

heritage_women_60203

May 31, 2003

Posted: 5/30/03

Heritage: Baptist women can thank pioneer pair for opening doors

By Ken Camp

Texas Baptist Communications

BELTON—A pair of Texas Baptist pioneers opened doors for women in missions and education, according to panelists at a recent meeting of the Baptist History & Heritage Society.

Rosalie Beck, an associate professor in the religion department at Baylor University in Waco, and Portia Sikes McKown, administrator at the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor in Belton, participated in a panel discussion about Baptist women on the frontier.

Beck examined the contributions of frontier missionary Mina Everett, and McKown described Elli Moore Townsend's role in providing educational opportunities for women—particularly poor young women—on the Texas frontier.

**See Related
Stories:**

- [Heritage: Baptists need new ethics 'scouts,' Tillman tells gathering of historians](#)
- [Heritage: Baptist women can thank pioneer pair for opening doors](#)
 - [Heritage: Dissenters maintain 'good company'](#)

“Mina's life was filled with firsts,” Beck observed. Everett's time in Brazil marked her as the first single woman missionary appointed by the Southern Baptist Convention's Foreign Mission Board for service in the western hemisphere.

She went on to be appointed the first paid missionary in Texas to work with Hispanics and the first female missionary employed by the state missions arm of the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

In 1889, she became corresponding secretary and organizer for the Baptist Woman's Mission Workers in Texas, the first paid woman staff worker for Woman's Missionary Union in any state. The SBC's mission boards and the BGCT jointly provided her salary.

“Mina's employment with the state and Southern Baptist Convention boards ended because of her willingness to speak to mixed audiences in an effort to raise support for and consciousness of missions. Through her time as a BGCT employee, some powerful pastors criticized her 'forwardness' in

speaking to both men and women,” Beck said.

One of Everett's most outspoken critics was B.H. Carroll, pastor of First Baptist Church in Waco and later the founder of the Baylor University religion department and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

“Although First Baptist Waco had women deacons, in Carroll's public statements he did not support women in ministry,” Beck noted. Carroll was chair of the BGCT state missions board in 1895 when that body voted to forbid Everett from speaking in public meetings “because such action was unseemly for a woman.”

Leaders among Baptist women in Texas convinced Everett to leave the state so they could argue in principle for a permanent Texas Baptist staff position for women's mission work, without getting entangled in personality conflicts.

“Mina Everett succeeded in many areas of her frontier work, but she crashed on the ministry barrier between genders in Victorian Texas. She always believed that one day, no barriers would separate God's people in their work for and worship of the Lord,” Beck said.

Likewise, Elli Moore Townsend opened up new vistas educationally for “girls of ambition and limited funds,” McKown observed.

She served as “lady principal” and presiding teacher for 12 years at Baylor Female College, now the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor. In the early 1890s, she launched Cottage Home, where poor but deserving students could live while working their way through school by milking cows, tending the garden and keeping house in exchange for college tuition and expenses.

When money for Cottage Home ran short in 1893, she sold a silver box of heirloom jewelry to buy groceries for the girls who lived there. After she married E.G. Townsend, dean and Bible teacher at the school, together the couple developed a cottage system of seven homes.

“Elli Moore Townsend was certainly an incredible lady who was a legend in her own time,” McKown said. “Strong-willed and determined from youth, she set out to help educate young women of her time and those to follow through the Cottage Home System, considered a forerunner of the modern work study program in college.”

News of religion, faith, missions, Bible study and Christian ministry among Texas Baptist churches, in the BGCT, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and around the world.