Women, Faith, Healthcare, and Education The Role Methodist Women in Creating Educational and Health Services for Mexican Nationals in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands

Belinda Román, PhD

St. Mary's University

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Introduction

- One of the least researched and much less understood issues facing Borderlands scholars is the role that secular and religious mothers, daughters, sisters, and aunts played in creating cross-border socioeconomic structures
- Researchers must broaden their lens to cross disciplinary lines and build a truly cross-border analysis.
- This is not easy because the international border creates a complexity whose boundaries are fluid and multifaceted
  - while academic disciplines often have margins as rigid as the notion of sovereignty embodied in the political definition of a border.

Introduction

- Another confounding factor is where to look for the details of this story.
- Sally Haslanger writes "…, women's contributions to our intellectual history may come in different forms; e.g., in poetry, song lyrics, essays, pamphlets or broadsides" (Haslanger, n.d.).
- In fact, it is on a broadside from 1917 where we find one of the many salient points in this regard made by Jane Addams:
  - "A city is in many respects a great business corporation, but in other respects, it is enlarged housekeeping." (Addams, 2020).

Introduction

- This research is a modest contribution to a very neglected element of Mexico-U.S. Borderlands discourse:
  - The role of Protestant (Methodist) women in helping create public health and education cross-border infrastructures
- This research focuses on the Social Gospel Movements of the late 19th and early 20th Centuries, and how they impacted the Mexico-U.S. Borderlands, specifically El Paso, Texas, and Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua.

Women in the Public Borderlands Space

- Women on both sides of the border had limited opportunities to participate in the public space.
- In the U.S., the two means by which women influenced society and the economy were the Woman's Missionary Movement (WMM) and Settlement Houses.
- The WMM involved 140 countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.
  - "..it was the largest grassroots movement of women in the world at the turn of the 20th century"
  - "...female Protestant missionaries established schooling for girls well before the development of most-nation states and the world polity" (Goff, 2019, p. 10).

Women in the Public Borderlands Space

- The social advocates behind these houses were well-educated, mostly White upper-middle-class women for whom participation in urban public life was limited.
- As these movements migrated to the U.S. Southwest, they came with the same ideas and had a religious foundation, albeit a type of frontier religion.
  - In the urban centers of the Northeast, religion was less conspicuous.
- The nature and composition of the early settlement houses north of the Mexico- U.S. Borderlands changed as U.S. urbanization and development changed.
- South of the border, the Catholic Church was a dominant social force in Mexico but, as this research shows, Protestant ideas and voices emerged and sometimes melded with Catholic activism as an important social alternative in Northern Mexico.

Methodist Theological Orientation

- “Place” is important in these types of analyses because the origin of ideas such as the Social Gospel Movements (SGM) was in England and, later the Northeastern United States (Boston and New York).
- As SGM moved across the Atlantic to North, Central, and South America, adherents added and transformed these movements to suit their local reality.
- Grace and money in the battle of ideas between Catholics and Protestants are ever-present.
  - The emergent capitalist economy and its role in dislocating religious life from economic life was part of this ideological battle.
- “Modernity” includes the notion of individuality and individual agency, a cornerstone of the movement away from religious doctrine.
  - Northern Mexico was a fertile ground for these ideas.

Methodist Theological Orientation

- In addition to evangelism, modern (early) Methodism emphasized charity and support for the sick, the poor, and the afflicted through the works of mercy.
- The practice of these ideals is embodied in the establishment of hospitals, orphanages, soup kitchens, and schools all in the name of Christ's command to spread the gospel and serve all people (Watson, 2014).
- Mexican Biblical scholar, Gonzalo Baéz Camargo (1975) writes that Methodists have not been necessarily concerned with systematic theological formulations.

Methodist Theological Orientation

- Baéz Camargo concludes that there has not been a strong Latin American contribution to Methodist or general theological thought.
- Ideas have been imported from other denominations, including Roman Catholicism, like "Theology of Liberation”.
- Finally, he writes, “Perhaps the main contribution that Latin American Methodism has already made is its strong emphasis on evangelism” (p.118).
  - This lead to the search for opportunities to spread the word.
- Latinas were active in more than just evangelism on the border. They became partners in the healthcare and educational projects by living next to and learning from the women of the settlement movements.

Methodist Theological Orientation

- Methodist parochial schools were "…the forerunners of the national rural education movement Baéz Camargo(p. 112)."
- Baéz Camargo documents that Methodist educational institutions were sprinkled throughout Mexico, and Central and South America.
    - Puebla, Chihuahua, Queretaro.
- Care for the sick in the form of clinics and hospitals in cities such as La Paz, Bolivia, and Chihuahua, Mexico, while help for the poor and works of mercy could be found in Santiago, Valparaiso, and Concepcion, Chile, and La Boca Mission in the heart of Buenos Aires' slums (Baéz Camargo, pp. 113 -114).

Methodist Theological Orientation

- The early Methodist women were progressives seeking a voice.
- Women's Rights Convention at Seneca Falls, New York in 1848.
- Isabella Bomefree, otherwise known as Sojourner Truth, joined the Methodist Church and became an itinerate Methodist minister as well as a suffragette.
- The Temperance Movement led by Frances Willard, Mary McLeod Bethune, and Jessie Daniel Ames, a graduate of what is today United Methodist-related Southwestern University in Georgetown, Texas, was among the courageous suffragettes.
    - Texas became the first state in the South (and the ninth overall) to ratify the women's vote.
    - Mary McLeod Bethune is perhaps best known as a champion of African American education (Church, n.d.)

Methodist Theological Orientation

- In 1878, the [Methodist] Discipline stated,

  "In view of the fact that in most heathen countries women are only accessible to teachers of their own sex, the women of the Methodist Episcopal Church (ME or MEC), South, are hereby authorized to organize special Missionary agencies ... "(p. 211)

- Here we find the beginning of the women who would later form Friendship Square in El Paso, Texas, where education and healthcare would emerge as key factors in the local economic empowerment of Mexican women on both sides of the border.

Health and Education

- Border Health Alliance 1940s was a binational effort run primarily by physicians and health administrators from both sides of the border.
- The Alliances met both in El Paso and in C. Juarez.
- Mrs. Alicia Barry said, “Laymen and technical men alike are aware that in hospitals, clinics, and soup kitchens, we are treating results of poor housing, poor nutrition, poor health education, lack of intelligent understanding of the inter-relationships of all groups when it comes to health” (p. 59, 1943).

Health and Education

“Dr. McIntyre, I am neither a doctor nor a public health nurse, but I do feel that I know something about the Latin Americans in Texas and the problems with which they are confronted. In my opinion. To state that the high incidence of tuberculosis among Latin Americans in Texas is due to the fact that they are “Mexicans” shows lack of knowledge, insight and analysis. In any consideration of the prevalence of, or the susceptibility to, tuberculosis among Latin Americans, we need to study very seriously and take into consideration all the economic and living conditions among our Latin American working class, which contribute so materially to the prevalence of this disease among them, and for why certain are not altogether to blame.” (p. 6.) To this Mrs. Gaddy, Executive Secretary of the El Paso Tuberculosis added that in her study of the disease dating back to 1892, she found no evidence of TB in the Spanish-speaking populations (p 7).

Methodist Women in the Economy of the Borderlands (Halo Effect)

- The economy, politics, and nationalism are not easily disentangled from religious movements in Latin America, in general.
- The establishment of the Houchen Settlement House and Freeman Clinic (later Newark Maternity Hospital) take place within a much broader struggle for ideological and economic control.

Methodist Women in the Economy of the Borderlands (The Halo Effect)

- The House itself was established in 1912, with start-up financing for Houchen provided by its namesake, Mrs. Gretchen Rose Houchen (a Chicago school teacher), who invested $ 1,000
- In 2024 dollars would equal approximately $18,773.33. The inflation rate between 1930 and 2024 is approximately 1,77.34%.
- A WHM Corresponding Secretary's Report cited in Ruíz, the building cost over $10,000, despite an original best estimate of $3,000 made ten years earlier (as reported by Carr, p.118, p. 131).
- These numbers seem highly improbable in 2024 given that the property value for the location of the maternity ward and settlement house according to today's tax rolls would be on the order of $1.5 million at a minimum.
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Table 1. Population of C. Juárez and El Paso, Texas 1890 -1960

Year	1890	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940	1950	1960
C. Juárez Population	12,000	8,218	10,621	Na	39,669	48,881	122,533	276,995
El Paso Population	10,388	15,906	39,279	77,560	102,421	96,810	130,485	267,687

Sources: *Statistical abstract of the United States,* Bureau of Statistics, Treasury Department,74th ed. (1953), p. 22. *Texas Almanac: City Population History* from 1850–2000. For C. Juárez, "Ciudad Juarez-El Paso, The Formation of A Cross-border Market Mexico-U.S. Economic Relations in Perspective, 1840s-1920s, MPhil Thesis, Belinda Román, London School of Economics.

Table 2. Per Capital national health expenditures, 1929 – 1968 (p. 12)

Select Years	**1929**	**1935**	**1940**	**1950**	**1955**	**1960**
Other services	$0.74	$ 0.50	$0.83	$ 5.93	$ 7.19	$ 7.98
Total (1968 dollars)	$83.93	$66.59	$ 84.64	$ 164.72	$ 175.66	$197.25
% of 1968 dollars	1%	1%	1%	4%	4%	4%
Other Converted to 2024 Health Dollars	$ 6.49	$4.38	$7.28	$52.00	$ 63.04	$69.97
Total Converted to 2024 Health Dollars	$735.93	$ 583.88	$742.15	$1,444.32	$1,540.25	$ 1,729.56
CDC Health expenditures (2019 dollars)						$11,582

Source: Table H ExpType. National health expenditures, average annual percent change, and percent distribution, by type of expenditure: United States, selected years 1960–2019. (Rice, 1968)

Table 3. Total, Maternal and child health (MCHH) programs expenditures under public programs, 1929 – 1968 (p. 5)

Select Years	1929	1934-5	1939-40	1944-5	1949-50	1954-55	1959-60
Total (MCH) (1967)	$ 6.20	$ 6.90	$13.80	$ 62.10	$ 29.80	$92.90	$ 141.30
Total MCH	$921.20	$6,548.30	$8,795.10	$9,205.30	$23,508.40	$ 32,639.90	$52,293.30
percent of Total	0.16%	0.11%	0.16%	0.67%	0.13%	0.28%	0.27%

Source: Ida C. Meriam, *Social Welfare Expenditures, 1929 – 1967*, . Social Security Bulletin December 1967. Note that the language is spent on social welfare. (Meriam, n.d.)

Methodist Women in the Economy of the Borderlands (The Halo Effect)

- According to contemporary reports, patients at Houchen paid for medicines at cost, and during the 1940s, $30 covered the hospital bill.
- an employee at the clinic stated that with $50, payable in installments, neighborhood women could give birth at "one of the best-equipped maternity hospitals city."
- Ruíz continues that fragmentary evidence for the period 1930 to 1950 suggests that perhaps as many as 15,000 to 20,000 people per year (or approximately one-fourth to one-third of El Paso's Mexican population) utilized Houchen's medical and/or educational services (Ruíz, 1991, p. 37).

Methodist Women in the Economy of the Borderlands (The Halo Effect)

- The Halo Effect (HE) is a socio-economic multiplier.
- Developed by Dr. Ram Cnaan at the University of Pennsylvania, School of Social Policy and Practice, in partnership with Sacred Partners and the University of North Carolina, Urban Institute
- Assuming that the HE estimated by Dr. Cnaan is appropriate, then recent research projects under his guidance have estimated the HE to be $3.39 for every dollar spent urban religious groups and over $5 for rural areas (Places, n.d.). (2016)
- For example, the $1,000 invested by Mrs. Rose Houchen would have an HE of $5.53 in 2024 dollars or less than $1 back in 1912/13 when the investment was made.
- A similar calculation could be made for each of the data points found in the research.
- Clearly, even back at the beginning of the Settlement House and healthcare movements, there were multiplier benefits that warrant additional study.

Summary

- The maternal and child health care is now in the hands of programs such as Medicare and certified community health clinics.
- According to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) 1 out 4 beneficiaries are in the reproductive years and Medicare finances about 41% of all births in the U.S. In Texas, the percentage is between 47 and 67% (Services, 2024, p. 1)
- This is ongoing research into the many layers that impact the Mexico-U.S. Borderlands.

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