

Walton L. Kamble and Friends: Central Pennsylvania Conference Gospel Song Writers

Rev. Walton L. Kamble (1870-1956) was born in Berrysburg, Dauphin County. As a young man he moved to East Point, Tioga County, where he became a sawyer and operated a planing mill. In 1902 he married Helen Venette Schiek (1878-1940), whose family was active in the establishment and ongoing ministry of the Evangelical Association in that community. In 1910 he yielded to the call to the ministry and was licensed to preach in the United Evangelical Church. During his 26 years in the active ministry he served the following charges: Grover 1910-11; East Point 1911-13; South Wayland NY¹ 1913-16; Hagerstown MD circuit 1916-21; Hanover circuit 1921-25; Sugar Valley 1925-28; Penns Creek 1928-35; Rebersburg 1935-37.

Rev. Kamble retired in 1937 to live near his daughter Mrs. Ira Walter, west of Middleburg, Snyder County. The first Mrs. Kamble died in 1940, and Rev. Kamble married Miss Lovie E. Wiest (1881-1956) in 1952. On April 21, 1956, the Kambles were in serious automobile accident. Mrs. Kamble died the day of the accident, and Rev. Kamble succumbed from injuries 36 days later.

This would be all that was known about Walton Kamble were it not for one of his songbooks that found its way to the conference archives. Apparently Walton Kamble enjoyed writing music for gospel songs, and he was also the author of the words for one of his tunes. While serving the Hanover circuit² in 1922, he edited and published a gospel songbook that included 19 of his own tunes. But included in that book, along with the usual popular standards, are many other songs with words or music by other Central Pennsylvania Evangelicals and Methodists. At least one them was also a true soul mate of his – a fellow Evangelical minister who enjoyed writing music for gospel songs.

¹ The Central Pennsylvania Conference of the Evangelical Church originally extended north into southern New York (until 1934) and south into West Virginia (until 1952) and Maryland (until the United Methodist union).

² The Hanover circuit was then a four-point charge consisting of Blooming Grove, Pleasant Hill, Porters and St. John's. The parsonage was in Hanover. The circuit was discontinued in 1928 when the first three congregations were merged into the Hanover church, then on Spring Avenue and now Grace United Methodist on Albright Drive, and St. John's was added to New Freedom. The Blooming Grove building is now a private home, with a cemetery in the back yard. The [former United Evangelical] building at Porters Siding is also privately owned, and the [former Evangelical Association] cemetery is just outside the village. Only the cemetery remains at Pleasant Hill, southwest of Hanover. St. John's was closed in 1995 and the building sold to the cemetery association.

Rev. James Huntingdon Welch (1860-1938) was born in Springfield MD. His family moved to Mahanoy City PA, where he was converted at the age of 12 and joined the Methodist Church. After working for a while in the coal mines, and having transferred his membership to the Evangelical Association, he attended Union Seminary in New Berlin with the intention of preparing for the gospel ministry. During his 45 years in the itinerancy he served the following charges: Wayland NY 1882-83; Jersey Shore circuit 1883-84; Nittany 1884-85; Milesburg 1885-88; Hagerstown MD circuit 1888-89; Keystone 1889-91; White Deer 1891-93; Liverpool 1893-95; Lewisberry 1895-97; Wellsville 1897-99; located 1899-1905; Berkley Springs WV 1905-08; Lycoming circuit 1908-12; East Point 1912-16; Yorkana 1916-21; Mexico 1921-26; Mt. Rock 1926-27. He retired to Yorkshire in 1927.

In 1884, Rev. Welch married Elizabeth Hoffman (1862-1932) of Friedens, Lycoming County. The first Mrs. Welch died in 1932, and Rev. Welch married Mrs. Nettie Brandt (1867-1940) in 1935. They moved into their newly-built new cottage at the Lewisburg Home just six weeks before the death of Rev. Welch. As with Walton Kamble, there is no mention of J.H. Welch's involvement with gospel music in his obituary. Were it not for his 10 tunes included in Kamble's songbook, this dimension of Rev. Welch may have been lost to future generations. And like Rev. Kamble, he was also the author of the words for one of his tunes.

Other than the fact that both W.L. Kamble and J.H. Welch were ministers in the Central Pennsylvania Conference of the Evangelical Church, there is no other obvious connection between them. They served the some of the same charges, but many years apart – and they never served simultaneously in the same area. But the large number of Welch tunes included by Kamble, especially considering that their musical involvement was not well-known, suggests that they must have had significant personal contact and/or a common link. Beginning in 1895 the Central Pennsylvania had a Minister's Chorus, but their records are incomplete. While conference pastors A.S. Baumgardner and Harry Minsker, who are each represented in Kamble's songbook by a single selection, were members of this chorus, there is no evidence that W.L. Kamble or J.H. Welch ever participated in the group.

Another piece of information that has failed to survive is the connection between Kamble and Welch as composers and those who words they put to music. In each case, however, most of lyrics that accompany their tunes were written by Central Pennsylvania poets. For Kamble, it was the Methodist sister and brother combination of L. Myrtle Sours and B.F.M. Sours. For Welch, it was fellow Evangelical minister Noah Young. While Kamble may have had occasion to meet the Mrytle and B.F.M. Sours personally, it is likely that he gleaned their poetry from various religious publications to which they were frequent contributors. Noah Young's poems are not known to have appeared in print, however, and he and Welch were undoubtedly in personal contact with each other.

Laura Myrtle Sours (1866-1923) provided the words that inspired 5 of Kamble's tunes. Her father John Dickson Sours (1815-1912) was a local preacher in the Methodist Church. Rev. Sours was born on the family farm near Idaville and followed his older brother Paul to Ohio, where he became a carpenter and a Methodist. He returned to Idaville in 1841, married Anna Mary Mears (1828-1917), served as a rural schoolteacher, and was licensed as a local pastor in 1844. In 1869 Rev. Sours moved to Mechanicsburg, where he spent the rest of his life active in church work and employed in various secular positions. Rev. John and Anna Sours had 6 children: 3 of them died in childhood, and the other 3 never married. Myrtle remained in the family home and apparently never took outside employment. Like her father and brother, she enjoyed writing poetry. The first stanza of her poem "I Yield," chosen by Kamble to be the lead selection in his songbook, summarizes her life.

I yield to thee my Lord Divine, now to be wholly thine.
Naught do I keep to sow or reap; naught would I say is mine.
I yield myself to Thee, to Thee, who gav'st thyself for me!
I yield, I yield, now to be thine, through all eternity.

Benjamin Franklin Mears Sours (1863-1956) provided the words that inspired 3 of Kamble's tunes. Never married, he remained in the family home and worked for 30 years in a wheel factory in Mechanicsburg, and then for 18 years for an office supply firm in Harrisburg. Although rich spiritually and a good steward before the Lord of his time and talents and resources, Frank was poor in the things of the world. After his employer went out of business in 1931, he was supported by Pennsylvania Family Assistance and spent his last 14 years at the Methodist Home for the Aged in Tyrone. Like his father and sister, he was a poet – only even more so. He is said to have produced 11,214 poems – many of which were published, without remuneration, in various religious periodicals. The conference archives include large two bound volumes of typewritten pages containing some of his poems. While the poems in neither volume are numbered consecutively, one volume includes approximately poems #5400-5800 and the other includes approximately poems #6900-8400. Additional information about B.F.M. Sours is given in Appendix II.

Rev. Noah Young (1846-1923) is the author of 8 texts set to music by J.H. Welch. The youngest of 13 children of Evangelical Association preacher John Young (d.1873), he saw 4 of his older brothers enter the ministry in that denomination: George (d.1858), Jacob (d.1895), Reuben (d.1903) and William. During his 50 years in the itinerancy he served the following charges: York circuit 1871-73; Baltimore MD circuit 1873-76; Liberty 1876-79; McClure 1879-82; Brush Valley 1882-83; Port Trevorton 1883-86; McClure 1886-89; Loganville 1889-91; Yorkana 1891-94; Millheim 1894-95; presiding elder Carlisle District 1895-99; presiding elder Lewisburg District 1899-03; Lewistown 1903-07;

Wrightsville 1907-11; North Berwick 1911-1915; Mifflinburg 1915-19; Danville 1919-21; retired 1921.

As with W.L. Kamble and J.H. Welch, Rev. Young's interest in poetry and gospel music is not mentioned in his obituary. Were it not for Kamble's songbook, this dimension of Noah Young also would not have been preserved. These 3 Evangelical preachers and the 2 lay Methodists in the Sours family are the Central Pennsylvanians featured most prominently in the songbook. But the book also includes material by at least 4 other members of the Central Pennsylvania Conference of the Evangelical Church.

Other Contributors with Central Pennsylvania Evangelical connections

Rev. Aaron Sylvester Baumgardner (1852-1916) – author of the text for one selection in the songbook. Born in Fayette County and licensed to preach by the Pittsburgh Conference in 1874, A.S. Baumgardner transferred to the Central Pennsylvania Conference in 1885 and served here for 30 years. He was a second tenor in the Minister's Chorus and his obituary states that "he was a sweet-voiced, persuasive singer, and often sang conviction to the hearts of the unsaved, and aided their faith when they knelt at the altar of prayer."

Rev. Henry Burns Hartzler (1840-1920) – author of the text for two selections in the songbook. Born in Yorkana and licensed by the Central Pennsylvania Conference in 1869, H.B. Hartzler served conference charges before being appointed editor of a denominational publication in 1874 and elected to the episcopacy in 1902. The 1939 conference history calls Bishop Hartzler "poet laureate of the Evangelical Church," and his texts have been set to music by composers from a variety of geographical and denominational backgrounds. His text "Go and Seek the Lost" appeared in the final hymnal of the EUB denomination. The conference archives contain a volume of his poetry published in 1920. A footnote to hymn #127 in the Kamble songbook states: "*Good Night*" is the last poem from the hand of the late Bishop H.B. Hartzler D.D. shortly before his death.

Helen Venette Kamble (1878-1940) – first wife of Rev. Walton Kamble, and composer of one tune in the songbook. Helen Venette Schiek was born in East Point, Tioga County, and married Walton Kamble in 1902. Her obituary identifies her as "a constant co-laborer with her husband" and makes it reasonable to assume that she was involved in her husband's music ministry in a significant way – even though only one of her tunes survives.

Rev. Harry Minsker (1867-1950) – author of both the words and the music for one selection in the songbook. Born near Dauphin, Harry Minsker was the son of Evangelical itinerant Rev. William Minsker (1830-1912). He was licensed to preach by the Central Pennsylvania Conference in 1888 and graduated with honors from Central Pennsylvania College (successor to Union Seminary, and forerunner of Albright College) at New Berlin in 1891. He was a second tenor in the Minister's Chorus and his obituary states that "he loved to sing and led the singing at numerous conference sessions and conventions."

Other Interesting Contributors Associated with W.L. Kamble

Rev. Kamble seems to have gleaned the texts for his songs from poetry published in religious periodicals. This appears to be true also for the poems of Myrtle and B.F.M Sours, even though they were from Central Pennsylvania. While no concerted effort has been made at this point to identify which publications Kamble regularly perused, or to find the any of his texts in a particular periodical, some future researcher may choose to pursue that approach. The following interesting connections do, however, suggest Kamble's resources extended beyond the usual Evangelical and Methodist literature.

Cestrian – an adjective meaning "of or pertaining to Chester or Cheshire." Not known to be the name of any individual, this is the curious designation Rev. Kamble gives for the author of the text for "The Cross Still Stands" that accompanies one of his tunes. Chester is the county seat of Cheshire, England. It was once the largest port in Northern England, until the River Dee silted up and trade was diverted to the relatively young town of Liverpool. The silting of the River Dee created land which is now Chester's racecourse, on which a stone cross, once used as a water level marker, still stands. It is assumed that this is the motivation for the text "The Cross Still Stands" – which includes a line about guiding frail and storm-tossed vessels "into the port of perfect peace." Who wrote the text, and where Kamble found it, however, remain a mystery.

John Garabed (1860-1937) – author of the text for one of Kamble's tunes. Salvation Army literature describes this spirited comrade as follows: "He was tall, impressive, and built like a prize fighter. Often considered rude or even obnoxious, he did not follow the rules. Though never in charge of a corps, he opened doors through which others could follow in a more conventional way." Born Nishan Der Garabedian in Turkey, he came to the United States at 17 to work as a shoemaker and settled in San Francisco – where he fell under the influence of Salvationists, became converted, changed his name to John Garabed (which later became "Joe the Turk"), and gave up his smoking and drinking habits. His shoe shop became a colorful religious center, and he constantly thought of new ways to attract attention. Then he gave up his shop to work full

time for The Salvation Army. He wore a turban or fez with his uniform, which usually was bright red with a gold braid. He traveled the country preaching and exhorting others to repent. When the town of Macomb IL was in the grip of a crooked mayor, Joe ran him out of town and took over until the people could hold an election. In another town, he saw a mob about to lynch the corps officer and braved the crowd to put the officer safely on the train. In city after city, he would be arrested for disturbing the peace – but usually acquitted, with the end result that many town ordinances forbidding open air meetings toppled in his wake. He boasted of being "jailed for Jesus" 57 times. His "Row Me Over the Tide" that Kamble put to music certainly reflects his unorthodox ways. The saga of two poor children longing to be re-united with their departed family in heaven, the first verse reads as follows:

Two little children were strolling one day,
Down by the clear water's side,
One came up the boatman and said,
"Please row me over the tide,"

Elwood Haines Stokes (1815-1895) – author of the text for one of Kamble's tunes. This New Jersey Methodist preacher is best known as a promoter of holiness and the first president of the Ocean Grove Camp Meeting Association. The words to "Fill Me Now" are the same as those usually associated with the John R. Sweeny tune. Kamble likely had no direct contact with Stokes, but rather thought that he could provide an alternative to the original 1879 tune for this popular gospel song.

War Cry – national magazine of the Salvation Army, given credit for the text for one of Kamble's tunes. The poem was likely printed without naming the author, and so Rev. Kamble named the publication as the source of the words. It is likely that the John Garabed text also came from the *War Cry*.

Charles Brenton Widmeyer (1884-1974) – holder of the copyright for one of Welch's tunes, and given credit for the harmonization of another. While the direct evidence connects C.B. Widmeyer only with Welch, the number of his tunes appearing in the songbook suggests he had at least a connection through admiration with Kamble. There are a total of 10 Widmeyer tunes, 9 of which accompany his own words – and since most of them are copyrighted by Widmeyer, there must have been contacts by Kamble for permission to use the material. His songs have a decided holiness orientation, as do his books on prayer and other religious subjects. Widmeyer and his wife both graduated from Southern Nazarene University in 1918, and he went on to become President of Point Loma Nazarene University 1923-26. While most of C.B. Widmeyer's songs did not stand the test of time, he is still well-known as the author of the words and music to the celebrated classic "Come and Dine."

Appendix I. Helpful Songs New and Old, Number 1

edited and published by Rev. Walton L. Kamble
314 Spring Avenue, Hanover PA

Music by Rev. Walton L. Kamble

<u>no.</u>	<u>title</u>	<u>words</u>	<u>comments</u>
1	I Yield	L. Myrtle Sours	
4	I am Trusting Jesus Only	B.F.M. Sours	
7	God Has Forgotten My Sins	L. Myrtle Sours	
9	In the Sky So Blue	L. Myrtle Sours	
11	I Love Thee My Jesus	L. Myrtle Sours	
15	I Want to Be Like the Loving Saviour	L. Myrtle Sours	
16	Am I a Soldier	Isaac Watts	not the known tune
22	Suffer the Children	unknown	
25	Don't You Love Him	L.N. McHose	
29	Be True	B.F.M. Sours	
41	Jesus Reigning Within	W.L. Kamble	
43	The Cross Still Stands	Cestrian	
45	Fill Me Now	E.H. Stokes	not the known tune
47	He Shall Direct Thy Path	Mrs. N.A. Gellatey	
48	Send Us the Light	B.F.M. Sours	
64	He Knoweth the Way that I Take	H.B. Hartzler	
67	Row Me Over the Tide	J. Garabed [Joe the Turk]	
69	God's Best	A.S. Baumgardner	
84	Pardon for Thee	from <i>War Cry</i>	

Music by Rev. James H. Welch

<u>no.</u>	<u>title</u>	<u>words</u>	<u>comments</u>
2	Joy, Great Joy	Charles Wesley	© C.B. Widmeyer
6	I Live in Sunshine all the Time	Rev. N. Young	
8	I'm a Hallelujah Christian	Rev. N. Young	
18	I am Coming Home To-Night	Rev. N. Young	
19	Homeland of Jesus	Rev. N. Young	
39	He Comes in Power	Rev. N. Young	
40	Singing Glory Hallelujah on the Way	Rev. N. Young	
58	Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross	James H. Welch	not the known hymn harmony by CBW
62	Jesus Seeks and Saves	Rev. N. Young	
124	The Suffering Servant	Rev. N. Young	

Other Central Pennsylvania Evangelical connections

<u>no.</u>	<u>title</u>	<u>words</u>	<u>music</u>
49	Tell Them of Jesus	B.F.M. Sours	Helen V. Kamble
125	The Unchangeable Christ	Harry Minsker	Harry Minsker
127	Good Night	H.B. Hartzler	Adam Geibel

Appendix II. Charles Berkheimer on the Sours Family

Charles Franklin Berkheimer (1896-1968) was the Methodist historian for the Central Pennsylvania Conference. The article in this volume of *The Chronicle* credited to Edgar Skillington is just one of the many papers he lovingly and meticulously assembled for the benefit of future generations. A plaque on the wall at the conference archives states that the room is properly named the “Charles F. Berkheimer Archives and History Library.” Dr. Berkheimer was born and raised in Mechanicsburg. On April 5, 1962, he presented at his home church a paper titled “Historical Comments on Methodism in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania.” The following paragraphs about the Sours family are taken from that paper.

Most of you who know me will expect me to speak about the influence of the Sours family upon the personality of this church. It was quite different than the others of whom I have spoken.

Holiness is the word used in its highest Methodist connotation which expresses my thoughts about this family. The Rev. John D. Sours became a local preacher in the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1844, and continued as one until he died in 1912 at the age of 97. He was patriarchal in appearance and behavior. He wore a long white beard, and in his later years had gone blind. But he was always in his place at church when he could be led there. For many years, especially after he was 80, he was invited to preach on the Sunday nearest his birthday. When his strength was too feeble for that, he would recite the scripture lesson from memory. Once after he was 90, he began at the first chapter of Genesis and recited two entire chapters before he was reminded that he had gone far enough.

This family revealed what early Methodist piety was like as no other I have ever known. Naturally such a family would be considered eccentric. But they were God’s people, and everybody in the church and town knew it. They were poor in this world’s goods, but rich in faith and good works.

Benjamin Franklin Mears Sours was my Sunday School teacher from the time I left the Primary Department until I went to college. No one outside of my own family influenced me as much as he did. No one else ever thought for a moment that I could be a minister of the Gospel. But he did, and he led me to see that God would use anyone who would surrender his life to His service. It took a peculiar person to see that I might ever amount to anything in His service. This indicates how God sometimes works, and that He needs more peculiar people to do His work and to send out His messages.

B.F.M. Sours never had the advantage of advanced schooling, but he was a well-educated person. His great interest and his outstanding accomplishment would be said to be his poetry. He certainly contributed more to our religious periodicals in his lifetime than any other person from this community. Actually, he wrote more than 10,000 poems in his lifetime – continuing as long as his

eyesight permitted. Many were written while he a guest in the Methodist Home for the Aged in Tyrone. All of his manuscripts are deposited in a New England depository for unpublished poems.

Many of his poems, quite likely the vast majority of them, would not pass for great poetry. Others of them, literally hundreds of them, were excellent. But every one of them revealed his deep religious experience and his constant praise of God, the Heavenly Father. He was a religious poet. More than that, he was a deeply spiritual poet. He was one of Christ's humble but holy followers.

These, being dead, yet speak. Their works follow after them in this church. Who will influence the personality of this church in this generation and the next and the next?

When B.F.M. Sours died, Dr. Berkheimer had made certain that his obituary was placed in the conference archives. The following appeared on Wednesday, May 2, 1956.

BFM Sours, 92
Dies at Tyrone
Rites Saturday

B.F.M. Sours, age 92, died early this morning at the Methodist Home for the Aged at Tyrone, where he had been a guest for a number of years.

The last surviving member of his family, he was the son of the late Jonathan and Anna Sours. He formerly resided on S. Frederick Street with his sisters, the Misses Emma and Myrtle Sours.

Mr. Sours was employed at one time at the Elliott-Fisher Co., Harrisburg, and was a cabinetmaker and poet. Many of his poems were published in church publications.

He was a member of the Mechanicsburg Methodist Church since 1875. He was a former chorister of the Sunday School and was teacher of the Rudisill Bible Class, and held many official positions in the church.

Mr. Sours is survived by two cousins, Harry Hamilton and Mrs. Minerva Chapman, both of Mechanicsburg.

Funeral services will be held Saturday at 11 am at the Methodist Home in Tyrone. The Rev. Elwood C. Zimmerman, pastor of the local Methodist Church, and the Rev. Harry Stenger, superintendent of the Methodist Home for the Aged, will officiate. Burial will be in the Mechanicsburg Cemetery late Saturday afternoon.