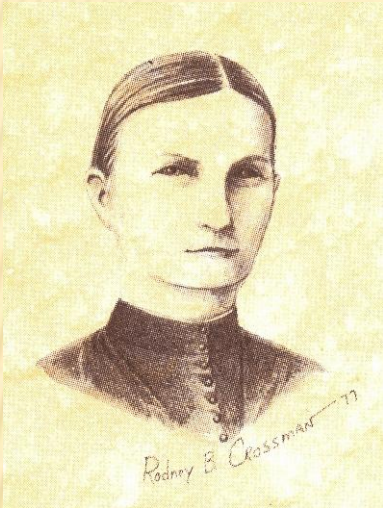


# MARY E. DEPEW

Our Wesleyan History



## THE HOLY SPIRIT'S EVANGELIST

By Lee Haines

*Historian of The Wesleyan Church*

The lady who was to become one of the major influences in the holiness revival in the Wesleyan Methodist Connection was born a Mary E. Kinney, near Warren, Ohio, July 2, 1836. Her father, Elisha Kinney, was a man of strong convictions, an intense abolitionist, one of the first laymen to withdraw from his former church connections and join the Wesleyan Methodist Connection in its organizational period. Her mother was meek, quiet, possessing a warm and gentle heart, but also devoted to the reform of the church. D.S. Kinney, who was to be a Wesleyan Methodist minister and serve as denominational publisher from 1875 to 1890, was Mary's older brother.

At about the age of 13, Mary gave her heart to the Lord. But it was not long before she discovered that she still had a problem as pride and impatience revealed an inward rebellion against God. She counseled with her Sunday school teacher who unfortunately told her that this was just part of the struggle which every Christian has. There was no hope of deliverance from the inner civil war in this life.

So in spite of the fact that the Holy Spirit was trying to lead her on, Mary heeded her teacher's counsel and resigned herself to a divided heart. As she later admitted, she simply died spiritually although she retained a name of being alive. In the years that followed into young adulthood, she was an acceptable worker in the church and the Sunday school. She was regarded by herself and others as a consistent Christian.

# MARY E. DEPEW

Our Wesleyan History

In 1865, when she was 29, Mary married J.W. Depew (also spelled DePew). One little son was born in their home, but he died in infancy.

In 1866, when she was 30, Mrs. Depew became very ill, almost to the point of death. It was while she was facing the possibility of passing into the next world that the Lord awakened her to her lost condition. She repented, and God not only forgave but he also healed her and raised her up to labor for Him.

Again she felt the existence of the carnal nature and again the Holy Spirit drew her onward. But her conclusion was that this was not for her. Three years later she went to the Allegheny Annual Conference. Rev. J.A. McGilvra of the Iowa Conference was there holding special services “for the benefit of those who were seeking the higher life.” Mrs. Depew began to hope that after years of seeking and growth she might attain to entire sanctification. But the Spirit brought her face to face with the fact that this blessed experience is possible “now.”

Mrs. Depew knew that to follow the Holy Spirit would bring sacrifice and reproach. “I seemed to see myself in the street, homeless, penniless, and friendless.” But she died to earthly ambitions, earthly possessions, and the love and approval of earthly friends. She chose to belong wholly to Jesus and she was baptized with the Holy Spirit.

In Keeping with Acts 1:8, Mrs. Depew now became a witness for the Lord. On the day of Pentecost, Peter had quoted the promise of Joel that “daughters,” would prophesy, and so it happened in her case. She began what was to be her work for the rest of her life – warning others against being deceived by an empty, fruitless profession of religion, and calling them to be cleansed and filled with the Spirit.

Apparently she faced great opposition from her friends and even members of her family in starting to preach. Wesleyan Methodists had been pioneers in asserting the right of women to preach, with Rev. Luther Lee in 1859 preaching the ordination sermon of Antoinette Brown, the first woman in America to be ordained to the ministry. In 1864 the General Conference refused to disapprove licensing and during Mrs. Depew’s years of preaching, in 1897, the General Conference

# MARY E. DEPEW

Our Wesleyan History

decided to license but not ordain women, and it was not until 1891, shortly before her death, that the rule against ordination was repealed.

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**Mary E. Depew was a woman surrendered to the Holy Spirit, cleansed by the Holy Spirit, empowered by the Holy Spirit. She neither waited for man's authority to preach nor debated the issue of her preaching with her questioners. She simply went forth wherever opportunity opened to share the burning message of what He had done for her.**

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Even though some of Mrs. Depew's women associates in holiness evangelism were later licensed and appointed as pastors and evangelists, she apparently never received credentials of any kind. But this did not deter her. The message burned within. And wherever she was given opportunity to testify, she did. And the Spirit's blessing upon her witness was immediately evident, as many were converted and others entirely sanctified. So invitations began to multiply and she began to travel widely preaching the gospel.

The records are missing from 1871 to 1875. But by 1876 she helped carry the Indiana Conference for the holiness revival, preaching to the assembled pastors and lay delegates at the annual sessions, and seeing many of them seek the cleansing power. From then on the columns of the denominational paper are full of reports of her revivals. Clara Tear Williams, writer of the popular gospel song, "All My Life Long I Had Panted," said of her, "The revival of holiness in the Wesleyan Connection has been largely the result, directly and indirectly, of her labors."

In 1885, the Depews sold their farm in Ohio so Mrs. Depew could move to Houghton, New York, to labor in the new school which the Wesleyans had established there. She was given charge of the lady students. She conducted a daily 4 a.m. prayer meeting (later shifted to 8 a.m.) where many of the future pastors and missionaries of the denomination were either saved, sanctified, or both.

# MARY E. DEPEW

Our Wesleyan History

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Mrs. Depew was plain to the point of austerity and no doubt left the impression of sternness and severity with some. She rebuked unnecessary adornment and worldly conformity. She was opposed to the use of musical instruments such as piano and organ in the church. But the warmth of her love for God and man, the earnestness with which she preached, the genuineness of her holiness far outweighed these aspects of her personality and led many to the lord.

Mrs. Depew became seriously ill again in 1891. She rallied a bit the following spring, but was laid low again at the Lockport Conference camp meeting in August 1892. She was the victim of cancer of the stomach, and died October 9, 1892, at Houghton. One of her instructions concerning her funeral was that she should not be held up but that Jesus should be exalted.