



Art Allen, designer, editor and publisher of the book proudly displays one of the first copies of *Zeal to Educate Women*. Art spent 43 years as spouse and partner in ministry with the author, Nancy Allen, and is leading book events and lectures to share the legacy of the work of these four remarkable women.

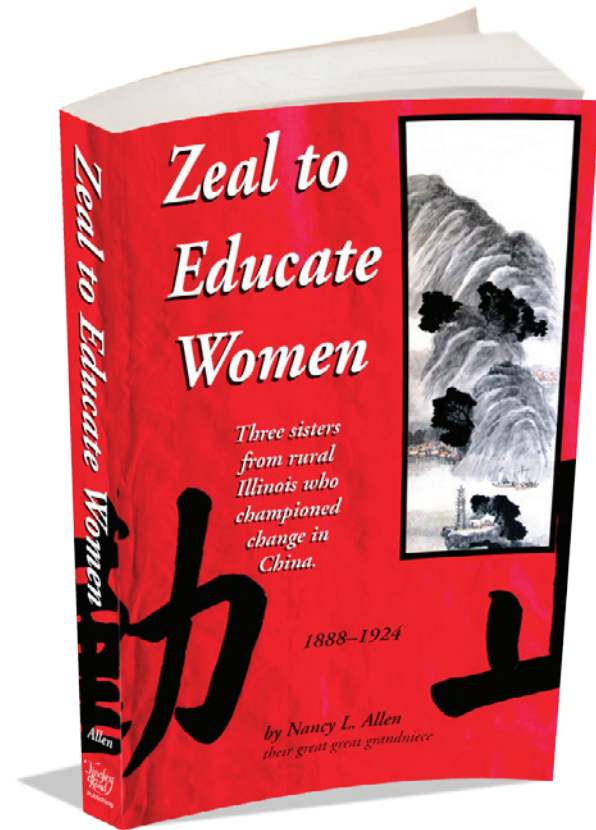
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Written by **Rev. Dr. Nancy L. Allen**
 the great great grand niece of the Peters sisters.



Sarah Peters 1857–1936
Zhenjiang (ChingKiang) 1888-1891
Nanjing (Nanking) 1891-1924



Mary Peters 1855–1937
Minqing (Minchiang) 1895-1906
Gutian (Kucheng) 1906-1924



Alice Peters 1852–1911
Nanjing (Nanking) 1904-1909

For hundreds of years Chinese mothers bound the feet of their infant daughters to make their feet small and thus more likely to find a husband for them. Engagements for marriage were most often made in the first few years of life. Even abandoning baby girls to die was not uncommon and it was a rare occurrence to meet an educated woman.

A huge change to these and other practices began to take place in the

late 19th Century and accelerated in the 20th. Experience this conversion through the stories of three American sisters, trained as professional educators, who committed their careers to the women and girls of China.

Leaving the American Heartland with missionary zeal, the Peters sisters of Princeville, Illinois, sailed to the other side of the world with the intent of changing China.



Sarah Peters with a class of young women from the school she started and supervised who are ready to become teachers of girls schools in the Nanjing area.

The only time three sisters became missionaries

“Miss Alice Peters of Princeville, Ill., after devotedly caring for her mother until her “home-going,” now hastens to join two W. F. M. S. missionary sisters, Sarah (1888) and Mary (1894) in China. The Society has sent nine pairs of sisters, the Misses Woolsten, Howe, Hewett, Wheeler, Seeds, Mans, Stockwell, Robinson, Martin, but this is the only instance of a trio of missionary sisters.”

–*Woman’s Missionary Friend*, August 1904, p. 273.

Zeal to Educate Women

the story behind the book

Nancy (Shepherd) Allen 1948-2011

When a student at The Divinity School of Duke University in the early 1970’s Nancy Allen remembered how her great aunt Isabell told her high school Sunday school class that when she was a girl in the same high school class they sent shoes to China at Christmas to a missionary relative. Shoes made locally in China were too small for the missionaries and the girls in the mission schools whose feet were unbound. Nan suddenly realized that if her Aunt Isabell had a relative who was a missionary, then so did she.

When Nan next visited Iowa she called her great aunt and Isabell pulled out of her attic letters, photos, and mementos handed down to her from her mother – Nan’s great grandma Belle (Peters) Varley. Belle had corresponded with the sisters



throughout their time in China. Thus began a decades long search by Nan for more information that has culminated in the writing of *Zeal to Educate Women*.

Nan was inspired by the story of the Peters sisters during her own pioneering ministry in Iowa as a United Methodist clergywoman from 1974–2009. When she retired she spent a part of nearly every day researching and writing this biography of her great great great aunts. She finished the writing in February of 2011, a month before being diagnosed with cancer. The book is published by her husband and colleague Art Allen who helped with research through the years and designed and edited the book.

*440 pages mostly of letters and reports by the sisters
537 footnotes – 61 photos, maps, and illustrations.*

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*Mary Peters and teaching colleagues
with a class of graduating girls.*