

“God’s Happy Little Band”

A Brief Retelling of God’s Mighty Work of Grace at Trinity Bible Fellowship Church over 140 Years

Written by the Reverend Daniel L. Williams (pastor, Trinity BFC - 2016 – present)

Presented to the BFC Historical Society on October 25, 2025

Dedicated to all the saints of God—past, present, and future—in Blandon and Fleetwood whose work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ have resulted in a harvest of good works for the glory of Almighty God (cf., 1 Thess. 1:3). Soli Deo Gloria!

THE GOSPEL COMES TO BERKS COUNTY

“At Blandon and Reading the membership is generally poor but zealous and devout as only I ever met. The Blandon brethren, few in number, have, on the day of dedication, December 27, 1885, secured in cash and by subscription, sufficient to shield them against impatient creditors. May Zion’s God edify, increase, and prosper Blandon’s happy little band of worshipers!”

W. C. Detwiler, *The Gospel Banner*, February 1, 1886

The roots of what today is known as Trinity Bible Fellowship Church of Blandon, Pennsylvania, may be traced back to the mid-1880s. At that time, as fresh national wounds began to heal from a bloody Civil War, the fires of revival began to spread in Southeastern Pennsylvania when seven Mennonite ministers, led by William S. Gehman, refusing to stamp out the moving of the Holy Spirit, established the *Evangelische Mennonite Gemeinschaft* (Evangelical Mennonite Society), or what is now known as the Bible Fellowship Church.

The diary of William Brunner Musselman, a Mennonite preacher who lived in Richland Township, Bucks County, indicates that by 1884, Musselman had already been assigned the fledgling congregations in Blandon and Fleetwood, with gospel work in Reading, Pennsylvania, serving as the primary hub of his evangelistic efforts. BFC historian Jill Davidson notes that, “It appears that [W. B. Musselman] did not preach in Blandon every week...It seems that he was in Blandon about once per month and not necessarily on a Sunday.” W. B. (as he was known) would travel nearly forty miles from his home in upper Bucks County to stay with friends in the Reading area. Musselman would then preach the gospel—God’s provision for man’s salvation to be received by faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ—at every available opportunity.

By February 1885, at the annual conference of the newly formed Mennonite Brethren in Christ Pennsylvania Conference, Samuel Musselman, a distant cousin of the highly influential W. B. Musselman, had been assigned to join the gospel ministry in central Berks County. The elder Musselman would continue the work in Reading. Samuel Musselman would now fan the flames of Spirit-led revival to nearby Blandon and Fleetwood.

A newspaper clipping from the *Lancaster Examiner* (February 11, 1885) reads:

The Mennonite Brethren

Representatives of the Church of the United Mennonite Brethren in Christ [a name that the small pietistic and revivalistic denomination had carried since its merger with the United Mennonites in 1879] continue in their annual conference at Quakertown. The most important matter done on Tuesday was to decide that no minister known as local, or an assistant who is addicted to tobacco, was to receive a share of the surplus of the home mission fund, which is divided annually among them. A new circuit was also established. Reading, Fleetwood and Blandon, constituting one, was divided by the first being made independent. Rev. Samuel Musselman takes charge of the Blandon and Fleetwood churches. A discussion relating to camp-meeting regulations is now in progress.

By the end of the 19th century, several other notable Mennonite ministers had begun to labor for the Lord's harvest in the quaint, rural villages of central Berks County. S. H. Frey and O. S. Bitting held frequent meetings in Blandon from 1886 to 1888. C. H. Brunner tended to the work in 1897. And the Rev. John G. Shireman held services from 1898 to 1902. Simple, evangelistic preaching, on nearly a nightly basis, was, indeed, producing a harvest of souls in new territory for the Lord.

On January 7, 1899, the *Reading Times* printed the following:

Mennonites Branching Out

The new Mennonite chapel at Blandon is now completed and will be dedicated on the 15th [*sic*] with appropriate exercises. It is a very handsome building for such a new congregation. The Mennonites are becoming aggressive and are branching out for the establishment of new churches. The original Mennonites, like the Quakers, were believers in freedom of worship according to the dictates of conscience and were unwilling to either assist or push conscience, hence their growth was only that of natural increase among themselves.

However, natural generation (i.e., natural birth) was not the only means by which God was growing His church. A few months later, in May 1899, J. G. Shireman contributed the following article to the Mennonite Brethren in Christ's main news outlet, the well-known publication called *The Gospel Banner*:

Blandon, Pa

Dear Bro. Hallman and Banner Readers. –

This morning finds us happy in Jesus. Praise His dear name! Yesterday (Sunday, May 21st) we had baptism in the flowing stream, God manifesting His wonderful power. Some were standing on the banks with the tears rolling down their cheeks. The work at Blandon

looks very encouraging, and we are looking forth for wonderful results in the name of Jesus. The pilgrims are standing by us nobly; the Lord is using them in the open-air meeting as well as supplying our temporal needs. Praise His name forever! Their chief delight is to uphold Christ in the open-air. They have also learned and experienced the more they give to the Lord's cause the more the Lord blesses them. Truly God is the same. Malachi 3:6, "For I am the Lord, I change not."

J. G. Shireman

Initially numbering barely in the double-digits, the Lord's "little band" happily preached the gospel of the living Christ in hopes of seeing many souls saved in the quiet village of Blandon. The seeds of sacrificial dedication to declaring the message of spiritual freedom in Jesus were beginning to germinate into a beautiful garden for the glory of God.

YOU ARE GOD'S FIELD, GOD'S BUILDING

The exact population of Blandon, from the turn of the century in the early 1900s, is unknown. However, what is well known is that the area's growth was largely influenced by the rapid development of the East Penn Railroad. Originally established in December 1746, Maiden creek Township was so named because of a small creek that runs diagonally across the township. The Quakers were the first Europeans to settle in the area as early as 1732 and lived peacefully among the Lenape Indians for many years. Around the turn of the 19th century, German-speaking settlers became the predominant people group. A post office has been in operation in Blandon since 1862. The exact origin of the name Blandon is still disputed today.

Blandon's progress into a tiny but significant town came as a result of the Blandon Rolling Mill, built in 1867 by Adam and Jacob Kauffman and Charles D. Geiger along the East Penn Railroad line. A *Reading Times* news article from August 1, 1905, states:

Road Double Tracked

Work between Topton and Lyons, on East Penn Road, Completed.

The double-tracking of the East Penn Railroad, between Topton and Lyons is now completed and the road was turned over to the transportation department on Sunday. This leaves the road between Lyons and Blandon and between Topton and Albury still to be double tracked, a distance of about 10 miles. No doubt this will also be double tracked during the next year or two, as it is needed to move the constantly increasing traffic over the East Penn Road.

It was sometime between 1872 and 1875 that the company laid double tracks between Reading and Blandon and between Allentown and Albury, providing a little more than one-half the road with double tracks.

Four hundred and ten persons took advantage yesterday of the cheap excursion of the Pennsylvania Railroad to the popular watering places along the Jersey coast.

The Philadelphia and Reading Railroad will run an excursion to Lake Hopatcong next Sunday. The train will leave at 1:30 a.m. and return from the lake at 5 p.m. The trip will cost \$1.75.

Another news article from June 1, 1900, was headlined:

Killed As He Slept

A Blandon Rolling Mill Employee Crushed to Death on the Railroad.

Blandon, May 31 – Jacob Boyer, living in Hofftown, was instantly killed by the fast freight going west about two squares from the P. & R. railroad station...Mr. Boyer was seen in Blandon at a late hour. It is believed that as he was going home he fell asleep on the tracks. [*Author's note: The rest of the article is unsuitable to be read publicly on account of its graphic detail.*]

Notably, the only other old-time industry of real importance was Blandon's broom-making industry which came into being in 1912. That year, George E. Schmick commenced production of about 840 units a day at a frame factory at the far end of South Main Street. But a fire destroyed the premises in 1915.

A year later, Smick erected a new "Blandon Broom Works" along Chestnut Street near the railroad. A Bicentennial publication (in 1976) stated that, "Blandon today can be remembered by its last well-known industry, the manufacturing of brooms." Trinity's own Dorothy Bolognese, who turned 98 years old on August 24, 2025, worked for many years in Blandon's broom works.

One other notable discovery from the early 1900s was the existence of a town baseball team. A *Reading Times* article from April 1915 states:

The Blandon baseball team is getting the diamond ready for the first game on Saturday, April 17. Bleachers and a new flag and pennant pole have been erected. They will cross bats with the Whitman Colts, of Reading.

And from June 28, 1915, we read:

The Blandon baseball team up to last Sunday played 12 games and lost three. On July 5 the team will go to Mohnton for two games.

Spiritually-speaking, God had providentially directed the Mennonite Brethren in Christ to the fertile, evangelistic soil of Blandon. But where would they be able to build a house of worship for the maturing of God's saints? The answer came in 1898. Up until that time, the Mennonite gospel workers met and ministered in a tabernacle (i.e., large tent) that had been

purchased by offerings collected by the Reverend Shireman. Regular meetings were held in the Tabernacle until cold weather set in; there was a clear, urgent need for a more permanent place to worship.

Owen B. Roberts donated land in 1898 to the Mennonite congregation along the east side of Chestnut Street in Blandon. Ephraim Dunkle donated lumber. Under Shireman's leadership, men from the congregation worked together to construct a simple, 28' x 40' meeting house. The small building on Chestnut Street was dedicated to the Lord on January 15, 1899. Records show that there were 25 members in the fellowship at the time.

The *Gospel Banner*, once again, reported on these exciting events:

Brother Shireman has been working very hard, collecting and working with his own hands until the building was finished. It is a neat little frame building 28 x 40, plastered and finished off nicely, lit up by a large reflector chandelier. It cost about \$600, of which \$400 had been paid, and the balance collected in cash and Bonafide [*sic*] subscriptions on the day of dedication.

The little church on Chestnut Street quickly became the location of a vibrant and growing spiritual family. "The dedication of the members and friends of Trinity Church was exceptional," one former member stated. When the congregation needed additional room, men from the church along with several others outside the church dug a basement out by hand. This space would later be used for classrooms and fellowship. Presiding Elder H. B. Musselman is quoted in a January 11, 1917, *Gospel Banner* article as saying:

The cellar has been dug under the Blandon chapel, and a heater has been installed. A beautiful building lot has also been purchased at Fleetwood [*sic*] with the view of building a more commodious church building thereon at some future time. The pastor of the charge is kept very busy, and appears to have excellent courage, with a view of having a people ready for the Lord's coming at all of these places.

H. B. Musselman, P. E.

One former member of Trinity, Mrs. Mildred Mengel Oyler, provides some additional insights into the early years of church life on Chestnut Street:

The outside of the church was a gray white. There was no vestibule, only a large metal awning with decorative edges over the door. The town had no running water, so in the backyard were two outhouses. The windows were frosted glass with a pattern. The woodwork a stained pine with grain. The pulpit area remains as it was then.

There was a center row of pews with two side rows and two aisles, one on either side of the center row of pews. Men and women sat alone, but I believe it was in the early thirties [*sic*] we sat as families. On either side of the front were pews against the wall with

folding chairs in front of those pews. There were wooden folding chairs. This was the ‘amen corner’.

The cellar was only large enough to accommodate a hot-air furnace and a coal bin.

There was no piano in my early years. Hymns were sung with the best singers leading off. I remember the hymn “We’re Marching to Zion” when the men would march around the church singing and clapping the hands. (I always liked that as a child.) There were no musical instruments.

As a reflection of our Mennonite traditions, when I was growing up there were what seemed to be many customs and taboos. Pins and watches were allowed but no other jewelry. No wedding or engagement rings. 1940 when I graduated from high school, I was permitted to have a class pin, but no ring. In the forties, wedding bands were finally allowed, and then gradually more pieces of jewelry. Women always wore hats to church and wore their hair long, pinned up. By my generation, girls continued to wear their hair short and permed. Definitely no movies [*sic*].

Marie Bean, wife of Rev. E. W. Bean (pastor, 1959-1966), adds:

The women wore long skirts, 9-inches from the floor. The colors were dark blue, black, or dark brown worn with a white long-sleeved cotton blouse with a little tie around the collar (like you would tie your shoelace) that would hang down. The tie colors were dark like the skirts.

You were to wear a plain hat to cover your head—no flowers or decorations on the hat. No make-up, no white gloves, no high heels—flat, dark shoes, no jewelry of any kind—wedding bands [were] okay. They used to give watches to each other sometimes instead of a ring when they married.

The women were to keep their hair long, parted down the middle, pulled into a bun in the middle or top of their head. If a woman had short hair, they were not allowed to teach any class.

When coming into the worship area, you were to bend the knee, bow down and say a prayer before you sat down in your pew.

The women sat on one side of the church, men on the other side. Men always wore a suit with long sleeves, white shirt and tie and did not take their jackets off no matter how hot it got.

Members sat towards the front of the church. Back sliders had to sit in the back. If there was someone sitting in the front that belonged in the back, a deacon or elder escorted them to the proper area. So, when the people started coming into the church, they filled up the front pews first (not like today—they do just the opposite).

The early years at Trinity, at the start of the 1900s, were characterized by plain dress, reverent conduct, dedicated service, and evangelistic preaching. But these attributes, significantly, were not unique to Blandon. Many were planting ‘gospel seeds.’ Others were watering them. But God, of course, was giving growth in His little fields of Blandon, Fleetwood, and apparently in nearby Terre Hill, as well (cf., I Cor. 3:5-9).

CIRCUIT MINISTRY: GOSPEL ZEAL AND SUPPORTIVE SAINTS

The gospel ministry in the first half of the 20th century, carried out by zealous servants of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ, was often done via a circuit ministry. North-central Berks County was no exception. In fact, it would not be until the year 1958, at the urging of Rev. T. D. Gehret, that Trinity would gain its independence and call its own pastor. Prior to that time, the gospel work in Blandon and elsewhere was carried on by ministers who also served multiple “classes” (i.e., congregations) in neighboring towns—in this instance, Fleetwood, Terre Hill, and at times, even, Kutztown.

Two primary characteristics stand out from the era of circuit ministry. The first of which was the zeal and evangelistic fervor of God’s committed, gospel servants. The second was the eagerness and enthusiastic support of God’s compassionate, humble saints. News articles from these early years reveal a full schedule—speaking, often, in multiple locations on the same day—for ministers. Other articles captured the committed and sacrificial support of local “classes” for their beloved gospel ministers.

Blandon, January 18, 1916 (*The Reading Times*)

Revival services now in progress in the Mennonite Church are largely attended.

And again:

Revival meetings have started in the Mennonite Brethen in Christ Church on Sunday evening and will continue indefinitely. Rev. B. Bryan Musselman is the pastor and invites everybody to come at these meetings.

The Reading Times, Feb. 13, 1917

Revival services in Mennonite Brethen in Christ church started New Year morning and will continue. The Rev. A. G. Woodring, of Fleetwood, has charge.

The Reading Times, Jan. 10, 1927

Blandon Mennonite, Rev. A. G. Woodring, pastor –

Evangelistic services at 7 p.m. Services every night except Monday and Friday. Sunday morning Rev. Mr. Woodring will preach in Fleetwood Mennonite church at 9 o’clock. Services in Town hall, Kutztown, each Friday at 7:30 p.m.

The Reading Times, January 1933

The special services held in the Town hall for many weeks continue each Friday evening at 7:30. Rev. A. G. Woodring, pastor of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church, of Fleetwood, is in charge. Evangelistic services will also be held in the Mennonite church at Blandon for a few weeks.

The Morning Call, January 26, 1933

Mennonites Will Immerse Converts in Fleetwood Dam

Baptism by immersion will be conducted at the Fleetwood Dam Sunday afternoon at 2:30 o'clock by the Rev. A. G. Woodring, pastor of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church of Fleetwood, Blandon, and Terre Hill. Ten converts will subject themselves to the ceremony rain or shine.

An open-air meeting will be held at Kutztown tomorrow evening at 7:30. Testimonies and examples of divine healing will be discussed at this meeting. Thursday evening, June 24, another open-air service will be held at the same place.

The Reading Times, June 17, 1926

Special Services by Mennonites

The Rev. A. G. Woodring, pastor of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ church, Fleetwood, will conduct two special services on Sunday, in the American Legion Hall, Kutztown, at 3 p.m. and 7 p.m.

Rev. Woodring will speak in the afternoon on "The Times of the Gentiles." Presiding Elder Rev. H. B. Musselman, of Allentown, will speak in the evening.

These services will be of an evangelistic nature with special singing by a large mixed chorus. Hot coffee and cocoa will be served free between the two services.

The Reading Times, February 1933

Missionary to Speak at Blandon

BLANDON, May 26 – Miss Mary A. Butterfield, a retired missionary, who has spent about twenty-five years in Palestine, will be the speaker in the Mennonite Brethren in Christ Sunday school, Sunday. She will be in Blandon at 9 a.m. and in Fleetwood, 10:30 a.m. She has many incidents and facts to give about the "Holy Land." The pastor A.G. Woodring extends an invitation to all. Rev. Woodring speaks at Fleetwood, Sunday evening at 7 o'clock.

Irene Snyder, a blind woman, will demonstrate Bible reading at Kutztown on Friday evening, May 26, at 7:30.

The Reading Times, May 1933

Will Show Scene of Radio Sermon

KUTZTOWN, Dec. 15 – Twenty-five young people of the Radio church, Allentown, with brass and string instruments will appear in Legion Hall here on Sunday afternoon at 2:30.

Rev. B. Bryan Musselman, Radio preacher, will be the speaker and with his group of young people will give an actual scene of how he broadcasts his Radio services from his studio.

The service is dedicated to the young people and the message will be of importance to them.

The evening service will begin at 7 o'clock, when Rev. A. G. Woodring, pastor of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ congregation, of Fleetwood, Blandon, Terre Hill and Kutztown will speak.

The Reading Times, December 16, 1933

Notably, the members of these circuit churches were just as engaged in the gospel ministry as were their ministers. An article from *The News Journal* dated June 5, 1915, indicates that:

Communion and feet washing was held on Sunday afternoon at the Mennonite Brethren in Christ church. The presiding elder, Rev. H. B. Musselman, of Bethlehem, preached the sermon. Several of the members from Fleetwood and Blandon were present.

The News Journal, June 5, 1915

FLEETWOOD – Thirty tents have been engaged by the Fleetwood, Blandon, and Terre Hill charge of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ, at the annual camp meeting, to be held July 2 to 10, at East Allentown.

The Reading Times, June 23, 1926

Pastor Woodring to Get New Auto

Special services will also be held next week on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday evening, in the town hall, at 7:30.

Last Sunday, when the communion service was held in the American Legion Hall, by the Mennonite Brethren in Christ congregation, the members and friends of Fleetwood, Blandon, Terre Hill, and Kutztown circuit, presented their pastor, A. G. Woodring, with four envelopes, containing a total of \$412 to be used to purchase a new automobile.

The Reading Times, December 1933

School to End with Exercises

BLANDON DAILY VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL AFFAIR FRIDAY NIGHT

May 23 – Community daily vacation Bible school, of Blandon, will hold its closing exercises on Friday evening at 7:45, in Maiden creek Union church, where its early sessions are being held.

The churches participating are Maiden creek Union, the Rev. Dr. M. H. Brensinger, Reformed pastor, and the Rev. Elmer F. Wenrich, Lutheran pastor, and the Mennonite church, the Rev. D. L. [sic] Woodring, pastor.

The Reading Times, May 1934

Boaster [sic] Day for Mennonite S.S.

On Sunday afternoon at 2:30, the Mennonite Brethren in Christ Sunday school, at Blandon, will present a booster day program. There will be music, speakers and special features, and prizes will be given to the oldest and youngest persons present, to the largest family, to the one coming the farthest, and to the one bringing the most visitors.

John I. Mengel is superintendent of the Sunday school, and Rev. A. G. Woodring is pastor of the congregation.

The Reading Times, September 1, 1934

Blandon

Watch night services will be held in the Mennonite church Wednesday night, Dec. 31, at 8 o'clock. These services will be followed by evangelistic meetings to last several weeks. An interesting program has been arranged for Wednesday night.

The Reading Times, December 31, 1924

The circuit ministry era, as demonstrated from these brief accounts, was one of true gospel zeal and great saintly sacrifice. God's servants traveled extensively, and often, between local "classes,"—in Blandon, Fleetwood, and Terre Hill, and for a season, in Kutztown. Evangelistic services, on almost a daily basis, were the norm, not the exception. Modest dress, unceasing dedication, and generous practical support were staples at every stop. However, one particular year stands out from the rest as uniquely indicative of what life in the Mennonite Brethren in Christ congregations looked like in those early and fruitful days. That year was 1917.

1917

By 1917, the Great War, raging over in Europe, was well into its third year. But while the forces of good and evil were fighting it out and spilling blood across the seas, and from trench to trench, here in Berks County one gospel herald—B. Bryan Musselman—was on the march with the message of God’s holiness and provision for man’s salvation in Christ.

That year, the *Eastern Gospel Banner* of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ, eagerly, chronicled the evangelistic exploits of B. Bryan Musselman on nearly a monthly basis:

FLEETWOOD, Pa. –

The brethren turned out well, and the attendance was very good. The class from Blandon was present and twenty-two came from Terre Hill with a large motor truck, a distance of thirty miles.

Eastern Gospel Banner, January 11, 1917

FLEETWOOD-BLANDON-TERRE HILL, Pa. –

“The Lord has done great things for us, whereof we are glad.” (Psalm 126:3)

We have been privileged to spend another year among the dear pilgrims at these places. Upon our return from Conference we were very kindly remembered with a large cash donation by the Fleetwood and Blandon classes and also a large donation of things to eat and wear by the Terre Hill class. We feel very unworthy of their many generous kindnesses shown toward us and pray God to abundantly bless them for the same.

We are at present engaged in a series of revival meetings at Fleetwood, Pa. The Lord is with us, the brethren and sisters have a hold of the rope and we expect a break in the ranks of sin.

Pray for us.

B. Bryan Musselman, Pastor, *Eastern Gospel Banner*, January 1917

FLEETWOOD-BLANDON-TERRE HILL, Pa. –

We are glad to report victory through Jesus Christ our Lord. We are at present engaged in a series of meetings at Blandon, Pa. The Lord is wonderfully leading. The attendance is very good every evening. On Sunday evening the church was filled with eager listeners. Conviction is resting upon the people. Thus far two have yielded and claimed victory. Seven have raised their hands for prayer. We are expecting a break in the ranks of the enemy. We enjoy witnessing for the Lord. Opposition keeps us on the move. We are encouraged in the work of the Lord.

We were very kindly remembered over the holidays by our loyal classes—Fleetwood and Blandon, both expressed their love to the writer by giving him a large cash donation. Also, very useful and beautiful gifts. We wish to have the Lord wonderfully bless them for their generosity and considerateness of us. Yours for souls.

B. Bryan Musselman, Pastor, *Eastern Gospel Banner*, January 25, 1917

FLEETWOOD-BLANDON-TERRE HILL, Pa. –

The classes are well united and have a mind to work for Him. We have been having wonderful meetings in which decisions have been made for eternity. Some are at present stepping out into new territory for the Lord. Our Sunday schools at the three places are very good. The attendance is increasing right along. Our revival meetings thus far have been grand and well attended. Thus far four have been saved and others are under conviction.

We enjoy laboring among these dear people. They stand by us in every way. The young people especially are very plain and obedient and are striving to be ready when the Lord comes. Our needs are wonderfully supplied for which we thank God. We are continually looking up.

B. Byran Musselman, Pastor, *Eastern Gospel Banner*, February 15, 1917

FLEETWOOD-BLANDON-TERRE HILL, Pa. –

We are having a series of meetings at Fleetwood which are being owned of the Lord. On Sunday evening the church was filled with eager listeners. Extra chairs and benches had to be supplied...many are attending who never were in the church before.

The pilgrims are standing by well. They are very much interested and are used of God in witnessing for Him in prayer and song. They love to work and are united in their efforts. Thus far two young men have been saved and are doing nicely. We believe some will step out into a deeper experience and still others be saved.

B. Bryan Musselman, Pastor, *Eastern Gospel Banner*, March 8, 1917

BLANDON, Pa. –

We held the Conference at this place in the midst of a raging snowstorm. A goodly number of the brethren from Terre Hill were present, in spite of the bad roads and far distance they had to come...The Fleetwood people also turned out in full...The finances showed an increase in the various offerings, and an increase in the attendance and interest was also reported.

The work on this charge is widely scattered, and it takes much time to meet with all of the members, and to speak at the different appointments. The pastor, Brother B. Bryan

Musselman, is keeping good courage, and his people stand by him most nobly. The condition of the work on the entire charge is most creditable.

H. B. Musselman, P. E., *Eastern Gospel Banner*, March 15, 1917

FLEETWOOD-BLANDON-TERRE HILL, Pa. –

We indeed have many and great reasons to rejoice in the Lord. His mercies have been great toward us. Our services are being continually owned and blessed by Him.

The dear pilgrims received the Word very gladly and we believe lasting impressions and effects have been made. Though a severe snowstorm was raging, yet the attendance was very good throughout the day. Strangers being in attendance at every service.

We are praying for a great ingathering, and we believe that we shall have an early answer. Hearts are touched and souls are on the verge of yielding...The dear pilgrims are on the job for God...We believe in the soon coming of our Lord and are endeavoring to hasten it by our actions and lives. The three classes are standing by the Truth in the plain old-fashioned way. Making no compromise and becoming more separated from the world.

B. Bryan Musselman, Pastor, *Eastern Gospel Banner*, March 22, 1917

FLEETWOOD-BLANDON-TERRE HILL, Pa. –

The dear ones are faithfully standing by on all lines.

Our last Quarterly Conference for the year was indeed a blessed one. Many have said it was the best ever held on this circuit. Our presiding elder, H. B. Musselman, came to us with three timely and helpful messages which are telling for good in our lives.

We baptized ten recently at Terre Hill, and last Sunday evening received ten into church fellowship. The Lord is blessing the work at Terre Hill and some are being added to the number.

We are minded to stand for the Truth and rally around the Standard till Jesus comes.

B. Bryan Musselman, Pastor, *Eastern Gospel Banner*, September 27, 1917

FLEETWOOD-BLANDON-TERRE HILL, Pa. –

The classes are united and have the work of the Lord at heart. They are encouraged and are looking for the coming of the Lord. The classes of Fleetwood and Bandon presented us with a large cash donation upon our return from Conference. We feel very grateful but very unworthy, and hope God will make us a blessing to them in spiritual things. Our needs are very well supplied.

...The dear ones are sacrificing as never before, and we expect to reap a harvest of good for God as the result. Pray for us.

B. Bryan Musselman, Pastor, *Eastern Gospel Banner*, December 20, 1917

A decade later, in 1927, the now regionally famous “Radio preacher” from Allentown, B. Bryan Musselman, would once again return to Fleetwood and Blandon, bringing along his music group and radio program and holding revival services almost every evening. The gospel message of the Lord Jesus Christ was indeed marching on to victory.

FROM MBC TO BFC: A NEW ERA BEGINS

In 1959, the Annual Conference adopted a new name to reflect the changing winds of doctrinal convictions and a sharp shift in church culture. That new name was the Bible Fellowship Church. Here, new articles of faith—which now favored more Reformed, or Calvinistic, doctrines as opposed to the old Wesleyan (i.e., holiness) doctrines—were ratified. The practice of foot washing was dropped. The office of the Presiding Elder began to fade away. In summary, ‘Out with the bishops, in with the rule of local elders.’

Interestingly, prior to the early 1960s, the Presiding Elder, and only a few others, would determine which minister would belong to what church. Remembering that time, Mildred Mengel Oyler, whom we heard from earlier, vividly recalls:

G. K. Himmelreich was the delegate to the annual conference for the three churches. I believe he served until his death. He would say a-going to conference and getting the pastor you wanted was like horse-trading. Those days pastors had no voice in where they were stationed. The delegate and two presiding elders would decide the assignments. It was in 1945 that a limit of years was placed on the assignments. But, I believe it was early in the seventies when this was discontinued and local churches began picking their pastors.

One such pastoral change affecting the Blandon church came to the Rev. N. H. Wolf in 1958. *The Daily Item*, from October 1958, abruptly announced:

Rev. Bean Given New Church Post – Rev. Wolf to Return to Sunbury Mennonite Church Next Week

Rev. Earnest W. Bean, pastor of Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church, this city for the past six years, was assigned to the Mennonite Church in Blandon at Thursday’s session of the annual conference of the denomination in Ebenezer Church, Bethlehem.

Information concerning the change came to Mrs. Bean Thursday evening from her husband, who is attending the conference with church lay delegate William E. Miller.

Rev. Bean’s transfer is one of 14 ministerial changes being made in the conference...Changes will be effective at once, the transferred pastors to preach their last sermon in their present pastoral capacity on Sunday.

The *Daily Item*, October 1958

Notably, the same article indicated that the Blandon and Fleetwood congregations were each made independent in the same year (i.e., 1958).

Other significant occurrences from the news of the 1960s, and 1970s, included:

Miss Kline Says Vows of Marriage

Sandra L. Kline, daughter of Mrs. Gladys R. Kline of Blandon, and the late Urias B. Kline, became the bride of Jensen L. Adams, son of Grace F. Adams of Fleetwood, and the late John L. Adams, on Nov. 2.

The Rev. E. W. Bean of Blandon and Rev. George H. Herb of Fleetwood performed the ceremony in Faith Bible Fellowship Church, Fleetwood.

The *Morning Call*, November 1963

The Reverend Ernst W. Bean was a frequent participant in baccalaureate services for Fleetwood High School, as noted in the May 1962 and May 1966 editions of the *Morning Call*. The Rev. Donald T. Kirkwood, likewise, addressed the high school graduates in 1970 with an address titled "What is Truth?"

Truth is co-respondent to the revealed will of God. Because there is so much in the world today that does not correspond to this definition, we must begin with ourselves in search of truth. Man must change himself before society is to be changed. People want freedom. But the Bible says, 'Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.'

The *Morning Call*, June 1970

Trinity's current pastor, the Reverend Daniel L. Williams, continues this legacy of local community involvement.

The Reverend Dana E. Weller served Trinity Bible Fellowship Church as pastor from 1975-1981. Pastor Weller was a volunteer driver for the Blandon ambulance which was housed very close to the Chestnut Street church building, as was the town's lone firetruck. "When the siren blew, the service stopped because it was so loud," recalls Weller. Pastor Weller also noted that "the big church" was the Lutheran church (today known as Maiden Creek Church). The "little church" was Trinity. Weller remembers that the people at Trinity were loyal and generous. He also noted that the adjacent mushroom houses, which were built in the early 1980s, produced a funny smell in the neighborhood. Visitors would sometimes ask, "What's that smell?" To which the locals would answer, "What smell?"

The Reverend Randall A. Grossman, who grew up in nearby Topton, Pa., was saved during his college years at Kutztown University and began attending Trinity during Weller's ministry. "The Blandon church was the first Bible teaching church that [I] ever attended,"

remembered Grossman. God would later direct Pastor Grossman to pursue a seminary degree at Biblical Theological Seminary in Hatfield, Pa., before planting a new BFC church in Kutztown. Pastor Grossman began that work on February 1, 1981. Three years later, Kutztown Bible Fellowship Church was received into Annual Conference. Today, Pastor Grossman continues to serve as pastor of Grace Bible Fellowship Church in Reading.

The “old church,” that on Chestnut Street, consisted of a sanctuary, Fellowship Hall (which was used for social gatherings and Sunday school), a nursery, and library—which was started by and named after Luther Brown who died tragically in a training accident with Wycliffe Bible Translators in Mexico—a kitchen, and two additional classrooms. “I remember when we had Sunday school rooms. They weren’t really rooms, there were cloth curtains to separate the classes. All the teachers could hear each other,” recalled Barbara Mast. In the early 1980s, the membership of Trinity Bible Fellowship Church was around 80 people, with Sunday school having an enrollment of 165. The church maintained an active bus ministry which former elder Michael Littlejohn often participated in. “There were two buses [at the time]. We would go out on Saturdays to recruit people to go ride on the bus,” stated Littlejohn. The “little church” on Chestnut Street saw God do many mighty works of grace in the lives of His people.

Nevertheless, discussions about the need for a new church building began as early as 1967. The question soon became: Where would the Blandon church move to next?

MOVING TO MAIN STREET

The present location of Trinity Bible Fellowship Church (220 Main Street) was originally owned by Mr. and Mrs. George Barrell. In the early 1980s, representatives of the church approached the owners about selling the property. At that time, however, the price was felt to be too high. Other properties were also considered. However, on January 17, 1984, the elders and deacons went to Barrell’s property and, in prayer, boldly claimed it for the Lord. Yet, Mr. Barrell was not ready to sell. On June 29, 1987, Mr. Barrell offered the land for a sell price of \$141,960, and with a unanimous vote of the members on August 9, 1987, the land was finally purchased. A building committee was appointed in January 1988. The final payment on the land was made on March 29, 1989. And by September of 1990, the congregation had voted to build a new church building on Main Street.

But, surprisingly, the very next month Trinity’s pastor felt called to leave. Some in the church asked, “Do we start the building phase of the project without a pastor?” After much prayer, the elders and congregation felt led to push ahead and finish the new building for the glory of God.

The current property was purchased, and ground had been broken for the new building by May 1991. The first portion, that nearest to Main Street, was completed and Trinity’s first services were held in the church’s existing lobby on November 24, 1991. The new church building was dedicated on January 12, 1992.

That very Sunday, Trinity welcomed its new pastor, the Reverend Carl J. Fischer. Pastor Fischer recalls that when he was asked to preach his “trial” sermon it was still in the old building on Chestnut Street. While preaching, the building started to shake. He wondered if the Lord was returning! But it turned out only to be the train—one being pulled by a steam locomotive, blowing its whistle. People were leaving their seats to look out the window as the train passed by. Much like the locomotive disrupting his first sermon, Pastor Fischer was a force for good in Blandon.

Pastor Fischer and his wife Julie joined Trinity, and the church quickly grew from 110 people to around 230 people. Initially, worship was held in the large foyer/fellowship hall/Sunday school room. There remained a large unfinished 300-seat sanctuary to complete. After the original church building on Chestnut Street was sold in February 1992, the elders and congregation unanimously decided to begin construction to finish the sanctuary. The work was completed, and the first service was held on Sunday, August 23rd, 1992. On October 4th, the sanctuary was dedicated for the use of the church to bring honor and praise to God.

After a few short years, the church body was still growing. The building was, once again, too small regarding usable classroom space. In 1994, a building committee was established to investigate additional construction. Again, the Lord was gracious, and in 1996 the congregation dedicated a new Christian Education wing. Still further expansion would occur around the year 2000 adding much-needed space for fellowship and, even, a new kitchen.

BETTER TOGETHER: BLANDON AND FLEETWOOD UNIFIED AGAIN

Four miles to the east, the Reverend R. Jerry Brush and the members of Faith Bible Fellowship Church in Fleetwood, Pa., enjoyed tremendous blessings from the Lord. Pastor Brush and his wife Julie arrived at Faith in March 1991. He recalls:

When Julie and I arrived in Fleetwood...we knew that we had been called to a great church. The history of Faith Bible Fellowship church has been rich. It has been marked with seasons of growth, seasons of trials and seasons of renewal. The same can probably be said of almost every church. Even today, it's hard to miss the favor of God at Fleetwood.

Our church has had some great pastors and great members. It is hard to believe that back in the 1950s and 1960s, over 250 people regularly packed into the modest church building located at 236 South Richmond Street. We have experienced great blessing!

Despite God's blessing and the congregation's tremendous faithfulness, a couple of sizeable challenges—most notably an aging building and limited parking availability—prompted the members of Faith to seek guidance and fresh direction from the Lord.

Back in Blandon, tragedy struck the Trinity church family when Rev. Alan G. Miller was killed in an auto-accident on May 11, 2015. Miller had pastored the church since his arrival in

2007. Pastor Miller, like many who came before him, was an excellent expository preacher. Miller gave special attention to one-on-one discipleship of Trinity's men and was active in the local community as a basketball and soccer referee. His wife Nancy and several family members continue to be active at Trinity today.

An initial attempt to merge Trinity and Faith Bible Fellowship Church in Fleetwood, Pa., was made in the summer of 2015, following Miller's death. However, by October, both elder boards had accepted the fact that this was not God's will for the moment. Trinity would continue its search for a new senior pastor. Faith BFC would remain in Fleetwood—again, only four miles away—for the time being.

On March 1, 2016, Rev. Daniel L. Williams was called as Trinity's thirtieth pastor. Williams had connected to the Bible Fellowship Church in 2004 when he and his wife Laurie began attending Grace Bible Fellowship Church in Wallingford, Pennsylvania. Less than four years later, God led Williams to help plant a new BFC church in Woodbury Heights, New Jersey. In April 2011, New Beginnings Bible Fellowship Church was received as a Particular Church by the BFC Conference.

Shortly after arriving in Blandon, Pastor Williams and Pastor R. Jerry Brush began to meet and discuss the possibility of attempting a new unification process between their respective congregations. Very quickly, the boards of elders were brought back into deliberations, the congregations were made aware of the possibility, and, most importantly, prayers were being offered to God for His special guidance.

On New Year's Day—January 1, 2017—Trinity Bible Fellowship Church welcomed and joined with members of the former Faith Bible Fellowship Church in Fleetwood, Pennsylvania., as one, newly unified BFC church. The minutes of the congregational meetings in both Blandon and Fleetwood record nearly unanimous support for the church unification. Minutes from the November 20, 2016, congregation meeting in Fleetwood read:

Chairman Pastor R. Brush called the meeting to order. He explained that we should consider the coming vote on Dec. 4 as a question of, is God moving us to join these two churches? He said that he and the Faith elders feel that it seems good to have a yes response to the vote.

We met with the Trinity elders last year and considered joining the two churches. At that time, it was decided by the Elders of Faith and Trinity to suspend talks until Trinity found a new lead pastor.

This year at a meeting of the two Elder boards, the spirit was good and encouraging to continue talks of joining the two churches. The meeting was turned over to Pastor D. Williams of Trinity. He introduced the two elders present from Trinity.

[Williams] went through an on-screen slide presentation to summarize and update everyone on the proposed joining of the churches to help the congregation with their vote on Dec. 4. This slide presentation was reviewed by both elder boards and approved for viewing by the Faith and Trinity congregations.

Some highlights of the presentation include:

- We are better together than [we are] apart.
- We have a shared history as local churches in the Bible Fellowship Church.
- There was more reason to have two separate locations in the past. Travel was harder when you had to walk to church. Even when cars were available, in the early years, most people did not have a car.
- Both churches have a common faith, a shared story, and serve a common community in Fleetwood and Blandon.
- Unification would possibly enable expanded staffing (i.e., a Youth Director).
- Unification would possibly enable future expanded facilities for greater outreach.

Following an overwhelming show of support from both congregational memberships, the elders at Faith Bible Fellowship Church (Fleetwood) and Trinity Bible Fellowship Church (Blandon) submitted a joint resolution for ratification by the BFC Executive Board. The resolution was dated December 6, 2016, and reads, in part:

Dear Executive Board of the Bible Fellowship Church:

WHEREAS the Boards of Elders at Faith Bible Fellowship Church (Fleetwood, Pa.) and Trinity Bible Fellowship Church (Blandon, Pa.) have prayerfully considered unifying these two Particular Churches into one Bible Fellowship Church meeting and serving the Lord and the Blandon-Fleetwood community,

and

WHEREAS, based upon the recommendation of the Boards of Elders at Faith BFC and Trinity BFC, the membership of both churches voted on Sunday, December 4, 2016, in favor of proceeding with the unification of these churches, therefore be it:

RESOLVED that we, the elders of Faith BFC and Trinity BFC, proceed with unifying the congregations and assets effective immediately, as the Lord allows, and it be further

RESOLVED that we give thanks to God for His gracious guidance with regard to this decision, as well as for His faithfulness to both churches for more than 140 years of gospel ministry to this community.

God has truly blessed this Holy Spirit-given sense of humility, sacrifice, and godly cooperation between the leaders and members of the unified Trinity Bible Fellowship Church. Since the (re)-unification, Trinity has doubled in membership, added support staff, launched new

ministries, and expanded its facilities (a new addition completed in August 2023 and sanctuary expansion completed in August 2025), all while maintaining the very same gospel “DNA” that was present in prior generations. Today, the leaders and members at Trinity preach Christ faithfully, love one another committedly, and reach out to the community winsomely—all to the glory of God! By God’s grace, and through the enabling and active ministry of the Holy Spirit among us, we are truly better together than we would otherwise have been had we not heeded God’s direction just a few short years ago.

LOOKING BACK WITH GRATITUDE, MOVING FORWARD IN FAITH

So, what does the story of Trinity Bible Fellowship Church teach us today? What are some of the lessons of gospel conviction, zeal, hope, love, and faith that may be captured from this retelling of God’s mighty work of grace over the last 140 (plus) years in Blandon? What benefit is there for the current generation of God’s children at Trinity in “looking back with gratitude, and moving forward in faith”?

First, our story declares the abundant goodness and faithfulness of our loving heavenly Father to an ordinary-yet-extraordinarily-committed community of disciples of Jesus Christ. The psalmist declares in Psalm 145:3-7:

“Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable. One generation shall commend your works to another and shall declare your mighty acts. On the glorious splendor of your majesty, and on your wondrous works, I will meditate. They shall speak of the might of your awesome deeds, and I will declare your greatness. They shall pour forth the fame of your abundant goodness and shall sing aloud of your righteousness.”

Clearly, the first lesson to be learned here is that God—and God, alone—deserves all the glory. “Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name give glory,” (Ps. 115:1). Every chapter of this incredible story is ultimately about a remarkably faithful and gracious Lord—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—fulfilling His purposes and plans to bring honor to His eternally glorious name through a group of (largely) “nameless” people. To God be the glory!

Secondly, our story underscores the essential place and purpose of evangelism in the life of God’s church. It is humbling—and not a little convicting—to look back upon previous eras of gospel ministry in Blandon and Fleetwood and see such zeal, sacrifice, and effort at seeing lost people saved. Truly, how much of our present ministry is spent on serving those who are not yet a part of our church? The centrality of God’s glory through the preaching of Jesus Christ, crucified, risen from the dead, and returning in judgment, in obedience to the Great Commission (cf., Mt. 28:18-20) is a repeated refrain throughout the sweet, simple story of “God’s Happy Little Band.” If God’s people fail to evangelize today, then it is quite possible for their local church to be gone tomorrow. Church history has borne this out time and again.

*We've a story to tell to the nations
That shall turn their hearts to the right
A story of truth and mercy
A story of peace and light, a story of peace and light
For the darkness shall turn to dawning
And the dawning to noonday bright
And Christ's great kingdom shall come on earth
The kingdom of love and light.*

“We’ve a Story to Tell to the Nations,” H. Ernst Nichol, 1896

Next, our story speaks about a group of people who, though humble and desiring to be holy, were also daring and willing to change. Let’s be honest, “change” doesn’t come naturally in Berks County, Pennsylvania. However, from tabernacles to sanctuaries, from circuit ministry to single-pastor churches, from Mennonite Brethren in Christ to Bible Fellowship Church, from Wesleyan holiness to Reformed (Calvinistic), from Chestnut Street to Main Street, and from two separate congregations to one unified ministry serving the Lord in central Berks County, the story of Trinity Bible Fellowship Church is one of daring and enduring change.

In his 1961 landmark article entitled “Dare We Change?,” former Trinity BFC pastor Donald T. Kirkwood said, “Change ought never cease. This side of glory we will never reach perfection. To think we have is to think unscripturally. Therefore, there is always room for change in our striving for perfection. This is true due to our increased understanding of God’s revealed will as we yield to the light possessed, and to the fact that history does not stand still. We must seek the leading of the Lord if we are to serve our generation well, if we are to communicate to them the gospel of Christ. We know in part and prophesy in part; only in glory will perfection be attained.”

May future generations look back upon us—as our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ carries—and say that we were willing to change in order that God, who never changes, might be glorified; that our lives, which stand in constant need of changing towards eternity, might be further conformed to the Word of God; and that our culture, which seems to continuously degenerate in rebellion against our holy God, might be won, boldly, for Christ with the gospel!

And, finally, our story is one of radical, costly, member-to-member love and generosity, wrought by the Holy Spirit in the hearts of generations of faithful members. The apostle Paul encouraged early Christians to “not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith” (cf., Gal. 6:9-10). The tremendous fruit of God’s work at Trinity over 140 years is not the result of a handful of ministers having performed their jobs well. Instead, it is a harvest of righteous deeds produced by the Holy Spirit through an untold number of yielded and obedient servants who have prayed, served, shared, given, taught, preached, and gone with the gospel for the glory of Jesus Christ in the church.

God’s faithfulness, the gospel’s urgency, a church’s willingness to change, and a people’s commitment to authentic Christian love—these are but four of the numerous lessons that heaven’s angels and God’s saints who have gone before us could tell of His mighty work of grace in a small, Pennsylvania town called Blandon. To God be the glory, great things He has done!

NOTE OF THANKS:

A special note of appreciation goes to the members of the 140th Anniversary Committee. The members include Jesse Adams, Jordan Eyster, Nancy Fisher, Louanne Kasperowicz, Bonnie Littlejohn, Mike Littlejohn, Josiah Valentine, and Julie Valentine. Special assistance and research provided by Jill Davidson.

Special thanks are expressed to the Berks Historical Society and to the Fleetwood Area Historical Society for their contributions to our 140th Anniversary “History Room.”

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Davidson, Jill. Interview of Carl Fischer, Jr. (June 19, 2025).

Davidson, Jill. Interview of Dana Weller. (June 20, 2025).

Davidson, Jill. Interview of Nancy Miller (August 1, 2025).

Davidson, Jill. Interview of Randy Grossman. (July 11, 2025).

Historical Committee of the Blandon Bicentennial. *The Story of Blandon, Pa., and Maiden creek Township* (1976).

Historical Sketches in the 100 Years of Trinity Bible Fellowship Church (1992).

Kirkwood, Donald T. “Dare We Change?” <https://bfchistory.org/writings-from-our-pastors/dare-we-change/> (1961).

Kirkwood, Donald T. “Why the Bible Fellowship Church Today” (Print copy, 1962).

Meiser, George M. and Gloria J. *The Passing Scene: Stories of Old-Time Reading and Berks*. Vol. 2. (1982).

Minutes of the Congregational Meeting at Faith Bible Fellowship Church. (Nov. 20, 2016).

Minutes of the Congregational Meeting at Faith Bible Fellowship Church. (Dec. 4, 2016)

Mortland, James E. *130 Years in Fleetwood*. (October 28, 2006).

Shelly, Harold P. *The Bible Fellowship Church Historical Committee, Bible Fellowship Church, Bethlehem, PA* (1992).

Taylor, Richard E. William Brunner Musselman: The Last Entrepreneur?
<https://bfchistory.org/biographies/william-brunner-musselman-the-last-entrepreneur/> (n.d.).