

The Lefever Family United Brethren Missionaries from York Fourth

Harry Edward and Mary Ann (Schaeffer) Lefever were married August 12, 1894. Their home congregation, York's Fourth United Brethren Church, is legendary for the extremely high number of persons – numbering in the dozens – it has recommended over the decades for preaching licenses, ordination, and home and foreign missionary service. And the Lefevers were part of that tradition. They became the parents of five children – their two oldest becoming missionaries to China, while their three younger sons died of causes apparently not recorded for posterity at ages 2, 22, and 1. This was a family that lived out this year's theme of **“Where He Leads Me I Will Follow”** in many ways.

The family lived, as was then typical, three blocks from the church at 1001 E. King Street. Harry E. Lefever (1874-1952) served as treasurer of Fourth United Brethren (now Fourth UMC), teacher of the Men's Bible Class, and a lay delegate from the Pennsylvania Conference to the denomination's 1909 General Conference. Mrs. Lefever (1875-1955) was an active member of Sunday School Class #3 and of the Woman's Missionary Society. Before leaving for the mission field, their two oldest children Rufus and Myrtle were active in leadership positions.

Rufus H. Lefever

Rufus Harry Lefever¹ (1895-1974) graduated from the denomination's Lebanon Valley College in 1917 and Bonebrake [United] Seminary in 1920. He and Mary Lucinda Daugherty (1894-1963) were married at Centenary United Brethren Church in Steelton, where her father was the pastor, on August 20, 1919. The following newspaper account gives the particulars and allows for the identification of various relationships.²

MISS MARY L. DAUGHTERY BECOMES THE BRIDE OF THE REV. R.H. LEFEVER

Centenary United Brethren Church in Steelton was the scene yesterday morning of a pretty wedding. The Bride was Miss Mary L. Daugherty daughter of the Rev. Joseph Daugherty pastor of Centenary Church. The Groom was the Rev. Rufus H. Lefever a student at Bonebrake Theological Seminary in Dayton Ohio. The large auditorium of the church was almost filled with relatives and friends of the couple. Miss Edith Shaffer of Harrisburg was the organist. She used as a prelude two Beautiful selections. “Calm as the Night” and “O Promise Me” were sung by Miss Miriam

¹ Although his name is so given in most church and secular records, Rufus actually preferred the older variant LeFevre for his surname, and so it appears in some records and on his grave marker.

² *Harrisburg Telegraph*, 8/21/1919, page 17.

Oyer³ of Shippensburg. While Lohengrin's wedding processional was being played the bridal procession entered the church. The Bride was given away by her uncle the Rev. B.F. Daugherty, twin brother of her father, pastor of Trinity United Brethren Church in Lebanon. The ceremony was performed by the bride's father. The ring ceremony of the United Brethren Church was used. The maid of honor was Miss Nellie Kottcamp⁴ of York. The best man was Dwight Daugherty, brother of the Bride. The bridesmaids were Miss Myrtle Lefever of York, sister of the Groom, Miss Nita Spangler⁵ of Harrisburg and Miss Mae [unclear] of Steelton. The ushers were Edgar Hastings⁶ of Highspire, William Martin⁷ of Waynesboro and Arthur Daugherty of Steelton, brother of the Bride. The two young sisters of the Bride, Miriam and Sarah, were flower girls. The Bride carried a beautiful bouquet of bridal roses and victory flowers. The bridesmaids carried wreaths of golden rod. The flower girls carried small baskets of wild sweet peas. As a recessional, Mendelssohn's "Wedding March" was used. Immediately after the ceremony a public reception was held in the Sunday School room of the church. A wedding breakfast was served at the home of the bride's parents to friends and relatives. The Bride is a graduate of Lebanon Valley College class of 1916, and is quite popular. She is known as an

³ Miriam R. Oyer (1895-1983) of Shippensburg was a friend of Mary from Lebanon Valley College, where both were members of the chapel choir and the Clonian Literary Society. She graduated in music in 1918 with a specialty in voice and went on to teach music in the public schools – beginning in Annville. She never married. While her college records give her middle name as Rhea, her grave marker gives it as Ray.

⁴ Census and other records indicate that Nellie Kottcamp of York was born in 1893 to Philip F. and Isadora (Wilmering) Kottcamp and graduated from high school in 1911, but her connection to Mary Daugherty is not known. Philip had deceased by 1919, and Mrs. Kottcamp resided at 117 North Newberry Street – near First United Brethren (later Otterbein UMC), where there were multiple Kottcamp families involved. The Kottcamps of First UB are discussed in the 2012 issue of *The Chronicle*, pages 53-82, in the article "Abraham Rudisill, United Brethren soldier and preacher."

⁵ The connection of Nita S. Spangler (1896-1986) to Mary Daugherty is not known. A graduate of Harrisburg Central High School and West Chester University, she later married Dauphin County Court Judge Homer L. Kreider, taught elementary school and was a member at Grace United Methodist on State Street.

⁶ Edgar Charles Hastings (1895-1982) was friend of Rufus from Lebanon Valley College, where he entered in 1915 but did not graduate until 1921. He then was a missionary of sorts and taught school for a period in Honolulu HI. He was raised in the Highspire United Brethren Church, where his parents were active members and he was active in Christian Endeavor.

⁷ William Norman Martin (1896-1988) of Rouzerville was a friend of Rufus from Lebanon Valley College and graduated in 1918. He, too, met his wife at college and then entered the mission field – in Sierra Leone Africa. That couple's story is told (from his wife's perspective) in the article "Mrs. Grace (Snyder) Martin" on pages 84-93 in the "Women and Ministry" collection in the 2021 issue of *The Chronicle*.

avid church worker and during her residence in Steelton succeeded in building up one of the best classes in Centenary Sunday School. The Groom is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Harry E. Lefever of York. He is a graduate of Lebanon Valley College class of 1917. He was licensed to preach two years ago. The couple left this afternoon for a trip to Niagara Falls. Upon their return they will make their home in Dayton where both will take up a course in missionary work at the Seminary. The course requires two years. It is the intention of the couple to enter the Chinese missionary field at the end of the two years.

By August 1923 the young couple was in Canton China ready for the mission field – and they were immediately greeted with a letter of welcome from their friends Rev. and Mrs. C.E. Burris.⁸ This original letter and envelope are preserved in the Lefever file at the conference archives, and the letter is reproduced on the following page. The text reads as follows.

Peitaiho, China
August 16, 1923

Dear Friends:

If you will excuse this pencil, I shall write anyway, even if I can't find the pen, which no doubt is in Mr. Burris' pocket.

Welcome to China! You must be happy indeed to arrive, and we are hoping you may have a long and fruitful term of service.

What about first impressions, isn't it all thrilling! We suppose you will be in Canton studying this year. It is hard to wait until we get there to see you. As we must hurry on home to Sinlam, we shall just get a glance of you this time, but hope you shall soon plan a visit with us.

These are full days for you, but you must take time for old friends, you know. With best wishes to you both,

Mr. and Mrs. Burris

P.S. We expect to arrive in Canton the first week of Sept.

While the text of the letter is only moderately interesting, it offers a glimpse into the beginning of the couple's missionary service – and the fact that it was saved as one of their cherished missionary memories indicates how important it was to the Lefevers

⁸ Clinton Edo Burris (1891-1970) and Vesta Dale (Czatt) Burris (1891-1978) were United Brethren missionaries from Ohio. They were 1915 graduates of Otterbein College and fellow students of the Lefevers at Bonebrake [United] Seminary. After serving in China, they served as librarians at the University of Chicago, Morningside College, and Florida Southern College.

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With best of wishes to you both,

Mr and Mrs Burris.

P.S. He expect to arrive in Canton the first week of Sept.

After serving one term in China, Rufus returned to the United States in 1927 and lived in York as a ministerial member of the Pennsylvania Conference before transferring to the Presbyterian Church in the state of New York. A noted and published ornithologist, he returned to China 1941-43 with the Evangelical and Reformed Church to serve as Dean of the Agricultural School in Hunan. He was later a professor of biology at Sampson College in Sampson NY and pastor of Hopewell Presbyterian Church in York County PA. He retired to York and continued to speak and supply pulpits until his death in 1974.

Myrtle M. Lefever

Myrtle M. Lefever (1898-1977) was a lifelong member of York's Fourth United Brethren (now UM) Church. In seventh grade she was president of the congregation's Junior Christian Endeavor. In eighth grade she had her first conviction that she ought to be a missionary. In ninth grade she taught a Sunday School class and was president of the Otterbein Guild. She graduated from York High in 1916, and from Lebanon Valley College in 1920.

After graduating from Lebanon Valley College in 1920, Myrtle moved to Ohio to teach high school and serve as the Junior and Intermediate Christian Endeavor Superintendent of the United Brethren denomination. When troubles in China delayed her scheduled missionary work there, she studied for a year at Biblical Seminary in New York. She finally arrived in China in 1926, but a Communist uprising the following year forced her to flee to Hong Kong before starting her teaching/missionary duties at Miller Seminary in Siu Laam in 1927. After returning home for her first furlough in 1930 and completing her M.R.E. at Biblical Seminary, she returned to Miller Seminary until 1937 – when war broke out between China and Japan.

In 1938 she received special permission from the State Department to return to Sui Laam, which fell to the Japanese in 1940. When the United States declared war on Japan, friendly Chinese helped her to escape Sui Laam just as the Japanese were ready to seize her – and she fled to inland Free China to continue her missionary work there. As the Japanese kept advancing, Myrtle eventually had to flee China by flying over the Himalayas to India and was brought back to the United States on an Army transport in 1944.

In 1946 she was able to return to China, but in 1949 the country fell to the Communists – who did all they could to disturb the ministry. She was eventually put under house arrest for over a year and returned to the United States in 1951. In 1953 she returned to Hong Kong and taught in True Light Middle School for ten years. In 1963 she returned to the United States for a year of missionary deputation and retirement. But in 1965 she returned to Hong Kong on her own and continued to work with a project she had started there in 1955 – until she died in Hong Kong in 1977. She is buried in the family plot with her parents, her brother Rufus and sister-in-law Mary, and her three younger brothers at Mt. Zion Cemetery in Springettsbury township, York County PA.

“Where He Leads Me I Will Follow” was truly the mantra of this family. Complete service records and other information about Rufus and Myrtle Lefever are available from the conference archives on-line data base: susumc.org → resources → archives → online databases → Pennsylvania UB Pastors.