

BERNARD WASHINGTON SPILMAN

PAPERS

AR 157



Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives

2024

Bernard Washington Spilman Papers

AR 795-157

Summary

Main Entry: Bernard Washington Spilman Papers

Date Span: 1871-1973

Abstract: Southern Baptist clergyman and Sunday school leader and editor. Papers include his writings, an extensive journal of his work and activities, clippings of his work and writings, correspondence, material related to North Carolina Baptists and the Ridgecrest Baptist Assembly, photographs, and some publications. The collection also includes a typescript of a biography of Spilman by Sylvester Green, entitled *The Sunday School Man*.

Size: 2.5 linear ft. (6 document boxes)

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Historical Sketch

Bernard Washington Spilman, Baptist clergyman and denominational Sunday school executive, was born January 22, 1871, to Bushrod Washington and Helva Roxanna Barham Spilman, of Weldon. Of German ancestry, the elder Spilman had become a fairly prosperous merchant and farmer after moving to Weldon from his native Westmoreland County, Virginia.

Spilman was instructed in the homes of various local teachers, at the Garysburg Academy, and in a public school in Wilson before his matriculation in the Horner School at Henderson in 1884. Two years later he transferred to the Littleton High School, a private institution operated by Professor LeRoy W. Bagley. He enrolled at Wake Forest College in the fall of 1887 and received a B.S. degree in 1891. He was awarded honorary doctor of divinity degrees by Stetson University (1911), Baylor University (1920), and Wake Forest (1921).

Upon his graduation from Wake Forest, Spilman assumed the pastoral care of the Smyrna, Davis, and Woodville churches in Carteret County, supplementing his salary by teaching school. By late summer of 1892, he had saved enough money to begin theological studies at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. However, he was unable to complete the two-year course because of illness, which necessitated his missing final examinations and his return to Weldon in the summer of

1894. Thereafter, he supplied churches in Smyrna and New Bern before assuming the pastoral care of First Baptist Church, Kinston, on January 1, 1895.

Spilman remained with the Kinston church for only fifteen months before entering upon the occupation that would engage his time, talents, and energies for the next forty-five years. In early 1896 he was elected the first Sunday school missionary for the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina—a position that found him visiting churches and associational meetings throughout the state in behalf of his ultimate goal of a "well-equipped, well-organized Sunday School, open fifty-two Sundays a year, in every church in every community in North Carolina."

The thoroughness of his work, together with his readiness to utilize innovative methods, attracted the attention of the Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. In June 1901 Spilman was named field secretary of the board—a post that he filled until his retirement in 1940. By the end of his first year with the board, he had designed a four-point plan of action, the objectives of which were to guide his ministry throughout his remaining career. The objectives envisioned the appointment of Sunday school promotional secretaries within each of the affiliated Baptist State conventions; employment of additional staff personnel to assist with the work of the Sunday School Board, especially with the travel involved in the successful promotion of Sunday School work; development of a comprehensive teacher training program for Sunday school workers; and the establishment of a series of state Sunday school assemblies—similar to the chautauquas he had helped sponsor in North Carolina—headed by a general southwide assembly that would serve the entire denomination. Later he was given the special assignment of encouraging the teaching of religion in southern colleges and universities.

By the time he left the Sunday School Board, Spilman had witnessed significant progress towards the realization of his goals. He initiated the first Sunday school training course for the denomination with his *Normal Studies for Sunday School Workers*, published in 1902. Moreover, he was primarily responsible for the founding of the Ridgecrest Baptist Assembly in 1907, serving successively as manager, general secretary, and president of the assembly's board of directors until 1933. In addition, he was an early and staunch supporter of the Baptist Student Movement throughout colleges and universities in the South.

A popular lecturer to church, civic, and student groups, Spilman was also a prolific writer. Besides serving as lesson writer for various periodicals published by the Sunday School Board, he wrote numerous articles and pamphlets—many of which first appeared in the denominational press. Among the books of which he was author or coauthor were *Convention Normal Manual for Sunday School Workers* (1909); *The New Convention Normal Manual* (1913); *A Study in Religious Pedagogy, Based on Our Lord's Interview with the Woman of Samaria* (1920); *The Sunday School Manual* (1923); *The Mill's Home: A History of the Baptist Orphanage Movement in North Carolina* (1932); and *Yesterday Greets Tomorrow* (no date).

Spilman married Agnes Mozelle Pollock of Kinston in 1900, and they had two children: Raymond Pollock, who died in infancy, and Agnes, who died at birth. Mrs. Spilman died on November 16, 1928. On August 12, 1939, Spilman married Esther Harrell Ward of Kinston.

Scope and Content Note

The Spilman Papers document portions of Spilman's career as a Sunday School leader in Baptist life. The papers include clippings, correspondence, subject files, writings, biographical information, posters, and photographs. The strongest part of the collection is the journals that Spilman maintained through many years. These document his education, leadership in the Sunday school movement in Southern Baptist life, his work with the Sunday School Board, and his involvement in the Ridgecrest Baptist Assembly in North Carolina. Also included is the book manuscript of Sylvester Green's biography of B. W. Spilman. Significant correspondence is included with H. B. Craven and I. J. Van Ness, Secretary of the Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. Spilman's writings and comments take up a significant part of the collection which includes his "Say it" column in the *Charity and Children* newspaper and other pamphlets and columns.

Arrangement

Arranged in alphabetical order by folder title.

Provenance

Donated to Southern Baptist Historical Commission (Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives) by A. C. Reid and J. L. McCollough of Wake Forest University in 1966.

Preferred Citation

Bernard Washington Spilman Papers, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee

Access Restrictions

None

Subject Terms

Spilman, Bernard Washington, 1871-1950.

Van Ness, Noble, 1897-1976.

Ridgecrest Baptist Conference Center (Ridgecrest, NC)

Southern Baptist Convention. Sunday School Board.

Baptists – North Carolina.

Sunday schools.

Related Materials

Biblical Recorder, North Carolina Baptist newspaper.

<https://digital.olivesoftware.com/olive/apa/wakeforest/default.aspx#panel=home>

Green, C. Sylvester. *B. W. Spilman: The Sunday school man.*:
Nashville: Broadman Press, 1953.

Isaac Jacobus Van Ness. Papers, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives.

Bernard Washington Spilman. Papers. MF 2190. Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives.

Wake Forest University. North Carolina Baptist Collection. Bernard Washington Spilman Papers.

Container List

Box 1

- 1.1 Anti-Dancing Society, 1920s
- 1.2 Association of Sunday School and BYPU workers of the South – Record book, 1902-1939
- 1.3 Baptist Student Union – College work, 1918-1938
- 1.4 Baptists in Sunday school history – by B.W. Spilman
- 1.5 Better equipment for the pastor – pamphlet
- 1.6 Biographical information – Spilman
- 1.7 Biographical information – Spilman
- 1.8 Book manuscript – *The Sunday School Man*, by Sylvester Green
- 1.9 Clippings, 1917-1940
- 1.10 Clippings – Spilman writings, 1941-1945
- 1.11 Clippings – Spilman writings – Snap Shots, 1941-1943

Box 2

- 2.1 Clippings – Spilman writings – Snap Shots, 1943-1945
- 2.2 Congratulation Letters on his 74th birthday, 1945
- 2.3 Convention Normal School Manual, 1913
- 2.4 Correspondence – A - C, 1913-1939
- 2.5 Correspondence – Craven, H. B., 1917-1919
- 2.6 Correspondence – D – H, 1913-1940
- 2.7 Correspondence – Family, 1920-1921
- 2.8 Correspondence – Family and Kennedy's Children's Home, 1871-1939
- 2.9 Correspondence – I – P, 1922-1940
- 2.10 Correspondence – Personal, 1916, 1939
- 2.11 Correspondence – R – Y, 1913-1940
- 2.12 Correspondence – Van Ness, I. J. (Sunday School Board), 1917-1919

Box 3

- 3.1 International Sunday School work – Scrapbook, 1899-1910
- 3.2 Journal, 1872-1917
- 3.3 Journal, 1917-1939
- 3.4 Journal, 1924-1928

Box 4

- 4.1 Journal, 1930-1931
- 4.2 Journal, 1934-1935
- 4.3 Journal, 1935-1936

Box 5

- 5.1 Kennedy Memorial Home, 1917
- 5.2 Kennedy Memorial Home, 1927-1931
- 5.3 Lecture notes and financial accounts book, 1872-1894
- 5.4 Lectures at Baptist Bible Institute, 1935
- 5.5 Mars Hill College, 1923-1940
- 5.6 *Normal Studies for Sunday School Workers*, 1902
- 5.7 North Carolina Baptist Religious Institute, 1932-1933
- 5.8 North Carolina Baptist State Convention, 1919-1920
- 5.9 North Carolina Baptists – Clippings, 1906-1926
- 5.10 Personal, 1920-1939
- 5.11 Photographs – Spilman, 1926-1934
- 5.12 Poster – Spilman, 1939
- 5.13 Programs, 1905-1935
- 5.14 Ridgecrest Assembly, 1912-1943
- 5.15 “Say It” – Quotes by Spilman, 1924

Box 6

- 6.1 Southwide Religious Journal – Proposal, 1936
- 6.2 Sunday School Board, 1904-1931
- 6.3 Sunday school work, 1906-1936
- 6.4 Sunday school work, 1915-1918
- 6.5 Teacher training, 1916-1933
- 6.6 Wake Forest College, 1918-1973

Oversized Items- Posters

Great Lecture – “Falling down on the Job”, Prof. B. W. Spilman, 1916

Laugh and Grow Fat, lecture by B. W. Spilman,