

**THE BOARD OF FOREIGN MISSIONS
OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

156 Fifth Avenue
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Miss Sarah C. Smith
Memorial Minute

Adopted by the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions
March 18, 1947

The Board made record of the death of Miss Sarah C. Smith, Honorably retired member of the Japan Mission, on February 18, 1947, at Pasadena, California.

Sarah C. Smith was born in Painted Post, New York, on March 24, 1851. She studied in Elmira, New York, public schools and Academy, and the Brockport State Normal School. After graduation she traveled extensively in Europe. On her return from Europe, the call to go to Japan for educational work in Graham Seminary, Yokohama, came by way of a letter from the son of her pastor, Dr. Knox, who was at that time a missionary in Japan.

Miss (S)mith was appointed by the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions in 1880, and six weeks after her appointment her lifework in Japan began as a teacher in Graham (S)eminary. In her third year of teaching, she was ordered home on account of her health, but she refused to return and went instead to Hakodate. She labored in direct evangelistic work in that area for two years, during which time she cared for several girls in her own home.

She was then invited to teach English in the new Government Normal School for

boys in Sapporo, for which she was to be paid a salary. The Mission agreed to permit her to use this additional salary for the establishment of a girls' school in Sapporo. Her new adventure began when, in the company of five young girls, she embarked upon a stormy sea bound for Sapporo. The establishment of this school, which became the real work of her life, was beset with many difficulties. There were no buildings, very little equipment, a lack of funds, and in addition the school was far removed from the Mission center. The girls were lodged in the upper part of a story-and-a-half house; and in this type of building, with a small number of students, she taught, cleaned floors and windows, planted flowers and trees, weeded gardens, mothered home-sick children, and achieved almost a miracle on a very small budget.

The school grew, being the second high school for girls in the Islands, and was finally officially known as The Northern Star Girls' School (Hokusei Jo Gakko), but throughout the Islands it was known and respected as "Miss Smith's School." Parents felt that their daughters were safe under her care; there was not too much opposition to the daughters becoming Christians during their stay in the school, and many of them did join the church. Among these was Miss Michi Kawai, who was graduated in the third class and later became the founder of the Keisen Jo-Gakuin in Tokyo. Miss Kawai has often given testimony of the deep impression made upon her by the Christian character of her early teacher.

On November 6, 1922, Miss Smith retired but continued to live in Sapporo, working with the alumnae and the Sunday Schools which she had helped to establish in that area. In 1923 the Government gave special recognition of her contribution to education in Japan by conferring upon her the Imperial Decoration of the Order of the Sacred Treasure, an honor rarely bestowed upon foreign women. The Minister of Education, in a letter, also commended her very highly for her contribution to the educational work in Japan.

The following statement has been made in regard to Miss Smith's services; "In the list of early missionaries to Japan the name of Miss Sarah C. Smith must be accorded a

high place not only for the length of her service on the field (fifty-one years with only four furloughs) but also for her strong character and solid achievement.”

Miss Smith finally returned to America in 1931 and took up residence in Pasadena, California. At the time she announced her approaching departure from Japan, many of her colleagues, both missionaries and Japanese, urged her to remain. The pastor at Sapporo told friends the story of his efforts to induce her to remain in Japan: “I was sure that she ought not to go. Her presence here is needed; we cannot spare her. It is a mistake for her to go. So I went to her home to reason with her. But she replied, ‘I have prayed over this and I am as sure of guidance now as when I decided first to come to Japan.’” The pastor stated, “What could I say?” He then made a request: “I have one fervent request to make. Today may not be a seemly time for it, but I cannot refrain from speaking. And this is what I beg for the sake of ourselves and of the work which you have done in Hokkaido; that when your days on earth are ended, you will at least make provision that your ashes rest here where you have labored so long.” What a significant request!

Her home-going came on February 18, 1947, at the age of ninety-five years and eleven months. She had spent many happy hours at the Japanese Presbyterian Church in Pasadena, and her benign influence had richly blessed all about her. “She went in a beautiful, peaceful way. She was sitting in her chair with the morning sun on her face,” wrote a friend who was with Miss Smith at the time of her death. God had claimed her, but the Christian influence of her life goes on in the lives of hundreds of her beloved students in Japan.