

Baird Bryan Musselman was “The Radio Preacher.” He was a talented visionary who saw opportunities for the gospel in new radio technology. He was known throughout the Lehigh Valley for his broadcasts. In the Mennonite Brethren in Christ, he was revered as a special and gifted preacher who helped to put the Allentown Church and the MBC denomination on the map. But when he left the ministry, silence descended over all the notoriety. Who was this man? Why did he end in silence?



1. Background and Life

Baird Bryan Musselman was born into one of the formational families of the Evangelical Mennonites / Mennonite Brethren in Christ of Pennsylvania. The Musselman, Gehman, and Brunner families were interwoven into the fabric of the new church and interwoven with each other. The families had intermarried making their early church meetings family affairs.

David Musselman, the great grandfather of B. B., as Baird Bryan was known, was a Mennonite and had been part of the progressive new group of Mennonites which followed the leadership of John Oberholtzer. When this organization became resistant to revivals in the Hosensack Valley in Lehigh County, Pennsylvania, where Musselman lived, he chose to stand with the revivalists and once again move out of the church he had joined. The first meeting which formed the Evangelical Mennonites was held in his home.

Insight into the life of David and Sarah Musselman comes through the story of the so-called Midnight Robber. A man, later identified as Oswin Gehman, had broken into their home during the night of December 30, 1885, carrying an axe. David and Sarah awoke and were threatened by Gehman but they protested saying God would protect them. Gehman dropped the axe and prepared to leave. They offered to cook a meal for him. Gehman was later acquitted. Whether this story has any embellishments is hard to determine but the response of faith was very present at the moment.

David and Sarah bore two children, sons Abraham and Jonas. Jonas was born November 12, 1839. Jonas, when a young 19 year old, was probably present at the gathering at the Musselman home on September 24, 1858 for the formation conference of the Evangelical Mennonites. A year later, he was married to Lucy Brunner, whose

siblings, Joel and Hannah, were also part of the new church, Joel as a leader in the Zionsville congregation and Hannah as the wife of preacher, Abel Strawn.

Jonas soon identified as a preacher in the Evangelical Mennonites and like most of the other preachers worked as a farmer to provide for his family. Lucy served with her husband and later was counted as the first of the women evangelists known as the Gospel Workers.

Jonas and Lucy had what might be called a ministry family. Their three sons, William, Harvey and Allen, all served as preachers in the Mennonite Brethren in Christ. Of their three daughters, Emma died young at age 16, Sally married preacher Joshua Fidler but died shortly after, and Hattie joined her brother, William, in ministry as a Gospel Worker.

William led the way in a second generation of leadership in the Pennsylvania Conference of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ becoming the presiding elder who replaced the venerable William Gehman. He was intelligent, articulate, entrepreneurial, and aggressive. Eventually, he gave up his leadership role in the denomination to found and lead the Gospel Workers and ultimately create the printing ministry known as the Union Gospel Press of Cleveland, Ohio.

The youngest of the Musselman brothers, Allen, died at the age of 28, in May, 1900, while serving the Athol congregation. He was married to Alice Baus.

The middle son, Harvey, was born February 11, 1868. In his early days, he worked with his father on the farm. Later, he worked as a printer for nine years. He married Annie Baus, sister of Alice, on April 23, 1888. They bore children, B. Bryan, Clarence E. and Jansen H. Their first born, Baird Bryan, is the subject of this paper. Harvey's ministry in the MBC extended for nearly half a century. He was chairman of the Annual Conference for 44 years which indicates the centrality and significance of his role.

B. B. was born October 18, 1890, the year his father entered the work of the ministry in Allentown, Pennsylvania. His was the life of a preacher's kid, closely scrutinized by parents and congregation, with high expectations for model behavior. Born while his family was at Royersford, at 4 years old he was moved to Weissport, at 7 years to Bethlehem, at 9 to Mt Carmel, at 10 to Reading, and at 15 to Bethlehem. The impact of these frequent moves would be difficult to calculate but probably left him with few if any close childhood friends.

Conversion came to B. B. in 1896 or 1898. He was baptized at age 9 on December 31, 1899, at Mt Carmel, Pennsylvania. In September, 1900, he joined the church there. In

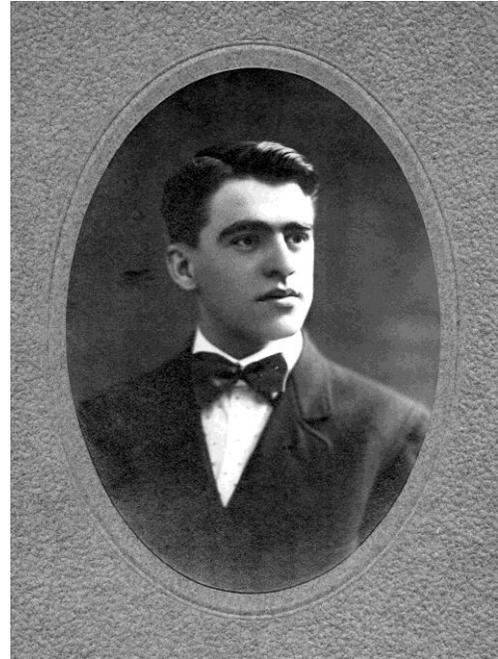
1905, he moved with his family to Bethlehem where he finished high school and began working as an electrician.

B. B. met Cora Belle Rothermel of Reading, Pennsylvania. According to their daughter, Olivia, they met at church and went to a restaurant on their first date where B. B. ordered shredded wheat and Cora the same so as not to embarrass him for his lack of restaurant experience. They were married on December 6, 1911, in his father and mother's home at 103 Second Avenue in Bethlehem where they lived for the first year and four months of their marriage.

Their marriage produced two children, Olivia Pauline, born March 31, 1917, and Reuel Harvey, born February 16, 1923.

Olivia Musselman Barnes left several pages of written notes and memories of her life. They give almost no insight into the Musselman home life so little is known from her of the day to day life and routines there. This silence might be explained in one or two ways. It is possible that great care was taken to guard the privacy of the pastoral family. Congregations had high expectations for the lifestyle of pastoral families and ordinary reactions to routine pressures would not be helpful. Not talking about private intimate life details would tend to protect the sanctified aura of the pastoral family. It might also be true that the demands of ministry placed on pastors in these days tended to remove the pastor from his family and leaving little time for family life.

Predictably, Olivia had more to say about her mother than she did of her father. As his ministry heated up, he may very well have given his energies and attention there leaving family matters to Cora. Olivia tells of her mother's practice of reading aloud to her and of her proficiency in reading even though she left school after eighth grade.



Cora Rothermel, seated

2. Church Ministry

The first evidence of B. B.'s activity in ministry comes in the records of the Bethlehem Quarterly Conference. On March 29, 1907, his service as secretary of the Sunday School was noted. He was only 16 years old. In October, 1908, at 18 years old, he was serving as the Sunday School superintendent, an important responsibility in an MBC church at that time.

The minutes of the Bethlehem Congregation record his licensing on September 27, 1912. "Bro. B. Bryan Musselman who had been recommended by the Congregation to this Quarterly Conference for Quarterly Conference License gave an expression of his call to the ministry to the satisfaction of all. He was granted Quarterly Conference License by a unanimous vote." Of him, his pastor C. H. Brunner wrote in his report to the Gospel Banner, August 21, 1913, "My Quarterly Conference Licensed Worker, Brother B. Bryan Musselman, is doing well. His preaching is very practical, instructive and devotional and is very much enjoyed. He possesses very promising pastoral qualifications and we believe he will be one of our successful pastors of the future." The following month, the congregation took the next step and recommended that B. B. become a candidate for Annual Conference. "The pastor presented the Conference Licensed worker, B. Bryan Musselman who had labored with the Pastor during the past year, as a candidate for Annual Conference License. The ballot was cast and the result was a unanimous recommendation to the Annual Conference."

The 1913 Annual Conference took note of the recommendation from the Bethlehem Class and gave B. B. a license to preach. He was assigned to the Fleetwood, Blandon, Terre Hill Circuit. The conference minutes note, "There were only a few changes in pastors. B. Bryan Musselman, the son of Presiding Elder H.B. Musselman, of Bethlehem, and L.D. Wesner, of the Gospel Herald Society, were granted Annual Conference Licenses." B. B. had not come down the path followed by many through initial service in the Gospel Heralds. It was also noted specifically that he was the son of the presiding elder who must have experienced some joy and perhaps pride at seeing his son follow in his footsteps. It has been suggested that B. B. had a bit of an advantage through his relationship to his father but the evidence seems to point to the recognition of his talents at this early age, not his biological connections. The 1913 minutes note that he was appointed statistical secretary even before he was received as a candidate.

On Sunday afternoon, September 24, 1916, at the Annual Conference held at the Philadelphia Church at Eleventh and Ontario, B. B. was ordained as a minister in the Mennonite Brethren in Christ. W. G. Gehman preached the ordination sermon.

Following the Annual Conference, B. B. and Cora moved to Fleetwood to begin public ministry. The three congregations of the circuit began to stir. They had a total of 79 members in 1913.

By 1917, the total had grown to 107 members, an increase of 35%. In the January 11, 1917, edition of the Eastern Gospel Banner, B. B.'s presiding elder, H. B. Musselman reported,

The brethren turned out well, and the attendance was very good. The class from Blandon was present and twenty two came from Terre Hill with a large motor truck, a distance of thirty miles. The various officers submitted grand reports of the condition of the work at these places. The services were spiritual, and general melting times were realized. The young converts, as well as all the young people, are growing spiritually, and the outlook for the work is good.

The cellar has been dug under the Blandon Chapel, and a heater installed. A beautiful building lot has also been purchased at Fleetwood, inst., with the view of building a more commodious church building thereon at some future time. The pastor of the charge is kept very busy, and appears to have excellent courage, with a view of having a people ready for the Lord's coming at all of these places.



Later in the same issue, B. B. gave his report and perspective.

We have been privileged to spend another year among the dear pilgrims at these places. Upon our return from Conference we were very kindly remembered with a large cash donation by the Fleetwood and Blandon classes and also a large donation of things to eat and wear by the Terre Hill class. We feel very unworthy of their many generous kindnesses shown toward us and pray God to abundantly bless for the same.

Our revival meetings at Terre Hill were a great blessing in every respect. Several were saved and quite a number consecrated their lives to God. The class is encouraged and stand by very well in every way. The Word of God we believe will not return void.

Our first Quarterly Conference for this year, held at Fleetwood, was indeed a most blessed one. Twenty-two folks were present from Terre Hill and with the Fleetwood and Blandon classes, we had a time of rejoicing together in the Lord. The Word spoken by our presiding elder was appreciated and attentively received. It is bearing fruit in the lives of the hearers.

We are at present engaged in a series of revival meetings at Fleetwood, Pa. The Lord is with us, the brethren and sisters have a hold of the rope and we expect a break in the ranks of sin.

Spiritual development, growing statistics, and expanding facilities were indications of ministerial success. C. H. Brunner had insightfully predicted that “he will be one of our successful pastors of the future.”

During his time of ministry in the Fleetwood / Blandon / Terre Hill circuit, Olivia was born. A parsonage was purchased for the pastor and his wife in Fleetwood.

In 1918, B. B. was stationed to the Reading Church. At that point, the Reading Church was the third largest church, measured by membership statistics, behind Bethlehem and Allentown. This was only his second assignment and makes a statement that he was given the task of serving this important church so early in his career. Some have wondered if being the son of the presiding elder helped in this step up. His giftedness had begun to show. His talents argue that he was not being shown favoritism but rather being given an important responsibility because of his recognized abilities.

B. B. served at Reading for the next three years. The membership statistics did not change significantly during his three years of service there (1918 – 162, 1919 – 159, 1920 – 161).

In 1919 and 1920, B. B. recorded the highest number of pastoral visits in the conference. In 1920, he preached more sermons than any of the other preachers. These numbers indicate that he was aggressive and active in his ministry. Other people in the church certainly would have been aware of his enthusiastic commitment and activity.

In October, 1920, he was appointed to the Allentown Church. He, Cora, and Olivia moved there following the Annual Conference of that year. This would be his last appointment and last experience of waiting for the report of the Stationing Committee since for the next 25 years he would serve as the pastor of this growing church.

Allentown was the second largest of the churches in 1920 with 220 members when B. B. was assigned to replace C. H. Brunner. At that time, Bethlehem was largest with 239 members. In 1934, 13 years later, the membership of Allentown had grown to 425 making it the largest church having 85 more members than the Bethlehem Church which was by then second largest. This was the



statistical peak of his years at Allentown.

By the spring of 1921, only months after his arrival, the congregation was anxious to find a new facility. At the Quarterly Conference, the congregation voted unanimously to build a new church. The Gordon Street properties were inadequate. With 14 new members in 1922 and 24 in 1923, the facility at 816 Gordon Street must have been bursting at the seams.

In June, 1921, 8 months after his arrival, B. B. convened a meeting to consider a proposal to sell the properties on Gordon Street. In June, 1920, land was purchased at 530 North 8th Street for a new building. Plans were made for the building. The prestigious architectural firm of Jacoby and Everett was hired to design the new building with fan shaped congregational seating and a balcony. By November, 1923, agreements were finalized to sell the building on Gordon Street. In March, 1924, the construction of the new building was far enough along to allow the Building Committee to meet there. The new building was dedicated on June 15, 1924.

During this time, the Musselman family was increased with the birth of Reuel on February 23, 1923. A new parsonage was purchased across the street from the new building at 529 North 8th Street during the summer of 1924.

Not only was there a new building to provide a base for ministry but a new approach to outreach through the newly developing medium of radio with which B. B. would become identified. For the next ten years, the church saw a steady increase of members.



The growth of the membership reached its high point in 1934 and then began a steady decline. In 1945, membership had shrunk to 361, a loss of 63 members. Analysis of statistics is never an exact thing but it is clear that something was happening.

B. B.'s statistical reports reveal a marked change in 1933. He preached 468 sermons that year, 250 more than in 1932, a significant increase. He made 135 more pastoral visits than he did in 1932 as well. In 1934, he recorded 584 sermons which amounted to over 11 sermons per week. From 1933 to 1945, he averaged 451 sermons per year,

more than 9 sermons per week. In spite of these impressive statistics, membership at the church declined during this period.

In 1935 he preached 520 sermons and made 415 visits. What is notable was a hospitalization with a broken jaw during the year. In August of that year, he had gone to Mizpah Grove to investigate a report of stolen lumber. The Pottstown Mercury reported the incident in which he was allegedly attacked by two men late on a Sunday afternoon. They hit him on the back of the head which dazed him. He reported that he threw a chair at his attackers but fell down a flight of stairs breaking his jaw in two places. A week later, the Mercury reported that he was discharged. Under the headline, "Rev. Musselman Leaves Sacred Heart Hospital," the paper reported:

The recent assault upon the Rev. B. Bryan Musselman, Allentown Mennonite pastor and owner of a radio station of that city, caused a number of rumors, all of which were found to be without foundation, a dispatch from Allentown said.

The Rev. Musselman was discharged from Sacred Heart hospital the past Wednesday after having his jaw broken in two places and suffering a head injury when set upon by two thugs at Mizpah Grove the past Sunday. The victim was interviewed by police at his home Saturday in an effort to obtain a description of his assailants. It will be several weeks before the Rev. Musselman will be able to resume his pastoral duties.

His 520 sermons that year are all the more remarkable given the period of recuperation he needed.

The Boundary and Stationing Committee appointed F. M. Hottel to Bethel in 1945. During the year, B. B. and his family relocated to 1214 S. 10th Street, Allentown.

At the Annual Conference of 1946, B. B. submitted the following resignation letter:

"Brethren Beloved. It has been a very pleasant privilege of mine for the past thirty-three years to be numbered with you as a Christian Minister. I have the inward assurance of my call of God and know that His hand has ordained me for His service. This is more deeply real to me than at any other time.

However, after much time spent in prayer and waiting upon God I am persuaded that the time has come when the most important decision of my life shall be made. Due to the fact that I have been unable to continue as an itinerant in the Conference because of other commitments, it is with sincere and deep regret that I hereby ask the Annual Conference of the M. B. in C. Church to accept my resignation from the active ministry and grant me my official

credentials; the resignation to take effect at the close of the session with the signing of the minutes.

I shall continue to minister in the Word in another part of the vineyard of our Lord. It is so near to the time of our Lord's return that I shall put forth my best effort to be at His disposal at all times.

I desire to thank all of you for your patience with me and for all that you have done for me. Each of us will face the record of dealings one with the other at His coming. I welcome that day and pray that it be soon. I hold no feeling of bitterness against any one.

I ask for your continued friendship and prayers. I wish you all well and a fruitful ministry. To any whom I may have wronged in any way I ask forgiveness as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

May you ever be a united ministry and loyally serve your Master. Till we meet at Jesus feet, God be with you all."

B. Bryan Musselman.

The Conference accepted his resignation and formulated a response.

Whereas, B. Bryan Musselman tendered his resignation as a minister of the Pennsylvania Conference, therefore,

Resolved, That we as a Conference express our appreciation for the years of service that he gave, and further,

Resolved, That we will continue to pray for him that God's blessing may abide and that fields of service may open, and a friendly spirit may continue between him and the brethren of the Conference.

Thus ended the ministry of B. Bryan Musselman in the Mennonite Brethren in Christ. F. M. Hottel was appointed to fill his shoes.

In somewhat typical fashion, later readers are left to wonder what was behind the resignation. Had 10 years of declining membership led to discouragement? Had the demands of the radio ministry become overwhelming? Had denominational ministry become too much? Or were there other factors, talked about behind closed doors but never mentioned where people would hear? On his 56th birthday, the Conference wished him well and they parted ways. Why did they express their hope that a friendly spirit might continue? Does this phrase provide both a cover and a clue that unspoken problems were behind this decision?

3. Denominational Ministry

B. B.'s first conference in 1913 brought him the responsibilities of the statistical secretary. He would hold at least one responsibility at every conference he attended. Predictably, his responsibilities began to expand.

In 1915, he was appointed recording secretary, responsible to keep an accurate record of the meetings and the decisions made. In 1916, he was appointed assistant secretary with the task of helping to prepare the minutes for final publication.

In 1917, he was made a member of the Board of Publication and Printing. During that year, the Eastern Gospel Banner began publishing. He was listed as one of the associate editors. It does not appear that he did a great deal of writing for the banner since only a few brief articles and reports appear over his name.

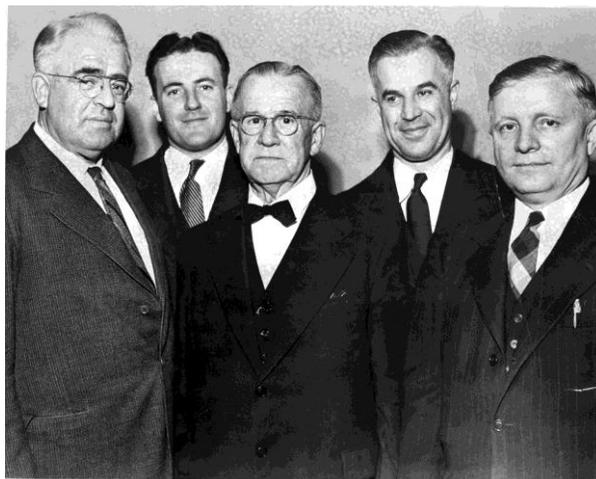
More appointments came in 1918, the Committee on Worship and the Committee on Examination of Applicants for Annual Conference License.

He was elected to Second Vice Presiding Elder behind C. H. Brunner in the leadership chain in 1920. In 1921, he was added to the Board of Foreign Missions and the Committee on Camp Meeting Equipage, served as chairman of the Ministerial Convention, and was appointed chairman of the Allentown Division at Mizpah Grove. In 1921, he held approximately 10 denominational responsibilities. He was 31 years old.

In 1922, he was added to the Executive Board taking a place among those who were the primary leaders of this time, H. B. Musselman, W. G. Gehman, C. H. Brunner and E. N. Cassel. During that year, he also served as the chairman of the Sunday School Convention for the Bethlehem District.

With the death of W. G. Gehman, B. B. assumed, in addition to all of his other tasks, the duties of presiding elder of the Easton District and president of the Gospel Heralds.

The minutes of the Annual Conference of 1945 show that B. B. still held nine responsibilities: Presiding Elder of the Easton District, President of the Gospel Heralds, Executive Board, Committee on Worship, Committee on the Examination of Applicants for Annual Conference License, Committee on Applicants for Ordination, Committee on Resolutions, Committee to Arrange the Program for the Services of Annual Conference, and the Committee on Camp Meeting Equipage and Tabernacle Outfits. By any measure, it must be said that he had a prominent role in the affairs of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ.



His many responsibilities either help to explain his resignation in 1946 at the next Annual Conference or raise questions that seek explanation.

4. Radio Ministry

1920 brought the family of B. B. to Allentown to a new church and a new home. As the plans were being formed to build a church to accommodate a growing congregation, a new ministry was beginning its infancy.

The fall of 1920 saw the start of radio broadcasting in Pennsylvania. Radio technology had been developing for a number of years and in September, 1920, KDKA began broadcasting in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Many were drawn immediately to the possibility of communicating on a larger scale than had ever been possible before.

Ardis Grosjean Dreisbach shared from the written memories of her uncle, Clarence Dreisbach. He remembered,

My brother Blair and I became interested in radio before most people knew there was such a thing. We had to build most of the parts ourselves, except for the headphones. To hear music for the first time was like a miracle: station KDKA in Pittsburgh.

We decided to build our own transmitter. Again we had to build the parts. The first set used a spark coil [to send Morse code]. If we did that today, it would get us run out of town [due to the interference it would cause in everyone's radio and TV]. A license was required for radio operation, so we had to travel to Philadelphia and take a test showing that we knew the rules and could send and receive the code. We both passed and received a license: 3BAQ. We built a five watt transmitter and could communicate with other amateurs. By this time the American Radio Relay League had been formed and we joined it. We would send and receive messages for people in any part of the country.

He continued, "Through our involvement with amateur radio, we became acquainted with a Charles Heimbach, who started as an amateur. He secured a license to operate a commercial broadcasting station, WCBA, the first such station in our area."

B. B.'s introduction to radio came at this time and seems to indicate his quick eye for opportunity and visionary outlook. Olivia Barnes, B. B.'s daughter, recalls how he came in contact with those involved with radio technology. She writes,

My first actual contact with radio was early in 1923. Our family was invited to the home of Bob Dreisbach for dinner. We lived at 529 N. 8th Street and they lived at 614 N. 8th St.... Two of the Dreisbach's sons, Clarence and Blair, had built a radio receiver and while we were in their home we all went up the two flights of stairs to see their production. I know it was early February because my mother was waiting the birth of my brother (he was born February 16, 1923). After getting to the radio room we were in time to hear the announcer say, "Good Night." We returned to the dining room to enjoy a good meal and a pleasant visit.

Charles Heimbach lived at 1015 Allen Street. He was a 26 year old electrical engineer who had been trained for new technology. He first received his license for WCBA in June, 1922. The Dreisbach memories can be dated to about that time which indicates Heimbach's early desire to join the broadcasting revolution that was taking place.

Because pastors were in the communication business, radio was seen as an opportunity to communicate more effectively with more people. In 1984, a television evangelist of the Seventh Day Adventist church, George Vandeman returned to Allentown to help his boy hood church celebrate its 100th anniversary. While there, he shared some of his memories in the Sunday Call-Chronicle.

But he said he still recalls, as a boy of nine in Allentown, a unique Pennsylvania Dutch character named Charles Heimbach who set up a radio transmitter in the attic of his home at 10th and Allen. "The living room parlor was his studio," Vandeman said.

As a boy, he listened in that parlor as his dad preached on a regular Sunday afternoon program. He remembered Heimbach telling his dad, 'I don't let all the ministers say all they want to say. If they're not speaking my language, I cut them off and play music. But, Vandeman, I never cut you off.' (April 29, 1984, by Dick Cowen, Sunday Call-Chronicle)

In 1985, Charlie Walp, a resident of California who grew up in Allentown returned for a visit and gave an interview to the Morning Call, complete with his memories of early radio broadcasting.

Then in 1924, Charlie became the first announcer for Allentown radio station WCBA, which Charles Heimbach had at 10th and Allen. "The first thing I announced was the Allentown Band playing out on Allen Street with Bert Myers as the director."

He says he played records, and he also broadcast the church services for that Mennonite church on N. 8th. He was with WCBA two years. The job was part-time. (July 18, 1985, by Dick Cowen, The Morning Call)

The Morning Call did another story recounting the beginning of radio ministry in Allentown which gave the following information:

The debut of WSAN was a hit in the Lehigh Valley. The Chronicle's rival, The Morning Call, did not run a word about the event. But since July 1922 The Call had been encouraging a small group of amateurs, the Allentown Radio Club, in their experiments. By 1923, the little station was well on its way toward transforming itself into WSAN.

That same year, WCBA, a small station operated by Charles W. Heimbach, began operating from 1015 Allen St. It was here that B. Bryan Musselman, who was later to purchase WSAN, got his start. Musselman was to tell the press in 1949 that he was most proud of his creation of "Radio Church of the Air," broadcast on Sundays.

Like the rest of the country, the Lehigh Valley's radio taste did not stay simple for long. By the late 1920s, nationally known programs were popular across the Valley. Although local radio remained important, it was not nearly the draw it had been in 1922. (October 11, 1992, by Frank Whelan, The Morning Call)

These records show that Charles Heimbach was a starting point for broadcasting as early as 1922 under a company called Queen City Broadcasting. Apparently, B. B. Musselman was one of the preachers who came to his home studio to broadcast his sermons as early as 1923.

But Musselman was just getting warmed up. On June 21, 1923, he began broadcasting the morning and evening services of Bethel. The Allentown congregation was moved into a new church building on North 8th Street in 1924. By 1927, B. B. had joined Heimbach and shared the broadcasting license with him. In 1928, B. B. Musselman is listed as the sole possessor of the license with records which note that "This seems to have been a sale which was accomplished over a period of time, rather than all at once." Clarence Dreisbach remembered, "Blair and I felt we had a sort of unwritten agreement that when Heimbach decided to retire, we would be given the station and the license. This was not to be. The minister Musselman gave Heimbach a car and was given the station." R. C. Reichenbach recalled that for a time broadcasting was done from the home of his uncle, Orlando Diefenderfer.

An unsigned obituary for B. B. states, "Early in his ministry in Allentown, he began to realize the potentialities of the new medium of communication – radio – as a means of spreading the gospel and in 1925 he began his daily religious broadcasts which were destined to extend over a period of 32 years."

Allentown Bethel hosted the 1926 Annual Conference and made the first reference to the radio ministry. The minutes of that year determined that the Sunday evening service would be broadcast by radio and B. B. would be the speaker.

Quickly, B. B. became identified with the radio ministry and may have seen his stature increasing as a result. In February, 1927, the Reading Times carried the announcement that B. B. would conduct services at Fleetwood. The announcement carried the headline, "Radio Pastor Will Come To Fleetwood." The article continued to state, "Rev. Mr. Musselman is well known here. Some years ago he was pastor of the Fleetwood, Blandon, and Terre Hill Circuit. Every Sunday Rev. Musselman broadcasts his church services over station WCBA, Allentown, Pa."

A history of camp meeting in the 1928 yearbook concludes with the following paragraph.

It might be of interest to state that Radio Sending Station W C B A, owned and operated by Pastor B. Bryan Musselman, is located in and above the Auditorium with the studio located in the Allentown National Bank Building, Seventh and Hamilton Streets, Allentown, Pa. A number of services were broadcast from here during our Camp Meetings this past summer.

The development of the radio business was not without its problems. Neither Bethel Church nor the Mennonite Brethren in Christ had any ownership or legal stake in the radio ministry. Because the radio industry was new and growing, certification and regulation were becoming problems. By 1928, Musselman was seeking to expand the power of the broadcast. The Mennonite Brethren in Christ General Conference of that year got involved.

Report of Committee on Radio

Whereas, Under the ruling of the Federal Radio Commission, Radio Station W. C. B. A. located in Allentown, Pa., the only radio station representing the Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church of the United States and the Dominion of Canada, has been made practically useless in the assignment of fifteen hundred kilocycles, and

Whereas, a great service and benefit have come to many of our constituents and friends, who because of their invalid and shut-in condition are deprived of religious worship and fellowship. Therefore

Resolved, That we as a General Conference assembled in Allentown, Pa., Nov. 7-12, 1928, representing the Pacific, the Iowa and Nebraska, the Indiana and Ohio, the Michigan, the Pennsylvania Conferences of the United States; and the Ontario and Canadian North West Conferences of Canada hereby urge and request the Radio Commission to re-allocate the wave-length of the aforesaid station and increase the power of the same so that it may serve profitably the constituency and friends of the general body of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ Conference; and further be it

Resolved, That a copy of this resolution be forwarded to the Federal Radio Commission of Washington, D. C. and Ira E. Robinson, Radio Commissioner of the Pennsylvania District and Congressman Boyle of Bethlehem, Congressman Esterly of Reading, Pa.

Committee :

W. G. Gehman

R. W. Herber

E. Sievenpiper

On Saturday, April 4, 1931, the Reading Times reported that two Congressmen, Coyle, a Republican from Bethlehem and Lichtenwalter, a Democrat of Allentown, spoke in behalf of the application of WCBA and WSAN to raise the power from 250 to 500 watts. That not all were happy with the broadcasting became evident later that year. In an article entitled, "WCBA Must Prove Right to Operate," The Reading Times reported an item from Washington on October 6.

Radio Station WCBA at Allentown, Pa., was requested today by the Radio commission to show it is operated in the 'public interest.'

The commission granted a hearing to complaints of individuals against the nature of programs broadcast by the station. The Rev. B. Bryan Musselman is owner of the station.

The impact of the broadcasting and the notoriety of B. B. Musselman continued to grow. The Kutztown Patriot announced meetings to be held there in December, 1933 as though it were announcing the presence of a celebrity.

Radio Preacher Here on Sunday
Rev. Bryan Musselman, Allentown to Give Program in Legion Hall
Town Hall Meetings

Twenty-five young people of the Radio Church, Allentown, accompanied with brass and stringed instruments and also harmonicas will be special features in the American Legion Hall, Kutztown, on Sunday, December 17, at 2:30 o'clock, sponsored by the Mennonite Church.

Rev. B. Bryan Musselman, radio preacher of station WCBA, Allentown will be the speaker and with his group of young people will give an actual scene of how he broadcasts one of his radio services on a Sunday night from his studio.

Rev. Musselman is well known in this vicinity, and thousands hear him regularly on the radio. This is an opportunity to hear and see him in person.

While the radio ministry continued its ascension, the ministry at Bethel entered a period of decline. How these two works were related is difficult to ascertain. The radio work would continue and pass into the possession of B. B.'s children, Reuel and Olivia during the 1950's. F. M. Hottel was assigned to the pastorate of Bethel and the ministry there continued on.

A footnote to B. B.'s connection to technology came in an article recording memories concerning the appearance of television in the Lehigh Valley. Sylvia Lawler of the Morning Call remembered, "The first televised event that was aired locally happened on Dec. 21, 1946. Muhlenberg College's basketball team was playing the University of Pennsylvania at the Penn Palestra, and the event was broadcast live by station WPTZ Channel 3 in Philadelphia into the Allentown home of B. Bryan Musselman."



5. Death

Following his resignation, B. B. continued his work and ministry on the radio. He attended to his business interests as partner in the Lehigh Valley Broadcasting Company and the Paramount Business Service.

In his last years, he experienced some physical limitations as a result of being hit by a car on North 7th Street in 1954 but continued his business in spite of it.

He passed from this life on July 27, 1957.

Conclusion

B. Bryan Musselman died in 1957 but, in the Mennonite Brethren in Christ, he ceased to exist in 1946. Following his resignation, his name was not mentioned in any of the official records. He served in no office after his departure. His death brought no yearbook obituary. Nothing.

How are we to understand this silence? B. Bryan Musselman was widely known and venerated as “The Radio Preacher.” How could he just disappear?

Prior to his resignation, it seems clear that a delegation of five men from Bethel Church met with him to ask that he step aside. What would have led to such a request?

Perhaps it was the rumors concerning a lifestyle inconsistent with Mennonite Brethren in Christ expectations and values. They were rumors which may or may not have been true but they were there just the same.

Perhaps it was the declining membership of Bethel Church. A pastor’s stature was measured by statistics. Those who pastored growing churches had growing stature. Success covers a multitude of faults and rumors. If success disappears, the faults are not overlooked and rumors are no longer ignored. Bethel Church had been losing members.

Perhaps it was the demands of the business of the radio. When a person is spread too thin doing too many things, people and responsibilities can be neglected. Perhaps some things were overlooked or people neglected. Pastors cannot afford to lose contact with the people in their churches.

The silence remains and gives way to questions that go unanswered. Does the silence cover something about B. B. Musselman? Or, does the silence say something about leadership or a failure of leadership? If a man is flawed, are those flaws to be made public? Or does airing dirty laundry damage the man and the church? If there were suspicions, is it best to admit them or is it better to avoid bitter accusations? If rumors are in the air, should the air be cleared to protect the reputation of a leader?

Baird Bryan Musselman was a talented, entrepreneurial leader whose accomplishments made him stand out in the Mennonite Brethren in Christ. He deserved more than silence at the end. Or did he?