

Summer Roads and Sidewalks



Professor Llorens and G.M. Taylor (seated), Manuel Calero and Vincent Tibbets (standing), canvassed in Cuba in 1919

For many students of Emmanuel Missionary College the end of the school year and the coming summer meant one thing: canvassing. The *Student Movement* of April 11, 1929, announced: “Emmanuel Missionary College is sending out a large number of young people into the field this summer. Ninety-six are going out to win souls and scholarships. Are there not more to join this group of Christian workers? Can not a hundred students enter the work this year? Can they not bring in a hundred souls at the end of the season? The answer is that they can. The spirit of E.M.C. says they will” (2).

Arthur J. Lewison was one who took the challenge to sell books door to door that summer of 1929. He wrote back to his classmates: “At present I am tramping the woods of northern Wisconsin, . . . I find many people up here interested in the truth. Some are very anxious to secure our gospel literature.”¹

Since the days of Battle Creek College, students had canvassed during their vacation months, fulfilling both their desire for

mission work and their need to earn tuition money. George Royal Avery enlisted in a scheme by Dr. J. H. Kellogg to sell his *Home Handbook of Domestic Hygiene and Rational Medicine*. In the summer of 1880 he struck out for Iowa, to work near Des Moines. A cloth-bound copy of the book sold for \$5.75 and a deluxe edition for \$7. George would receive a forty-five percent cut of the sales. But he would also be responsible for all shipping expenses, his travel and his room and board.²

George put in ten-hour days but had to confess in a letter to his parents almost a year later, “. . . it has cost me more to canvass the past 10 mo[nths] than it would to have attended school for the same time.” But George, always the optimist, continued, “. . . but I would not take \$5.00 for the experience I have had so I consider that I have made the book business a success....”³

The tradition continued at Emmanuel Missionary College where the young women hit the country roads as well. Edna Fitton gave this lively description of canvassing in 1915:

They always tell us that rainy weather is fine for canvassers, but I don’t see how a girl can work in the rain. I tried it one week and you should have seen me when I got back to town. I came in in the middle of the week, my dress and shoes just covered with mud. My rubbers stuck fast about six miles from town and as I couldn’t keep them on and would not carry them I left them there. A couple of farmers in a single buggy took pity on me and wedged me in between them. When we reached the city they dropped me in the middle of the business section and it seemed to me as if everyone on the street turned to stare at me. I looked down at my bedraggled

skirts and then for the first time in my life I said to myself, ‘Oh, I wish I were a boy.’⁴

Still other students spent their summers in urban canvassing work, selling the *Watchman* magazine. Dorothy Lucile Marks worked in the Chicago loop, approaching businessmen on the sidewalk to say, “Pardon me, Sir. I am working my way through college selling the *Watchman* magazine for only a quarter.”⁵

For many students canvassing proved an excellent way to earn “scholarship” money. By 1943, the “most successful” year in the history of student canvassing, forty-eight Lake Union students returned to college with more than \$17,000 in scholarships among them.⁶ In 1957, students in the Lake Union delivered more than \$108,225.87 worth of books. EMC students Jan Kuzma, Neil Mullins, Bill Richardson, and Ross Salyer were the top salesman, each exceeding \$3,000.⁷

But the real benefits of canvassing, as the students of EMC discovered, were not monetary. Their summer experiences on the road and sidewalk blessed them with “new friends, healthy bodies, deeper Christian experiences....”⁸

¹ *SM*, 15 August 1929, 4.

² Leroy T. Nicola to George Avery, February 1881, AHC.

³ 24 April 1881, AHC.

⁴ “Girl Colporteur Tells of Work,” *SM*, 19 August 1915, 2.

⁵ “Pardon Me, Sir,” *SM*, April 1928, 8.

⁶ “Laurels go to Canvassers As Scholarships Are Given,” *SM*, 26 November 1943, 5.

⁷ “They Did It; So Can You,” *SM*, 12 March 1958.

⁸ “Book Salesmanship Paves Way for College Training,”

SM, 15 February 1943, 3.

Andrews historian and professor of English, Meredith Jones Gray (BA '76, MA '77), is author of As We Set Forth.