



"Lord, When Did We See You A Stranger?": Scenes of City Rescue Work from the BGC Archives

[This talk was given by Robert Shuster of the BGC Archives on May 8, 1999, at 9:30am in Barrows Auditorium in the Billy Graham Center. The talk was part of the annual Treasures of Wheaton program, given on Alumni Day. Shuster's talk was illustrated by slides, most of which are embedded in the text that follows. It also included audio tapes of excerpts from documents. Audio excerpts are indicated in the text by italics.]

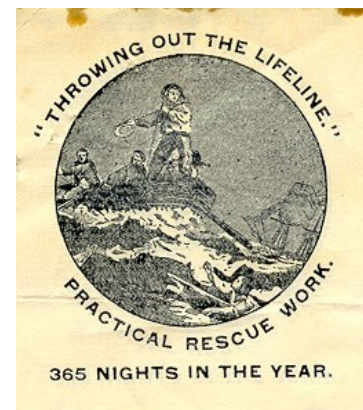
Let me read you a few lines from the report of the meeting of the board for the Faith and Gospel Mission of Chicago, Illinois, gathered together at the mission on Roscoe Street on the evening of May 8, 1939. The board members - staff at the mission, local pastors, local Christian laymen, gathered in the mission chapel to discuss the previous quarter and plan for the next. Then the minutes report, *"A season of prayer, remembering all the avenues of the work and a blessing on Mr. Taylor. Just at close of prayer, a man entered the Mission and sat down. Rev. Williams inquired of his errand. He was very intoxicated, wished an argument about Hitler. Bro. Williams dealt very carefully with his salvation. It was a good while before he would leave but promised to return some night. Gave his name as Walter Bahlia."* Then the minutes go on to give the reports and discussion of the rest of the board meeting.

Members present: Mr & Mrs. Williams, Rev. Moore, Mr. Heyns, Mrs. Schimmel, Mr & Mrs. Heinie, Lawrence Killiams, Mrs. Jungwith.
Just at close of prayer a man entered mission and sat down. Rev Williams inquired of his errand. He was very intoxicated, wishing an argument about Hitler. Bro. Williams dealt very carefully with his salvation. It was a good while before he would leave, but promised to return some night. Gave his name as Walter Bahlia.
Minutes of last meeting approved as read.

CN 20: Papers of Herbert Taylor

An angry, drunken man who wants to argue about Hitler. It does not sound much like Jesus Christ, does it? But rescue missions across the United States have traditionally taken as their motto Matthew 25:35-36 "I was hungry and you fed me, thirsty and you gave me a drink; I was a stranger and you received me in your homes, naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you took care for me, in prison and you visited me." This morning I want to present you with a few vignettes from the Archives' pictures, letters, interviews, and reports about rescue mission work.

Rescue missions as they are known in the United States started with Jerry McAuley's Water Street Mission in New York City in 1872, and his example was followed by many others, including the Pacific Garden Mission of Chicago, started in 1877. Rescue missions provided food and shelter for those considered the refuse of society - drunks, drug addicts, those who had stopped even pretending to cope with life. Fanny Crosby celebrated the rescue mission movement in her 1895 hymn, "[The Rescue Band](#)". Along with the food and other gifts, the mission workers[193c] also preached Christ and encouraged the men and women who drifted in to accept the salvation and hope that He offered. Gradually these rescue missions, also called city missions, began ministry to others in the slums. They would hold services, Bible studies, [47e] Sunday schools and prayer meetings for the poor families in the area, what we would now call daycare centers for working parents, [224d] becoming in effect a storefront church for their community as well as suppliers of physical needs, like [193e] clothing and jobs. Let me tell you some tales of the people who worked in these missions.



CN 47: Papers of Melvin Trotter

William Whiting Borden was born in 1887 to one of the wealthiest families in Chicago, owners of the Borden dairies. From an early age he dedicated himself to Christian service and at the age of 19 he was a sophomore at Yale University, preparing himself to be a foreign missionary. He was already known around campus for his commitment to Christian service as well as for his wealth. Presumably, that is why he was approached by John Magee of the YMCA about some needs close to home. New Haven, the home of Yale, was also a seaport with a dock that provided irregular, occasional work for vagrants. As a result, there was a large population



CN 330: Records of Moody Church. Borden Scrapbooks, Folder 71-1 and 71-2.

of tramps, as well as recently released prisoners of the county jail. Magee saw the need for a rescue mission in the area and he saw the need for the undergrads of Yale to learn about the suffering of many in their own society. Magee and Borden began regularly praying about the needs of the dock area and with help from the Water Street Mission of New York, they started the Yale Hope Mission.



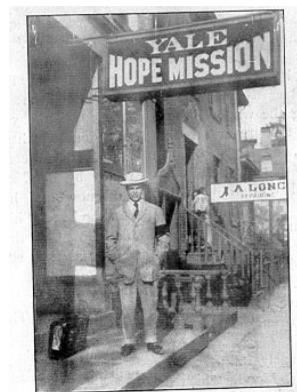
The things we do speak louder than our words.

ONE YEAR'S SERVICE TO NEEDY MEN.

Attendance at Gospel services,	14,602
Meals that are meals,	17,639
Clean, warm dormitory beds,	8,592
Odd and permanent jobs,	1,134
Garments to the worthy,	610

YALE HOPE MISSION aims to re-build human lives by the power of the Gospel, and adds into a constructive effort such material things as are needed, so that a man may have a real chance.

Borden recruited many of his classmates to come to the mission to befriend and witness to those who came in. He started a continuing tradition of involvement of the undergrads in the life of mission, because from the beginning the mission was aimed as much as at the elite students as the down and out hobos. Here are the comments of a student about the mission a few years after Borden's time, *"I might say that sophomore year I was a pure atheist. Because there was so much selfishness and conceit in me, I was unhappy most of the time. The meeting at the mission opened my eyes. After attending several meetings, I saw that Jesus Christ could work miracles in men's lives. I began to get interested in the men – trying to help them get a new start and a firm hold on Christ. This work at the Mission made me a Christian. You may remember that after these few meetings when I became convinced that what I needed more than anything else was Jesus Christ as my Savior, I consented to lead a meeting. I lead several later on. The work at the mission has been the biggest joy of my college career. I had firmly impressed on me this joy of humble service."*



Borden himself was the main benefactor of the mission in the beginning, not only recruiting students but providing the funds for the purchase of the building that served as chapel, hotel, and kitchen to the down and out of New Haven. His involvement was not just of the checkbook, but also of the heart. Magee remembered later that Borden city at night—on the streets, in a cheap lodging-house or some restaurant to which he had taken a poor hungry fellow to feed him—seeking to lead men to Christ."



Jack Clark was one of the men of the mission who remembered Borden, "I came here on the 27th of March 1908. I was on a drunk and hadn't much use for religion....

That night Bill was there, and he spoke to me. Bill was a great personal worker. He always believed in getting right down and talking to a man. If Bill had anything to say, he gave it right out....He would tell you to hope again; tell you of the God who'd made the universe and held you in the hollow of His hand and could help you if you'd only ask. That's the way he talked. He was one good boy. I could never forget him as long as I breathe-no, I never forget him. And he was barely twenty when I first knew him! After my conversion I was baptized and joined the church. If Bill hadn't opened this mission, I'd been dead..... He was great at individual



CN 330: Records of Moody Church. Borden Scrapbooks, Folder 71-1 and 71-2.

work. As a talker, he'd hasten through his address and get to work with the men, always aiming at getting close to the man he was talking to—always with his hand on his shoulder. He'd interest you quicker than the ordinary man because he had a more sympathetic way to start with.... I never knew a feller like him. He was a gentleman in every sense of the word and a Christian through and through. That was first and last in his life. He enjoyed life and people who came in contact with him, seeing his happy spirit, would say, 'Why, life is worth living after all.'"



CN 47: Papers of Melvin Trotter

Let me tell you about another man.

This is [Mel Trotter](#), a man in many ways the opposite of William Borden. Borden was born into a wealthy family, was a Christian from an early age and from a young age had a strong sense of purpose and direction. Trotter was the son of a bartender who drifted from place to place and, although trained as a barber, had trouble holding a job because of drunkenness. In January 1897, when Borden was a ten-year-old boy in Chicago, Trotter was in Chicago too, separated from his family and on another drinking spree. He wound up somehow at the Pacific Garden Mission for food and a bed and there experienced God's grace through a sermon preached by mission superintendent Harry Monroe. He committed his life to Christ that

night. He brought his family to Chicago and started barbering again but soon gave it up. This time he quit not because of alcohol but for mission work. He was continually helping at Pacific Garden and traveling with Monroe on evangelistic tours.

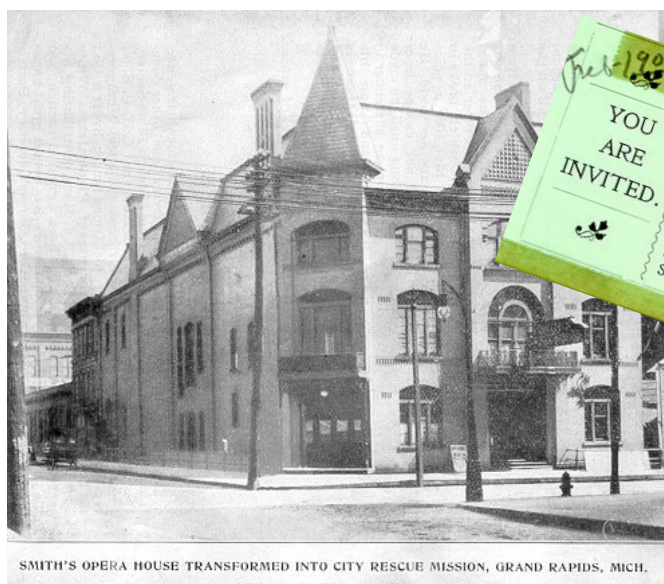


CN 197: Papers of Virginia Asher

In 1900, about 36 months after Trotter's conversion, they were in Grand Rapids to lead meetings there. [A group from the city](#) asked Monroe to start a city mission in their town and Monroe told them Trotter was the man to do it. So, Trotter started his first city mission that year.



CN 47: Papers of Melvin Trotter



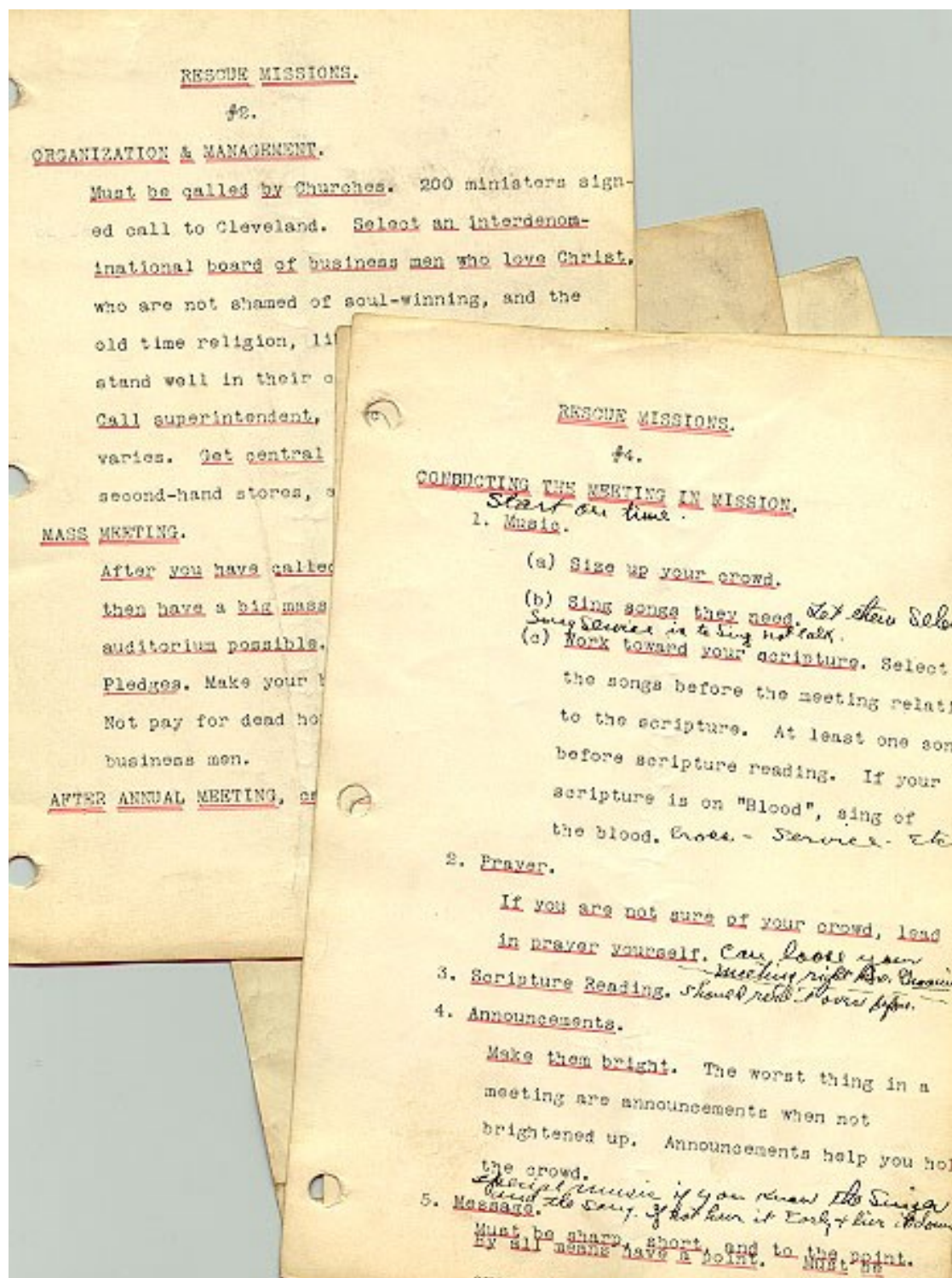
CN 47: Papers of Melvin Trotter

Before he died in 1940, Trotter had founded dozens of missions around the country and a generation of mission superintendents had been trained by him and were members of the Brotherhood of Rescue Mission Superintendents, which he helped found.



CN 197: Papers of Virginia Asher

Here you see notes from a series of talking on how to organize and lead a rescue mission work.



CN 47: Papers of Melvin Trotter

As did Jerry McAuley in the previous era, Trotter provided leadership to the city missions of his generation. Many had been saved at missions he helped found and more had been saved at his evangelistic meetings, where his style represented a vigorous and muscular Christianity.



CN 47:
Papers of
Melvin
Trotter

Here is an excerpt from one of his sermons, ca. 1937.: ...to show the white feather. When they came to take him that night, he stepped out in front of the disciples and said, 'Whom seek ye?' And they said, 'Jesus of Nazareth.' And he said, 'I am he. Now let these go free,' In other words, he stepped into the breach always. When it came to courage, there never was anyone like him. It was the same thing too when it comes to compassion, suffering for others. You know, if you really wanted to tell the story of Jesus in one word, you could do it with that word "others" - O-t-h-e-r-s. He absolutely stood foursquare with that. He lived for others, he died for others. He had compassion on those that were in sorrow. He would weep with them that would weep, he rejoiced with them that rejoiced. You know, when you think you can look at sorrow with dry eyes, that's not being great. Any dub with a hard heart can do that. But Jesus stood and wept. When he found people that were weeping, he wept with them. And I tell you when Mary and Martha stood there in the suffering and cried, he broke down and sobbed with them. And they looked and said, 'How he loved this man Lazarus,' who was dead. And when we look at him, we see how he altogether suffered in order to serve others."

[Andrew Wyzenbeek](#) was a new Christian convert who became involved in a Mission that Trotter helped get started in Ottumwa, Iowa. Like the Yale undergrad quoted earlier, Andrew found that through mission service, he was served.



CN 349: Papers of Clarence W. Jones

"In the meantime, Mel Trotter, who was the mission superintendent in Grand Rapids, came to Ottumwa to start a rescue mission.... I led the song service for quite a while. A good song service. And some (usually a layman) to give a testimony or a couple of them. And sometimes the mission superintendent would give a short Gospel message and an invitation. And some drunken bums would come forward to be prayed with, and occasionally one would not

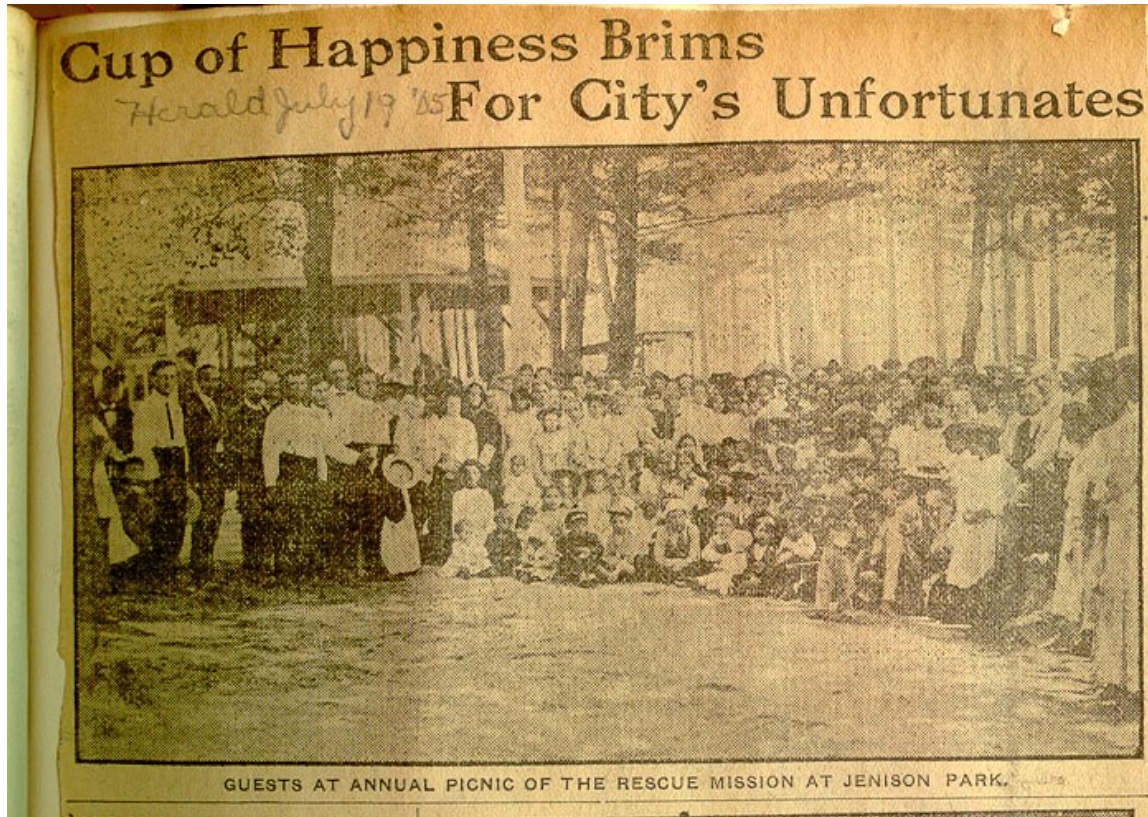
only accept Christ but become a changed person. And practical work was awfully good for me in those days.... I remember one old fellow who was very much under the conviction, and he came forward and we prayed with him. But a few days later he was drinking again and carousing around. Sometimes he would last a week or two. But next thing you would find him in the gutter or on the railroad...in the railroad yards lying drunk sleeping it off. And that happened seven times. And I wanted to give him a good swift kick in the pants and let him go. But the superintendent said, 'No. Don't do that. Go after him again.' He said, 'The Lord will forgive him. He will forgive him seventy times seven.' So we went after him once more. Cleaned him up. Gave him a shower out at the YMCA. Got him a room to sleep in. And do you know that was the last time he ever got drunk. He became...he became a real saint. We got him a job as janitor in the city hospital. And there he became a blessing to everybody."

[Edna Asher Case](#) was only a very small child when her father, Alexander Asher, went full-time into city and rescue mission work. She had vivid memories of the personalities of rescue mission workers:

"I recall Saturday nights when the mission men, both Mr. Trotter and Mr. Monroe and any visiting mission men would come up to the bakery and Dad would have put a ham in the oven after the bakers were all through using the oven and it was still hot. We could all sit around downstairs and have ham sandwiches and coffee and lots and lots of laughter. I've never known any group of men, men to have a bigger sense of humor than the mission men had.... I think first of all it was the joy that they had in them. Secondly, in the type of mission work you let that out, you weren't reserved. Thirdly, they had many experiences



to share and a lot of them were funny. [chuckles] There was a great comradeship among mission men, something that I don't know if I've ever seen anywhere else. I really feel that we had a wonderful heritage of all this background of knowing such wonderful Christian people that we have who were giving out the message of salvation."



CN 47: Papers of Melvin Trotter

Edna also remembered the many ways the mission served the community and let people know about Christ's love:

"Well, we had a few of the men who came through the city and needed a place to sleep. We didn't do very much in the way of feeding, but we did have some rooms on the third floor. It was a four-story building, had some rooms on the third and fourth where they could stay overnight. But then also there were people, families who had come in from the rural areas with the men looking for work. The times were hard, and those families could not afford to settle anyplace in the downtown area.



From CN 330: Records of Moody Memorial Church

And so that work and the work that we had that grew out of the city rescue work in another location became a family work. Parents, Sunday school, we had women's work, we had young girls and young men's clubs in which we were able to minister to them in a social way, in camping ways.... We had a visiting a woman visiting missionary who would go into the homes of the people who were coming or into the homes of any people where we knew there was a need, or problems, or sorrow and who would bring them a Christian witness and also pray with them and bring them some practical help. Those people then would come to the mission, it became their church, so it really was. It was not only their church, but it became their social center.... Peters' Shoes was a Chris...was headed by a Christian family. That was, they were interested, in fact Mr. Peters was on our board. They would outfit the children with shoes every fall before they went back to school. We would take groups of them over and they would put them in shoes that would last for the school year. And also, we had during the time when the war period was on Dad thought that it would be a very beneficial thing to have breakfast for the children before they went to school. So, we had one of the mothers of our family would cook breakfast in the morning and the children would all come to breakfast before they went to school. And of course, the practical things, churches sent in clothing, food, and we were able to give it to those who had the greatest needs."



From CN 47: Papers of Melvin Trotter

Interviewer: "Were you able to do anything as far as helping people find work?"

CASE: "Yes, a number of times men who were on our board were businessmen and quite often they found places as far as work was concerned. We had a least two of our young people put through Wheaton College by board members."

The position of the Church of God should be that
of the God of the Church.
Must condemn, but weep.

*This always leads to
a scrap long know
as. Stillus -*

CITIES AGAINST GOD.

Built on selfishness. Survival of the fittest.
Advancing at expense of other men.

Church unselfish, considering others - salvation
of the unfittest. *Survival of the fittest*

And we must work for their salvation constantly.

That is the work of the Church.

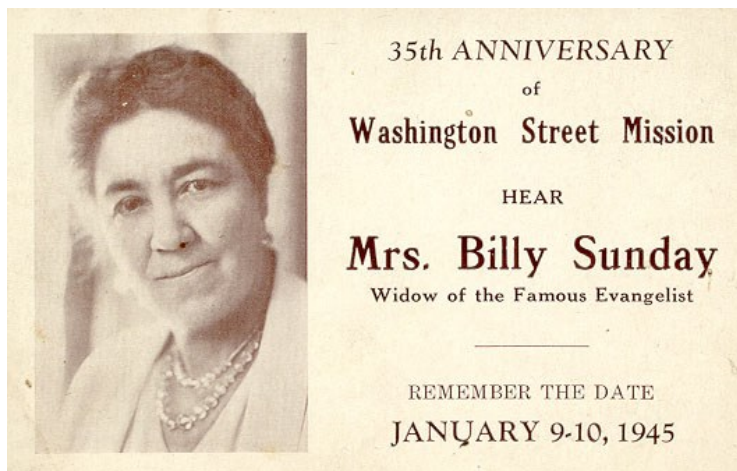
Knowville Civitan Club - 11/28/24
Knowville Civitan Club
Clarksburg W. Va Oct 23/23
Powers Opera House, Jan. 25, 20. \$21,000
Bible Inst. of Los. Ang. Mar. 14, 20
Tucson, 5/17/20
Rotary Club, *Evansville* Sept. 1920.
Ad Club Cleveland nov 14/20
Exchange Club. U.P. 12/27/20.
Business Science Club Phila 3/11/21
Rotary + Kiwanis at Danville Va 9/28/21
Cleveland, O. 10/23-21. \$1350.00
6th U.P. Church Pittsburgh Nov 27, 21 - \$4200
3. Presby "
Monte Liza 3/1/22 - Tyons club - Wheeling 12/6/22
Bristol Rotary 11/14/22
Bellairs C. Knowville club 12/5/22 *Wash. City Club 12/1/23*

From CN 47: Papers of
Melvin Trotter

Mel Trotter had a talk he often gave around the country called **God in the Cities of Men**. Above are the notes for it. He gave at the Bible Institute of Los Angeles and to the Rotary Club of Evansville and the Third Presbyterian Church of Pittsburgh and the Ad Club of Cleveland. And in Texas and new England and many other points in between. As you can see, he contrasted the selfishness of the cities, with emphasis of survival of the fitness,

with what must be the unselfishness of the Church, considering others, salvation of the unfittest. And he would say, "*And we must work for their salvation constantly, that is the work of the church.*"

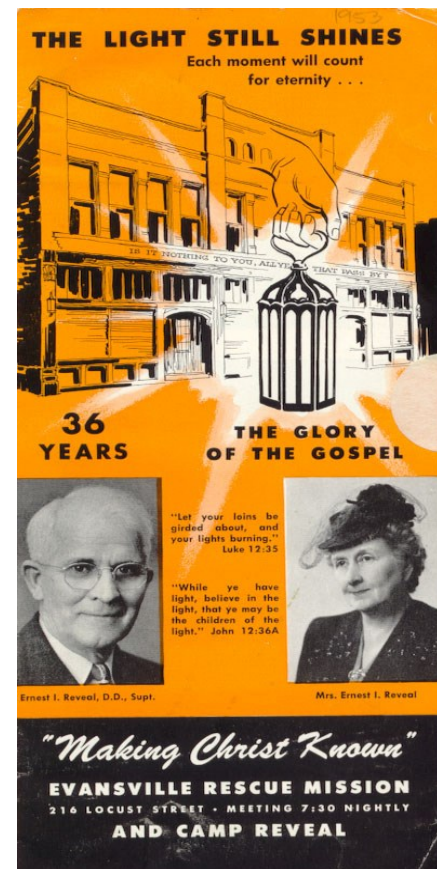
It is the work that Trotter and Harry Monroe and Alexander Asher, and William Borden did, as well as host of others, some of whom we can show here. And we are proud to have the story of their ministry in the Archives and to be able to make it available to you.



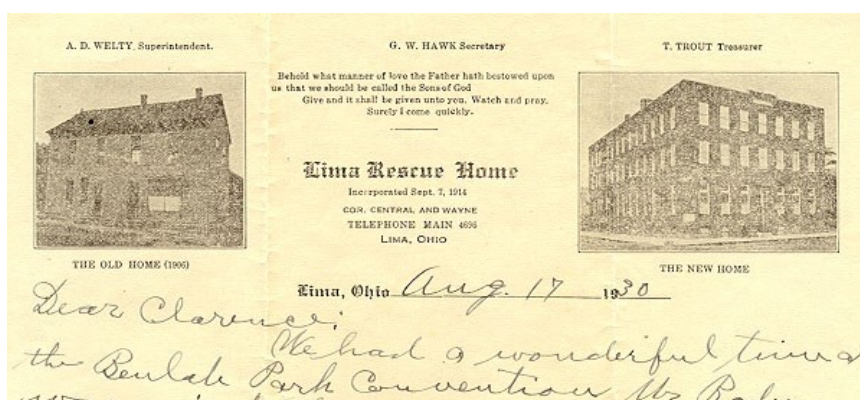
CN 193: Records of Washington Street Mission



From CN 193:
Records of
Washington
Street Mission



From CN 224: Papers of J. Stratton Shufelt



From CN 349: Papers
of Clarence W. Jones