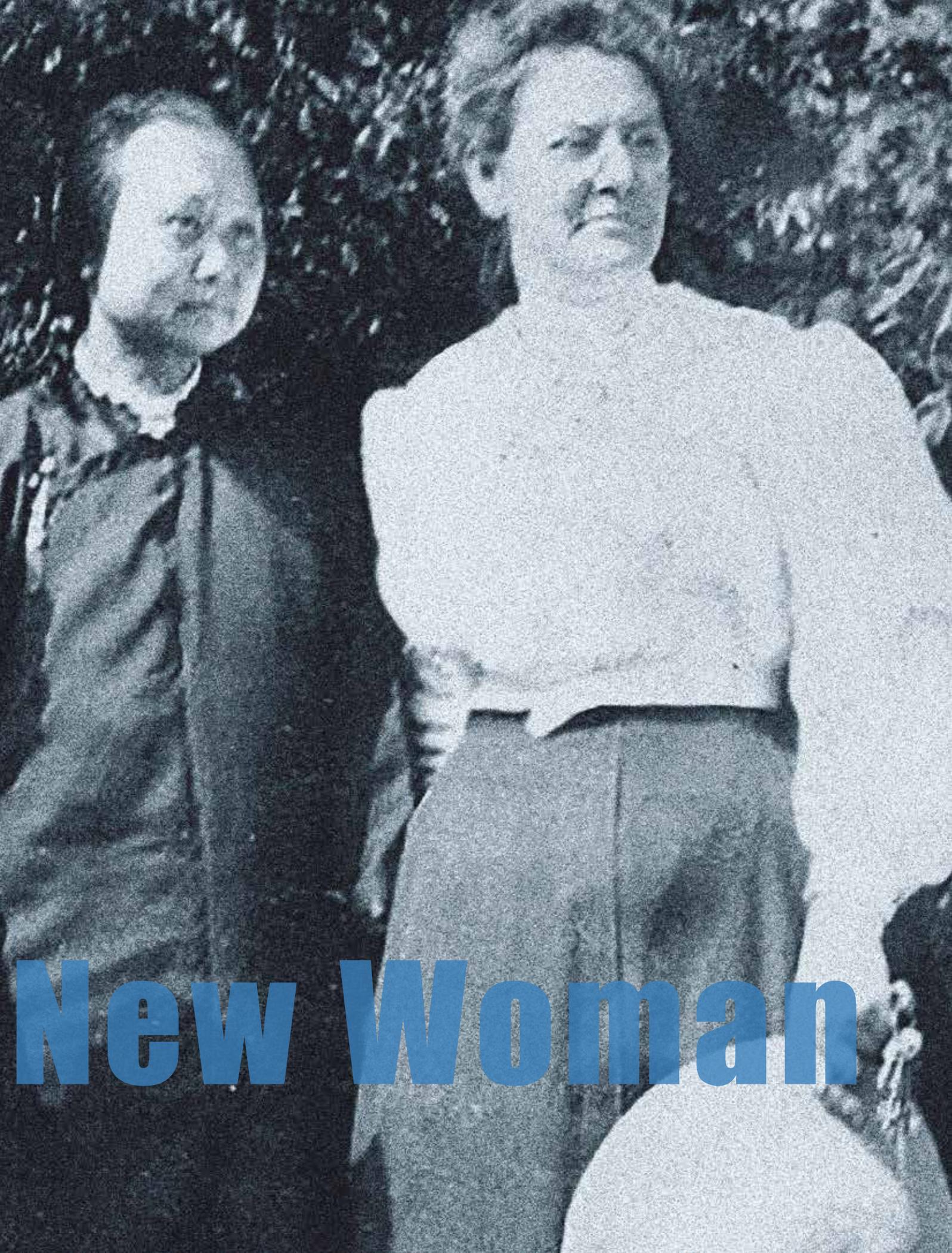


A Victorian

The pioneering career of Dr. Lucy A. Gaynor

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New Woman



Dr. Lucy Gaynor. Courtesy of the Malone University Archives, Cleveland, Ohio

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Is not this the fast that I have chosen: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy bands of the yoke, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?

—Isaiah 58:6 (ASV)

Dr. Lucy A. Gaynor Memorial Document¹

Eleanor Roosevelt, Gloria Steinem, and Nobel Prize winner Malala Yousefzai are familiar examples of feminists who have inspired generations of women through their advocacy for the social, political, economic, and legal rights of women to be equal to those of men. However, the New Woman concept of the late 19th century was one of the first women's movements forged by American women working and serving abroad.

A New Woman was one who desired far more than the submissive role of Victorian domesticity. A New Woman was a decisive, independent, career-minded self-advocate who used her newfound freedom and education to ignite societal change. For many women during the Victorian era, missionary work provided an exciting opportunity to become this sort of empowered woman—one who pursued her career while righting social injustices.

Many Western health care workers became advocates for disenfranchised groups through mission work. The

feminization of mission work in the late 1880s resulted in successful female-led missionary boards that provided a robust support base for female field workers overseas. Missionary work offered financial and emotional support for women, as well as a place to apply their education.² Due to the lack of opportunity in their home countries, women missionaries abroad quickly became a powerful addition to the work force.

In China, the culture dictated that men and women be separate, creating a tremendous need for female physicians, which led to the creation of training programs for female missionary medical doctors.²

Lucy Alice Gaynor

Lucy Alice Gaynor was born in 1861 in Ballygarry, Ireland, to Jane Julia Salter and Henry Alfred Gaynor. During her first year of life, she emigrated with her mother to the United States, with her father and brothers following later.³

In the summer of 1870, Lucy and her parents were

visiting her brothers in Philadelphia when Henry contracted cholera and died. Although early epidemiological studies of the waterborne transmission of cholera by Dr. John Snow were accepted as published in the British journal *Lancet* in 1866, public health literacy regarding cholera was lacking in the United States.

Following Henry's death, Jane settled the family in Chicago's ninth ward on the south side of the city, and opened a furniture store to support her family. Jane asked Lucy to forego her formal secondary education to assist in the family store, but Lucy refused.

Lucy earned the money needed for her education, and in 1891 graduated, with honors, from the Woman's Medical College of Chicago, securing an internship at the Chicago Ear and Eye Infirmary.¹ Following her internship and post-graduate work in Philadelphia, Dr. Gaynor was offered an opportunity to work in a private practice, but chose instead to apply to the Quaker Friends Board for a missionary post in China.



The bound foot of a southern Chinese woman, circa 1880. Popperfoto/Getty Images

Illustration by Erica Aitken



In September 1892, Gaynor sailed for Nanking, China, becoming the city's first female physician. She worked there for the next 20 years, interrupted only by a four year furlough to care for her ailing mother in the United States.¹

The binding of feet

Although the practice of enduring mutilation and perpetrating violence in the name of beauty has been found in almost every culture, historians believe that foot binding began in China in the 12th century, and continued until it was outlawed there in the first half of the 20th century.⁴ While there was notable resistance in small pockets of Chinese provinces, the extinction of this practice took years of opposition from multiple groups, including Western missionaries such as Gaynor.

Gaynor sent written and photographic correspondence to the Woman's Medical College in Chicago regarding her advocacy to unbind the feet of Chinese women and girls. She offered a two-pronged effort of medical therapy and education.

Although the destruction of the foot by the binding process sometimes left the foot in a condition impossible to change, Gaynor tirelessly pursued medical correction and was in some instances able to mitigate the deformities thereby allowing girls to walk and stand comfortably.

The Quaker Missionary Board reinforced Gaynor's efforts and insisted on natural and liberated feet for attendance in their schools, unless a physician deemed correction hopeless.⁵

Taking on other causes

In 1902, during an epidemic in Nanking when all of the city's male physicians were away, Gaynor initiated a public health campaign to eliminate cholera. Dr. William E. Macklin, a physician from the Christian Mission outside of the city, came to assist her. They placed placards showing the cause, prevention, and cure of cholera. With the help of other missionaries, the physicians also distributed medication via chapels and dispensaries to 50,000 people.^{1,6}

In 1903, Gaynor was notified of her mother's ailing

health and returned to Chicago. During this four-year-period, she served as an executive on the Women's Board of Foreign Missions of the Methodist Episcopal Church, supporting field workers.

After her mother's death in 1907, Gaynor returned to China where she was approached by several young Chinese women asking to be trained in medical work. Her response was enthusiastic and brisk, establishing the Nurses' Training School in Nanking in 1908. The original school was adjacent to the hospital in a building donated by the Friends Mission, where Gaynor assumed full responsibility for the student nurses' training.

Gaynor financially mobilized other missionary boards to support the school, and with immense support, on October 5, 1908, it was renamed the Union Nurses' Training School.⁷ Six missions contributed financially to the running of the school, including donations for annual scholarships in the amount of \$30 of gold to cover the cost of a year of training.

Later, Dr. Gaynor asked the six mission boards to annually pledge \$100 each for five years to support Frances Harris, a nurse who was hired in Autumn 1910 to train the students.^{3,8}

Although many in China viewed foreigners with great suspicion, the trust the community had for Gaynor was profound. She was summoned to the home of Viceroy Duang Fang whose daughter was critically ill. Through Gaynor's care, the child recovered which bolstered the trust of the local Chinese people. The Viceroy paid Gaynor with valuable silks which she sold, using the money to fund the school.

During the Chinese Revolution in late 1911, Gaynor and some of her nurses were trapped in Shanghai due to an uprising against the Manchus, the ruling ethnic minority. After providing aid in Shanghai, Gaynor was asked by the Red Cross to open a new hospital there. She quickly accomplished this with the help of her assistant Dr. Jiang and two unnamed "Bible women" from the Methodist Church.¹

Gaynor re-entered Nanking December 6, 1911, following its siege, and found Manchu refugees living there. They



Drum Tower Hospital Compound staff members and their families, 1895.

were ill, and lacked adequate food or shelter. She cared for the sick and dying, and with the help of the Chinese guild of cloth merchants organized the delivery of a multitude of resources. Daily, she carried supplies from her hospital to a dispensary in the section of Nanking where the refugees lived, dubbed “Manchu City.” Toward the end of March, the funding for aid to Manchu City was almost exhausted so Gaynor devised a plan to optimize what was left. Beginning April 1, those capable of work were to be paid a daily wage for their contribution to the upkeep of Manchu City, which they would use to obtain food, thereby preserving the limited resources for the sick.

The conditions in Nanking and Manchu City were crowded, and unsanitary. Gaynor related to friends that she had concerns about exposure to typhus from contact with vermin at the dispensary. Just five days later, she began to have fevers, and succumbed to typhus on April 23, 1912.

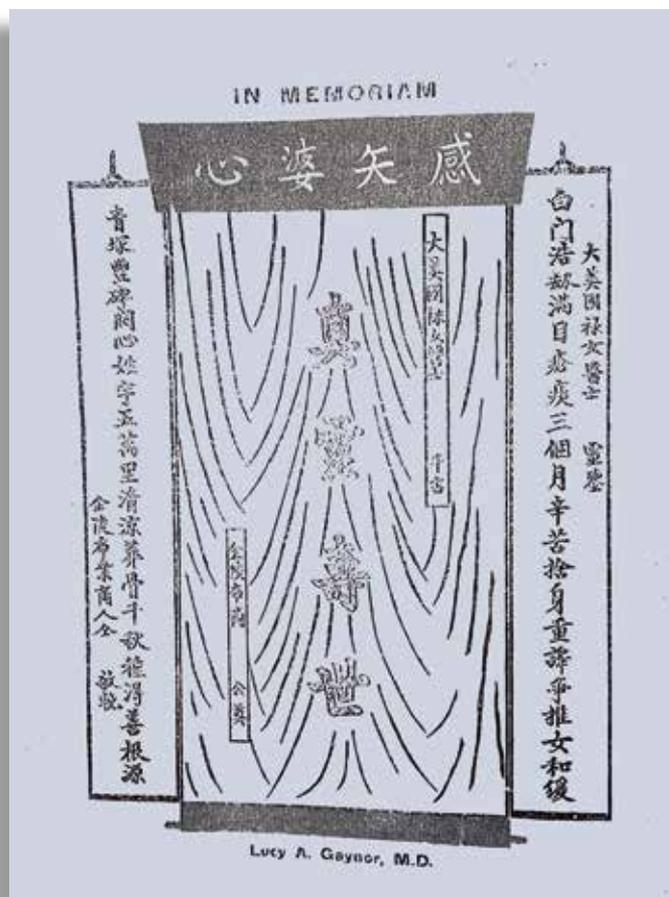
Shortly after her death, the Board of Managers of the Union Nurses’ Training School created the Dr. Lucy A. Gaynor Memorial Fund, to benefit a new school building.¹

A New Woman

Gaynor was a heroic New Woman. She was an advocate for patients, girls, and women in 19th century China. She used her training to care for the sick, and ignited the spark of women’s independence through education of Chinese girls and women—all in a time when she didn’t have the right to vote in her home country.

Gaynor’s work in China was accomplished almost exclusively with the help of other women. Her mentorship of women and girls contributed to their own advancement, and perpetuated change for subsequent generations.

Her dedication to the timeless principles of advocacy for self and others engenders her as a mentor for all physicians.



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