

150 Years of Baptist Women in Ontario & Quebec



Since 1876, women across Ontario and Quebec have been growing in faith and responding to the needs of the world around them.

Through prayer, generosity, leadership, and service, they have supported missions, strengthened churches, advocated for justice, and built communities of care—locally and globally.

This gallery highlights moments, movements, and milestones from across those 150 years.

Each story reflects a shared calling:
to follow Jesus, and to respond faithfully—right where we are.

Sources & Acknowledgement:

Adapted from *Our Heritage Becomes Our Challenge: A Scrapbook History of the Baptist Women's Movement in Ontario and Quebec* by Esther Barnes, along with CBWOQ archival materials and annual reports.

As a boy growing up in Elgin County, Ontario, A. V. Timpany planted a small apple tree and claimed it as his “missionary tree.” He believed that one day his life would belong to God’s work in the world.

That simple act became a quiet symbol of the calling that would shape his life.

As a young man, Timpany wrestled deeply with surrendering himself to God’s service. Eventually he and his wife, Jane, left Canada to join American Baptist missionaries working in India. There they helped establish new mission work among communities that had little access to education or the Christian message.

During his only furlough to Canada, Timpany travelled across Ontario and Quebec sharing what he had witnessed. One burden weighed heavily on his heart: the situation of women and girls in India.

At the time, many people believed educating girls was unnecessary—or even dangerous. When missionaries invited fathers to send their daughters to school, some responded with disbelief: “Teach girls to read? Better go and teach the donkeys to read.”

Yet change was already beginning. A small school started by missionary Mary McLaurin on her verandah grew from just three students to more than 250.

Moved by these stories, Timpany gathered influential Baptist women in meetings in Toronto and Montreal. He challenged them to support mission work among women in India.

They responded.

From those early gatherings grew a movement of Baptist women committed to prayer, generosity, and global mission—fruit from seeds planted long before.

A Missionary Tree



A YOUNG MAN’S PRAYER
THAT WOULD BEAR FRUIT
AROUND THE WORLD

During his visit to Canada, A. V. Timpany spoke passionately about the lives of women in India. Their struggles weighed heavily on his heart, and he challenged the women of Canadian Baptist churches to respond.

“What can I say to the Christian women of my native land,” he asked, “that will move them to greater interest for the salvation of their Hindu sisters—unwelcomed at their birth, enslaved as wives, accursed as widows, and unlamented when they die?”

Then came his challenge:

“Will you not organize? Can you not give one short hour each month... to talk and plan and pray together for your Telugu sisters?”

The response was immediate.

“We will at once arise and organize!” Baptist women declared.

Women across Ontario began forming mission circles, gathering monthly to pray, learn about the work in India, and support missionaries. Each woman was asked to contribute two cents a week—a small but sacrificial gift in a time when many women had little income of their own.

Within a year, mission circles had formed in 30 Ontario churches, raising more than \$1,000 for the work in India. Soon similar circles appeared across Eastern Ontario and Quebec.

In the years that followed, these women:

- sent missionaries such as Mary Jane Frith and Isobel Hatch to India
- supported Indian Biblewomen who shared the gospel with other women
- opened schools for girls
- and launched a magazine, *The Canadian Missionary Link*, to connect supporters with the work.

What began with a challenge became a movement—women praying, giving, and working together for mission around the world.

A Compelling Call



WOMEN RISE TO A
NEW MISSION

Susan Moulton McMaster believed deeply that education should prepare women “to do good.”

Born into a prominent New England Baptist family, Susan’s faith took root early. As a young student, she was influenced by educator Mary Lyon, whose vision for Christian higher education for women left a lasting impression. It was a vision Susan would carry with her throughout her life.

After settling in Toronto with her husband, Senator John McMaster, Susan became known for her gracious hospitality and strong sense of purpose. Their home on Bloor Street was not only a place of influence, but a gathering space for ideas, faith, and service.

In 1878, Susan was among a group of women who gathered to hear missionary A. V. Timpany’s urgent call to respond to the needs of women in India. Within hours, those women organized the Women’s Baptist Foreign Missionary Society of Ontario West, and Susan was chosen as its first president.

With wisdom and quiet strength, she helped guide the new society through its earliest days—encouraging women to step forward in faith, even amid resistance to their leadership.

After her husband’s death, Susan found herself with an unexpected opportunity. Unable to sell her Bloor Street mansion, she chose instead to offer it for a greater purpose. Remembering Mary Lyon’s vision, she gave the home to be used as a college for women.

In 1888, Moulton Ladies’ College opened its doors—shaping generations of young women in faith, character, and leadership. Susan herself visited often, offering encouragement and wise counsel. Students remembered that “her presence was like sunshine, and her words a benediction.”

Through both mission and education, Susan McMaster helped cultivate a legacy that continues to bear fruit.

*Susan Moulton
McMaster
(1819–1916)*



A VISION FOR WOMEN'S
LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING

"The gift of consecrated and dynamic leadership was given to Mrs. Parson to a remarkable degree."
—Mrs. E. Gordon Blackadar, 1941

In 1889, as Lizzie Parson travelled by horse and buggy through the Ottawa Valley, she noticed an abandoned Baptist church in Beckwith, Ontario. The building had fallen into such disuse that it was being used as a sheep pen. Lizzie resolved then and there to reclaim it.

When she learned the Baptist Home Mission Board had no funds for the project, she turned to the women of the church. On November 14, 1889, eleven young women gathered around a small heater in the basement of First Baptist Church, Ottawa. Lizzie's mother chaired the meeting and invited each woman to pray for God's guidance. Some had never prayed aloud before, but "with tears in their eyes and trembling voices," they asked for God's blessing—and it came.

That evening marked the beginning of the Women's Baptist Home Missionary Society of Eastern Ontario and Quebec.

As corresponding secretary for the next 26 years, Lizzie became a driving force behind the movement. She urged women to pray, give, and work for mission both at home and abroad. Their first project—the Beckwith church—was repaired, reopened, and soon thriving, with a summer student pastor and new believers being baptized.

Lizzie's final vision focused on Ottawa's growing Slavic community. In 1916, Baptist women quickly organized a mission to serve these new Canadians. Within a year, they established the Parson Memorial Fund and built a permanent mission—continuing the work Lizzie had begun.

Her legacy lives on wherever women gather, pray, and act in faith together.

*Lizzie
Parson
(1862-1916)*



THE WOMAN WHO GATHERED
OTHERS TO THE WORK

“Rise up, ye women that are at ease...
hear my voice.”
—Isaiah 32:9

Sarah Isabel Hatch was the first missionary to India supported entirely by Baptist women of Ontario (West). Raised on a farm near Woodstock, Ontario, she was a gifted teacher with a deep sense of calling. A passage from Isaiah stirred her conviction that God was sending her overseas.

She arrived in India in 1886 during a difficult time for the mission, after several Canadian Baptist missionaries had died unexpectedly. Isabel quickly stepped into leadership, learning Telugu while overseeing outreach to women in Kakinada. With a small team of co-workers, she visited hundreds of homes each year, bringing songs, Scripture, sewing lessons, and stories of Christ to women who were largely isolated and unable to read.

A teacher at heart, Isabel also trained future church leaders and opened a school for girls. In the town of Ramachandrapuram, where she would serve for the rest of her life, she gathered Christian women for Bible study and then sent them out with her to share the gospel in surrounding villages.

But another calling soon emerged. When Isabel discovered that several people working in her home had leprosy, she refused to turn away. Instead, she began a ministry of care and dignity among those rejected by society. What began in 1898 with one small hut grew into a thriving leprosarium offering shelter, medical care, education, and Christian community.

For this work, the government of India awarded Isabel the Kaiser-i-Hind medal for humanitarian service.

When she died in 1935, fellow missionaries remembered her simply as “Big Sister”—a woman of great faith, deep compassion, and unwavering dedication to Christ.

*Isabel
Hatch
(1850-1935)*



MISSIONARY, EDUCATOR, AND
FRIEND TO THE FORGOTTEN

“Life is not just a hospital to succour the suffering... it is a place to set things straight.”

Dr. Marion Bates lived with a deep conviction that faith must be lived out boldly in the world.

Born in India to Canadian Baptist missionaries and granddaughter to A.V. Timpany, mission shaped her from the very beginning. As a young woman, she first felt called to nursing, training in Toronto and helping pioneer clinical teaching. But her life would take many turns—wife, mother, widow, educator, and eventually Dean of Women at McMaster University—each one widening her influence.

Yet it was on the global stage that Marion’s leadership would take root.

In 1947, she stepped onto the platform at the Baptist World Congress in Copenhagen as one of the first women to speak at that level. There, and in the years that followed, she became a compelling voice—calling women not only to compassion, but to action.

Out of conversations with Baptist women from around the world grew a shared vision: a global fellowship of women, united in Christ. Marion helped bring that vision to life through the formation of the Baptist World Alliance Women’s Department and the creation of continental unions, including the North American Baptist Women’s Union, of which Canadian women are a part.

One of the most enduring expressions of this unity began simply.

After hearing how European women, recovering from the devastation of war, found healing as they gathered to pray together, Marion helped establish the Baptist Women’s World Day of Prayer. Beginning in the early 1950s, women across continents joined in shared prayer—lifting one another before God in a powerful expression of global sisterhood.

That practice continues today.

Through her leadership, Marion Bates helped women see beyond their own communities to a wider world—calling them to pray, to serve, and to stand together in faith.

Dr. Marion Bates
(1899–1992)



A VOICE THAT CALLED WOMEN
TO PRAYER—AND TO THE WORLD

"The design of this organization is to form a Women's Mission Circle in every church... and to labour for the evangelization of the women of heathendom." —1877 Baptist Yearbook of Ontario & Quebec

For generations, mission circles were the heart of the Baptist women's movement.

In churches across Ontario and Quebec, women gathered each month to pray, learn about mission work, and support those serving around the world. They read letters from missionaries, shared stories of the work, and brought small offerings to support it.

Most women in those years had little or no income of their own. Yet they found creative ways to give—saving pennies from household budgets, using one less egg in a cake recipe, or setting aside small amounts through careful spending. What seemed like tiny sacrifices, offered faithfully, added up to something remarkable.

By the mid-20th century, mission circles had spread widely. In 1956, the 75th anniversary of the Baptist women's organization, 433 circles were active across Ontario and Quebec, bringing together more than 10,000 women. Together they raised \$129,000 for mission work—the equivalent of roughly \$1.5 million today.

But mission circles were about much more than fundraising. Within these gatherings, women found friendship, encouragement, and spiritual growth. Young girls were welcomed and mentored, often encountering the message of Christ for the first time.

One such girl was Barbara Simmonds of Uxbridge, who first attended a church girls' group after a school friend invited her. Decades later, the friendships she formed there remain among the most meaningful in her life.

From small monthly gatherings grew a community that shaped generations of women in faith and mission.

The Mission Circle Movement



WHERE FAITH, FRIENDSHIP,
AND MISSION GREW TOGETHER

In 1878, Baptist women launched a small publication with a big purpose: to keep mission circles informed, inspired, and connected.

The first issue of The Canadian Missionary Link was produced by a small group of women in Toronto after missionary A. V. Timpany encouraged them to create their own publication to share news of mission work. A trial issue was mailed out on July 1, 1878. More than 1,000 women sent 25 cents for a yearly subscription, confirming that the new magazine had found its audience.

Through its pages, readers followed the stories of missionaries, learned about the lives of women in other parts of the world, and discovered ways they could pray, give, and serve. The magazine also provided devotional reflections, teaching, and practical resources for mission circles meeting in churches across Ontario and Quebec.

In 1890, a second publication, The Baptist Visitor, was launched to highlight home mission work. For decades, the two magazines ran side by side until they merged in 1927 as The Link & Visitor, reaching more than 11,000 subscribers.

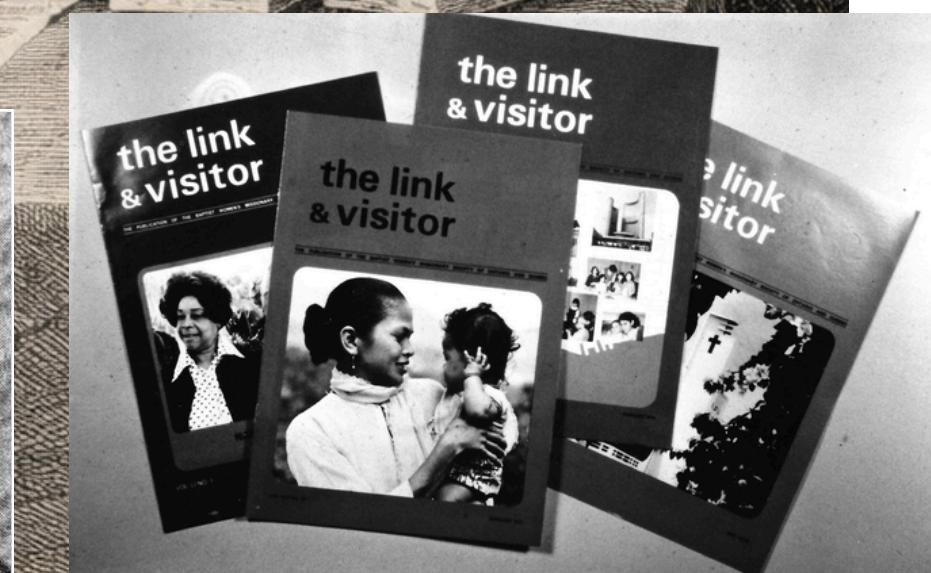
Remarkably, most of the editors served without pay, offering their gifts of writing, leadership, and vision as a ministry. Among them was Ernestine Whiteside, who guided the magazine for more than twenty years with wisdom and careful attention to the missionary cause.

Over time, the magazine evolved, eventually becoming live magazine—a publication that continued to inform and inspire Baptist women for nearly a century and a half.

When its final issue appeared in March 2024, it marked the end of 148 years of mission reporting, storytelling, discipleship, and connection—a written record of generations of women serving Christ together.

Today, that connection continues in new ways – through a monthly digital newsletter, a website, and social media, women across Ontario and Quebec are still sharing stories, encouraging one another, and participating in God's mission—carrying forward the same spirit that first filled those printed pages.

A Magazine that Connected a Movement



STORIES, FAITH, AND
MISSION IN PRINT

In the early 1900s, thousands of immigrants were arriving in Canada, bringing new languages, cultures, and hopes for a different life.

In 1903, Baptist women were challenged by a simple question. More than 7,000 Chinese people were living in Canada, “within a stone’s throw of Christian churches,” noted Baptist women’s leader Carrie Holman. “Has God not sent them to us,” she asked, “that from us they might learn of Him?”

Some women began responding in practical ways. In 1909, Agnes Roberts opened her Toronto home on Sunday evenings to teach English and share the Bible with Chinese immigrants—the first known Baptist outreach to Toronto’s Chinese community.

Others soon followed similar callings. In 1912, Emily Weir—recently widowed—felt drawn to serve Slavic immigrants in Toronto. Supported by Baptist women, she visited homes and gathered women for classes in cooking, sewing, and English. “To reach the women,” she wrote, “we must first gain their confidence and love.” Those she visited affectionately called her “the good smiling lady who knocks at our door and says, ‘Come to a meeting.’”

By 1919 Baptist women were ready to appoint their first official female home missionary. Anna Phelps opened a mission to immigrants from Eastern Europe on Royce Avenue in Toronto. Within a few years, the growing community formed the First Polish Baptist Church, Canada’s first Baptist congregation for new Canadians.

Through open homes, practical care, and deep faith, Baptist women helped newcomers find both community and hope in their new country.

Welcoming New Neighbours



BAPTIST WOMEN AND
THE MISSION TO NEWCOMERS

In 1914, a generous and unexpected gift became a place of restoration for generations of missionaries.

After recovering from serious illness, Edith McFarlane married W. J. Stephens, a widower from Bracebridge. Not long after, she persuaded him to donate a piece of land on Lake Muskoka to Baptist women—land that would become a missionary rest home.

Women across Ontario came together to make the vision a reality. A simple cottage was built on the wooded shoreline. It was furnished through gifts—quilts, supplies, even a rowboat—each one offered with care. What emerged was more than a building. It was a shared expression of love and gratitude for those serving far from home.

For the next 96 years, the cottage provided something many missionaries living on modest salaries could not otherwise afford: rest.

There, on furlough, they found quiet mornings, fresh air, and space to breathe. Families gathered. Friendships deepened. Strength was restored for the work to which they had been called.

In 2010, after nearly a century of service, the decision was made to sell the cottage. As the needs of missionaries had changed—with greater financial support, pension provisions, and a growing emphasis on global partnerships rather than long-term overseas placement—the cottage was no longer needed in the same way.

But its story did not end there.

The proceeds were reinvested into ministry—supporting new initiatives, strengthening partnerships, and extending the reach of Baptist women's work. What had once offered rest in one place now became a source of renewal in many.

The cottage was a gift. Its legacy continues.

The Cottage



A PLACE OF REST FOR
THOSE WHO SERVED

Muriel Spurgeon Carder (1922-2023)

Muriel Spurgeon Carder lived with a kind of joyful determination that made it hard to confine her to any single role. From the time she was a child, she sensed what she would later call her first calling—a deep, persistent desire to serve as a missionary. It wasn't dramatic or sudden. In fact, that troubled her. She went looking for a "proper" call—visions, certainty, something unmistakable—but instead discovered that faithful desire itself could be enough. Over time, that quiet conviction grew steady: there was, for her, "no other path than the road to India."

At just twenty-five, she stepped into history as the first woman ordained in CBOQ and soon after set sail for India. There, her spirited personality flourished. She preached—her "first love"—taught, translated Scripture into Telugu, led schools, cared for the sick, and helped shape theological education. She once described her work as "everything from soup to nuts."

But Muriel's story didn't end with her decades overseas. Her second calling emerged later, unexpectedly, out of disappointment and loss when a hoped-for opportunity fell through. In that vulnerable space, she discerned a new direction: ministry among those with mental and physical challenges. Here, too, she brought imagination and compassion—reshaping chaplaincy to engage the whole person, body and spirit, and asking profound theological questions alongside those often overlooked.

Muriel's life opened doors for others. Though decades passed before more women were ordained, many later pointed to her as an inspiration.

Across both callings, Muriel was marked by the same thread: a courageous willingness to follow where God led, even when the path was unclear. Her life reminds us that calling is not always a single moment—but a faithful response, lived out again and again.



CALLED— AGAIN & AGAIN—
TO SERVE

From the earliest days of the Baptist women's movement, there has been a deep commitment to welcoming those arriving in Canada—offering not only practical help, but friendship, dignity, and hope.

That work continues today.

In 1998, Baptist women helped open Matthew House in Toronto, a place of refuge for newly arrived refugees. Within days, the home was full. Over the years, thousands of people from over a hundred countries have found temporary shelter, community, and care there. Women supported the work through prayer, meals, clothing, financial resources and the countless practical details of helping families begin again.

Similar expressions of care have taken root in many places. At Oasis Dufferin Community Centre, women walked alongside newcomers navigating poverty, language barriers, and isolation—offering food, training, counselling, and community. At Calvary Baptist Church in Toronto, Grace Pascoe's simple act of providing food for her students grew into the city's first food bank.

And the story is still unfolding.

Today, Baptist women continue to respond to the needs of those seeking safety and a new beginning. Through sponsorship, advocacy, and support, they walk with women like Nazia and Robina—sisters who have spent years waiting for refuge and now hope to build a new life in Canada.

Across generations, the response has remained the same:

To notice.
To care.
To act.

In welcoming the stranger, Baptist women continue to reflect the love of Christ—offering not just help, but hope and belonging – a legacy of welcome, rooted in compassion and lived out in every generation.

Welcoming the Stranger



A LEGACY THAT CONTINUES

As the new millennium unfolded, the landscape of ministry began to shift—but the heart of Baptist women remained the same: to grow in faith and respond to the needs of the world.

New opportunities opened both locally and globally. Short-term mission teams travelled to places like Brazil and the Czech Republic, building relationships, sharing skills, and learning alongside sisters in Christ. Partnerships replaced older models of mission, emphasizing mutuality and connection across cultures.

At the same time, women were responding to emerging challenges with courage and compassion. They raised awareness of human trafficking, advocated for vulnerable women, and stepped into conversations around justice and dignity. Relationships with Indigenous communities deepened, marked by listening, learning, and a growing commitment to reconciliation.

Spiritual formation also took fresh shape. Through initiatives like the Great Canadian Bible Study—where women across the country gathered around Scripture while supporting global projects—faith and action remained deeply connected. New resources like Soul Sisters and Sacred Journey groups invited women into prayer, spiritual friendships, and intentional spiritual growth.

Connection itself evolved. Where printed publications once carried stories from place to place, new digital rhythms emerged, continuing the tradition of sharing, encouraging, and staying rooted together.

And new ministries were nurtured through intentional support. Grants empowered emerging initiatives—offering women the opportunity to respond creatively to needs in their communities and around the world.

Across all of these changes, one thing remained constant:

A willingness to say yes—to God, to one another, and to the work still unfolding.

A Changing Landscape



NEW WAYS OF LIVING
OUT A SHARED CALLING

From the very beginning, Baptist women responded to a compelling call—to pray, to give, to go, and to serve.

That call has never changed.

Today, it continues to take shape in new ways. Through She Gives, women are being invited once again to listen for God's voice and respond with courage, compassion, and action.

Across six areas of focus, women are engaging both locally and globally—supporting education for girls, caring for refugee families, strengthening health and well-being, fostering economic stability, and nurturing the next generation.

But this moment is also shaped by what we are hearing from women today.

Women are seeking connection. They are longing for spiritual growth.

They are navigating complex lives and asking for simpler, more relational ways to engage. And they continue to desire meaningful opportunities to make a difference.

In response, CBWOQ is evolving—serving as a connector, a catalyst, and a companion as women discern where God is at work and how they are being invited to join.

Because this has always been the story.

Women listening.
Women responding.
Women stepping forward in faith—together.

And now, as we look ahead, the invitation remains open:

To grow in faith.
To deepen in community.
To respond with generosity and hope.

The story is still being written.

Still Growing



THE CALL CONTINUES

A Well Watered Garden



A Movement Begins (Late 1800s – Early 1900s)

In the fall of 1876, a call was heard. On his only furlough from India, A.V. Timpany urged Canadian Baptist women to come alongside the women of India.

Women listened and they responded. They formed four mission societies covering home and foreign missions in Ontario East and West.

Two publications connected them across distance. Together, they sent their first single missionary, Mary Jane Frith, to India.



Change and Reorientation (1960s–1980s)

Foreign mission changed, becoming supported through CBM, and the era of career home missionaries came to an end. As society changed, women reimagined their purpose—focusing on spiritual growth, community, and everyday mission. Doors opened for women in pastoral ministry, and the name “Baptist Women” came to reflect this broader identity.



Renewal and Reimagining (1990s–2010s)

New expressions of ministry emerged:

Matthew House (1992) & Oasis Dufferin (1994)

A renewed focus on discipleship and leadership took shape and included national gatherings and initiatives like the Great Canadian Bible Study.



Faithful Through Hardship (1920s–1930s)

During the Great Depression, women continued to give sacrificially and support mission at home and abroad. By 1927, the publications merged to form The Link & Visitor. By 1935, Baptist women across Canada were connecting for shared vision and encouragement.

Courage and Expansion (1940s–1950s)

Wartime conventions drew record numbers. Women stepped forward in new ways—even as they supported war efforts.

In 1950, the Baptist Women’s World Day of Prayer began. In 1953, the four mission societies united to form the one unified Baptist Women’s Missionary Society of Ontario and Quebec.

At the time of the merger, the Society had 822 groups and 17,428 members; it supported 39 active and furloughed missionaries and pensions for 16 retired missionaries.



Responding in New Ways (2020s–Today)

Women continue to respond through:

- global and local partnerships
- relational ministry
- justice, leadership, and spiritual formation

The expressions have changed – the heart has not. The same compelling call continues: Women listening, responding, and stepping forward in faith—together.



The invitation remains open...