

**Louise Crummy McKinney (1868-1931):
A Window into Western Canadian Christianity**

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Louise Crummy McKinney was a prominent social activist and popular preacher in Alberta during the first three decades of the twentieth century. McKinney was president of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) in Alberta and Saskatchewan for over twenty-two years, and vice-president of the Dominion WCTU for twenty-one years. Shortly before her death in 1931 she was elected as first vice-president of the World WCTU.¹ In 1917 McKinney also made history by becoming the first female elected to the Alberta Provincial Legislature and the first female MLA in the British Empire. In addition, she was a Methodist local preacher, Sunday School superintendent, church organizer, Bible class leader, a champion of women's ordination, a teacher, writer and an international speaker. Further, she was a delegate to the final Methodist General Conference in 1925, and in that same year was one of only four women chosen to sign the Basis of Union for the United Church of Canada alongside 327 male counterparts.² Louise C. McKinney was also one of the Famous Five women in the Persons Case, who successfully petitioned the British Privy Council in 1929 for full legal definition and recognition of women as persons under Canadian law.

Forgotten Heroine

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Surprisingly, despite her many achievements, McKinney herself has never been the object of an extensive scholarly analysis. This oversight as to her important contribution to Canada was pointed out by the late Alberta author, historian, and former Lieutenant-Governor, J.W. Grant MacEwan, in 1995, when he stated concerning Louise Crummy McKinney, that the full extent of her influence had never been adequately measured.³ Prior to MacEwan's work, there had been several brief biographies and articles published concerning McKinney, with the main focus of that research addressing her involvement as a social activist, temperance leader and member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta.⁴ In addition to this body of research, two other publications were compiled after 1995. The first one was written by Catherine Cavanaugh, addressing and critiquing McKinney's role in achieving Dower Rights legislation for women in Alberta. The second work was a draft biographical study guide published by the Famous Five Foundation in Calgary.⁵ What is interesting to note, however, is that within all the material available, McKinney's strong commitment as a Christian, engaged in social reform, has only been cursorily mentioned.⁶

The Religious Dynamic

Utilizing the perspectives of church history and religious studies, the available archival material attests to the fact that McKinney was first and foremost an intense, charismatic and profoundly religious woman, who interpreted her life to be one dedicated to the service of Christ, the church and society. Using existing primary source documents, verification of her strong religious orientation can be found in texts such as the biographical pamphlet, written by McKinney's son, J. Willard McKinney,⁷ the eulogy delivered by the Rev. George Webber (President of the Lord's Day Alliance),⁸ and her memorial address given by the prominent Rev. Hugh Dobson.⁹ It is, however, within McKinney's own existing letters and writings that her profound religious orientation and interpretation of service can be fully identified. Summing up her ideals in her own words, McKinney stated that ". . . father, mother and children all need to cultivate the spiritual and to identify themselves with the church of God, as the recognized agency for developing high ideals and fostering a love for and a vital interest in our fellow men, both of which find their highest expression in service."¹⁰

Charisma, Dedication and Politics

Louise C. McKinney was a charismatic woman with penetrating dark brown eyes, who possessed a powerful personality which inspired others. In a letter written to James McKinney shortly after Louise had died, Emily Murphy, alias Janey Canuck,¹¹ stated that Louise possessed great force of character yet was wise and gentle.¹² Nellie McClung, in her book *The Stream Runs Fast: My Own Story*, said of McKinney that she never flattered anyone, was very straightforward, but sincerely loved and respected people. McClung also said that McKinney was astute in her dealings with others.¹³ What emerges from the records is that Louise McKinney, during her time in the Alberta Legislature, was a formidable debater who could quietly, ruthlessly and with the systematic use of logic, reduce her opponents' arguments to the absurd. An example of this is to be found in a newspaper article concerning a public forum surrounding the Dower legislation. McKinney, as an MLA, was trying to reintroduce Dower laws into provincial legislation in order to afford some protection for women by means of marital property rights. One man, strongly opposed to these ideas stated, "The husband is the earner, the wife earns nothing, is not a producer at all, but is supported by the earnings of her husband." McKinney replied, "May I ask the gentleman if he thinks that the wife in addition to labouring more hours a day than the husband, in addition to bearing and rearing his children, should pay board; or does the gentleman think that she earns her board and keep? Would he go as far as that?" The report indicates that McKinney won the debate with very little problem.¹⁴

Life, Teaching, Evangelism and the WCTU

As previously observed, Louise McKinney had an intense personality. When her biographical history is examined these same characteristics become evident in the evolution of her life and work.

Louise Crummy was born in Frankville, Ontario, in 1868, to Esther Empey and Richard Crummy, both of whom were Irish Methodists.¹⁵ Louise was the sixth in a family of ten children, and the second of three daughters.¹⁶ She was noted to have a good Irish sense of humour, an unusual talent in debate, and strong leadership qualities.¹⁷ After graduating from Athens High School, Louise Crummy expressed the desire to attend medical school and become a doctor. She was unable to realize this

ambition because, in the later words of her son Willard, “too many obstacles were placed in the way of women taking the medical course at that time.”¹⁸ Grant MacEwan observed that she resented the discrimination deeply and this statement would appear to find corroboration with McKinney herself who is on record as saying that even as a child she “recognized and resented the disabilities laid upon women.”¹⁹ Louise Crummy went on to train as a teacher and taught public school in Ontario from 1886-1893.²⁰ Later, in 1893, she moved to North Dakota to live with a married sister and she subsequently obtained a teaching position there.

1893 was a momentous year for Louise Crummy because it was during that year that she joined the Young Woman’s Christian Temperance Union and served as its president. In 1894 she was elected as State Evangelist for the North Dakota WCTU. It was in this capacity that she travelled throughout North Dakota, preaching with evangelical fervour for the cause of Christ, the necessity of a Christian life and a Christ-centred temperance union in order to combat the abuses and violence associated with alcohol consumption.²¹ It is also during this time that she wrote several letters to her close friend, and later sister-in-law Jennie McKinney. These are some of only remaining letters in her own handwriting, and in them she expressed her strong religious orientation and commitment, and her exhilaration over the call to duty. In one letter describing her activities she wrote, “I find the work hard but pleasant in many ways. One finds so many sleepy, worldly Christians and careless sinners, that it is appalling and we wonder how they can act and live as they do. I can’t understand how a follower of Christ can be so careless about the salvation of others.”²²

In 1886 Louise Crummy married rancher James McKinney, who was himself an Irish Methodist. James McKinney was originally from Ontario but had moved to the United States in order to acquire farmland. The couple farmed in North Dakota until 1903²³ when they relocated to ranch in the Claresholm area, which was then within the Northwest Territories, later to become the Province of Alberta in 1905.²⁴ Prior to this, in 1899, Louise C. McKinney had been elected as the District President of the WCTU in North Dakota,²⁵ and upon her arrival in Claresholm she promptly established a branch of the WCTU there.

Claresholm, Church, Preaching and Service

It was also during the early days in Claresholm that both Louise and

her husband James, were integral members and founders of the Claresholm community.²⁶ The records also substantiate the fact that the McKinnays played a major part in establishing and building the Methodist church there.²⁷ James McKinney taught a Bible class in the Sunday School and was actively engaged in church business. Louise McKinney was an accredited local preacher,²⁸ primary school superintendent, leader in the Ladies Aid Society, a Bible-class leader,²⁹ and also a leader in the Women's Missionary Society.³⁰ Other interesting information can be found regarding Louise McKinney's role within the church through examination of the Rev. George Webber's eulogy in which he stated that, "In the pulpit her deep spiritual insight, her keen intellect, and her inspiring fervour combined to make her preaching ever welcome and fruitful."³¹

Webber also praised McKinney's compassion, sympathy and practical Christian love. He observed that she possessed a "deeply sympathetic heart," was a "very wise counsellor" and "an open-minded listener," who helped many sorrowing people.³² McKinney's commitment to her church in Claresholm and to the wider church, Webber observed, remained constant until the time of her death.³³

Additional information can also be found regarding Louise McKinney's involvement with the United Church through the Memorial address given by the Rev. Hugh Dobson, on 6 September 1931. Dobson recorded that he knew her as a fellow member of the General Board of Evangelism and Social Service of the United Church. He stated that "on that Board her voice and influence was more particularly expressed in guiding the evangelical activities of the church" but that she "never put Christian evangelism over against Christian service." He continued further by emphasizing her ability to balance evangelism and social service by declaring that ". . . she recognized more clearly than some that service lacked the dynamic of the church if the church lacked a clear, aggressive and winsome, evangelical message that gripped the conscience and converted the character, and gave constantly new direction to the lives of those who came within the church's influence." Dobson concluded by saying, "This I think was in many ways her greatest work."³⁴

The WCTU, the Franchise for Women and Work as an MLA

Louise McKinney, however, was involved in many other far-reaching campaigns outside the purview of her denominational affiliation.

As previously mentioned, she was president of the Alberta and Saskatchewan WCTU for more than twenty-two years and served as vice-president of the Dominion WCTU from 1908 until 1930. Shortly before her death In 1931, she was elected president of the Dominion WCTU and World WCTU vice-president. It was in these capacities that she travelled extensively throughout Canada, the United States, Britain and Europe. As a high profile leader, McKinney had played an important role in the early campaign for prohibition in Alberta which, in 1915, made the province the second to have prohibition on the retail sale of alcohol.³⁵

Louise C. McKinney campaigned, however, not only on temperance issues but also in the crusade for women's enfranchisement. At the ninth annual WCTU convention in Alberta and Saskatchewan, held in Calgary on 13 October 1911, Louise McKinney is on record to have said, "The vote is coming . . . Woman's franchise means home protection. In this age it is no longer possible for women to protect their homes from within. They must go outside and the best way for her to accomplish this protection is by the ballot."³⁶

Women in Alberta gained the franchise in 1916 and, in 1917, Louise was persuaded to run as an independent candidate on a prohibition platform for the Non Partisan League in the provincial election.³⁷ She agreed to do this because, as a strong prohibitionist, she felt that she could remain separate from the other political parties which she believed were financially supported by the vested interests of the liquor industry and were therefore corrupted. As an independent candidate not funded or influenced by any industry, McKinney felt that she would not be compromised and that her principles would remain intact.³⁸ This election was the first in which women could vote in Alberta and run for office in the Provincial Legislature. McKinney was elected and became the first female MLA (1917-1921) in the British Empire. It was during her term of office, that McKinney developed the reputation as a strong debater and a formidable opponent of the liquor industry.³⁹ Further, she established herself as an authority on parliamentary procedure and was recognised for her expertise and knowledge.⁴⁰

It was also during her time in the Alberta Legislature that Louise McKinney secured the reputation as an advocate for the needy and the helpless, playing an integral role in the later adoption of many social welfare measures for immigrants and widows. She was also very concerned with the protection of the mentally handicapped and indeed, in her

inaugural parliamentary speech she addressed the interests and protection of this group. This appears to have been a cause to which she remained strongly committed.⁴¹ It is not clear, however, from the available archival records whether McKinney, in her defence and protection of the mentally handicapped, favoured compulsory sterilization and perhaps accepted some of the arguments for eugenics as a reason for that procedure.

As an MLA, McKinney was instrumental in reintroducing Dower protection into Alberta Provincial legislation in 1917 after the older British Dower Act had been revoked by the Dominion Government in 1886. The Alberta Dower Act afforded some property rights and protection for widowed, married women and separated wives,⁴² who before implementation of the Act had possessed no legal rights to matrimonial property even in the case of the death of their husbands.⁴³ Louise McKinney regarded this achievement of Dower legislation as one of her greatest accomplishments.⁴⁴ In 1921 she was defeated in her second election due to her rigid prohibition stance and did not campaign further for re-election to the Legislature.

Speaker, Preacher and Advocate for Women's Ordination

McKinney continued as a popular speaker and leader of the WCTU. She preached from pulpits and championed female ordination. In an untitled and undated newspaper article written between 1922 and 1925, news of her recent attendance at the General Conference in Toronto and subsequent arrival in Ottawa was announced. The article went on to furnish information concerning her upcoming preaching engagement on the following Sunday. What is interesting to note is its concluding comment, which read, "At the General Conference Mrs. McKinney made a strong plea that women be admitted to the Methodist pulpit. She was defeated in this yet nevertheless she will occupy the pulpit of St. Paul's Methodist Church on Sunday morning."⁴⁵

McKinney appears to have been an effective preacher with the ability to make her preaching relevant to the ordinary person. Either during that same St. Paul's preaching engagement or on another occasion in Ottawa, one person took the time to write a note to her, thanking her for her message and the practical help it had given him. The writer said that it was the clearest and most helpful advice he had heard "in a very long time." The note was simply signed "A travelling salesman."⁴⁶

The Famous Five and the Persons Case

In 1928, Louise McKinney as one of the Alberta Famous Five women, added her name to a petition that was submitted to the Supreme Court of Canada. The petition, signed by Emily Murphy, Nellie McClung, Henrietta Muir-Edwards, Irene Parlby and Louise McKinney, requested that the Supreme Court clarify the definition of “Person” under the British North America Act.⁴⁷ The reason for this was simple; under the Federal interpretation of the BNA Act women were not considered to be persons under the law. Although Canadian women could vote in Federal elections⁴⁸ and even run for election, still, as officially non-persons under the BNA Act, women were not eligible for appointment to the Senate of Canada. Many women wanted access to appointments as Senators in order to change laws pertaining to females as it was within that body of government that final authority lay to adopt or rescind laws, many of which affected women. This was especially true pertaining to final assent in divorce proceedings and it was felt that female representation in the Senate would assist women in these matters by adding sympathetic representation.

The petition went before the Supreme Court of Canada and the question posed within it was simple. It merely requested clarification as to whether or not the word “person” under the BNA Act included women. The Supreme Court returned a judgment that in fact women were not persons under the BNA Act. This ruling caused an uproar from women within the Federated Women’s Institutes, the National Council of Women and the WCTU. The ruling was consequently appealed by the Famous Five, and the appeal was heard before the British Privy Council in 1929. On 18 October 1929, the Privy Council rendered the judgment that women were in fact persons under the law alongside men. For her contribution to the recognition of women as full legal entities through the Persons Case, Louise McKinney was made a World Vice-President of the Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire, which was a prestigious and widespread organization throughout the British Empire.⁴⁹

Unexpected Closure

In June 1931, Louise McKinney officiated as WCTU Dominion President⁵⁰ and Canadian hostess to 1,500 delegates from fifty-four countries, at the Toronto WCTU convention. During this function

McKinney received high commendation for her abilities and organizational skills.⁵¹ McKinney became ill during the convention but was still able to continue with her duties. However, shortly after returning to Claresholm she became gravely ill, but then appeared to be improving. Then suddenly, on 10 July 1931, Louise McKinney died. The news of her death was a great blow to the WCTU⁵² and many messages of sympathy were sent by stunned friends and admirers to Louise's husband James, and also to Willard, the couple's son. One year later James McKinney also died and the couple are buried side by side in Claresholm Cemetery.

Tribute and Testimony

Of Louise McKinney and her dedication to her various social causes, the Rev. Hugh Dobson in his memorial address stated that, "Her life and leadership in these movements was the gift of God to Alberta, to Canada, and to humanity." On her own behalf Louise McKinney had also once declared "my life has never been bounded by the four walls of a home. I have always been interested in the affairs of church and state."⁵³ This commitment to service was an enduring, life-long one to which she still held dear just a few days before her death. In a letter to an unidentified friend, on Alberta WCTU letterhead, which bore the motto, "In the Name of our God we will Set Up Our Banners," Louise McKinney spoke of her illness and frailty.⁵⁴ At the conclusion of the letter, written in the hand of her secretary, Louise stated that she was waiting patiently for the outcome, "whatever it may be," and that she trusted in God for his guidance, "rejoicing that so many years of effective service have been possible."⁵⁵ Louise McKinney died as she had lived, committed to service and to her God.

Endnotes

1. "In Memoriam: Mrs. Louise C. McKinney," *The White Ribbon Tidings*, 25 July-1 August 1931, 9.
2. Marilyn Whiteley identified four women who signed the Basis of Union for the United Church of Canada in 1925 including: Mrs. W.T. McGorman, from Port Arthur, Manitoba (Methodist); Mrs. L.C. McKinney, Claresholm, Alberta (Methodist); Miss E.A. Jamieson, Toronto (Congregationalist); Mrs. C.R. Crowe, Guelph, Ontario (Congregationalist) (see "Subscription to the Basis

of Union by the Members of the First General Council of The United Church of Canada" [Toronto: United Church Publishing House, 1925]).

3. Grant MacEwan, *Mighty Women: Stories of Western Canadian Pioneers* (Vancouver: Greystone Books, 1995), 139.
4. Louis Alexander MacKay, "Crummy, Louise (1868-1931) Mrs. James McKinney," *A Standard Dictionary of Canadian Biography: Canadian Who was Who* (Toronto: Trans-Canada Press, 1938), 2:83-85; *The Clear Spirit: Twenty Canadian Women and Their Times*, ed. Mary Quayle Innis (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973); Jean Cochrane, *Women in Canadian Politics* (Toronto: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1977); *Women are Persons: A Tribute to the Women of Canada and the "Persons Case"* (Edmonton: Alberta Women's Bureau, 1979); Nancy M. Sheehan, "Achieving Personhood: Louise McKinney and the WCTU in Alberta, 1905-1930," in *Women as Persons Special Publication No. 8, Resources for Feminist Research* (Fall 1980), 105-108; Nancy M. Sheehan, "Temperance, The WCTU, and Education in Alberta" (Ph.D. Diss., University of Alberta, 1980); Michael Palamarek, *A History of Women and Politics in Alberta, 1900-1988: A Report for Senator Martha P. Bielish* (Canada: s.n., 1989); *Now That We Are Persons* (Edmonton: University of Alberta, Museums and Collections Services, 1990); and *The Persons Case* (Edmonton: Alberta Women's Secretariat, 1992).
5. Catherine Cavanaugh, "Limitations of the Pioneering Partnership: The Alberta Campaign for Homestead Dower, 1909-1925," in *Making Western Canada: Essays on European Colonization and Settlement*, eds. Catherine Cavanaugh and Jeremy Mouat (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1996); and *Louise McKinney: Research and Discussion Guide, Working Draft* (Calgary: Famous Five Foundation, 1999).
6. The primary sources were found in fonds stored at the Glenbow Archival Institute (GAI), Provincial Archives of Alberta (PAA), the United Church Archives in Toronto (UCA), and the Claresholm and District Museum Archives (CDMA). Other primary source material was found in various newspaper articles of the period.
7. J. Willard McKinney, "Mrs. Louise C. McKinney: Pioneer Temperance Crusader of Alberta," *Alberta Temperance Review* (July [no year is printed on the publication]).
8. Rev. George Webber, "Mrs. Louise C. McKinney: An Appreciation," F1, M4069, Louise Crummy McKinney Fonds, GAI.

9. Rev. Hugh Dobson, "Address at the Memorial Service for Mrs. L.C. McKinney, McDougall Church, Edmonton, Alberta, Sunday, 6 September 1931," F1, M4069, Louise Crummy McKinney Fonds, GAI.
10. Louise C. McKinney, "Where are Canadian Women Going-Back to Their Homes or Continue in Business Life?" *Canadian Home Journal* (August 1919): 5, 59.
11. Writing under the pseudonym Janey Canuck, Alberta social activist Emily Murphy had established herself as a popular Canadian writer.
12. Letter from Emily Murphy to James McKinney, 15 July 1931, File 3, Box 1, M8138, Letters to James McKinney, GAI.
13. Nellie McClung, *The Stream Runs Fast: My Own Story* (Toronto: Thomas Allen Limited, 1945), 174.
14. "Alberta Women and Alberta Laws," *Lethbridge Herald*, 8 October 1920.
15. Grant MacEwan, *Mighty Women*, 139.
16. McKinney, "Mrs. Louise C. McKinney: Pioneer Temperance Crusader of Alberta," 5.
17. Dobson, "Address at the Memorial Service for Mrs. L.C. McKinney," 139.
18. McKinney, "Mrs. Louise C. McKinney: Pioneer Temperance Crusader of Alberta," 5.
19. "Quotes: Louise McKinney," Acc. No. 91.60, PAA.
20. *Louise McKinney: Research and Discussion Guide*, 17-18.
21. "Program of the Sixth Annual Convention of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, September 13, 14, 15 and 16, 1895," File 5, Box 1, M8138, Louise McKinney Fonds, GAI. Miss Louise Crummy is listed to represent a report as State Evangelist during the main session on Saturday, 14 September 1895.
22. Letter from Louise Crummy to Jennie McKinney, North Dakota, 23 January 1895, File 2, Box 1, M8138, Louise McKinney Fonds, GAI.
23. *Louise McKinney: Research and Discussion Guide*, 17.
24. The McKinneys were part of a group of twenty-six families from North Dakota who took up the offer of homestead land in the Claresholm area.

25. McKinney, "Mrs. Louise C. McKinney: Pioneer Temperance Crusader of Alberta," 5.
26. R. Soby, G. E. Dickensen, A. Wannaker, and S. Hillerud, *A History of Claresholm United Church, 1904-1969* (November 1969), 4, 5, 7, Acc. No. H966-015-03, CDMA.
27. Sheehan, "Temperance, The WCTU and Education in Alberta," 120.
28. *A History of Claresholm United Church*, 5. The Methodist Denomination had, and still does have, an order of lay preachers called local preachers. These are trained evangelists and preachers who are also authorized to conduct services, evangelism and teaching ministries.
29. "To Honour Alberta's First Woman Member," newspaper clipping, 5 April 1930, 2, Acc. No. 91.60, PAA.
30. "To Honour Alberta's First Woman Member."
31. Webber, "Mrs. Louise C. McKinney: An Appreciation," 2.
32. Webber, "Mrs. Louise C. McKinney: An Appreciation."
33. Webber, "Mrs. Louise C. McKinney: An Appreciation."
34. Webber, "Mrs. Louise C. McKinney: An Appreciation."
35. McKinney, "Mrs. Louise C. McKinney: Pioneer Temperance Crusader of Alberta," 6.
36. "President of the WCTU is in Favour of Votes for Women: Mrs. McKinney Predicts That Equal Suffrage is Coming," *Lethbridge Herald*, 14 October 1911.
37. MacEwan, *Mighty Women*, 143.
38. Dobson, "Address at the Memorial Service for Mrs. L.C. McKinney," 1.
39. Dobson, "Address at the Memorial Service for Mrs. L.C. McKinney," 2.
40. MacEwan, *Mighty Women*, 144.
41. *Women of Canada* (Montreal: Women of Canada Publishing Co., 1930), 156.
42. McKinney, "Mrs. Louise C. McKinney: Pioneer Temperance Crusader of Alberta," 7.
43. Palamarek, *A History of Women and Politics in Alberta, 1900-1988*, 14.

44. Cavanaugh, "Limitations of the Pioneering Partnership," 188.
45. "Former Member to Occupy the Pulpit," Acc. No. 91.60, PAA,
46. Letter from a travelling salesman to Mrs. McKinney, care of the Rev. W. T. Brown, File 2, M8138, Louise McKinney Fonds, GAI.
47. "Reference to the Admission of Women to the Senate of Canada," in *Louise McKinney Reference Volume*, CDMA.
48. The majority of Canadian women, apart from groups such as First Nations and Oriental minorities, obtained the federal franchise in 1918.
49. *Louise McKinney: Research and Discussion Guide*, 18.
50. McKinney, "Mrs. Louise C. McKinney: Pioneer Temperance Crusader of Alberta," 7.
51. File 7, Box 1, M8138, Louise McKinney Fonds, GAI.
52. "Tribute To Mrs. L. McKinney," File 7, Box 1, M8138, Louise McKinney Fonds, GAI.
53. "Quotes: Louise McKinney," Acc. No. 91.60, PAA.
54. Letter from Louise McKinney to Dear Friend, 1931, Louise McKinney File, CDMA. This illness was never identified.
55. McKinney's secretary, G. Weatherhead, placed the following footnote to the letter: "Dictated by Mrs. McKinney a few days before she died."

