

# Review: Charlotte Atlee White Rowe

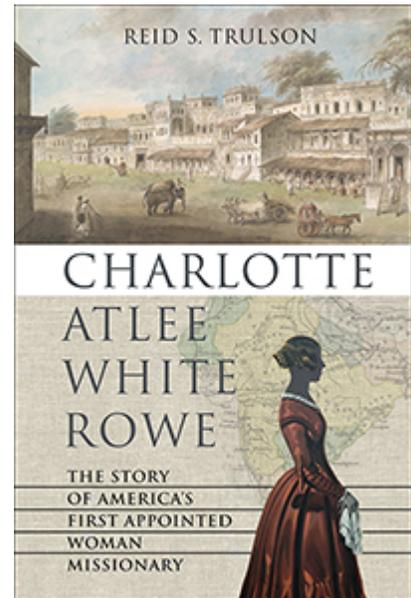
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## *Charlotte Atlee White Rowe: The Story of America's First Appointed Woman Missionary*

**By Reid S. Trulson (Mercer University Press)**

Reading the words “Charlotte” and “Woman Missionary” brings to mind Charlotte Moon, namesake of the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering, who served in China from 1873 to 1912. However, few could name the first female “officially appointed ... by any denomination or mission agency.”

In *Charlotte Atlee White Rowe: The Story of America's First Appointed Woman Missionary*, Reid Trulson, retired executive director of American Baptist International Ministries, chronicles the other Charlotte, whose service and controversial appointment in 1815 have been largely overlooked and “written out of history.”



Charlotte Hazen Atlee was born July 13, 1782, the 11th and final child of

Pennsylvania Supreme Court justice, who was Episcopalian. Sadly, Charlotte's mother passed away before her 8th birthday, and three years later, her father died from yellow fever. Although much of her early life is a mystery, Charlotte probably lived with her oldest sister and was well educated.

In 1803, she married Nathaniel Hazen White, a Congregationalist. Her happiness was short-lived when Nathaniel died on Christmas Day 1804, and their baby boy followed five months later.

The 22-year-old widow searched Scripture and joined Haverhill Baptist Church. Over time, she answered God's call to missions. Missionary wives like Ann Judson were considered "assistant missionaries," and both in Britain and the United States, single female volunteers were expected to marry.

Charlotte White's appointment by the newly formed Baptist Board of Foreign Missions in Philadelphia was miraculous, scandalous and ultimately reversed. Nevertheless, at her own expense, she sailed with Phebe and George Hough for India in 1815, a year before a resolution passed that no more single women would be appointed.

Once in India, Charlotte fell in love with British missionary Joshua Rowe, a widower with three sons. The two married in Calcutta in June 1816. Intelligent and a gifted linguist, "educational missionary" Charlotte learned Hindi, taught, wrote and cared for her family. American Baptist records show she resigned in 1816, although her correspondence indicates she did not. Her status with the British Society was never clear, but she continued to serve.

She bore twin daughters and a son. Joshua died at age 41 in October 1823, leaving his widow to continue mission work and care for six children ages seven months to 17 years. Three years later, without support, Charlotte

made arrangements in India for Joshua's sons and sailed for England at her own expense.

She hoped to be appointed by the British Missionary Society, but in spite of strong recommendations, they would not engage a woman. Instead, they provided one-time payments of £45 for her children and £100 for her. She had to raise funds to travel back to America, where she supported her family as a teacher and actively participated in female missionary societies.

Charlotte Rowe died on Christmas Day 1863 at age 82 and was buried two days later in an unmarked grave. However, she left her mark through those she taught in India and with her Hindi spelling book that long outlived her, as did her articles and children's books shedding light on the practices of widows throwing themselves on funeral pyres and putting the elderly out to die. The stepsons she raised left their own fingerprints on the country.

Because of gender-bias, Charlotte didn't walk through open doors herself, but she left the door ajar for appointment of missionary wives, funding for widows and official appointment of all women, married and single. Thankfully, Reid Trulson's meticulous research and engaging narrative help write Charlotte Atlee White Rowe back into missions history where she belongs.

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