

Letter explaining 1939-41 letters
Jan. 13, 1973

Dear Ronald:

I am sending you herewith the copies of letters for three years beginning in 1939. They end with Pearl Harbor when we were interned and unable to send any letters.

The background of the letters is as follows: When the Sino-Japanese war broke out in 1937, and the city of Nanking seemed likely to be in for trouble, I decided to ask to go home as Mother had just died and I was anxious to get back. The school where I was teaching was closed and the future was uncertain as to work in Nanking. Everybody was out of Nanking until late in the fall of 1937, on further thought, I think ~~it was nearly finished~~ sometime in 1938, I think late in the year. Anyhow early in 1939, the Board urged me to return and do whatever I could.

On the boat with me was a fellow missionary, Margaret Seeck. She had promised to help in Fukien for a short time and afterward she came to Nanking to work. Her reason was language as she could not manage the Foochow dialect. After about six months in Nanking she was able to return to work in her own conference.

I had two fellow missionaries in Nanking, Lulu Golisch and Marie Brethorst. Marie ~~was~~ had been doing ~~an~~ church work at Wesley Church in the south city. (My school, Hwei Wen, was in the north.) She was overdue for furlough and not well, and she wanted me to take over her work at Wesley church. This included quite a bit of educational work.

In both churches, Central (North) and Wesley in the south part of the city had a sort of school, which were "pu-sih" i.e. sort of review classes. The idea was that any sort of school was better than none, so no attempt was made to keep to any standards. As teachers, they hired anyone they could get, not matter how unqualified. It was partly to give employment to the teachers. They were self-supporting i.e. dependent on fees paid by students. Gradually efforts were made to improve the standards, but not much in the three years. One school "Chen-mei" was in a building loaned to us if we would run a school in it, the idea being to keep it from being taken over by the Japanese. At Hwei wen, formerly a high school for girls, there was a similar school for all grades, and anybody who could read and write was given a job.

For some reason, I was nominally principal of all of these schools. The Chinese who really ran them, had an idea that there would be less trouble with the Japanese authorities if the schools had a American principal. For a while I think it was five schools, but later the people who owned the Chen Mei buildings decided that it would be better not to have a Church school in it and that went out of our hands in the summer of 1941.

At the time of Pearl Harbor, I was attending our annual conference at Wuhu along with some other missionaries. We were kept in Wuhu, in a sort of house arrest until March and then sent back to Nanking, where I stayed at Ginling College until we were repatriated in June, or started back on the road home about that time. We arrived in New York early in Sept.

Love Jessé

P. S. I should say there were other missionaries in Nanking, i.e. Meth. but as the situation became threatening, the number was finally reduced to ~~four~~ ~~five~~, Harriet Whitmer, at Gingling College, Dr. Trimmer at the hospital, and Albert Steward at the University. There were a number in other missions too. All of us Methodists except Albert were repatriated. He decided to stay, hoping to be useful when the war ended. He was interned in Shanghai under rather uncomfortable circumstances. I rather enjoyed the time in Nanking during which we were under a sort of house arrest. No guards were set over us. We were told by the Jap. that for our own safety, we should keep off the streets, and we ~~obeyed~~ observed it very carefully in order to avoid anything worse.

At Ginling College, there was a large campus and a high school being conducted so our friends felt free to come to see us. I had guests nearly every afternoon. I studied Chinese in the morning and tried to learn to read and write a thousand characters.