



Global Ministries
Celebrating 200 Years in Mission



Photo: General Commission on Archives and History

ANN WILKINS

Outstanding Early Missionary to Liberia

Ann Wilkins was born in the Hudson Valley of New York in 1806. She experienced conversion at age 14. At age 17, she married Henry F. Wilkins, who later abandoned her. As an adult, Ann moved to New York City, worked as a teacher there, and attended Bedford Street MEC.

Wilkins first offered to go as a teacher to Liberia in 1834, but the Missionary Society took no action on her application. Two years later, she attended a Methodist camp meeting at Sing Sing, New York. John Seys, then serving as the superintendent of the MEC mission in Liberia, preached. Upon hearing him, Wilkins' desire to go to Liberia was renewed. She sent a note to Nathan Bangs of the Missionary Society declaring, "A sister who has but little money at command, gives that little cheerfully, and is willing to give her life as a female teacher, if she is wanted." Wilkins' application was accepted, and she left for Liberia in 1837. She was the first female American Methodist missionary sent out

as an individual missionary herself and not as a missionary spouse.

After teaching in the White Plains Manual Labor School and the Liberia Conference Seminary (now the College of West Africa), Wilkins founded the Millsburg Female Academy, the first Methodist girls' school outside of the United States. It was notable as one of the first mission institutions dedicated to serving indigenous Liberians and not just Americo-Liberian settlers.

Wilkins was one of the longest-serving of the first generation of American Methodist foreign missionaries. She returned twice to the United States for health issues, once in 1841 and once in 1853. Both times she recovered and returned to Liberia. She returned to New York a final time in 1857, again for health reasons. She died seven months later, after having served in Liberia for nearly 20 years.