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Digital Library of Georgia (March 2022)

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Digital Library of Georgia (March 2022)

The Mission Messenger Is Now Available Freely Online

19th- and 20th-century issues from the journal of the largest group of Protestant women in the world are now available freely online. Mercer University Special Collections and Archives have partnered with the Digital Library of Georgia (DLG) to digitize Mercer's run of the [Mission Messenger](#) from 1895–1921, published monthly by the Woman's Baptist Missionary Union of Georgia (WBMU), more commonly known today as simply the [Woman's Missionary Union \(WMU\)](#).

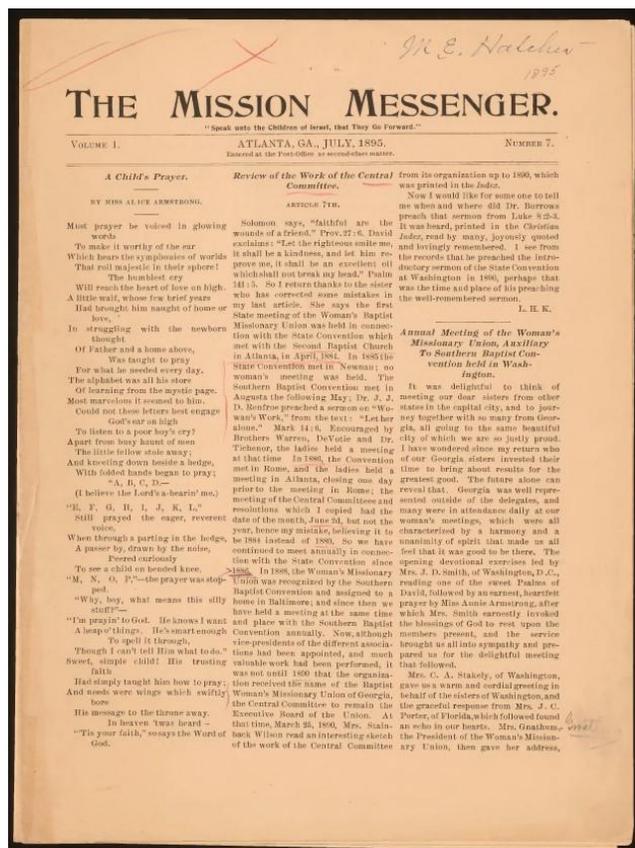


Image courtesy of Mercer University Archives and Special Collections

The Mission Messenger was digitized and described as part of the DLG's [competitive digitization subgrant program](#), broadening partner participation amongst nonprofit cultural heritage institutions across the state. The collection was transferred to Mercer directly by the WMU, making it likely the most complete run of the Mission Messenger for the period.

Starting from a handful of women in 1888 as the WBMU, the organization became the largest Protestant group for women in the world, with a membership of approximately one million. It was also the first—and remains the largest—body of organized laity in the Southern Baptist Convention.

Women's organizations like the WBMU played a significant role in American life during the 19th and early 20th centuries, mobilizing women to raise money for Southern Baptist missions worldwide.

Written contributions to the *Mission Messenger* came from a broad variety of WBMU members across the state. One of its most famous contributors was [Mary Emily Wright Wilbur](#), a notable female leader of fin de siècle Georgia and the first member of WBMU leadership, who served as one of the publication's early editors from 1899–1906.

Although consigned to the private sphere of the home by law and custom, women influenced the public sphere of policy and society through organizations dedicated to causes such as temperance, poverty relief, antislavery, and suffrage, among others.

Reports from local church chapters, adult and children's programming suggestions, letters to

the editor, financial reports, fundraising drives, Bible studies, and reports from Southern Baptist missionaries worldwide were regular features of the magazine and described how Georgia women viewed the world and demonstrated Georgia's influence across the globe.

Issues of the *Mission Messenger* show how Georgians responded to significant historical events, including:

- the Spanish–American War
- World War I
- the flu pandemic of 1918
- the Women's Suffrage Movement

These issues are also a valued resource for scholars interested in:

- 19th and early 20th-century women's history
- Baptist history
- Georgia history
- the history of 19th-century international Baptists missions

Genealogists will also find this collection valuable because of the articles and entries documenting individual members and contributors.

Beth Ann Williams, the current executive director of the WMU, emphasizes the importance of the *Mission Messenger's* digitization:

What began as a small number of missionary societies in Georgia Baptist churches has grown into women's ministries and missions discipleship for all ages for 3,600 churches. A digitized *Mission Messenger* provides widespread and easy access to state and church women's leadership. [They] would be able to read

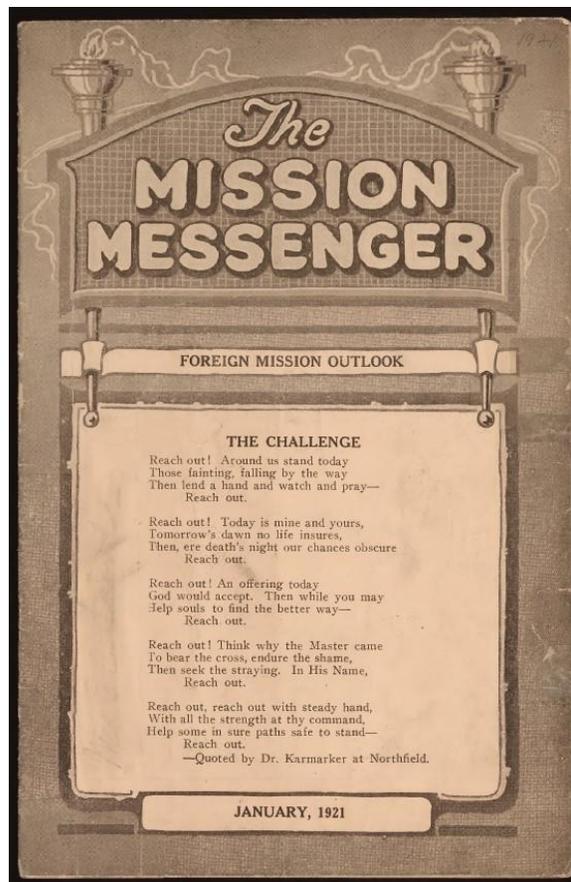


Image courtesy of Mercer University Archives and Special Collections

firsthand about the successes, struggles, challenges, and accomplishments of the WBMU. What a valuable and interesting source to help highlight the early years of missionary giving and serving that was done by and through Georgia Baptist women.

View the full collection online at https://dlg.usg.edu/collection/mercer_col-10898-12395

Mandy L. Mastrovita is a digital projects librarian and archivist with the University of Georgia Libraries