

Rufus P. Bucher

On 2 November, 1883, Rufus Pfautz Bucher was born in a farm home near Kleinfeltersville, Lebanon County, Pennsylvania, and was baptized on February 11, 1894 in the Tulpehocken congregation. He was the son of George Bucher and Fianna Pfautz Phillippy Bucher. He had twelve siblings, some being step siblings from his father's previous marriage before his wife's passing. After attending several rural schools near Kleinfeltersville and Mechanic Grove, Rufus enrolled in Elizabethtown college as one of the first six students.<sup>1</sup> They were known as the "Faithful Six." The students from out of town and the faculty roomed a private home and used the downstairs as the study area. His father was an active participant in the surveys and decisions which eventually led to the founding of the new Brethren College in Elizabethtown, PA.<sup>2</sup> His father also served on the board of trustees in the early years following the founding of the college. Rufus attended regular terms at the school from 1902 to 1906. In addition to his regular classes he attended numerous Bible terms at Elizabethtown and participation in special conferences. In accordance with the school's motto "Educate for Service," Bucher exercised his training to teach public schools in the area which made him a very trusted community figure.<sup>3</sup> He received a DD degree from Bethany Theological Seminary in 1947.<sup>4</sup>

While attending Elizabethtown, somewhere between 1905 to 1906, he met and fell in love with Naomi Patterson White. Upon marrying her, the couple moved into a farm home adjoining Bucher's parent's farm compound in Mechanic Grove. Bucher and his wife went on to have ten children. On 11 May, 1901 he was called to ministry in the Mechanic Grove Church. He began preaching at the church shortly after he was elected to ministry and was advanced to the second degree eight years later. He was recognized as a promising young preacher. On 17 August, 1914, while he was 30 years old, Bucher was ordained to be an elder. Although his life was always occupied with farm work and duties as an elder of the church, he found time to hold evangelistic meetings often throughout the year. He held meetings for forty congregations in the Eastern District of Pennsylvania. In the year 1915, Bucher became the elder of Mechanic Grove church, succeeding S. H. Hertzler. In that year the congregation had a population of around ninety people. By the end of his pastoral responsibility, the congregation had grown to three hundred and fifty.<sup>5</sup>

Bucher served on the board of trustees for Elizabethtown College from 1913 until his death. He was president of the board for fifteen years.<sup>6</sup> However, on 29 July 1954, Bucher wrote a letter to the board of trustees to make the request that they fill his position due to his declining health. The request was granted, and to honor Bucher's forty years of service to the school, the board designated him as Chairman Emeritus.<sup>7</sup> Bucher passed away in April, 1956.<sup>8</sup> On October 28, 1989, the Galen S. and Jesse B. Young Center for Anabaptist and Pietist Studies was dedicated. The building houses research space, exhibitions, a classroom, and the Bucher Meetinghouse, named for Brother Rufus P. Bucher. It was modeled after the meetinghouse in Germantown, and was meant to be a venue for all members of campus, not just Brethren, Mennonite, Amish, and Anabaptist members.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Church of the Brethren of Pennsylvania Eastern District, History of the Church of the Brethren: Eastern District 1915-1916 (Lancaster, PA: Forry and Hacker, 1965), 267.

<sup>2</sup> Ralph W. Schlosser, History of Elizabethtown (Elizabethtown, PA: Elizabethtown College, 1971), 40.

<sup>3</sup> Church of The Brethren of Pennsylvania Easter District, 268.

<sup>4</sup> The Brethren Encyclopedia Inc., The Brethren Encyclopedia, Vol. A-J (Philadelphia, PA and Oak Brook, IL: The Lakeside Press, 1983), 225.

<sup>5</sup> Church of The Brethren of Pennsylvania Easter District, 268-269.

<sup>6</sup> The Brethren Encyclopedia Inc., 225.

<sup>7</sup> Schlosser, 177.

<sup>8</sup> Church of The Brethren of Pennsylvania Easter District, 275.

<sup>9</sup> Jean-Paul Benowitz and Peter J. DePuydt, Elizabethtown College (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2014), 59-60.