson Street.” The poor thing had escaped from a vile den on Jackson Street, leaving all her tinseled jewelry and gay trappings behind her; had run some six or seven blocks down to the foot of the street, and had deliberately thrown herself into the cold waters of the bay, choosing rather a watery grave than longer endure her life of slavery, shame and sorrow; desiring thus to end a pilgrimage upon which no ray of light ever shone, no star of hope ever beamed. A colored man with a long boat hook rescued her from drowning, and a policeman brought her to the station.

After a few minutes’ conversation with me she desired to be taken to the Mission House. While on the way she frequently murmured in Chinese, “Don’t take me to Jackson Street,” “Don’t take me to Jackson Street.” In six months from that time “Jin Ho” was so changed and improved that those who saw her at the Police Station did not recognize her. She remained about a year in the asylum, then did service in a Christian family, professed faith in the religion of Jesus, was baptized and received into the Methodist Church, and afterwards married a Mr. Jee Foke, a good substantial Chinaman, a member of the Congregational Church, with whom she is now living in peace and comfort, with none to molest or make her afraid. She is now clothed and in her right mind and enjoys a good hope of eternal life [emphasis in the original] through Jesus
Christ our Lord. Such was Jin Ho; and such is Jin Ho now [emphasis in the original], the first Chinese woman that sought refuge in the Asylum of the Methodist Mission.  

Two years after Gin Ho’s rescue, there were three long-term residents on the third floor of the Mission House. The new president of the WMSPC, Serena Goodall and the rest of the board decided it was time to hire a full-time teacher, and turned to the twenty-nine year old Miss Laura S. Templeton to fill the position. Within a short time, however, Miss Templeton was requesting help, for she realized that she was, in fact, functioning more as matron than school teacher to the women in the Rescue Asylum. When no additional support was forthcoming from the WMSPC, Miss Templeton resigned in 1876. Mrs. Jane Walker, the forty-four year old widow of Reverend Lysander Walker, was hired as matron and teacher to replace her. Mrs. Walker would remain as matron and teacher in the Asylum for eleven years, until 1887. During her tenure, nearly two hundred women and girls would pass through the Home.  

By the time Mrs. Walker took over in the fall of 1876, a general strategy of mainstreaming the rescued women had developed, even though an anonymous author had written that in 1871 the WMSPC Board had “commenced work without any definite plan as to how it[s work] should be carried on, waiting for Providence to open the way and circumstances to denote what should be done.” Now, no woman was being accepted into the Asylum for less than a year since many of the women were placed in the Asylum by “Chinamen who wish[ed] to marry them.” The men were obligated to pay their prospective bride’s board of sixty dollars for one year, and had to sign sworn affidavits stating that they would not sell their wives or place them in houses of
prostitution. Annual reports to the MEC Missionary Society usually listed the number of marriages during the year, along with how many of those could be counted as “Christian” marriages.

While the Chinese women and girls were in the Asylum, the Methodist matrons and teachers taught them to speak and read English, to read Chinese, and to sew, clean, and cook. Selling their “fancy work” helped defray the cost of the inmates’ food and clothing, and encouraged them with the hope that when they left, they would be able to support themselves or their families without returning to lives of prostitution.

When the Woman’s Home Missionary Society was formed in 1880, ten years after the founding of the WMSPC, its first annual report states: “Communications have been received from this association [WMSPC] proposing a union of the two Societies. . . . A union of the branches seems very desirable, and if the contemplated arrangement for co-operation with the Missionary Society be effected the work of the women for women in this country will probably be transferred to this Society.” However, the annual report of the WMSPC reads: “In April [1882] we received a proposition from the Home Missionary Society to become auxiliary to that Society. It was carefully considered by the Executive Committee and ladies of our Society, and the following resolution adopted, ‘Resolved, That the Woman’s Missionary Society of the Pacific Coast desires to become an auxiliary of the Woman’s Home Missionary Society, provided that the general Executive board will agree to appropriate not less than $2,000 per year to the work already established among Chinese Women in San Francisco.’” But after a committee was “appointed to promote” the union, the fledging WHMS found itself unable to
commit the funds to the California Methodist women. The merger would have to wait until 1893 to become reality.

In the meantime, the last few years of Reverend Gibson’s leadership in the Chinese Domestic Mission was marked more by his absence than his presence. He had been to England in 1881, and his stroke on November 10, 1884, left him incapacitated. With the support of her daughter Myra (a teacher), her son William (a lawyer and public defender of Mission interests and Chinese immigrants), and Mrs. Walker, Mrs. Gibson was in charge of both the Domestic Mission and the Rescue Asylum in 1881 and in 1885. But with the arrival of Reverend Frederick J. Masters and his wife Mary in late 1885, changes were in the air. No doubt some were due to personality differences, but other changes must have also been responses to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and the anti-Chinese riots that swept the West in 1885 and 1886. In 1886 both Frederick Masters and the WSPC Board, now under the leadership of Mrs. Laura P. Williams, argued that “the time has come to adopt other and more aggressive modes of work”. For Reverend Frederick Masters, two of these “more aggressive modes of work” were “street preaching,” and the plan to build a preaching chapel in the heart of Chinatown. But Rev. Masters’ name is also associated with the more aggressive and frequent rescues of Chinese women and girls that began in 1886. Peggy Pascoe writes that the earliest references to aggressive rescue strategies in the Presbyterian Home date from 1885. Interestingly, Rev. Frederick Masters’ wife Mary had been a United Presbyterian missionary in China before her marriage. Perhaps Mrs. Masters’ connection to Presbyterianism had brought her into close contact with Miss Culbertson in the
Presbyterian Occidental Mission Home and was the impetus to Rev. Masters’ more activist rescue strategies.33

Upon Mrs. Walker’s retirement in 1887, Mrs. S. C. Russell and Miss Gertrude Humphrey were hired as matron and teacher respectively. Nothing is known about either of these women, except that Mrs. Russell had been one of eight teachers in the Asylum in 1884, and she, along with Miss Humphrey, remained four years until Mrs. Downs was hired as matron and teacher in 1891. Apparently Mrs. Downs fulfilled both roles of teacher and matron through 1893, since the 1894-95 WHMSGBM Annual Report states that the “missionary and teacher [is] one and the same person” [emphasis in the original], and then goes on to talk about “Mrs. Hull our missionary.”34

Mrs. Ida Hull, a thirty year-two year old widow with a ten year-old son, joined the Rescue Home staff in 1891.35 Except for a brief hiatus around the turn of the century, when she was living with her brothers and mother in Ventura County, Ida would spend most of her life in close association with Methodist women’s work in Chinatown. Her first task as teacher was to start an “infant school” (kindergarten), which grew rapidly, and she was also in charge of home visitations. In the latter role she quickly became a Methodist leader in the rescue of abused women and girls. For example, in an 1897 Call article, Ida Hull is the first missionary the author seeks out as she reports on “the bravest women in the world.”36 There, Ida is quoted as saying, “I don’t use much tact—tact isn’t useful among the Chinese. A hatchet is more effective. . . . Oh, I only use it to break down doors with,” she laughed, “not on their heads, although sometimes if I were a man I should like to.”37
The ordained deacon Ho Fan Chan, one of Rev. Gibson’s early converts and recent pastor in Tacoma and Portland, returned to San Francisco in late 1890. He began “Chinese instruction” in the Rescue Home in 1891, and as mentioned earlier, he and Ida Hull would marry in 1901, not long after Ho Fan’s wife’s death.

Ho Fan Chan and family (WHM 17 [March 1900])
Miss Marguerite Lake of Yamhill OR (1873-1968; back row, second from left),
married Ernest Garton later in life. She was the missionary for the Oriental Bureau from
1896-1903, and a deaconess for a short time. She is pictured here with some of the girls
she and her mother, Kate, helped rescue (ca 1899). Yuk Ying, seated in front of Miss
Lake, was “one of the most vigilant and successful of Miss Lake’s assistants in the rescue
work” (“Exodus of Slaves from Chinatown” San Francisco Examiner, Tuesday, April 9,
1901, 4). “San Francisco Chinese Community and Earthquake Damage” #3. Courtesy of
the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

The WHMS Oriental Bureau 1893-1902

The WMSPC sought to join the Woman’s Home Mission Society during the
national financial crisis of 1893. In October of that year, Laura P. Williams attended the
national meeting of the WHMS General Board of Managers in Toledo Ohio, and
petitioned to join the younger WHMS. The WHMS approved the merger as its last piece
of business that year, and thus the Oriental Women’s Rescue Asylum in San Francisco
became the “Oriental Bureau” of the WHMS, with Laura P. Williams as its first
secretary.40 That same year a separate Home for Japanese women was begun.41

Over the next few years, accounts of Mrs. Ida Hull’s daring rescues were
regularly featured in the Woman’s Home Mission magazine and in WHMS General
Board of Managers’ annual reports. For example, Ida Hull tells the rescue story of an
eleven year-old girl whose back was horribly scarred from being burned with hot irons,42
and other accounts relate how she tried to grab the assassin of a Sam Yap man whom she
later identified in court.43 By the time the twenty-three year-old Miss Marguerite Lake
became the Oriental Bureau’s San Francisco Chinatown missionary in 1896, the Bureau could claim that 353 Chinese women and girls had been rescued in the twenty-five year history of the Methodist women’s work.44

Mrs. Kate Lake, Marguerite Lake’s forty-nine year old widowed mother, became the matron of the Home also in 1896,45 and with the Methodist minister, Rev. John Endicott Gardner’s return from eleven years in Victoria, BC where he had founded the Victoria Rescue Mission,46 Mrs. L. P. Williams could write:

In 1896 there was so much bribery and fraud by the Government officers here, that those in authority at the different Missions aroused the Department at Washington, requesting that a man who had stopped the traffic in British Columbia be sent here to enforce the law. At the time he came, it was no uncommon thing for twenty or thirty women to come in on every steamer. About $900.00 for each girl was paid to a certain interpreter in whose hands the matter rested. It took three or four years to turn out the bad men and get honest ones in charge. And now the Inspector and Interpreter has virtually stopped all the traffic. When vigilance is relaxed, or when the owners of the slave girls get desperate, a few get in by perjury. This important man understands the Chinese language and all the tricks of these law breakers, and is therefore able to defeat fraud, and so also to help land those Mongolians who are entitled to do so. So justice is done and law becomes justice.47
Over the next few years John Endicott Gardner would serve as an interpreter for the Immigration Service and would have close ties to the Oriental Home, where he often taught classes in the afternoons and evenings.

Reverend Masters’ goals for the Chinese Mission had been more evangelistic than educational from the very beginning of his tenure as superintendent. His long range plan was to sell the Mission House at 916 Washington Street and buy a storefront in the middle of Chinatown to serve as a center of evangelistic services and street preaching. And so when a storefront chapel on Jackson Street was finally purchased in April 1898, he served notice to the WHMS Oriental Bureau of his plans to sell the original Mission building. However, due to a depressed real estate market, the Mission House was never put on the market. Instead, by 1899 Frederick Masters was dreaming of turning 916 Washington Street into a boarding school for Chinese merchants’ sons. The Oriental Bureau realized the days of its Rescue Asylum on the third floor of 916 Washington Street were numbered, and it was able to secure $5,000 from the parent WHMS board to begin plans to build its own facility.48

Not long after Reverend Masters died in January, 1900, the Methodist women selected the lot they intended to purchase. It was a six room house across Trenton Street from the Mission House. They purchased the house, along with the empty lot next to it and began building January 20, 1901.49 An addition more than doubled the size of the original brick house, and a Spanish-style stucco façade was added to the front and sides. Seven months later the WHMS Oriental Home officially opened its doors to a full house of local dignitaries. It was dedicated by Methodist Bishop Hamilton on the twenty-first anniversary of the founding of the WHMS, July 17, 1901, in the midst of an Epworth
League Convention which had brought over 25,000 people from across the United States and Canada to San Francisco. That week, over one thousand visitors toured the new “Oriental Home” at 912 Washington Street.

The Methodist women’s work in San Francisco had finally completely severed its ties from its parent institution, the MEC General Missionary Society. And it wasn’t long before the women were hoping to add a third story to their just finished building so that rescued prostitutes and Immigration Service detainees could be kept separate from the younger, growing number of permanent orphan children in the Home. Unfortunately, the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and fire changed the short-term building plans of the Oriental Bureau. The Home would not be remodeled. It would be rebuilt from the ground up, after six difficult years of living in temporary quarters in the East Bay.

Ironically, this photograph appeared on the cover of the April 1906 Woman’s Home Missions magazine. It was taken probably during the Festival of Lanterns at the end of the Chinese New Year celebration, just a few months before the Oriental Home at 912 Washington Street was destroyed by the April 18, 1906 earthquake and fire.
January 1903 found a new matron, Miss Gillette, in charge of the Oriental Home.\textsuperscript{52} Apparently, Mrs. Kate Lake had resigned as matron a few months earlier; however, \textit{WHMS} annual reports say nothing about Mrs. Lake’s departure. By the time Miss Gillette left just ten months later,\textsuperscript{53} Miss Marguerite Lake was also gone, and for health reasons Mrs. L. P. Williams had found it necessary to resign as Bureau Secretary. The June 26, 1903 \textit{San Francisco Chronicle} announced that “Miss Margarita J. Lake” had been appointed “missionary and traveler’s aid, to meet all incoming steamers and trains at San Francisco;”\textsuperscript{54} and shortly thereafter, at its August 1903 annual meeting, the Oriental Home was restructured with Miss Carrie G. Davis being named its first Superintendent. However, Miss Davis would not take over official duties until December 1.\textsuperscript{55} She would hold the superintendent’s position for the ten most trying years of the Oriental Home’s existence.

Caroline Gertrude Davis was born in Flesherton, Ontario, Canada on December 14, 1856 and immigrated to the United States (and probably to California) in 1890, not long after her father’s death.\textsuperscript{56} She had been \textit{WHMS} California Conference Secretary for Young People’s Work from about 1891,\textsuperscript{57} and beginning in 1899 had been in charge of Thursday night services at Rev. Frederick Masters’ Chinese Gospel Hall on Jackson Street “with a corps of workers from Grace Church.”\textsuperscript{58}

Miss Davis was living at 275 San Carlos Avenue in the Mission District of San Francisco when the 1900 Federal Census was taken.\textsuperscript{59} Along with an older woman,
Georgia Backford, she was a boarder in the home of Thomas and Sarah Davis—the former probably being Carrie’s cousin. Carrie’s occupation is listed as grocery clerk, and Thomas Davis’s occupation is listed as “customs house clerk.”

In June 1904, after working about six months in the Oriental Home, Miss Davis began meeting incoming steamers from China at the Pacific Mail Dock, “inform[ing] the slave girls . . . of the terrible fate before them and tell[ing] them of [the] Home as a place of refuge where they might come and find a welcome.” Eventually rescues would take Carrie as far as Los Angeles, Salt Lake City, and southern Oregon in pursuit of abused Chinese women and children. On top of these responsibilities, there were ongoing courtroom appearances in habeas corpus cases and guardianship disputes. But the great San Francisco earthquake and fire of April 18th, 1906 would dramatically alter the direction of Miss Davis’s work. The Mission House and Oriental Home were destroyed in the ensuing conflagration, and the rescue of women and girls would be put almost entirely on hold for the next five years as the WHMS Oriental Home struggled to survive in make-shift quarters in Berkeley and Oakland.
Two weeks after the earthquake and fire. Looking east, down Washington Street, at the remaining west wall of the WHMS Oriental Home ("San Francisco Chinese Community and Earthquake Damage" #36. Courtesy of the Bancroft Library University of California, Berkeley).

The Great Earthquake and its Aftermath

On May 7th, 1906, two and a half weeks after the San Francisco earthquake and fire, Miss Carrie G. Davis submitted an account of her experiences to the editor of Woman’s Home Missions:

Words can never tell the dreadful experiences of the last few weeks. It appears to me that it happened ages ago, and entering the ruined city seems like entering the city of the dead. Although I passed through the earthquake and fire, and fled the city, I could not conceive how dreadful it all was until I went back just two weeks later, and walked the streets of the desolated city. . . .
How we all escaped from the Home alive seems most wonderful, and was surely owing to the protecting care of our heavenly Father. Not a child received a slight injury.

Owing to the violent pitching of the house, I was thrown back into bed twice on attempting to get out. I finally succeeded in reaching the outside door of my room, and in the midst of crashing glass, falling chimneys and plaster, and cracking of the walls, I called loudly for the family to get downstairs and out on the street. Then, turning back to snatch the baby from her crib, I heard another child screaming, who had been left alone in the room, and snatched her up;\textsuperscript{63} and got down the stairs I shall never know how!

After a little time I ventured into the house, and hastening upstairs, seized clothing and threw it into the hallway below where the children dressed with the door open, so that they might rush into the street if another shake came. We knew that the house was then unsafe to stay in, and we went to the church mission building next door, where we remained all day. Being built of wood, it was not all affected by the earthquake. During the day we had several shocks, and have had others every day since.

When the fire started we thought nothing of it, as it was in another part of the city, and we had no idea that it would reach us, and even when it crossed the city, and was but six blocks below us, I did not feel that it could possibly take our Mission.\textsuperscript{64}
Meanwhile on the other side of the San Francisco Bay in Berkeley, Mrs. F. D. Bovard, secretary of the WHMS Chinese Bureau, was trying to reach the Oriental Home. She wrote in the same issue of Woman’s Home Missions magazine:

I tried to reach the Mission in about three hours after the earthquake, but both sides of every street leading from the ferry were in flames so as to make it impossible to reach them. I returned [probably to the Ferry Building and to Berkeley] but Mr. Bovard walked in the opposite direction along the waterfront, and in making a circuit of nine miles reached them and found them in the “Old Mission” across the street, which was a wooden building.65

But as night approached, the flames were just two blocks away,66 and Carrie was growing fearful [. . . So] when word was brought to me at eight o’clock that a team could be procured [for fifty dollars]67 to take us all beyond the fire limits, I seized the opportunity and forty-eight women and children took advantage of it,68 each carrying only a little bundle in our hands. My own package was the records and books of the Mission.69

[At 10 PM]70 we were put down at the home of Mrs. L. P. Williams, our former secretary of the Oriental Bureau, where we spent the night.71

Remembering the events of that day fourteen years later, Laura P. Williams wrote in 1920:
We opened the door and forty-eight Celestials came in and that night we tried to rest on the floors of the rather small house. Hon Fan Chan, the pastor [of the Chinese Mission Church] sat in a chair all night near the door. [His wife, Ida Hull, and their three children must also have been there]. When morning came we gave them a little breakfast, and they, the girls of the Mission, started for this side of the bay [i.e., Oakland and Berkeley] via North Beach, by which hundreds were making the trip. . . . 72

Carrie continues her account:

. . . [L]earning that the Mission was gone, and that the flames were making a clean sweep across the city below us, and also coming directly on one side of us only a few blocks away, we started on our march to the ferry. No team could be procured for love or money, and we did not know whether we could get across the bay and out of the city or not. However, we decided to try. 73 So we started out, carrying three babies in arms and holding twice that number by the hand. 74

I had directed the children during the first day to run into the Mission building between shakes and get something in case we should have to go on. Every girl tried to get her Bible first of all.

We walked from eight AM until three PM, and these children had only a few crackers and oranges the day before, and the same that day, with a drink of water here and there. Although we took this long, hard walk under a broiling sun and the terrible heat of the burning city, yet these little ones never once cried or even fretted, not even the babies,
though doing without their bottles of milk. It brought tears to my eyes to see their fortitude.

How thankful we were to arrive on this side of the bay! The children were received into the homes of ladies of the Board and other friends in Berkeley, Oakland, and Piedmont, and there kept until a house could be secured.  

Housing in the East Bay was not easy to find after the earthquake, and it was made doubly difficult by the fact that most white people refused to allow the Chinese to live in their buildings. But within a week, the women of the Bureau for Chinese Work were able to find a rentable ten-room house in Berkeley, one that was isolated from other homes in the immediate area.

Carrie wrote for the June issue of Woman’s Home Missions from her new surroundings at 2116 Spaulding Avenue:

[W]e have beds to lie upon and tables to eat from and chairs to sit upon, and that is all. . . . The children are fairly well clothed in garments that have been sent in.

I have said we had beds to lie upon. Most of them are on the floor, others are on cots, and all without pillows. As some may want to know what we need, I will just mention that pillows, sheets, pillow covers, spreads, towels, table covers, napkins, knives and forks, teaspoons, tablespoons—anything and everything needed in a home—will be received with great gratitude. We are simply in a house with nothing in it.
A year later Mrs. F. D. Bovard had reached the end of her emotional and physical endurance and was ready to resign from her position as Secretary of the Bureau for Chinese Work. In her final report she wrote plaintively,

“[T]here is no gas or electricity, and little or no prospect of getting it. The matron [Miss Lois Thorn] broke down because no one could be found to relieve her, for a vacation and rest. Since then it has been impossible to find a matron because of the cramped quarters for workers (who share the same bedroom) and the general inconvenience of the house arrangements. The superintendent is alone with the girls.”

Miss Carrie Davis, however, was more sanguine. She noted that the house on Spaulding Avenue had “several acres of vacant land on both sides, and unlike the
Oriental Home in San Francisco, there was “no one to molest us or make us afraid, since we are far removed from any of the Chinese people. We live a very quiet life and there is a beautiful view of the hills and the bay.”

Despite Carrie’s upbeat spirit which seemed rejuvenated by the rural, wide open spaces of west Berkeley, the rental house had not been built for the use to which it was being put, and it was understandably overcrowded. Moreover, the landlord refused to remodel the house without a long-term lease agreement—and the Bureau for Chinese Work was unwilling to make such a commitment. Thus, it is not surprising that Carrie ended her 1907 update to the Woman’s Home Missions magazine with a strong appeal: “We must have the Home rebuilt at once. . . . We pray that our friends will come to the rescue and take a part in the new Home that is to be. . . .”

By April 1908 the WHMS Bureau for Chinese Work kindergarten had reopened in San Francisco’s new Chinatown, and Donaldina Cameron was busy moving into her rebuilt Chinese rescue mission, the Presbyterian Occidental Home, at 920 Sacramento Street. Carrie Davis and the Bureau for Chinese Work officers could not help but expect that they, too, would soon be back in San Francisco’s Chinatown. Mrs. Julia Elizabeth (“Lizzie”) Piatt, the new Bureau Secretary, voiced what surely must have also been Carrie’s optimistic feelings when later that year she stood in front of more than three hundred women at the National meeting of the WHMS Board of Managers in Philadelphia. There, from the platform, Mrs. J. E. Piatt spoke confidently about the prospects for building a new Oriental Home: “The matter of the property adjustment between the Board of Home Missions and Church Extension and the Woman’s Home Missionary Society has finally been settled. . . . The erection of our building will proceed
at once, and the delayed and long-talked of Oriental Home will soon be a realized force for salvation expressed in brick and mortar.”

The eight Chinese children of the 1908-09 WHMS Oriental Home for Chinese Women and Children fundraising tour. The English names of the tentatively identified children are: Maud Lai (the tallest girl), Ruby Tsang and Pearl Tsang, sisters (probably second on right and center), May Shem (probably second on left); Ida Alice Woo (on the extreme left), Lydia Esther Woo (probably third on the right), and Mamie Grace Woo (probably on the extreme right), were sisters; Hardy Washington Wong, was the only boy (center, with baton).

This photograph, apparently taken by the Denver Rocky Mountain Daily News (Monday, September 28, 1908, p. 4), was reprinted and sold for a penny a piece on the tour.
The Chinese Children’s 1908-1909 Fundraising Tour

On September 1, 1908 The Oriental Home moved into a new building on 1918 University Ave, and three weeks later, on September 21, 1908, Home Superintendent Miss Carrie G. Davis took eight of the Chinese children under her care on what was intended to be a one month trip back to Philadelphia, to the annual WHMS Board of Managers meeting. The trip turned into a seven-month fundraising tour of the United States, with the children finally returning to Berkeley in late March or early April 1909.

Miss Davis later states that she and the eight children “entered” a total of forty-eight cities and towns on their trip. Out of these, a total of thirty-three official stops can be identified—twelve stops up to and including the Philadelphia meeting of the WHMS Board of Managers—and twenty-one stops after the Philadelphia meeting. These towns and cities were, in the order visited: Salem, Oregon; Denver, Colorado; Oakley and Wilson, Kansas; Lincoln, Weeping Water, Omaha, and University Place, Nebraska; Council Bluffs, Iowa; Cleveland and Warren, Ohio; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. After Philadelphia their known stops were: Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania; Camden, New Jersey; Washington, DC; Baltimore, Maryland; Newark, New Jersey; Scranton and Wilkesbarre, Pennsylvania; Brooklyn, New York; New London, Connecticut; Syracuse, Rochester, and Buffalo, New York (twice); South Bend, Indiana; Chicago, Illinois; Des Moines, Iowa; Kansas City, Missouri; Topeka, Kansas; Salt Lake City and Ogden, Utah (twice), Riverside, and Redlands, California. As the journey dragged on, Bureau Secretary Julia E. Piatt appears barely able to disguise her dismay at their delayed return, writing in late December, 1908: “Miss Davis is still in the field. She is being called upon for so many more dates than we had expected that we have given up setting a time for her return.”

28
The eight-day annual meeting of the Board of Managers of the Woman’s Home Missionary Society at the Church of the Covenant in Philadelphia was the children’s first prolonged stay since leaving Berkeley a month earlier. The Friday Philadelphia Inquirer wrote approvingly, that “One of the daily sensations of the convention is the singing of a chorus of Chinese.”

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Page two of The Philadelphia Inquirer Thursday, October 22, 1908
The eight Chinese children who sang for President Theodore Roosevelt on November 5, 1908, were each given an autographed postcard of the White House. The one pictured above was given to Maud Lai, the thirteen year-old who played the piano on the fundraising tour (author’s personal collection).

At the conclusion of the WHMS Board of Managers meeting in Philadelphia, Miss Davis and the children visited nearby Bryn Mawr and then Camden, New Jersey before arriving at the newly dedicated Union Station in Washington, DC—probably on November 1, 1908. The meeting of the WHMS Baltimore Annual Conference began on Election Day, Tuesday, Nov 3, 1908 and ended on November 5. The children’s ten days in Washington, DC would be the highlight of their seven month fundraising tour.

An entry in President Theodore Roosevelt’s “Desk Diary” for Thursday, November 5, 1908, reads: “12:00—Mrs. D. B. Street, four ladies & 7 little Chinese children.” Carrie Davis would later write in her “Record of Work”: “The children sang at the White House for President Roosevelt—to his great delight—and were [each]
presented with a souvenir card of the White House with his autograph on it. The rules of the White House were broken and after singing for the President [the children] sang in the lobby for the visitors and newspaper. Carrie went on to relate what would become the signature story of the trip:

- Mr. Lum will never make a greater political speech than he made to the President that day. Folding his little arms, and leaning against the table at which the President sat writing his autograph on the cards, [Lum] said, “Mr. President, when I was down in Lincoln, Nebraska I was for [William Jennings] Bryan; but since I came up here I am for Taft—because you are.”

This brought a roar of laughter from the President and the others.

The President said, “Lum, you are a politician—and mighty great one already.”

The next morning the story of the children’s visit to the White House was on the front page of The New York Times, and it had been picked up by other newspapers across the country as well, including the children’s hometown San Francisco Chronicle and The Call.

Carrie and the children remained in Washington, DC for another five days and although there was a flurry of presentations before church congregations and public officials, they slipped out of Washington newspaper headlines. The same day they met President Roosevelt at the White House, Carrie and the children were at the Chinese embassy, meeting Wu T’ing-Fang, the Chinese foreign minister to the United States, his wife, daughter, grandchild, and servants. Wu T’ing-Fang’s brother-in-law, Ho Yow,
was a graduate of Oxford University and had been consul general in San Francisco when the WHMS Oriental Home was completed in 1901 and had spoken at its dedication July 17, 1901.\textsuperscript{96} Returning the diplomatic favor, the children now “sang several times to . . . [the family’s] delight and talked with [Mr. Wu] in English and Chinese.”\textsuperscript{97}

Miss Davis and the children had their pictures taken on the Capitol steps, they met Oscar Straus, Secretary of Commerce and Labor—the person who oversaw Chinese immigration policy which was at the heart of much of Carrie Davis’s work, and visited the Library of Congress. On Sunday, November 8, Carrie and the children made seven presentations, “being rushed in an auto from place to place.”\textsuperscript{98}

From Washington, DC Miss Davis and the children went north, visiting at least seven cities before Thanksgiving. Carrie later tells a Los Angeles reporter that the audience rushed the stage in Brooklyn, New York, nearly crushing them.\textsuperscript{99} Thanksgiving Day found them singing at the Monroe Methodist Church in Rochester, New York.\textsuperscript{100} After visiting Buffalo where they sang in a number of tree-lighting ceremonies,\textsuperscript{101} they headed back to the Midwest. By New Year’s Day they were in South Bend, Indiana.\textsuperscript{102}

After visiting Chicago, Miss Davis and the children spent time in Des Moines, Iowa; Kansas City, Missouri; and Topeka, Kansas before heading back across the Rockies to Salt Lake City and Ogden, Utah. In Topeka they experienced their first prairie blizzard, which luckily hit late January 28, shortly after the children had left the vaudeville stage at the city’s “Mid-Winter Exposition.”\textsuperscript{103} The California Christian Advocate stated that Carrie’s plans were to go to Oklahoma,\textsuperscript{104} but there is no mention of any cities or towns she intended to visit. Perhaps the blizzard forced her to cancel those stops. Carrie and the children arrived in Ogden, Utah on February 12, just as another
major blizzard hit the Rockies. Trains behind them were snowbound for sixty-five hours in the mountain passes. On Sunday, February 21 they were in Salt Lake City, where they took the evening service at the First Methodist Church. They returned to Ogden again and stayed there for two weeks while some of the children recuperated from bouts of the measles.

A brief notice in the March 25th California Christian Advocate states that the children had “had more engagements . . . than [they] could fulfill” in southern California. And on Thursday, March 18th Carrie and the children were in Redlands, California, where they sang at the Methodist church. The following week’s Advocate mentions that “Miss Carrie G. Davis . . . has broken down,” but gives no details as to the nature of her health problems. However, the March 21, 1909 Pomona Daily Progress fills in some of those blanks. Apparently Carrie and children were to have been at First Methodist Church, Pomona on Sunday, March 21, but had to cancel their engagement. The newspaper states “Miss Davis is herself ill and one of the Chinese girls is in the hospital at Redlands [California]. There is no additional record in the Redlands newspapers of this setback.

In the 1908-09 annual report for the WHMS Board of Managers, Julia E. Piatt wrote:

The visit of Miss Davis and the eight children through the East was a revelation to many of our people and did more to really interest and awaken the members of the Woman’s Home Missionary Society to the merits of our work than any other method we could have employed.

During the seven months of their travel they visited forty-two cities, and
many thousands of people outside of our Society learned something of the work of the Woman’s Home Missionary Society as it is carried on under the Bureau for Chinese Work on the Pacific Coast. Lasting friends were made for the work, and we are hoping great things from them. The results of that trip we can not estimate, but we trust we will go on reaping benefits from it in ever-increasing volumes of sympathy and love and generous gifts.¹¹³

Carrie summarized the seven month trip in more extravagance tones:

We cannot begin to tell of all the splendid achievements of this trip. . . . making known in colleges, universities, high schools, Bible Schools, kindergartens, clubs and churches of every denomination, YWCA and YMCA, and private homes—the story of our labor of love among and for these people under the Woman’s Home Missionary Society on the Pacific Coast.

It was a strenuous trip, yet [it] made plain to us that God was with us: Never a stop or hindrance or accident to ourselves or the train we were on. Never late or one of our engagements broken because of weather or sickness.¹¹⁴ Called to go places we never expected, raising thousands of dollars for our new Home and the work. Converting many to missions, putting a love for the Home work as well as the foreign work into the hearts of others. Hearing splendid men of our church say, “Nothing you could have ever done could have made such a demonstration of missions as this has.” And hearing them say, “If this is what the WHMS is doing,
come into our churches and we will open both our pocketbooks and our hearts to you.”

Despite Carrie’s joyous response to the fundraising trip, a year later the WHMS Bureau for Chinese Work was still trying to resolve title and property disputes on its Washington Street lot. And so in the fall of 1910 Carrie volunteered to go on the road again—this time alone, and despite her continued poor health. On October 8, 1910 she left for the WHMS Board of Managers meeting in Buffalo, New York. Carrie would later write that “this trip financially was far beyond my expectations, and indeed [in] every other way and again we could see that the Lord was leading us, and giving us success.”

Carrie did not return to California until August, 1911, ten months after she had left for the annual WHMS conference. By that time the Oriental Home had moved to Beulah Heights in Oakland, and the new Oriental Home at 940 Washington Street, San Francisco was under construction.

Mrs. J. E. Piatt, writing her annual report for the WHMS Bureau for Chinese Work—probably in July or early August 1912, states that the year had “been a heavy strain upon [Carrie’s] strength and health. [And] now that the worst of the work is over, she has been obliged to take an enforced rest. We are hoping for her a speedy recovery.” But Carrie’s health would worsen before it improved. In the spring of 1913 she suffered a nervous breakdown in Spokane, Washington and shortly thereafter decided to leave “the work” to which she had dedicated the ten most fruitful years of her life.

Carrie must have been in and out of nursing facilities between 1920 and 1925, for her death notice in the December 17, 1925 California Christian Advocate states that she had recently died after a “prolonged illness.” Carrie was nearly sixty-nine years old.
when she passed away. Reverend F. P. Flegal, “pastor of Grace Church [San Francisco where] . . . she had been a member for many years,” conducted the funeral.\footnote{121} Her place of burial is not known.

The new Julia Morgan designed Oriental Home, 940 Washington Street, San Francisco (CCA 62 (January 25, 1912)).

Groundbreaking for the new Chinese Mission church in San Francisco had taken place on April 18, 1909. A quartet from the Oriental Home sang at the ceremony, but apparently neither Miss Davis nor the young traveling fundraisers were on hand for the event.\footnote{122} Due to a number of entangling legal battles, the cornerstone of new Julia
Morgan designed Oriental Home was not laid until two years later, on June 19, 1911.\textsuperscript{123} Exactly how the board of the WHMS Bureau for Chinese Work retained Julia Morgan as architect is not entirely clear.\textsuperscript{124} However, Julia Morgan’s sister, Emma had married Hart Hyatt North, the Commissioner of Immigration in San Francisco, July 10, 1900 at the Morgan house (754 14th Street, Oakland).\textsuperscript{125} Hart himself had worked quite closely with the Oriental Home for many years, and specifically with Miss Davis beginning in the summer of 1904.

On December 12, 1911, the Chinese women and children of the WHMS Oriental Home moved into their new quarters at 940 Washington Street, San Francisco. The building was dedicated January 27, 1912.\textsuperscript{126} Now known as “Gum Moon Women’s Residence,” it is still affiliated with the United Methodist Church and its women’s work, but is now consolidated under the General Board of Global Ministries.\textsuperscript{127} The polished, inscribed stone at its entry—a stone from the threshold of the original house that had stood at 912 Washington Street—is the only physical reminder of the long history of Methodist women’s work in Chinatown.\textsuperscript{128}

Although the rescue of prostitutes and abused girls continued in the following years, by the time Miss Carrie Davis resigned from the superintendent’s position in 1913, the focus of the WHMS Bureau for Chinese Work had turned more and more toward the care and education of children—both boys and girls.\textsuperscript{129} Mrs. Anna M. Dye replaced Miss Davis as superintendent,\textsuperscript{130} and by the time Mrs. J. E. Piatt resigned from her position as Bureau Secretary in 1919, the Oriental Home mortgage was completely paid off. The WHMS could be justly proud to celebrate 1920 with its fiftieth anniversary of work in Chinatown.
Probably taken in 1920, on the fiftieth anniversary of Methodist women’s work in Chinatown. Mrs. J. E. Piatt, WHMS Bureau Secretary for Chinese Work, 1907-1919, is in the back row, extreme left (author’s personal collection).
This essay is dedicated to the memory of my mother-in-law Marjorie Jean Wong (1925-2004), whose mother, May Chun (“Maud”) Lai was raised in the Oriental Home from 1900-1923, and played the piano on the Oriental Home’s national fundraising tour in 1908-1909.


Gibson, The Chinese in America, 201.
The nine women known to have responded were: Mrs. George S. Phillips (who became the first president of the Womans’ Missionary Society of the Pacific Coast), Mrs. E. Burke and Mrs. R. Bentley (who became the first vice-presidents), Mrs. J. T. (Mary F.) McLean (who became the first corresponding secretary), Mrs. Morrell (who became the first recording secretary), Mrs. John R. Sims (who became the first treasurer), Mrs. R. McElroy, Mrs. E.C. Gibson, and Mrs. Lysander (Jane) Walker (Anthony, Fifty Years of Methodism, 297).

In this context, “heathen” refers to Chinese people (author unknown, History of the Mission of the Methodist Episcopal Church to the Chinese in California [San Francisco: B. F. Sterett, 1877] 10).

Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Annual Report (1870) 124-127.


10 Pascoe states that “by the late 1880s, the [Presbyterian] Mission housed an average of fifty residents a year” (Relations of Rescue, 98). By comparison, the Methodist Mission averaged only twenty-seven residents per year from 1886-1889 (MECMS-AR 1886-1889), and probably only rarely had more than seventeen at any one time (MECMS-AR 1890-1899; California Conference of the Woman’s Home Missionary Society, Annual Reports 1900-1903).


12 The California Conference usually gave the Chinese Mission $7,500 per annum, but it started out giving the WMSPC less than $50 per annum. However, beginning in 1888, the Conference each year doubled the amount given to the women’s work until in 1896 it allotted nearly $5,000 to the WMSPC (Anthony, Fifty Years of Methodism, 415, 421, 427, 433, 437, 441, 444, 448, 450).

He had also been the superintendent of the Chinese District MEC from 1899-1900 (Choy, “Strangers Called to Mission,” 69).

In one report the anonymous author mentions having been in China “nine years” (MECMS-AR [1886] 302) which is how long Frederick and Mary E. Masters were there as missionaries, and Mrs. L. P. Williams states that Mrs. Masters “was for some years the recording secretary” (Mrs. M. E. Masters, et al. “Missionary Work for the Oriental People,” 18). In 1901 Mrs. M. E. Masters is listed as the assistant secretary of the Oriental Bureau (WHMSCC-AR [1901] 17).

His name is often given as “Hon Fan” (Tomkinson, Twenty Year’s History, 207; Thirteenth Census of the United States (1910), Santa Clara County, San Jose Township).

Mrs. E. C. Gibson, “Historical Sketch of Work,” 6; Masters, “Historical Sketch of Work,” 83; Tomkinson, Twenty Year’s History, 203.

Mrs. Mary McLean, the first WMSPC Corresponding Secretary, took Jin Ho “into her own family, taught her to work, and devoted her evenings to teach her to read and speak English, and also taught her that the Bible is the Word of God and the rule of Christian living” (Anthony, Fifty Years of Methodism, 298). Jin Ho died about 1878 (ibid., 300).

This is an allusion to the story of the Gerasene demoniac, Mark 5:1-20 (cf. v. 15).

Gibson, The Chinese in America, 204-205.
Serena Goodall was the wife of Captain Charles Goodall, co-founder of the Goodall, Nelson & Perkins Steamship Company. A bitter competitor of Pacific Mail, Charles Goodall had managed to purchase controlling stock in the rival company by the late 1870s. In the 1870s and 1880s his company hired hundreds of Chinese laborers to build what would eventually become the Pacific Coast Railway (Gerald M. Best, Ships and Narrow Gauge Rails: The Story of the Pacific Coast Company [San Diego: Howell-North, 1981] 18, 25-29, 41, 99-103).

History of the Mission, 12.

MECMS-AR (1882) 177. But this rule would eventually change—perhaps because the Immigration Service began to rely more and more on the Methodist and Presbyterian Mission Homes to temporarily house women awaiting court hearings (cf. MECMS-AR [1892] 356).

History of the Mission, 12.

At least one of these sworn affidavits still exists (“Yee Hong and Bow Gue,” Alameda County Superior Court June 3, 1910. “Work with Chinese Americans 1906-1982” Women’s Division of the General Board of Global Missions part 2 series 11-29. Series Woman's Home Missionary Society, Methodist Episcopal Church. General Commission on Archives and History, United Methodist Church, Madison, NJ).

First Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Woman’s Home Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church for the Year 1881-1882 (Cincinnati Western Methodist Book Concern, 1882) 42.


WHMS-AR (1884-85) 46

He was an invited delegate at the Ecumenical Conference on Methodism in London, September, 1881 (MECMS-AR [1881] 249), and had left for Glasgow, Scotland with his son, William, on the steamship
Her husband, Hannibal, had been a mining foreman in Mariposa County before moving to San Francisco (Mariposa Gazette January 26, 1907 [http://www.cagenweb.com/mariposa/DISVIT11.html]).

MECMS-AR (1886) 299; MECMS-AR (1888) 401.

Pascoe, Relations of Rescue, 96, footnote 78. The more aggressive strategies may be related to changes in California law having to do with raising “the age of consent.” For example, California raised the age of consent from ten to fourteen in 1889 and then from fourteen to sixteen in 1897. Then, in 1913, California again raised it from sixteen to eighteen (Jonathan Dolhenty, The Crazy-Quilt of Our Age of Consent Laws, http://www.ageofconsent.com/comments/numberone.htm).


WHMSGBM-AR (1894-95) 215.

Tompkinson lists Ida Hull’s years of service as 1889-1896 (Twenty Year’s History, 207). However, Ida’s name does not appear in MECMS Annual Reports before 1891, and she still figures prominently in the news in 1897 (e.g., “San Francisco has the Bravest Women in the World” The San Francisco...
36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.

38 MECMS-AR (1890) 330.

39 MECMS-AR (1891) 350.

40 Mrs. L. P. Williams, “Bureau for Orientals” WHM 18 (April 1901) 66.

41 Tompkinson (Twenty Year’s History, 209), says this happened in 1888, but Mrs. L. P. Williams writes that the separation happened in 1898 (“First Oriental Home Built and Work Grows” CCA 70 [Oct 21, 1920] 3). However, these accounts must surely be in error, since ten Japanese women were in the Oriental Home in 1892 (MECMS-AR [1892] 356), and seven were in the Home in 1893 (MECMS-AR [1893] 318). But, by the spring of 1893 “Dr. Harris, Superintendent of the Japanese Mission, opened a separate home for Japanese women and girls[, and] it was thought best to transfer the Japanese girls in our home to his care . . . (MECMS-AR [1893] 318). In 1894 the Home had nine women and four children residents (E. J. Hewett, “Notes from the Japanese Home” WHM 11 [September 1894] 139).

42 WHMSGBM-AR (1894-95) 115. The same girl is featured in San Francisco Call articles (“Her Back was Burnt with Irons” [Friday, July 23, 1897] 12; “Scourged with Fire and Knife” [Saturday, July 24, 1897] 9).

43 MECMS-AR (1895) 310-11.

44 MECMS-AR (1896) 288.

45 The earliest reference I have found to Marguerite Lake’s mother is in the The San Francisco Call, Sunday, July 11, 1897 where the writer mentions “Miss Lake . . . and her mother, who has charge of the Methodist mission-house” (“San Francisco has the Bravest Women in the World,” 18). Strangely, Marguerite Lake’s mother, Kate, the matron of the Home from 1896-1902, is rarely mentioned in WHMS publications, even though her name appears often in San Francisco newspaper articles.
His children entered the US in 1896.


Ibid. Mrs. L. P. Williams, "Oriental Bureau" CCA 50 (December 20, 1900) 11.

"Epworth League" The Examiner (Monday, July 15, 1901) 1.

Mrs. J. E. Piatt writes “the new matron is getting her work better in hand” (“Conference Board of the W.H.M.S.” CCA 53 [February 5, 1903] 12), and Carrie G. Davis, in her unpublished “Record of Work in Oriental Home from Feb. 1903” (Gum Moon Residence, 940 Washington Street, San Francisco, CA, 1), names a Miss Gillette as beginning work in February 1903. I am assuming that Mrs. J. E. Piatt’s “new matron” is the “Miss Gillette” whom Carrie G. Davis mentions, and that Carrie Davis is mistaken about Miss Gillette’s starting date.

Carrie writes that she had “been Conference secretary for young people’s work for about twelve years” prior to “entering the work of the W.H.M.S. in the Oriental Home” December 1, 1903 (“A Few of Our Noble Missionaries” WHM 29 [June 1912] 9).

60 Ibid.

61 WHMSCC-AR (1904) 26; Carrie G. Davis, “The Oriental Home in San Francisco” WHM 22 (April 1905) 63.

62 “Record of Work,” 50, 60-51, 71.

63 Just a few months earlier, Carrie had written “We now have three babies in the family—Ida Alice, two years old, another seven months old, and one seven weeks old” (“Present Day Items Concerning the Oriental Home” WHM 23 [April 1906] 304).

64 Davis, “Tidings from the Oriental Home” WHM 23 (June 1906) 351.

65 Mrs. F. D. Bovard, “The Great Disaster” WHM 23 (June 1906) 342. That is, Rev. Bovard walked north along the San Francisco Bay before turning west then south. This would become the route Carrie and the children followed to the Ferry Building the next day.

66 Davis, “Record of Work,” 45.

67 Ibid.

68 The women and children of the Presbyterian Occidental Mission had left their Home at 920 Sacramento Street, two blocks south of the Methodist Home, much earlier in the day, arriving at the First Presbyterian Church on Van Ness and Sacramento at 4:00 PM (Mrs. James T. Watkins, “The 1906 San Francisco Earthquake: A Personal Account” California Geology 34:12 [1981] [http://www.johnmartin.com/earthquakes/eqpapers/00000047.htm]. Accessed February 15, 2003). However, Donaldina Cameron, the Superintendent, went back to the Occidental Home sometime after midnight to retrieve its valuable records (Wilson, Chinatown Quest, 76-77).

69 Davis, “Tidings,” 351.

70 Davis, “Record of Work,” 45.

Williams, “First Oriental Home,” 18. This was a distance of about five miles (Bovard, “The Great Disaster,” 342).

Most likely the “we” here refers to the adults: Carrie Davis, Rev. Freeman D. Bovard, Rev. and Mrs. Ho Fan Chan, and Miss Lois Thorn, the Home matron.

According to Mrs. F. D. Bovard, “there were nine children under seven years of age, and thirty in all” who made the trip from the Williams’ residence to the Ferry Building (“The Great Disaster,” 342).

Davis, “Tidings,” 351.


Ibid; Davis, “Record of Work,” 47.

Davis, “Tidings,” 351.

Bovard, “An Imperative Need” WHM 24 (April 1907) 63.

Davis, “The Latest from our Chinese Home” WHM 24 (April 1907) 63.

Ibid., 65.


Wilson, Chinatown Quest, 84.

WHMSBM-AR (1907-08) 200.

“Record of Work,” 70; WHMSCC-AR (1909) 14. This is confirmed later by Maud Lai, the thirteen year-old pianist on the tour (“To Teach in China,” undated newspaper clipping [probably the San Jose Evening News, 1920], personal collection).

The report of the 1908 annual meeting in the Woman’s Home Mission magazine states that Carrie and the children “stop[ped] at meetings twenty-five times . . . and travel[ed] by day and by night” prior
to their arrival in Philadelphia (“The Twenty-Seventh Annual Meeting” WHM 25 [December 1908] 226-227). However, it is unclear from this wording whether Carrie and the children were in twenty-five different towns and cities before Philadelphia, or whether they gave twenty-five different performances in an undisclosed number of cities and towns. I am assuming the latter is the case, and that probably in Lincoln and Omaha, Nebraska, and Cleveland, Ohio the children gave multiple performances.

87 “The Wanderings of Miss Davis” CCA 59 (January 28, 1909) 9; Davis, “Record of Work,” 70; “Little Lum Big Leader” Los Angeles Daily Times, Wednesday, March 17, 1909, 1, 9.

88 CCA 58 (January 21, 1908) 20.

89 “Mission Pledges Total $500,000” Friday, October 23, 1908, 4.


91 Carrie G. Davis had Maud Lai’s souvenir card framed, and then gave it to her as a Christmas present when Maud was nineteen. Carrie wrote on the back: “Maud Lai visited the White House Nov. 1908 with seven other Chinese children. After singing before the President he presented her with this picture. Framed by Miss C. G. Davis Christmas 1914.” The original is in my possession. This framed postcard, given to me by Maud Lai’s daughter (my mother-in-law), was the impetus for this essay.

92 Davis, “Record of Work,” 67-68. It is not clear what rules the children “broke.”

93 Ibid.

94 Carrie mentions that they spent ten days in Washington, DC, but does not say what day they arrived in the city (Davis, “Record of Work,” 68).


96 K Scott Wong, “Cultural Defenders and Brokers: Chinese Responses to the Anti-Chinese Movement,” in Claiming America: Constructing Chinese American Identities During the Exclusion
“Dedication of the Oriental Home” WHM 18 (September 1901) no page number.

97 Davis, “Record of Work,” 68.

98 The Evening Star (Washington, DC) names some of these places: Sunday morning, McKendree MEC Washington DC; probably Sunday afternoon, Waugh Chapter and Douglas Chapter of the Epworth League; Monday night, 1st Presbyterian, Washington, DC (“Chinese Children Heard” Monday, November 9, 1909, 9; “Epworth League Notes” Saturday, November 14, 1908, part 3, 8).

99 “Little Lum Big Leader” Los Angeles Daily Times, Wednesday, March 17, 1909, 9. They sang twice at Simpson MEC Church in Brooklyn, where the semi-annual meeting of the WHMS New York East Conference was gathering on November 17-18 (“Methodist Mission Work” Brooklyn Daily Eagle, Monday, November 16, 1908, 14).

100 “Songs by Chinese Children” Rochester Democrat and Herald, Wednesday, November 25, 1908, 13.

101 “Little Lum Big Leader,” 9.

102 “To Describe Waif’s Rescue” South Bend Daily Times, Thursday, December 31, 1908, 12.

103 “Short Stories of Topeka Happenings” Topeka Daily Capital, Friday, January 29, 1909, 5.

104 “The Wanderings of Miss Davis and the Chinese Children,” 8.

105 “Eight Little Chinese Children Are Coming” The Standard (Ogden, Utah) Friday, February 12, 1909, 3.

106 “Other Churches” Deseret Evening News, Saturday, February 20, 1909, 12.

107 “Little Lum Big Leader,” 9.


111 “Detained By Illness,” The Daily Progress (Pomona, California) Monday, March 22, 1909, 8. Carrie states in her “Record of Work” that she spent a month in the hospital at Loma Linda (65).
This is an error which Mrs. J. E. Piatt will later correct to “forty-eight” (WHMSCC-AR [1909] 14).

Carrie has gotten carried away by her own rhetoric at this point. Her own account of the cross-country fundraising trip begins with a missed date in Portland, Oregon and a late arrival in Denver (“Record of Work,” 66), and many appointments in Southern California had to be cancelled due to illness (e.g. “Detained By Illness” The Daily Progress [Pomona, California] Monday, March 22, 1909, 8).

In her annual report for 1910, Julia E. Piatt wrote: “Miss Davis has not been well the entire year, but with only a few weeks’ rest has gone faithfully on with her too arduous work” (WHMSCC-AR [1910] 14).

In a brief article describing a visit to San Francisco in August, 1925, the author writes of Carrie Davis: “she is now in uncertain health and is on our retired list, but retains her interest in all that is connected with the Chinese Home or the Woman’s Home Missionary Society” (“To California and Home Again” WHM 42 [December 1925] 25).

The fond, “Work with Chinese Americans 1906-1982” has a number of letters that deal with the property dispute (Women’s Division of the General Board of Global Ministries part 2. Series 11-29.

For a list of California buildings designed by Julia Morgan, see http://www.bluffton.edu/~sullivanm/jmindex/genericindex.html.

Personal email correspondence, Karen McNeil (January 8, 2004).
CCA 62 (January 25, 1912) 17, and (February 1, 1912) 17.


The state of California raised the “age of consent” to 18 in 1913, and outlawed prostitution the following year.

WHMSBM-AR (1913-14) 198.