

Jacob Manning

Library Research Prize Essay

Research Short Title: "Apostle to Burma"

Learning and Research

I grew up on weekly trips to the church library. Tucked in among the armloads of Christian fiction titles, I remember a few striking biographies; most notably, at one time or another I had wandered into a biography of Adoniram Judson, and the radical sacrifices of this man and his family captured my mind. What made them so committed?

This past fall, I wrote a researched response to that long standing curiosity. During the topic selection process, I used CLICnet keyword searches to locate all available material with "Adoniram Judson" in the CLIC library system. The Bethel Seminary Library had print copies of all the significant Judson biographies. These contain extracts from letters, diaries, and interviews.

I walked to the Seminary Library and checked the shelves: there were three shelves devoted to Judson literature, including three crucial scholarly volumes. After this discovery, I knew I had enough source material for a good research paper, and I continued to pursue the topic.

The next step in research was the process of learning the different interpretive frameworks that have been used in scholarly analysis of the subject over the last two centuries. This required familiarizing myself with the historiography of the Judson mission and missions history in general. I decided the best way to get up to speed on the historiography of missions was to talk with the history professors and ask for some direction.

Diana Magnuson directed me to the works of Dana Robert, Rosalie Hunt, and Ruth Tucker, who all offer excellent critiques of male-dominated missions history. Paul Reasoner helped me to appreciate the extremely dangerous, eccentric, and theologically questionable nature of the Judson missionary venture at that time. Today, overseas missions is normative, if not a felt imperative—this modern attitude should not direct the research process, lest the answer to “Why?” be presupposed and left undiscovered. Chris Gehrz suggested several works on the history of evangelical missions which helped me discover the Pietist impulse in Christian missions. AnneMarie Kooistra recommended Mark Noll for background reading on American religion during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Asking my professors’ input was the single most helpful part of the entire research process. These conversations allowed me to find key secondary resources quickly and avoid common pitfalls as I began to gain a deeper knowledge of the subject and refine my research question.

As I read the scholarship on the Judson mission, I checked through the authors’ bibliographies to find more sources. This was useful, but slow going, until I rediscovered the library’s reference section. The bibliographies in the *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, and the *National American Biography* helped prioritize my source list based on which sources were most widely regarded works. Additionally, I used WorldCat to do faster, more exhaustive searches with a subject search: 'su: Adoniram Judson 1788-1850' limited to Libraries Worldwide.

When I began intensive reading of the primary sources, I met with Earleen Warner to ask about archival collections at the American Baptist Historical Society. She came back with the recommendation to investigate their Judson200.org online digital exhibits. This led to the discovery that all of my primary sources were available through Google Books. Moral of the story: if in doubt, ask a librarian!

The chief advantage of the Google Books digitized versions was the ability to use control+f searches in lengthy biographies and periodicals for mentions of names, place names, and keywords: Pietism, Guyonism, Baptist, Ziegenbalg, Shwartz, David Brainerd, Pedobaptist, etc. After thorough reading over large sections of the primary sources, the search function enabled me to comb over 5,000 pages of primary source text for critical passages about specific people and topics.

Throughout the semester, I continually realized the resourcefulness of friendly professors and librarians. These people helped me ask better questions and saved countless hours in locating the best and most up to date scholarship on evangelical history. Especially during initial research, these people and the library's reference collections are indispensable. Along the way, tools like WorldCat, CLICnet, Google Books, EBSCO are truly a researcher's best friend, and specialized searches (i.e. subject search, word search, sort by date, etc.) are essential to maximizing the power of these tools. Ultimately, the primary texts gave a clear window into the lives of the Judsons and sustained my excitement for this project. It's true what Arthur said: "Having fun isn't hard when you've got a library card!"