

BARBARA JOHNSTON OF SARNIA, ONTARIO:
THE FIRST CANADIAN PENTECOSTAL MISSIONARY TO
INDIA

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Abstract

In Canada, three early geographic centers of Pentecostal revival emerged within the first decade of the twentieth century, along with its leaders: R. E. McAlister in Ottawa, Ellen Hebden in Toronto, and A. H. Argue and his family in Winnipeg. Ellen Hebden is the first person known to have received Pentecostal baptism in Canada. We know some detail about these personalities and their work in these cities largely because of the earliest Pentecostal newsletters that have survived until today. These Canadian newsletters, along with some international newsletters, reported information about the experiences of connected missionaries and evangelistic efforts and mentioned several small Canadian towns and cities. The acknowledgement of these little-known communities hints at the establishment of Pentecostalism in less urban centres, and yet, most of these stories remain untold, lost, or forgotten. This biographical portrait of Barbara Johnston of Sarnia, Ontario, is an attempt to reclaim one such story, with a hope that readers might be inspired to recover and retell similar accounts of other early Canadian Pentecostals.

In Canada, three early geographic centers of Pentecostal revival emerged within the first decade of the twentieth century, along with its leaders: R. E. McAlister in Ottawa, Ellen Hebden in Toronto, and A. H. Argue and his family in Winnipeg. Ellen Hebden is the first person known to have received Pentecostal baptism in Canada.¹ We know some

¹ For an excellent treatment of the history of James and Ellen Hebden, see William Sloos, "The Story of James and Ellen Hebden: The First Family of Pentecost in Canada," *Pneuma* 32.2 (2010): 181-202. For another history of Canadian Pentecostal origins, in two parts, see Thomas William Miller, "The Canadian Jerusalem: The Story of James and Ellen Hebden and Their Toronto Mission (Part 1)," *Assemblies of God Heritage* 11.3 (1991): 5-7, 22-23, <http://ifphc.org/pdf/Heritage/1991_03.pdf>; Thomas William Miller, "The Canadian Jerusalem: The Story of James and Ellen Hebden and Their Toronto Mission (Part 2)," *Assemblies of God Heritage* 11.4 (1991): 22-31, <http://ifphc.org/pdf/Heritage/1991_04.pdf>.

detail about these personalities and their work in these cities largely because of the earliest Pentecostal newsletters that have survived until today: *The Promise*, published in Toronto between 1907 and 1910 by “Mr. & Mrs. Hebden, Evangelists,”² *The Good Report*, published in Ottawa between 1911 and 1912 by “[Herbert] Randall, [H. L.] Lawler and [R. E.] McAlister, Missionaries,”³ and *The Apostolic Messenger*, published in Winnipeg between 1908 and 1910 by “A. H. Argue.”⁴ These Canadian newsletters, along with some international newsletters, reported information about the experiences of connected missionaries and evangelistic efforts. As others have noted, several small Canadian towns and cities are mentioned by name in these newsletters.⁵

The acknowledgement of these little-known communities hints at the establishment of Pentecostalism in less urban centres, each locus having its own story and distinct personalities. As yet, most of these stories remain untold, lost, or forgotten. This biographical portrait is an attempt to reclaim one such story, with a hope that readers might be inspired to recover and retell similar accounts of other early Canadian Pentecostals.

It is well-known, but perhaps much less documented, that women played a key role in missions and church planting in the early Pentecostal movement in Canada. For instance, a cursory glance at V. G. Brown’s history of the Western Ontario District of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada reveals that of the five missionaries listed from that district before 1920, all are women.⁶ Four out of the five were single

² Ellen Hebden and James Hebden, “The Promise,” *The Promise* 1, Toronto, Ontario, May 1907: 4.

³ Herbert Randall, H. L. Lawler, and R. E. McAlister, “The Good Report,” *The Good Report* 1, Ottawa, Ontario, May 1911: 4.

⁴ A. H. Argue, “The Apostolic Messenger,” *The Apostolic Messenger* 1.1, Winnipeg, Manitoba, February and March 1908: 2.

⁵ See Adam Stewart, “A Canadian Azusa? The Implications of the Hebden Mission for Pentecostal Historiography,” *Winds from the North: Canadian Contributions to the Pentecostal Movement*, eds. Michael Wilkinson and Peter Althouse (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2010): 17-37. Stewart lists the following Ontario communities as being mentioned in *The Promise*: Norwich, Bouck’s Hill, Woodstock, Abington, Sarnia, London, Ingersoll, and Hartford.

⁶ Brown lists Miss Coralee Haist (left for China in October 1917), Miss Ethel L. Bingham (left for Liberia on May 6, 1915), Mrs. Marian W. Keller (née Weller, left for Kenya in October 1913), Miss M. Louella Morrison (left for China in November 1919), and Miss Letitia May Ward (left for China in October 1914). See Victor G.

when they first became missionaries; the fifth was married, but persisted in Pentecostal missionary endeavours that outlasted two consecutive late husbands.⁷ In Robert A. Larden's history of the Apostolic Church of Pentecost of Canada, the only three missionaries on record prior to 1925 left as single women.⁸

At a time in Canadian history where young women were encouraged to pursue "domestic science—held to be the first and finest of all accomplishments," these missionary women were on a very different assignment.⁹ Armed with the Great Commission in one hand ("Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" in Mark 16:15) and the experience of Spirit baptism in the other ("endued with power from on high" in Luke 24:49), they had been given divine authority and power to accomplish the missionary task. This paper intends to establish a previously unnoticed missionary, indeed one of Canada's earliest Pentecostal missionaries, as an important part of the Canadian Pentecostal narrative.

The Hebden's newsletter, *The Promise*, mentions the small town of Sarnia in February 1909 in an unattributed testimonial piece, entitled "My Missionary Call."¹⁰ In it, the writer mentions that the Hebden's visited Sarnia in August 1908. This part of *The Promise* is actually a reprint of an article first printed in a newsletter from India, which helps

Brown, ed., *Fifty Years of Pentecostal History: 1933-1983* (Burlington, Ontario: The Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada Western Ontario District, 1983), 169-178.

⁷ Gary B. McGee, "Keller, Otto C. and Marian (Weller)," in *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions*, ed. Gerald H. Anderson (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 356.

⁸ Larden mentions Miss Corabelle Hammond (left for China in 1912), Miss Louise Biddle (left for Jerusalem in 1920), and Miss A. E. Stromquist (left for Japan in 1924). See Noel McNeill, "Unto The Uttermost," in *Our Apostolic Heritage*, Robert A. Larden (Calgary, Alberta: Apostolic Church of Pentecost of Canada: 1971), 141-158. This discussion is not intended to imply that Canadian Pentecostal men were not becoming missionaries in the early twentieth century, as there are records of several men (e.g., Charles W. Chawner to South Africa in 1908; James Hebden to Algeria in 1910, and Herbert Randall to Egypt in 1912). However, it seems that in comparison, there were more Canadian Pentecostal women pursuing this path than men.

⁹ Canadian Pacific Railway, "To The Young Women Of England, Ireland And Scotland," quoted in Linda Rasmussen, Lorna Rasmussen, Candace Savage, and Anne Wheeler, *A Harvest Yet To Reap: A History of Prairie Women* (Toronto, Ontario: The Canadian Women's Educational Press), 18.

¹⁰ "My Missionary Call," *The Promise* 12 (February 1909): 7.

identify the author as Barbara Johnston, from Sarnia, Ontario.¹¹ Johnston is generally unknown, uncelebrated, and sometimes even left unnamed in newsletters.¹² However, she is the first Canadian Pentecostal missionary to India.¹³ A thorough examination of existing correspondence printed in various newsletters across the world about Johnston, together with some local historical resources, enables an assembly of Johnston's biography.

Johnston was a firstborn child, born on May 28, 1879 to John Johnston (1848-1928) and Alice Smith (1851-1926).¹⁴ John had immigrated from Scotland to London, Ontario with his parents as an infant. At sixteen, the family moved to Enniskillen Township, a rural community about thirty-five kilometres southeast of Sarnia. At twenty, John became the teacher at the country school at Enniskillen Township. John married Alice, who had been born in the township to pioneer parents, on May 21, 1875, and the couple moved to Sarnia in December 1877, where John had accepted a teaching position on the staff of the Sarnia public schools.¹⁵ They had a total of five children together between 1879 and 1889, all born in Sarnia: Barbara A. (1879-1911), Archie Alfred (1881-1884), Mary Bella (1883-1967), Wallace

¹¹ In publications about Barbara Johnston, the surname Johnston (which appears on her gravestone) is often spelled "Johnstone" or "Johnson." The newsletter identifies her as Mrs. John Norton, who prior to her marriage was known as Miss Barbara Johnston. See "Testimony: Mrs. John Norton," *Jehovah-Jireh, A Witness to Christ's Faithfulness* 1.4, (December 1909). Also see Albert Norton, "From Brother Albert Norton," *The Bridegroom's Messenger* 2.43 (1 August 1909): 3.

¹² Thomas Miller has included a brief mention of Johnston among his account of several early missionaries connected with the Hebden mission. Thomas Miller, *Canadian Pentecostals: A History of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada* (Mississauga, Ontario: Full Gospel Publishing House, 1994), 237.

¹³ Sarah Weller, of Parry Sound, Ontario, is another early Canadian Pentecostal missionary who left for India in 1911.

¹⁴ Johnston's exact date of birth was provided to me in personal correspondence from one of Albert Norton's living descendants, Charles Norton Shepard, dated 14 August 2017.

¹⁵ John Johnston later became a school principal and served the board of education for over forty-eight years. After his death, he would become the only school teacher in the district to have a school named after him, Johnston Memorial School, in Sarnia, Ontario, which stood in Sarnia from 1928 to 2009. See Lawrence A. Crich, *The Way It Was: The History of the Sarnia Public Elementary Schools* (Sarnia, Ontario: s.p., 1986), 65. See also, "Johnston Memorial School Named After John Johnston," *The Sarnia Canadian Observer*, July 29, 1936, 19.

Augustus (1885-1970), and Alice Jean (1889-1982).¹⁶ John was a Presbyterian, and was on the membership roll at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Sarnia, while Alice was a Baptist, and regularly attended Central Baptist Church in Sarnia with her children.¹⁷

One major account of Johnston's life is her own testimony. As has been observed in several early Pentecostal testimonies, especially those of women, Johnston's began with a claim of being set apart to the Lord.¹⁸ In a distinct parallel with how the biblical Hannah gave her firstborn son Samuel to the service of the Lord, Johnston tells, "My mother gave me to the Lord at my birth."¹⁹ According to her mother, "as soon as she could say His name, she spoke of Jesus as [her] Saviour ... [and] wished to please him more than anything else."²⁰ As an eight-year-old child, Johnston heard two young outgoing missionaries to India speak at her Sunday school at Central Baptist Church. The impression left an indelible mark on her life, and with her heart burning within her she thought, "Someday I hope I can go to India, to tell the people about Jesus."²¹ Two years later, at the age of ten, she made the decision to follow Christ.

Whether on leisure trips across the St. Clair River to what Johnston termed "Uncle Sam's domain" (the United States of America) or whether she was in class at school, she was a chronic note-taker, jotting down "voluminous data on everything imaginable" in her black loose-leaf notebook.²² As a young schoolgirl, she would not only work

¹⁶ The dates given for each of the family are from a combination of sources, including birth certificates, census records, marriage records, death records, cemetery records, and family records. Unfortunately, Barbara A. Johnston's middle name has proved to be quite elusive.

¹⁷ "Johnston Memorial School Named After John Johnston." John Wilkinson and W. H. Pitfield, *Central Baptist Church: Seventieth Anniversary* (Sarnia, Ontario: Central Baptist Church, 1942), 9. This information is also consistent with census records.

¹⁸ Linda Ambrose highlights the importance of "call narratives," especially as it relates to gender, in her recent work. See Linda M. Ambrose, "Aimee Semple McPherson: Gender Theory, Worship, and the Arts," *Pneuma* 39 (2017): 105-122.

¹⁹ "Testimony: Mrs. John Norton." The biblical account of Hannah giving her son Samuel to the Lord at his birth can be found in 1 Samuel 1:21-28.

²⁰ Quoted in J. E. Norton, "A Sketch of Mrs. Barbara Norton," *At The Roll Call* (April 1912): 10-12.

²¹ "Testimony: Mrs. John Norton."

²² "Barbara Johnstone," [sic] *The McMaster University Monthly XVI: October 1906 to May 1907* (Toronto, Ontario: The Miln-Bingham Printing Company, 1907), 372.

and study, but pray over her work and study as well. In her spare time, she worked to raise money for missions.²³ As a teenager, Johnston routinely gathered groups of children together to bring them to Sunday school at the Baptist church. She regularly helped several older ladies who were ill, by visiting them, reading to them, and bringing them food.²⁴

Johnston hoped to go to medical school to become a medical missionary, but after experiencing a severe illness, she altered her plans. In 1904, she decided to go to McMaster University, a Baptist denominational school located near downtown Toronto.²⁵ In her own words:

I went to McMaster University, Toronto, in 1904, to prepare me for whatever work the Lord had for me. At that time I was an earnest struggling Christian, with a scarcely recognized longing for more than I had known. Once at college I plunged into study with all my heart, and in my desire to make the most of my opportunities I lost a good deal of my zeal for the Lord's work. Early in 1906 I became thoroughly aroused to the fact, that instead of becoming better fitted to serve the Lord, I was losing what little earnestness I had had.²⁶

Johnston desired to be a missionary to India more than ever, but believing that she had become overly academic, and much less spiritual, she felt very unfit for missionary service. She continued into her final year of studies, scheduled to graduate in the spring of 1907.

Around this time, on November 17, 1906, only five kilometres from McMaster University, a small mission at 651 Queen Street East and its resident evangelists, James and Ellen Hebden, were experiencing some new spiritual phenomena. Ellen had been praying for more power to heal the sick. James had been fasting and praying for the day. Just after ten o'clock in the evening, Ellen, prompted by the Lord to get out

²³ Norton, "A Sketch of Mrs. Barbara Norton," 12.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ The site of McMaster University at the time, known as McMaster Hall, is located at 273 Bloor Street West in Toronto, Ontario. Since 1963, this building has been the home of the Royal Conservatory of Music (Toronto).

²⁶ "Testimony: Mrs. John Norton."

of bed and pray, immediately did so, and had a tremendous encounter with the Holy Spirit.²⁷ Initially reluctant to speak in tongues, saying “No, Lord, not tongues,” she decided that God knew best, and revised her statement to “Tongues, or anything that will please thee and bring glory to thy name.” Ellen received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, spoke in tongues, and noted that this experience filled her with a “flood of love,” and gave her a great “yearning for souls as I had never had before.”²⁸

On January 16, 1907, the *Toronto Daily Star* sent a reporter to the Wednesday evening meeting at the Hebdens’ mission, and then published a report the following day, with a large title and two full columns about “The Gift of Tongues in a Queen Street Mission.” In it, the reporter gives a brief theological description of tongues, relating it to the day of Pentecost, and then states that “seventeen people, men and women, of Toronto, claim now to have that same gift, and they call it ‘the Baptism of the Holy Ghost.’” He explains to the *Star* readers, “The gift, they allege, is simply a manifestation of His power in the bodies of those who are wholly consecrated to His service.”²⁹

For Johnston, such words would hold great meaning, as she yearned to be wholly consecrated to the Lord, and had a lifelong desire to have a powerful impact in missionary service to India. However, she must have missed the *Star* article, as she didn’t hear about these events until a few months later:

In April 1907, my last year at college, I first heard of the Baptism of the Holy Ghost, with the sign of speaking in new tongues, as it was manifested in Toronto. I took my Bible, and hunted up everything I could find on the Baptism of the Holy Ghost, and on speaking in tongues, and I was convinced from the word, before attending any meetings, that speaking in new tongues was the sign by which the Apostles knew that the Holy Spirit had come.³⁰

²⁷ Ellen Hebdens, “How Pentecost Came to Toronto,” *The Promise* 1 (May 1907): 1-3.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁹ “The Gift of Tongues in a Queen Street Mission,” *The Toronto Daily Star*, January 17, 1907, 15.

³⁰ “Testimony: Mrs. John Norton.”

Johnston had attended Free Methodist meetings several years earlier, where she had observed people behaving strangely, and where the leader of the meeting had explained such behaviour by saying that they were full of the Holy Ghost as on the day of Pentecost in Acts. Johnston, with a healthy skepticism, had thought to herself at that time, “if they would speak with other tongues as they did on the day of Pentecost I would believe they were filled with the Holy Ghost.” Nevertheless, Johnston, now studying for her final exams, became hungry for the baptism of the Holy Ghost, and began to seek and pray for this blessing. Around the same time, Johnston was quite ill and began to research the Bible on the topic of divine healing. As she did so, she began to pray and received the answer from the Lord, “According to your faith be it unto you.” She says in her testimony, “I believed and was healed.” She did the same with the topic of sanctification, and again ended up relying on faith instead of knowledge, testifying, “One day I woke up to the fact that old habits and sins had lost their power over me.”³¹

The value she had placed on her ability to learn and her education was overshadowed by her desire for more of God. She writes, “When at last I graduated on May 15th, my degree seemed of little value compared with the blessing I was seeking.”³² She made her way to the Hebdens’ mission, praying and waiting—indeed “tarrying”—for her baptism in the Holy Ghost. On May 29, two weeks after her graduation, her attention became occupied by two scriptures: Luke 11:13 and 1 John 5:14-15. She took these as promises from the Lord, and experienced a great spiritual experience, but no tongues. For the next two days she continued to pray and wait in the upper room of the Hebdens’ mission, and finally on Friday, May 31, 1907, Johnston received the baptism of the Holy Ghost, spoke in tongues, and received her own personal commission from the Lord to take her experience back to her hometown of Sarnia, Ontario.

In the upper room, 651 Queen St. East, Toronto, on Friday afternoon, May 31st, the Lord came to me again in great power, and in the evening spoke through me in another tongue. Then I knew the work was finished. The Lord said to me “Go home to

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

thy friends and tell them what great things the Lord has done for thee.” I went home and tried to obey.³³

Johnston had applied to be a missionary to India with the Woman’s Baptist Foreign Missionary Society, but when she began to seek the baptism of the Holy Ghost, she wrote them again to see if having this experience might disqualify her from working with them. They wrote back, saying that they had not heard of any such thing, and that they would get back to her about it. However, for whatever reason, she never heard again from the Missionary Society. Johnston took this as a closed door to India for the time being. The baptism of the Holy Ghost, though popular among Pentecostal believers, had an alienating effect on the one who experienced it, even among other Christians. One later account would say of Johnston, “She was willing to be counted a fanatic, and ridiculed by her friends for the sake of being true to her convictions.”³⁴

Upon her return home in 1907, Johnston became a teacher at School Section 15, the “Kimball School,” a school in Moore Township, about twenty-five kilometres south of where she was staying at her parents’ home at 286 College Avenue North in Sarnia.³⁵ She describes the school as “large and rather troublesome.” She also opened a Pentecostal mission in Sarnia, where she was the leader of a small group of people who had received the baptism of the Holy Ghost. It is likely, though as yet unproven, that Arthur Williams was a part of this group, who later wrote letters to R. E. McAlister in London, Ontario, unsuccessfully attempting to affiliate with the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada.³⁶ If it were so proven, this would provide a continuous link from Johnston to the present-day Bethel Pentecostal Church in Sarnia.³⁷

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Norton, “A Sketch of Mrs. Barbara Norton,” 11.

³⁵ “Our Graduates,” *The McMaster University Monthly XVII: October 1907 to May 1908* (Toronto, Ontario: The Miln-Bingham Printing Company, 1908), 331; 1908 *Sarnia City Directory*.

³⁶ Private correspondence between Arthur Williams and R. E. McAlister dated 25 November 1924 to 30 April 1929. Arthur and Letitia Williams had one daughter and five sons, one of whom, Earl Corcoran Williams (1908-1989), became a minister with the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada.

³⁷ If proven, this link would be from Barbara Johnston to Arthur D. Williams to Adeline E. Stephan to Etta Kemsley to Edna Riblet, which then provides the link to the known history of the church’s beginnings as the White Street Gospel Mission. See

In August 1908, James and Ellen Hebden came to Sarnia.³⁸ At this time, the Hebdens travelled only occasionally, spending most of their time at the mission in Toronto. The Sarnia newspaper seems to have had no interest or knowledge of their visit, in either the social columns or the news columns. However, one particular article reprinted in the local newspaper from the Toronto Globe around this time about “Rev. Dr. Torrey” gives a taste of how the paper’s publishers might have felt about evangelists: “The life of the Christian church does not depend on such spasmodic efforts. Greater and more lasting by far is the work of the patient local pastor who, by both precept and example points the way to the better life.”³⁹ The local newspaper had a high volume of religious content, but its reports would generally focus on the endeavours of more established local Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian denominations, as well as giving heavy attention to the proceedings of local fraternal orders.

The Hebdens’ visit to Sarnia, though lacking newsworthiness at the time, was life-changing for Johnston because of one outstanding incident. One day during their visit, Johnston visited the house where they were staying. She heard Ellen Hebden speaking in tongues while reclining on the couch with her eyes closed. As Johnston walked into the room, Ellen began to interpret, “They are calling— They are calling to thee— They are calling from over the sea. The time of separation is coming for thee. India—The Lord will open the way. Man closes up, but the Lord will open the way. The time of separation is coming for thee.” While Ellen knew full well of Johnston’s missionary impulse, she did not know that India had been Johnston’s chosen missionary destination since childhood. That very Sunday, Lillian Denney, a missionary to India, had been scheduled to visit the Hebdens’ mission, and call for workers to work with Pandita Ramabai at her mission in

Caleb Courtney, *A History of Bethel Pentecostal Church in Sarnia, Ontario* (Sarnia, Ontario: 2016).

³⁸ “My Missionary Call,” 7; “Testimony: Mrs. John Norton.”

³⁹ “Professional Revivalist’s Methods,” *The Sarnia Daily Observer*, May 17, 1907, 2. Unfortunately issues of Sarnia’s August 1908 daily papers have been permanently lost, but the weekly papers—which essentially summarize the social and newsworthy activities in the daily papers—have been preserved.

India.⁴⁰ Johnston did not want to abandon the Kimball School without a teacher, nor leave the Pentecostal mission in Sarnia without a leader, but felt that God was calling her to respond to this call and go with Denney. Johnston prayed to the Lord, asking that if indeed he had called her to India this fall, to send someone to lead the mission, and also to send a teacher for her school. Within three weeks, both of these roles were newly occupied.

Johnston met up with Denney's group of missionaries at Jersey City, and boarded a boat leaving from New York on Saturday, November 7, 1908, with a reported thirty missionaries onboard destined for India.⁴¹ The missionaries held meetings twice each day on the ship as it sailed towards its destination.⁴² India was experiencing a harsh famine at this time.⁴³ All of these missionaries knew they were signing up for a mission "to labor, to suffer, and if need be, to die for Jesus, in efforts to spread the knowledge of His gospel among the many millions

⁴⁰ "Testimony: Mrs. John Norton." Lillian Denney would later set up her own independent mission at Nanpara, India, and also work in Lucknow, India, and in Nepal. See Max Wood Moorhead, "There Is Another Answer To Prayer," *The Bridegroom's Messenger* 4.91 (1 August 1911): 1.

⁴¹ Apparently, ten of the thirty missionaries ended up at Albert Norton's mission in Dhond. These were led by Mrs. Lillian Denney, who was a widow, and included among them: Miss Barbara Johnston of Sarnia, Ontario, Canada; Mr. Robert Edward Massey and his wife, Mrs. Mollie Massey, from Atlanta, Georgia; Miss Mary Courtney from Grand Cane, Louisiana; Miss E. J. Whitaker from Hartford, Connecticut; Miss Hattie Hacker from Huntington, Indiana; Miss Sarah White from Marceline, Missouri; Mr. Dickey Shoope Mahaffey from Page County, Virginia. The Masseys and Courtney were sent by Mrs. E. A. Sexton's mission in Atlanta, Georgia. Johnston was sent by the Hebdens' mission in Toronto. Whitaker was sent by C. W. Sherman's mission in St. Louis, Missouri. White was sent by S. D. Kinne's mission in St. Louis, Missouri. Hacker and Mahaffey were sent by Levi Lupton's mission in Alliance, Ohio, along with five others who went to India, but may not have all ended up at the Norton mission. Albert Norton, "The New Missionaries," *The Bridegroom's Messenger* 2.31 (1 February 1909): 2; E. A. Sexton, "Our Missionaries," *The Bridegroom's Messenger* 2.29 (1 January 1909): 3; Albert Norton, "From India," *The Bridegroom's Messenger* 2.25 (1 November 1908): 2; "My Missionary Call," 7; "Testimony: Mrs. John Norton."

⁴² "Items from Letters Received," *The Promise* 12 (February 1909): 7.

⁴³ Albert Norton, "From Famine-Stricken India Again," *The Bridegroom's Messenger* 2.23 (1 October 1908): 1; Albert Norton, "Still Suffering from Famine in India," *The Bridegroom's Messenger* 2.32 (15 February 1909): 4.

of this land, who have not yet had one single opportunity to hear it.”⁴⁴ Regular appeals for workers were delivered to North American Pentecostals via missions newsletters from Pandita Ramabai in Kedgaon, India, and Albert Norton in Dhond, India. Norton noted that there was not a single foreign missionary worker in ten of the forty-eight districts in North India—an area containing a combined nine million unreached people, saying, “Is it not a call to Pentecostal workers in America?”⁴⁵ Ramabai’s daughter reported that about a hundred people at Mukti were no longer able to go out to preach the gospel for want of an experienced missionary leader there.⁴⁶ These appeals, along with a conviction that Jesus was coming soon, and that people had a limited time to receive the gospel message, began to motivate several Pentecostal people to passionately respond to the call.

The missionaries transferred to a second ship at Naples, Italy, which then progressed through the Suez Canal to the Red Sea, stopping at Colombo, Ceylon, and finally arriving to Tuticorin, India, where they boarded a train to the Norton’s mission in Dhond, India.⁴⁷ The missionaries finally arrived at their destination in Dhond on Wednesday, December 9, 1908.⁴⁸ They were greeted by Albert Norton’s oldest son, John, complete with fireworks, which made a great first impression on Johnston: “Bro. J. Norton met us at the train with a lot of the boys. They gave us a royal welcome. They were so glad to see us. They shot off fireworks, and as we reached the house they all lined up and sang ‘Praise the Lord, oh my soul.’ It was blessed to hear them and to see their shining faces.”⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Albert Norton, “From India,” *The Bridegroom’s Messenger* 2.29 (1 January 1909): 1.

⁴⁵ Albert Norton, “Letter From Brother Albert Norton,” *The Bridegroom’s Messenger* 2.27 (1 December 1908): 2.

⁴⁶ Manoramabai, “Letter From Manoramabai,” *The Bridegroom’s Messenger* 2.29 (1 January 1909): 1.

⁴⁷ Ceylon is now known as Sri Lanka. Tuticorin is now known as Thoothukudi. Dhond is now known as Daund. For simplicity in dealing with the historic sources, I have retained the historic spelling and name of the cities in this document. Mollie Massey, “Reached India At Last,” *The Bridegroom’s Messenger* 2.30 (15 January 1909): 1; R. E. Massey, “Our Missionaries Have Reached India,” *The Bridegroom’s Messenger* 2.30 (15 January 1909): 1.

⁴⁸ Albert Norton, “‘Rain in the Time of the Latter Rain’—A Testimony,” *The Bridegroom’s Messenger* 2.39 (1 June 1909): 3.

⁴⁹ “Items from Letters Received,” 7.

At this time, there were six orphanages in the Bombay region of India where people were experiencing the baptism of the Holy Ghost accompanied with tongues.⁵⁰ At the Dhond mission, about sixty of the hundred and thirty-five orphans had received this Spirit baptism, but the missionaries who were in charge of the orphanage had not.⁵¹ The new influx of missionary workers arrived, including Johnston. Nearly all of them had already experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit and had spoken in tongues. The orphanage leaders noted that Johnston had “received the Baptism of the Holy Spirit and speaks in tongues fluently.”⁵² Albert Norton and his oldest son John Norton, had previously desired the experience, and found new determination to seek and pray for this experience from God.⁵³ The elder Norton had become convinced this Baptism was from God not because of the miraculous tongues, but rather because of “the marvelous change wrought in the lives of those who received it.”⁵⁴ Albert ended up being baptized in the Spirit on March 6, 1909.⁵⁵ John, who had been given much of the responsibility of caring for the orphanage at Dhond, continued to seek, and would receive his baptism there on April 4, 1909.⁵⁶

⁵⁰ Max Wood Moorhead, “Word From India,” *The Bridegroom’s Messenger* 2.25 (1 November 1908): 4. The other four Spirit-filled missions were at Kaira, Dholka, Ashapur, and Khamgaon, and were associated with the Christian and Missionary Alliance.

⁵¹ Mary Courtney, “Jesus Is Victor,” *The Bridegroom’s Messenger* 2.30 (15 January 1909): 1. One early history of Christian missions in India describes Albert Norton as a “devout but fanatical free-lance” who “in Dhond, near Kedgaon ... established a boys’ orphanage with accommodation for 4000 children.” This number is clearly an error, as Albert Norton indicates in 1910 that they have about “two hundred orphans, widows, and others.” See Julius Richter, *A History of Missions in India*, trans. Sydney H. Moore (Toronto: Fleming H. Revell, 1908), 216, 240. Also, Albert Norton, “From Brother Albert Norton,” *The Bridegroom’s Messenger* 4.73 (1 November 1910): 2.

⁵² *Jehovah-Jireh, A Witness to Christ’s Faithfulness* 1.2 (January 1909).

⁵³ Courtney, “Jesus Is Victor,” 1.

⁵⁴ Quoted in Massey, “Our Missionaries Have Reached India,” 1.

⁵⁵ R. E. Massey, “Pentecostal Fire Falling at Bahraich, India: Brother A. Norton Receives the Pentecostal Baptism,” *The Bridegroom’s Messenger* 2.36 (15 April 1909): 1.

⁵⁶ Albert Norton, “Latter Rain Still Falling,” *The Bridegroom’s Messenger* 2.38 (15 May 1909): 1. He writes, “I think I sent you word of my having received my baptism on March 6th. Then my youngest son, William, received his baptism at Bahraich on March 21st, his father’s birthday, and John, our oldest son, received his baptism here at Dhond on April 4th, his mother’s birthday.”

After just two days at Dhond, Johnston was sent to Pandita Ramabai's Mukti Mission in Kedgaon, India.⁵⁷ Having been trained in New Testament Greek, and possessing a love for languages, she began helping Ramabai by translating the New Testament from the original Greek to the Marathi language.⁵⁸ Johnston, significantly younger than the other workers, earned the name "Little Monshi"—meaning "Little Auntie"—from the little girls they cared for there.⁵⁹ According to Johnston, prayer meetings at the Mukti Mission involved upwards of "fifteen hundred girls ... [where] everyone is oblivious of everyone else, and taken up with the Lord alone."⁶⁰ After "six months [of] happy work" at the Mukti Mission, Johnston married John Ezra Norton on June 23, 1909.⁶¹ Their wedding, described by John's father Albert as a "Pentecostal wedding," was held at the Mukti Mission, graciously hosted by Ramabai.⁶² After their marriage, Johnston moved with her husband to Dhond. As she continued with Bible translation from there, she also took on greater responsibilities at the orphanage.⁶³ Some of the orphan boys had married, and Johnston met daily with these women in Bible study and prayer. She taught the ladies how to sew, and how to make dresses from patterns. She taught the boys how to speak and write English. Her patience and kindness was also an asset in caring for some of the younger children. Johnston, a meticulous planner, organized a preaching tour for her husband throughout remote villages, in which she too preached. Her husband commented that nowhere was she happier than when out preaching to those who were ignorant to the gospel message.⁶⁴

⁵⁷ The word *mukti* is a Sanskrit word for salvation. "Items from Letters Received."

⁵⁸ Norton, "A Sketch of Mrs. Barbara Norton," 11.

⁵⁹ "Items from Letters Received," 7.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Albert Norton, "From Brother Albert Norton" (1909). The quote is from "Testimony: Mrs. John Norton."

⁶² Curiously, the wedding happened while John's mother was in the United States, and she was apparently unaware of the marriage until she arrived back in India at the end of the year. See Hubert Cooper and Ruth Norton, *The Triumph of Faith: The True Story of Albert and Mary Norton*, ed. Charles Norton Shepard (Russellville, Arizona: Boys and Girls Christian Home, 2017), 154.

⁶³ Norton, "A Sketch of Mrs. Barbara Norton," 11. Johnston continued to translate the Bible throughout her entire lifetime. See also "Testimony: Mrs. John Norton."

⁶⁴ Norton, "A Sketch of Mrs. Barbara Norton," 11.

Johnston never gave birth to children of her own. However, one day at the mission in Dhond, some very poor people brought a baby girl to Johnston, asking that she would take it as her own. Johnston's heart was very moved at this, and she agreed to raise the Indian baby. She named the baby Ruth, dreaming of the things the child might do in the plan of God. Despite Johnston's motherly care, the child soon became sick and died. With sorrow, Johnston placed Ruth's body in a small grave in India, and she wrote to her friends, saying that "it pleased God to call little Ruth up higher."⁶⁵

The missionary work at Dhond was considered one of the "mother colonies" for Pentecostal missionary endeavours in the region.⁶⁶ Young indigenous missionaries had gone out from the mission at Dhond to preach the gospel to the neighbouring Indian provinces. One of the great blessings to the missionaries in India, both indigenous and foreign, were the Pentecostal missionary conventions hosted at various mission locations from time to time. These conventions served as a nexus for Spirit-baptized missionaries and provided much needed mutual support for them. Other times, missionaries would simply visit other missions for fellowship and to help as needed. Early in 1911, Johnston traveled to Bahraich in northern India, an eighteen-hour train ride from Dhond.⁶⁷ Her mind was ever on evangelism. She writes of the great witnessing opportunities that exist while people are on religious pilgrimages to ancient tombs, "hungry for something, they do not know what."⁶⁸ As she visited one pilgrimage site, she observed the boys from the mission preach to the pilgrims and give them translated portions of the Bible to read in their own language. She prayed that these seekers

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* This story of a baby may have caused some confusion at home, as at least one second-hand source includes that Johnston died shortly after giving birth: Grace Lester, *Historic Research of School Section 15, Moore Township*, handwritten, 1959, accessed at the Lambton County Archives, Wyoming, Ontario.

⁶⁶ Albert Norton, "From Bro. Albert Norton," *The Bridegroom's Messenger* 4.77 (1 January 1911): 4.

⁶⁷ The mission at Bahraich, India, was operated by William Norton and his wife, Mary (née Courtney).

⁶⁸ The tomb Johnston visited in Bahraich, India, belongs to the eleventh-century prince, Gazi Sayyad Salar Masud, who according to local legend, cured a lady, Zohra Bibi, of her blindness.

would come to know the one who “could give sight ... to their spiritual eyes.”⁶⁹

During the last week of July in 1911, Johnston became suddenly ill with kidney trouble, which intensified into acute nephritis together with other complications.⁷⁰ On August 1, 1911, she died at the age of thirty-two. Her husband, John, of the same age, was devastated and unable to care for the Dhond mission. His brother William traveled from Bahraich to take temporary leadership of it, while John took some time away.⁷¹

Johnston's father-in-law, Albert Norton, in a letter announcing the death of his “dear and much beloved daughter-in-law,” describes her as being greatly loved and having “worked hard, too hard, to care for the orphans and the Christian families at Dhond, besides giving much help at Mukti.”⁷² Pandita Ramabai writes, “Miss Barbara Johnston of Sarnia, Ontario ... helped us in many ways, chiefly in the Greek work connected with the Bible Translation. [...] At the Master's call she left all, and followed Him to India, to live a Christ-like life among simple village men and women, devoting all her time and talents to the work of revealing Christ to them, that they might ‘Look and Live.’”⁷³ A close college friend and fellow missionary, Anita Waters, commented, “She was one of the most consecrated girls I ever knew.”⁷⁴ After some time, in April 1912, John Norton wrote a brief summary of his wife's life that begins, “She was such a comfort and help to me, and although now it is over eight months since she passed away, yet I have not recovered from

⁶⁹ Mrs. John Norton, “Visiting a Princes' Tomb in India,” *The Bridegroom's Messenger* 4.83 (1 April 1911): 2.

⁷⁰ Albert Norton uses the term, “Bright's Disease.” See Albert Norton, “A Missionary Called to Her Reward,” *The Bridegroom's Messenger* 4.94 (15 September 1911): 2.

⁷¹ M. Courtney-Norton, “From Sister Mary C. Norton,” *The Bridegroom's Messenger* 4.94 (15 September 1911): 2.

⁷² Norton, “A Missionary Called to Her Reward,” 2.

⁷³ “Face to Face,” *Mukti Prayer-Bell* 5.2 (January 1912): 3-4.

⁷⁴ Anita Waters became Mrs. Roy Carlyle Bensen. See *Chatham Baptist Church Centennial 1850-1950* (Chatham, Ontario: Chatham Baptist Church, 1950), 50. Quoted in Norton, “A Sketch of Mrs. Barbara Norton,” 12.

the blow of her sudden death.”⁷⁵ Johnston’s own mother, reminisces, “I had five children, all good children. No other like her.”⁷⁶

There is no known previous record of Pentecostals in Sarnia before Johnston, and she was the first Canadian Pentecostal missionary to India. Johnston aimed the trajectory of her life from the age of eight towards missions in India. In the midst of her journey she experienced the fullness of the Holy Spirit that she had longed for, receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues. On the Johnston family plot at Lakeview Cemetery in Sarnia, Ontario, there is a marker that reads, “Barbara A. Johnston, wife of John E. Norton, died in India, 1879-1911.” While cemetery records indicate that a plot was assigned to her, there is no record of an actual interment in her plot. Therefore, Johnston is memorialized in her hometown of Sarnia, but her physical body rests in the very place she knew God had called her to in life: India.⁷⁷

Johnston’s life came to a conclusion over a hundred years ago. Today, Johnston’s living relatives know only that she died young as a missionary to India. Her husband’s living relatives know only a few more details connected to the Boys and Girls Christian Home, the name of the same mission in India that continues today. This account of her life is a patchwork quilt that sews together the details of her life from surviving sources and records. Why has Johnston’s story as Canada’s first Pentecostal missionary to India gone untold for more than one hundred years? Perhaps Johnston has been overlooked because many of the original sources fail to mention her name altogether, opting instead for descriptors such as “the lady who came ... from Canada.”⁷⁸ Or, perhaps her Canadian origin was forgotten after becoming Mrs. John Norton, sharing the namesake of the famous missionaries from the United States to India. More likely, Johnston may have been missed

⁷⁵ Norton, “A Sketch of Mrs. Barbara Norton,” 11. John Norton (1878-1956) married again several years later on January 22, 1917, to Emma Hester Elliot (1888-1970), and together had one daughter in Dhond, India, Margaret Ruth Norton (1926-1994). See “Death Notices: John Ezra Norton,” *The Coshocton Democrat*, October 29, 1956, 6.

⁷⁶ Quoted in Norton, “A Sketch of Mrs. Barbara Norton,” 12.

⁷⁷ According to the oral history of the oldest people living in the region where she died, Johnston is said to have died in The Sassoon Hospital in Pune, India and is believed to be buried in the English Cemetery in Hadapsar, Pune, India.

⁷⁸ Lillian Denney, “Letter From India,” *The Pentecost* 1.9 (August 1909), 3.

because her life was cut short so soon into her missionary work, only a few months short of three years. As one of Canada's earliest Pentecostal missionaries, Johnston is certainly important to the Canadian Pentecostal narrative.

As the historical distance from the earliest Canadian Pentecostals increases, the opportunity to hear the memories of those who knew them decreases, and, eventually, many of these memories will die with the generation that holds them. Pentecostals are often consumed with the present ("What is God doing now?") and future ("What is God about to do?"). Certainly, Pentecostals need not live in days gone by; but, whether it is the story of a "Pentecostal work" in a remote Canadian place, or the biographical portrait of a lesser-known Canadian Pentecostal personality, these stories from the past ("What has God done?") can encourage today's Pentecostals to be particularly Pentecostal in theology, spirituality, mission, and life. The challenge, therefore, is to research, write, and talk about the Pentecostal stories that exist in the diverse Canadian communities in which we live.