A Woman on a Mission:
The Story of Susan Bauernfeind and Protestant Women in Missionary Work

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An Evangelical Church conference assembled in Philadelphia on October 19, 1875. Debate had been raging in the Fourth Street Church on where to establish a new mission to spread the word of God. Soon the conversations were going nowhere, and Reverend C. F. Deininger proposed a break for prayer. The entire church was filled with singing and at the end of the day all in attendance were in agreement that Japan was to be the focus of a new effort in missionary work. This account is pulled from a book written by Paul Himmel Eller entitled *History of Evangelical Missions*. It displays an important characteristic of many missionary associations during the 19th century: the growing interest in evangelizing Japan that was newly opened to the West. It is in this frenzy of zeal and ambitious new plans that the role of the foreign missionary, a role that was typically reserved for men, was expanded. The role of Protestant women within missionary work grew in the last nineteenth and early twentieth centuries outside of conventional missionary associations to achieve a place missionary work. Young people would also strive to find a voice in how Christianity would move across the Pacific. Colleges and universities found themselves flooded with eager acolytes clamoring for spots in foreign missions.

One college student would help pioneer both new sources of missionary power. Her name was Susan Bauernfeind, a graduate from North-Western College (now North Central College). With support from a newly formed Woman’s Missionary Society, Bauernfeind set off for Japan with the intent to share God’s glory with its inhabitants. It was during her time in Japan that Susan Bauernfeind acted as a missionary for Christianity, but in addition to that she gave the Japanese a representation of Americans. Susan Bauernfeind’s work as an Evangelical Missionary is a concrete and relatable story that demonstrates the growing influence of Protestant women on America’s international image. This essay will examine the work of females in Evangelical Missions within Japan, through specific people and places. It is within this wide scope that the patterns of religious zeal and cultural diffusion can be detected, but it is inside the smaller personal stories that those ideas become tangible and powerful.

Before weaving Susan Bauernfeind’s story into the history of Protestant women’s missionary work, it is important to recognize existing historical research. The work of Dr. Karen Seat in “Providence
Has Freed Our Hands”: Women’s Missions and the American Encounter with Japan serves as an effective model for how personal narrative can be juxtaposed with the wide happenings of the women’s missionary movement. Her ambitious work centers on telling the story of Protestant women, in particular Elizabeth Russell, a female Methodist missionary sent to Japan, and her efforts to challenge the normalized religious hierarchy in order to gain a stronger say in missions abroad. Dr. Seat works with primary and secondary sources from both America and Japanese. Overall, Seat outlines the new role that female missionaries carved out for themselves. Their motives, as described by Seat, were based in a desire for women to have influence not only in shaping culture within the church, but abroad as well.

Another work that deals with American missionaries within Japan is American Missionaries, Christian Oyatoi, and Japan, 1859-73, written by Hamish Ion. Ion relies on a wide range of sources that allows him to explore the role of missionaries more generally. The focus of his book is how American missionaries were first received by the Japanese government and people. His work also provides the intricate context for how Protestant missionaries initially found a place to work around Tokyo and how they evolved over time. His comprehensive research includes both American and Japanese primary and secondary sources. His work, along with the more specific work of Dr. Seat, demonstrates not only their thoughts, but also the arguments of other experts within the field. Their research provides the background needed to understand Susan Bauernfeind’s story.

It is important to consider the reliability of certain sources introduced into this work. There are several sources, like the one introduced within the opening paragraph, that were written by clergyman or others tied closely to the Protestant church. This relationship undoubtedly influences their perception of church history and the impact of Protestant missionaries. Despite these limitations, these sources are incredibly helpful because, even though they are accounts through rose tinted glass, they still offer a vision of how the church viewed its own work valued its missionary efforts.

A final source offers details about Susan Bauernfeind before, during, and after she went to Japan. Lowell Messerchmidt, a nephew of Bauernfeind, wrote of her life in Bauern-Sensei. His work was not published by an academic source. While he cited several primary and secondary sources, he envisioned
dialogue that might have happened between Bauernfein and her fellow missionaries. Within this mix of reliable source and creative storytelling it is sometimes difficult to discern facts from fiction. Nevertheless, this source is the most complete version of Bauernfeind’s story and with it, in addition to other primary sources written by and about Susan Bauernfeind, the story of an incredible woman and her work as a missionary in Japan can be told.

It is in her work as a missionary that many connections can be made to the wider female missionary movement. Many young college educated women in the late nineteenth century into the early twentieth century found themselves looking for ways to use their education in ways outside of the average domesticated setting. The opportunities for freedom outside the rigid gender structure, along with the chance to work for the church, drove many young women, like Bauernfeind, into missionary work. In addition, many of these women were educated in the field of education which would aid them in establishing bible schools that would have lasting impacts. In fact, Susan Bauernfeind’s story echoes the growth of Protestant missionary women aptly. From her college education, to her commitment to her missionary work in Japan, even to her dedication in educating her Japanese converts, Bauernfeind shows why Protestant women gained so much influence abroad and back home.

**In the Beginning**

When Susan Bauernfeind drew her first breath on November 25, 1870 she was in the small rural town of Nerstrand, Minnesota.¹ The second child in a family of eleven, her family was not well off. Bauernfeind often looked back at her childhood and saw how her faith took the place of material comforts. She “remembered how our little house in the poverty of our parents, but in glad that Christ came for all classes and that the poor received him gladly.”² With her family’s life centering on farm work and the local church she chose to pursue religious education. It was easy to see how connected she became: “Prayer was normal in the family. This included family devotions. Tithing was an ingrained

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² Messerschmidt, *Bauern-Sensei*, 16.
habit from Susan’s early days. The Bible was the guidebook for life.”

Her devotion to her faith drove her to seek ways to spread her love of Christ with others.

After saving some money Bauernfeind made her way to the academy of North-Western College in Naperville, Illinois at the age of 20. Since most rural towns in America at this time lacked a formal high school, academies, like the one found at North-Western College, were a common site on college campuses. Bauernfeind attended classes at the Academy for four years in preparation for enrollment into the college. In total she spent eight years learning from the various teachers of North-Western College.

She spent a great deal of time in local church programs, and since she was a daughter of a German immigrant she found joy in participating in a church service where the sermon was given in German.

She wasted no time fostering her love of sharing the gospel. She often involved herself in teaching the children of the local Mission Band, which was a program that educated children about missionary work. She attended a conference of the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions in 1894. The purpose of the organization was to inspire college and university educated churchgoers to engage in missionary work abroad. The work of the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions showed promise for the future since, “apparently that conference had an inspiring influence on her [Susan] because eight weeks later she had recorded that God had called her to the foreign mission field.

Susan Bauernfeind would commit herself to a new goal of preparing herself for a proselytizing journey. This commitment would manifest itself in positive ways as Bauernfeind graduated as the president and valedictorian of her class.

Susan Bauernfeind wanted to experience the world outside the Midwest. During her time at North Central College she developed a view of Christian ministry and how it could include the world as a

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3 Messerschmidt, Bauern-Sensei, 17.
4 North-Western College would change its name to North Central College in 1926.
5 Messerschmidt, Bauern-Sensei, 18.
6 Messerschmidt, Bauern-Sensei, 18.
7 Norman E. Thomas, Missions and Unity: Lessons from History, 1792-2010 (Eugene, OR, 2010), 38.
8 Messerschmidt, Bauern-Sensei, 18.
whole. These ideas can be seen in an article she wrote for *Missionary World*, a religious publication, in 1899 during her senior year.

How deplorable… The thousands of our young men and women are excellent students and have spared no time or labor to gain knowledge about the Earth’s rotation, its surface, and interior, the stars, moon and sun, and how very few comparatively have given the Lord’s Vineyard even a single thought. Can it be possible that we belong to a King, one who is ruler of the universe, and not concern ourselves about His vineyard?9

Within this article the struggle between church orthodoxy and a new wave of secularism can be seen. Bauernfeind found it disconcerting that her peers were more invested in the science of the world rather than the mystery of faith. Also she sought to ask the question, why are her fellow Christians not concerned with the condition of the world as a whole? In her mind to serve God one must tend to the garden that God has placed all of humanity within. This inclusive view of how Christians should understand the world would impact her opinions and actions within her missionary work. Bauernfeind found other Protestant females who were as eager as her to tend to the garden that God had given them.

The decision of a young Midwestern woman to share her religion with strangers is an inspiring story, but not one solely reserved to Susan Bauernfeind. Seat explains that women like Ann Hasseltine Judson, who took in a missionary position in 1812, within the areas of India to Burma, had similar motivations behind their missionary work. Just as Bauernfeind had felt that her work in Japan would help bring her parishioners salvation, so too did women like Judson feel a desire to “be instrumental of spreading the knowledge of the Redeemer’s name in a heathen land.”10 Even with women wanting to travel to places like Japan to spread Christianity the religious organizations they worked for, as well as the countries they wanted to travel to, often acted as obstacles to their work.

Even before Bauernfeind and other women that organized missions to Japan there had been tumultuous history of turmoil between Christians and the Japanese government. Japan had been engaging

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in a major set of political reforms, commonly known as the Meiji Restoration, during 1868 with the goal to consolidate power to the Emperor of Japan. During that time conflicts between Christian missionaries and the Japanese government occurred. Even though Protestantism had been supposedly brought to Japan in 1857 and the first Protestant missionary had arrived in 1859 the Japanese government saw Christianity, and specifically Protestantism, as a threat to the authority of the emperor. “Protestantism was seen as destructive to the established order into the Imperial system, and its acceptance by Japanese would lead to chaos.”11 This focus on Protestantism stemmed from the idea that the Protestant sect went against Confucian tenets such as filial piety. This sentiment would lead to the persecution of Christians within Japan led by the Japanese government. It wasn’t until foreign diplomatic pressure on Japan to allow Christianity within its borders that the government halted its oppression of Christians within the state. Religious tolerance wasn’t introduced by the Japanese government until 1871.12

Western Christian organizations soon turned fuller attention to Asia. The protections afforded to their neophyitic communities in Japan had been hard fought, “yet missionaries were, by necessity, optimistic about the future prospects of Christianity in Japan.”13 An optimism spread from the Christian missionaries in Japan, back to the organizations based in the West, to the colleges and universities that provided the new candidates for missionary work, and North Central College was a part of this world. Evidence of this can be found in excerpts from the college’s paper that are filled with references to missionary work. “The United States and England are the training grounds for missionaries, and from these two lands missionaries are penetrating every land. China and Japan are fast being converted to Christianity.”14

It is important however, to explain some of the differences between the varying sects of Christianity with regard to missionary work. This is because each sect dealt with its own unique set of

12 Hamish Ion, American Missionaries, 124.
13 Hamish Ion, American Missionaries, 124.
14 “Clio sophia,” North Central College Chronicle, October 1, 1874, 6.
obstacles as well as triumphs when it came to sending their people overseas. For the sake of consistency my focus will concentrate on the efforts of the Evangelical church to evangelize the Japanese as that was the denomination that Bauernfeind was subscribed to. The Evangelical church is currently a branch of the Methodist denomination of Protestantism, but it started as a splinter group. The Evangelical church was founded with the purpose to preserve German language and culture in a religious setting. The Evangelical Association was conceived in 1800 by Jacob Albright. It is claimed that, “Undergirding Christians compassion and humanitarianism, a sense of duty, and a desire to save imperishable souls was a deeper dynamic that inspired Albright…and the hundreds who followed in their footsteps.” While humanitarian work was completed by the Evangelical missionaries, the true goal was to save the souls of nonbelievers by bringing them Christianity. It was in 1875 that the General conference of the Evangelical Association decided that Japan was ready to receive Protestant humanitarian aid and evangelism. A resolution was drafted that the general conference in Philadelphia that “two suitable men” were to be assigned as missionaries to Japan forthwith.

Interestingly enough when “two suitable men” left San Francisco for Yokohama in October of 1876, Japan they were in the company of a woman who agreed to be in this first group of missionaries to the east. Records contain details

Figure 1. This illustration depicts two of the first evangelical missionaries sent to Japan by the Evangelical Association. It is important to note that the third missionary sent to Japan with this same group, Miss Rachel Hudson, is not depicted.


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about the two men who were the first missionaries to Japan, Karl Halmhuber and Dr. Fredrick Krecker. Karl was a college graduate from Germany whose father was an instructor at the Polytechnic Institute in Stuttgart, Germany. He had just recently graduated from North Central College. Dr. Fredrick Krecker served in the United States Navy as a surgeon at the end of the Civil War. After marrying an Evangelical minister’s daughter, and conversation with the treasurer of the Evangelical Association, Dr. Krecker sent a letter to the officers of its missionary society, “after much anxious thoughts and many earnest prayers we have finally decided to accede to the wishes of the board, and the name of the Lord accept the call to Japan.” Little is known about the origins of the female missionary that accompanied these men to Japan. Only one line in fact is dedicated to her background in Paul Eller’s *History of Evangelical Missions*, and it reads, “[I]n July Miss Rachel Hudson, State Normal School at Millersville, Pennsylvania, received her appointment.” The absence of a comprehensive history on Rachel Hudson, when compared to her two male counterparts, shows significant underemphasis of Hudson’s role in the first group of missionaries to Japan.

Between the time that the first three missionaries sent from San Francisco for Japan in 1876 and when Susan Bauernfeind made her journey across the Pacific, the Evangelical Association sent twenty Protestants to Japan for the Evangelical Mission. Missionaries had spread from Yokohama to Osaka as well as Tokyo. During that time, the importance of education in emerged, and it was decided that religious education could help convert the Japanese population. By the time Bauernfeind arrived in 1899 none of the three original missionaries would still be in Japan. Still, as a last bit of irony, it was Rachel Hudson who had spent the longest time in Japan out of the original three. Hudson left Japan in 1885 after nine years of missionary service, two years longer than her male counterparts.

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Women Looking for Change

Susan Bauernfeind was given her chance to engage in missionary work by the newly formed Woman’s Missionary Society. The appointment was suggested to the Evangelical Association’s general conference, and it was accepted with the proper response:

In conformity with the desire of the W.M.S. to take a more active part in our missionary and charitable work in Japan, be it resolved, that for this purpose the sister Susan M. Bauernfeind and Anna M. Kammerer be sent to Japan to work there under the direction of our missions, provided that the conditions of their health prove satisfactory, and that the agreed to the conditions laid down by the board, and that the W.M.S bear their expense by special contributions. 20

And with that Susan Bauernfeind and Anna Kammerer said goodbye to their loved ones and sailed for Japan on September 22 1900. They spent 19 days traveling across the Pacific Ocean on a Japanese ship named Nippon Maru. Arriving in Yokohama on October 10 they were greeted by F. W. Vogelein the superintendent of the Japanese mission, as well as other Americans who began calling them the “Sisters Twain” combining Bauernfeind and Kammerer. 21 They then traveled to an area of Tokyo known as Asakusa ward, the most populous ward of Tokyo. Bauernfeind conducted a majority of her missionary work within the city limits of Tokyo, the growing metropolis at the center of Japan.

Figure 1.2. A photo of Susan M. Bauernfeind

Source: H. Bennett, Woman’s Missionary Society(Cleveland, OH)

21 Messerschmidt, Bauern-Sensei, 25-27.
Some of the enlisted work that Bauernfeind engaged in was the creation of the English Bible class for a small congregation of Japanese girls and boys close to the Imperial University.\textsuperscript{22} Bauernfeind found herself frustrated at times because she could not speak the Japanese language. She had to be content to play the organ for the Bible classes. “I long to get down and teach some of the boys and girls, and yet all I could do was smile.”\textsuperscript{23} However, it was during this work that Bauernfeind began to connect with the Japanese people. She began to be a role model for those interested in converting to Christianity. She gained the title Sensei, teacher in Japanese, and to assist her Japanese brothers and sisters in pronunciation she allowed them to call her Baurensensei.

After Bauernfeind’s first year in Japan past she and Kammerer had moved to another house near their first home. While she could still not speak fluent Japanese she had found a teacher named Shima Naguchi. Bauernfeind worked at the Shitaya Church near her new home. The pastor of that church had introduced her to the president of a cotton mill that drew workers from the local suburb.\textsuperscript{24} Masugumi Fuji would work with Bauernfeind together to help spread Christianity. After meeting Fuji, Bauernfeind found herself traveling to the factory once a month. Her commitment to helping Fuji was demonstrated by the distance she had to travel to get to the factory. In a letter to the \textit{North Central Chronicle} she described how hard it was to travel in Tokyo due to the lack of infrastructure.\textsuperscript{25} Yet, Bauernfeind saw the great potential for evangelization in the female workers at Mr. Fuji’s mill. For many of the female workers at the cotton mill it was the first time they had seen an American or been told the teachings and tenets of Christianity. Susan Bauernfeind was ecstatic to find a place where she thought she could make a large impact: “what a joy filled my heart!”\textsuperscript{26}

Bauernfeind made time to educate the women and children at Fuji’s factory. On several occasions she worked with the wives of officers within Fuji’s company. The more interactions that Bauernfeind had

\textsuperscript{22} Messerschmidt, \textit{Bauern-Sensei}, 36. Imperial University is now known as Tokyo University.
\textsuperscript{23} Messerschmidt, \textit{Bauern-Sensei}, 37.
\textsuperscript{24} Messerschmidt, \textit{Bauern-Sensei}, 55-56
\textsuperscript{25} “Letter from Japan,” \textit{North Central College Chronicle}, February 1, 1903, 84.
\textsuperscript{26} Messerschmidt, \textit{Bauern-Sensei}, 57.
with the women at Mister Fuji’s factory, the more her influence grew. With an expansion in the factory during 1903 her monthly Bible class grew dramatically. At one meeting as many as 900 young women attended to hear Bauernfeind. That number is evidence of the influence that Susan Bauernfeind developed. Her voice, the voice of an American female Protestant missionary, drew many Japanese women and children into interaction with the West. The face of America was Susan Bauernfeind, and it brought music, and hymnals, and salvation through Christ.

It is not clear that Bauernfeind understood her work as a way for western ideals to be introduced into the working population of Fuji’s factories, however that fact could not have been lost on the fledgling industrialist. Many schools were being established around Tokyo to introduce Western ideals to Japanese citizens. These schools, while few in number before the twentieth century, spread Christianity along with Western culture. Once certain industrialists, like Fuji, found how Western Christian ideals could create a more industrious work force they had every incentive to bring missionaries like Bauernfeind to their factory. Again, while Bauernfeind does not clearly state that she held ethnocentric views Dr. Seat explains how missionary work had an ethnocentric part to it. The act of sending a missionary to a foreign “heathen” land is imperialistic in nature. But, for Bauernfeind and other missionaries, educating young factory workers was as a good thing and the idea that, “this was yet another kind of ethnocentric, even imperialist, project did not occur to them.”

But Susan Bauernfeind was not the first to experience these kinds of adventures in Japan. Woman like Rachel Hudson found their impact underrepresented. Historian Hamish Ion notes, “[T]here is an overwhelming silence of missionary records on the experiences of ‘Other’ and ‘Western’ women alike.” Amanda Porterfield, a professor of religion at Florida State University argues, “American influence in the nonwestern world has been shaped more by women and women’s issues than many historians have

27 Messerschmidt, Bauern-Sensei, 58.
28 Hamish Ion, American Missionaries, 150.
30 Hamish Ion, American Missionaries, xiv.
realized.”31 This influence would come from the overwhelmingly strong commitment that women had to missionary work. Women compromised almost half of the missionaries sent during the early 1800s, “by 1880 they reach 57%, and by 1929 they were 67% of the Protestant missionaries from the U.S.”32 The large number of Protestant women volunteering for foreign missions reflects a commitment to women playing a larger role in missionary work. From Japan, Hudson would plead with her sisters at home, “May the women of the Evangelical Association go and do likewise.”33 Protestant women would organize in order to bring their ideas and passion to missionary work, despite many obstacles.

The beginnings of the Woman’s Missionary Society, often abbreviated W.M.S., started many years before Hudson had crossed the Pacific Ocean in 1876. The success of the society shortly after its conception is debated within church records. One perspective suggests the society held a central role for a male pastor who “appears to have been largely responsible for the society, at least upon his departure from the Immanuel Church, the Woman’s Society completely disappeared.”34 The perspective emphasizes the power of men, as well as the Association itself, within the story of the Woman’s Missionary Society. In this institutional history, woman’s work is condensed into a rather black and white description: “Before 1930 the single lady missionaries in most cases were supported by the Women’s Board, but appointed by the General Board. All confusion arriving from such dual administration was erased in 1930 when the W.M.S. was chained from an auxiliary of the general board to a department thereof.”35 Here the story of W.M.S. was only described through its connection to the general board of the Evangelical Association. This inability to reference the W.M.S as a separate entity capable of independent work evidences the sexism suggested by Porterfield.

That history stands in contrast with the story portrayed by the Woman’s Missionary Society itself. The W.M.S version focused much more on the efforts made by women to organize, “certain devout

32 Norman, *Missions and Unity*, 42.
women of the East Pennsylvania Conference, residing in the city of Philadelphia, Pa., Members of the Evangelical Association, caught the missionary spirit and earnestly desire to help the brother and raise money for missions."\textsuperscript{36} The fact that the association was begun and supported by Protestant women is clear. Furthermore, while the institutional history of the W.M.S presented the origins as a bureaucratic headache, the W.M.S. history outlines its purpose as a way to further the position of women in missionary work:

One of the most suggestive results of the mighty missionary upheaval of the 19 century has been the awakening of Christian womanhood to the needs of a dying world. Woman, who was “first in the transgression”, is also coming to be first in evangelization and rescue. In the Zenanas of India, the wretched hovels of China and Japan, the harems of Moslem lands and the crude huts of the dark continent, woman’s deft fingers, gentle tact and loving grace, have done pioneer work in carrying the Cross into the dark corners of the earth.\textsuperscript{37} This distinctly establishes the desire that Protestant women become more involved in missionary work because women had a strong propensity for missionary work. This was due to the fact that women had certain traits that male missionaries did not.

In both histories, women still served in a subservient role within the parent organization. However, the W.M.S was inspired by groups like the Woman’s Foreign Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, who had true autonomy in sending and supporting female missionaries overseas. In 1878, in an attempt to gain more independence from the General Conference of the Evangelical Association, members of the W.M.S. submitted a plan to create their own Woman’s Foreign Missionary Society. Their request was denied with a clear explanation given by the General Conference, “We can see no necessity for organizing such a society in our church, in order to give our sisters and adequate opportunity to labor individually and collectively in the interest of our foreign home missions, as our excellent missionary arrangements do afford ample opportunities to all our members to pray, give and work direction.”\textsuperscript{38} The problem is that there is evidence to support the fact that missionary

\textsuperscript{36} H. Bennett, \textit{Her Story: History of the Woman’s Missionary Society of the Evangelical Association} (Cleveland, OH, 1909), 9.
\textsuperscript{37} Bennett, \textit{Her Story}, 7.
\textsuperscript{38} Bennett, \textit{Her Story}, 13.
appointments prior to Susan Bauernfeind were primarily given to men. In fact, between 1876 and 1898 out of the twelve missionary appointments that were created for Japan, designated by the Evangelical Association, only 2 were given to women, one of which was Rachel Hudson.39

Despite being denied autonomy, the women of the W.M.S., and the other women of various Protestant missionary associations, committed themselves wholeheartedly to the support of the female missionaries. During these appointments women wrestled with many of these questions about gender roles. The W.M.S. admitted that, in its infancy, their “movement” had its struggles, “like all such movements it had a small and feeble beginning, and though exceedingly modest, encountered stout prejudices and opposition from the start. It grew “under a weight,” but it grew.”40 These struggles came from a male dominated hierarchy that claimed an advocacy group for female missionaries was unnecessary because of the equality of the missionary selection process, even when it was not. In response to the struggles, associations like the W.M.S. looked to find ways to challenge the status quo. This led many women to support female missionary societies, “the foreign mission fields served as a testing ground where women could experiment with new roles and implement new visions for womanhood.”41 This ability to engage in evangelizing work while at the same time having the freedom to challenge gender roles made becoming a female Protestant missionary appealing, “missions attracted progressive women who sought a wider sphere of experience and influence for themselves and their sex, as well as women who are committed to replicating traditional American gender ideologies worldwide—and women who were motivated by elements from both of these agendas.”42 More and more women saw missionary work as their way to use their talents outside traditional domestic roles. Young college

39 Eller, History of Evangelical Missions, 296-297. These calculations were made without taking into consideration that many, if not all, men who were appointed missionary positions overseas were married. While some brought their spouses overseas with them, it is not clear which wives came and which did not. The decision to exclude spouses from the calculations was also made because the dominating view at that time for the role of a spouse was confined to the sphere of domesticity. The spouses of the men who were chosen for missionary appointments would not engage in the same work that their husbands would, nor the same work that Susan Bauernfeind did.
40 Bennett, Her Story, 7.
41 Seat, “Providence Has Freed Our Hands,” 8.
graduates were especially keen to the idea, and by the time that Susan Bauernfeind sailed off to Japan more than half of all members of the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions who sailed abroad annually were female.

The proof that women had claimed a growing power in the molding of American’s influence abroad can be confirmed when looking back to the case of Susan Bauernfeind and the W.M.S. The positive trend of woman’s involvement in missionary work can be seen in Figure 1.3. Without the support from the W.M.S. it is unlikely that Bauernfeind would have been able to teach to a room full of 900 Japanese women. Organizations like the W.M.S. gave women like Susan Bauernfeind positions where they could interact with Japanese citizens.

By the time Susan Bauernfeind arrived in Japan a more Protestant females were on missions to Japan than males. With women in the majority of missionary positions abroad, foreigners begin to see female missionaries as the face of America. Many women, like Bauernfeind, saw missionary work abroad as their chance to make an impact on the world. It was this desire that drove Bauernfeind, a woman from

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**Evangelical Association's Missionaries to Japan**

*From 1876-1942*

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<th></th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
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<tr>
<td>Before 1898</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After 1898</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20</td>
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![Graph showing number of men and women missionaries to Japan](image)

Figure 1.3 This chart demonstrates the number of men and women that were sent on missions to Japan by the Evangelical Association in two categories. The section on the left shows men and women sent before Susan Bauernfeind’s appointment in 1899. The section on the right shows men and women sent after Susan Bauernfeind’s appointment.

a small town in rural Minnesota, to cross halfway around the world in an effort to spread education and salvation. Her inspirational story would lead many young women to follow in her footsteps.

**Education for the Masses**

After several years of intense dedication to her missionary work Susan Bauernfeind started to adapt to Japanese culture. While she could still not speak the language fluently, she had begun to absorb most of its customs. However, the amount of non-Christians within Japan made evangelizing a daunting task for Bauernfeind. She enlisted the help of Japanese Bible women. These were Christian converts who evangelized to their fellow Japanese sisters and brothers. Bauernfeind soon found that identifying more Bible women was a task in itself, “while there were a few schools were such women were being so trained, it was almost impossible to get any of their workers to help in this important work. Hence the suggestion given by an old missionary lady, train your own workers.”

Susan Bauernfeind visited Christian Bible schools and decided that, with support from the W.M.S she would be able to develop such a school. After conversing with her fellow missionaries, including Anna Kammerer who agreed to help teach at this new school, a plan was finally submitted to the Woman’s Missionary Society for action. The Bible Women’s Training School was created in 1904. On April 5, 1904, five students were accepted and instruction began.

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The desire to create missionary schools strictly for women grew out of the disparity of education between Japanese men and women. As a newly graduated college alumnus Bauernfeind would view education for young Japanese women as a priority. This feeling was common for young missionary women to feel. During the later 1880s, “as the Japanese government systematized its patriarchal agenda for women over the course of the Meiji period,” female missionaries found themselves becoming advocates for their fellow women abroad. Many of them, like Susan Bauernfeind, saw the best way for Japanese women’s lives to improve was through education.

After several successful years the work being conducted within the Bible Women’s Training School continued to grow as enrollment increased. However, Susan Bauernfeind lost a fellow teacher as well as longtime missionary companion, Anna Kammerer. Kammerer was leaving her missionary to join her new husband and fellow North Central College Alumnus Clarence Ranck. Kammerer returned to the United States with Clarence in 1906 and never again held an official missionary post. In a letter to a former college roommate at Kammerer’s departure, Bauernfeind noted that she had no intention of getting married and leaving her missionary work. By the time that the Bible Woman’s Training School had its first graduating class, the Evangelical Association had sent Mrs. Ranck’s replacement. The

Figure 1.5. A Photo of the Tokyo Bible School, Tokyo, Japan

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45 Seat, “Providence Has Freed Our Hands,” 83.
46 Eller, History of Evangelical Missions, 296-299.
47 Messerschmidt, Bauern-Sensei, 78.
replacement was a relative of Clarence Ranck, Miss Elmina E. Ranck.48

The success that Susan Bauernfeind had as principal of the Bible Women’s Training School led to the support and expansion of its physical space. Throughout the years the school gained land and built new buildings with support from the Evangelical Association as well as the Women’s Missionary Society. Dormitories were built to house students, and classrooms were expanded to help account for the influx of learners. During these years Susan Bauernfeind was able to influence many students. Not only did Bauernfeind act as the school’s director, students daily saw and listened to her words, “every morning we had a worship service, presided over by Bauren-sensei.”49 Through her interactions with students, and her actions behind the scenes to support the school, she was able to create an influential institution. When a bishop from the Evangelical church visited Japan in 1917 he claimed that the Bible Women’s Training School was, “the largest, and may I say without exaggeration, the best institution of its kind in Japan.”50 Throughout those years Bauernfeind stayed committed to creating well-educated Bible women who could assist the ministry in evangelizing the Japanese population. An example of this commitment playing dividends would be the incorporation of the school’s first full-time native teacher in 1919.

As the popularity of the Bible school grew so did the desire to open the school to a larger student population. After much consideration by the Board of the Bible Women’s Training School, the school was renamed the Tokyo Bible School in 1921. There were two major factors behind this. The first was an increasing need for men to be included in this kind of religious education. The second was a growing desire of Japanese students learn English.51 So it became a gender inclusive institution that had female Protestant missionaries, or teachers taught by female Protestant missionaries, instructing Japanese

48 North Central College Chronicle, December 1, 1907, 91. “Miss Susan M Bauernfeind, ’99, his principal of the Women’s Training School of Tokio, Japan. Associated with Mrs. Bauernfeind as a teacher of this institution is Miss Elmina E. Ranck, ’99, who went to Japan last year… The training school offers a four years course of study, and last spring graduated its first class of five members.”
49 Messerschmidt, Bauern-Sensei, 85.
50 Eller, History of Evangelical Missions, 212.
51 Messerschmidt, Bauern-Sensei, 83-84.
students in western language. The changes to the school were followed by an explosion in student enrollment: “[I]n 1925 there were 343 registered students in the Bible school and its affiliates.”

However, even as Susan Bauernfeind gained a great many new students she still focused on training new Bible women. While speaking to a Japanese magazine, Japan Evangelist, she noted that “perhaps no worker in the Evangelical field is of more value in bringing the gospel of salvation into the homes of the people than the too often forgotten Bible woman.” That emphasis would stay with her as long as she directed the Tokyo Bible School.

Even as her role as principal of the school became more important, Bauernfeind found herself engaged in a myriad of other missionary projects, “Bauern-sensei often found herself like a juggler with several balls in the air at one time. She was principal of the Bible school, the teacher in the school, a Sunday school teacher, treasurer of the Christian Leper Hospital Association, teaching numerous Bible classes to groups and individuals, as well as supervising the orphanage.” While it is safe to say Bauernfeind affected a large number of Japanese citizens, her growing influence is most convincingly displayed in the story of a young man who came to Bauernfeind with his marriage plans.

In Japan, the customs was for the parents of both the prospective husband and wife to meet and act as go-betweens for the young couple. In this one instance Bauernfeind was asked by the young man to be his representative in the go-between due to her position as principal of the Bible school. Since the prospective wife was a student at the Bible school Bauernfeind agreed. Her parents agreed explaining to Bauernfeind that, “if I introduced the young man they had no objections because they trusted me.” The fact that a Japanese family trusted an American female Protestant to help in their daughter’s marriage demonstrates the influence that Bauernfeind held in the community. Her commitment to educating the

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52 Eller, History of Evangelical Missions, 213.
53 Messerschmidt, Bauern-Sensei, 84.
54 Messerschmidt, Bauern-Sensei, 98. The reference to the orphanage is made due to Bauernfeind's role in helping to organize the creation, as well as future participation in supervising children at, the Aisenryo Orphanage supported by the W.M.S.
55 Messerschmidt, Bauern-Sensei, 122.
younger generations in Japan provided power to impress her own ideas about religion, gender, and culture on her students and fellow community members.

It was through education that so many Christian missionaries found their way to imbue their community with Western ideals as well as the word of God. All over Asia and Africa the school’s aim to convert their students into followers of Christ, while the same time giving them a basic education by way of reading the Bible. The emphasis of education in Japanese missionary work overshadows education programs put on in other places such as China or India. This emphasis stems primarily from the interest in the West by the Japanese government as well as its people. Westernization would make Bible schools very popular due to the school’s ability to teach the Bible in English. Furthermore, the Evangelical Association references several educational statistics that are associated with Japan as explanation for why Evangelical missionaries focus so much on education:

The land of the rising Sun is a land of schools. The government reports that there are 450,500 schools in Japan, ranging from the lowly kindergartens to the great universities. The literacy rate of 99.3% is the highest of any nation in the world. The reading public is served with influential newspapers, such as the Osaka Mainischi which boasts a daily paid circulation of 2,500,000. The fourteen universities in Tokyo establish it as the second city, in educational importance, in the world. These facts explain why educational evangelism has played such a signal role in the evangelical mission work in Japan.56

This emphasis would come forth in a variety of ways. Some Christian teachers would use their influence to gain positions at prestigious Japanese universities to raise interest in Christianity. Some faculty at Tokyo Imperial University, near Bauernfeind’s school, acted as “agents for the introduction of Western ideas into the schools and towns where they worked and as catalyst for the growth of interests in Christianity among their students.”57

A great need was seen for the education of women in Japan. “[P]ost primary education for young women received even less attention, and as late as 1894 only eight public high schools for girls of been established in Japan thus, women in late 19 century Japan had few other options than to attend Christian

56 Eller, History of Evangelical Missions, 211. The author uses no citation to corroborate the statistics cited in this passage. However, it does demonstrate the rationalization of the association's emphasis on education in Japan.
57 Ion, American Missionaries, 150.
missionary schools.”

This would lead to Christian missionary schools having very little competition in Japan. Missionaries had a near monopoly on girls and young women who wanted an education. The many female Protestant missionaries became teachers at these new missionary schools. Their commitment to educating women was fueled by a desire to give their new Christian converts an education similar to what they had. Women like Susan Bauernfeind “sought to provide nonwestern women with the opportunities she herself had received: in education equal to that of men’s education, and economic independence through a meaningful career.” Again, the young idealistic progressive women who entered the missionary movement during its height would attempt to continue the movement by creating liberally educated women abroad.

Interestingly the push for female education within these missionary schools increased beyond the initial intentions of their creators. A set of Japanese government educational ordinances in 1899 put restrictions on missionary schools. While none of the ordinances were explicitly targeting missionary schools, they separated religious educational systems from public schools as well as requiring certain districts of Japan to establish public schools of higher education for women. This impacted missionary schools greatly, “mission schools for girls and women no longer had the edge, is a scene were competing with free public schools and a unprecedented number of female higher schools.” Still, female Protestant missionary teachers, such as Susan Bauernfeind, persevered and looked for new ways to expand their schools. Despite the ordinances many missionary schools continued to operate successfully. One positive outcome from missionary school struggling with these adversities was in advancement in class rigor, “the ultimate effect of government educational ordinances on missionary schools for girls and women, then, was to push them to advance their curriculum to a level beyond what many WFMS missionaries had

58 Seat, “Providence Has Freed Our Hands”, 73.
60 Seat, “Providence Has Freed Our Hands,” 108.
originally envisioned.”\(^61\) Even as schools expanded and advanced their curriculum female Protestant missionaries continued to find jobs as teachers.

**A Life Dedicated**

Susan Bauernfeind would leave Japan in February 1941 under pressure from the United States Embassy in Tokyo advising her to return to America. While her responsibilities had been winding down towards the end of her missionary career she still stayed involved in the community. The Tokyo Bible School had gained a Japanese principal in April 1934, and while Bauernfeind stayed connected to the school her responsibilities there were lessened.\(^62\) As feelings of militarism rose in Japan, she still felt a deep connection to the people she had served. Despite her positivity there were setbacks during her time, “the instability of the civil government and militarism had a negative effect on Japanese church throughout the 1930s… Baptisms and church attendance decreased. Evangelism seemed handicapped.”\(^63\) As the United States moved towards conflict with the axis powers there grew a dividing line between the Japanese and their curiosity in Christianity. Even when

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\(^{61}\) Seat, “*Providence Has Freed Our Hands,*” 110. The WFMS stands for the Woman’s Foreign Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church which was a female organized missionary society much like the W.M.S.


\(^{63}\) Messerschmidt, *Bauern-Sensei,* 148.
Bauernfeind returned to the United States at the age of 71 years old she found herself advocating for peaceful relations with Japan, “with a heart that ached beyond description after December 7, 1941, Susan crisscrossed much of the United States trying to reconcile the feelings of two adversaries, one, the land of her adoption, the other, the land of her birth.”

Susan Bauernfeind’s life was dedicated to bringing salvation to the Japanese people. Regardless of bombings in Tokyo, some of which had destroyed large parts of the Tokyo Bible School, nothing had prepared Bernstein for the atomic bombs being dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945. Even though so many Americans cheered on V-J Day Bauernfeind found herself devastated at the destruction in Japan. In October that same year she found herself back in Naperville lecturing to the student body of the Evangelical Theological Seminary. During her speech she referenced the 250 churches that were destroyed in Tokyo alone. She also read the names of those who she knew to be among the casualties. She closed her speech with a call to reconciliation:

I’m grateful to God that it was my privilege to spend so many years in Japan, and win so many souls to Christ. Those who have gone to glory through fire are with him. They served and loved, and their souls live on victoriously with the Lord. And those who remain are courageous and taking a new lease on life. God will strengthen the church of Christ in Japan through these faithful. They need our prayers.

That would be Susan Bauernfeind’s last service to the Japanese people. She died that very same night, October 27, 1945.

The story of Susan Bauernfeind is the epitome of what it means to serve a singular purpose. Ultimately, her life touched many at home and abroad. Her story was made possible by those who fought for the inclusion of women into the Protestant missionary movement. Through her, numerous Japanese citizens encountered Christianity. Many had never seen an American in real life. It is remarkable to think that a woman from rural Minnesota would spend most of her adult life trying to convert the populous of Tokyo, but her story is not as unique as it sounds. Her story is like so many other American female

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64 Messerschmidt, Bauern-Sensei, 150.
65 Messerschmidt, Bauern-Sensei, 152.
Protestant missionaries who left their homeland to missionize. Her story gains more power when it joins with the stories of her sister missionaries in a memoir of their efforts. Female Protestant missionaries gained more and more influence from the late 1800s into the early 1900s in Japan and around the world. Through the personal accounts of Susan Bauernfeind that influence becomes tangible. Those who knew Bauernfeind encountered one committed woman. To them she was that determined American woman who devoted her life to improving those of Japanese man, and women.
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