

Sisters in Service: The History of the Gospel Worker Society

For presentation at the BFC Historical Society meeting

October 31, 2010

By Ronald L. Kohl

When Anna Bachman was just 10 days old, her Austrian-born mother brought her to the Gospel Worker Society mission at 1021 Liberty Avenue in Pittsburgh, walked to the front, and gently laid her baby on the altar in an act reminiscent of Old Testament characters Hannah and Samuel.

According to 1 Samuel 1:11, Hannah, thought to be barren, had promised the Lord that if He would grant her a son, she would “give him to the Lord all the days of his life.” That’s what Mrs. Bachman was doing.

Her act of dedication was neither coincidental nor haphazard; for through the preaching and evangelizing of the Gospel Workers, Anna Bachman’s mother had recognized her need of a Savior. So when Anna was a baby, she was presented at the Gospel Worker Mission altar, and Lucy Musselman – Gospel Worker # 1 – assisted at little Anna’s dedication ceremony.

The year was 1914. A war was beginning in Europe. But in Pittsburgh, little Anna Bachman was regularly brought to the Gospel Worker Mission. It was there that she, too, heard that she was a sinner and that Jesus had died to save sinners. Not surprisingly, at age seven, Anna surrendered her heart to Jesus right there at 1021 Liberty Avenue. Shortly thereafter, she was baptized in Lake Erie.

And it came as no surprise, given the events of her infancy, that Anna Bachman would herself become a Gospel Worker. Certain that the Lord was calling her to the ministry that had led to the salvation of both her mother and herself, Anna boarded a train in 1930, when she was just 16 years old, and traveled to Cleveland, to the headquarters of the Gospel Worker Society.

She would serve as a Gospel Worker for almost 54 years. Like most of her sisters in the ministry, she devoted her life to the publishing ministry of Union Gospel Press, and like her sisters, she learned to play the guitar and sang frequently in open-air services in Cleveland’s Public Square in the 1930s and 40s.

Shortly before her death at age 84, Anna Bachman wrote, “Many times down during the years, I have thanked the Lord for dying on Calvary’s cross in my place so that my sin could be forgiven and I could be born into the family of God.



Anna C. Bachman

To anyone who doubted that the sacrifices that Gospel Workers like Bachman made were of value, she stressed, "It certainly pays to serve Jesus! It will be worth it all when we see Jesus."

Anna Bachman saw Jesus face-to-face on Dec. 14, 1998. Like almost 70 of her fellow Gospel Workers, and their founder, W.B. Musselman, Bachman's body was laid to rest in the Gospel Worker Society plot at Brooklyn Heights Cemetery in Cleveland.

The Gospel Worker Society is part of the history of the Bible Fellowship Church. The efforts of the Gospel Workers and Musselman, their driven leader, directly led to the formation of at least five current BFC churches, and the zeal of these costumed, musical instrument-playing, Gospel-preaching ladies led hundreds to the Lord and influenced many who followed their lead into ministry.

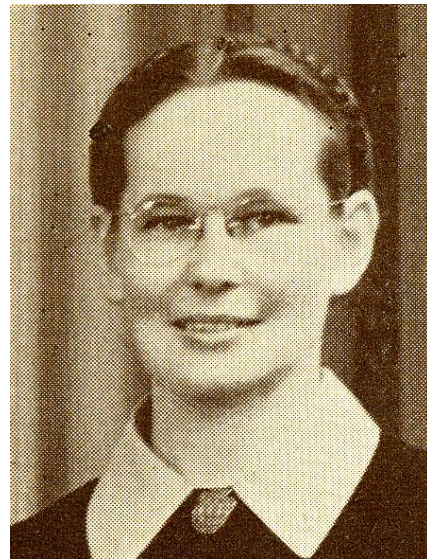
At the time of this writing, there are only four remaining Gospel Workers, all living at a retirement home at the corner of Brookpark Road and Broadview Road in Cleveland, the home of Union Gospel Press and the Gospel Worker Society since 1950.

Grace Todd, the youngest, is 76 years old. In God's timing, she and fellow Gospel Workers Beryl Bidlen (86), Vera McKinney (88) and Beatrice Jones (99), will join dozens of their sisters in ministry in death, and the chapter that was the Gospel Worker Society will draw to an official close.

There has been no direct connection between the Bible Fellowship Church and the Gospel Worker Society for decades. Retired BFC pastor R.C. Reichenbach, at 96 a contemporary of many of the Gospel Workers, calls the relationship between the Gospel Workers and the Gospel Heralds, whose men's ministry remained closely tied to the Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church that eventually became the BFC, called the connection between the Gospel Workers and Gospel Heralds "a relationship of mutual love and respect for each other."

But many informal ties remain as long as women like Grace Todd still draw breath. Todd, the current Gospel Worker Society President (as of August 2010), hasn't been to Pennsylvania in years, but she grew up in the pews at Bethel Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church on N. 8th St. in Allentown and spent her summers at Mizpah Grove Camp Meeting. Former Bethel pastor C. Leslie Miller used to come to Cleveland to give a weekly Bible study at Union Gospel Press, the headquarters for the Gospel Workers, and it was Pastor Miller whose influence led Grace Todd to become a Gospel Worker in the first place.

"He was very familiar with the work at the Union Gospel Press, and he was the one who influenced me to join the Gospel Worker Society," recalled



Beryl C. Wood Bidlen

Todd. “After much prayer and consideration, I left my home and started a new venture for God.”

That was more than 50 years ago. Todd, like so many others, sacrificed her dreams and plans to join the ministry, but like most of her fellow Gospel Workers, she hasn’t looked back. “Serving the Lord for these 50-plus years has been the least that I could do for the One who has given His life for me!” she concluded.

Their chapter has largely come to an end, and most of their names are all but forgotten now in current Bible Fellowship Church circles, save largely for relatives, elderly contemporaries and history buffs. But the Gospel Worker Society has left a deep imprint upon the fabric of the Bible Fellowship Church. Indeed, if you step into the sanctuaries at Bible Fellowship Churches in Sunbury, Shamokin, Mt. Carmel, York or Nazareth, you are witnessing the fruits of the ministry of a group of committed ladies who went everywhere and anywhere – in public squares, from door-to-door, and even into bars and taverns – to share the Gospel and to bring sinners to repentance. Their approach was simple: if the sinner won’t step into the church, bring the church to the sinner.

This is their story.

Beginnings

While the Gospel Worker Society proved to be unique to our history, it was not created out of a vacuum. Even a cursory study of the beginnings of the ministry reveal several similarities to a better-known counterpart: The Salvation Army.

The Salvation Army traces its roots back to 1865, when William Booth, a London pastor, left his pulpit to begin a street ministry to the poor and destitute. Upon learning that many of the poor felt uncomfortable within church settings, Booth went to them, founding The East London Christian Mission in one of London’s most forbidding sections – not far from the dark, dirty streets where Jack the Ripper killed six prostitutes just two decades later.

The Salvation Army took its name from the May, 1878 East London Christian Mission annual report, whose heading read, “The Christian Mission is a Volunteer Army.” Booth’s own son Bramwell objected to that title and made his disagreement known to his father. Bramwell was not a volunteer; he felt compelled to do God’s work.

At that moment, Booth had an inspired idea. He crossed out the word “volunteer” and replaced it with the word “salvation.” At that moment, The Salvation Army was born.

By 1895, its means and methods were well known. The Salvation Army then is not the Salvation Army of today. Perhaps the Jean Simmons character from the 1955 film *Guys and Dolls* presents a more accurate picture. Simmons portrayed Sergeant Sarah Brown of the “Save a Soul Mission,” which playwright Frank Loesser modeled after the Salvation Army. She wore a uniform, played a musical instrument, served at a mission in the Broadway section of Manhattan and worked to convince gamblers and drinkers – like Nathan Detroit (Frank Sinatra) that they were sinners in need of salvation.

Like the Salvation Army, the Gospel Worker Society was conceived from a perceived need. It largely sprang from the mind and will of Rev. William Brunner Musselman.

At the time of the Gospel Workers' inception in 1895, W.B. Musselman held the title of Presiding Elder of the Eastern PA Conference of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church, along with the considerable power that his position afforded. He was only the conference's second Presiding Elder, having followed William Gehman upon the latter's retirement in 1892. At the time of his election as Presiding Elder, Musselman was just 32 years old, and a man of considerable gifts. He possessed both energy and creativity, assets that would lead him to produce both our first published hymnal and our first printing organism.

He was also a man with an active widowed mother. Lucy Musselman was never just an accessory to her husband Jonas, and when he died in 1886, Lucy was already experienced in ministry, with a desire, not just to help, but to preach.

By 1895, W.B. Musselman had seen a clear need. There were many places lacking a prominent evangelical witness. There were too many unsaved sinners and too few men to reach them with the Gospel. There were too many lost sheep who would no longer consider darkening the doors of a church. How to reach them?



Jonas and Lucy Musselman

The date of birth for The Gospel Worker Society is somewhat unclear, but in 1895 – either on January 5 or June 5 – Rev. W.B. Musselman and seven women met in Annandale, NJ for the purpose of organizing the Home Missionary Society of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church.

Like William Booth years earlier, Musselman and the women who attended that meeting felt that something was missing in the Mennonite Brethren in Christ's approach to evangelism. It was one thing to invite people to church and to share the gospel with them within the confines of formal church ministry. But, then as now, many people wouldn't come to church. Even within the confines of Victorian society, with its outwardly-religious mores and social norms, many no longer felt welcome in a church building. The unchurched, as such, knew little to nothing about Jesus Christ.

How to tell them? If they won't come to you, W.B. Musselman and the others reasoned that day, you must go to them. Quickly the ideas started coming. The new organization would focus on organizing open-air missionary meetings and tent meetings. They would go out into the streets daily to sell Christian literature – the word most frequently used for that ministry was colportage. They would even go into saloons and bars to offer their literature.

And they would focus their efforts in cities and towns where the gospel had largely been neglected. “We see the necessity of different rules for the future prosperity of the church and work in general,” they reported at meeting’s end.

That day concluded with a formalization of their ministry. “We the undersigned organized ourselves in a ‘body’ to be known as the Mennonite Brethren in Christ Home Missionary Society.” W.B. Musselman signed on as



Original Gospel Workers

chairman, and many of the early driving forces of the Gospel Worker Society were already present. We can imagine Lucy Musselman stepping forward to claim the title of “Gospel Worker # 1.” Dora B. Rote, was named secretary. W.K. and Agnes Ziegler. W.C. Betz. Lizzie M. Christman. Cora J. Felty. Lydia Weber. Franny Wismer. Elmira C. Dech.

(Curiously, while it has been widely reported that this first meeting consisted of W.B. Musselman and the first seven Gospel Workers, 11 names are listed)

Initially, this was not a gender-specific mission, but at a meeting held in Glen Gardner, NJ on Jan. 31, 1896, the Home Missionary Society split into two branches – one for men, and one, the Women’s Home Missionary Society, for the fair sex. By 1897, the women’s ministry had adopted the name of Gospel Worker Society. Those who served, by extension, were called Gospel Workers.

W.B. Musselman could have retained his post as Presiding Elder, but the Gospel Worker Society experienced immediate growth. Growth is always accompanied by increasing responsibilities. By 1898, just three years after its

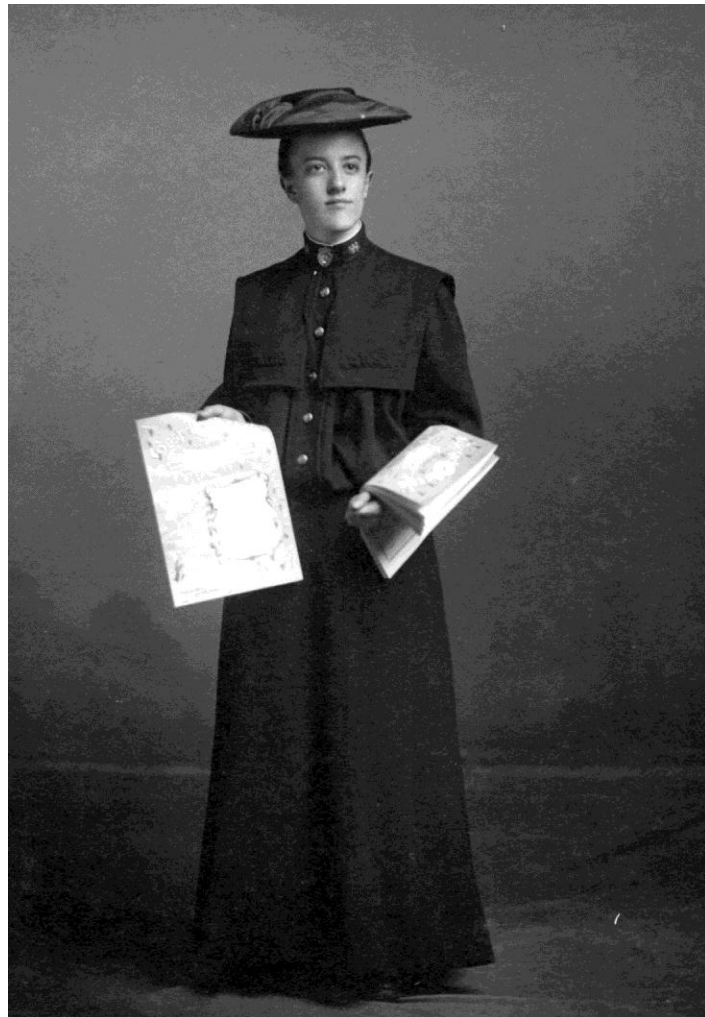
formation, Musselman was so ensconced with the work of overseeing the Gospel Workers that something had to go. He valued the role of Presiding Elder, but as Musselman reviewed the work of his fledgling ministry, he couldn't help but see that souls were being saved, missions were being started and churches were starting to be planted.

So he made the jump. He requested to be released from his position as Presiding Elder. For the rest of his life, W.B. Musselman would be known at Annual Conference by the title of "Missionary Presiding Elder."

That same year, 1898, saw an official separation in principle. The Gospel Worker Society would not simply be a ministry arm of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church, but an independent organization, albeit one with close connections to the MBC through its founder. The Gospel Workers would refer to themselves as an "undenominational" ministry organization whose primary focus was evangelism, with a secondary emphasis upon teaching and discipling new and immature believers, largely through the distribution of Christian literature.

W.B. Musselman described the Gospel Workers' mission in relatively simple terms: "The primary work of this Society is...to scatter good instructive literature and visit all, in order to reach such who are neglected, and bring those to their meetings who under ordinary circumstances do not attend services, with the object of finally bringing them to Christ."

The Gospel Workers soon came to be easily identified by their uniforms and their musical instruments. In that way, they were nearly identical to the Salvation Army. "At first the Gospel Workers did not wear uniforms," noted Harold Shelly. "But because of harassment in their saloon work and to protect their throats for outdoor meetings, the women soon adopted the uniform." And if you wanted to be a Gospel Worker, you had to play an instrument, with most reaching proficiency in



Sarah J. Lord

guitar or mandolin – instruments that were portable and thus suitable for open-air and tent ministry.

Over its first few years, the Gospel Worker Society's colportage work proved less than entirely satisfactory because it was selling someone else's literature. Feeling the lack of control over what was being distributed, W.B. Musselman saw the need for a printing organ of its own, and in 1902, the Gospel Worker Society began publication of its own materials. Now the Gospel Workers had something they could sell proudly, something which reflected their own beliefs and approach to missions and evangelism. Enter the *Gospel Worker Society Herald*.

Initially, the *G.W.S. Herald* was printed by an outside firm and was then distributed by the Gospel Workers. That, too, was quickly seen as an inadequate short-term method of distribution. Before long, the Society purchased its own press and took over printing duties. The first in-house editions of the *G.W.S. Herald* were printed in a remodeled livery stable in the Gospel Worker Society's headquarters in Williamsport, PA, calling its new printing wing the Herald Publishing House.

Success was almost immediate. More and more *Gospel Worker Society Heralds* were being sold, and the printing house needed more room and more workers. In addition to the *G.W.S. Herald*, the Herald Publishing House began printing its own Sunday School literature, which eventually came to be known as the "Christian Life Series."

Evangelism, meanwhile, was immediately the hub of the Gospel Workers Society's ministry. Missions were being started, and by 1899, the Gospel Workers' influence was being felt in many small towns throughout Pennsylvania and New Jersey.

Indeed, the Jan. 24, 1899 edition of the *Gospel Banner* provided a full registry of Gospel Workers and their missions. New Jersey missions had been started in Hackettstown, Schooley's Mountain and Washington. In Pennsylvania, future Bible Fellowship Churches had already reached mission status in places like Mt. Carmel, Shamokin and Sunbury, with many of the first Gospel Workers right at the forefront.

Lucy Musselman was listed as band leader in Sunbury. Sarah Brunner occupied the same position in Shamokin. Dora Rote was listed as "assisting in opening, taking stock account."

But by the start of 1899, Gospel Workers had established PA missions in many places that would not produce future Bible Fellowship Churches. Places like Girardville, Lewisburg, Muncy, Vilas, Gettysburg and Lock Haven.

And the numbers of Gospel Workers were also growing. What started as a group of 10 women under W.B. Musselman's leadership had grown to 29, stationed at 14 different sites. And what was printed in the *Gospel Banner* is likely only a partial group, for only three of those first 10 Gospel Workers were listed. It is known that many of the other charter members were still active long

after 1899. So they must have been serving in places not listed in the *Gospel Banner*.

While several future Bible Fellowship Churches came out of the efforts of the Gospel Workers, and while W.B. Musselman was initially a Presiding Elder in the Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church, the separation between Musselman's Gospel Worker Society and the Pennsylvania Conference of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ quickly became increasingly acute. While many of the biggest Mennonite Brethren in Christ churches were in eastern PA, many of the Gospel Worker missions were further west – in places like Buffalo, Pittsburgh, Detroit, Baltimore and Cleveland.

W.B. Musselman, for his part, was enjoying his relative freedom. His attendance at Annual Conference became more and more spotty, and finally largely died out altogether. He would send a report along with his greetings, which usually included something of an apology for his absence, as was the case at the 27th Annual Conference in 1910. The minutes for that year read, "W.B. Musselman, being unable to be present personally, reported that he had absolutely nothing against any one, especially not against any one in the church. He stated that the Lord has been blessing their work more this year than ever. Their presses in the Herald Publishing House are often running day and night, which, together with his other duties, have taxed his time and strength more than ever, necessitating his absence from this Conference session."

And, typically, Annual Conference minutes would respond with a cordial resolution, such as this one from the 23rd Annual Conference in 1906: "WHEREAS, We received a letter from Brother W. B. Musselman that he could not be present at once but expected to be present some part of this Conference, therefore, Resolved, That we are very glad to hear from him. We are, however, sorry that he cannot be with us all the time, as we would greatly enjoy his presence and wise counsel during the entire Conference."

As of 1907, W.B. Musselman had a more convenient excuse for his recurring absence from Annual Conference, for that year saw the Herald Publishing House and the Gospel Worker Society leave Williamsport for a 15-building complex on West Seventh Street in Cleveland. For the rest of its history, the Gospel Worker Society would call Cleveland its home, and in 1922, the Herald Publishing House had, after expansion, become Union Gospel Press, the name by which the Cleveland printing ministry still operates.

As is often the case in ministry, W.B. Musselman had many who loved him and others who chafed at his leadership style. Noted the June 14, 1952 edition of the *Gospel Herald*, "Mr. Musselman was of the rugged type of preachers and was both loved and hated."

He was, at the very least, an innovator who could inspire devotion in his charges. He didn't just preach *at* his Gospel Workers; he preached *to* them, as evidenced from this sermon based on Jesus and the woman who gave two mites in Mark 12:41-44. "It may be a great lesson if the Lord Jesus Himself were here and saw some of you [Gospel Workers] laboring for the Lord," Musselman

stressed. “You attend to little odds and ends that apparently do not seem to count for very much. The Lord, however, would say that the Gospel Workers give their lives, their entire beings, while other people are having a good time. Others may make some pretty big shows, yet there are some who are giving their all, and it might be happening right in our sight.

“All those things are happening for a purpose,” he concluded in charging his Gospel Workers to remain faithful to the task.

W.B. Musselman died in 1938, and with him died the closest connection between the Gospel Worker Society and the Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church. His daughter, Miss Mary Euphie Musselman – known to many simply as Miss Euphie – took over as president of the Gospel Worker Society while also assuming leadership over Union Gospel Press.

Not that all connections between the Gospel Workers and what would become the Bible Fellowship Church had been severed. Several years later, C. Leslie Miller, who had served at Bethel Church in downtown Allentown, showed up in Cleveland in a leadership capacity. Dorothy Mann, the sister of longtime Gospel Worker Beulah Mann, remembers that it was Miller who introduced the concept of providing the Gospel Workers with financial remuneration.



Mary Euphie Musselman (center)

The Gospel Workers served in two capacities. Whenever a woman joined the Society, especially in later years, she moved to Cleveland and started in the printing ministry. That had not been the case early in the Gospel Workers’ history, but as the ministry became more institutionalized, the publishing wing became something of a training ground for new Gospel Workers.

While many Gospel Workers spent most, if not all, of their ministry lives in publishing (some even as long as 60 or 70 years), others moved on to mission work, which could be in Cleveland or elsewhere. Many of the later Gospel Workers moved from publishing service to “field work” at missions in Cleveland, Pittsburgh or Youngstown, Ohio. The separation from our BFC heritage is readily apparent, as none of those places produced MBC churches.

There were, in essence, two kinds of Gospel Workers, although many ladies engaged in both works. According to the late Doris Hoyle, whose mother Cora Schearer was a Gospel Worker, local Gospel Workers serving in Cleveland

weren't the same as missions Gospel Workers. In a 1997 interview, Doris Hoyle said her mother served part-time as a Gospel Worker, playing the banjo and handing out literature in places like Reading while also holding down outside employment. That option was not available to Gospel Workers who were serving at the Cleveland headquarters. "Cleveland Gospel Workers were supposed to be committed to it for life," Hoyle recalled. "PA was not the same. Cleveland Gospel Workers were printers. PA Gospel Workers did street meetings and church plants."

Her observations weren't entirely true, for open-air meetings were held in Cleveland, too, but Hoyle was correct in asserting that many of the later Gospel Workers at least primarily in publishing

Joyce Musselman, whose late husband Reuel (known as "Bud") was a grand-nephew of W.B. Musselman, concurred in a 1997 interview in which she described the Cleveland headquarters as "like a big fort," with a large front gate and big dormitories for the Gospel Workers. The ladies' lives were strictly regulated. They could not hold outside jobs. As Joyce Musselman recalled, her aunt, Hettie Rothermel, was not allowed to go shopping. The Society purchased the things its women needed in bulk quantities: underwear, stockings and the like. It was committed to providing everything its Workers needed.

Gospel Worker # 1

Lucy Musselman was a character. In an era and a culture where women were largely expected to quietly support their husbands, maybe that explains why she was once thought to be a witch.

It's true. The December, 26, 1899 edition of *The Gospel Banner* noted, "It will be amusing for the many friends of Mrs. L. Musselman, wife of the late Rev. J. Musselman, and mother of the president of the Gospel Workers Society, to read that she has been taken for a witch in Muncy, PA."

Muncy, in Lycoming County and near Williamsport, was one of many small towns where the Gospel Workers conducted mission outreach in the waning months of the 19th century. It appears that Lucy Musselman was witnessing door-to-door, but at one place, her efforts were stymied; the person who opened the door refused to admit Gospel Worker # 1. She did so with an explanation, according to *The Gospel Banner*. "If it is true what the people say, I cannot let you in."



Lucy Musselman

Lucy Musselman's curiosity was aroused, and she asked the woman what she meant, promising that she would withhold preaching a sermon on the spot. "They say you are a witch because so many people go to these meetings and can't stay away," the woman answered.

While opposition to the Gospel Workers' efforts had been especially strong, Lucy Musselman's boldness was readily apparent. To quote *The Gospel Banner*, "The eloquent, powerful and straight preaching of this same Mrs. Musselman was effectual in keeping up a great interest all last summer, while different churches were comparatively empty. No wonder if the members still believe in witches. The writer is anxious to know if they are descendants of Salem."

Lucy Musselman was not content to let her husband Jonas and son William preach the gospel. She, too, was a preacher. In a culture where formal education was largely frowned upon and certainly wasn't required, even for male preachers, Musselman thought herself as well-versed in the Bible as anyone. Indeed, her personal Bible was filled with notes, poems, theological jottings and much of her family history. It included statements like, "God has nothing worth having that is easy. There are no cheap good[s] in the heavenly market. Our redemption cost all that God had to give. And everything worth having is expensive."

Lucy's ministry experiences predated the formation of the Gospel Worker Society. Widowed in her mid-40s, she became a licensed evangelist in 1890. By 1892, she had been examined and accepted as a probationer, effectively giving her *carte blanche* to preach. Records list her as an assistant pastor in churches in Coopersburg, where she assisted two pastors, J.E. Fidler and J.B. Knerr. The early 1890s also saw her be assigned by the stationing committee to Emmaus, Ruch's, Springtown and Zion Hill.

The formation of the Gospel Worker Society proved to be right up Musselman's alley. In an article published in the April 25, 1893 *Gospel Banner*, her son had argued that it was not contrary to Scripture to allow a woman to preach. W.B. had undoubtedly heard his mother proclaim the Gospel. And so, in 1895, when he gathered the ladies who would become the charter class of Gospel Workers, Lucy was right there at the forefront, ready and eager to get to work anywhere and everywhere God would call her to go, ready to preach with her son's full consent.

The first quarterly conference of the Home Missionary Society in Sept., 1895 resulted in the stationing of these soon-to-be-named Gospel Workers. Lucy Musselman joined W.K. Ziegler and Agnes Ziegler in Nazareth, PA. It is unknown how long she remained at work in Nazareth, but Grace Bible Fellowship Church in that town traces its founding back to 1898 and noted that its 12 founding members started a church as a result of tent meetings in a peach orchard at the east end of Nazareth, moving in colder weather to a storefront on Main Street. Tent meetings, of course, were prime fodder for the Gospel Workers.

By 1898, the Gospel Worker Society and the Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church's Pennsylvania Conference had largely separated, at least in an official capacity. Records from that year listed only men as Annual Conference Licensed Evangelists. Lucy Musselman and 25 other women were now listed in a new category: "Gospel Workers."

She was in her 56th year, but Musselman wasn't about to slow down. Indeed, it's hard to keep track – largely because of the absence of available records – of all the places where she served. We do know, for instance, that Lucy was at the Gospel Worker mission in Pittsburgh in 1914, because she assisted at Anna Bachman's dedication ceremony. And we also know that she had moved, along with her son, to Cleveland in 1907 when the Herald Publishing House transferred its headquarters from Williamsport. Lucy, who was identified within Gospel Worker circles as "our beloved grandmother," would die in Cleveland on Oct. 20, 1916, and she is buried at Brooklyn Heights Cemetery, alongside her son W.B. and many of the first Gospel Workers.

The Rote sisters

If Lucy Musselman was, by virtue of her connection to the founder, Gospel Worker # 1, Dora Rote was a close second.

The Rotes, like many other Gospel Workers, came from Indiana roots, thereby showing connections, not to the Pennsylvania Conference of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ, but to some of our Midwestern branches.

After relocating to Reading in the early 1890s, Dora and her family sat under the teaching and influence of W.B. Musselman. Indeed, it was through W.B.'s preaching that Dora was saved. Dora was, in effect, a Gospel Worker even before there were Gospel Workers. She appears among the names of those who established the Graterford Congregation, and she joined C.H. Brunner in early mission work in Lehighton in 1893 – when she was, as yet, practically a newborn believer.

The Rote sisters were blessed with talents both musical and oratorical, making them perfect for the Gospel Workers Society. Dora Rote's evangelistic zeal reaped dividends everywhere she went, right from the start.

In Weissport/Lehighton, armed with an Annual Conference quarterly conference license as an "evangelist," Dora did just that, preaching the Gospel, and in the process, the Holy Spirit used her efforts to convict Richard Woodring of his need for a Savior. Woodring never forgot who it was who led him to the Lord, and when a daughter came along, he named her Dora Naomi Woodring. Dora Woodring later married Rudy Gehman, whose son Richard, along with his wife, would serve for many years as missionaries to Africa.

Dora Rote's rise in the Gospel Workers Society was immediate. In 1896, she served as secretary under President W.B. Musselman. She was also pursuing ordination of sorts with the MBC, in 1896 taking examinations on reading courses and topping her class in Bible, Philosophy of the Plan of Salvation, and Lessons in Holiness. Only in Church History was she found deficient (with a score of 25 percent), but that was no impediment to her Gospel

Workers ministry, and by 1900, she was listed in Annual Conference reports as “A District Leader of the Gospel Workers Society.”

Like her fellow Gospel Workers, Dora never married. She apparently never considered her single status as a detriment, for her singleness allowed her to travel anywhere she was needed. And travel she did, to the extent that it’s nearly impossible to pin her down. Mt. Carmel came under her leadership. By 1912 she was serving in the Altoona Mission. There were always places to go and plenty of work to be done, as she wrote in the Nov. 8, 1917 *Gospel Herald*. “These are busy days for all missionaries. Even when their hands are full of work, they can still see so much that ought to be done. There are so many who are spiritually



Dora B. Rote

hungry that ought to be fed.”

Even among Gospel Workers, Dora’s gifts and exuberance stood out. Noted the Dec. 19, 1912 *Gospel Banner*, “Miss Rote was active in the public work for 20 years without intermission and today stands out for devotion and piety. On the pulpit few are her equal.”

“I have had some wonderful experiences since I have received the Holy Ghost – testings of such a nature that I could never have stood at one time,” she recalled. “But, oh, the Holy Ghost so sweetly preserves me. For myself I was not ready for the trial, because I didn’t know it was coming; but surely He was there, and His presence and comfort I never realized more. I know He is with me, and all that comes to me, be it good or evil, comes by his permission, and He turns it all into blessing. Praise His dear name! I am resting sweetly.”

Like many of her co-workers, Dora Rote moved to Cleveland and labored faithfully until her death in 1948. She spent more than 50 years as an active Gospel Worker and was always well thought of. At her memorial service, one Gospel Worker noted, “Miss Rote once said, ‘If they were to put me out the back door, I will come in the front door because I am called by the Lord.’” At the same service, Franny Wismer said of her co-worker, “Fifty-four years next month we were stationed together for the first time, and fifty-five years ago we first met in a tent meeting. I liked her from the beginning. We had always been friends.”

Dora Rote outlived her sister by 24 years. Rosa Rote died on Dec. 6, 1924 at the Cleveland headquarters of the Gospel Workers Society, so the *Altoona Mirror* reported. She died from an illness with an innocent beginning.

She had been scratched by a cat, but the scratch developed into phlebitis and later into blood poisoning. Nine days later, she traveled from Altoona to Cleveland for treatment, only to succumb just over one month after she was scratched.

Rote was the superintendent of the Gospel Workers Society's Altoona mission, which had its residence and assembly hall at 1118 11th Avenue. Altoona's mission was a small one. Rote's obituary noted that all three surviving workers traveled to Cleveland for her funeral. Like many others, she was laid to rest in Cleveland at the age of 48.

By then, Rosa was already a veteran of 30 years of Gospel Workers service, having joined the organization in her teens. She may not have held the same prominence as her sister, but Rosa, like Dora, was a leader and a stalwart Gospel Worker, as evidenced by her many years of service as superintendent of the Altoona mission. She was a familiar figure in Altoona, as noted even in that city's daily newspaper. "By reason of her appearance in street meetings and her identification with Christ during the period of her residence here," the *Mirror* reported. "She was a most zealous worker, filled with the spirit of service to others. She devoted much time to visiting the sick and she was active in Bible conferences and other forms of Christian service."

The responsibilities of a Gospel Worker

It was Gospel Worker # 1, Lucy Musselman, who in 1897 assembled the Gospel Workers Manual. It is unknown whether or not she assisted in the formation of many of the rules that provided the Gospel Workers' strict regimen. Given her strong personality, it seems highly likely that she was a driving force in the manual's development.

The Gospel Workers Manual featured a doctrinal statement made up of 29 Articles of Faith. A few of these are worthy of mention in passing, for they reflect much of our MBC theological heritage.

Article IX, Faith – "Genuine and saving faith is that simple trust in the promises of God in Christ through which all doubt is excluded from the heart and peace and rest are produced in the soul according to the language of the Holy Spirit."

Article XI, Sanctification – "It is an instantaneous act of God through the Holy Ghost by faith in the atoning merits of Christ's blood and constitutes the believer holy inasmuch as it excludes depravity and all unrighteousness from the heart. We therefore is [sic] perfect – perfectly saved by the will of God, perfectly performed in the soul."

Article XVIII, Foot Washing – "The Lord Jesus has instituted and commanded feet washing who also Himself washed the disciples['] feet and has thereby given an example that we 'ought to wash one another's feet.'"

Article XXII, Self Defense – "Jesus has forbidden His disciples and followers all revenge and resistance with the divine injunction 'Resist not evil' [and] again 'my kingdom is not of this world....'"

Article XXV, Ordaining Women – "We believe that woman's work is just as sacred and important as man's work and women as well as men cannot stand

nor do any thing acceptable to God without the Holy Ghost and Him continually abiding in her and guiding her into all truth...Therefore we recommend devoted women who are decided in reference to their call for life to be ordained as missionaries [home or foreign] by the laying on of hands by the President and others and so giving them over to the Holy Ghost forever as a living sacrifice for God.”

The final sentence of Article XXVI, the Lord’s Day, provided a transition from doctrine to practice for the prospective Gospel Worker. “We believe...in doing good on all days and therefore go about our mission daily entering any place at any time delivering our messages spreading the Gospel and laboring to the glory of God and salvation of men.”

The Gospel Workers operated by a strict and well-defined set of rules which could easily be mistaken for legalism. Each day during the summer season (May 1 to Nov. 1), Gospel Workers had to rise by 4:30 a.m. (they were given an extra half-hour to sleep from Nov. 1 through May 1st) so as to “expand lungs in the morning air.”

After dusting the floor, Gospel Workers held a united Bible study and then dressed for their ministry before going to breakfast. They had to be ready to visit no later than 9 a.m. in the summer months and were not allowed to return to the mission until 4:30 p.m. But their daily service was far from complete. After preparing dinner, they had to daily record how many books they had sold, and daily Bible study was also regimented, after which they must prepare for open-air meetings or other ministry. Services would conclude by 9:30 p.m., after which sales were noted, the doors were locked and the hall was again swept before retiring by 10 p.m. Each day’s ministry was accompanied by this solemn reminder: “Never retire with a murmuring spirit or fall asleep without having Jesus in your mind, and peace with every one, as far as lies [with]in you [being] ready for His coming.”

Sundays afforded a few exceptions to the daily regiment. There was no Sunday evening sweeping of the mission hall, and after worship services, “all workers are at perfect liberty to rest as they choose between the hours of 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.” But that, too, was structured. Gospel Workers were instructed to keep quiet, read, write, rest or sleep. This is Workers rest day or Sabbath.”

There were various and sundry other rules which were also applied, giving the Gospel Workers a Spartan appearance and lifestyle. Their apparel was simple: “They will wear no article of dress not strictly plain, corsets or injurious substitutes strictly prohibited. They are to wear the uniform as adopted and supplied by the Gospel Workers Uniform Department before they can become full members of the gospel Workers Society, and all probationers are required to wear the adopted badge from the time they enter the work.”

In short, the Gospel Worker’s life was not her own. They were not allowed to keep weekly or pre-arranged correspondence with old friends or relatives, for doing so “always continually divides their virtues.” They were not allowed to have “especial stopping places to loaf or chat.” Also forbidden was

correspondence with the opposite sex. A Gospel Worker started as a “Miss” and was to spend her entire life as a “Miss.”

Cheerful obedience was the expected norm. “It is expected and essential that every worker is dead to the old man and purified by the blood; whenever any worker manifests the carnal mind in stubbornness, harshness, touchiness, lightness, evil speaking, murmuring, fault-finding, unkind criticism, jealousy, love of praise, or flattery, selfishness or laziness or love of ease and the fear of man which bringeth a snare, shrinking from reproach, etc., such an one shall be corrected or rebuked by any other member according [to] St. Paul’s advice to Timothy [in] 1 Tim. 5:20.”

For many, the restrictions of the ministry were seen as light burdens, not heavy weights. Longevity in the Gospel Worker Society was more the norm than the exception. Many of the first Workers were still hard at work many years later. Cora Felty and Franny Wismer, two of the charter members, were still listed as active Gospel Workers in the 1920 Cleveland census records.

How to become a Gospel Worker

According to the Gospel Worker Manual, all interested women had to send an application, accompanied by a written recommendation from a “spiritual overseer,” directly to W.B. Musselman, who would then respond. If Musselman was “favorably impressed,” the prospect’s application would be studied by a committee that consisted of W.B. Musselman and two Gospel Workers he hand-picked for that role.

A satisfactory review would then bring the applicant to the following Gospel Workers Quarterly Conference, at which she would publicly state the nature of her call and would then be subjected to an oral examination on “doctrine, consecration, etc.” If she passed the oral test (by a two-thirds vote of Quarterly Conference), she became a probationer for a six-month period.

Upon approval as a probationer, she would receive a quarterly conference license, subject to ratification and annual renewal. Should she serve satisfactorily throughout her probationary period, she would return to a Quarterly Conference for an examination on doctrine and regulations. Should she earn a test grade to the consent of another two-thirds vote of Quarterly Conference, she would be told to turn in her probationer’s badge and trade it in for a Gospel Workers badge “with number in regular order.”

Again, in the early years, it was clearly understood that not all prospective Gospel Workers had their whole lives to devote to the ministry. With that in mind, a separate set of procedures were adopted for the reception of “local workers,” described as “Members of the Gospel Workers Society who are called to work and are not able to be active in the work all the time.” They would receive local licenses by Quarterly Conference on most of the same conditions as full-time Gospel Workers.

Separate guidelines were listed for two higher positions: that of “district leaders” and those Gospel Workers who were called to be ordained as ministers of the gospel. As Bruce Musselman, another descendant of W.B. Musselman,

noted in a 1996 phone interview, “The Gospel Workers did not call it ‘preaching,’ but that’s what it was.” And ordination was required.

District leaders “must be sound on separation in the fullest sense, also in reference to their conviction for the future and very zealous for the right, with holy boldness accompanied with the Holy Ghost.” Ministers were required to be “very positive in reference to their future separation, backed up by good sound Bible conviction which has already been substantiated and manifested by their past lives....”

Such was the life of a Gospel Worker. She was to give all of herself to the cause of Christ, no matter how hard the work or where it took her. She had to come in as a “Miss,” and – with few exceptions – she had to remain a “Miss.” No husbands. No children. Instead, through her evangelistic efforts, she was to claim “spiritual children” – those who had responded, by faith, to the call of Christ for salvation.

Furloughs were almost nonexistent, vacations unheard of. A 1912 *Gospel Banner* reported, “The time of regular furloughs for Gospel Worker Society Workers used to be two days, but is now three days. Very few avail themselves of this opportunity.” One Gospel Worker, Amanda Schaeffer, was cited as having been active in the ministry for 18 years. During that period, she had taken but “three or four two-day furloughs.”

On preaching

The Gospel Workers Manual’s Rule XIII, Restrictions for Gospel Workers, assumed that each Gospel Worker was a preacher of the Gospel. “They shall not surrender their respective pulpits to anyone unless in an exceptional case to parties recommended by good known authority...”

In other words, zeal for preaching was expected. The Gospel Workers, in public squares and tent meetings, and even in door-to-door ministry, were expected to preach. And preach they did. They didn’t just speak or share or teach; they preached with Holy Ghost



Street Meeting, Pittsburg PA 1916

conviction. As R.C. Reichenbach noted, preaching was part of the Gospel Workers’ unabashed approach to ministry. “Oh, yes, they’d preach,” he said. “They were great in colportage. They’d go from door to door, and even into saloons. They had no fear.”

It was clearly understood, right at the start, that Gospel Workers had the freedom to preach. When the Home Missionary Society (remember, the Gospel Workers hadn't officially been given that designation yet) held its first quarterly meeting in early September, 1895 in a hall at the corner of Berwick and Center Sts. in South Easton, women delivered the sermons. Lizzie Christman preached the Saturday evening sermon from Philippians 3:10. After W. B. Musselman provided "appropriate remarks," the session continued on Sunday morning as Dora Rote preached using Acts 20:28 as her text. Rote was "followed by a goodly number of speakers with very spiritual remarks, and Franny Wismer then preached from Isaiah 43:2, "with her usual boldness."

Several other Gospel Workers delivered messages before the meeting concluded, setting the stage for years of Gospel Workers proclaiming the Gospel to the lost and to backsliders.

Sarah G. Brunner, who was serving at the Sunbury mission, wrote this entry in the *Gospel Worker Society Herald's* Oct. 29, 1904 edition: "We had an inspiring message by Sister [Elmira] Zimmerman, which was rich and spicy, backed up by the Holy Ghost, followed by a sweet testimony meeting."

Their freedom to preach the Gospel did not make these women outcasts within Mennonite Brethren in Christ circles, accusations that Lucy Musselman was a witch notwithstanding. Minutes of the 1885 General Conference, which predated the founding of the Gospel Worker Society by a decade, read, "Whereas, we believe that God, in former times, chose holy women to prophesy and labor in the church, therefore Resolved, that we allow a sister thus chosen of God, to preach and to labor for the salvation of souls, under the supervision of a minister or presiding elder."



Sarah G. Brunner

The stage had therefore been set for powerful preachers like Musselman and Dora Rote to come forward in Gospel Worker garb. The same 1885 General Conference minutes noted 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 exception [for the recognition of] ordination."

Jill Davidson notes that the Gospel Workers were filling a void, even at the turn of the 19th century. Many places lacked male preachers who were committed to getting the Gospel out to the lost. Where there were no men, women like Lucy Musselman and Dora Rote willingly stepped in. The Gospel Workers provided the ticket to do what they felt gifted to do. “The interest of women in entering a full-time ministry and the need to preach the Gospel among the unsaved, un-churched communities in some areas led to the official organization of the Gospel Worker Society,” she wrote. Eventually, the Gospel Heralds provided a viable training ground for men seeking vocational preaching ministry, but the stage had already been set. In cities and towns lacking a substantial evangelical witness, the Gospel Workers were on hand to proclaim Jesus as Savior.

The primacy of publishing

W.B. Musselman always maintained that the sales of literature were of primary importance for his Gospel Worker Society. “The primary work of this Society is, first, Colportage work, to scatter good instructive literature...” he stressed. Literature, after all, could go places his Gospel Workers could not. And, besides that, the publication and sale of literature could provide the financial wherewithal to keep the ministry advancing and to meet the needs of the women who were serving so faithfully.

So Musselman always saw printing as a means to a greater end, as noted in the June 17, 1916 edition of his *Gospel Herald*. “Missionary colportage is the advance guard of the Gospel message. The colporter is, indeed, a traveling preacher...the colporter comes in contact with people in every walk in life. He distributes his tracts and volumes in the home.”

“It is a sad fact, however, that 60,000,000 of our 100,000,000 population are not in attendance upon any church or mission station,” the unattributed *Gospel Herald* article continues, “And moreover, the usual evangelistic and missionary efforts put forth do not gain to any perceptible extent upon the non-church-going. If these are ever reached, it must and will be by means of the printed page and its house-to-house distribution through missionary colporters.”

While Williamsport and – later – Cleveland are most often cited as the



Headquarters, Williamsport PA

publishing headquarters of the Gospel Worker Society, the Dec. 19, 1912 issue of the *Gospel Banner* notes that the first book headquarters of the Gospel Worker Society was located in a hall in South Bethlehem. The first few years saw publishing headquarters move around quite a bit – from Bethlehem to the parsonage occupied by Elder O.S. Hillegas, and then to Watsonstown, PA. From there, book headquarters moved to Williamsport...and remained there for eight years.

By 1902-03, having sold periodicals like the *Rams Horn* and the *Gospel Banner*, the Gospel Worker Society was seeing the need for its own literature – published material more suitable to W.B. Musselman’s doctrinal positions. The first publication was, aptly named, “The Gospel Worker Society Herald.” A printing press had been purchased and the publishing work grew...and grew and grew some more.

Minutes of 1905 Annual Conference noted that sales of literature by the Gospel Heralds – who sold materials published in Williamsport – had reached \$4,000. C.H. Brunner reported, “The *G.W.S. Herald* sells excellently.”

W.B. Musselman’s report at that same Annual Conference hit upon some somber chords. There were fewer available halls and only a handful of new Gospel Workers. While evangelistic work was increasing with 3200 open air meetings held over the course of the previous year, a little reading between the lines shows Musselman more encouraged by his printing ministry than by anything else. He reported that “8100 *G.W.S. Heralds* are published per week. They expect to have 10,000 by another year. They receive many encouraging reports from readers of the *G.W.S. Herald*.”

A year later, Musselman devoted most of his Annual Conference report to the advances his publishing house in Williamsport had made. “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 [sic]. We are also printing a great many tracts.”

Musselman noted that 1,000 *Gospel Heralds* were being sold each week in Pittsburgh alone. But almost in the same sentence, he noted that the Gospel Workers’ Williamsport location was becoming increasingly inadequate. “We are still launching out by faith and are aiming at a larger permanent home and plant in some large city,” he explained.

That “large city” proved to be Cleveland, and Musselman moved the operation there, to a 15-building complex on W. Seventh Street, in 1907. As he reported that year, “We are laying the foundation for a permanent work there.” The change of venue proved to be immediately successful, as Musselman reported in a letter he sent to the 26th Annual Conference in 1909. God never supplied so wonderfully financially as in the past year. In the month of Sept. we printed weekly as high as 16,600 copies of the *Gospel Banner* and *Gospel*

Herald, besides over 4,000 copies of a 32 page monthly. Our literature sales exceeded everything previous.”

Success in one area, however, led to subtle downsizing in other areas of ministry. Jill Davidson observed that by 1911, the Gospel Workers Society was more widely seen as a publishing house, with its *Gospel Herald* and *Gospel Messenger* and various other materials, than as a ministry whose focus was public proclamation of the Gospel. It wasn't that the Gospel Workers no longer held open-air meetings. They still did, and they still went door-to-door, both witnessing and selling their evangelistic publications. But they were becoming known more for what they printed than what they preached. It may be more than a curiosity that our future churches in Shamokin and Sunbury were turned over to the Gospel Herald Society in 1907, the same year the Gospel Workers Society moved out to Cleveland, to larger publishing headquarters.

Gospel Worker Society publications offered a little of everything. The *G.W.S. Herald*, for instance, included articles by a variety of theologians from a variety of theological positions – from Finney to Phillips Brooks, writer of “O Little Town of Bethlehem.” And many of the Gospel Workers themselves proved to be regular contributors. Sarah Brunner, Annie Halteman, Elmira Zimmerman and L.M. Musselman (Lillian Musselman, the daughter of W.B.) supplied articles, and each edition included regular space for reports, testimonials and personal letters from those who had been ministered to by the Gospel Workers.

As the years passed, the ministry in Cleveland split into two divisions: Union Gospel Press and the Gospel Worker Society. Women entering the ministry started in the publishing end, and while there was fluid movement between printing and proclamation, many Gospel Workers spent their entire ministry lives in printing, packing and shipping.

Gospel Workers and Gospel Heralds

It is not possible to detail the efforts of the Gospel Workers without paying due homage to their brother ministry organization, the Gospel Herald Society. When the Gospel Workers got their start in 1895, they did so as a ministry for both men and women before quickly becoming a female-only organization.

That left a felt void for men, and C.H. Brunner stepped into that void in 1899, when he created the Gospel Herald Society as a brother organization. Notes BFC historian Harold Shelly, the Gospel Herald Society was “a non-denominational training school for gaining practical experience in ministry. The society became a major instrument in the extension of the church into urban areas.”

Brunner, like W.B. Musselman before him, saw a void and sought to fill it. While Musselman had largely focused on ministry for women, Brunner explained the Gospel Heralds' inception by writing, “A number of young men had been expressing a call from the Lord, asking for opportunities in missionary work.”

Similarities between the Gospel Workers and Gospel Heralds were immediately apparent. Like the Gospel Workers, the Heralds wore uniforms. Like the Workers, Gospel Heralds were required to play musical instruments, at

least at first. Like the Workers, the Heralds established missions, starting with an outpost on Germantown Avenue in Philadelphia. The late Jansen Hartman, himself a Gospel Herald, recalled some of those experiences this way, in the process sounding very much like one of the Gospel Workers: “We went along with my brothers to street-corner meetings or to services in a city park. These were occasions for mission converts to aggressively seek out lost people to bring them to Christ.”

And, like the Workers, while doctrine was important, practical ministry was inherently more valuable, as noted in the Dec. 25, 1903 *Gospel Worker Society Herald*. “Practice without theory [if that is possible] is better than theory without practice.”

While Brunner gave the Gospel Heralds their start, W.G. Gehman was effectively the motivating force that gave the Heralds their ministry muscle. There were never very many Gospel Heralds, but they were certainly active, as Gehman reported at Annual Conference in 1908: “The young men are doing very well. Some of them are very strong characters. They are loyal and preach and work with enthusiasm. Their work is very difficult. Their domestic work in the missions, preaching every night and making a great many calls speaks well for their energy and faithfulness.”

While the Gospel Workers and Gospel Heralds held no official ministry link, both were church-planting organizations, and quite often their ministries would overlap. Long after the Gospel Workers had stopped starting missions that would lead to the establishment of future Bible Fellowship Churches, the Gospel Heralds were still at work, producing new congregations – up until the 1940s, with churches like Brooklyn, NY.

Many of our current churches – Lebanon, Wallingford, Maple Glen, Harrisburg and several others come quickly to mind – were started by the Gospel Heralds. But several others were started by the Gospel Workers and then turned over to the Gospel Heralds, who supplied capable men to preach and shepherd new congregations.

Sometimes the evangelistic efforts of the Gospel Workers produced men who, desiring to please the Lord by entering ministry, would be passed along to the Gospel Herald Society for training. This happened more than once, as R.C. Reichenbach, one of a small handful of surviving Gospel Heralds, recalls. Reichenbach cited the example of Tommy Turnbull, who came from the Gospel Workers to the Gospel Heralds, served in the Herald mission in Chester (later Wallingford), and went on to pastor churches in Graterford and Elizabethtown, NJ, before health issues caused him to leave the MBiC for the Evangelical Congregational Church.

R.C. Reichenbach, now 96, remembers a distant kinship between the Heralds and Workers, and not just because the Workers’ Union Gospel Press was supplying colportage material for the Heralds. “There was no connection between the Gospel Workers and the MBiC and the Gospel Heralds, except a relationship of mutual love and respect for each other,” Reichenbach said. “They

were a separate organization. But there was always a friendship with them. There was a relationship that way.”

Reichenbach’s only complaint is that he feels many of his faithful fellow workers were slighted along the way. “It seems that the Gospel Worker Society gets more attention than the Gospel Heralds, which is unfortunate,” he said. “I felt that that was unfair.” At the same time, when his ministry travels took him to Cleveland, he received a warm welcome from the Gospel Workers. “They took us in, we stayed overnight,” Reichenbach explained. “They were always very gracious. They would treat us very well – and what a meal they would prepare for us.”

Relations with the MBC

As of 1898, the Gospel Worker Society was a separate entity from the Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church. Musselman’s publications clearly identified the Gospel Workers as “non-denominational” or even “undenominational.” But the Gospel Workers and the MBC frequently crossed paths. Annual Conference collected special offerings for the Gospel Workers. Gospel Workers turned their missions over to the Gospel Heralds. The relationship between these two independent entities was usually a cordial one, as noted in the minutes of 1900 Annual Conference: “A spirit of unity exists between the [Mennonite Brethren in Christ] Church and the Gospel Worker Society more than ever before.”

The Gospel Heralds sold materials provided by Union Gospel Press. Many Gospel Workers came from Mennonite Brethren in Christ backgrounds. The blood of the Musselman family still runs strong through our denominational veins. Sarah Brunner was the sister of C.H. Brunner. Annie Heffner has many relatives in the Bible Fellowship Church, among them Bruce Heffner. R.C. Reichenbach remembers how Annie Heffner would visit her brother, W.F. Heffner, and when the Harrisburg church was about to build its new sanctuary, the Gospel Worker Society sent a check for \$10,000. “I think it was through her efforts,” Reichenbach said.

Those who attended camp meeting at Mizpah Grove often found themselves listening to the teaching and singing and playing of the Gospel Workers who were invited there on a regular basis.

“A band of Gospel Workers have spent a most blessed day at the Mizpah Grove Camp in the past week,” reported Gospel Worker Annie Spellman in the Aug. 30, 1913 *Gospel Herald*. She went on to describe the MBiC folks who attended. “This is a most marvelous people – young and old, in full fellowship with the Spirit. They are conspicuous for their plainness in dress and speech, for their simplicity in worship, and for their fervency of spirit.”

The Mizpah Grove interchange continued for many years. R.C. Reichenbach remembers seeing the Gospel Workers at the Allentown camp meeting. “It was only when they went to camp meeting at Mizpah Grove that I saw them,” he recalled. “They would come in and sing and speak at Mizpah Grove. They all played instruments; that was one of the requirements, I think. They were always in uniform, and they always gave testimonies.”

The start of future BFC churches

Mount Carmel

Mount Carmel was one of several coal region towns targeted by the early Gospel Workers. Indeed, it may have attracted the attention of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church even before the 1895 meeting. Alva Cassel's church history cited the year 1894 – a year before the Gospel Worker Society's inception – as the starting date for the work that eventually became the Mount Carmel Church.

It isn't hard to see why Mount Carmel became a focus for the Gospel Workers. A census noted that the town was 85 percent Catholic by background.

In 1896, before they were even largely known as Gospel Workers, the Gospel Workers were at work in Mount Carmel, as

evidenced by this report in the Nov. 24, 1896 *Gospel Banner*. "The work in general under the auspices of the W. H. M. [Women's Home Missionary] of [the] M. B. C. Church is nicely advancing. God is working marvelously. The forces are well united. Three halls are opened so far, and we feel very much encouraged. We have stand-by of the best stamp at all the places – yet not so many at some as at others. The district leader has great interest in the work there, and many have been converted, sanctified, and healed, and also baptized. Victory is here, and greater victory ahead."

That same report noted that 24 people had just been baptized in Mt. Carmel, which was hailed as "a model town of free Americanism". "Nearly all were so filled that they had to be carried out of the water. Great manifestations."

Rosa Rote was heading up the work as of Thanksgiving, 1896, but she was soon joined by her sister Dora. The Dec. 1, 1896 Mount Carmel report cited Dora Rote as assigned to Mount Carmel, with Annie Weutzel [sic – Wentzel] serving as band leader. Wentzel had no small role in the work, as evidenced by a *Gospel Banner* report that appeared three weeks later. "Mt. Carmel is still booming. Souls are being saved right along. Sister Weutzel is in charge when the D. L. [District Leader] is at the other places attending to the work. She is encouraged in the work."

Dora Rote's report of Dec. 29, 1896 hints at the spiritual warfare that the early Gospel Workers faced. "For some time a number of souls have been convicted at this place yet would not yield to God until last night there was a



**Gospel Worker Sunday School,
Youngstown OH**

melting time among the Christians and a wonderful spirit of prevailing prayer was manifested," she wrote. "There could hardly be any singing; all were praying. When God's people get in communion with the blessed Holy Ghost and are altogether taken up with Him and His presence, their souls will be saved.

"We look for still greater victory at Mt. Carmel," she concluded.

That would come in 1897. That spring saw the Gospel Workers rent space over the post office at the corner of 4th and Oak Sts. in Mount Carmel. W.B. Musselman's May 4, 1897 report notes the transitory nature of ministry as a Gospel Worker. Neither of the Rote sisters nor Wentzel were mentioned, but Musselman cited the efforts of Anne Spellman and Mamie Caskie, who "are loved by all." Besides that, a local girl, Christa Hopson, was serving her own community as a Gospel Worker.

By the start of 1899, leadership of the Mount Carmel Mission had passed on to Bertha Snyder, a native of Blandon.

As was undoubtedly the case everywhere else, there was opposition to the ministry. W.B. Musselman noted in late January, 1899, "We were just informed that 7 or 8 backsliders were reclaimed at Mt. Carmel, and a number of seekers are at the altar. The work is doing grandly there all along." Musselman was hinting at one of two possibilities. Either these were professing Christians who were not meeting the standards of Christian living that he and the Gospel Workers expected, or else he was referring to those who had responded earlier in the work but had gone back to worldly ways, thereby requiring ongoing attention from the Gospel Workers.

But God granted the Gospel Workers great success, too. The dedicated evangelistic efforts of these women were leading to the salvation of both men and women. A Feb. 21 1899 Gospel Banner entry noted as much: "I praise the Lord from the bottom of my heart for saving a sinner like me, and for putting such peace and joy in my soul," wrote James Manney, Jr. "The Lord is indeed precious to my soul and keeps me day by day, and I never can praise Him enough for what He has done for me. I love to speak for my Savior, and to let the world know that I am saved. We are having grand meetings here in Mt. Carmel. The Lord is leading His children wonderfully. The op-en air meetings are good; we are having victory through the blood of Jesus."

Manney signed his entry, "Your brother, saved and waiting for the coming of the Lord."

Isabella Gotshall, who would later serve as a Gospel Worker, was saved through the efforts of the Gospel Workers and was quick to ascribe her salvation to those faithful women in the uniforms who were unafraid about sharing their faith. "I praise God that he ever sent the despised Gospel Workers to Mount Carmel, who came and gave us the milk of the Word," she wrote in 1899. "I was a professor of Christ; more than a possessor; sometimes happy and sometimes doubting. Now I can rejoice in a full salvation. I am glad for the blessed Holy Ghost, the Comforter. I do praise His dear name for the healing power...I praise God that there are some shepherds who will take care of the sheep and feed them with the best meat in due season; and the lambs he even carries. We have some sheep and some lambs, but he takes care of us all."

Gotshall's letter added a note of praise for a pastor God had supplied for the Mount Carmel Mission. "Praise the Lord that He ever sent us such a pastor," she wrote. "We are indeed a happy family. Come and see us, as it will do good to such as can come. You can find us worshiping above the post office. I praise God for His goodness toward me and I mean to go through for Him at any cost. He put such a love in my soul, and my only cry is to be more like Jesus."

That pastor was H.B. Musselman. By 1899, H.B. was on the scene in Mount Carmel as the work there expanded beyond the efforts of the Gospel Workers. It was often that way. The Gospel Workers would establish a mission. They would preach and pray and sell literature and hold open-air meetings, but they would also call in Mennonite Brethren in Christ preachers like H. B. Musselman to speak at open air meetings and in camp meeting settings. Cooperation was a key to missions that often resulted in the establishment of future Bible Fellowship churches.

So H.B. Musselman, who had earlier been praised as the "boy preacher" for his passionate, gifted sermons, wrote on May 15, 1899, "Our open air meetings are glorious—and well attended. Conviction seems to seize upon the people, many are at times weeping and sobbing in their seats."

By June 15, 1899, Mount Carmel already had its own Sunday School, complete with a superintendent in N.A. Habenstine. A month later, H.B. Musselman referred to the cooperative efforts that were spreading out from Mount Carmel itself. "We had the privilege to assist the Gospel Workers, in attending their open-air meetings at Frackville on Saturday night," he wrote. "A large number from this place had been conveyed to the above named place with coaches, under the supervision of our venerable Bro. David Camp. Bro. F. W. Stein was also on hand and took a number with his team."

H.B. Musselman was Mount Carmel's first official pastor. One year later, W.G. Gehman succeeded him, and the church was well on its way.

Nazareth

The Gospel Workers came to Nazareth for the first time in 1896, with Lucy Musselman leading the way. By autumn, Franny Wismer had joined her, and as of Dec. 1, 1896, it was noted that Lucy Musselman was serving as district leader, Franny Wismer as band leader in Nazareth and Elmira Dech filling the same position in nearby Plainfield Township. Later, Cora Felty replaced Franny Wismer as band leader in Nazareth, and it was Felty who reported in the Dec. 29, 1896 edition of *The Gospel Banner*, "The Lord has manifested His healing power, also cleansing power and these things the Devil could not stand... In visiting from house to house, I find some [people] really hungry to know something of Christ and of the Holy Ghost... Let us move on shouting the victory through the blood of Jesus."

The official Nazareth church history reports that 1897 was a year of "continual blessing" for the Gospel Workers stationed there. A year later, W.B. Musselman appointed J.B. Knerr to be Nazareth's first licensed preacher, with W.B. serving as his supervisor. That year also saw the Mennonite Brethren in Christ appropriate \$40 to help shepherd the six members of the Plainfield

congregation, six more in Nazareth, and the 100 Sunday School pupils in that district.

As was the case elsewhere, the Gospel Worker Society paid the first month's rent and helped to furnish the hall and living spaces for its workers, who were supposed to be self-supporting. "But in new openings, eating on the boxes and doing without carpet is often the condition of our workers' homes in the beginning; and the workers accepted donations of eatables, bedding, furniture, carpets, tracts, etc.," reported the Feb. 1896 minutes of Annual Conference.

The Gospel Workers were busy. They went door-to-door, held open-air meetings and split their evangelistic efforts between Bath and Bangor. They sold the *Gospel Herald* and the *Daily Food Wall Roll*. Converts to Christ were baptized in East Bushkill stream, and Bible studies were held on a regular basis as the fledgling church met in homes and storefronts before finally renting a hardware store on North Main St, just across from a well established Moravian church.

In a town of just 2,000, with unpaved streets and 30 recently-defined city blocks, what would become Grace Bible Fellowship Church was clearly in the foundational stage.

Shamokin

The Gospel Worker Society came to Shamokin in 1897 as part of its concerted efforts to evangelize the coal region's many small towns. Ministering in their distinctive uniforms and in pairs, the Gospel Workers evangelized from house to house, "meeting and praying with the local people and usually holding prayer meetings every night, either in halls, people's homes, or out in the open air. Their work was inspired and guided by the Holy Spirit and because of that, they became known for their excitement and enthusiasm in preaching the Word."

Camp meeting was held in the summer of 1897, as *The Gospel Banner* reported. "There were many saved, as the altar was crowded with seeking souls at every opportunity." Another *Gospel Banner* entry noted, "The Shamokin camp meeting was a grand success, exceeding above expectations; wonderful unity." Some 30 tents were set up for the first of several meetings run by the Gospel

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Workers, and even though the altar was sizable – 32 feet long – it was frequently filled to capacity with people who came forward to beg forgiveness and receive Jesus as Savior.

By 1900, a meeting hall on Shamokin Street was being rented, but the Gospel Worker Society continued to operate in the Shamokin area over the next several years before the Gospel Herald Society, under W.G. Gehman, took over. In addition to sending Gospel Heralds to Shamokin, three Gospel Heralds quickly came from the Shamokin area, and one of them – John Reitz – went on to become ordained.

In 1907, W.G. Gehman summed up the Gospel Worker Society's efforts this way: "The Gospel Workers Society mission at Shamokin has been turned over to us and is now supplied by Gospel Heralds. The work there has been making steady progress." What is now Calvary Bible Fellowship Church asked to be admitted into Annual Conference in 1915 and was received on Oct. 18, 1915 as Shamokin Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church. Horace A. Kauffman was appointed by Conference as the church's first pastor.

Sunbury

It was January, 1904, and H. B. Musselman couldn't help but be excited. The efforts of the Gospel Workers were beginning to pay off in Sunbury, and Musselman, the much-praised "boy preacher" of the Pennsylvania Conference of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ, wrote about the tabernacle meetings with a flourish of enthusiasm. The weather was cold, but the work was heating up. "Since our last report one soul was gloriously saved and several raised their hands for prayer," Musselman wrote. "God has a people here who realize that this world is not their home, therefore are laying up treasures in heaven and looking forth to the coming of Jesus, which, we believe, is very soon."

The same edition of the *Gospel Workers Society Herald* also included a report from Miss C.B. Stametz, who had witnessed many of the same things H.B. Musselman had seen. Her perspective, however, was different. He was the preacher; she was the faithful Gospel Worker who had put in the legwork, going door to door and even – in this case – from prison cell to prison cell.

Stametz wrote that she and a fellow worker had engaged in prison evangelism. A number of the class also gathered in the jail, and as we prayed and sang praises unto our God, the prisoners were very attentive." Indeed, two of them responded to an invitation to receive Jesus as Savior by raising their hands.

The following autumn saw the work progressing, although not without challenges from a worldly target audience. "The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad," wrote Sarah G. Brunner, song leader for a mission that also included Elmira Zimmerman and Mary Holtzapple. "He has a few here whose garments are not defiled. They are rejoicing in the hope of His coming."

Sara K. Kuntz, another Gospel Worker serving at the Sunbury mission by Nov., 1904, wrote that the ministry in Sunbury was enjoyable. "I enjoy the privilege of going from house to house to tell lost souls of Jesus' love and power to save," she wrote. "We meet many who tell us they once were Christians but

are living very indifferent...we also meet such who are filled with the love of Christ.

"They welcome us into their homes and although many can't come to the meetings still they are interested in those yet outside of Christ," Kuntz concluded.

By 1904, Sunbury was an established mission that had been bearing fruit for seven years. The work in Sunbury had begun back on Oct. 1, 1897 as W.B. Musselman and his Gospel Workers set up camp on S. Third Street. By October 10, 1907, the Gospel Workers transferred oversight of the Sunbury mission to the Gospel Herald Society. Annual Conference minutes from 1907 presented by Gospel Herald Society President W.G. Gehman noted, "The work has been making steady progress. The Gospel Worker Society Missions at Sunbury and Shamokin have been turned over to us and are now supplied by Gospel Heralds."

The Gospel Heralds carried on the work, with several young men supplying faithful preaching and shepherding as the work in Shamokin continued to grow toward maturity as a particular church. Wrote Gehman of the Gospel Heralds: "They are loyal and preach and work with enthusiasm. Their work is very difficult. Their domestic work in the missions, preaching every night and making a great many calls speaks well for their energy and faithfulness."

Seven years later, an abandoned chapel was purchased, dismantled and loaded onto railroad cars for transportation to newly-purchased lots on Race Street, near Sixth Street, where they were rebuilt as the first Sunbury church. In charge of the rebuilding was C.B. Brosius. The Brosius connection to Emmanuel continues even to this day under longtime pastor Bert Brosius.

Emmanuel Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church was officially organized on Oct. 20, 1917, with J.B. Layne serving as first pastor. Fifty members were received into fellowship on that banner day for the new Sunbury church.

York

While our York church was officially established as a mission work in 1914, its beginnings go back to the early days of the Gospel Workers, with many of the first Workers actively involved in its genesis. In 1904, for instance, Rosa Rote was involved in the York mission, as were Lillian Goranflo and Anne Spellman. Early in 1904, Rosa Rote noted, "Our crowds are still increasing, so much so that we are at times at a loss what to do with all the people. Souls are being saved right along. Those who have been converted are very willing to learn, and seem to have child-like faith. Tonight there were 24 in the ring in open air meeting besides the Workers. Meetings closed with six at the altar. Praise God for victory."

The roots of Faith Bible Fellowship Church can, perhaps, be traced back to the Gospel Workers' colportage efforts. As Rosa Rote reported on Jan. 16, 1904, "Today was our first experience in selling 'The Herald' in its new form."

The selling of evangelistic literature by the Gospel Workers was considered to be a valid evangelistic tool of its day. An editorial in the June 17, 1916 *Gospel Herald* claimed, "Missionary colportage is the advance guard of the

Gospel message. The colporter is, indeed, a traveling preacher...the colporter comes in contact with people in every walk in life. He distributes his tracts and volumes in the home...it is a sad fact, however, that 60,000,000 of our 100,000,000 population are not in attendance upon any church or mission station, and moreover, the usual evangelistic and missionary efforts put forth do not gain to any perceptible extent upon the non-church-going. If these are ever reached, it must and will be by means of the printed page and its house-to-house distribution through missionary colporters.”

So Rosa Rote and her fellow Gospel Workers kept selling their literature, praying that it would find a home, not just in houses, but in hearts. And it apparently did, along with the rallies and open-air meetings that were characteristic of the Gospel Workers Society approach to ministry.

The latter were a special emphasis in York and bore enough fruit to eventually start a church.

Wrote Katie Knopp in November, 1913: “Our Sunday night meetings will tell in eternity. There is an old-time awakening among the unsaved. Many shed tears on account of their sins.”

In York, as was true elsewhere, there was strength in numbers. In 1904, for instance, Jennie Goranflo, Annie Halteman, Sallie Musselman, Laura Steinmetz, Jennie Caskie, Anne Spellman, Emma Geisinger and C.B. Stametz, along with Rosa Rote, all served in the York Mission – maybe not all at the same time, but in the same calendar year.

By 1914, the Gospel Workers felt their services were best suited elsewhere, and York was transferred to the oversight of the Gospel Herald Society as the believers met in a building on East Princess Street. What is now Faith Bible Fellowship Church was organized as a church in 1928.

Lehighton: Not quite, but almost

While Salem Bible Fellowship Church cannot claim Gospel Worker Society roots, our church in Lehighton has a distinct Gospel Workers connection, thanks to the indefatigable Dora Rote.

In 1893, C.H. Brunner, who was then an applicant for ministry as well as secretary of Annual Conference, came to Lehighton. He did not come alone, for



Rosa Rote and Katie Knopp

Dora Rote went with him. While the inception of the Gospel Workers Society was still two years away – and Brunner’s Gospel Herald Society would not begin until 1899 – both Brunner and Rote already had evangelism and church planting in their blood.

For on Sept. 9, 1893, C.H. Brunner and Dora Rote held the first of several tabernacle meetings on Third Street in Lehigh. Those meetings continued through Oct. 13th, only concluding because a storm knocked down the tabernacle for the second time. Even then, the work in Lehigh switched to an indoor venue – a vacant store room on Main Street – and two weeks later, Dora Rote and another future Gospel Worker, Lizzie Christman (who would become Gospel Worker # 6), joined Brunner for foot washing and communion in nearby Weissport.

Nightly meetings continued until Dec. 18th, with Brunner in charge. The Lehigh church was well on its way, and both Dora Rote and Lizzie Christman were gaining valuable training for future responsibilities as Gospel Workers.

A sixth Gospel Worker-started future Bible Fellowship Church is worthy of brief notice. The Gospel Workers’ efforts were responsible for the founding of a church in Scranton, PA in 1925. It closed in 2005.

Far away places

The Gospel Workers were not content to operate in small towns in Pennsylvania. Their influence was felt from PA and New Jersey to the Midwest. As connections between the Gospel Workers and the Mennonite Brethren in Christ lessened, places where the Gospel Workers extended their ministry grew. As W.B. Musselman moved his publishing interests to Williamsport, then to Pittsburgh and finally to Cleveland, many of his Gospel Workers went with him, and not just to print, but to preach and to evangelize.

In 1904, for instance, the *Gospel Worker Society Herald* included reports from Stroudsburg, York, Sunbury, Shamokin and Bethlehem – all in Pennsylvania, all within a radius of 75 miles or so.

By 1911, however, missions had been established in Norfolk, and Newport News, VA, with Franny Wismer serving in both places and noting the presence of fellow Gospel Worker Sarah Brunner. “Many anxiously await the coming of the [Gospel] ‘Herald’ and love its contents,” Wismer reported.

And by late 1917, Gospel Worker Annie Spellman was providing a report from Detroit, where a second mission had been opened on West Jefferson Avenue. Eleven souls were saved, Spellman noted. “There have been real victories won here in Detroit the last week.”

On one hand, much of the ministry was now focused on publishing and distribution of published materials. But evangelism, which had driven the Gospel Workers right from the start, was still important.

Some who left

Not everyone who joined the Gospel Worker Society was ultimately cut out to be a life-long Gospel Worker. The sacrifice was total, and not everyone could make it. In Cleveland, Grace Todd has a listing of the first 215 Gospel

Workers, accompanied by the dates of their death. All of the first 215 received numbers. But, Todd acknowledged, "Many of the ladies on that list have left the organization due to various reasons."

In some cases, marriage drew Gospel Workers away from the ministry. In other cases, some Workers bore similarities to the biblical John Mark, who joined Paul and Barnabas on the apostles' first missionary journey but left in mid-stream. Paul and Barnabas later separated over Mark, as noted in Acts 15. "Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work," Luke wrote in Acts 15:38.

No specific reasons were given for John Mark's departure, but it's not difficult to surmise. The pressures of ministry. Opposition from non-believers. Temptations. Grace Todd has witnessed some of the same obstacles to faithful service, especially in the later years of the organization. She admitted, "It is...a shame that so many ladies turned their backs on the ministry."

Gospel Worker records provided by Todd list the first 215 Gospel Workers by number, along with the birth and death dates for the 69 whose remains may be found in Brooklyn Heights Cemetery in Cleveland. One, however, remains something of a mystery. Gospel Worker # 31, Miss J.B. Caskie, is listed as "terminated." No reason is given, but while many Gospel Workers eventually left the ministry of their own volition, J.B. Caskie was removed from her position.

On the whole, though, it must be said that most ladies who gave their lives to service remained with the Gospel Worker Society. Indeed, of the first ten Gospel Workers, the Dec. 19, 1912 edition of the *Gospel Banner* reported a 90 percent longevity rate. "All are still active in the work, and happier than ever with the exception of one, who got married to a wonderfully saved drunkard." As a side note, the article also reported that both the inactive Gospel Worker and her reclaimed husband "attend and support the Gospel Worker Society meetings of their town."

In some cases, women left the Gospel Worker Society for other ministries. That was the case of Jennie Goranflo and Mamie Caskie. In 1914, Goranflo and Caskie founded The Grace and Hope Mission, a Baltimore ministry that shared much in common with the Gospel Workers: Wesleyan doctrine, an emphasis on evangelism, holiness and the hope of Jesus' second coming, and operation by female officers, all of them in black uniforms with red trim and the emblem of The Grace and Hope Mission. And like the Gospel Worker Society, all missionaries in The Grace and Hope Mission are known by the title of "Miss."

The Grace and Hope Mission website's on-line history states that Goranflo and Caskie carried 17 years of experience as Gospel Workers, and \$14, into their new ministry venture. Caskie had been serving at the Gospel Worker mission in Altoona when she felt a call to open a mission in Baltimore. After much soul-searching, knowing that such a move would cause her to leave the Gospel Workers, and not wanting to feel disloyal, she finally confided her calling to Goranflo, and the two women left Cleveland for Baltimore with just enough money to rent a room at a YMCA with \$4 left over.

Their efforts bore fruit, and at one point there were 15 Grace and Hope Mission centers in places like Baltimore, Norfolk, Philadelphia, Buffalo, New Haven, CT, Boston and Providence. While Goranflo died in 1941 and Caskie succumbed in 1959, Grace and Hope Mission still has active chapters in Reading, York, Boston, Baltimore, Jersey City and Norfolk.

A poem written by Caskie still occupies a prominent position on the ministry's website:

“Be ready then and watching for His coming,
Be toiling for the Master day by day,
The souls that you will win for His kingdom
Will give you joy and gladness all the way.
Up there we'll tell the same old story,
And we will sing the same old song,
How Christ saved us for His glory,
To Him the honor doth belong.”

Another prominent Gospel Worker, Annie Spellman, left the Gospel Worker Society to found a ministry called Missionary Workers, Inc. Spellman, born in 1878, died on June 9, 1954. Following her conversion, she had been baptized in the MBC and had turned to the Gospel Workers following an 1896 camp meeting in Walnutport. At that meeting, it was reported that Spellman “rose to tell the congregation of the burden for lost men and women that rested on her heart.”

Upon joining the Gospel Workers, Spellman was initially appointed to the mission in Ashland, PA. She later led the mission in Altoona and by 1910 was leading the mission in Cleveland. But in 1914, Spellman left the Gospel Workers to begin a work in Detroit, and she took other Gospel Workers – like Alice Eisenhart, Emma Geissinger and Laura Ebersole – with her. No reason for Spellman's leaving of the Gospel Worker Society has yet been discovered...but as Dick Taylor speculates, “It might be that the Gospel Workers who left in 1914 did not share that [printing ministry] vision. Apparently, their idea of ministry was not to be workers running printing presses but rather out doing street and mission ministry...”

Later Gospel Workers

When W.B. Musselman died the Gospel Worker Society did not die with him. Under his daughter, Mary Euphie Musselman (who succeeded him and served as president until her death in 1971), Union Gospel Press kept expanding and the Gospel Workers kept serving. Since 1971, leadership of The Incorporated Trustees of the Gospel Worker Society and Union Gospel Press has fallen to longtime Gospel Workers: Julia Stabley (1971-90), Beryl Bidlen (1990-2010) and, as of August, 2010, Grace Todd.

Surviving Gospel Workers sound very much like their devoted forbears. “I've never been sorry, nor have I ever considered it a sacrifice to serve my Lord in this way,” noted Todd, a Gospel Worker for 57 years. “Oh, there were many struggles along the way, as with all other ministries, but with God as my pilot, I

have come this far, and I'm trusting Him to lead me home one day soon. It will be worth it all, when we see Jesus."

That said, for later Gospel Workers, a greater emphasis was placed on the publishing end of the ministry, and so new Workers would start at Union Gospel Press's Cleveland headquarters. By 1910, just three years after W.B. Musselman moved the ministry's headquarters from Williamsport to Cleveland, that was already standard procedure, as it was for Annie Heffner. Heffner, described in the *Gospel Herald* as "a little country lass from Reading, Pennsylvania," caught a train from Reading to Cleveland and immediately began working in the bindery. From there, she moved to the composing room, learned to operate a linotype machine, and would sometimes pull double shifts – from 8 a.m. one day to 4 a.m. the next.

Mildred Weidner spent the first six years of her service as a Worker in the bindery, processing publications for shipping. Katie Foltz, from Terre Hill, moved from the bindery to the packing department. Grace Gray found herself in the folding department. Many moved into supervisory positions within the publishing ministry.

Like their predecessors, these later Gospel Workers felt called to ministry, and they came from many different places and walks of life. Beryl Bidlen, who later married one of W.B. Musselman's sons, learned about the Gospel Workers through reading several copies of the *Gospel Herald*. One of them featured an advertisement seeking young women who were willing to serve the Lord. She wrote a letter of inquiry to Union Gospel Press. Even the reply, which informed Bidlen the ministry was a "volunteer position" (meaning, of course, that there would be no financial remuneration), couldn't dissuade her, and she arrived in Cleveland in June, 1946.

Some, like Beulah Mann, came to the Gospel Workers as veteran missionaries. By the time she became a Gospel Worker, Mann had already spent 19 years as a home missionary in rural Kentucky. She was a college graduate, too, having earned a degree from Nyack Bible College at age 25. She joined the Gospel Workers when she was 45.

By then, Beulah Mann had been a Christian for 36 years after coming forward to receive Christ at Mizpah Grove. "One afternoon a few girls were talking about the coming of the Lord, and that night I went forward and was saved," she recalled.

A member of Calvary Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church in Coopersburg, Mann had initially desired to serve in overseas missions. "At that time, she wanted to go to South America," recalled her sister, Dorothy Mann. "But the conference wouldn't send her. They didn't send women then."

So she went to Kentucky and took those experiences with her into the Gospel Worker Society. At her memorial service, one of her fellow Gospel Workers recounted how, "All of us enjoyed hearing Miss Mann tell about riding a horse up and down the trails and from home to home as she delivered the gospel message...there was no doubt that she had a great ministry in Kentucky."

Many Gospel Worker Society missions produced future Gospel Workers. That was the case with Mabel Glenn Haldeman, who would spend 86 years as a Gospel Worker (in a sense, Gospel Workers are like U.S. Presidents. While they retired from active ministry, they never stopped being Gospel Workers, and service was counted from the day they joined until the day they died).

Haldeman grew up in Sunbury. She first heard of the Gospel Worker Society when she was five years old, when her father took her to the Society's mission services on the second floor of a rented building in nearby Shamokin. She first heard W.B. Musselman preach when she was 9-10 years old. And she dedicated herself to the Lord's service some time later, at a Gospel Herald Society camp meeting in Shamokin.

Thus exposed to the Gospel Workers, Haldeman decided to become one when she was 23. On a bitterly-cold February morning in 1914, Haldeman boarded the 4:17 a.m. train out of Sunbury, changed trains in Buffalo – meeting a Gospel Worker from the Buffalo mission in doing so – and arrived in Cleveland. Haldeman, who was known for many years as “Cousin Glennie” due to her writing skills (she authored two children's poetry books and served as editor and regular contributor for several Union Gospel Press publications), counted herself as a faithful Gospel Worker until her death in 2000 – at the age of 109.

While some Gospel Workers started in the publishing ministry and never really left it, others paid their dues in printing and then moved on to field mission work, speaking and playing and serving in colportage work. Heffner played her guitar and sang on Cleveland's Public Square and later served at Gospel Worker missions in Youngstown and Pittsburgh. She was remembered as someone who was “always on hand to do whatever she could.”

While some ladies left the Gospel Worker Society for a variety of reasons (marriage, ministry, disgruntlement), most devoted the rest of their lives to the cause of Christ, linking them directly to the Lucy Musselmans and Dora Rotes who were among the first Gospel Workers.

They retired, but they didn't retire. Until and unless they became physically incapacitated, most found some way to serve, as Beulah Mann did, up until the day of her death, some 43 years after she joined the mission. “She was very happy there,” Dorothy Mann said of her sister. “She felt they were doing a great work.”

Their faithful service was rewarded with the fulfilled promise of perpetual care at the Gospel Workers Home in Cleveland. For a time, some retired to a retirement facility the Gospel Worker Society had purchased for their use in Sarasota, Florida, but that home eventually closed down and most retired Gospel Workers returned to Cleveland, where they were cared for until they died.

As the years passed and publishing remained the primary emphasis, missions began to close. As Beryl Bidlen wrote, “When the ministry of the Gospel Worker Society focused more and more on printing the message of the gospel at Union Gospel Press, the missions were gradually closed.” The last of the Gospel Worker Society missions, in Youngstown, Ohio and Pittsburgh, closed in the 1960s. Bidlen provided this epitaph: “The closing of the last

Gospel Worker Society mission signaled the end of over fifty years of colportage and mission work in several cities. It was, however, the beginning of expanding the printing ministry in Cleveland.”

The era of The Gospel Workers had come to an end. The work at Union Gospel Press was now completed by paid employees. Those who had remained faithful retired to the ministry lived out their days at the Gospel Worker Society Home, although many couldn't stay far away from the printing and publishing ministry, and helped out wherever they were needed.

With the death of Annie Heffner in 1983, the number of Gospel Workers still living at the Gospel Worker Society Home had dwindled to 18. Each time a Gospel Worker died, the story of her life would be told in the *Sunday School Times and Gospel Herald*, with Beryl Bidlen, the Gospel Worker Society president, often writing a gracious obituary. The Gospel Worker Society held its 100th anniversary celebration in 1995. By then, all the living Gospel Workers had reached retirement age.

And now there are just four who remain alive.

“These women gave their lives to the Lord's work,” Bidlen noted during her active service as Gospel Worker Society president. “In return, they were promised a home, food, and care for the remainder of their lives. I am going to see that we keep the promise that was made to them so long ago.”

Gospel Worker Society founder W.B. Musselman had preached practically the same message decades earlier. “The people who put in the most self-sacrifice and enjoy the least self-gratification are the ones who do and give everything for the Lord,” he said. “They do not want to be seen or known; they deny themselves, endure the most, and have the most continual self-sacrifice.

“They do the most without having their names published, without honor, and without recognition, but they do what they do for the Lord,” Musselman continued. “They are the people who do not talk about how they feel in the body, who suffer the most quietly, and who are not the big complainers. We have some Christians who suffer for the Lord a little and complain a lot. I do not believe that they will be honored for it. In all lines, the believers who quietly serve the Lord are the ones who keep up His dignity, who honor the Lord.”

Excerpts from a poem by Haldeman serve as a fitting epitaph for the many women who served the cause of Christ as members of the Gospel Worker Society.

**“As workers in the field of God,
Our lives are not our own,
But rich returns shall crown the seed
We oft in tears have sown.**

**Yet while we labor, watch, and pray,
May we our work attend;
Nor let the ministry be blamed
By aught that may offend.**

**But in affliction, want, and pain,
May we by patience prove
The comfort of the God of love,
By every act and move.**

**In stripes and in imprisonment,
In tumults, Satan's roar,
We labor on and courage take –
God's grace exceeds the more.**

**In self-denial we delight,
To keep His temple pure;
By knowing Him, we suffer long;
By kindness we endure.**

**The Holy Spirit fills our hearts
With holy love divine;
The Word of Truth attends our life;
His power is sublime.**

**His righteous armor on the right,
And also on the left,
Equips us for the fight of faith –
Of naught are we bereft.**

**A reputation here below
We seek not, nor invite,
But wish to humbly walk with Christ
And live as in His sight.**

**We die, but yet, behold, we live!
We're chastened, but not killed;
We sorrow for the empty souls,
With earthly riches filled.**

**Though poor, we're making many rich;
Yet, having nothing here,
We have a heritage with Christ,
Who made our title clear.**

**So now we suffer, labor, wait,
Approved by grace alone,
And then when He shall come for us,
We'll share with Him His throne.”**

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Special thanks to:

- Jill Davidson, who supplied a number of sources, including census records, obituaries and notes from a 1995 paper she wrote which included quotes from Doris Hoyle and Joyce Musselman
- Richard Taylor, for his encouragement and for providing access to BFC historical sources.
- Harold Shelly, for his work *The Bible Fellowship Church*, which continues to be the primary source for all historical reference in the BFC.
- Dorothy Mann, who has collected many Gospel Worker items and shared them happily.

