CHAPTER 5

Bertha Mae Lillenas

How Women Are Lost to History

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How do women become lost to history? The story of Nazarene hymnist and evangelist Bertha Mae Wilson Lillenas (March 1, 1889–April 13, 1945) provides us with an opportunity not only to reclaim the life of an early twentieth-century preacher and hymnist, but to examine how she was written out of the historical narrative. She was not considered an activist during her lifetime. However, recovering her story and tracing her erasure from history becomes an act of scholarly activism. The current historical narrative focuses on Bertha Mae's[1] famous husband, Haldor, who authored more than three thousand songs and created the first Nazarene hymnals. While Bertha Mae was not as prolific a writer or organizer as her husband, she was nonetheless a popular hymnist. She was also an early Nazarene church planter, preacher, and evangelist. At a time when most women focused on the home, Bertha Mae shared the same occupation as the select group of less than 0.004 percent of women in the 1920 U.S. Census listed as "clergymen" (U.S. Dept. of Commerce 1923, vol. 4, chap. 2, table 4).[2]

Ordained as an elder in the Church of the Nazarene at the age of twenty-three in 1912, from 1910 to 1925 Bertha Mae preached and pastored in the western and midwestern United States (*Herald of Holiness* 1945; "Bertha Mae Lillenas' Diary 1911 and Haldor Lillenas' Diary 1913," Bertha Mae Lillenas personal file). In an age

when men dominated the pulpit and the public square, those who heard her seemed to be universally shocked that a woman would preach so well. They consistently reported her as being a preacher with "unusual ability" or as notably "talented" (*The Nazarene Young People's Societies Journal*, "Who's Who in Junior N. Y. P. S. Circles," January 1930; "Haldor Lillenas, Mus. D., A Life Sketch" 1941, 5, Bertha Mae Lillenas personal file). Nevertheless, while Haldor praised and recorded his wife's ministry activity in his autobiography, his biographers either limited their mention of, or erased, her ministerial roles from the historical narrative, only mentioning her as a wife and hymnist. The biographers who limited her mention provide an example of how Haldor's fame overshadowed Bertha Mae. The biographers who erased her work may have thought that Haldor's biography would be more attractive to a conservative religious audience if Bertha Mae were presented as a helper who preached only because her husband was unavailable and not because she was a co-minister. This is a possible motivation in light of the publication dates (1978) and the Nazarene church's identification with broader conservative evangelicalism during the culture wars of this time. Recovering the life and ministry of Bertha Mae Lillenas thus not only recovers a lost herstory, but creates an opportunity to investigate the process by which many women have been written out of history.

Early Life and Influences

Although Bertha Mae romantically reminisced that her life began "among the wildflowers and field larks" in a log home near the village of Hanson, Kentucky, her childhood was marked by tragedy ("Bertha Mae Lillenas' Diary 1911 and Haldor Lillenas' Diary 1913," 5, Bertha Mae Lillenas personal file). Her mother, Eliza Jones (1867–1893), died of typhoid fever when Bertha Mae was only four years old. Eliza was said to be "large, robust, outgoing, and loudly demonstrative in her religious expressions," and even on her deathbed implored her husband to remain faithful to holiness doctrine. In her last moments, she allegedly took each child, looked as if she was praying over each one, and then died saying, "Bless God," (Wilson 1995, sec. 5). Whether a prophetic word or a charge laid on her as a child, Bertha Mae indeed went on to spend her life seeking to "bless God" with it.

After Eliza Jane's death, Bertha Mae's father, W. C. Wilson, took his young children (the youngest was four months old) to live with Bertha Mae's maternal aunt. As a zealous young Methodist holiness minister and circuit rider, he could not afford a horse, so his descendant and biographer called him a circuit "walker." Because of his duties, W. C., as he was known, was unable to care for his children until he remarried (Wilson 1995, sec. 5). Although Bertha Mae loved her aunt and

looked to her as a second mother, she was overjoyed when, three years after Eliza's death, her father married a young schoolteacher named Sarah Ragsdale. "How my heart swelled with pride to think that now I had a mama too as other little girls did," wrote Bertha Mae after W. C. arrived home in a carriage with Bertha Mae's new stepmother ("Bertha Mae Lillenas' Diary 1911 and Haldor Lillenas' Diary 1913," 7, Bertha Mae Lillenas personal file; Wilson 1995, sec. 7).

With a minister for a father in the Methodist tradition that frequently assigned pastors to new churches, the family moved often, a pattern Bertha Mae would later continue. Methodist holiness ministers like her father were accustomed to this peregrinating life, even embracing it for offering them more opportunities to share their holiness beliefs. As a holiness minister, W. C. not only pastored but at times held or traveled with revivals. When he became more successful, he was invited to speak along with other noted holiness leaders (Wilson 1995, sec. 6).

W. C. eventually fell out with his denomination, the Methodist Episcopal Church, over one of these revivals and joined one of the newly formed holiness denominations, the Church of the Nazarene. In its early days, it was centered in Los Angeles and led by Phineas Bresee. The Church of the Nazarene ordained W. C. as an elder in 1903. Two years later, he traveled to Los Angeles from the Midwest to meet Phineas. Subsequently, W. C. agreed to pastor a church in Upland, California. When the letter came to Illinois announcing the move, Sarah said to the children, "Let's sell the furniture and pack before he changes his mind!" (Wilson 1995, sec. 8). When he wrote again saying he had indeed changed his mind, she responded that it was too late. They had already sold everything and packed. They would see him soon.

Through his actions and connections, W. C. set the example for his daughter of a preacher and a revivalist who practiced an egalitarian ministry. Holiness evangelists and singers sisters Carrie Crow and Lulu Kell were not only friends from Kentucky but also entered the ministry through W. C.'s encouragement and preached in his Upland church (Wilson 1995, 10; R. Pierce, "Some Things Done at the General Assembly," *Nazarene Messenger,* October 31, 1907, 2; A. H. Higgens, "Correspondence: Peabody, Mass.," *Nazarene Messenger,* March 5, 1908, 4). Of Lulu and her other sister, Nora, a comment was made about their leading music at a revival, "For ability and anointed ministry in song, these girls are second to none I know" (C. W. Raymond, "Correspondence: Ayburn, IL," *Nazarene Messenger,* November 21, 1907, 4). Two other female ministers Bertha Mae would have seen in her father's church were Minnie Staples and Lulu Rogers, who helped lead a revival in W. C.'s Upland, California church in 1908 (Wilson 1995, sec. 10). As her pastor, W. C. encouraged Minnie to become an ordained elder and licensed minister in the Church of the Nazarene (Edwards and Edwards 1907, 1–3). After ministering to

local Japanese fruit-pickers, Minnie learned the language and moved to Japan as a missionary (Wilson 1995, sec. 9).

As part of the Wesleyan-Holiness movement, Bertha Mae therefore grew up seeing ministry as a calling for both men and women. It is not surprising then, that, as a first-year college student, Bertha Mae wrote enthusiastically in the *Nazarene Messenger* that, since leaving Kentucky, "God has saved and sanctified me, and today the way seems clearer and more glorious than ever before" (Bertha Mae Wilson, "Deets Pacific Bible College," *Nazarene Messenger*, December 26, 1907).

Education

Education was important in the Wilson family, with Bertha Mae being educated as a child under the attentive eyes of her schoolteacher stepmother and then overseen through college by her father. Despite her father's itinerant ministry and the many moves made by the family, Bertha Mae finished grammar school and a year of high school by the age of sixteen. She also recalled that, by this time, she "was quite proficient in instrumental music" ("Bertha Mae Lillenas' Diary 1911 and Haldor Lillenas' Diary 1913," 8, Bertha Mae Lillenas personal file). Her primary and secondary education complete for her era, Bertha Mae prepared for college.

Early picture of Bertha Mae Lillenas (Bertha Mae Lillenas personal file).

With Bertha Mae's family waving their hankies like "white flags," she boarded a train at the age of seventeen ("Bertha Mae Lillenas' Diary 1911 and Haldor Lillenas' Diary 1913," 9, Bertha Mae Lillenas personal file).[3] The train took her about forty miles west to Deets Pacific Bible College in Hollywood, California, the college started by Phineas Bresee (Wilson 1995, sec. 13). It was so named because one of W. C.'s church members, Jackson Deets, donated the money to purchase and start its first campus. The school would go through a series of name changes and moves over the twentieth century. It was finally named Point Loma Nazarene University and found its home in San Diego, California. A developing leader in this denomination, W. C. himself later taught at the school and then served as a trustee (sec. 1). Haldor recalled it being a very small school, with only sixty-five students enrolled in the first semester (H. Lillenas 1953, 23).

Bertha Mae flourished at Deets. During her time there, she rarely saw her family because of her involvement with the school's singing group that traveled to churches on weekends and her focus on her studies (Wilson 1995, sec. 12). Of her last year, she said, "After nine months of hard work … I received [the] highest credits of any student during the four years and also [while] taking a post graduate

course," ("Bertha Mae Lillenas' Diary 1911 and Haldor Lillenas' Diary 1913," 10, Bertha Mae Lillenas personal file). Her senior year included pastoral ministry; in her final six months of school, she was given a small Los Angeles church to pastor (11).

Life and Career

Although, after graduation, her denomination sent her to Northern California as an evangelist, she would soon return to Southern California to marry. During her last year in school, she met a new student, Haldor Lillenas. She wrote about that meeting in her diary a year after their marriage. With a special flourish drawn under the section she entitled "Love and Marriage," Bertha Mae recalled going to meet the new students at the beginning of her final year of school. Of those students, "One was standing alone, a tall slender young man of twenty-three, with brown hair and hazel eyes. I was especially attracted to him because he seemed to be alone and a stranger" ("Bertha Mae Lillenas' Diary 1911 and Haldor Lillenas' Diary 1913," 13, Bertha Mae Lillenas personal file). Of him and their relationship, she said, "I found Mr. Lillenas to be [a] firm Christian young man and a sociable companion. Our friendship deepened, soon we became engaged" (14). A Norwegian immigrant, Haldor had worked in ministry and as a composer of hymns. A family member wrote of their courtship that, "When summer came, he called on Bertha at home, and the family could hear them in the parlor singing and playing the piano. They decided to marry the following summer." The family member also noted, "Haldor did not have a regular job, but he had saved over $100 from various sources, including the proceeds from songs he had written and sold" (Wilson 1995, sec. 12). Of their meeting, Haldor wrote, "During the school year I became acquainted with a fine young woman, Bertha Mae Wilson, who had a rich and powerful contralto voice and exceptional ability as an evangelistic piano player" and that "She was an eloquent and gifted preacher of the gospel." Of their relationship, he said, "We soon learned that our voices blended well and so we arranged it that our lives should also be blended" (H. Lillenas 1953, 24).

Bertha Mae and Haldor combined their ministerial calling and worked together as partners. This was a unique position for the couple, since their denomination trained both men and women to become ministers and evangelists. For Bertha Mae, the issue was not if she "could" accept her calling–an issue with which many of the female preachers who came before and after her struggled–but if she "would." Affirmed from a young age in her call to preach, the confidence of Bertha Mae reflects a first generation of Wesleyan-Holiness women encouraged and trained as female clergy. Because of this training and affirmation, for the next

fifteen years, Bertha Mae and Haldor co-pastored churches and led evangelistic revivals. During this time, Bertha Mae gave birth to two children, Evangeline Mae Lillenas (1911–84) and Wendell Lillenas (1915–65), while Haldor was writing and publishing music.

Bertha Mae and Haldor Lillenas (Bertha Mae Lillenas personal file).

These were busy years for them as they followed the Methodist tradition of an itinerant ministry. Their frequent transition between pastorates and evangelistic tours was the lived reality of many Nazarene pastors at this time (Ingersol 2004). To do this, they embraced poverty for the sake of Christ. Bertha Mae keenly recalled a moment when they arrived in Jackson, California to do evangelistic work but had no building in which to meet. After dinner at the hotel, they went outside to hold a service on the street, which she said became a "novelty" and attracted a crowd. They sang and preached and, at the end, Haldor announced that his wife would take the offering. She said, "I had never taken an offering on the street so with a deathlike grip on my will and a looser one on the gray hat I started." Moving through the crowd seemed to take a very long time because she was nervous, recalling, "How every one stared at me and my clothing! I was a beggar and felt it keenly. That night I rec'd $1.95 and I surely deserved it. My battle was fought"

("Bertha Mae Lillenas' Diary 1911 and Haldor Lillenas' Diary 1913," 20, Bertha Mae Lillenas personal file). She had allowed herself to become a "beggar" to help raise funds to rent a hall and to eat, giving up one identity for another.

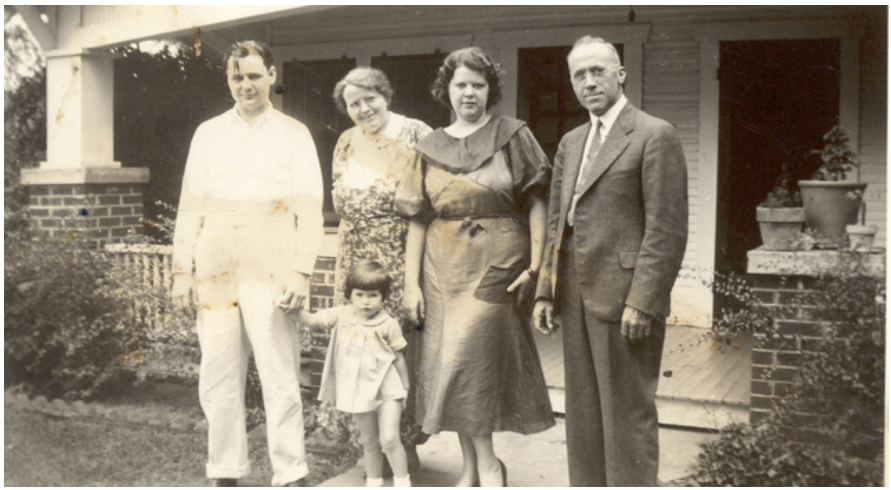
During this time, Bertha Mae also found that there was an increasing need for her to preach and minister because, the more time Haldor devoted to writing and publishing music, partly in an effort to earn money for his family, the less time he had for pastoral ministry. The reality of their partnership meant that, because of Haldor's passion for music, preaching was not an occasional or special task for Bertha Mae but one of her main ministerial duties. In her diary, she frequently and casually mentions herself preaching. In his portion of the diary, Haldor does the same. Often Haldor's words reveal his excitement to build choirs and work on his music, followed by a casual mention that Bertha Mae was doing the preaching ("Bertha Mae Lillenas' Diary 1911 and Haldor Lillenas' Diary 1913," 48–9, Bertha Mae Lillenas personal file). Family memory supports this as Debby Pueschel recalled that "Uncle Haldor was a magnificent songwriter and song evangelist. He was a good preacher. But apparently, from what I understand, Bertha was a slam dunk, hellfire and damnation preacher. She would tell Uncle Haldor, 'Haldor, you just do the songs and lead the music, and I will do the preaching'" (D. Pueschel, pers. comm., May 21, 2020).

At least early on in their ministry, Haldor seemed to prefer an itinerant evangelistic life. On October 22, 1913, he mentioned that "one of the worst disappointments of my life" was when they decided to take a pastorate again. However, because of the baby, his health, and that particular church's great need for a pastor, "we took the position" ("Bertha Mae Lillenas' Diary 1911 and Haldor Lillenas' Diary 1913," 50, Bertha Mae Lillenas personal file). On the other hand, Bertha Mae was likely excited about the turn of events. For her, evangelistic work meant the sacrifice of a stable home and the opportunity to be a housewife. In the diary account of their itinerant first year traveling and eating at hotels, it seemed that when she could be a housewife, she enjoyed it. One day she wrote, "I enjoyed my housework. How pleasant it was after years of college life to be able to be a housewife! How I delighted in preparing dainty and delicious dishes for Haldor!" (17).

Despite their personal desires, their sense of ministerial calling persisted. During their fifteen years in evangelistic and pastoral ministry, they not only preached at revivals but led churches in Lompoc, Pomona, and Redlands, California, as well as in Auburn, Illinois, Peniel, Texas, and Indianapolis, Indiana. Of Bertha Mae, it was said that "Her ministry was anointed of God, and she became a powerful and effective minister of the gospel and a soul winner of more than ordinary gifts" (*Herald of Holiness* 1945).

The Lillenas' lives changed dramatically in 1925, when Bertha Mae's health took a sudden turn for the worse. At this time, they were co-leading a church in Indianapolis, which was their most successful pastorate. In 1924, a year before she became sick with an unrecorded illness, Haldor had started the Lillenas Publishing Company to begin publishing hymnody himself (H. Lillenas 1953, 41). This, of course, meant that Bertha Mae was doing even more of the preaching. Although it is not stated directly, her inability to work and preach due to her illness was likely a key reason they resigned from their pastorate in 1926. Without Bertha Mae to preach and pastor–and her family recalls that she did both in their shared ministerial work–Haldor was not able to both minister there and continue with his work in sacred music (Pueschel 2020).

Now settled in a house in Missouri so that Haldor could work with the publishing company, Bertha Mae had time to work on her projects. Around 1930, Bertha Mae served as the second vice-president of the Women's General Missionary Council, focusing on youth. As part of this role, she helped organize and excite youth in their denomination to raise money for missions. One method of doing this was her service as the editor for the "Junior Light Bearers" newsletter. In this work, she raised funds by bringing missions to life for the youth. She listed the names of thirty-eight children under fifteen years of age who were in the mission field with their parents. She asked the young people who read the newsletter to remember the missionary children in their giving (Church of the Nazarene 2019).



Top row, left to right: Reginald Williams, Bertha Mae Lillenas, Evangeline Lillenas Williams, Haldor Lillenas. Bottom: Tatia Williams (Bertha Mae Lillenas personal file).

Although those in her denomination may have been familiar with Bertha Mae's name and work through the Women's General Missionary Council and the "Junior Light Bearers" newsletter, it was through the world of music that Christians across denominations or just listening on the radio typically encountered her. Bertha Mae's music not only found its way into a variety of hymnals but onto the radio and into the recording industry. Radio was a new medium, and Christians were quickly adapting their ministries to it.

One pioneer of the Christian music industry was Homer Rodeheaver. Raised in a Methodist home, Homer rose to fame while traveling with Billy Sunday as his music director and transformed the Christian music industry by incorporating entertainment practices with church music and then monetizing this through starting one of the first Christian recording labels (Cusic 1990, 70). He took cheerful songs that could be secular, meaning they did not necessarily mention God but had Christian values, and included them in his revivals. These simple songs with catchy melodies sold well on records. By combining secular and sacred music, he sold more records and popularized new hymns, such as "The Old Rugged Cross" (Roger Butterfield, "Homer Rodeheaver," *Time Magazine,* September 3, 1945, 61; Cusic 1990, 74). However, Homer was not content with records, revivals, and music recitals. He took his ministry to the air, becoming a national radio figure ("Famous Singer Charms Hearers: Homer Rodeheaver Gives Diversified Program for Union Mission Before Appreciative Audience," *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, December 19, 1933; "Advertisement for Homer Rodeheaver Record: At Carson's an Album of Sacred Music," *Chicago Tribune*, March 23, 1941, sec. 1). When Homer adopted one of Bertha Mae's songs, "Jesus Took My Burden," he brought the name of Bertha Mae Lillenas before the masses (H. Lillenas 1953, 43–4).

Bertha Mae's work was also making its way into the hands of other popular Christian artists, such as Edward MacHugh. A Scottish immigrant, Edward started in radio in the 1920s singing Christian hymns ("'Gospel Singer' Dies in Florida," *Bridgeport Telegram*, February 4, 1957, 2). His baritone voice became so popular that the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) and the American Broadcasting Company (ABC) sponsored him nationwide for six broadcasts a week from 1933 to 1943 ("Edward MacHugh, Radio Gospel Singer Who Had Network Shows, 1933–1943, Dies," *New York Times*, February 5, 1957, 23). So well-loved was his program that, upon the release of his 1937 hymnal, *Edward MacHugh's Treasury of Gospel Hymns and Poems*, 43,000 listeners requested a copy (MacHugh 1938; "Behind the Scenes: About Programs and People," *New York Times,* January 24, 1937, 160). MacHugh was a businessman and familiar with the push and pull of business; he chose music he liked as well as what the public requested. Although Haldor authored more than three thousand songs, it was Bertha Mae's work, not Haldor's, that made it into this popular book of music–"Jesus Is Always There" and "Jesus

Took My Burden" (Young 1978, 33; MacHugh 1938, 42, 47). She may not have been as prolific of a writer or composer as her husband, but what she wrote had mass popular appeal. Some of the other songs she wrote or composed that became popular in that era were, "He Will Not Forget," "Leave Your Burden at the Place of Prayer," and "Saved by the Blood" (*Herald of Holiness* 1945).

In addition, arranging hymnals was not solely Haldor's area of expertise but also Bertha Mae's. In 1929, she served as an editor for one of Haldor's published hymnals, *Great Gospel Songs* (H. Lillenas 1929). When Bertha Mae died of cancer in 1945, Haldor published Bertha Mae's own hymnal that she had just finished, *Fireside Hymns*. In the foreword, Haldor wrote that no one had suspected that this work would be her last work, but he noted that "her songs will sing on in the hearts of a multitude of people everywhere" (B. M. Lillenas 1945).

Why Have We Not Heard of Bertha Mae Lillenas?

Like many notable women with famous spouses, Bertha Mae's talents, at least in the historical record, were eclipsed by those of her husband. Haldor's contributions to sacred music were voluminous and have made him the subject of many articles and books. The music publishing house he started grew quickly. In its first few years, there were 700,000 copies of his hymnal in circulation. However, due to financial setbacks, in 1930 he sold the company to the Church of the Nazarene, agreeing to let them use his name while he stayed on to manage the business. Over the course of his life, he had 1,535 copyrights, and his publication became the official Nazarene hymnal. The history of the hymnal itself reveals his lasting, though declining, influence. We find that, in 1931, 81 of the hymns in the denominational hymnal were his own. The 1952 version contained 34 and, in 1972, 19 remained (Young 1978, 56–57). The 1993 fourth edition contained 18 of his songs (Bible 1993, 776).

Haldor was not just prolific, he is also remembered for the theological impact of his hymnody. Upon Haldor's death in 1959, D. I. Vanderpool, a former Nazarene Los Angeles District superintendent, pointed to Haldor's Christocentric theological focus. He said, "There was a constant flow of sacred song springing from the fountain of his poetic soul, which made him the outstanding sacred song writer of his day," and that "Christ was always exalted in his songs as the source of strength for the weak, comfort for the sorrowing, and deliverance for the enslaved" (Young 1978, 61). Another superintendent, G. B. Williamson, said, "Furthermore, in the context of his times and their religious mood, Haldor Lillenas has been to Nazarenes what Charles Wesley was to beginning Methodists. Inescapably, both of

these men have had influence far beyond the groups with which they were identified and far beyond the day in which they have lived and labored" (Young 1978, 62; Cunningham 1992, 70). We see the broad appeal of his music by noting that Haldor's song "Behold the Coming Savior Stands," could be found in a variety of hymnals used by denominations such as the Christian and Missionary Alliance to the Pentecostal Assemblies (*Hymns of the Christian Life* 1936; Benson 1920). Likewise, his song "Coming to Jesus My Savior I Found" was included in hymnals sponsored by Mennonites (Derstine 1925), the Evangelical Covenant Church of America (Swedish) (*The Covenant Hymnal* 1931), the Free Methodists (*Free Methodist Hymnal* 1976), and the Baptist General Conference (Baptist General Conference of America 1950). When people looked at the Lillenases, their eyes passed over the "unusually talented" wife to the husband compared to Charles Wesley. Bertha Mae's legacy had been overshadowed by that of her husband.

In Haldor's lifetime, but after Bertha Mae had died, a few short articles on him completely ignored the fact that they had been co-pastors. In the *Herald of Holiness,* two side-by-side articles retold his story in almost the same words. One said, "By the time of his pastorate in Indianapolis his hymn writing had become a major service, and he faced the choice between that and continued preaching. Feeling it to be God's leading for him, he resigned his pastoral work and began to devote full time to the service of song" (Georgia M. Anderson, "A Service of Song," *Herald of Holiness,* June 26, 1950). The article next to it, ironically entitled, "Honor to Whom Honor is Due," said that he went to Deets Bible College and did not know if he should pursue the pastorate or music ministry. It then jumped to a decade later when he and Bertha Mae were pastoring in Indianapolis, saying he chose "the right way" and left the pastorate to focus on his music. The articles make no mention of Bertha Mae. It was always presented as his ministry and his pastorate, and the decisions he made were for the benefit of his music ministry (A. E. Sanner, "Honor to Whom Honor Is Due," *Herald of Holiness,* June 16, 1950, 4).

In 1961, two years after Haldor's death, James McGraw, a professor at Nazarene Theological Seminary, wrote a short biography on Haldor called, "The Preaching of Haldor Lillenas," (*Preacher's Magazine*, May 1961). The biography was like many written before it. McGraw started by saying that most people would remember Haldor for his music, "yet he served for about fifteen years as pastor of several churches, the latter two of which grew under his leadership until within three years they had doubled in size" (5). When McGraw later mentioned their most successful pastorates, he again excluded Bertha Mae by only referencing Haldor: "In his last two pastorates–Redlands, California; and Indianapolis, Indiana–the membership grew steadily to more than double the size of these churches when he began there" (7–8). While McGraw briefly mentioned Bertha Mae by saying that "as a team they preached, sang, and composed songs" (6), her role in

that list and those churches was ambiguous at best. For these writers and the public who read their words, these were Haldor's pastorates; Bertha Mae's leadership was lost to history.

Subsequent biographers followed the pattern of these first omissions by continuing to edit Bertha Mae out of the couple's shared ministry to focus on Haldor. Grace Ramquist (1960) wrote the first biography after his death, *The Boy with the Singing Heart: The Story of Haldor Lillenas*. Her work closely summarized Haldor's and has a primary focus on his youth. The book did mention Bertha Mae, saying that, at their first church, he primarily preached and she "accepted calls to hold revival meetings in nearby towns" (26). It also noted that, in Indianapolis, "Mrs. Lillenas continued to preach" while he focused on his music ministry (28). Bertha Mae then disappeared from the biography, with no reference to her death. Another work was written by Elaine Cunningham (1992), which also closely followed Haldor's autobiography, but read more as historical fiction for young adults. The book did mention that Bertha Mae preached and included new source material from family records.

In these references, Haldor's work overshadows Bertha Mae's ministerial work. In Bill Young's (1978) book, we see it erased. Young's direct and purposeful omissions of Bertha Mae's ministry highlight a trend of historical revision minimizing the role of women. While Young clearly stated that his work was "The Story of Haldor Lillenas," it is still significant that he chose to rewrite history in such a way as to exclude Bertha Mae.

Consider the way Haldor mentioned ministerial calling in his autobiography. He used phrases like, "*my wife and I* accepted a call at Lompoc"; "While living in Olivet *we* conducted revival services"; and "In the latter part of 1916 *we* were called to pastor the church at Auburn" [emphasis added] (H. Lillenas 1953, 32). In contrast, Young, who wrote an almost identical chronicle based on Haldor's original work, altered the references to omit Bertha Mae. When Young cited the same events quoted above, he changed the wording to, "*Haldor's* first pastorate in Lopoc;" "While living in Olivet, *Haldor* conducted revivals;" and "Toward the end of 1916, *Haldor* was called to pastor the church at Auburn" [emphasis added] (Young 1978, 38). Each time, Young removed any mention of Bertha Mae. Another example is Young's revision of Haldor's words, "During 1918, my wife served the church at Auburn, as pastor, while I traveled much of the time as a singing evangelist" (H. Lillenas 1953, 32–3), to "During the entire year of 1918, *because* of the heavy traveling schedule that Haldor had, Mrs. Lillenas served as the pastor" [emphasis added] (Young 1978, 42). While this is a true statement, the wording and previous exclusions make it sound like more of an exception than the daily reality of a ministerial partnership. Likewise, Haldor had titled a sub-section "*Our* Most Successful Pastorate" to describe their time in Indianapolis, saying "*We* received a

call to the pastorate" and "*Our* three years spent in this field were very fruitful" [emphasis added] (H. Lillenas 1953, 40–1). Young reinterpreted Haldor's words, saying, "Dr. Lillenas looked back at *his* time as a pastor of Indianapolis First Church as *his* most successful pastorate" [emphasis added] (Young 1978, 45). As before, there was no hint or mention of Bertha Mae's co-leadership. In this piece and others on Haldor, Bertha Mae's work was deliberately erased.

Why might Young have omitted Bertha Mae when the Church of the Nazarene has been open to women's pastoral leadership since its inception? Catherine Brekus explored how women disappear from the history of Christianity, highlighting the pattern of historians and editors who, in chronicling a movement or man, find it makes the history more respectable to omit female evangelists and ministers (C. Brekus 2009, 27–8). Likewise, Susan Juster traced women's early involvement in an egalitarian Baptist governance. She found a subsequent removal of history about women's involvement with the increasing desire for respectability for their male peers during and after the Revolutionary War (S. Juster 1994, 4, 7, 11, 76-108).

Similarly, Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham coined the phrase the "politics of respectability" in her consideration of the way Black church women negotiated sexism and racism. These women embraced the "bourgeois values" of the wider society in pursuit of racial uplift (Higginbotham 1994). Higginbotham's phrase, the "politics of respectability," helped to explain why women have been removed from historical narratives. Perhaps to Young, it seemed that Haldor's biography would be more fitting for youth if it did not encourage or affirm the ordination and preaching of women. Or he might have thought it would be more attractive to a broader audience of parents and church leaders who would purchase the books if Bertha Mae were a helper who preached only because her husband was unavailable and not because she was a lifelong ministry partner and co-minister. This is a possible motivation in light of the fact that he published in 1978, when the culture wars were raging between feminists and conservative women over the Equal Rights Amendment and evangelical churches began vocalizing an emphasis on female submission.

In support of this, Ed Robinson, a former president of MidAmerica Nazarene University, in 2000 attributed the decline in female pastors to "institutionalization." He said, "Authoritative women at the front of our dynamic movement have been slowly but surely replaced by men in organizational positions of authority." He added that "our present hesitance and opposition to women in pastoral and church leadership roles aren't biblical or theological, but cultural, pure and simple" (Robinson 2000). In fact, the percentage of female clergy in the Nazarene denomination dropped from a high of 20.7 percent in 1930, to 16.7 percent in 1950,

to a low of 5–6.7 percent from 1975 to 1999 during the peak of the rhetoric towards female submission in popular evangelical culture (Houseal 2003, 10).

The significance of Bertha Mae Wilson Lillenas as a female evangelist and composer makes her notable in her own right. The subsequent overshadowing of her work in favor of remembering and honoring her husband highlights one manner in which accomplished women have been lost to history. The likelihood that Bertha Mae was written out because of the political battle between feminists and conservatives is significant and should be acknowledged. However, in order to reclaim Bertha Mae's lost herstory and others like it, our attention needs to shift to methodology.

Bertha Mae's story highlights how reclaiming women's contributions and voices involves more than creatively piecing together a variety of sources. Historians and scholars of religion also need to value the sources that remain in their entirety. Bertha Mae chose to record her burgeoning young love for her husband in the midst of her retelling of her first years in ministry. She shared that she was excited to cook dainties next to stories of evangelistic courage. To dismiss this as historically frivolous is to privilege "great-man history" over social history and studies in popular culture. Hers is the story of how a young woman embraced evangelistic ministry and family life, amidst the tensions of gendered stereotypes and roles. She wanted to be a housewife, but she wanted to be an evangelist *more*. Bertha Mae Lillenas' story highlights not only the archival and textual work that needs to be done to redress the historical narrative, but a scholarly shift to esteem women and "women's work" along with each woman's particular legacy.

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Notes

1. Because of the many family members sharing last names, and in an effort to represent Bertha Mae as an individual distinct from her famous father and husband, this historical narrative will use first names to reference all historical actors.
2. In 1920, only .0034 percent of "females" were recorded as "clergymen" in the US Census records. Although not listed as a female "clergyman," the 1920 census does have her listed as "Bertha A. Lillenas" married to "Haldor Lillenas" living in Hunt, Texas with an occupation of "ministry." The census taker noted her husband's occupation as "minister," although they co-pastored churches and both preached and played music at evangelistic events (U.S. Department of Commerce 1923, Justice Precinct 1, Hunt, TX, Roll T625_1820, p. 3B, Enumeration District 118). She may have fallen outside of the options the census taker understood for women, thus listing them with different occupations.
3. In her diary, she does not say that they were hankies; my reading of the text led to this conclusion.