



“Mother Ross”

1860-1936

“God moves in a
mysterious way
His wonders to perform”
— William Cowper, 1774

Vol. XXXV, No. 49

Bethinking of Olde Orleans

Mrs. John Ross, affectionately known by thousands as “Mother Ross” was born in Shelby Center where she married her husband who was also a Shelby native. She was the former Clara McDonald and on April 30, 1871 was baptized into the membership of the Shelby Baptist Church. At that time, little did the people of Shelby Center realize that Clara would become a widely-known Christian Crusader who would bring comfort to a countless number of wayward individuals. But it was indeed the Shelby Baptist Church where she committed herself at that very early age to the love and unselfish work of her Savior. In 1891 Clara and John, who later became known as “Daddy Ross,” moved to Buffalo as missionaries in the Maple Street Baptist chapel. Later she worked with Dr. Gifford, Pastor of the Delaware Avenue Baptist Church.

“Early in the year of 1902 the social evil had grown to alarming proportions in the city of Buffalo. On March 11 of that year a meeting of women was held in the library of the Women’s Christian Association Building with Mrs. W.A. Wilkes presiding, to form an association for the suppression of vice in the city of Buffalo.” A committee was formed to engage a missionary, whose duty it would be to visit police stations and interview young women who were arrested and thus help them reform. Mrs. John Ross who was active in the Delaware Baptist Church was secured to undertake this task. Later that year, through Mrs. Ross’ work the Gospel Lighthouse Mission was opened on Michigan Street. Gospel services were conducted by “Mother Ross” each evening and interest continued to grow. In October 1903 the women’s group which had backed the mission relieved itself of all financial obligations turning it over completely to “Mother Ross.” This was accepted by her and without money, but she decided to keep on with its work. She renamed it the “White Light Mission” using a white light as its beacon

11-22-13
signal in what was otherwise a red light district. Later the White Light Mission moved to Ellicott Street where her earnest endeavor was in “trying to steer folks to God.” She fed the hungry, clothed and sheltered the destitute and offered spiritual assistance to derelicts. During 1935, the year prior to her death, 12351 persons attended her services with 384 professed conversions. Free beds were provided for 621 people and 2,000 free meals were given out to the hungry.

Mother Ross was a frequent visitor to city court, police stations and detention buildings where she worked among prisoners, bringing them cheer and often times converting them or influencing them to mend their ways. She credited the police with being of great help to her. “I couldn’t do half of what I have done, if it weren’t for their cooperation,” she once declared. “I’m there with the Gospel and the police are there with the law and we work together...”

In 1930 she was lauded with the title “Buffalo’s Sweetest Girl,” and received a cash prize awarded by the Buffalo Evening News. Never during her many years of spiritual service did she make a public appeal for charity, but from wide sources voluntary contributions poured in from those who knew of her good work.

Throughout her life she occasionally made visits back to the Shelby Baptist Church and with radiant smile and happiness frequently told how it was there that she became devoted to Jesus.

“...it is something to use your time and strength to war with the waywardness and thoughtlessness of mankind...” - John Ruskin

C. W. Lattin is the Orleans county historian. *Bethinking of Olde Orleans* appears every Friday in *The Journal-Register*.