

A Scandal in the MBC?

The story of A.B. Musselman

By Alan Russell

I was recently doing some research into one of the family lines that is prominent in the BFC – Musselman. There are seven generations of this family in my investigation as follows:

- Jonas Musselman (1839-1886), m. Lucy [Brunner] (1842-1916)
- Allen Brunner Musselman (1872-1900), m. Alice Baus (1865-1921)
- Perth Ward Musselman (1892-1958)
- John Marvin Musselman (1918-1989)
- Jay Carl Musselman (1951-)
- Jason Musselman (1979-)
- Lucy Musselman (2013-)

I was originally just wondering if Lucy (2013-) was named after her great-grandmother, Lucy (1842-1916). (After consultation with her father, Jason, I confirmed that she was.) But as I was looking through the various records, something in the nature of a “scandal” leaped out of the records. This involves Allen B. Musselman (1872-1900).

Allen Brunner Musselman was born on 29 Dec 1872 in Upper Milford Township. He was the youngest of three boys, having older brothers William Brunner (b. 3 Oct 1860) and Harvey Brunner (b. 11 Feb 1868), known as WB and HB Musselman respectively. On 26 Mar 1886, when Allen was only 13 (his brothers would have been 25 and 18), his father Jonas died, leaving his mother, Lucy, a widow with three teenage boys (while that is what is said in BFCHistory, it was actually two teenagers and one in his 20s). There is a whole separate story about Lucy which I will not go into here.



While his older brothers followed their father into the ministry at a fairly young age (WB was licensed to preach in 1884 at age 23, HB in 1890 at age 22), Allen trained to be a printer (probably at the Quakertown Printing and Publishing House where his brother HB had worked from 1881 until entering the ministry in 1890). At the time there was a publishing arm of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ located in Kitchener, Ontario, Canada, as the MBC, though various mergers over the preceding decades, had churches not only in PA, OH, and IN, but in Ontario as well. However, before Allen could move to Canada, he got married. This story is about that marriage.

On August 10, 1892 (a Wednesday), Allen and Alice got a marriage license at the Allentown courthouse. Allen was only 19, so he had his mother with him to give approval. His occupation was listed as Printer. Alice [Baus] was then 26, 7 years older than Allen. She was the oldest child of a family that had resided in Upper Milford Township somewhere along what is now St. Peter’s Church Rd, about halfway between Shimerville and St. Peter’s Church. It is believed that she lived in Allentown at the time of her marriage. On the marriage license she was listed as House Keeper. On the bottom of the page is a filing from the

pastor who married them, W. Bamford (William Bamford was the pastor of the Methodist Episcopal church on Linden Street in Allentown – now the Salem United Methodist Church – from 1889-1894). That was filed on August 27 and says that he performed the marriage on August 15 (a Monday). Being married on a Monday may indicate that the ceremony was not held in a church, but was a private ceremony, perhaps held in the pastor's study. (I have not found any announcement of the wedding in the local paper.)

Allen had apparently already accepted a job working with the MBC publishing house in Canada, so within a very short time, he and Alice moved from PA to Canada. They had three children while living in Canada:

- Perth Ward (b. 30 Nov 1892 in Berlin [now Kitchener], Ontario)
- Verna Essie (b. 5 Nov 1894 in Waterloo. Ontario [adjoining city to Berlin/Kitchener])
- Arta Olivia (b. 27 Jul 1897 in Markham, York, Ontario [outside of Toronto]), Allen's occupation on her birth record is now listed as Minister instead of Laborer which had been on Perth and Verna's birth record

But notice the date of Perth's birth – 30 Nov 1892 – when his parents had only been married since 15 Aug 1892, just 3.5 months earlier! That means that not only was Allen's wife 7 years older than he was, but that she was 5.5 months pregnant at the time of their marriage.

Gee – get married (but not in a church?) to an older woman who is 5.5 months pregnant, then leave town (in fact, leave the country) before she's starting to show too much! Sounds like a scandal to me!

Allen and his family remained in Berlin/Kitchener Ontario for 5 years (1892-1897) while he worked for the MBC publishing house [this would have been the Gospel Banner which was published in Ontario from 1885 until 1909], while also continuing his studies. In 1897 he was ordained into the ministry and served in the "largest congregation" in their town in Canada until 1899 [I have been able to confirm that this was the Gormley Missionary Church in Richmond Hill, Ontario – see link below]. He then returned to PA in early 1899 when he assumed the pastorate of the MBC church in Reading. (The Annual Conference minutes of 3 Mar 1899 record that "Whereas, Elder A.B. Musselman, a member of the Canada Conference, being present with a proper transfer from P. Cober, P.E. [short for Presiding Elder], in his presence, therefore resolved, that he be received as a full member of this Conference.") Unfortunately, after a protracted illness, he died just a year later on 2 May 1900.

Given the rather strict morality of those days, one wonders if the circumstances of this out-of-wedlock conception was known and if it would have prevented the ordination of Allen in 1897. The Faith and Order of the MBC from 1897 does not cover this particular situation, but it's unlikely that the elders in Canada knew the exact date of Allen and Alice's marriage, and it's also unlikely that the Annual Conference in PA in 1899 knew everything either (although Allen's two older brothers were both in high leadership positions in the PA Conference.)

[Taylor note – the lack of a church wedding is not a significant matter because most weddings were held in homes.]

Obituary for Allen – 1900 Yearbook, page 15.

Brother Allen B. Musselman was born December 29, 1872. Became a Christian in his early years; married Alice Baus in 1892, entered the ministry in Canada in 1894, ordained in 1898. Entered the Pennsylvania Conference in 1899 and was stationed at Reading until the time of his death, May 2, 1900.