

Introduction ([00:00:03](#)):

Women have been a part of carrying the gospel where it's not for generations. And part of the legacy they've left can be found in the courage their stories inspire in an entirely new generation of women who would go. But that legacy can only be realized if their stories are told. Welcome to the Velvet Ashes Legacy Podcast.

Denise ([00:00:46](#)):

Well, hello to you, wherever you are joining us from you have found your way to the Velvet Ashes Legacy podcast. I'm Denise Beck, the executive director here at Velvet Ashes, and today I'm joined with Sarah Hilkemann and Dr. Laura Chavalier Beer, our resident expert on global Christianity and history of Christian Missions. Ladies, so good to be with you today. How are you?

Sarah ([00:01:09](#)):

Doing well. So excited for this conversation.

Laura ([00:01:12](#)):

Yes, same.

Denise ([00:01:13](#)):

Me too, me too. Okay, Sarah. But how happy are you to have Laura here with us today?

Sarah ([00:01:19](#)):

Oh my goodness. I mean, for many reasons. Laura is definitely the expert that we are not, and it is a busy season in Velvet Ashes right now. There's just a lot going on and a lot that we're preparing for. And so I can't tell you how many times in the last month I was like, Ugh, thank goodness for Laura, and that she is the one bringing her expertise and doing the research. And, um, yeah. I just, I love that we get to sit and hear this story, really as she's sharing with us.

Denise ([00:01:51](#)):

Oh my goodness. Yes. We're getting ready for the first in-person Velvet Ashes retreat, and that has been a blast and so much work. And Laura, we are so grateful for you. Thank you so much for your expertise. And I have to say that I didn't know much about the woman that we're gonna talk about today. Did you, Laura? Were you familiar with her?

Laura ([00:02:10](#)):

So I was familiar with some of, as of the aspects of her life, um, particularly just her influence on Christian missions. But I, I had the opportunity this month to dig a little deeper into some of the personal things about her life that maybe are less, less known to the wider world. Um, so that's been fun to do.

Denise ([00:02:30](#)):

I really can't wait to share this with the women today, but, well, okay. And men, maybe we've got men that wanna listen to this today. I know my husband does, but I, so I feel like for women like us who care so much about cross-cultural work and women and how they've interacted with it, this is like the dream coffee date. This is sitting across from you guys and getting to just discuss the things that are important

to us. You know, maybe, maybe some people like to talk about recipes, but this is like us geeking out over amazing women. So, so this is, this is my ideal coffee date, so I'm super excited. Laura, let's, let's talk about the guest for today, or the women that we're gonna cover today. Would you like to start sharing about Clementina?

Laura ([00:03:10](#)):

Yes. So we're gonna talk today about Clementina Rowe Butler. And one of the things that I came across in my research this month, um, that I hadn't really thought about much before, was that, uh, Clementina at the age of 34 received a letter of proposal of marriage. So at that time in history, the age of 34 would be considered an old spinster for this Irish English woman. It was a dramatic turn that her life took. So this letter had been hand delivered to her, um, in 1854. And it had been written by this man by the name of William Butler. He was an itinerant Methodist preacher who had immigrated to the northeastern United States in 1850. So he's not even in the same country as her. So in this letter, William told her of a recent, the recent loss of his wife and three little, and he had three little boys that he needed help in bringing up in what he called the nurture and admonition of the Lord. So in the letter, he asked her if she'd be willing to cross the ocean, share his life as a preacher's wife in a new country, and be the mother to these three little boys. Now, according to her daughter, who is her biographer quote, she says, "Of course, a family conflict was caused by this amazing proposal".

Denise ([00:04:24](#)):

No doubt.

Laura ([00:04:25](#)):

<laugh>, No doubt. So it is important to know that William was not a stranger to her. He had been a family friend of her family, of her family, um, since Clementina was a late teenager. So he wasn't unfamiliar. In fact, it was under his preaching that she had dedicated her heart to Christ in a very deep way. And it really changed her life in the trajectory of her life. So after consulting with trusted members of her family and making the necessary preparation, she sailed to Portland, Maine, where they wed November 23rd, 1854. So her life just in the span of a few months, changed dramatically.

Denise ([00:05:02](#)):

So much.

Laura ([00:05:04](#)):

So much. She traveled to Quebec, Canada for her wedding journey, where she actually had a sister who was married, so she had family on different continents. So that's where we start with Clementina story. It's probably the most important decision she made in her life, um, be beyond, um, you know, choosing to follow Christ. And it took her across an ocean to a completely new life and a family that was already there waiting for her.

Sarah ([00:05:27](#)):

Yeah. Laura, do you know, did they, were they interested in each other at all before this? Like, obviously he had been married, but was there anything before this?

Laura ([00:05:37](#)):

As far as I know, no. Just mutual admiration for kind of the, the life that they were living.

Denise ([00:05:43](#)):

Did this give Sarah plain and tall vibes to either of you. Whenever I heard this part of the story, it just reminded me of that story of Sarah Plain and Tall, that book, you know, the mail order bride coming and taking the family. So I just found it so fascinating.

Sarah ([00:05:58](#)):

Yeah. I love seeing, you know, that they knew each other growing up and kind of that weaving of those threads that, that God brought them together. It's really amazing. And, and I just can't imagine, like if she was 34, which would have for sure, I feel like been like that old maid sort of idea, like this huge, huge change in her life of maybe thinking she was gonna be single forever. And then yeah, all of a sudden she's in a different country and helping raise these kids.

Denise ([00:06:31](#)):

Do you know if he was older, like how much older than her he would've been?

Laura ([00:06:34](#)):

He's just about two years older than her, so they're very similar in age.

Denise ([00:06:38](#)):

Yeah. And it's so, so neat that she actually gave her life to Christ underneath him.

Laura ([00:06:46](#)):

Yeah. So she had grown up in a Christian family, but there was kind of a renewal of her faith through his preaching.

Denise ([00:06:53](#)):

Okay. I'm excited to see where it goes from here.

Laura ([00:06:55](#)):

Yeah. So just wanted to tell you a lot of, um, the writing that about, um, Clementina Butler is not really by her. So it's, she's, her voice is really interpreted through the voice of her husband and her daughter, who's also named Clementina, by the way. So if there's any confusion as I'm going, I'll try to make sure that they're, we're talking about the daughter versus the mother, but her daughter was her biographer. And, um, so you hear a lot of their thoughts about Clementina. But what does come through where they quote her is, and where they talk about her is Clementine's strong faith, her pleasant disposition, and her desire to enlist to others in the cause of Christ, and also her deep love for her husband. So she was born in 1820 on July 30th. She was the six of seven children, and she was born into a family where her mother was English background, and her father was Irish background.

Laura ([00:07:52](#)):

It's interesting, her daughter and her, uh, as her biography tends to emphasize that there's English and Irish in her background because it's significant. They're different cultures, even different languages and dialects and things. So, um, there's already kind of a cross-cultural aspect there. But she grew up in

Ireland, um, and at that time it was part of the United Kingdom. And her family was very hospitable and philanthropic, and they were part of the Wesleyan Society, um, or the Methodists. At this time, in, in the history of, of the world, <laugh> Methodists were not in, especially in Great Britain, they were not recognized really as a real church because as many of you know, in Europe there's state churches, and those were like the recognized churches. In England and the UK it's the Church of England, or the Church of Ireland and the Anglican Church. And so for them, they were kind of, it is, it wasn't considered something as respected as being part of the state church.

Laura ([00:08:51](#)):

So that's important to remember as you're thinking about who they are. And through this Wesleyan society around the age of eight, she had exposure to this idea of missions, and she decided to become a collector, someone who would take the funds in that they would raise to support, uh, missionaries. During this, uh, growing up year, she read histories of other countries, including places like India and Mexico, and she was a great reader. She loved to read as she was growing up. Now, an interesting thing that she notes, or that her daughter noted in her biography is that she was just a year younger than Queen Victoria. So Queen Victoria, if many of you know your history reigned for a very, very long time in Great Britain, and she, uh, was a teenage queen to begin with. And so Clementine is growing up and she's kind of tracking with her life.

Laura ([00:09:42](#)):

And, um, they even said that her family would compare her sometimes to see, you know, how things were same, the same or different. And the Victorian era, it's important to remember too, there were lots of changes going on in terms of technology. There was lots of, um, new inventions and there was industrialization that was happening in the Western countries. Um, there was steam power and boats and lots of things that were, were changing how transportation happened. So she's living during that time, and she grew up with this Wesleyan family, and she felt this call to minister and to share her faith with others. So she ended up moving to Liverpool, England at, uh, one point and taught in a mission Sunday school in the slums. So that's kind of her background. And then you don't hear a whole lot about what happened, um, between like her teenage years and when she got this marriage proposal from William Butler.

Laura ([00:10:36](#)):

Mm. Now William Butler, he had also grown up in Ireland. And again, the daughter has emphasized that his background was actually English. So there, his English family living in Ireland, um, and he was orphaned when he was very young and raised by a great grandmother. And one of the interesting things that you hear about him is that his grandmother used to have him stand up on a chair dressed in his father's shirt and read from a prayer book as a young boy. Kind of like he was doing the church service for her because she couldn't go to church. She was infirm and, and couldn't get there. So that's what they would do. So he, he's had this experience of some sort of faith from a early age too, but he underwent a dramatic conversion as a young man and then became a preacher through that.

Laura ([00:11:25](#)):

And eventually he moved to the United States. Now, the interesting reason why he did that, it doesn't come up in a lot of the academic sources, but in the biography by the daughter, she actually mentions it had to do with his, his love life <laugh> So yes. Very interesting. So he actually had been married twice before he married Clementina. The first time he was married to a Ms. Lewis, she was an invalid, and he

knew that she was probably gonna die pretty quickly, but they ended up having a son. And kind of, um, on her deathbed, she asked him if, if he and her sister, Julia, would marry and raise the son for her. And at that time, the church did not allow for, uh, widower to marry his late sister. Wife's sister. Interesting. Not sure why that rule was there, but it was not allowed. And so they decided to get married and move to the United States.

Denise ([00:12:22](#)):

So they were in Ireland at the time. And then in order to marry, they moved to the US.

Laura ([00:12:27](#)):

Yes. I'm not sure if they were in Ireland or in England, because their stories sometimes they moved back and forth between the islands, but, um, definitely in the United Kingdom. So yeah, that's, this is the reason why they moved to the US and he becomes part of the Methodist there in the United States, and they have a couple of sons. So he has three sons, one from his first wife, two from his second wife, who is the sister. And then one day she just all of a sudden drops dead. And he's kind of like, what is <laugh>? He's, he's in shock. He doesn't know what's, what's gonna happen and tries a few things to try to care for the boys, but then decides, feels like God brings Clementina to his mind as someone he's known from his past who maybe isn't, isn't married. And so he inquires, he finds out that she's not married, and he sends this letter and she accepts. So that's kind of the background with William and Clementina and how they got together.

Denise ([00:13:25](#)):

Can I just say, so the three boys are brothers and cousins? Yes.

Laura ([00:13:29](#)):

Yes.

Denise ([00:13:31](#)):

Okay. There we go.

Laura ([00:13:32](#)):

<laugh>. So Clementina arrives in North America. They're married, and she and William move to Lynn, Massachusetts, which is where he's a Methodist preacher, that's where he's stationed. In a letter to her sister, she writes, I must not, I suppose praise William too much as a preacher. I only wish you could hear him. And then you would have some faint idea of how highly he is esteemed here. I've had most convincing proof since we came home that he's considered one of the first missionary men among us here in America. I am as happy as I suppose anyone on this continent can be. And William says he is the happiest man on it.

Denise ([00:14:10](#)):

I love that.

Laura ([00:14:11](#)):

So these dramatic circumstances that surrounded their marriage, it seems like they're happily married, which I mean, wasn't a guarantee <laugh> mm-hmm. <affirmative>. Um, but they seem like they were well suited in terms of disposition and faith commitment and, and those most important things.

Denise ([00:14:29](#)):

Well, and you don't think of missionaries coming to America a lot during this time period, and so it is kind of an interesting context to, to have them in that way.

Laura ([00:14:40](#)):

Yes. So America's kind of still a missionary field, but then they're also thinking about other places and foreign missions. And so he starts writing a lot about foreign missions and lecturing on the topic, because that's something that he'd been studying even since before he immigrated. So that was part of his background before he even got to the United States. So he's taking that with him wherever he is now. And then in the United States, the Methodists, um, actually were more recognized at that time. And the, the difference for them was that after the Revolutionary War, they couldn't really be affiliated with the Anglican Church anymore. It just, there was this kind of break between countries. Right. And so, um, John Wesley blessed them, and they began a new denomination in 1784. So that's happened quite a few decades before the Butlers are there. And the Methodist denomination in 1784 is the Methodist Episcopal Church that was started.

Laura ([00:15:36](#)):

And this is the precursor to what you know today as the United Methodist Church, but it's also the precursor to every other, uh, Wesleyan or Methodist group that exists as well. So if you think of the Wesleyan Church, the Free Methodist, the Nazarenes, and, and other later iterations of those groups that broke off. So there's a lot of history here that if you're a part of any of those denominations, the the Butlers were, were instrumental in, in this denomination. Um, and the mission, mission history in particular. Now moving back to their time period in 1854, there was actually a Scottish Presbyterian missionary to India named Alexander Duff. And he came and he spoke to the Methodist in the United States, and he encouraged them to send missionaries to India. As I find it interesting in their story that there's a lot of interdenominational discussion that goes on, and people aren't so much of like, oh, it needs to be our mission that spreads all over India.

Laura ([00:16:34](#)):

No, they were trying to recruit different groups of Christians, um, to cover the whole, the whole subcontinent, and make sure that there was a Christian witness in all the corners of, of that land. So Mr. Duff, or Dr. Duff, as he was known, he was a missionary educator and he believed in English language education and the inherent value of education. And he saw Indian's desire to learn, um, English and acquire Western education as a providential tool. And so in his ministry, he used that as a way to, um, share the gospel with people. But in contrast, and this is an important part of, of the mission history and their story is that, uh, the main American sending agency, right then was the American Board by the Congregationalists. And they believed in a slightly different approach. Um, and you might, you might be familiar with this approach, it's called the Three Self Theory of producing self-supporting self-governing and self propagating indigenous churches.

Laura ([00:17:33](#)):

And it wasn't completely in contrast with what Duff was doing, but they were not interested in setting up educational institutions unless their main purpose was for world evangelization. So they did set up some primary schools, but it's usually in the local languages. And they didn't really wanna establish hospitals or institutes of higher education in the same way that Duff and people who followed his philosophy did. So the Methodists were very much influenced by Duff's philosophy. So many of you out there on the field in different parts of the world, you may have encountered places where you see the name Methodist. So a Methodist hospital, a Methodist seminary, a Methodist, um, college. A lot of these have roots in this kind of philosophy that was, um, introduced at this early stage in the Methodist mission history. So after, um, Duff's speaking to the Methodists, and because of their Mission Secretary, they set aside funds to look for a pioneer missionary to India.

Laura ([00:18:33](#)):

And they looked for several years, they couldn't find someone who wanted to go and give their life to this cause. And finally, William, who has this missionary interest already decides, well, they're not finding someone, maybe it's me. And he volunteers to go to India. And of course, Clementina agreed at the time, they, they, they made this, this decision together. So the hardest part of this decision was they had to figure out what to do with their boys. And at this time, it wasn't considered wise necessarily to bring children to the mission field, especially if they had not been born there. And so they made the very difficult decision to leave the two oldest boys behind. So remember, these boys are cousins. The first one was from the first wife, the second and third were from the second wife. And so they made that decision, and, uh, they were gonna actually leave all three of the boys behind. But Clementina decides, no, I cannot do this. This little one is so young, I need him with me. And she had actually, by that time, had a baby daughter of her own. And so she decides to bring the two youngest with her.

Denise ([00:19:39](#)):

Wow.

Laura ([00:19:40](#)):

Yeah. So on April 9th, 1856, they sailed from Boston to England, and then they finally landed in Calcutta in India, September 23rd, 1856.

Denise ([00:19:50](#)):

I can't even imagine, you know, having to make that decision. And I know so many of the women that we have talked about and studied have actually had to make that decision about leaving children behind. And, and I don't think it gets less complicated the decisions that people have to make about their kids. You know, once you go, you, you know, you're taking them and you're gonna have to talk about things like homeschool or boarding school or their health and wellbeing and mental status. You know, like all of those things still weigh heavily, but back then, just even that, it was an option to go and leave half of your family behind. Just, it seems so hard to even comprehend today, I think.

Sarah ([00:20:30](#)):

Well, and you couldn't, you know, like even now, you might leave your, your college age kids, uh, you know, back in your passport or that type of thing. But you can get them a plane ticket and they can be with you, you know, pretty easily.

Denise ([00:20:45](#)):

Right. They can come for Christmas,

Sarah (00:20:47):

Right? Yeah. Yeah. Or you can get back to them if there's an emergency or, you know, those types of things. So yeah, the, the thought of the rigors of travel and all that went into, you know, potentially even not seeing those children again, like knowing the danger of, of going to another country. I just Yeah. I can't imagine having to do that.

Denise (00:21:10):

Well, and can we talk about the complicated word home for Clementina? Because she is...

Sarah (00:21:17):

Oh my goodness. Yeah.

Denise (00:21:17):

...Irish raised by Irish English moved to America, and now moving to India. And I think we all know that that word home is so complicated, but I have no idea for her what that must have even felt like to be so mixed culturally about maybe, maybe it was easier, because to her it was like, well, places aren't, aren't a thing. It's just going and being with the people that God has called you to be with.

Laura (00:21:41):

Well, you definitely see that her, her reactions to being in the United States, she's viewing it as a new culture, and there's things that are different there. She talks about like what the, uh, congregation does that's different than it was in England. Mm-hmm. So she's definitely aware of the fact that, and, and, and there really are real tangible ways that her settings are different, even from the two different Western countries.

Sarah (00:22:07):

But maybe that helps prepare her a little bit for, you know, the next change in, in another new culture and adopting to another new place.

Laura (00:22:14):

Yeah. She seemed like she was pretty flexible in, in that way. So they land in, uh, 1856, and they, they consult with various mission organizations when they get there. At that time, Protestant Missions tried not to compete with each other. What they did was they divided, uh, different areas and said, okay, you go here, Congregationalists, go here, the Baptist go here, the Methodists go up there. And so they had some options of where they could go, but they ended up settling in Northwestern India, just west of Nepal, and the Himalayas in a city called Bareilly. And this particular part of India has a Hindu majority, but it has the largest Muslim minority of any part of, of that land. And I still, I think that's the case today. They ended up recruiting a local helper from the Presbyterians. Um, as we said before, the Presbyterians were very influential in this, in kind of encouraging the Methodist to go. And so they kept that relationship with them. And in this city, William established English and Vernacular services, and Clementina planned to start a school, but she couldn't get any children to come. There was a lot of resistance to teaching girls.



Denise ([00:23:24](#)):

Oh, man.

Laura ([00:23:25](#)):

So that was very discouraging at first. And as they're settling in there, they realize that there's great unrest in this city. Um, so this is during a time when the Indian subcontinent was being ruled by the British East India company. And 10 weeks after they settled and uprising began, and in history, this uprising has several different names. Um, it's called the Sepoy Uprising, or the Sepoy Mutiny, or the First War of Independence, depending on who's vantage point of history you're looking from. So the Sepoy mutiny from the British perspective. What happened was the Sepoys were Indian soldiers, serving under the British East India company, and they ended up rising up and killing their commanders because they were tired of the political dominance of this company in, in their land. From the Indian perspective, this was in War for Independence.

Laura ([00:24:22](#)):

You know, let's throw off the, the oppression and get rid of the British. And so just interesting to think about how people viewed this from different sides. But it was a very complex reason why this happened. As I said, the British East India company was part of the reason. There was also, this was the waning days of the Mughal Empire. This was a Muslim entity, not to be confused with the Mongol Empire, which was much earlier in history, but they had ruled much of the Indian subcontinent and were kind of in the, the last part of their rule. And the British East India company was kind of over them, but using them. And anyway, there was a lot of resistance in hatred of Christians by Muslims and Hindus. So there were political reasons, there were religious reasons why this happened. And the Western missionaries were very dependent on these British forces for safety.

Laura ([00:25:14](#)):

And they were grouped together with them by choice and by necessity. And so, you know, you, you see Hindus and Muslims viewing the Christians as the same as the colonial powers. Whether or not they were. I mean, the Butlers, they were Americans. They weren't British anymore. Mm-hmm. Um, so it's, it's just interesting to think a bit about that dynamic. So when this uprising happens, the Butlers, and this is 1857, the Butlers were first urged by Presbyterian missionaries that were their friends to escape to Calcutta with them, um, on a boat on the river. Um, but they decided against it. And for them, this was, ended up being a good decision because they found out later that this whole party of missionaries, including men, women, and children, were killed in this uprising. So there wasn't a lot of differentiation by the oi, um, between people who were, you know, against them or fighting against them, and people who just represented Christianity or, um, Western power.

Laura ([00:26:14](#)):

So after, um, finally being urged by British authorities to leave, they decided to escape over the mountains, um, with a whole contingent of people kind of evacuating. And their, their goal was a settlement by Lake called Naini Tal at the foot of the Himalayas. And it was a, an elevation of about 6,000 feet. In Clementine's account. In a letter that she wrote, she says, we set out on our journey with very solemn feelings. We were leaving our home, leaving for an uncertain time, our beloved missionary duties, not knowing what might lie before us. And then she goes on to describe endless hours of driving, and I'm assuming this is in carts, because there's no cars, no cars, automobiles up there. Yeah. Um, endless hours of driving in the dust, in the heat, avoiding tigers, having little food and water. And then

the last 12 miles up this, um, mountain, she's riding in a chair suspended between men's shoulders. This was a, a kind of a typical way for a Western woman to be carried about, but the main reason that this is happening for her is because she's very pregnant.

Denise ([00:27:23](#)):

Oh my goodness.

Laura ([00:27:24](#)):

So, yes. So she's pregnant with her second child. Six weeks after they finally arrive at this destination. Her daughter Julia, was born. Oh. So can you imagine all this happening? You have three children in tow, plus you're pregnant. And it, it's just a very difficult time for them. Later they heard that Burrelli was attacked, and their first indigenous comfort Maria was killed by these Sepoys. And where they were was kind of, uh, a str, uh, was a stronghold. It was strategically chosen because there wasn't a very easy way to get into where they were. And they, they knew that there were, um, Sepoys that were going to be attacking. And over the course of several months, about 3000 of these former soldiers for the British East India company were sent to try to root them out. And there were only about 80 something English men plus William defending. And this was the first time William had ever taken up a gun. And, um, the only reason he did this was because he needed to protect his family. He, and he and Clementina had a hard time with that morally that they were having to do this. They were trapped for so long in this mountain site that the outside, there was no outside contact. And everyone thought that they were dead, that they had died during this uprising. Alexander Duff, their Presbyterian friend, even wrote an obituary for William.

Denise ([00:28:51](#)):

Well, goodness. I mean, it makes sense. You know, that word would take too long to travel, and people would assume that, but you just, that seems so bizarre.

Laura ([00:28:59](#)):

Yeah. So eventually the British army starts gaining ground, and Clementina and William decide that they're gonna escape over the mountains to the capitol in Delhi, and leave the boys behind so that they can get word out about their situation. And while they're there, everything kind of comes to an end. And the British begin taking over rule of this Indian subcontinent in a new way. So the British East India company is no longer in charge, but it's the British crown at that point. Um, and it, I think it's important at this time to just pause a little bit and reflect on this idea that their mission was so intertwined with colonial power at this time in history.

Sarah ([00:29:41](#)):

Yeah. I was thinking that Laura, as you were sharing this, like, goodness, how hard it was for the Butlers. But then, yeah, you have all of these hard layers, and it brings up how tricky it can be to think about the history of missions and colonial power and how, how heavy that can be, and how difficult that can be to navigate. Even just thinking about it and talking about it. And I know, like, in just different reading I've done, particularly younger people who are thinking about going to serve cross-culturally, like this is a sticking point for them. Mm-hmm. <affirmative> sometimes to think about how this, um, connection of colonialism or, or missions, how they have gone together in the past.

Denise ([00:30:28](#)):

I actually was wondering, you know, we have both served, and you know, Laura, you have spent significant time even overseas. Did you experience any of the colonialism, you know, even the imprint left by colonialism where you all were?

Laura ([00:30:44](#)):

I definitely did. I was, um, based in, in East Africa. And, um, just the, the privilege of, uh, of being a white person there was so evident everywhere I went. And that definitely has its roots in the colonial past. And I was automatically, as there were things that were automatically assumed about me, um, of having knowledge and power and resources in a way that someone who was from that place would not have received. And then, yeah, just the, the infrastructure and, and things that you saw around you there, it was clear everywhere you went that it was a British colonial history.

Denise ([00:31:30](#)):

Yeah. I would say even like the streets sometimes where we were in, you know, the middle of Africa, there was, they would sometimes be lined by these trees that had been there for hundreds of years, and you knew that they were planted, you know, when there was a British influence to line the streets to look a certain way, you know? But then I, I must say, you know, I think I have so much more of a lens to view it through now that when I look back, there's things that I didn't realize were influences of colonialism. Like some of our, you know, African friends, locals would have two names. One of them, you know, would be the name that was given to them locally, but then they almost adopted a Christian name or a western name that we would, you know, refer to them by.

Denise ([00:32:17](#)):

And, and I didn't think twice about it, but it was like, what is that communicating that their name wasn't, you know, somehow good enough once they became a Christian that they had to adopt a new name. And, and I, I would have to like, go back and, you know, ask more questions about did they understand why or was that something imposed on them, or, you know, but just what we are even communicating by the fact that, you know, God isn't good enough for your name and you have to adopt a new name in that. And so there were just things that I look back on now and I view differently than, than when I was there.

Sarah ([00:32:51](#)):

Well, and we don't wanna just lump all missionaries together in, you know, in this sort of thing. Um, because, and Laura, you can speak to this more probably, but there were missionaries that went against the colonial powers or, you know, really did value the local people, and were looking to lift them up and empower them.

Laura ([00:33:13](#)):

Yeah. And I think it's important to remember that every context was different. Certain places there was a lot more force used, um, and so, uh, and there was more violence, but in many places there was a lot of peace. And there were things that, as you said, Sarah, um, missionaries opposed and, um, tried to be advocates on behalf of local people to, to have things be done differently, helping preserve culture instead of, um wiping it out. I think that's often how the history of missions is cast as, you know, missionaries, were going to just obliterate culture and impose western ideas on everyone. In many cases, it was actually local people who were asking for some of these new things to, to learn. And, you know, the world is changing around them. Here's an opportunity for me to be a person that has an

ability to speak another language and interact with people who are, who are coming and going. And so there's lots of motivations and things, um, to consider. Um, but I do think it's important to recognize that when mission is done from a place of power and privilege, it does affect how that message is received. And I think that's probably the takeaway for today.

Denise ([00:34:26](#)):

Yeah. I think the tragedy is in the mindset of maybe Gen Z that's coming up, even millennials, is that, is that they throw the baby out with the bathwater. They just say, okay, some harm was done, so no good must have been done. And you know, I think the, the thing about podcasts like this, or even other organizations that are talking about this is, is separating them out and recognizing, Hey, if we all aren't learning from past mistakes and growing, then what's the point? And there's so much we can learn, but definitely there's still needs to be the spread of the gospel and that they're still good that needs to happen. And how do we do it better if we weren't doing it well before? So I'd be interested, you know, even as we move forward, you know, what did their mission look like after, after that, you know, when it all fell apart.

Laura ([00:35:15](#)):

Yeah. So, so for the Butlers politically, things settled down. And so the British rule came into place and there wasn't so much violence around them. They were able to go back to Bareilly and to work there as they had planned. But the difference was that while they were in Delhi, William had had a vision and he shared this with Clem Clementina and his vision gave him sort of a new mission strategy. He felt like the Lord was laying on his heart, that they needed to prepare themselves to take in and educate orphans. He expected that after this uprising, um, because there had been many deaths and, and, um, many men had been killed and many women had been killed, they expected that there would be many orphans because of this. So the British retaliated, and so many of these Sepoys actually died. And so they're leaving orphans.

Laura ([00:36:06](#)):

And he, and he thought, our strategy should be to take in these Christian girls and provide them, um, with education and raise them in the knowledge of Christ. And he believed that this would be a foundation for, for their work in India, and a foundation for the Christian Church that they hoped to, to establish there. So he decided to write letters and recruit supporters in the US for individual Indian children. Um, this was kind of a new way of doing things. Before, when people had done philanthropic kind of things like this where they're taking in orphans or people in need, they would've asked for money for just for the institution. But he decided to adopt this idea of linking people with individual children. And that's something that we still see today. So he's, his, um, idea was one of the first instances you see in Christian history of that happening.

Laura ([00:37:02](#)):

Um, and he actually also raised funds inside of India. He would talk to other believers, other Indians and Europeans, and ask for them to, to help with the work as well. So initially in 1858, they took in their first girl, and then in 1860, there was a famine in that part of the country, and they took in 150 orphan girls, and then later started an orphanage for boys. And so those institutions became the foundation of their mission. Now, keep in mind, this is also during the Civil War era in the United States, but they still had funds for, um, these institutions to be set up much, much later in their history. The Butlers returned to

India, and one of their goals was to kind of find out what had happened after they had left. And they tracked the lives of these initial 150 girls, plus the others that came in initially.

Laura ([00:37:51](#)):

And there were a total of 309 of them. And in his report, William said that there were 181 of them who were Christian workers at that time. This is in 1886, so almost 30 years later. Um, and there were 78 who were wives of Christian farmers and tradesmen. And then a few of them had either died or left the orphanage. And so a huge percentage of them were actually following Christ and were part of the Christian Church and work that was going on. So the, the Methodist mission really, really took off with this new strategy that they, that they started, uh, and they were there until 1865. So 1856 to 1865, and then they resigned and came home. On their way home they've been working in Ni India for nine years. They're, they're looking forward to this trip. It's gonna be four months on the, on the ocean. They have been looking forward to just relaxing and studying and reading lots of books. And once they get on board and they're on their way, they realize the books have been left behind <laugh>. And so they're like, what are we gonna do for four months? And so Clementina, she's very, uh, has a lot of ingenuity. She decides she's gonna teach all of the children, including the boys, to sew and make the linens for their new home in England. And so that's kind of how she deals with that huge disappointment.

Denise ([00:39:13](#)):

It's like the road trip when you realize the radio quit working, and you know, like, what are you gonna do? But I actually, I wanna go back to the idea that all of that was happening when the Civil War was happening, because to me, that is an amazing provision of the Lord. Because what that meant for people in the, in America, you know, was, I mean, the soldiers had nothing. So people were pooling their resources together to so close and supplies and, you know, every little scrap was going to help the, the war effort wherever part of the country you were in. And the fact that during that time of great need here, there was also abundance to meet the needs, you know, half a world away. And I'm just like, I love that in the Lord's economy. It, it doesn't matter, you know, he can Mm, yeah. He can provide.

Laura ([00:40:05](#)):

Yeah. And they actually had friends. Uh, so the Presbyterians come up and again, and again and again in their story, and they actually wrote to the Butlers asking, Hey, you know, there's a war in your country. Do you need extra funds? Um, so it's, it's the British Presbyterians who, or, or the Scottish Presbyterians who are asking this. And they got help from many, many sources.

Denise ([00:40:27](#)):

Mm-hmm.

Laura ([00:40:27](#)):

<affirmative>. One of the things that got William into a little bit of trouble with his mission board, because he was always trying to raise funds and kind of going outside of their purview, but, um, <laugh> it ended up working for, for them. So when they returned home, remember they left their, their two sons behind. Uh, we don't hear about one of them much, but the one of them was named John Wesley Butler. And, uh, so they've been apart for almost 10 years. They have this sweet reunion with him, and he immediately tells them that he's decided he's going to become a missionary. And so what Joy warms their heart with this news, that the sacrifice that they made did not mean that his life was in, his life was in vain. Like he had decided to follow the Lord and wanted to go into Christian service as well.

Laura ([00:41:18](#)):

So at that time, William returned to being a pastor in the Boston area, and he and Clementina continued to promote this work of Methodist missions in India. And many women actually sought Clementina out that were interested in missions because she was this figure that everyone had heard about, the whole denomination across denominations. And so some of these women would come to her and say, we should organize ourselves and do more. And, um, we could do this more effectively and support the missionary cause. So it's kind of things that are swirling in her ears. And as we said at this time, it was the Civil War had just taken place, and that left a lot of women single, because a lot of men died. So you had many women who were lifelong singles, and many women who had been organized into social action supporting the war efforts.

Laura ([00:42:10](#)):

And many women who had had to take independent action because there weren't any men to do certain things. And so, at this point in history for women, life was changing a bit. And what you see happening at this time in the mission history that Clementina was very much a part of it, was that wives of prominent men in Christian evangelical circles decided to help establish women's missionary boards to promote and support the work of female missionaries. And they would raise funds to send out single and married women as missionaries. And so single women had been being sent out a little bit by some of the just general mission boards, but at this point in history, there were so many of them, and there weren't enough opportunities for them. The women decided we have to do something to be able to get some of these women out there to do the work.

Laura ([00:42:57](#)):

And so they would fund hospitals and schools and orphanage, and, and women's missions theory emphasized bringing about change in the surrounding society, not just establishing Christian churches. So they wanted people to come to faith, but they also wanted to change what they saw happening because they saw that women in many of these lands were being oppressed by certain cultural practices. And that was kind of their, you know, their western lens looking and seeing, oh, we have it better here. You know, women in China have their feet bound, and, uh, women in India, if they're married and their husband dies, and they are widows, they're sometimes killed after during the funeral ceremony. So there were things like that, that were in their, on their radar of we need to do something to help women have better lives. And they viewed it as like, uplifting women and other lands.

Laura ([00:43:48](#)):

And in many ways, you really cannot separate women's approach to mission from this idea of, of kind of changing culture around them. At the same time, there was also a great respect for a lot of the culture too. So it wasn't just a, a one-way, uh, street. So Clementina was actually instrumental in establishing several, several of these women's boards. The first major one was the Congregational Women. She helped them in 1868 start their board. And the women's board was encouraged to just, you know, be part of the main missionary board, but they decided that they wanted to administer their own funds, and they wanted to be in charge. And so they succeeded in doing that. And the goals of the women's board for the, the Congregationalists was to work for women and children through their parent board, but to increase knowledge, to also increase knowledge of mission among women and to train children in mission work.

Laura ([00:44:41](#)):

So they were really focused on empowering women and training up children, um, for missions. Clementina also was a founding member of the Women's Foreign Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church the very next year in 1869. And this body sent out its first missionaries to the Methodist India mission that they had started. Very soon after that, the teacher there, one was a teacher, Isabella Thoburn, and the other was a medical doctor, Clara Swain. And the girls from the orphanage that the Butlers had set up, made up almost the entire first class of Dr. Swain's first medical students.

Denise ([00:45:17](#)):

I love that. That's so great.

Laura ([00:45:19](#)):

So you see Clementina and William back in the United States doing all these things to help support the work that they had already started. The Women's Foreign Missionary Society of the Methodists also raised funds, printed magazines, and literature. And the numbers that you see in the reports are kind of incredible. And so I just wanna read some of those numbers to you. In 1894, just a few years after they had started, I guess more than a few years, they started in 1869, uh, 1894, uh, like 25 years later, the women's board supported 151 missionaries, and 14 of them were medical missionaries. They supported 750 Bible readers, assistants and teachers, 390 day schools with 10,000 pupils, 50 boarding schools with 4,000 pupils, 11 orphanages with 450 orphans, 10 training schools with 200 students. And they also had 13 hospitals and dispensaries serving 60,000 women annually.

Denise ([00:46:24](#)):

That's crazy.

Laura ([00:46:24](#)):

So the numbers are kind of staggering when you think about what they were doing.

Denise ([00:46:29](#)):

And this was all just from the organization she started, not nationally.

Laura ([00:46:34](#)):

Yeah. So she didn't start it. I just wanna clarify. She didn't, she wasn't the only person to start it. There were eight women who were the founding members, but she was one of the ones, and yes, this is the organization that she helped start. So according to Mission historian, Dana Robert, this women's board was the most powerful women's mission organization in the late 19th and early 20th century. So the Methodist women were doing a lot of work.

Denise ([00:46:58](#)):

We have even heard Sarah, there's the, sorry, this just comes to my mind. Like, there was a, one of the women's stories that we told that were actually influenced by the Methodists, was it Isabel Kuhn was saying, Hey, if the Methodists are doing this, why can't we be doing this? Was that who it was? Do you remember?

Sarah ([00:47:17](#)):

Or was it Lottie Moon? I know Lottie Moon was kind of at this time too.

Denise ([00:47:20](#)):

Yes. Lottie Moon, that's who it was. She was like, Hey, why can we not be doing this if the Methodists are over here doing all of these things? So this would've been the Methodists who were doing all the things that inspired Lottie Moon to reach out to the Baptist and go, Hey, we can also raise money.

Laura ([00:47:36](#)):

Yeah. And so you see that happening with women across denominations. There's so much interdenominational work that goes on amongst the women, um, and across denominations. You see women embracing this idea of women's work for women, they use this as kind of a rallying cry of we're women, we can do work that women do on behalf of women and make their lives better. And all, you know, also share Christ with them. By 1890, 60% of American, the American mission force were women. And so this is a dramatic shift because at one point it was kind of unusual and new for, um, missionary wives to go. And now all of a sudden there's single women going. And so the, the numbers are skewing now towards more women because there's not as many single men that are going, there's married men and married women, and then there's a lot of single women. And so that's, that's where you see this shift happening, where the missionary force becomes, um, a greater majority of women. And according to mission historian Dana Robert, by 1900, over 40 denominational women's societies existed with 3 million active women. That's, that's a huge movement in the history of missions, in the history of the United States. And I just wanna point out this, this wasn't just happening in the United States. You also see this happening in Europe, um, amongst other evangelical, um, groups as well.

Denise ([00:49:04](#)):

And I think that the shift has, you know, actually continued because today even the majority of, you know, cross-cultural workers all over the world are comprised of women. And so this movement, you know, has not shifted since then. And, and I, I, I'm so impressed by this, uh, coming together of women and what they did to bolster people to be able to serve. And, and I would say that, you know, sometimes what we have found, even, you know, today, is that women feel the privilege to be able to serve out of their giftings better in a third world country where there's not all of those, um, cultural stipulations put on them about what they can and can't do, because the gospel is the, the great equalizer. Everybody needs it. And if men aren't willing to do it, and women are, you know, that's the one place where they feel like I can actually, you know, serve out of my giftings better here than I am able to do in my home culture. And I think that's changing some, but we still see those numbers today.

Sarah ([00:50:07](#)):

Yeah. I love, you know, with all these, the numbers and, and all of these stories, like just that idea of women supporting and cheering on other women, um, yeah, that just is so cool. There's a little part of me that's like, I, you know, that expectation of this is the work that women do, um, where I'm like, no, I wanna push it against that of, of, yeah, fitting into expectations, I guess, of what women do. But for the time it definitely makes sense.

Denise ([00:50:38](#)):

And I would say that the Velvet Ashes community like this reminds me, like women cheering on women. And so it just, like, for us, to me, that just makes my heart swell. It's just like, yes, I love that when



women are just like, how can we encourage support, lift up, enable you to do the best that you can possibly do?

Laura ([00:50:55](#)):

Yeah. And you have to remember at that time in history, it was pretty unusual to find, uh, a woman pastor or preacher or someone who was recognized by a denomination. So what the women were doing, were saying, okay, we embrace these roles that are given to us as we can be teachers, we can be educators, we can be wives, and we're just gonna press into that and do the best work that we can. Because those are the roles that are available to us right now. A little bit later in mission history, you see a little bit more pushing back against that of like, we wanna do something different and we, we can do something different. Yeah. <laugh>. So in terms of Clementina's life, she continued to be very active in this women's missionary movement. She would head up and start local branches wherever she and her husband happened to be.

Laura ([00:51:42](#)):

Um, and she continued to serve on the Methodist Women's Board. Um, and William served in various capacities as, as an evangelical leader. They really had no plans to be foreign missionaries again. But in 1873, in their fifties, they were asked to establish the Methodist mission in Mexico. Now, Protestant missions had traditionally avoided South America because there was a huge Catholic dominance there. But around this time, that began to change. So the Butlers accepted this invitation and worked in Mexico for six years, um, before coming back to the United States again. So I didn't go a lot into the history of that part of their lives, but they had two very different contexts that they had to learn and adjust to and start work in. Um, and were very successful in both places. And they had a privilege actually, of returning to both those places, um, later in their years, um, to see the fruit of their work.

Laura ([00:52:39](#)):

I mean, that doesn't happen for everyone, but they were able to go back and see, as I mentioned before, when they went back to India, they kind of tracked what happened with the original girls that they had taken in. And they saw that things had progressed beautifully. Many of the girls were Christians. In 1906, the India Mission actually celebrated, uh, a Jubilee, uh, or 50 years of being established. And Clementina well into her eighties, decided to, uh, go and be a part of that celebration. And she brought her daughter and a son with her, I believe. But during that time, they were able to dedicate a hospital there and called it the Butler Memorial Hospital in Burelli, where she originally had, she and William Butler had first started the mission and there were 3000 Christians gathered there for that celebration. So that just gives you a little bit of the scope of what they had started. And on the way back, it's interesting that her daughter mentions this in her biography, but she stopped and spent some time in England with her sister, who is then 89. So she's coming back from India, stops in, in England on her way back to the United States.

Sarah ([00:53:47](#)):

Which, yeah, it's hard enough. I was just thinking of like home assignment now where you have different states that you have to go to, like if you're in the US, uh, but for, for them, like all of these different layers of like, where, where do you stop and where do you spend your time? And it's not just, it's not just different cities or states. It's multiple countries.

Denise ([00:54:09](#)):

Different countries, you know. And Sarah, it reminds me of one of the women in our community who, she actually is Irish, but her husband got cancer and he's American and, and they served in a third country and, and when he was sick and she's contemplating, what if you die? I don't know where I belong, which country would I even go back to? And I don't have citizenship here. And, and just, you know, the complicated things that, that women that serve cross-culturally wrestle with that you don't normally have to think about.

Sarah ([00:54:40](#)):

Right. Yeah.

Laura ([00:54:42](#)):

So Clementina and Williams certainly had to navigate a lot of different places and cultures in their life, that's for sure. And, um, they did it with a lot of grace and respect for each other. One of the things that I really loved, um, seeing in the writings about them is that they displayed a great, um, mutuality in their work that it was both of them doing the work. Though William was the official appointed missionary. Clementina was equally a part of it, and, um, maybe did some greater things when they came back to the United States in terms of helping mobilize people. And both of them together were the best known Methodist missionaries during their time. And so they're influencing many, um, Methodists, but they're also working across denominational lines, and they're known, uh, in the congregational circles and in other circles. And so it's really beautiful to see that they have this mutuality between themselves, but even then across theological differences, uh, amongst Christians in the United States and other parts of the world where they served.

Laura ([00:55:44](#)):

So their legacy is just very rich in terms of that. And then the Christian churches and institutions that they helped establish in North India and Mexico, they also introduced and promoted new ways of funding and supporting missions by supporting individual children, helping send single women and organizing women to be a force in, in missions. Much to their joy some of their children actually continued their work. So John Wesley Butler one, one of the sons that was left behind when they originally went to India, he ended up taking over the Mexico mission and being the leader there for the Methodists for a great number of years. And then their youngest daughter, Clementina, was a prolific writer and promoter of Christian missionary causes. And then finally, the women's missionary movement that they were instrumental in helping start had, it was really one of the most significant social and religious movements of the 19th century.

Laura ([00:56:39](#)):

And all the work that the women in these various groups did to support education and, and medical missions and evangelical missions was, was tremendous. And again, as I said before, the women at this time became the dominant force in mission. So the Clementine and Butler was a part of all of these things. She was a humble, a humble lady, and sometimes even reluctant to speak in front of others, but when she did, she would always remind people of, of the cause of Christ and the desire to help other people know about him, and to also just uplift women in other parts of the world and help ensure that western women weren't forgetting their sisters in other countries.

Denise ([00:57:25](#)):

Whenever I hear this story and I just sit back a minute, and I think you wonder how many stories of women that have left the field are sitting in a church or sitting somewhere next to you, and you just haven't taken the time to hear that. You know? Um, and the fact that she came back and was able to still have an influence and people were, you know, wanting to hear her story and, and she didn't just sit quietly in a church, and that story just faded away. It was, it continued to be something that she perpetuated and equipped and served. And, um, I don't know. We have so many, you know, here where I am in the Midwest, there's so many people that have returned from the field, and I think about the stories that they have with them and the things that they have to offer still that if we don't take the time to ask them, we just don't know. And so I, I love because she was so unknown to me, I feel like that's what I've done today. I've gotten to sit down next to her and uncover these treasures that I would've had no idea about if we hadn't sat down together today.

Sarah ([00:58:28](#)):

Well, and Denise, I feel like that's something you've said before that, that I think about a lot that sometimes our time serving cross-culturally is just the start of the story. You know, we can look at it and think, well, that is the story, and now I have no purpose. Right? Or, or, you know, whatever. And yet, sometimes it's just the beginning and, and what, what else does God have for us? Or, or how is God going to use our experiences and the lessons that we learned while serving cross-culturally to continue to impact, um, his kingdom for his glory? So I love seeing the way that, that Clementina did that, you know, how she used maybe the things that she saw and, and heard and and her passion for her work, um, to then have such a huge influence.

Denise ([00:59:16](#)):

I totally agree. Hey, Laura, thank you for bringing and introducing Clementina to us.

Laura ([00:59:21](#)):

Yeah, my pleasure. I'm, I'm excited to, to see, um, where we go next too.

Denise ([00:59:28](#)):

Oh, me too. I was like, shall we do this again next month? Geek out over the women who shaped the history of missions <laugh> I'm in. Well, ladies, I am so grateful for those of you that took the time to join us today. I hope you were blessed by getting to meet Clementina and I would love to know what you take away from this story. And, and we hope that no matter where you're at, whether you are just receiving this as someone who will never go to the mission field themselves, or if you are currently serving, or, or if you are one of those people who are looking at your time of service in the rearview mirror, we hope that this story has been encouraging to you and, and we hope that you remember until next time, you may be living the story that will inspire the courage for someone else's legacy. Thanks for joining us.