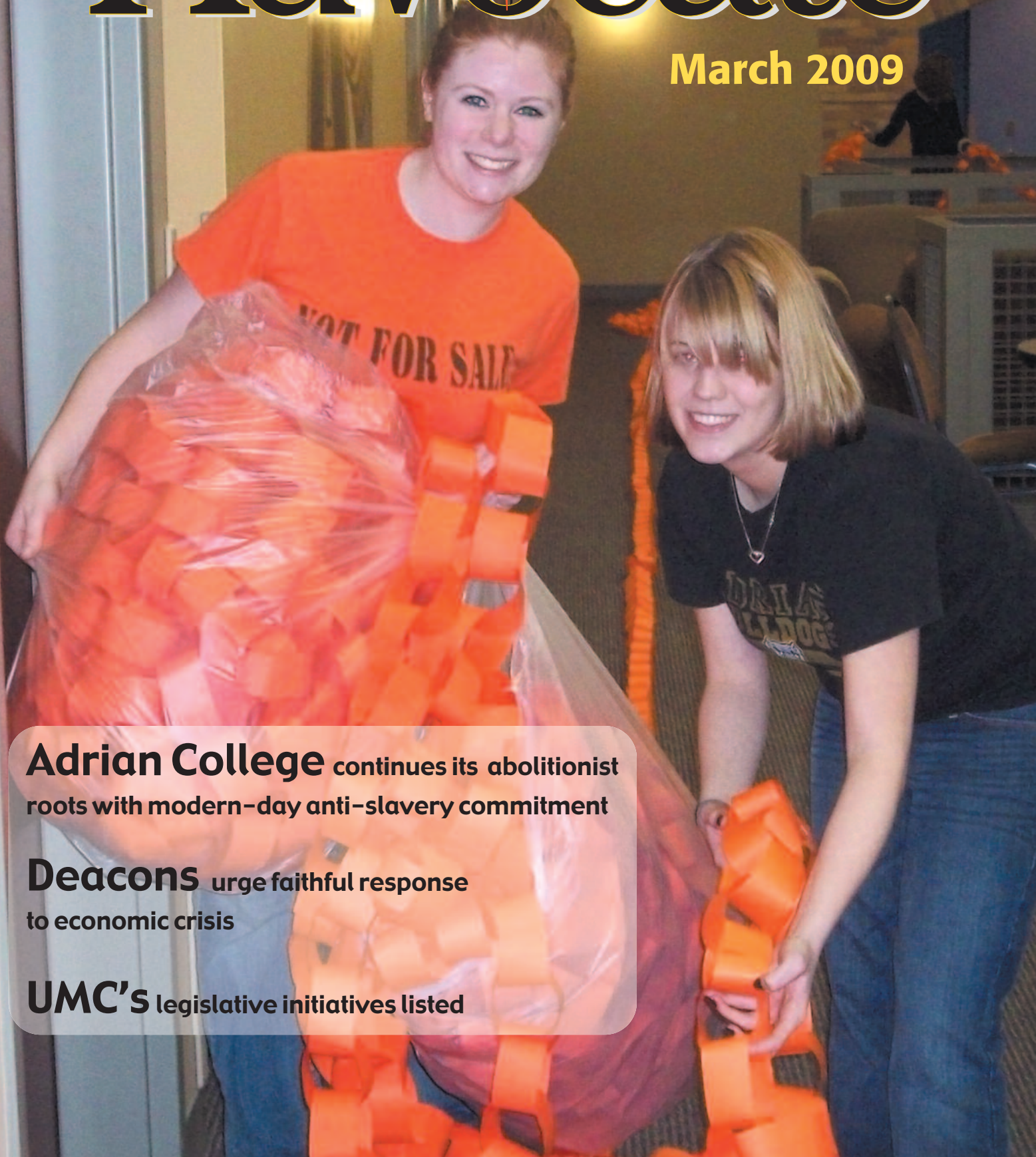


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Adrian College continues its abolitionist roots with modern-day anti-slavery commitment

Deacons urge faithful response to economic crisis

UMC's legislative initiatives listed

ADRIAN COLLEGE – at 150 – still determined to extend history of inclusion, human rights

CHRIS MOMANY

March 28, 2009 marks 150 years of ministry for Adrian College. This institution of the Wesleyan tradition was at the center of the abolitionist movement before the Civil War, and today it leads the nation in the fight against contemporary slavery, often called “human trafficking.”

Adrian College was founded by Asa Mahan. Mahan was born in Vernon, New York and attended Hamilton College, as well as Andover Seminary. While a young pastor in Cincinnati, he supported a group of local seminary students who agitated against slavery. In 1835 he headed north to Oberlin, Ohio and became president of the Oberlin Collegiate Institute where he was the philosophical genius and founder of Oberlin’s prophetic human rights tradition. He also led a unique spiritual revival committed to “Christian Perfection” or Holiness. By 1859 Mahan was in Adrian, Michigan, making plans for another anti-slavery school that would unite spiritual conviction and social justice.

Soon after the launch of Adrian College, young people poured in from various abolitionist communities. The story of William Henry Fitzbutler is especially compelling. Fitzbutler (known in his early years as Henry Butler) was born in Amherstburg, Canada West (now Ontario). His father escaped slavery in Virginia, and his mother had been an indentured person from England. Young Henry’s mind was captivated by the study of science. He and his sister, Elizabeth, came to Adrian College and studied in the preparatory department during the year 1861/1862. Fitzbutler continued his work at the college, presumably with Professor John Kost, a noted lecturer



William Henry Fitzbutler—used with permission from Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan/BMC Media/Box 3.

in chemistry and geology. Kost’s museum collection of scientific specimens had a reputation all its own. By 1864 Fitzbutler was a campus leader among a wide array of disciplines. He served as an officer of the Adrian College Star Literary Society, the marquee debate and writing organization of the college. The Star Society met on the first floor of the college chapel (now Downs Hall), and today our college archives contains remarkably well-preserved minutes of the society

recorded by Fitzbutler. Even during his collegiate years he combined a passion for the sciences with literary prowess. William Henry Butler would go on to excel in both medicine and journalism.

In 1872 Butler became the first person of African descent to earn an M.D. from the University of Michigan. His distinguished work in medicine took him to Louisville, Kentucky, where he established a medical school, worked for human rights, and helped publish a newspaper. Henry was married to Sarah McCurdy, and she earned her M.D. degree in 1892. The 2008 *African American National Biography*, edited by Harvard’s Henry Louis Gates Jr., includes a lengthy entry on William Henry Fitzbutler.

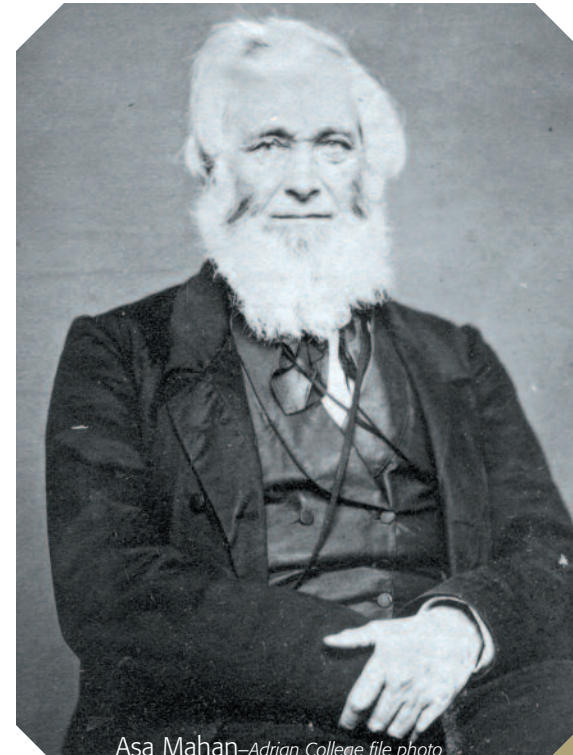
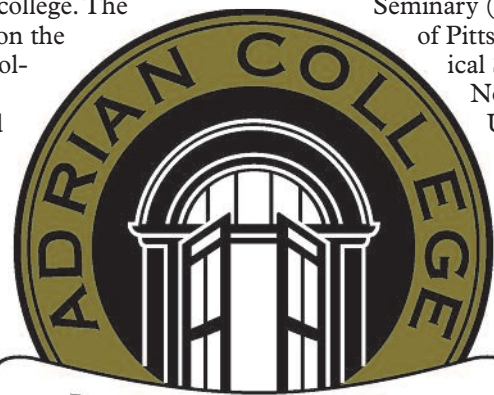
This Adrian College commitment to human dignity also expressed an evangelical feminism. The college welcomed both women and men from its beginning, and before long nationally-recognized leaders in biblical studies and the role of women found a home in Adrian.

Lee Anna Starr (1853-1937) was one of the first women pastors of the Methodist Protestant Church. She was born in Point Pleasant, W.Va. and educated at the University of Chicago, Allegheny Theological

Seminary (a predecessor of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary), and Northwestern University.

Today Pittsburgh Theological Seminary has a dining room named after Lee

Lee



Asa Mahan—Adrian College file photo

Anna Starr and awards a scholarship in her memory. Starr was ordained in 1895 and served a number of congregations in Illinois before coming to Adrian’s Plymouth Church. Plymouth was known as the “College Church,” and Starr integrated the role of community pastor and college educator. For a time she lived on the Adrian College campus in South Hall. So beloved was Starr and so respected as a pastor that upon her leaving Plymouth Church in 1909, Adrian College President B.W. Anthony led the local congregation in drafting a formal resolution of blessing. The pastor was commended for faithful work and assured that she would always possess the “loving esteem of the Methodist Protestants of Adrian.”

Perhaps most of all, Starr was revered for her deliberate and painstaking scholarship. Her 1900 piece, “The Ministry of Women,” confronted the exclusion of women from ordained ministry. In 1926 she offered a lengthy study of the He-

brew and Greek scriptures and their teaching regarding gender issues. *The Bible Status of Woman* received wide ac-

claim and was published well into the 1950s. Starr acknowledged that many interpret the Bible as prohibiting the ordination of women, and she knew very well that some dismissed scripture as no friend to equal rights. Yet Starr chose a third perspective. As a Christian her commitment to biblical authority was unshakable. As a woman called of God, she insisted that gifts for ministry are not bestowed according to some exclusionary criteria. True, the scriptures had been interpreted for almost two thousand years by a male-dominated church, but this does not preclude a corrective reading. Starr argued that the dynamism of the Bible had been held captive by



Lee Anna Starr—Adrian College file photo

our patriarchal culture. Only when the text is set free to speak as God desires (not as dominant powers desire) will we hear the Good News. At one point she offered an especially pithy challenge: “Not the Bible, but religious hierarchs, have effected the subordination of woman.” Following her death in 1937, Lee Anna Starr was celebrated as a “clear, logical and forceful” speaker and a “champion of woman’s suffrage.”

We at Adrian College are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, and we are determined to extend this tradition today and beyond.

Momany is chaplain at Adrian College.