Nile Mother: Lillian Trasher and Egypt’s Orphans

By Beth Baron

I was a young, happy girl [in 1910] of not quite 23, full of dreams of all the wonderful things I was sure life held for me. The most important of all was the 12 children I was hoping for. I wonder what I would have felt like had the curtain been lifted for just a few minutes and I could have seen myself this morning, 50 years later! Here I am — a tired, old gray-headed woman, looking out my window and seeing not 12 children but 1,200!

— Lillian Trasher, January 4, 1960

One hundred years ago, in 1911, Lillian Hunt Trasher started what would become the largest orphanage in Egypt. Trasher, a single Christian woman, successfully navigated complex cultural and social currents in this largely-Muslim country, and her Assiout Orphanage survived political turmoil and war. Although she did not have children of her own, she became known as the “Nile Mother,” raising thousands of orphans in the home.

Trasher is probably the most recognized missionary in the Assemblies of God. Her supporters followed her story through her letters to Pentecostal periodicals, features in magazines, biographies, and a movie (“The Nile Mother”). These works frame her life and the success of her mission as an affirmation of the Christian faith. Trasher supporters in the West may be less familiar with her interaction with Egyptian political and social elites and her impact on Egyptian society. This article provides a brief overview of Trasher’s childhood and call to the mission field, as well as a more thorough examination of her life and work in the context of colonial and postcolonial Egypt.

Childhood, Conversion and Call

Lillian Trasher was born on September 27, 1887, in Jacksonville, Florida. Her father was manager of an asphalt paving company, and her mother was educated at Vassar College. Lillian spent much of her childhood in Brunswick, Georgia, where neighbors Ed and Anna Mason awakened in Lillian a hunger for religion during the Christmas season in 1896.

Biographer Beth Prim Howell recounted a story Lillian told about an experience as a nine-year-old. One day Lillian was walking home from school when she knelt before an old log, as if it were an altar, and cried out loud, “I want to be your little girl.” She later said that she prayed alone for some time in the piney woods and finally declared boldly, “Lord, if ever I can do anything for You, just let me know and — and — I’ll do it!”

During her teenage years, Lillian grew into an attractive young woman and also developed a remarkable artistic talent. At age 16, Lillian and her family moved to Asheville, North Carolina. One day, while at a train station on her way to visit the Masons in her hometown, she met Mattie Perry — a Pentecostal woman who had started the Elhanan Training Institute and Orphanage in Marion, North Carolina. Perry’s venture was not supported by a denomination, but operated on faith that God would provide for needs as they arose. The course of Lillian’s life changed because of her encounter with Perry. Lillian had intended to apply for a position in the art department at a newspaper in Atlanta, but instead joined the staff at Perry’s orphanage, where she learned to feed and clothe infants and children as well as run a mission on faith-based lines.

Lillian took a break from the orphanage, studying for one year at God’s Bible School, a Holiness institution in

— Beth Baron, 2011 AG HERITAGE 31
Cincinnati, Ohio. She also was active in ministry in a Church of God congregation in Dahlonega, Georgia, and then traveled as an evangelist.

Back at the orphanage with Perry, Lillian felt called to serve as a missionary to Africa. She was engaged to marry a handsome young minister, Tom Jordan, but he did not share her call to the mission field. She tearfully broke off her engagement and accepted the invitation of a Pentecostal couple, G. S. Brelsford and his wife, to join them in Egypt. Hearing that she did not have the financial backing of a mission board, Lillian’s own family initially opposed her plans. Undeterred, Lillian solicited funds and went out in 1910 accompanied by her sister Jennie to the Nile town of Asyut in southern Egypt.

**Arrival in Egypt**

Within months of her arrival, Lillian went to pray for a dying young mother. She returned to the Pentecostal mission home with the dead woman’s baby, but her hosts soon lost patience with the infant’s crying. Rather than give the baby back to its family, which did not have the means to feed it, she kept the child. Unfettered by a board bureaucracy, Lillian rented a home and started an orphanage. She believed that God would provide.

The Assiout Orphanage, which later became affiliated with the Assemblies of God Division of Foreign Missions, grew into a village that held at its peak 1,400 children and widows and contained its own schools, church, clinic, bakery, dairy, dormitories, and swimming pool. During its first fifty years, roughly eight thousand orphans passed through its doors.

Lillian Trasher’s orphanage became the centerpiece of Pentecostal missions in Egypt, producing many of its converts, preachers, and leaders. It surpassed in size and longevity most other foreign missionary projects, and when other missionaries were expelled or prevented from returning at critical moments, Lillian enjoyed a special status.

**Presbyterians Prepare the Field**

Pentecostal evangelists in Egypt followed in the footsteps of Presbyterians, who arrived in Egypt in 1854 and established a base in Asyut early on. The fourth largest city in Egypt, Asyut was the capital of Upper Egypt and a stronghold of Eastern Orthodox Christians, who were considered by Presbyterians to be in need of reform and receptive to Protestant “conversion.” Indeed, a number of prominent Coptic families in Asyut, most notably the Wissas and Khayatts, became Protestants.

The Presbyterians enjoyed board support and established self-sustaining and money-making operations such as schools and hospitals. The Pentecostals, by contrast, came out “on faith,” hoping to raise money from local supporters and those back home; they focused on preaching, prayer, and proselytizing through distributing Bibles, Arabic periodicals, and gospel literature.

The better-educated Presbyterians were elitist and sought out converts from the wealthier classes; the Pentecostals were populists who spent more time with the poor. The groups had very different notions of conversion: Presbyterians focused on learning and indoctrination; Pentecostals stressed a religious experience that included “baptism in the Holy Spirit” and speaking in tongues. The Christian sects also had different notions of gender roles in church and society: the Presbyterians came out as couples in
the early days; wives often taught or directed Bible women; single women mainly taught. The Pentecostals came out as couples or as singles, but missionary wives and single women could preach should God choose to “use” them in this way.

Lillian Trasher chose the most marginal of people for her ministry: orphaned, abandoned, and handicapped children, who lacked family in a society that considered the family its basis and saw family lineage as critical to creating and sustaining social and political bonds. This helped insure Lillian’s success even when Presbyterians and other missionaries in Egypt began to withdraw.

Winning Local Support and Averting Attacks

When Lillian Trasher arrived in Upper Egypt, preachers were plentiful, but no orphanages existed in Asyut or its environs. She resolved to start one. Children initially did not come flocking to the Malja’ al-Aytam al-Khayri bi-Asyut (shortened in English to the Assiout Orphanage). “Then we took in a few children, but at first it was very hard to get them.” Egyptians suspected that Lillian planned to take the orphans as slaves to America. Given Asyut’s historical role as a major depot in the slave trade, which ended only in 1877, as well as the American history of slavery, the thought was not that strange.

The first year of the orphanage was rocky. After a child entered the home with bubonic plague, authorities closed it down temporarily, and Lillian returned to the U.S. to convalesce. While in Durant, Florida, A. J. Tomlinson of the Church of God gave her ministerial credentials as an evangelist. Upon her return to Egypt, the Assiout Orphanage began to grow.

Every week I have to turn away four or five little ignorant children from lack of space who might be taught and led to Christ,” Lillian wrote in 1913. By the next year she had fifty children under her care. An unnamed Turkish woman taught rug making, and Sarah Smith, a missionary from Indianapolis, gave Lillian a hand.

With space tight, Lillian decided to move the home out of the city in 1915. She built across the river in Abnub on a half acre. With a base on the east side of the river, the orphanage had room to grow. At the same time, the orphans, whose status was often ambiguous, were removed from the center of town and physically marginalized.

Lillian received support from local elites as well as foreign backers, raising funds through Pentecostal periodicals, but the Pentecostals had not picked the most propitious moment to launch their missionary effort in Egypt. They arrived after the founding of the first nationalist parties in 1907 and were oblivious to the growing nationalist and Islamic opposition to British occupation.

As the war wound down and international peace talks loomed, Egyptian nationalists sought a place at the table, but colonial officials arrested them. Massive protests erupted throughout Egypt; protestors called for the release of their leaders. The British acted quickly to restore order in the capital, where among those protesting were some of Lillian’s staunchest support-
ers, notably Esther Fanus (daughter of Balsam Wissa and Akhtukh Fanus, and wife of Fahmy Wissa). In Asyut, events started peacefully but took a violent turn.

An American Presbyterian minister had tried to persuade Lillian before the violence erupted to take refuge with them in one of the schools in Asyut, but she refused to leave the orphanage in Abnub. After communication with Cairo was severed and the banks limited access to funds, Lillian and “Auntie” Zakiya, the head matron, decided to send all of those children with family in Asyut and nearby villages to their relatives. The orphanage subsequently became cut off from town and came under attack by looters.

A neighbor intervened, “Men, be ashamed!” he apparently said. “These are our own orphans, our own Egyptian children for whom the lady has given her life … and she has never done you any harm. Be ashamed and go somewhere else but to the home of our orphan babies.” While many other foreign institutions and businesses were attacked and burned in the revolt, the orphanage was spared.

When British reinforcements arrived in the region, they forced Lillian and the children to evacuate the orphanage. The boys were moved into one of the American Presbyterian schools in town; the girls and babies were sent to the American Presbyterian Hospital. “Auntie” Zakiya took charge of the children, awaiting permission to return with them to Abnub. British officials forced Lillian to join other foreigners being evacuated to Cairo. Having been away from her family for seven years, Lillian decided to use the time of her enforced separation from the children to visit the U.S. There, in 1919, she raised funds for the orphanage and she received ministerial credentials and a missionary appointment with the Assemblies of God, beginning her official affiliation with a church that did not exist when she left for Asyut in 1910.

Royals, Notables, and Local Egyptians Help Fund the Home

In the wake of the 1919 Revolution, Egyptians started new orphanages, sensing that they needed to care for their own orphans and abandoned children, rather than leave this to foreigners.

Lillian’s refuge had little competition in Asyut, to which she had returned in February 1920. She had more requests for entry than she could accommodate. “You cannot imagine how I feel when I have to refuse some [children entry],” Lillian lamented. “There are no other orphanages within hundreds of miles from here and the other orphanages in Cairo and Alexandria will not take in new ones until some of the older ones leave.”

Rather than continue to turn down children, Lillian decided to expand the home again. A gift in 1921 of $1,500 from the then Sultan (later King) Fu’ad (r.1917-1936) helped make this enlargement possible. His visit to the orphanage was one in a line of Egyptian rulers and foreign royals and nobles, such as the Queen of Belgium and Lord Maclay of Scotland, who sought to demonstrate their benevolence and enhance their prestige through charitable giving.

In 1926, Lillian Trasher went to the Shari’a Court in Asyut to establish a trust (waqf) for the lands and buildings of the Assiout Orphanage. Her strategy deviated from the standard practice of American missionaries, who accumulated property in the name of a board, which then controlled the property. According to the terms of the trust, Lillian could never sell the land but would remain head of the trust.
as long as she lived. She appointed a committee of interrelated Wissas, Khayatts, and Alexans along with her sister Jennie Benton to administer the trust after her death. Elite Copts now felt assured that they were giving to an institution that would serve Upper Egypt for the long term.

It was no accident that the refuge was located next to the Nile Sporting Club, for the same families who sold or donated land to Lillian for her orphanage provided land for the club. The playground of the Asyut elite, the club contained tennis courts, a nine-hole golf course, and a box for charitable donations that Lillian periodically emptied.27

Women such as Lily (Alexan) Khayyat and Esther (Fanus) Wissa, longtime supporters of the orphanage, took out subscriptions, started sewing circles, and sent gifts of wheat, beef, cooked meals, cotton, and cloth. They celebrated births, weddings, and major life events with donations, and adopted Lillian as one of their own. They invited her to meals, took her on outings, and sent her new dresses.

Middle strata merchants and poor workers and peasants also gave gifts in kind or sums of money to the orphanage, ranging from free taxi rides for the children to stocks of soap or other items to crumpled bills. Lillian’s letters are full of stories of local generosity, often from people of humble appearance. The community valued Lillian’s commitment to caring for the orphans.

Royal, notable, and general support was needed to fund expansions of space and the quotidian feeding of a constantly growing group of children. The orphanage charged no admission fees, and accepted boys under ten and girls under twelve. Lillian wanted the children long-term in order to be able to work the transformation to body and soul that she envisioned.28

Egyptians increasingly turned to the orphanage for help. Fathers often brought in babies after their wives had died from complications of childbirth. Many infants deposited at the orphanage were thus not technically orphans but offspring of single fathers who had insufficient knowledge, will, or means to raise motherless children. The orphanage also accepted foundlings: “About two weeks ago I had some one knock at my door about midnight and hand me a wee tiny baby, just a few hours old which they had found in the street,” wrote Lillian in 1921.29

Another set of children arrived with widowed mothers who had no financial resources or willing relatives to help raise fatherless offspring. Roughly ten percent of the population consisted of widows, who were indispensable to the orphanage, becoming its main labor force and replacing the servants hired earlier.

Egyptians supported the orphanage in spite of its religious agenda, and in some cases because of it, for it provided a service others were unwilling to provide. The shame of illegitimacy hung over those children whose mothers were not married or whose fathers were unknown, making it hard for them to be accepted into the larger society and for society to care for them.

Another set of stigmatized children who ended up at the home were those with physical handicaps, including children with birth defects and those injured in accidents. The orphanage accepted the offspring of lepers as well as blind girls but not blind boys, for whom there was already a home in Egypt.30 For the children, the orphanage became a large family.
The Anti-Missionary Movement and Its Aftermath

Lillian Trasher opened the doors of the orphanage wide, not denying entrance based on religion. “I take into my orphanage Mohammedans, Syrians, Catholics — anyone. My work is not denominational, although I myself am Pentecostal,” she explained. Under the terms of the charitable trust written in 1926, the orphanage was established “as a home for the training and education of poor orphans, of any religion and of any denomination.” The trust stipulated that Muslim children were to be trained in Islam, and Christian children “instructed in the teachings of the Assemblies of God.”

Serving as matriarch and patriarch of the orphanage family, Lillian sought to save souls. In winter 1926, she began to see results. “After crying and praying like the sound of many waters, they began to testify. One little Mohammedan boy got up on top of the bench and testified saying, ‘In my village I was a sinner but now God has saved me and if I was cut in little pieces I would not serve idols.’ … Souls are being saved and others baptized in the Holy Spirit.”

An episode that began as a confrontation between a fifteen-year-old orphan girl named Turkiyya Hasan and a matron in the Swedish Salaam Orphanage in Port Said galvanized the country and led to investigations of missionary institutions. “I am very much in need of the prayers of all the Lord’s children as there is a great stir among all of the Muslims against the missionaries here,” Lillian Trasher wrote in a letter home on June 23, 1933.

A correspondent in Asyut for the daily Arabic newspaper al-Jihad, which prided itself on being in the vanguard of the anti-missionary movement, called upon the authorities to investigate the orphanage. Lillian admitted to the inspection officials sent by the governor that the Muslim children went to Christian services along with the other children. She explained that hers was a faith-based enterprise — “the Lord supplies our needs” — and she told them about her own “call to the work.”

She gave them copies of financial reports, pamphlets, and, upon request, a Bible. The governor subsequently called Lillian in for a meeting; while thanking her for what she had done for the poor children of Egypt, he informed her that they were going to take the Muslim children out of the orphanage and build new refuges for them.

Government officials returned to remove Muslim children, in a move that was celebrated by al-Jihad: “July 8th, 1933 was a day of great joy at Asyut when about 64 Moslem boys and girls were taken away from Miss Lillian’s Orphanage.” Although Lillian was relieved that she had not been forced out of Egypt like the matron of the Port Said orphanage, she lamented the loss of the children. “Words cannot describe the sad sight as they took them away! … Pray that the teaching of years will go with them and not die.”

From the 1930s, the large American Presbyterian mission began retrenching due to the anti-missionary movement in Egypt and decreasing support for foreign missions at home. But Pentecostals were not on the retreat. The orphanage that stood at the center of the mission in Egypt settled back into its routine. When the writer Jerome Beatty visited in 1939, there were 647 orphans and 74 widows, and the orphanage had grown into a virtual village.

Florence Christie, who taught, delivered babies, and supervised the girls in this period, described working for Lillian: “She possessed a loving, but strong personality, which people sometimes found hard to follow…. She was known to be difficult to work for also because of her high expectations and demands.” There was only one “Mama.” The other women, as Florence Christie quickly learned, were “Aunties.”

Boys were taught artisan skills (carpentry and chair making) and girls trained in domestic tasks (infant care and sewing) along lines that were typical of industrial schools. Both had farming tasks, with girls feeding and collecting chicken eggs and boys working with barn animals. The boys attended primary and secondary schools at the orphanage and could continue on to college if they had the
aptitude. They took up the trades into which they had been apprenticed or took up careers as teachers, clerks, and pastors. Some of the boys became active in the Assemblies of God in Egypt, forming its core. They evangelized in villages, started schools and churches, and staffed the missions scattered about Egypt.41

Girls attended a general school in preparation for marriage. Lillian made it clear that the girls were not to be hired out as domestic servants, the once expected fate of female orphans; working in a home around unrelated men would compromise their reputations and hurt their chances for marriage. Most of the orphan girls married; some did not and stayed in the home as helpers. A few felt “called” to join American female missionaries in their work outside the orphanage. This was the only career path available to them.

As the promised Axis attack grew closer, American missionaries were evacuated from Egypt. Those in Asyut headed south to the Sudan. Lillian stayed on but sent Florence Christie to America to raise funds, which were in short supply during the war. When cities such as Alexandria were bombed, the orphanage opened its doors to those of its grown children who had become refugees. The orphanage survived the war intact, but faced challenges in its wake when cholera and malarial epidemics devastated the countryside. After the war when Presbyterians were downsizing, Pentecostals sent reinforcements to help Lillian.

Weathering the 1952 Revolution

“It is whispered around the city of Assiut that it is always good to give an offering to the orphanage when God has been good to you!” wrote Lester Sumrall in 1951. With donations from Egyptians and Americans, the Assiout Orphanage continued to expand. Lillian decided to transform the orphanage hospital into a nursery for babies over seven months of age and to build a new hospital for sick children. Ground was broken for the new building in late 1951; it opened the following year.42 That year marked a sea change in Egyptian politics.

Revolutionary winds transformed Egypt in 1952 when a group of officers led by Gamal Abdel Nasser (1918-1970) toppled King Farouk (r.1936-1952) and inaugurated military rule by a Revolutionary Command Council (RCC). This effectively put an end to the British presence in Egypt as well as to the presence of most of the foreign missionaries they had assisted and protected.

When the RCC toured Upper Egypt in March 1953 as part of an attempt to consolidate power by rallying popular support, they stopped at the orphanage. Prime Minister Muhammad Naguib led the entourage of government officials, local leaders, reporters, and photographers that visited Lillian and the children on the afternoon of March 24. The RCC hoped to demonstrate through the visit to the orphanage their concern for the poor and their genuine interest in social welfare.

Before departing, Naguib inscribed a message in the guest book, part of which read, “I call upon all those who are engaged in social reform and activities to visit this institution and learn from it what they should do if they really wish to achieve.”

The leading Arabic and English dailies — al-Akhbar, al-Ahram, and the Egyptian Mail — covered the visit, giving the orphanage widespread publicity. The press pieces transformed Lillian Trasher from a missionary into a social worker to fit revolutionary times and new social agendas.44 Lillian noted that the nice things Naguib said “helped to give the people of Egypt a more friendly feeling toward us.”45 Lillian needed this political capital if she and her institution were to survive revolutionary transformations.

In September 1952, the revolutionaries limited agricultural landholdings. They undercut the main sources of wealth of elite landowning families such as the Wissas, Khayyats, and Alexans — Lillian Trasher’s original patrons. The authorities then began to appropriate and nationalize businesses, properties, hospitals, and schools.

Power clearly shifted from the landed elite to the military and security forces. The orphanage could no longer look to notable families as major benefactors. In any case, in the 1940s Lillian had already reconstituted the board of the orphanage, replacing deceased Coptic friends with orphans and Assemblies of God representatives.

Lillian did not downsize or plan to leave. At the start of 1957, the
orphanage head count stood at 1,035, not including refugees from the Suez War. The next year Lillian built a new school to accommodate the growing numbers. Supporters sent supplies. When a new car got held up in customs, she appealed directly to Nasser to waive the duties. His response — “I would like to tell you that your work for the orphans is very much appreciated by everyone in this country” — reassured Lillian. “I feel it will give me by far the greatest pristage [sic] I have ever had,” she wrote, anticipating it would help her in dealing with the Egyptian authorities. The Egyptian press recognized her as “Mother of a Thousand.”

No longer young, Lillian carefully updated her affairs. She intended to run the orphanage during her lifetime and then turn it over to a team of handpicked successors. Lillian’s hopes were that the orphanage, which numbered 1,340 in 1960, would survive under a system of checks and balances — officials of the local Ministry of Social Affairs, orphan successors, and the Assemblies of God Foreign Missions advisors — after her death.

Lillian Trasher cut short a trip to the U.S. in 1960 when she grew ill, not wanting to die and be buried away from Egypt and her orphans. She returned to Asyut, where she celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the orphanage in February 1961. She died on December 17, 1961. The Egyptian and Pentecostal press mourned the passing of a woman called alternatively a “saint,” “virgin mother of thousands of Egyptians,” “Nile Mother,” and “Mama” Lillian.

Many of the former residents of the orphanage returned for the funeral, the largest in Asyut’s history: a six-horse carriage pulled the body through the streets of the city to a plot in the orphanage cemetery where she was buried alongside helpers and many of her “children.” She had sought to instill American Christian culture and values in the orphans and abandoned children under her care. By the end of her life, after fifty years in Egypt, she considered Egypt her home and the orphanage her family.

The Assiout Orphanage (now called the Lillian Trasher Orphanage) is today run by one of Lillian’s orphans, George Assad. The Assemblies of God of Egypt, which has authority over the orphanage, is the second-largest Protestant denomination in Egypt, with over 100,000 adherents. This success is due in large part to the orphanage, which trained several generations of church leaders and whose ministry of compassion gave the Assemblies of God credibility in this Muslim nation.
Conclusion

Lillian Trasher’s orphanage survived real and potential nationalist assaults at pivotal moments — the Revolution of 1919, the anti-missionary movement of 1933, and the Free Officers Revolution in 1952 — because it served an underserved community that sat at the margins of society. While Presbyterians were in retreat from the 1930s, Pentecostal enthusiasm for foreign missions did not wane, and the Assiout Orphanage continued to grow, surpassing in size and longevity other better endowed foreign missionary projects.

The orphanage proved to be the most enduring part of the Pentecostal mission in Egypt. It also became an important symbol of the power of faith for the Assemblies of God, one of the fastest growing churches in the world. In recent decades, the orphanage, which was sometimes known as “Miss Lillian’s Orphanage” during her lifetime and became known as the Lillian Trasher Orphanage after her death, has become a destination for young North American volunteers, who give service to affirm their faith.

Lillian Trasher had an uncanny ability to navigate the cross-currents of political change, thus insuring the longevity and success of the mission.

At critical moments British colonial officials, and later American officials, interceded with help, and a broad base of Americans and other Westerners supported the project with donations. Lillian found a niche in Asyut precisely because Egyptians of all classes supported the venture, though some felt strongly that the home should not raise Muslims, who were removed from the home in the 1930s.

While the colonial state relied on a patchwork of social welfare providers, the postcolonial state moved to take over many of these projects, ousting missionaries and foreigners. Lillian was permitted to stay on in Egypt when others were expelled or asked to leave because she had earned the trust and admiration of Egyptians at the highest levels.

The marginality of women and Pentecostals in the missionary field, the view held by Asyut and Copts in Egypt, and her work with orphans in Muslim society all served to shelter Lillian Trasher’s undertaking. While most of the children in the orphanage came after the death of one or both parents, the social shame associated with illegitimacy and birth defects surrounded them all and protected the mission of the orphanage. Lillian cultivated local support from Egyptians who preferred to subcontract the raising of such children to foreigners and foreign support from those who saw her mission as worthwhile. Her initial independence from a board or bureaucracy gave her broad scope for working with local inhabitants and foreign donors in launching and expanding the home.

Ultimately the orphanage worked because the locals shaped it. The marginality of the missionary, the location, and the children allowed the orphanage to grow and flourish in unimagined ways. The children raised one another, with the first generation of grown girls and boys in turn caring for the next, creating a sense of family for those without the bonds of kinship. This was crucial for their life within the orphanage and later in the larger society outside of it. The labor of widows was also critical to sustaining the home, but shelter came at a price: many of the widows were physically separated and socially distanced from their children. The widows, though, at least maintained ties with their transformed children. Those single mothers who felt forced by social circumstances to abandon their children at birth could not maintain ties: Lillian became the “Nile Mother” of their children.

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Watch the classic documentary film about Lillian Trasher, The Nile Mother (1955?) on AGTV: http://agtv.ag.org/the-nile-mother

To learn more about the Lillian Trasher Orphanage, go to the official website: http://www.ltochildren.org

Donations may be made online (www.worldmissions.ag.org) or mailed to Assemblies of God World Missions, Trasher Memorial Orphanage Account #891133(45), 1445 N. Boonville Ave., Springfield, MO 65802.

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A 100th anniversary edition of Letters From Lillian will be available April 1. Visit worldmissions.ag.org

NOTES

1Lillian Trasher, Letters from Lillian (Springfield, MO: Assemblies of God Division of Foreign Missions, 1983), 110.


3Other Christian traditions recognize Trasher’s example. Interestingly, the Episcopal Church added Trasher to its liturgical calendar (calendar of saints) in 2009. This was part of an effort to recognize “holy men and women” from other Christian traditions (including the Southern Baptist Convention’s Lottie Moon).

4U.S. Department of State, Report of the Death of an American Citizen, Lillian Trasher file, FPHC. However, she listed her birth date as September 28, 1887, on her 1919 application for endorsement as an Assemblies of God missionary. Lillian Trasher file, AGWM archives, Springfield, MO. Denominational documents used the September 27 birth date.

5Beatty, 56.

6Howell, 14-20.

7Howell, 22.

8For an unknown reason, Howell identified Perry as Myrtle Marker. Howell, 24-28. Trasher identifies Mattie Perry by name in her booklet, “The Birth of Assiout Orphanage or Why I Came to Egypt in 1910,” FPHC.

9Howell, 44-49. According to historian Charles Conn, Trasher “was not a Church of God missionary, but was considered a product of the church.” She was “closely associated with the work in Dahlonega, Georgia,” was a frequent contributor to the Church of God Evangel, and received offerings from the Church of God. Charles Conn, Like a Mighty Army Moves the Church of God, 1886-1955 (Cleveland, TN: Church of God Publishing House, 1955), 143-144.

10While Assyt is the preferred transliteration for the town, I will use the spelling of Assiout when mentioning the Assiout Orphanage, as referenced by Lillian Trasher. For background on orphans, see Beth Baron, “Orphans and Abandoned Children in Modern Egypt,” in Between Missionaries and Dervishes: Interpreting Welfare in the Middle East, ed. Nefissa Neguib and Inger Marie Okkenhaug (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 12-34.


13Muhammad Asyut, Asyut fi 10 Sanawat (Cairo: Matba’a at Nahdat Misr, 1962), 9.

14Lillian Trasher personal papers, FPHC; Lillian Trasher file, AGWM.


20Beth Baron, Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender, and Politics (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), chapters 5-7.


25Lillian Trasher, Pentecostal Evangel, April 2, 1921, 12.

26Lillian Trasher personal papers, Waqf Document in Arabic and English translation, FPHC.


28Sumrall, Lillian Trasher, 22-23.

29Lillian Trasher, Pentecostal Evangel, June 25, 1921, 13.


32Lillian Trasher personal papers, Waqf, FPHC.

33“A Big Revival in Egypt,” Pentecostal Evangel, March 27, 1926, 11.


35Al-Jihad (July 10, 1933) in Presbyterian Historical Society (PHS), RG 209, Box 26, Folder 38.


37Al-Jihad (July 10, 1933) in PHS, RG 209, Box 26, Folder 38.

38A Work of Faith, 20; Letters from Lillian, 22-23.


40Florence Christie, Called to Egypt (Wichita Falls, TX: Western Christian Foundation, 1997), 54.

41Samu’il Mishriqi, Tarekh al-Madhab al-Khamsiniyya, 1985).

42Sumrall, 38.


44al-Ahram (March 25, 1953); al-Akhrar (March 25, 1953); Lillian Trasher personal papers, scrapbook, FPHC; Christie, pp.142-43; “General Naguib’s Visit to Assiut,” Pentecostal Evangel, Feb. 13, 1955, 2.


47Lillian Trasher personal papers, Gamal Abdel Nasser to Lillian Trasher, Cairo, Oct. 13, 1959; Lill to Jen, Assiout, Oct. 20, 1959, FPHC.