

William Brunner Musselman
The Last Entrepreneur?
Richard E. Taylor

Leaders in the Mennonite Brethren In Christ did not tend to be entrepreneurial. They were godly, faithful, loyal, and wise but not particularly entrepreneurial. Thinking outside the box was not a virtue. H. B. Musselman wanted to strengthen what remained. Protect and preserve what was in the box but do not go outside. W. G. Gehman rode close herd on the Gospel Heralds to be sure there was not too much independent thinking. Be busy and active but do not go outside the box.

William Brunner Musselman might be the exception. He may have been the rare leader from who went where others would not or could not. He knew what he wanted to do and how to get it done. He put up a church building in four days at Reading. He re-started the church in Allentown. He was the first assigned preacher in Blandon and Plainfield. He organized and printed a hymn book. He was the second presiding elder. He was the founder of the Gospel Workers and the Union Gospel Press.

If there is such a thing as ecclesiastical blue blood, it flowed through the veins of W.B., as he was known. He was the grandson of David and Sarah Musselman in whose house was held the first meeting of the church. He was the son of Jonas and Lucy. His father Jonas probably attended the first conference as a young man.

Jonas went on to begin four churches in his relentless drive to preach gospel. His mother became Gospel Worker number one and for years served among them under her son's leadership. His uncle, Joel Brunner, was an important part of the Upper Milford congregation. His aunt Hannah Brunner had married the well heeled preacher Abel Strawn and served with him in our churches. W.B.'s two younger brothers, Allen and Harvey, were both preachers whose progeny included preachers. His sister Sallie was married to missionary Joshua Fidler until her early death.



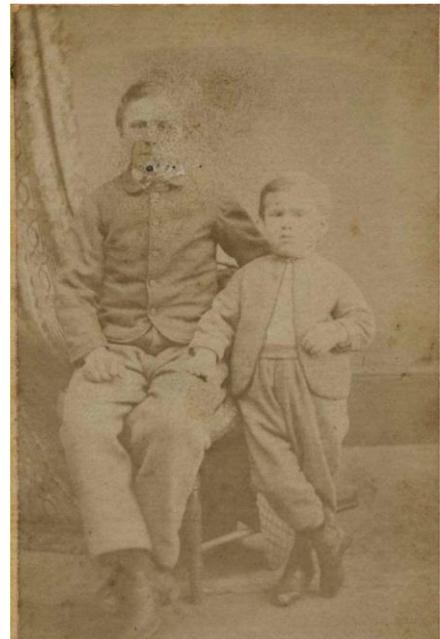
William Brunner Musselman

W.B. was born October 30, 1860, the first child of Jonas and Lucy. Jonas and Lucy made their living from the farm. By 1870, they were living in Richland Center, Bucks County, where Jonas listed his occupation as that of a farmer. W.B. was another set of hands to help on the farm. He knew about long days at an early age. Jonas did not care for the farm work which took up his time and probably got in the way of serving the Lord. Farm work could be left to the first born son as he went off to do the work of the Gospel. He wrote to the editor of the Gospel Banner in February, 1881, "Bro. Brenneman, God has delivered me from my farm. I am now freed from that and am no longer a farmer. I am only waiting for God to open the way and to direct me as to how and where to labor for Him." As time went on, Jonas did more preaching and began to experience deteriorating health.



Jonas and Lucy

As he entered his later teens, W.B. began to work away from the farm. He took up the molder's trade. By his own testimony, it gave him a good life and he was doing well. In the summer of 1880, he married Mary Ann Oberholtzer, daughter of Tobias and Anna (Reiff) Oberholtzer of Hatfield Township, Montgomery County. But God began to stir in his heart.



His biography in the Gospel Banner, June 14, 1952, tells of these days:

His high school days under an infidel teacher brought him dangerously near to infidelity, but once he took his stand for Christ, he turned away radically from infidelity to faith. For some years he was not too active in his Christian profession, though he was a dutiful son and even as a mere lad he carried much of the burden of the home life in order that his father might be free to preach the Gospel.

When he finally married a thrifty farmer's daughter, they together set themselves to building

William and Harvey

a comfortable “nest” with not too much concern about what became of the world around them.

That plan, however did not prove to be God’s plan for their lives; so, in order that God’s plan should materialize, there suddenly came an illness upon him which unfitted him for making a living. Prayers were offered for his recovery and he was entirely healed from his malady. He started back to work, but readily discovered that healing had come for God’s glory, not his own.

This brought him to a full surrender to the will of God with the conviction that a preacher should live of the Gospel without secular encumbrances. (Gospel Banner, Volume 50, June 14, 1952, page 841)

During these days of stirring, W.B. wrote to the Gospel Banner in August, 1881,

Dear Editor:- I feel to write a few lines for the Youth’s Department to my young Christian companions. I set out to serve my Lord a few years ago and am still on the way, and by the help of God, will hold out. I am now at a certain place away from home working where there is nothing but swearing and drinking going on. I must say that it presses the tears out of my eyes to see how our young people are going to destruction; they are blind and hate us because we are not of one father. O, my dear Christian friends let us pray for each other: but also never forget to pray for our young people, with all our hearts. W. B. M. (Gospel Banner – August 15, 1881).¹



By 1884, in the first three years of the marriage, William and Mary Ann produced three daughters,

The Musselman Family ca 1890

¹ Author’s note – I believe WBM is W. B. Musselman though I cannot be certain since W. B. Moyer occasionally wrote.

Lillie Mae (1881), Minnie Lucy (1882), and Sallie Mae (1883). Ultimately, the Musselmans would bear nine children, Paul Jonas (1885), Janet Nancy (1887), Timothy Tobias (1888), John Wesley (1890), Mary Euphie (1894), and Elvin Haddon (1897).

In 1884 as a husband and father of three, after surrendering to God's call, he was approved as a probationer. The minutes of the February 4, 1884, meeting record, "That William Musselman of Emaus be taken on a probation term as preacher" (Verhandlungen (1859-1895), page 147). His first assignment was the Blandon, Fleetwood, Reading Circuit.

W.B.'s ministry in Reading began with a bang. Two months after coming to Reading, he was on the front page of the Gospel Banner and in the Reading Times. During meetings being held at the home of Frederick Reinhold at 928 North 6th Street, Nellie Himmelreich, a young girl of 14, entered into a trance-like state. On the evening of March 11, 1884, just weeks into W.B.'s ministry, Nellie was overcome, supposedly by the Holy Spirit, while singing the hymn, "Forgive My Sins." She could look into heaven and possessed a great knowledge of the Bible. Her countenance was transformed when the pastor sang hymns softly to her. The next day, a reporter from the Reading Times was there to verify the story and confirmed that she was still in the trance. The pastor who sang to her, W.B. Musselman, was prominently quoted in the article that was circulated for all of Reading to see. Such things could be taken as an indication of God's presence and blessing on the meetings and the pastor. (The entire text of this article can be found at <http://www.bfchistory.org/musselmanhimmelreich.htm>)

And thus began the ministry of W.B. Musselman. It was clear that he was deeply committed to the principles of holiness which expected to see a visible sanctification and works of healing. He described the ongoing ministry in Reading in a letter published January 1, 1885, in the Gospel Banner:

Dear Editor: -- May the blessings of the Lord rest upon you and your labor.
Amen.

The Lord is working wonderfully with us here. Four weeks ago we started a protracted meeting, but for the first two weeks we were compelled to work by force, and with very few people; but thanks be to God! -the just live by faith, and whatever we ask in accordance with His will, believing, it shall be granted unto us. Thanks be to God for his promises, which are sure and steadfast. The last two weeks we had wonderful victory all along, and we trust it is only the beginning of good things. So far fourteen souls have been gloriously saved, while eight more are earnestly seeking Jesus as their Saviour. Never let us be

discouraged even if the walls will not fall the first round. I suppose that no one could have persuaded Joshua that the walls of Jericho would not fall, for he knew he was going forward at the Lord's command, doing His will and that victory must surely come, if everything was right with themselves. Therefore let us start out in the "name of Jesus," as David went out to meet Goliath, knowing that we have the stronger on our side, and that victory will be sure. In case there should be no victory or no conversions, we ought to fall upon our faces, as Joshua did, until God answers our prayer, and if an Achan is found, stone him, crucify self, cleanse ourselves, and start again. God must prevail, for no victory belongs [t]o Satan.

May God inspire his people and especially his servants with holy zeal in his work. One soul is worth more than the whole world; then how can we be idle while our neighbors are going to destruction daily?

I was called to a sister belonging to another denomination, to pray for healing. She was very low with consumption, having been given up by the doctor, expecting to live only a few weeks at the longest, sweating very much at night, unable to be up, and could eat but very little in the morning. We prayed for her, with laying on of hands, and she was instantly strengthened and the next day she arose, ate a hearty dinner, and in the evening attended the protracted meeting, (14 squares, going and coming), and testified for Jesus. She said that her desire had been to be able to sing one more hymn in her life, which she had been unable to do, but now she could sing better than ever. She has been away visiting out of the city since, testifying for Jesus. Oh! for living testimonies for Jesus' who is the same yesterday, to-day and forever. All we want is the same faith to perform the same miracles. Oh may the Lord put it into our hearts to take Him for our refuge under all circumstances, for our commission is to preach and baptize, and to lay the hands upon the sick, (not only the apostles) for James, (who presided at Jerusalem, after all the apostles had been martyred excepting John) commanded to call for the elders in case of sickness, that they might pray for them and anoint them with oil, and that the sick should be saved and the sins forgiven if any are committed. James v; 14.

It is my prayer that this command be obeyed instead of ignored. Let us remember that all scripture is given by inspiration and that we may think over this matter very seriously and take the whole commission, and the results will be glorious.

A.B. Musselman² (Gospel Banner, January 1, 1885, page 4).

² This letter is signed A. B. Musselman but clearly this was an error.

The work was moving ahead and great things were happening. Two weeks later on January 15, the Banner published another letter dated December 29, 1884, in which Musselman reported, "God is gloriously manifesting Himself here. There have 25 souls been saved so far and six more are seeking, while many more are deeply convicted. We baptized four times already, and will baptize again next Sunday. To God be all the praise" (Gospel Banner, January 15, 1886, page 8). In February, 1885, he reported, "Our meeting-house, which was enlarged, from 35ft. to 80ft. in length was crowded on the occasion (sic). Thus far, there are fifty converts, and the end is not yet, for God is working wonderfully amongst the people yet. Glory be to God, for victory!" (Gospel Banner, February 1, 1886, page 14).

W.B.'s emphasis on healing, which seems to have characterized his ministry in these early days, must have hearkened back to his own testimony that he was miraculously healed from his work related injury in a way that led him to the Lord and to the ministry. When the Gospel Banner re-printed an article from the Free Methodist publication, it implied that it might not be correct to believe that God was going to answer every prayer for healing. The article suggested that faith to believe in miracles was a gift of the Holy Spirit. W.B. wrote to the Free Methodist to protest. His response was reprinted in the Banner as well. He wrote in a reply dated February 17, 1886,

Faith is the gift of God in nearly the same sense as *seeing*, *walking* and *eating* are the gift of God. Neither of these can be done without Him, yet He does neither of them for us. The power to *see*, *walk*, and *eat* comes from God, (for which we ought to be very thankful) but He neither *sees*, *walks* nor *eats* for us, and yet we can do neither without Him. Thus is faith. God gives us something to *eat* and power to *eat*, now we can *eat*. Thus God gives us His promises which are *Yea* and *Amen*, and the power to *believe* when we come unto Him wholly. It is for us to simply trust in the promises of God and be healed from our infirmities. If we are not healed from our infirmities, it is not for the want of promises or supply of faith on God's part; but for the want of complying with His conditions, and exercising that *faith*...

The prayer of faith SHALL save the sick. Now I believe this word and trust in the same Christ who has healed thousands and never refused one, (so the inspired word tells us) and is the same forever. If the above is not a command, my dear readers, let us not heed it, but think and pray over it, and let us be careful that we don't do like Asa, II Chr. 16 12-13, Asa was ... diseased, yet in his disease he sought not the Lord, but to the physicians... and died. Let us read our commission, Mark 16 15-18. (Gospel Banner, April 1, 1886, page 4) (The entire text is available at <http://www.bfchistory.org/musselmanwbsoberview.htm>)

Another part of the ministry of W.B. had begun to open up. At the Annual Conference held February 1-3, 1886, the Conference recorded:

William B. Musselman of Reading asked permission of the Annual Conference for issuing a book of Revival Songs to be printed at our own printing establishment providing printing can be done as cheap as at other establishments.

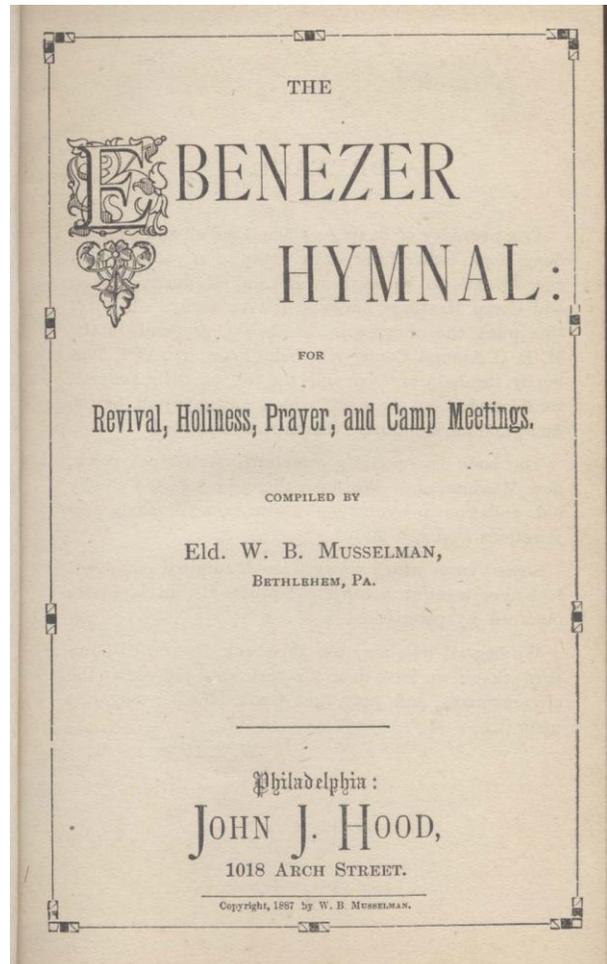
Resolved: That an examining committee to be appointed to examine said Revival Songs (to be issued by the said William B. Musselman of Reading in book form). Committee as follows: Joel Brunner, W. C. Detwiler and A. Kauffman. (Verhandlungen , page 159)

The Ebenezer Hymn, copyrighted in 1887 by William B. Musselman soon appeared. It was published by John J. Hood, 1018 Arch Street, Philadelphia. In the preface, Musselman wrote:

The necessity of having a cheap English and German Song Book, either in separate volumes or combined in one volume, to be used in Revival, Holiness, Prayer and Camp Meetings, has been felt by many. To meet this want the undersigned made the proposal to

the M. B. C. Annual Conference, held February, 1886, that he, by the help of God and the aid of their prayers, would undertake the work, which was approved by the same, and an Examining Committee appointed.

The book is especially calculated for Gospel Work, new Missions etc. We have there selected chiefly old, well known hymns and choruses, while some new selections were also added.



Some hymns which we very much admired could not be had on account of copyright, others of this class were obtained by permission.

We beg all who may use this book to overlook imperfections; we have done the best we could under the circumstances, and pray that God's blessing may rest upon it.

1887 brought a new assignment to the Bethlehem and Coopersburg circuit and a deeper commitment. W.B. was clear about his commitment to holiness and saw those principles throughout the Bible. He went to a new level as he began to work with the Heavenly Recruits.

The Heavenly Recruits began in the early 1880's. Three men identified with the Recruits, L. Frank Haas, C. W. Ruth and Jonas Trumbauer, had ties to the Mennonite Brethren in Christ. Whether the Recruits found W.B. or W.B. found the Recruits is hard to say.

As early as 1882, L. Frank Haas was holding meetings in Philadelphia. Haas was from Reading and might have had contact with W.B. there. When he was in ministry, he was identified with those who believed in entire sanctification. He spent a few years as a licensed preacher in the Mennonite Brethren in Christ but was removed in 1908 for reasons not expressed.



CW Ruth, standing, middle

Christian Wismer (C.W.) Ruth was a friend of the Musselmans. He worked for John Stauffer in Quakertown with co-worker Harvey Musselman. Harvey attended the camp meeting at Chestnut Hill in 1882 and returned religious, according to C.W. C.W. admitted that he feared it but attended a meeting with Harvey where he was apparently saved in September of 1882. C.W. became part of the Heavenly Recruits and took their name with him when he moved to Indianapolis to work for a printer there. He gave up the printing business to become an evangelist who was deeply committed to the holiness movement. He is listed among the founders of the Church of the Nazarene.

Of Jonas Trumbauer, less is known. He was probably the founder of the Heavenly Recruits though his name fades from the records. What is interesting is that he was from Lower Milford prior to his relocation to Philadelphia and Chester where he worked as a market man. In 1870, he and his wife were living in Shimersville where he worked as a miller. Whether there was an actual acquaintance with the Musselman family is not apparent but it would be hard to imagine that they had not come across each other.

In October, 1887, W.B. enthusiastically reported to the Gospel Banner concerning a holiness convention held at Bethlehem in September:

There was a Holiness Convention held at Bethlehem, Pa., from the 20. to the 23rd of September, which did a work for God, that eternity only will reveal, in the way of converting sinners and sanctifying believers.

Elders Haas, Trumbauer, and Hyde of the Heavenly Recruits Association, and Eld. Frank Berkheiser of the Church of God were present, and their services were wonderfully owned and blessed of God, and appreciated by the children of God. I find that God blesses all united efforts to save souls. The above men all preach straight gospel truths. Regular blood and fire soldiers. O for more of them! (Gospel Banner – October 15, 1887 – page 9)

In April, 1889, W.B. reported on his ministry on the Bethlehem / Allentown Circuit, “For several weeks we have been engaged in holding meetings here and five persons, all heads of families, have found the Saviour, and three more are seeking, while others are deeply convicted. Quite a number have experienced the blessing of entire sanctification. Praise God for the keeping power of Jesus Christ.” (Gospel Banner – April 1, 1889 – page 109)

In August of the same year, C.W. Ruth came to minister for him.

Bro. W. B. Musselman writes from Allentown, Pa., under the date of July 29th, that Eld. C. W. Ruth, from Indianapolis, Ind., a member of the “Heavenly Recruits Association,” held a week’s meeting in Bethlehem, Pa. in the M. B. C. Church with good success. He also held Bible readings, some of the most interesting kind, which were highly appreciated by all. He states that Eld. Ruth is an evangelist, solely trusting God for his support, that he is very radical in the doctrine of “entire sanctification” and “divine healing.” (Gospel Banner – August 15, 1889 – page 248)

Musselman’s enthusiasm for the ministry of supernatural healing had not diminished. He shared his experience with the Banner.

On Sunday, Jan. 20th, I was called to the bedside of a sick sister at Bro. Charles H. Brunner's. I anointed the sister with oil, according to the injunction of James 5; and while thus engaged, the power and presence of God was so manifested, that five other persons present, who were still unconverted, became wonderfully miserable on account of their sins, and the result was, one gloriously saved, and the others promised to continue seeking until they find peace through Jesus. Brethren, it pays to visit if we go in the name and power of our Saviour. Hallelujah! Yours and Christ's. Wm. B. Musselman. (Gospel Banner – February 1, 1889 – page 45)

With a ministry record like this, it is no wonder that in 1889, at age 29, W.B. Musselman was selected as the assistant to Presiding Elder William Gehman. He was the heir apparent and added his new title to his letters to the Gospel Banner that year. In February, 1892, the transfer was complete and he was the presiding elder of the Pennsylvania Conference of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church. In October of the same year, William Brunner Musselman was elected as the Vice Chairman of the General Conference. His ministry and leadership had caught the eyes and ears of his peers.

W.B. settled into the life of the Presiding Elder as he began to exercise a new conference wide leadership. His responsibility was to lead the Quarterly Conference meetings. He came to the First Quarterly Conference on Saturday, April 9, 1892, at the Terre Hill Class. He preached from 1 Thessalonians 5. Some concern had been voiced about the lack of attendance at the conferences. The minutes record that "Pre. Eld. and Bro. Musselman shall remind class leader and Steward of Remp's Church of their duties concerning conference, and they shall give an account of their absence at next Quarterly Conference." He was expected to assure that leaders toe the mark. The minutes of the First Quarterly Conference of the following year (April 20, 1893) note that "the duties of the Preacher in Charge of Class Leaders was read by the Presiding Elder W. B. Musselman." These same minutes revealed that a couple of the brothers of the Remp's Class were not supporting the preacher in charge. The problem needed to be faced. "It was moved and adopted that Bro. Presiding Elder Musselman should visit the two said Brothers concerning their failing to contribute enough towards the payment of Preachers Salary." At the Second Quarterly Conference in July, 1893, action had been taken. "P. E. W. B. Musselman stated that according to his duties by a Resolution adopted at the last quarterly conference, he visited Brothers Richard Remp and John Miller, and explained the duties of his appointment to them as set forth in said Resolution the best way he could." He was not one to shy away from his tasks. At the Third Quarterly Conference in October, 1893, the following was noted: "Examination of

Sunday Superintendent. Bro. P. Y. Foltz, no charges, only that the organ used in the Sunday School is contrary to the Discipline and Rules of the Church which a part of said Discipline bearing on the subject was read by Bro. Wm. B. Musselman P. E. and was agreed by Bro. P. Y. Foltz to abandon using the organ during Sunday School Services and to be dispensed with." No compromising with the world would take place on his watch.

January 5, 1895, was a red letter date in the life and ministry of W.B. Musselman. According to the history of the Union Gospel Press, on this date the ministry of the Gospel Workers began.

For some time a general missionary spirit prevailed among the licensed workers of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ, and where as there have been Hall and other revival meetings held in different localities of Pennsylvania and New Jersey in the past with grand results and where as the work is fast spreading, we see the necessity of different rules for the future prosperity of the church and work in general. Therefore (June³ 5, 1895 in the hall in Annandale, N.J.) We the undersigned organized ourselves in a "body" to be known as the Mennonite Brethren in Christ Home Missionary Society

W. B. Musselman, Chairman

D. B. Rote, Secretary

W. K. Ziegler

Agnes Ziegler

W. C. Betz

Lucy Musselman

L. M. Christman

Cora J. Felty

Lydia Weber

Frany Wismer

Elmira C. Dech (From the Gospel Worker's Manual, page 3)

The normally newsy Gospel Banner records no news of this event though it had been reporting news of women involved in ministry. On June 26, 1894, C. H. Brunner reported to the Banner, "Our dear Sister workers, Dora B. Rote, Lizzie Christman, Franey Wismer and Agnes Messinger did noble service for Jesus" (Gospel Banner, July 3, 1894, page 12). In November, Agnes Messinger wrote, "Sister Wismer and I were sent here (Easton) to open a new mission. We commenced on Thursday by the

³ Lucy Musselman's minutes record the date as June 5, 1895. Obviously, one of the dates is wrong.

help of Bro. Musselman our presiding elder” (Gospel Banner, November 20, 1894, page 12). Dora Rote sent word from Annandale, New Jersey, “Sister Lizzie Christman and I came to this place the last day in Oct. We have rented a store room to have meetings in this winter; opened our meetings on the 2nd inst., assisted by W. B. Musselman.” (Gospel Banner, November 27, 1894, page 12).

What were the circumstances that led to this meeting, on Saturday, January 5, 1895? What had brought them to Annandale? How had this ministry of women began? What caused them to band together?

The ministry at Annandale must have gone well. In August, 1895, a new camp meeting was held there. Apparently, enough people had been saved to warrant a camp meeting. The purpose of a camp meeting was to bring people to the point of entire sanctification. W.B. shared the story:

The Annandale camp-meeting was something entirely new in that part of New Jersey. People did not fully appreciate it at first, but it increased in interest, and by the time it closed there was a wonderful interest awakened and everything seemed ready for a great break in the ranks of sinners. We never closed a camp meeting where there was such a clamoring for another week’s camp meeting. Even the citizens of Annandale (many of them stopped us and our preachers, requesting to continue another week) We did not think we ever had a camp-meeting that had such an effect for good in a neighborhood as this one; yet we had no member of ours there when it started.

We have now organized a small class on the straight line. The condition of the work was grand. Perfect harmony reigned throughout, and if ever the Holy Ghost had the right of way it was here- such a melting and coming down amongst the workers and preachers, too, and unity reigned. Our venerable Bro. Taylor preached with liberty in the English language which was highly appreciated. (Gospel Banner, June 25, 1895, page 12)

The ministry of camp meetings began to explode and bring a new excitement. In 1896, five camp meetings were planned, Annandale, Fairview Park, Spring City, Chestnut Hill and Mt. Carmel.

W.B. interrupted his work to attend the General Conference in October, 1896, which was held in Coopersburg, Pennsylvania. He reported of the work in Pennsylvania, “We have passed through a time of sifting. The opposition is great on all sides. The home mission work is making grand progress. We have between 20 and 30 mission workers out on the faith line.” As early as 1888, the General Conference had established that

women might serve in the ministry. The role of women in ministry was defined by the following:

OF WOMEN PREACHING.-

Resolved, That any sister who feels called of God to preach shall be recognized as an evangelist, subject to the minister in charge and the Presiding Elder. They shall be received the same as probationers except ordination. (www.bfchistory.org/gencon1888)



At the 1896, Musselman was serving on the committee to revise the discipline. His committee proposed:

Sec. 4, page 69. OF WOMEN PREACHING. Erase the entire section and insert in its place the following: "Sisters who are licensed according the Discipline may be recognized as evangelists, helpers, and missionaries subject to the Presiding Elder or minister in charge. They shall be received according to Chap. 4 Sec. 3 except ordination. They shall have a voice in their respective Quarterly Conferences. (<http://www.bfchistory.org/gencon1896.htm>)

The next summer saw the work progressing. In 1897, the Banner carried the following report from Gospel Worker Dora Rote:

Oh, it is wonderful! Wonderful! How God is working at this time. What a stir there is! Such a hungering and thirsting among the people. I have never seen it so before. The Christians of all denominations are swinging in line with the truth, and oh, such sweet melting times! The Holy Ghost is preparing a people for Jesus' coming, which may be soon. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

D. B. Rote



Shamokin Camp Ground, Pa., June 26.
(Gospel Banner, July 6, 1897, page 14)

Dora B. Rote

J. E. Fidler added his delight:

The same Holy Spirit who saved the people at the camp meeting and took his abode in their hearts also healed many of them. We don't know definitely how many but about thirty five were anointed and many claimed healing and went on their way rejoicing. Everything seemed to have the clear and definite ring. Also the Lord's coming rang clear and distinct. The trumpet had not uncertain sound. Everybody could wheel right in line. The four-fold gospel is proclaimed in all its fulness among the Gospel Workers, and who should not encourage such a blessed work which is needed all over the country and cities? And we would say as a word of encouragement to the Gospel Workers, Go right on in his name and our inmost heart bids you all, "God speed." The above words are the inmost convictions of my heart and I would support and stand by such a work under any circumstance all for the glory of Jesus. Such conviction as was there I have not seen for a long time, even among the Polish Catholic people which could not understand our language: they stood with tears in their eyes and wished to understand, but knew nothing but the visible manifestations, the strange feeling came over them. How sorry I was that I could not speak with them about our loving Jesus. (Gospel Banner, July 13, 1897, page 13)



Mrs. W B Musselman

The Gospel Workers were making their presence felt. With their leader leading them on, they were reaching out to the towns and villages where they could reach greater numbers of people. In 1896, the home missionaries were divided into men's and women's groups. The on line history records that "In 1896 two branches of the Home Missionary Society were established, one for men and one for women. In 1897 the name of the Women's Home Missionary Society was changed to the Gospel Worker Society. "Gospel Workers" was the name by which the women missionaries had come to be known." (www.uniongospelpress.com/history)

The Annual Conference has no mention of any action to establish any of these workers. The 1897 Annual Conference notes that the Gospel Workers were invited to bring their bookstand to the camp meetings.

At the 1898 Annual Conference, the time had come for recognition and moving ahead. The following is noted in the minutes:

WHEREAS, W. B. Musselman. President of the Gospel Workers' Society gave a clear and definite report of the past operations of the Society in every department (spiritual, statistical and financial) to the complete satisfaction of the Conference; therefore

RESOLVED, That we recognize their work as organized and carried on under the inspiration and direction of the Holy Ghost and pledge ourselves to pray for them and use our influence for the promotion of their work; and further

RESOLVED, That according to the resolution of last year the monthly collection for them in each class shall be continued and increased as much as possible.

WHEREAS, We greatly appreciate the energetic and devoted labors of Brother W. B. Musselman in connection with Home Missionary work; therefore

RESOLVED, That we recognize the President of the Gospel Workers' Society as Missionary Presiding Elder ex-officio;

RESOLVED, That at each camp meeting in our Conference one day, appointed by the Presiding Elder, shall be offered to the Gospel Workers, in full charge of the President or district leaders.

The Gospel Workers Society had arrived. They were full fledged Christian workers, even given W.B. Musselman was recognized as Missionary Presiding Elder, a position he held until his death.

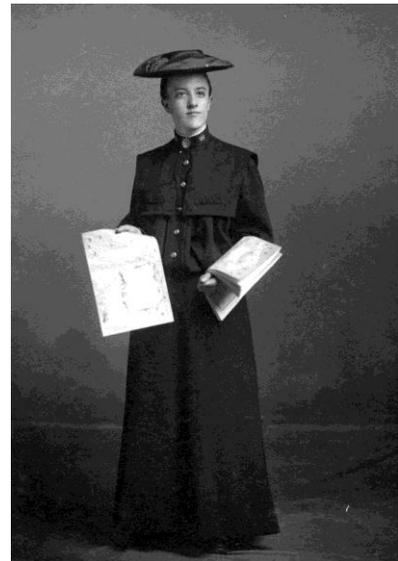
It was time to move out. The 1900 census found W.B. Musselman, his family and ten Gospel Workers living in Williamsport at 648 and 650 Franklin Street. No indication is given of the decision to move there or the rationale for the decision. One might assume that the decision was based on what was thought to be more effective places for evangelism. At the General Conference of 1900, W.B. reported:

The nature of our work is somewhat peculiar. We have no men in our work. We open a mission in any town where the Spirit may direct without consulting any one in the town. We send two workers there, open a hall and move forward slowly. We do not encourage them to preach everything they know, or some things they may not know, in one week. We do not encourage them especially to preach, but to read a chapter or part of a chapter and talk on the same. Our work

extends over quite a number of counties from one end of the state to the other. The Lord blesses us financially. We trust in God alone, and He wonderfully provides for us. We try to get the proper workers together. This we find sometimes a great difficulty. We have at present twelve missions open every night. We mean to move forward. (www.bfchistory.org/gencon1900)

Apparently, the Spirit had directed them to Williamsport. W.B.'s gospel ambitions were not yet satisfied. He wanted to reach even more people and believed that printed literature offered the way. Street preaching was useful but a mass distribution of literature and gospel tracts could be even more effective. His reports to the Annual Conference in 1901 and 1902 show that literature was a growing ministry.

W. B. Musselman, Missionary Presiding Elder, gave a very interesting report of the Gospel Worker Society. Financially the Lord provides in a most marvelous manner. Many were saved and filled with the Holy Ghost during the past year. The colportage work is grand. Many banners and books were sold, and the sale of Gospel Worker Calendars is marvelous. In his report he plainly showed the approval of God in all things (www.bfchistory.org/Minutes1901).



W.B. MUSSELMAN, Missionary Presiding Elder of the Gospel Worker Society, gave a very spicy and interesting report. At present they have more than a dozen applicants for the work. They had more converts this summer than ever before. Finances are on the increase. The colportage work is marvelous. They expect to print about 2500 Gospel Worker calendars this year. Many of their newly published G.W.S.S. Heralds are being sold. The Lord leads wondrously" (www.bfchistory.org/Minutes1902).

The on-line history of the Union Gospel Press tells us that the transition to printing literature was made in 1902.

Gospel Worker – S J Lord

In its early years, the Gospel Worker Society distributed denominational literature, but it had no literature of its own. Steps to correct that were made in 1902, when the first issue of the *G.W.S. Herald* was printed. This was the nondenominational magazine of the Gospel Worker Society, and it was intended to be a model paper for mission work. Its purpose was to bring sound Christian literature into the home.

The first editions of the *G.W.S. Herald* were printed by an outside company, but in a short time the Gospel Worker Society purchased its own press and took over the printing of the *G.W.S. Herald*. The first issues were printed in a remodeled livery stable in Williamsport, Pennsylvania, where the Gospel Worker Society then had its headquarters. This newly established printing place was called the Herald Publishing House. (www.uniongospelpress.com/history)

In 1907, yet another move was contemplated. In an article entitled, “The Phantom and the Fortress” in the *Cleveland Magazine*, July, 1990, author Greg Stricharchuk wrote,

But by 1906 Musselman had come to realize that a printing press, even a small one in an old livery stable, could reach far more people than an army of Gospel Workers or the thunderous voice of the most powerful of the pulpit preachers. It was then that he decided to move the Gospel Worker Society to Cleveland

because of the city’s strategic location in terms of mail delivery, essential to a publishing business intent on getting its materials circulated among a wide audience, and because a distant relative happened to own a building that could be adapted to house the press and the women. (*Cleveland Magazine*, July 1990, page 91)



Musselman was clearly committed to doing more. His ambitions were bigger than the denomination that had formed him. He wanted to serve a larger audience and be a factor that all churches could serve. To limit his work to his denomination would have wasted the opportunities that became available through the medium of print. He reported to the Annual Conference in 1906,

We have remodeled the building where we are in, quite extensively, and have at the present time a fully equipped printing plant. We bought a large new up-to-date Babcock Optimus printing press, besides smaller presses, cutter, stitcher, etc. We are printing 10,700 copies weekly of our twenty page paper, *The Gospel Herald*, though we have not been pushing the paper very hard of late. We are also publishing a twenty-four page religious monthly for a party in Pittsburg. We are also printing a great many tracts. We printed 200,000 for one party. We buy our paper at bottom rates by the car load. The whole work

Williamsport, Pennsylvania

on these papers, tracts, etc., from beginning to end, except the linotype work, is all being done by our workers. In Pittsburg we sell 1000 Gospel Heralds weekly and often hundreds more. We are still launching out by faith and are aiming at a larger permanent home and plant in some large city.

In 1907, he reported,

"We are steadily moving on. One year ago We said, in substance, "We are launching out by faith and are aiming for a larger permanent home and plant in some large city." To-day, our headquarters, comprising large buildings, is in Cleveland, Ohio, and we are laying the foundation for a permanent work there." (www.bfchistory.org/Minutes1907)

After the relocation to Cleveland, W.B. was able to enter an agreement with the General Conference in 1908 to print the Gospel Banner and assume financial responsibility for what had been a financial loser. The General Conference was probably relieved that he would assume financial liabilities. His decision to include advertising would help to end the deficits and turning the printing ministry around. Money began to flow into the coffers.



In 1922, the publishing company which he founded took the name, Union Gospel Press, by which it is known even today. The Sunday School literature published by it still lists the name of the founder on its title page.

In these latter years, the tie between the Mennonite Brethren in Christ of Pennsylvania and W. B. Musselman of Cleveland, Ohio, grew even more distant. He had set out to do a bigger work and would not be limited to them as customers nor limited by them as leaders. Between 1907 and 1938, W. B. would serve as Missionary Presiding Elder and was re-elected to that position annually. He attended only three of the Pennsylvania Conferences between 1907 and 1938. His annual letter to them gave almost no report and asked to be excused because of his busy-ness. Stricharchuk states that "despite a stroke at age 67 that partially paralyzed the 300-pound Musselman's right side, he maintained a rigorous schedule that began at 6 a.m. and ended between 9 and 10 p.m. six days a week." (Cleveland Magazine, page 92)

Cleveland, Ohio

W. B. Musselman died on February 21, 1938, at the age of 77.

The ministry of the Union Gospel Press continues even today. Because he had not left a will, the family experienced turmoil in determining who would take the reins. Stricharchuk records the story as follows:

In February 1938 Musselman sensed his death was imminent. But instead of passing the reigns (sic) of control of the press to his youngest daughter, Mary Euphie, a Gospel Worker, he instead turned to a far-off grandson who bore the same first initials as his own.

On February 21st, William Brunner Musselman lay dying in his bed, listening to the singing of the Gospel Workers while watching the door to his room. Suddenly his grandson, Rev. W. B. Musselman, a son of the Rev. Paul J. Musselman, appeared. The founder, then 77, was only able to clasp his grandson's hands and to mutter a sound, but Mary Euphie Musselman and other Gospel Workers interpreted the incident to mean an heir had been chosen. (Cleveland Magazine, page 93)



The descendants of W. B. Musselman still maintain control of the business. No active connections continue between the Bible Fellowship Church and the Union Gospel Press. Some churches use the material and have long forgotten that the founder's name listed on the title page started as one of us.

William Brunner Musselman was ambivalent in his relationship to the church which nurtured him and in which he served well. He retained his ties. Every year he was re-elected to the office of Missionary Presiding Elder. He must have valued that title and saw himself as the holder of the office. On the other hand, and at the same time, he did not allow himself to be held accountable for the work of the Gospel Workers. He also did not allow himself to be limited to a ministry simply to the denomination he served. He knew that were he committed to the denomination alone, the ministry would never have expanded as it did to a nationally known and recognized printing house. He would serve the many, not the few.

His attitudes may have set the tone for our denominational leadership in the years that followed. What was important was accountability, loyalty and commitment to our church. But ministry was never to be limited to our church. There was always a bigger

world out there. We would serve the many, not the few. It was important to evangelize, not to build the church. A false dichotomy grew which separated evangelism from church planting. It might be argued that we have never recovered.

For more reading, you can see Musselman's sermon, The Practical Life of Jesus, at <http://www.bfchistory.org/musselmanwbsermon.htm>.

Learn about Jonas Musselman, W.B.'s father, at <http://www.bfchistory.org/jmusselman.htm>.

W.B.'s brother, Harvey B., is featured in a paper you will find at <http://www.bfchistory.org/musshb.htm>.