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A Metaphysical Rocket in Gotham

The Rise of Christian Science in New York City, 1885-1910

Rolf Swensen, Queens College, City University of New York¹

Abstract

This article investigates First and Second Churches of Christ, Scientist, New York – the two largest branch (local) congregations of the new indigenous faith Christian Science in the eastern United States. These churches were led by the charismatic Augusta E. Stetson and the more self-effacing Laura Lathrop, who had lively healing practices, taught hundreds of students, and built impressive edifices on Central Park West. After describing the rise of the two competing churches and their leaders, this essay examines several hundred testimonies of healing and the occupations of 1,600 members. This is the first study to scrutinize the internal operations of Christian Science churches and their membership in any large city and as such gives us a hitherto unavailable window into the swift rise and growing pains of a new American religion.

Introduction

[1] Christian Science appeared on the American scene during the late nineteenth century. Its practice of physical healing by cadres of predominantly newly-empowered women captured

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the attention of a society burdened by an ineffective medical profession and grappling with huge societal changes wrought by industrialization. Nowhere did the new faith achieve more publicity or notoriety than in the burgeoning, noisy metropolis of New York, where its swelling ranks included a lively, enthusiastic group of women and men. For one hundred years, records of Christian Science churches were largely unavailable for research, but since the opening of the Mary Baker Eddy Library for the Betterment of Humanity in Boston, Massachusetts, early in 2003, scholars may now study this American phenomenon. Included in the library's religious treasure trove are thousands of letters between Eddy and her students, records of scores of disbanded branch (local) churches, and hundreds of historic photographs. This article investigates First and Second Churches of Christ, Scientist, New York – the two largest branch congregations of the new faith in the eastern United States. These churches were led by the charismatic Augusta E. Stetson and the more self-effacing Laura Lathrop, who had lively healing practices, taught hundreds of students, and built impressive edifices on Central Park West. After describing the rise of the two competing churches and their leaders, this essay examines several hundred testimonies of healing and the occupations of 1,600 members. This is the first study to scrutinize the internal operations of Christian Science churches and their membership in any large city and as such gives us a hitherto unavailable window into the swift rise and growing pains of a new American religion.

[2] Emerging just as cities were increasingly occupying center stage, Christian Science offered residents a viable antidote to a wide array of psychological and physical stresses of urban life. Among the reasons for the impressive early growth of Christian Science in New York City and elsewhere were the dismal state of medicine, the freshness and vibrancy of the early movement, its highly committed leaders, and the opportunity for hitherto strapped women, as well as men, to venture out into the world with a new message of healing and redemption. Many testimonies of healing state that the writer came into the fold through a relative, a friend, an acquaintance, a pastor, or even a doctor, in descending order of importance. Franklin Blake, Second Church member and senior partner in a New York coffee brokerage firm, typified many members when he exulted, “The greatest happiness has come through the ability to lift others out of conditions of sickness and sin” (Testimonies 1904: 179).



Figure 1. Mary Baker Eddy. Used courtesy of The Mary Baker Eddy Library.

[3] Founded by New Englander Mary Baker Eddy (1821-1910, Figure 1), Christian Science was codified in her 1875 textbook, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* (on the movement, see Gottschalk 1973; Swensen 2003; Hansen; Knee; Wilson). Spurred on by the dismal state of medicine and convinced that prayer could lift mankind into a spiritual, metaphysical realm where the material world, sickness, and sin do not exist, Eddy exulted that “all things are possible to God” (on Eddy, see Gottschalk 2006; Gill; Peel 1966, 1971, 1977; Bates and Dittmore). Leigh Eric Schmidt dubs the seminal *Science and Health* a “canonical rendering of mind-cure.” Far from being simple mind-cure, Christian Science was a radical new-old concept grounded

in the healings of Christ Jesus, which drew ardent disciples, as well as the sometimes hostile attention of the media, clergy, and medical and legal establishments. There were many religious groups competing in the burgeoning metaphysical marketplace in the late nineteenth century. Offshoots from Christian Science, including the “harmonial” Divine Science and Unity – often called “New Thought” – soon manifested themselves, but the Spiritualists, a popular religious group originating in the mid-nineteenth century, were particularly vexing to Eddy (Eddy 1934: 1; Schmidt: 148; Satter). One reporter for the *New York Times* stated that Spiritualists “seem to have become Christian Scientists or Faith Healers, without any other change than that of name” (1889). Eddy was insistent that Christian Science churches and “Sabbath schools” be formed as an antidote to the “*barlots* [sic] and such trash as spiritualists [sic] who call themselves one with us” (1889). Yet Catherine L. Albanese recently claimed, “Eddy combined Platonized Hermeticism and spiritualistic-magnetic lingerings with Calvinism” (329; see Braude). This writer differs with this premise and postulates that, while Eddy may have been exposed to Platonic idealism, magnetic healing, and spiritualism, she broke free of such limiting bonds and offered a practical and distinct religious system that drew on the healing work of Christ Jesus, while retaining – with American idealistic overtones – some of the Calvinism of her youth.

Christian Science Enters the Empire City

[4] Beginning in the 1880s, Eddy’s students began to fan out from Boston as practitioners, or healers. When the first Christian Scientists arrived in New York City to begin their work in 1885 and 1886, they entered a vast and growing metropolis with a great influx of immigrants from mainly eastern Europe, an increasing percentage of them Roman Catholic and Jewish. This was a challenging and rapidly evolving environment in which “masses of new urban dwellers appeared mostly to be insensitive to traditional religious obligations” (Christiano: 13; see Burrows and Wallace). The established Christian denominations, such as Episcopal, Presbyterian, and Methodist, appeared to be holding their own, but new Catholic and Jewish houses of worship proliferated in Manhattan and suggested profound changes in political power. Various religious groups such as Unitarians, Spiritualists, and Quakers offered women opportunity for leadership, but the *New York Times* observed that a woman “has had no channel of usefulness open to her except that of marrying a missionary” (1888). Theologically liberal Henry Ward Beecher still held national sway at Plymouth Congregational Church in Brooklyn until his death in 1887. Since Beecher owned a copy of *Science and Health* and termed it “one of the most wonderful books ever written,” it followed that several of his female descendants would soon embrace Christian Science (White 1908a: 320). In 1886, Rev. Heber Newton, pastor of All Souls’ Unitarian Church, suggested that when a “woman became a citizen she would carry the spirit of religion into the reorganization of society and the State would perform its rightful work” (*New York Times* 1886). The sometimes starry-eyed Christian Scientists intended to be healing missionaries and religious reformers. “Small but growing numbers of women,” comments Beryl Satter, “believed that in the hands of today’s high-minded and spiritual women, Christian or Spiritual Science could be a tool that would speed the millennium . . .” (25).

[5] The pioneers of Christian Science in New York mainly consisted of an energetic group of women, including Augusta E. Stetson (1842-1928, Figure 2; see Swensen 2008; Cunningham; Gottschalk 2006: 365-97; Gill: 534-42; Peel 1977: chap. 19; Bates and Dittmore: chap. 22; and Stetson 1914) and Laura Lathrop (1845-1922, Figure 3; see Peel 1971: 178, 223-24, 237, 249) in Manhattan. These two stalwart souls encountered many obstacles, but Eddy buoyed her students by correspondence and a lecture in Steinway Hall early in 1889. As one local resident complained to the *Brooklyn Eagle* later that year, “This heresy is undermining our homes. The women are absolutely crazed by it” and practice “free love.” Undeterred by opposition, Stetson, Lathrop, and others had organized First Church of Christ, Scientist, New York, in 1887. The following year, largely owing to Stetson’s efforts, attendance was as high as 125; thereafter, the metaphysical rocket took off (Minutes, Oct. 28 and Nov. 4, 1888). One article has described the largely self-made Stetson as “endowed with boundless energy and executive capacity, audacious, abrasive, unbending and ruthless, yet adored by hundreds of students and church members” (Swensen 2008: 76). Since Peel has described Lathrop, daughter of a Methodist minister, as a “well-educated, intellectually able woman,” she might have seemed no match for Stetson. Indeed, Stetson would not allow her to speak at meetings, so Eddy urged Lathrop in 1891 to withdraw from First Church and found her own congregation, later Second Church of Christ, Scientist.

[6] Peel has characterized Stetson and Lathrop as the “Scylla and Charybdis of the New York Scientists . . .” (1971: 178, 224). As Swensen reasoned, “Stetson’s personality, philosophy, and tactics exasperated Eddy, inflamed Lathrop, and contributed to unrest among the New York congregations” (2008: 81). Convinced that she was the unquestioned leader of the Gotham Christian Scientists and thus enjoyed a unique relationship with Eddy, Stetson exulted to her teacher that “all the fiery darts of the enemy fail to separate us” (1895). An annoyed Eddy had already written, “Do not claim that you are my chosen one for you are not” (1893). The early days of Christian Science seemed at times to be a free for all contest of personalities and show. One unidentified New York newspaper reported that, after a well-attended service at First Church, “Beautiful women, richly gowned, superb in beautiful coloring, swept up and down the aisles,” in a setting “more like a reception at a Fifth avenue mansion than the ending of a religious service” (c. 1899). Referring to Lathrop and other leaders, prescient Brooklyn Christian Scientist Pamela



Figure 2. Augusta Stetson. Used courtesy of The Mary Baker Eddy Library.



Figure 3. Laura Lathrop. Used courtesy of The Mary Baker Eddy Library.

Leonard had earlier written to Eddy, “All seem to [be] jealous of her [Stetson’s] success; she does not storm the [illegible] by a loud noise, but holds the Fort with great strength and power . . .” Stetson was indeed tenacious. One journalist later described her as possessing “unbreakable reserve power” and commented that Lathrop was “almost the antithesis of Mrs. Stetson in character and temperament.” The reporter insightfully concluded, “Mrs. Lathrop attracts love, whereas Mrs. Stetson compels respect” (Johnston: 159; for conflicts in New York, Toledo, Ohio, and elsewhere, see Wilson: 140-41; for a Stetson-caused church split in Oregon, see Swensen 2005/6).

[7] Despite controversy, grandstanding, and pageantry, healing outreach through the ministrations of practitioners was the drawing card in both First and Second Churches, as it was in every Christian Science congregation. Stetson ensured the undeviating loyalty of her largely male church officers by healing every one of them, including former railroad executive Edwin H. Hatfield and successful attorney George F. De Lano, of various physical and nervous claims. She also ensured that, on the passing of any loyal member, a heartfelt letter went out to the bereaved family (Swensen 2008: 79-80; First Church Minutes, Oct. 13, 1900). As Lathrop observed, most people were not concerned with Stetson’s sophistry and tactics, but “care for nothing only to be cured of disease” (1886). Article 2 of the 1891 by-laws of Second Church stipulated that the “Pastor of this church must be able to heal the sick after the manner of Christian Science, must be strictly moral and an earnest and devoted follower of Christ’s Truth . . .” Lathrop herself had been healed through Christian Science of a serious heart ailment by Eddy in 1886, maintained a busy healing practice, and claimed to a reporter that “there is not one [disease] which cannot be cured” (L. Lathrop 1904; Unidentified NY Newspaper c. 1894). Both First and Second Churches were in large part an outgrowth of the successful healing work of Stetson, Lathrop, and their students. As Stetson exulted to Eddy, “The healing is astounding” (1894).

[8] There was a fertile field of suffering confronting the new faith, for, as Danish immigrant Jacob Riis wrote in his epochal *How the Other Half Lives* (1890), “Here is a door. Listen! That short hacking cough, that tiny helpless wail – what do they mean?” (quoted in Burrows and Wallace: 1182). Perhaps a baby in its death throes, but there were countless examples of physical and mental suffering among all ages and classes in the teeming city. A hitherto almost unreported aspect of the early history of Christian Science was the establishment of free dispensaries in New York, Brooklyn, Boston, Buffalo, Milwaukee, and other cities, staffed by practitioners who made au gratis forays into slums during the late 1880s and early 1890s (see First Church Minutes, Oct. 15, 1889; Second Church Minutes, June 13, 1893; Testimonies 1891; Beasley: 201-2). Despite some success, the new faith was not to make its greatest mark among the downtrodden elements of society, as efforts shifted to more receptive educated and affluent people. “The Christian Science Church does not support missions,” one member later explained. “We enable the poor to help themselves and not ask for alms” (Johnston: 163). Yet members were expected to engage in healing outreach, including one practitioner who made regular visits to the thickly-settled Orthodox Jewish neighborhoods of the Lower East Side (Testimonies 1902).

[9] Early branch churches were sinecures of their founding teachers, Stetson in First Church and Lathrop in Second. Stetson firmly controlled her church, sat ex-officio on the board of trustees, served as pastor, and approved all major decisions and nominations of officers,

whom the congregation always ratified unanimously. Lathrop also held considerable sway in her church, but was less of a prima donna than was Stetson. Both women gave effective sermons. Nevertheless, Eddy dealt with overweening personalities in the pulpit early in 1895 by abolishing pastors and instituting lay readers, a man and a woman who read alternate passages from the Bible and *Science and Health*. Stetson and a close colleague occupied those offices in First Church (Minutes, April 12, 1903), while Lathrop and her son John usually served as readers in Second Church (Minutes, April 2, 1895, Dec. 6, 1897, and Dec. 17, 1900). In 1895, Second Church unanimously resolved that “only members of the Students Assn [sic] of the New York Christian Science Institute [run by Lathrop] shall officiate as Readers” (Minutes, Oct. 11). This myopia was short-lived, at least in Second Church. The membership roll books of First Church show that 50% of the congregants were students of Stetson, thus cementing her control. The Lathrops readily complied with Eddy’s guidelines and her evolving *Church Manual*, while Stetson often proved obstinate. Yet late in 1899, Laura Lathrop called a meeting of leading New York Christian Scientists and launched a collective attack on Stetson, leaving the target in tears (1899). Eddy was not impressed, writing, “This meeting was not suggested by God or it would have resulted in Love and Unity” (1900).

Church Building Lifts Eyebrows

[10] In the spring of 1899, Lathrop’s church had embarked on a plan to build an edifice at Central Park West and 68th St. seating upwards of 1,000 and designed by the noted architect Frederick Comstock of Hartford, Connecticut. For a time, as First Church sought to buy a lot for its own new edifice two blocks away on 66th St., there was bitter contention between the two churches, but Second Church prevailed in its desire to avoid a “church building in such close proximity to a sister church.” After the cornerstone was laid and construction was proceeding, Eddy made it known that she wished the



Figure 4. Second Church. Used courtesy of The Mary Baker Eddy Library.

auditorium to have a significantly larger seating capacity than the plans envisioned, so an additional lot was purchased, and the rear wall was demolished, allowing for 1,500 seats. After two years of planning and construction, Second Church was ready to open its classical edifice, in French Renaissance style faced with white Dover marble, on Easter Sunday, 1901. The *New York Herald* dubbed the structure a “beautiful marble palace” (1901; see Ivey: 63-65; Figure 4). However, due to outstanding debt, denominational practice dictated that the church could not celebrate dedication, but had to settle for a less lofty “consecration.” Despite Lathrop’s warning that it would not be “depending on God and a vital mistake,” the church had taken out a \$75,000 mortgage, subsequently increased to \$170,000. By 1903, the church could not even pay the interest on the mortgage, prompting an appeal to Mary Baker

Eddy in which they warned of “gossip in the field.” John Lathrop stated that the church members had allowed anxiety to replace the “simple, trustful, fearless spirit which produced such natural results in the beginning . . .” (1903a). On June 26, 1907, members were requested to “remain after service and go around Jericho,” but the resulting euphoria was punctured in December when the chief subscriber announced that she could not honor her \$60,000 pledge! In 1911, Eddy’s will provided \$72,000 to retire the remaining debt (Minutes, May 23, 1898, Jan. 18, April 12, 1901, May 13, June 26, Dec. 10 and 31, 1907; Second Church 1903, 1934).

[11] By contrast, the construction and opening of Stetson’s magnificent house of worship on Central Park West at 96th St. was a testament to her drive and organizational skills (Figure 5). As Swensen has noted, “The rich records of First Church show a committed Stetson superbly organizing her coterie of wealthy congregants to plan and build an impressive edifice now recognized as the finest example of religious Beaux Arts architecture in the Empire City” (2008: 84; see Ivey: 24-25, 64-68).



Figure 5. First Church. Used courtesy of The Mary Baker Eddy Library.

During construction, a circular letter arrived from Second Church in November 1900, requesting assistance in dedicating its structure the following Easter. The board of First Church found it “inexpedient” to read the letter to the membership, because nothing should “distract or divert” the church from completing its new building (Minutes, Dec. 1, 1900). The dedication of Stetson’s \$1,200,000 debt-free 2,200-seat granite-faced edifice featuring a John LaFarge window and designed by the firm of Carrere & Hastings was a media event. During services on November 29, 1903, Stetson reminded the overflow congregation that the church “has been built entirely by those who have been healed of all manner of diseases” (Minutes, Nov. 29, 1903; *New York Times* 1903a). As Bates and Dittmore observed, “Mrs. Lathrop’s creation lacked the glory of dedication ceremonies. Gussie [Stetson], moving more slowly, but paying her bills as she went, still had the inside track” (383).

[12] The very day that Stetson’s structure opened, the *New York Times* ran a story about serious dissension in her congregation. Stetson assured the reporter that all was peaceful within her ranks and claimed that anyone who would “make such a bitter attack on a woman behind her back must be insane” (1903b). Actually, anyone guilty of opposition or “refractory” behavior in First Church, including future Mother Church reader William D. McCrackan, was marginalized, ostracized, or excommunicated (see Article XI, Section 1 of amended by-laws in Minutes, Jan. 19, 1903; on church dealings with dissidents, see Minutes, Sept. 26, 1897, Jan. 5, 1899, Dec. 26, 1900, March 17 and 19, 1903). Because Stetson and some other leaders retained firm grips on their churches, Eddy required three-year terms for readers in 1902. Although Laura Lathrop and her son John readily gave up their long-held offices as readers, Stetson did not relinquish her readership until Eddy prodded her. The

trustees of First Church then nominated a single slate of candidates for the office, which the membership elected unanimously, a practice that did not change during Stetson's tenure. The members also voted to raise a fund of \$100,000 as a gesture of thanks to Stetson, which she declined, while accepting an annual stipend of \$5,000 (Minutes, July 27, 1902).² Yet, in 1902 a new Second Church by-law encouraged more democracy through new committees to handle much work formerly done by the board, to "promote the Cause of Christian Science along those human lines ready for spiritual growth and understanding" (Minutes, July 28, 1902; Annual Report attached to Minutes, July 14, 1902; the new by-law, Article 4, Section 4, was written by hand into the 1900 by-laws, fastened into p. 171 of the Minutes). In 1907, Second Church dubbed Lathrop "Reader Emeritus and Founder of this Branch Church," worthy of "tender love for you and appreciation for the patient, indefatigable work which you have accomplished in making this demonstration possible" (Second Church 1907b). While touched by the approbation, Lathrop refused the title of Reader Emeritus and rejected any financial remuneration (1908).

[13] According to its official history, Second Church's "beautiful marble palace" was to "serve as a great dispensary – a place where Christian Science would be taught, and Christian healing would be carried on every day in the week." Some practitioners initially had their offices in the church edifice, which was designed to be a teaming center for church outreach through healing, reminiscent of the short-lived dispensaries of the 1880s and 1890s. But, finding that Eddy disapproved of the practice because it might interfere with the integrity of the very private relationship between healer and patient, the church reluctantly discontinued the practitioners' presence at the end of 1902 (Second Church 1934: 12). By contrast, 24 practitioners had their offices in the new First Church edifice up the street, prompting Eddy to promulgate a by-law in 1909 forbidding practitioners from operating in church buildings. First Church had long held itself aloof from other branches in New York City, refusing to cooperate in efforts to defeat legislation aimed at restricting the new faith and to participate in a new central reading room in Manhattan, despite Eddy's entreaties (on legislative efforts, see Minutes, Feb. 27, March 6, 1901; on the central reading room, see Stetson 1903; Eddy 1903; J. Lathrop 1903b). First Church member Anne Dodge, daughter of Iowa railroad promoter General Grenville Dodge, observed to Eddy that Christian Science in New York "seems to be frills and frothiness" and that the West Side (site of both First and Second Churches) was "reserved more especially for a newer, more parvenu element" (1905, 1906, 1909; Eddy 1909).

[14] In the aftermath of the sensational 1907 "Next Friends Suit" – in which both Eddy's natural and adopted son unsuccessfully attempted to prove her incompetent, with the aid of Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World* – coupled with various lawsuits against Christian Scientists, Eddy and the Boston authorities moved to discipline their sometimes smug and naïve co-religionists. Mother Church official Alfred A. Farlow sent out seminal notices advising church members not to discuss their faith indiscriminately on the streetcars or in testimonial

² Although Stetson had been paid \$5,000 per annum as first reader, the new reader was paid but \$1,000, while Stetson continued to receive her stipend (Minutes, July 9, 1902). A special members meeting ratified a new church constitution and bylaws on January 19, 1903, but this offered no new steps toward democracy (see minutes of annual meeting of January 20, 1903 for modus operandi of nomination and election of officers).

meetings, for the “evil one lies in wait for us at every point” (quoted in Swensen 2004: 35). Second Church debated a motion that it was “disorderly for any member to discourse, exhort or moralize in or expound religious subjects in public or in other words to preach, especially at Wednesday evening meetings.” The church rejected this effort to stifle “unauthorized preaching” (Minutes, Oct. 12, 1908). Seemingly oblivious that Eddy and her church officials were reining in effusive personality, Stetson continued to run her church with a firm hand and to encourage unrestrained praise. One First Church report in 1908 noted that Stetson “valiantly and courageously for twenty years has held high above the reach of the enemy in this city the pure, true teaching of a pure, true Teacher, Mrs. Eddy . . .” During lengthy daily sessions with twenty-four of her closest practitioners in 1909, Stetson proclaimed that her branch was the only true Christian Science church in the world, that Laura Lathrop was a “bondwoman” who should “go out” [expire or “die”] and that the Mother Church was in the hands of the devil. Coupled with other indiscretions, this led to her excommunication from the Mother Church and her resignation from her own First Church, despite her legions of devoted students. First Church later noted that Stetson’s “genius had always been more for personal leadership than for cooperation with others . . .” (Strickler; First Church 1932; see Swensen 2008: 85-87; Stetson 1917).

Testimonies by the Early Faithful

[15] Why did thousands of Gothamites embrace the controversial and sometimes dysfunctional new faith? The most important answer lies in the approximately 340 New York City area testimonies published in the monthly *Christian Science Journal* (1883-1910) and weekly *Christian Science Sentinel* (1898-1910). The writers of these accounts were probably either unaware or unconcerned with the antics at the top of the movement, but were attracted by the practical benefits the new religion offered. Of the testimonies examined, more than 70% indicated that they came into the faith for physical healing, about 13% were searching for release from nervous ills, and 16% had been involved in a general search for new answers. There was some shading between physical and nervous ailments, although the overwhelming majority of those claiming physical healings did not mention nervous problems. While the Pacific Coast Christian Scientists were almost exclusively attracted by their need for healing of physical and, secondarily, nervous ailments, a sizable minority of the New York Scientists embraced Eddy’s discovery after searching for the holy grail (see Hansen: chap. 6; Peel 1988: chap. 8; Gottschalk 2006: 331-37; England; cf. Swensen 2003).

[16] While serving as a spy in the Spanish American War, engineer John C. Carlyle was struck forcefully in his jaw and chest by a gun butt and received a “terrible machete wound in the knee.” When doctors at New York’s St. Vincent Hospital wanted to insert a silver jawbone and breastbone and amputate his leg, Carlyle turned to Christian Science, experienced complete healing of all ailments – including growing back a jawbone that doctors had cut away – and began to attend Second Church (Testimonies 1900a). Devoted Stetson student, practitioner, and First Church member Marion E. Stephens, who had been a Protestant missionary to Native Americans until Apache Chief Geronimo ridiculed her to her face, found Christian Science and was healed of a serious spinal injury that had impaired her ability to walk since childhood (Testimonies 1899c). Margaret Beecher White, granddaughter of Henry Ward Beecher, related that she had been a religious skeptic, but was

so impressed by friends who had been healed of tumors, tuberculosis, and heart trouble that she joined First Church (1908b). Dora Studebaker Innis, scion of the wagon and automobile manufacturing family and a member of Second Church, rejoiced that her six-year-old son recovered in one week from a severe head gash sustained in a sledding accident (Testimonies 1899a). First Church member and staunch Stetson partisan Kate Y. Remer, daughter of Pennsylvania brewer Daniel Yuengling, was healed of a “most agonizing pain” in her side of ten years’ standing and was “born again” on the first day of the class she took from Stetson (Testimonies 1899b). Prominent playwright-author Charles Klein, a member of First Church, overcame skepticism and was healed of “liver disease complaint, insomnia, dyspepsia, nervous irritability, and a constant dread of some impending danger” (Testimonies 1905a). Second Church member Elizabeth E. Souza, former “infidel” and future practitioner, exulted that God had taken her from a “desolate” land to the “garden of Eden” (Testimonies 1905c).

[17] What of the lower white collar and working ranks of society? Several salesmen, or “commercial travelers,” were relieved of that bane of their profession, “dyspepsia.” Salesman Jules O. Lorimier of Second Church overcame liquor, tobacco, gambling, and profanity (Testimonies 1908). Stenographer Nellie Rose Nixdorf, an orphan and member of First Church, was healed of “chronic constipation, severe spinal trouble, and neuralgia in all its various forms,” and was unscathed when lightning struck the telephone switchboard at which she was seated (Testimonies 1905d). Clerk Thomas G. Boles, a member of Second Church, was healed of inflammatory rheumatism, but was especially grateful for trouncing “hatred, revenge, malice, sensuality, self-love, etc.” (Testimonies 1905e). When Charles S. Klautscheck, a clerk and member of First Church, realized that “Truth is sharper than a two-edged sword,” he was healed of a longstanding and disfiguring “large lump” on his neck (Testimonies 1905b). Unlike the Pacific Coast, there are very few testimonies from or about members of the working classes in New York. One exception is manual laborer and night school student Robert H. Smith of Brooklyn, who was freed from a “disease of the lungs” (Testimonies 1906). First Church member and canned goods agent W. A. Winselmann rejoiced that a French maid, who had been “wasting away,” made it to church with a “bloom . . . back in her checks” (Testimonies 1900b).

Analysis of Christian Science Church Membership

[18] How large were the Christian Science ranks and how did their numbers compare with established religions in New York City? A 1903 religious census in Manhattan helped answer this question. At 3,366 attendants and 2,236 members, the five Christian Science churches in Manhattan were well ahead of Disciples of Christ, Unitarians, Universalists, and Congregationalists, but significantly behind Presbyterians, Reformed, Baptists, Episcopalians, Lutherans, and Methodists, and less than 1% of the numbers of Roman Catholics (*New York Herald* 1903).³ Not only were the Christian Science ranks experiencing rapid growth in New York, but emissaries from Second Church, including Frances Thurber

³ In 1906, Christian Scientists in Manhattan had 2,799 members, while Congregationalists enjoyed 3,949, Disciples of Christ 1,070, Unitarians 1,120, Baptists 22,798, Episcopalians 57,344, Lutherans 21,340, Methodists 19,684, Presbyterian Church USA 28,763, Reformed 11,321, and Roman Catholics 873,277 (U.S. Bureau of the Census: I, 339-40).

Seal, were instrumental in introducing Eddy's teachings to Germany and Norway (see Lathrop 1898; Seal). In a 1906 lecture in Boston, Clarence A. Buskirk exulted that the increase of the faith "is constant as well as rapid, and results from the grateful advocacy of its adherents" (70). The upsurge in the Christian Science ranks is remarkable, considering that membership in some Protestant denominations in Manhattan declined from 1900-1910, as the numbers of Catholics swelled (Wenner: 59). According to Kevin J. Christiano, "Religious bodies such as the Salvation Army and Christian Science were tailored to modern life changes and life-styles, and thus they enjoyed a comparative advantage in appeals to city dwellers" (148-49). Yet the board of trustees of Second Church ruminated in its 1907 annual report that Chicago, with two million people, had eight Christian Science churches, while Greater New York, with over four million people, had only nine churches (Second Church 1907a).

[19] First Church was the largest branch, or local, Christian Science church in the world, while Second Church was the second-largest branch east of Chicago (at times, First Church of Christ, Scientist, Chicago, may have surpassed First Church, New York). To examine the greatest number of individuals, this analysis encompasses all members of First Church, 1893-1902, and Second Church, 1891-1906, even if they passed away or withdrew their membership during these periods. First Church reached more than 1,200 members in 1903, 1,602 late in 1905 and 1,883 by 1907. According to Cunningham, Stetson's congregation was made up "substantially of merchants, industrialists, stockbrokers and heiresses, who gave generously of their resources to the church" (6). Lathrop recalled in 1907 that her initial church was a "small congregation of poor people" and had remarked to Eddy ten years earlier that the "church is not a rich church," with "only two members of much means" when they bought the plot of ground for their edifice (1907: 3; n.d.). Organized with some 20 members in 1891, Second Church had 175 on the rolls by 1897, 349 in 1900, 474 in 1902, and 673 by 1907. The 1906 religious census reported that Christian Scientists nationally comprised about 72% females and 28% males, the highest percentage of women of any American denomination (U.S. Bureau of the Census: II, 200). The membership of First Church, 1893-1902, comprised 72% females and 28% males, while Second Church, 1891-1906, had 68% females and 32% males.⁴ Yet one observer noted in 1907 that more than half of the 2,500 people present at a Sunday service at First Church were men (Johnston: 165).

[20] Since New York City was host to a steadily increasing number of foreign-born residents, how many did the Christian Scientists attract? Of the 1160 names in the First Church roll, the birthplaces of 609 (53%) are known, of which 117 (19%) were foreign-born. Percentages include: United States 81% (half from New York, with sizable numbers from Pennsylvania, Ohio, and New Jersey), Germany 8%, England 3%, Ireland and Canada (2%), with the rest scattered between Scotland, Sweden, Russia, Denmark, Iceland, the Ottoman Empire, etc. Of the 836 members of Second Church listed on the rolls, the writer found the birthplaces of 431 (52%), of whom 121 (28%) were foreign-born. Percentages are as follows: United States (half from New York) 72%, Germany 8%, England 7%, Ireland 3%, France, Sweden and Canada (2%), with the rest scattered between Scotland, Netherlands, Russia, etc. The

⁴ There is a First Church roll for 1887-1892, with most names copied into the 1893-1902 roll, but no extant roll for 1903 and following years.

two churches are thus similar, except that Second Church enjoyed a significantly larger percentage of foreign-born members than did First Church. There were at least two African Americans in Second Church. A J. Lamme postulated that “one may infer that Christian Science appealed to those individuals with a Yankee-Yorker background,” people who were “rootless and optimistic” (4, 6). Foreign-born members of the two churches were fewer than the non-native population recorded for Manhattan in the 1900 census (41%), but Eddy’s faith did draw a significant number of new arrivals, who may be termed “rootless and optimistic.”⁵ While almost half of the immigrants to New York came from Eastern and Southern Europe by 1906, the Christian Scientists drew primarily from English and German stock (Christiano: 7-12).

[21] We will now analyze the occupations of almost 1,600 members of First and Second Churches, 1893-1906. Tools include church membership rolls, ancestry.com, and city directories. To enhance data, the results are broken down into specific occupations with percentages. For accuracy, the category entitled “Clerical, sales & kindred workers” is reported as stockbrokers, real estate and insurance, and all others (clerical, sales). Of the 1160 names in the First Church roll book from 1893-1902 (563 of whom had studied Christian Science with Stetson), the occupations of 963 members or their spouses (83%) are known. There are 836 members of Second Church listed on its rolls from its organization in 1891 through April 11, 1906. Of these, occupational data on 625 members or their spouses (75%) are available. Thus, there are 1996 names on the rolls of the two churches, with the total occupations known for 1588 members or their spouses (79.5%). A few of these people experienced mobility during the years considered, including one carpenter who rose to be a stockbroker, but most stayed in the same job.

[22] The following table should help rescue the early Christian Scientists of Manhattan from the oblivion to which church policy and members’ indifference consigned them for 100 years. Most members lived in Manhattan or other boroughs of New York, with some in suburbs or far flung states. About 30% of the members of First Church were professionals or married to professionals, with 31.5% at Second Church. Included were several former physicians and clergymen. About 12% of the members of both churches were in the arts (comprising art, literature and music), including “cattle painter” Charles M. Howe of First Church and actress Maude Granger of Second Church (Dreiser). Managers and entrepreneurs constituted 32% of First Church and 29% of Second Church. Merchant prince Orlando M. Harper of First Church may have rubbed elbows with Mary Wright Plummer, director of the Pratt Institute Library, while William Delevan Baldwin of Second Church, president of Otis Elevator Company, may have spoken with porter Frederick W. Gerken. There were more small proprietors (10%) in First Church than in Second Church (8%). Clerical, sales and kindred workers comprised about 21% in both churches. “All others,” including clerks and sales people, constituted 15% in First Church and 16% in Second. The disparity is greater for craftsmen in the two churches, with about 7% in First and 10% in Second, while service workers numbered about 6% in each church. Claire

⁵ The following are the nationalities of 10% of the names of members of the Mother Church nationally: English 82%, German 8.6%, Irish 3.3%, Scottish 1.8%, French 1.2%, Scandinavian .9% (listed in Swensen 2003: 247 n. 51).

Minerva Milligan, milliner of Second Church, was one of about two dozen women dressmakers in the two congregations. Milliners in First Church enjoyed a special advantage, since Stetson liked her members and attendants to be well-dressed! More than one dozen people of independent means, or “own income,” belonged to First Church, with few such members of Second Church.

Table 1. Occupations of Male Members and Female Members and non-Member Male Spouses of First and Second Churches of Christ, Scientist, New York City, 1887-1906

	First Church, New York, Numbers	First Church, New York, Percentages	Second Church, New York, Numbers	Second Church, New York, Percentages	Total Numbers, Both Churches	Percentages, Both Churches
Professional & kindred workers	291	30%	197	31.5%	488	31%
<i>CS practitioners</i>	54	6%	41	6.5%	95	6%
<i>Arts</i>	118	12%	78	12.5%	196	12%
<i>Teachers</i>	22	2%	19	3%	41	3%
<i>All others</i>	97	10%	59	9.5%	156	10%
Managers, officials & proprietors, not farm	307	32%	180	29%	487	31%
<i>Entrepreneurs & officials</i>	214	22%	133	21%	347	22%
<i>Small proprietors</i>	93	10%	47	8%	140	9%
Clerical, sales & kindred workers	204	21%	135	21.5%	339	21.5%
<i>Stockbrokers</i>	28	3%	12	2%	40	2.5%
<i>Real estate, insurance</i>	33	3%	21	3.5%	54	3.5
<i>All others</i>	143	15%	102	16%	245	15.5%
Craftsmen, foremen & kindred workers	65	7%	64	10%	129	8%
Service workers	55	6%	35	5.5%	90	5.5%
Farmers	19	2%	6	1%	25	1.5%
Students	7	.5%	5	1%	12	.5%
Own income	15	1.5%	3	.5%	18	1%
Totals	963	100%	625	100%	1588	100%

Sources: ancestry.com, city directories, and church membership rolls

[23] The two Christian Science churches thus drew members from similar occupational categories. Although First Church had more members and spouses from the managerial and

entrepreneurial classes than did Second Church, the latter drew a greater proportion from the artisan and service classes, as well as from the foreign born. To ascertain just how many members and spouses came from the lower rungs of the economic ladder, let us add percentages of “all others (clerks, sales people)” from clerical, sales and kindred workers, to those for artisans, service people, and farmers. For First Church, the percentage is 30%, with Second Church garnering almost 33%. While both churches were roughly similar in their occupational breakdown, Second Church clearly had more members from the lower echelons of society, as well as having significantly fewer names on the rolls. If one compares Second Church with the six branch churches on the Pacific Coast studied in a recent article, the New York Christian Scientists emerge as slightly less egalitarian. Almost 39% of the Scientists in the more fluid society of the Pacific Coast were clerks, artisans, or service workers (Swensen 2003: 252-53). Yet one member of New York’s First Church remarked in 1907 that “far from the wealthy predominating, the church attracts more greatly the small-salaried man and self-supporting woman” (Johnston: 163). Although working people and professionals occupied an important niche in the two branches, managers, entrepreneurs, and stockbrokers held much sway at First Church, while a less affluent Second Church followed suit in many respects.

[24] We will now compare the occupational classification of Christian Scientists in New York City with that of other religious groups. The breakdown for Christian Scientists in this essay is much more detailed and different in scope than the scheme that Thernstrom, McLeod, and Kessner employed, based on Alba M. Edwards “socio-economic grouping” devised in the 1930s. Therefore, we must combine many white-collar occupations into high white-collar, with small proprietors, clerks and salesmen (“All others”), actors, musicians, journalists, accountants, librarians, auditors, etc., treated as low white-collar, in some cases using estimates. For the purposes of this table, the number of Christian Science service workers is evenly distributed between semi-skilled and unskilled manual. Since students and “own income” are not included, the Christian Science figures do not total 100%.

[25] Table 2 offers a striking comparison of Christian Scientists with other religious groups. Juxtaposed against sampled Catholics, Lutherans, and Jews, New York Christian Scientists were 82.5% white collar, compared with 50% in St. Luke’s Lutheran Church, 43.2% in St. Stephen’s Catholic Church, and 35.9% of the Russian Jews. Although Christian Scientists had far more members in high white-collar occupations than the others sampled, the four religious groups all had similar percentages in low white-collar occupations. It would be interesting to see a breakdown of Episcopalians and Unitarians. In the more fluid society of the Pacific Coast, the Christian Scientists enjoyed about 68% in white-collar occupations. There Eddy’s flock had a considerably greater percentage of members in labor/crafts (28%) than did the sampled Los Angeles Protestants (7.8%) or Portland, Oregon B’nai Brith members (4.5%) (Swensen 2003: 255). New York may have been a great melting pot, but for Christian Scientists the brew was definitely tilted toward the middle and upper middle reaches of society, with more than a few adherents from the lower rungs (13.5%), in addition to farmers (1.5%). One may wonder why the Scientists did not attract more followers from the waves of largely working class immigrants who landed at Ellis Island. Language is one answer. Although there were some Christian Science tracts in German and Norwegian available as early as 1890, *Der Herold der Christian Science* (monthly) did not appear until 1903

and the German translation of *Science and Health* – the first translation of this seminal work – made its debut in 1912 with facing pages of English and German, as directed by Eddy. She was concerned about maintaining the purity of her works and felt that the whole world would ultimately speak English. As Peel observes, “Missionary activity must wait upon ‘scientific’ demonstration” (1977: 121).⁶

Table 2. Comparison of Occupations of Christian Scientists with Those of Other New York Religious Groups, in Percentage

	1 st & 2 nd CS Churches, all members, Manhattan, 1892-1906	St. Stephen’s RC Church, heads of households, Manhattan, 1901	St. Luke’s Lutheran Church, all members, Manhattan, 1900	Russian Jewish heads of households, Manhattan & Brooklyn, 1905
High white-collar	31.5	12.7	8	15.1
Low white collar	51	30.5	42.0	30.8
Total white collar	82.5	43.2	50	35.9
Skilled manual	8	22.0	24	34.8
Semi-skilled manual	3	22.0	4.0	17.7
Unskilled manual	2.5	8.5	6.0	1.7
Farmers	1.5	NA	NA	NA
No occupation	NA	4.2	16.0	NA

Sources: For Christian Scientists, Table 1; for Lutherans and Roman Catholics, McLeod, for Russian Jews, Kessner; occupational categories are based on Thernstrom.

Conclusion

[26] In examining the two congregations and their membership, we have investigated the growing pains, the pivotal role of healing, and the social complexion of a significant new American faith. Second Church may have in many respects typified early urban Christian Science branches across the country, while First Church was a very successful and notable aberration. Even as Christian Scientists welcomed or coped with a continual stream of Eddy directives and by-laws aimed at curbing the excessive influence of Stetson and others – including “A Reader not a Leader” – Second Church steadfastly maintained its loyalty to the pioneering work of Laura Lathrop. That is, there was some subtle resistance to Eddy’s efforts to depersonalize the movement and therefore some tension between the Christian Science Board of Directors and some leading local figures. During the Stetson crisis of 1909, outspoken Mother Church director John V. Dittmore – who was expelled ten years later by his four fellow directors – remarked that Lathrop and Second Church were “just as bad as Mrs [sic] Stetson and not half as smart” (quoted in Strickler).⁷ Yet Lathrop epitomized the

⁶ Since the mid 1890s, the New York churches had maintained a boat to take Christian Science literature to ships at anchor in the Hudson River, the East River, or anywhere in New York Harbor.

⁷ Dittmore also mentioned to Strickler on July 24 that the Board had forced a strong female leader to resign from another branch church. The Board wrote that the “jurisdiction of this Board extends to every matter

more humble teacher who adhered to Eddy's desires to concentrate on healing, while Stetson was a talented, driven leader who let her ego stand in the way of Eddy's changes. Eddy meant her directives not only to rein in her headstrong students, but also to alter the behavior pattern of the rank and file, channeling them into lives of healing in their communities from New York City to the Pacific Coast and abroad.

[27] Somehow, in this shuffle the selfless outreach of Franklin Blake and others largely fell by the wayside. The increasingly narrow interpretation that the Christian Science Board of Directors placed upon the *Church Manual* after Eddy's passing late in 1910 ultimately constituted "one major contributing factor in the church's long and steady decline in the decades after World War II" (Swensen 2004: 51-52; see Gottschalk 2006: 408-9; Wilson: 156, 159).⁸ Yet as late as 1951, John Gunther could observe that New York City had a "powerful upper sprinkling of Christian Scientists" (577-78). The faith never made a substantial numerical impact on the Empire City, but is notable for its revival of spiritual healing, the leadership role it afforded women, and its spacious, formerly crowded, and largely classical church edifices. Robert C. Fuller observes that the "role [of Christian Science] in introducing Americans to metaphysical spirituality has been enormous" (104). One might add that this debt is largely unacknowledged. Although some of the reasons for the decline of the Christian Science movement are unique to Eddy's flock, this downturn must be placed against the loss of membership in most main line Christian denominations, as well as against the impressive gains made by the other three indigenous American "sects," the Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Seventh Day Adventists (on the decline of church attendance, see Putnam: 70-73, 200-1, 251-54; Wuthnow; Roof).

[27] From 2003-4, Mother Church authorities tried to shake the movement out of its lethargy by invoking the outreach of the Good Samaritan, but after the abrupt departure of longtime Mother Church director Virginia Harris in December 2004, this promising antidote to ego-centrism and ingrown church culture was dropped (Swensen 2004: 56-58). However, the new leadership has also been discarding the outmoded "Imperial Mother Church" in favor of more local initiative. Healing outreach among the faithful is alive and is at the center of the present Board's laudable new direction, but most members of the church have yet to follow Eddy's admonition to launch their "bark upon the ever-agitated but healthful waters of truth" (1934: 254). With little awareness of their significant debt to the early workers in New York and elsewhere whose initiative, enthusiasm, and spontaneity built their movement, Eddy's steadily dwindling flock is selling off many of their impressive edifices all around the country, from Los Angeles and Seattle to Chicago and New York City, including

affecting the Cause of Christian Science as a whole" (cited in *Christian Science Sentinel* 12 [November 6, 1909]: 181). Thus the Board's actions during the Stetson affair clearly show officialdom flexing its muscles.

⁸ The Board's increasing authority after Eddy's passing may have stemmed in part from repeated requests for direction from branch churches trying to express loyalty but also taking their cue from the Stetson imbroglio, thus continuing and augmenting the centralization that Eddy had started. During the divisive 1919-1921 litigation between the Directors and the Trustees of the Christian Science Publishing Society, the Directors – while in the right legally – alternated in their relations with the field from displaying detached restraint to encouraging or allowing the use of what one detractor termed "destructive policies" to enforce their authority (Turner). Further scholarship is needed to clarify the evolution of the Board of Directors.

Stetson's landmark Beaux Arts First Church.⁹ One notable exception to this trend is the present restoration of Lathrop's "beautiful marble palace" to its pristine 1901 French Renaissance appearance, with money gleaned when First and Second Churches merged and the new organization acquired the \$15,000,000 garnered from the sale of Stetson's building to a California evangelical group.¹⁰ Thus, Stetson's financial legacy has restored Lathrop's building, perhaps a tardy response to that 1900 Second Church circular! Pioneer altruism and evangelism – with healing as a centerpiece – much stronger Christian fellowship, and some of the more positive leadership techniques of the early workers are needed to recapture some of the original spirit and innovation that launched a metaphysical rocket in Gotham.

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⁹ There is now some growth of Christian Science in Africa, perhaps akin to the original spontaneity and upsurge in New York City.

¹⁰ "For Sale: 1 Church, W. 96th St., Park, Vu," "A Tale of Two Warring Churches, and of One Woman," "Deal Is Close on Landmark Church near Central Park," all in *New York Times*, July 10, 2003, B4, February 15, 2004, RE7, March 27, 2004, B3. Sixth Church of Christ, Scientist, Portland, Oregon, recently restored its 1000-seat c.1930 Art Deco edifice to its original splendor, although some of the congregation resigned in protest. During the 1980s, First Church of Christ, Scientist, Atlanta also restored its impressive 1913 classical edifice.

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