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Jewell Leggett and the Social Curriculum: The Education of a Southern Baptist Woman Missionary at the WMU Training School, 1908-1909

T. Laine Scales

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Jewell Leggett was twenty-four years old in 1908 when she traveled from her home in Port Lavaca, Texas, to enter the Woman’s Missionary Union Training School (WMUTS) at Louisville, Kentucky.

Jewell planned to be a missionary and had the credentials to be a perfect candidate for the Southern Baptist mission field: the daughter of a Baptist “cowboy preacher”; a graduate of coeducational Baylor University, in Waco, Texas; and a lifetime member of Woman’s Missionary Union (WMU), auxiliary to the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC).

The new WMUTS had been opened officially for one year when Jewell arrived, and the school operated as a coordinate of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Women students took advantage of selected classes with seminary men while also participating in a separate “women’s curriculum” made up of courses that Southern Baptist leaders considered appropriate for female students. This article focuses on the “social curriculum” that operated alongside the formal curriculum to prepare
women students like Jewell for circumscribed roles in Southern Baptist life. Drawing from Jewell’s diaries written at the Training School, between November 1908 and May 1909, as well as her diaries from her first four years on the mission field in China, 1910–1914, the following pages outline several lessons Jewell learned from the social curriculum of the Training School: expectations for Southern Baptist women in domestic life, polite society, personal work, and public speaking. The article also will describe briefly how she used lessons from the Training School social curriculum in her work with women and children in China.

A Typical Student?
A brief description of Jewell’s background provides a context for her reactions to the social curriculum. In many ways, she was a typical Training School student. She was a Southern white woman who came from a Baptist family of modest means. Most Training School students were, like Jewell, from rural communities. Most had previously attended college although in Jewell’s era, the Training School only required that students have an eighth-grade education. Since the majority of Training School students had previously attended college, they were often older than women at other higher education institutions. The school did not admit students younger than twenty years of age nor older than thirty-nine, since the Foreign Mission Board (FMB) discouraged women in their late thirties from going overseas.¹

Although Jewell had much in common with other Training School students, she had experienced in Texas a socialization in terms of gender roles that was different from some of her classmates. Patricia Martin documented the more lenient practices in early twentieth-century Texas regarding women’s roles in Baptist life.² Jewell’s diary from her student days at the co-educational Baylor University demonstrated her engagement in more egalitarian roles for male and female students, particularly through the Baylor Foreign Mission Band.³ In Kentucky, hoping to please the teachers and WMU leaders associated with the Training School, Jewell successfully met the expectations of the social curriculum. However, her diary revealed her discomfort with and anxiety about certain elements of the social curriculum, particularly when Training School practices differed from her previous experiences in Texas.

In early November, Jewell arrived in Louisville by train, one month late for the 1908–1909 term. In the year prior to heading to Louisville, she had taught at a Christian academy in Goodnight, a town located in the Texas Panhandle.⁴ Jewell did not specify in her diary why she arrived late, but she did note the extra studying she had to do in order to catch up; the first exams were just after Thanksgiving. Although she intended to complete a two-year course, Jewell would leave the school after one year, following her appointment by the FMB to serve in Pingu, China.

The strong background Jewell had in biblical subjects from her Baylor days provided a solid foundation for her continued biblical and theological studies. She reported in her diary that there were three hundred male students at the seminary and thirty-three women students at the Training School.⁵ Not all classes at the seminary, however, were open to female students. In an effort to assure Southern Baptists that women were not being prepared to preach, seminary professors and Training School founders had created a “women’s curriculum in 1904 that excluded women from Greek, Hebrew, and homiletics courses.”⁶ This restriction represented a narrowing of choices for Jewell, since she had already studied Greek as an undergraduate.

Learning about the Woman Missionary’s Role in Domestic Life
At the Training School, no tuition was charged but students paid three dollars per week for board, a furnished room, and utilities. Students performed domestic duties that kept operating costs to a minimum.⁷ Churches and mission organizations donated food items such as home-canned goods, hams, and other produce.

When the Training School was adopted by WMU in 1907, the SBC’s Sunday School Board donated $20,500 toward the purchase of a three-story brick house that would serve as both school and home for the women. This house was located at 334 East Broadway, a few blocks away from the
Jewell Legett and the Social Curriculum

The matron and teachers gave lessons in sewing, cooking, and setting the table. McLure stated that sewing lessons benefitted the student herself and helped her “learn the best method for teaching children and ignorant mothers how to sew.” Students learned to prepare a diet for invalids so that, as missionaries, they might properly care for the sick. The Training School intended to prepare women to manage their own households as well as function as women missionaries. When Jewell arrived in China, she found herself living in a home called “House 0’ Joy” with two other single missionary women, Florence Jones and Eila Jeter. Each of the housemates had been a student at the Training School, and all would have been accustomed to the same domestic routine. In addition to maintaining their own homes, missionary women used a domestic framework for evangelization. As Patricia Hill notes, they considered “the world their household,” and Jewell passed on to Chinese women and girls the lessons of hygiene and household care that she had learned at the Training School.

Learning about the Woman Missionary’s Role in “Polite Society”

When visitors came to the Training School, students had an opportunity to observe the principal and teachers in the role of hostess. Students were encouraged to develop their own skills in hospitality by planning parties. Through the years, a tea for married couples of the seminary became an annual event, as well as a party for single men living in the dormitory. The ability to organize and host such entertainment was considered an important part of the social curriculum: “Any girl who has lived here a year must have learned . . . how to have a pretty ‘party’ without extravagance . . . . To serve afternoon tea charmingly is no small accomplishment, and to have everything delicious and up-to-date, yet inexpensive, is invaluable knowledge for any social or religious worker.”

Though the curriculum was designed to prepare women to entertain in their own homes, Jewell resisted doing so on the mission field, perhaps sensing that such fancy entertainment was not practical for missionary life. She also associated the role of hostess with being married. While she
admittedly had a "right nice time" at a reception given by the wives of 
seminary professors, she declared "these fashionable teas get me. Never 
will give one when, cr...if I am married."20

Elite WMU women visited the Training School often, creating and 
representing the ideals of Southern Baptist womanhood. However, the 
school's principal, Maude McLure modeled for students the refined 
and gracious "Southern Lady." McLure had no formal training in mission work, 
which may account for the impracticality of the "polite culture" curriculum 
she and the founders designed. Yet, Jewell admired her greatly. When 
describing McLure's hosting at a tea, Jewell described her as a model who 
embodied the "Southern Lady" ideal, yet was who was approachable.21 "She 
is one of these women who carries with her that indefinable air of refine-
ment and graciousness that has made woman loved and revered down the 
ages. There was such a sweetness about her as she went about that we 
wanted to gather around her and hug her tight. She introduced every one 
of us with the name and state and some dear remark."22

McLure was responsible for teaching the students to behave as ladies, 
and Jewell struggled to live up to the ideal. While serving punch at a 
Christmas party, Jewell was "pretty badly embarrassed" when McLure 
admonished, "Child! Look at your sash!" Lacking enough ribbon to tie 
around her waist, Jewell had economically tied several pieces together. "I 
looked and it was untied one end hanging from one piece part, the other 
from the other. I reached down and retied it, as nonchalantly as you please, 
but I sure felt funny."23

The curricular focus on polite culture as an important component of 
the educational process was typical in women's colleges established across 
the South, where students were required to entertain guests from the 
community in their elegant parlors.24 "Training School women who came from 
single-sex colleges of the Old South would have participated in this tradi-
tion, perhaps receiving company as often as once per week. However, as a 
graduate of a co-educational school in the Southwest, Jewell's college life 
was much less focused on *cultivating polite society." She may have attend-
ed an occasional "soiree" held at Baylor University, but instead of the fancy 
women's teas held at women's colleges in the Old South, Jewell's college 
activities had been co-educational events. The frolicking senior picnics for 
both men and women students better suited her fun-loving nature.25

Jewell Legett and the Social Curriculum

When she arrived at the Training School, Jewell was not accustomed 
to receiving company in formal settings, and she found herself becoming 
anxious when asked to be a server at an important reception. She wanted 
to please the faculty and be a good hostess for the visiting WMU women, 
yet she expressed her worries in her diary, "Sure as fate, I'll spill the salad 
or coffee or pour ice tea down some dear sister's neck."26 When the day 
came, Jewell did a fine job in spite of her nervousness. That night in her 
diary she recorded, "Mrs. Eager whispered to me during the dinner that we 
were serving beautifully, which cheered my feelings considerably, since 
my soul was heavy with the fear of unpardonable crimes committed in the 
serving."27 By the time the two-day event was over, Jewell was exhausted 
from playing the role of a "Southern Lady." She wrote, "My face literally 
aches from the company smile I have worn continuously for two days."28

While the Training School's social curriculum for women empha-
sized "the company smile," Jewell's more practical instincts about the limited 
use of hosting skills for a missionary were accurate. On the mission 
field, she found little use for knowledge about how to host a tea party. In 
Pingtou, China, an area known for its famines, Jewell lived a simple life and 
worried more about helping to feed the starving than about the drooping 
of her pieced-together sash. In spite of its impracticality for missionaries, 
the "polite society" curriculum persisted at the Training School well into the 
1920s.29

Learning about the Woman Missionary's Role 
in "Personal Service"

One of the most useful courses in the formal curriculum for a woman 
missionary was practical work, a course which formed the basis of a social 
work curriculum developed later at the Training School.30 Practical work 
was launched in 1904 by seminary professor W. O. Carver, but by the time 
Jewell enrolled in 1908, McLure was teaching the course. Jewell recorded 
in her diary McLure's prayer for the class: "Lord help them win souls as 
long as they have breath in their bodies."31

The school taught methods of soul-winning that reflected Southern 
Baptist practices regarding "women's work." The terms "practical work," 
"personal work," and "personal service" were all used to describe feminine 
methods of evangelism that differed from masculine forms in several ways.
First, men typically preached in their efforts to win souls, but preaching was a prohibited practice for Southern Baptist women. Second, while men were entitled to evangelize anyone, women were expected to evangelize only women and children, which narrowed the field of prospects. Women's mission societies expressed this idea in the slogan: "woman's mission to woman." Finally, women's approach to evangelism included social services to individuals while men primarily dealt with groups in a preaching context. The WMU adopted the term "personal service" in 1909 to describe women's method of evangelism that incorporated social services and carried a feminine distinction.33

In the practical work course, first-year students like Jewell studied "Christ's methods in winning souls," and during the second year, they focused on "relief problems, settlement and welfare work." Texts included How to Work for Christ, by the evangelist R. A. Torrey, and Principles of Relief, by social work educator Edward T. Devine. Jewell was impressed when Torrey came to Louisville to deliver a lecture.34

Students supplemented their courses with field work in agencies and churches in Louisville, and after 1912, in their own settlement house. Some of the organizations in which students did field work through the years included: King's Daughters Home for Incurables, Masonic Orphans Home, City Alms House, and the Union Gospel Mission, where Jewell was assigned.35

Field work was designed for the novice missionary to practice what she was learning in the classroom. On Saturday afternoons, Jewell worked at the Union Gospel Mission where she helped to design a curriculum for the Industrial School, an adult education evening school offered to laborers. Some of her tasks included planning work for the classes and "making the model books."36 As a former teacher, Jewell was familiar with these educational tasks, but she was less confident when completing home visits. This type of "friendly visiting" was an expected role for Southern Baptist women, and Jewell had grown up observing her mother, Alice Legett, a strong model for such personal service. However, Jewell was not as comfortable in this role and found herself in fear; as some of the neighborhoods were "dangerous ones, though we didn't know it at the time." On December 5, 1908, she wrote, "Never was I so scared in my life as I was once this afternoon." "We girls go into all sorts of places. I've gone to some where my heart quaked."37 On February 13, 1909, Jewell noted that she did not enjoy the visiting much and declared, "I am not fashioned for that work." Discovering her strengths and limitations was part of the process of learning. Admiring her mother's gift for "just such a work" she wished her mother were here to go with her every Saturday. She is made for just such work as that, and I surely am not. She can meet people and make them love her and trust her right at once. That is my mother's most distinctive trait, I think, and I'd give the world if I had inherited it, if I were as great a "commoner" as she... It is what every one who would do mission work needs. Mamma could help me so much if she were here, and I wish she were.39

In addition to her mother, Jewell had another great role model for practical work: her teacher Emma Leachman, who managed the field work. Jewell admired Leachman, as she did McIlroy, but Jewell's diary descriptions revealed that Leachman modeled for students a different prototype than the refined and gracious "Southern Lady." Leachman represented the poor but dedicated evangelical servant with a big heart. In contrast to the founders and the principal, teachers like Leachman came from families of modest means. Born in Washington County Kentucky, she had worked in Louisville at the Baptist Orphans Home and the Hope Rescue Mission; in 1904 Kentucky Baptists appointed her as a "city missionary." She lived at the Training School and received an honorarium of $100 per year to supervise student work.40

Jewell went to observe a session of juvenile court as part of her field work and wrote of Leachman's work:

Dear Miss Leachman, she goes with her people through their every trial literally. She sees that their babies are buried and her heart breaks with mother's hearts when boys are sent to jail, penitentiary, reform school, or when they are killed in drunken brawls. When their cases come into
Learning about the Woman's Role in Public Speech

The Training School's formal curriculum included one course on public speech, an elocution course, which Jewell playfully called "Yellocation," as the women were reminded often to speak loudly. In spite of Jewell's playfulness with the course title, the issue of public speaking for Southern Baptists was no laughing matter. At the Training School, Jewell would learn some hard lessons about the differences in public speaking practices at the Training School and in her home state of Texas.

In 1905-06 the Training School founders fought for the new school to be established against the will of opponents who feared that the school would prepare women preachers. McLure continued to reassure Southern Baptists that women students were taught to make speeches exclusively to other women. The faculty set the example by arranging for male seminary faculty members to deliver the commencement addresses for women graduates so that the principal did not address a mixed audience of graduates' parents and friends. In contrast to other students, Jewell had a solid foundation of public speaking experiences from her days in the Mission Band at Baylor where she and other women students had regularly delivered academic papers to mixed audiences. While presenting a paper to an audience of men and women was an unusual practice for Southern Baptist women of this era, Patricia Martin argued that Southern Baptists in Texas were more lenient than the rest of the denomination with regard to women's public speaking.

When she arrived in Kentucky, Jewell learned about the more conservative practices of the majority of Southern Baptists. Yet, one Sunday in January, Jewell "disgraced the Training School" by doing the unthinkable in a local Baptist church: she addressed the congregation of Highland Baptist Church. She had gone to visit the church when her former Baylor professor, Dr. Doolan, was preaching. That day, a guest speaker from China, moved Jewell so much that she felt she was receiving a call from God to go as a missionary to China. In an excited state, she walked to the front of the church during the traditional "altar call," "and I told him [Dr. Doolan] that I wanted to say a few words. And I told those great-bright-hearted Kentucky people the whole story, [about feeling called to China] right out, as the words came to me." Later in the afternoon Jewell realized her mistake,

court Miss Leachman stays until the sentence is pronounced, and then on during the next hard days. She supplies food and coal and clothing to those that are needy. Never a sorrow comes into their lives, or ours [students], that Miss Leachman is not there and yearning to share it.41

After initial skepticism, Jewell was surprised one Saturday in March when "the work at the Industrial School, for a wonder, was pleasant." She and her classmate Penny made two visits that day to a young man who was "in the very last days of consumption," and an older woman who was cheerful in spite of her suffering with rheumatism. "That visit did me a world of good." Jewell wrote.42

By the end of the term, Jewell had come to appreciate her field work and had learned something about herself in the process of struggling through this difficult course. On May 9, 1909, after a satisfying day of home visitation, she wrote: "Now that it is almost time to give up our missions, we hate to do it. Time was when I didn't get much pleasure out of it; but--when will I learn the lesson?"43

Jewell did indeed learn the lesson. Her instincts told her that in contrast to the fashionable teas that were not much use in China, the home visitation experience would become an essential part of her mission work. There she would follow the models established by her predecessors in Shantung Province. Martha Foster Crawford and Lottie Moon had pioneered the home visitation methods that Jewell and her female colleagues imitated.44 After several years in China, Jewell would eventually become as proficient in friendly visitation among women and children as her mother and her teacher. As in Kentucky, the personal approach of women missionaries in China differed from evangelistic techniques of men. Historian Jane Hunter noted that male missionaries in China typically preached to gathered crowds, while women used "an effusion of encouragement and love on the part of the missionary, manifested in soulful eye contact and frequently a held hand."45 Jewell had seen these differences reinforced in the Training School's social curriculum. While her male counterparts at the seminary had been studying homiletics, Jewell's field work experiences taught her that home visitation work was more appropriate for women missionaries.
O I never thought till this minute what I have done. I've disgraced the Training School and Dr. Doolan's church, and myself. I forgot in my happiness that women never speak in mixed audiences in Kentucky. But on reflection I was glad I had done it, and I knew Dr. Doolan knew conditions in Texas and knew I really did forget. The fact was that I couldn't get over the wonder of it all.

That evening, Jewell rushed to tell McLure what had happened, perhaps in fear of being reprimanded. Jewell was relieved when the principal was happy that Jewell had found her calling, 'even if I had talked out in meetin'.' As a missionary, Jewell would be able to return to the more lenient practices she had learned in Texas. On furlough in Texas in 1916, she spoke to men and women of the next generation of missionaries associated with the Baylor Foreign Mission Band. With such opportunities to address mixed audiences both before and after her Training School days, Jewell's Louisville experience was a short one-year hiatus in her long career of public speaking to men and women in the course of her mission work.

The Student Becomes a Missionary

By creating a social curriculum in which women learned to be housekeepers, hostesses, and friendly visitors, while limiting public speaking to audiences of women and children only, the Training School assured the denomination that a woman missionary would stay in the sphere to which she had been appointed by God. Jewell Leggett demonstrated in her diary her uneasiness with aspects of the social curriculum. She recorded how housekeeping and hosting duties added stress to her academic schedule, while friendly visiting made her uneasy, at least until she gained experience. She violated expectations of the public speaking curriculum when she spoke out in church, but was forgiven for her mistake and reassured by Dr. Doolan and others who also came from Texas where practices were more lenient. As she sailed for China in September 1910, Jewell would take with her many lessons from the WMU Training School intended to prepare women for their limited sphere within the Southern Baptist denomination. She practiced these lessons in China, often in partnership with other Training School graduates.

1. For a composite portrait of Training School students, see T. Lula Scales, All the Firs a Woman (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2000), 67-100.
3. Diary, Jewell Leggett, copy in author's possession, January 1, 1908 (hereafter cited as JL diary).
5. Ibid, March 5, 1909.
6. Faculty minutes, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, April 23, 1904.
10. JL Diary, February 1, 1909.
12. Ibid, 70-71,117-2, 223-38
15. JL Diary, February 3, 1909.
18. Littlejohn, History of Career School of Missions, 57-58.
19. Mrs. Robertson, Clipping, [Royal Service, 1917], Historical Scrapbook, TSC, SMTS.
20. JL Diary, December 4, 1908.
22. JL diary, December 24, 1908.
23. Ibid.
27. Ibid, May 12, 1909.
28. Ibid.
30. See Catalogue, WMUETS, 1914-18, 1922-23 for development of a social work curriculum.
The Quiet Revolutionary:
Amelia Morton Bishop

Barrett Kent Border and Dan Gentry Kent

Barrett Kent Border is a former catalog librarian at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas. Dan Gentry Kent is retired professor of Old Testament and Hebrew Studies at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas.

Following is the story of a simple Texas housewife, mother, sometime denominational worker (especially in the Woman’s Missionary Union-WMU), church volunteer, school teacher, university professor, and free-lance writer. That woman, Amelia Morton Bishop, now lives in Austin, Texas. To our way of thinking, she is a quiet revolutionary.