

# Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for North American Missions

**Our Goal: \$1,500.<sup>00</sup>**

Who is Annie Armstrong? Born in 1850 in Baltimore, Maryland., Armstrong, or “Miss Annie” as she was affectionately known, attended Seventh Church, which at the time met at Paca and Saratoga Streets. At Seventh, Armstrong was baptized at the age of 19, and shortly thereafter, joined over 100 members from Seventh to pioneer a new work at Eutaw Place Church at Eutaw Place and Dolphin Street. There, Armstrong remained an active member for nearly 70 years, until her death in 1938.

Describing Armstrong as “a tall, stately, outspoken, strong-willed leader,” author Bobbie Sorrell credits Armstrong’s Harvard-educated pastor, Richard Fuller, for building her deep convictions about missions.

With his preaching described as “logic on fire,” Fuller’s passionate Southern lawyer roots paved the way for his influence in framing the Southern Baptist Convention, of which he preached its first annual sermon, giving Armstrong and others an insider’s view into the birth of the denomination.

At the local church level, Armstrong taught in the Infant class (also called the Primary Department, for children up to age 12) for 50 years. All the while, she maintained an interest in ministering to mothers, immigrants, the underprivileged, the sick, African Americans, Indians, and later in her life, her Jewish neighbors. Accordingly, she worked at the *Home of the Friendless*, where she served on the board of managers for over 20 years. She started the *Ladies’ Bay View Mission*, in the same site as today’s *Johns Hopkins Bayview Medical Center*, which was formerly known as *Baltimore City Hospital*.

Armstrong’s ties to Baltimore were even more numerous. Her great-great-great grandfather was Henry Sater, who built the first known Baptist church in Maryland. A childless widow at 50, Sater later married Dorcas Towson, of the family whose name lives on in the community of Towson, who became Armstrong’s great-great-great grandmother.

Not only did Armstrong embrace Baltimore with the love of Christ, but her reach also extended to the uttermost parts of the world. Most notable are her efforts in missions education and missions support.

In 1880, in her first prominent leadership position, Armstrong served as the first president of the *Woman’s Baptist Home Mission Society of Maryland*, which involved women in supporting the *Home Mission Board* (now *North American Mission Board*) of the *Southern Baptist Convention*. The society’s first priority locally was forming an Indian school and ministering to Chinese immigrants. The organization also provided support for work in Cuba and New Orleans.

As early as 1880, Armstrong's heart was touched when she heard a speaker describe the plight of Native Americans who had been forced from their ancestral lands onto reservations. Armstrong realized that numerous churches close to her home could supply necessities for local people in need, but frontier churches struggled to help those around them. She determined to do whatever was necessary.

Soon afterward, a desperate plea came from the *Levering Manual Labor School*. Government assistance had failed, and 240 Native American students needed clothes. Could the women of Armstrong's home church help? Never one to back away from a challenge, Armstrong organized women in *Eutaw Place Baptist Church*, as well as several other Baltimore churches, and quickly shipped barrels of clothing to the school. That was the beginning of a ministry to Native Americans that continued for the remainder of her life. Armstrong made five trips to Indian Territory during her lifetime, and her legacy lives today as women in Oklahoma strive to carry out her famous command to "*Go forward!*"

Armstrong later became the corresponding secretary of the *Maryland Mission Rooms*, later called the *Mission Literature Department, SBC*. This department served as a missions library and reading room and ultimately became a publisher and distributor of missions literature.

Beginning in 1888, Armstrong led in framing the constitution of the *Woman's Missionary Union (WMU)*, an auxiliary to the *Southern Baptist Convention*. She served as corresponding secretary until 1906, always refusing a salary for the work she did through *WMU* to further the gospel.

Without today's technology, Armstrong wrote letters by hand to all the Southern Baptist foreign societies. On one occasion, she asked them to contribute to the first Christmas offering, which resulted in enough money to send three--not one, as had hoped--missionaries to assist Lottie Moon in China. The *Lottie Moon Christmas Offering* for Foreign Missions, so named at Armstrong's recommendation, has raised over \$2.6 billion for foreign missions since then.

In 1895, Armstrong led the *WMU* to contribute \$5,000 to help alleviate the *Home Mission Board's* \$25,000 debt and prevent the withdrawal of missionaries from their missions fields. In response, *WMU* instituted the *Week of Self-Denial* as a time of praying for and giving to home missions.

Since that time, a week of prayer and a home missions offering have continued. In 1934, the offering was named the *Annie Armstrong Offering*. To date, the annual *Annie Armstrong Easter Offering* for North American Missions has accumulated over \$1.1 billion.

Year after year, Armstrong came up with new ways to get missions information out to the churches, to stir up missions efforts and to raise more prayer support and money for missions. "So much of the *International Mission Board's* work depends on the generous and faithful giving of Southern Baptists to the *Lottie Moon*

*Christmas Offering*, and we have Annie Armstrong to thank for creating the offering," agreed Jerry Rankin, president of the *International Mission Board*. "Annie's legacy to the *IMB* began with a single missionary, Lottie Moon, and today, because of her tireless effort and passion for reaching the lost, the number of missionaries overseas has grown to more than 5,000."

One of Armstrong quotes still inspires:

*"The future lies all before us . . . shall it only be a slight advance upon what we usually do? Ought it not to be a bound, a leap forward, to altitudes of endeavor and success undreamed of before?"*

(This article was shortened from one on the Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware website.)

While the Week of Prayer is promoted as a prayer emphasis, it would do us good to make it also a week of denial, to sacrifice something of our comforts and pleasures for the week and use that money for missions. I challenge you as families to come up with creative ways of emphasizing missions this month.

-- pastor Robin