

# Homer Rodeheaver: Reverend Trombone

Douglas Yeo

## Introduction

Since his death in 1955, Homer Rodeheaver (1880–1955) has slipped into obscurity, an astonishing fact given that he played the trombone for as many as 100 million people in his lifetime. While not nearly so accomplished as the great trombone soloists of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries such as Arthur Pryor, Simone Mantia, and Leo Zimmerman, Rodeheaver's use of the trombone in Christian evangelistic meetings—particularly during the years (1910–30) when he was song leader for William Ashley “Billy” Sunday—had an impact on American religious and secular culture that continues today. Rodeheaver's tree of influence includes many other trombone-playing evangelists and song leaders, including Clifford Barrows, song leader for the evangelistic crusades<sup>1</sup> of William Franklin “Billy” Graham.

While Homer Rodeheaver was one of the most successful publishers of Christian songbooks and hymnals of the modern era—he owned copyrights to many of the most popular gospel<sup>2</sup> songs of the first half of the twentieth century—and was the owner of and a recording artist with one of the first record companies devoted primarily to Christian music, the focus of this article is on Rodeheaver as trombonist and trombone icon, his use of the trombone as a tool in leading large congregations in singing, the particular instruments he used, his trombone recordings, and his legacy and influence in inspiring and encouraging others to utilize the trombone as a tool for large-scale Christian evangelism.

## Homer Rodeheaver: Beginnings

The fourth child of Thurman Hall Rodeheaver (1841–1912) and Fannie Armstrong (d. 1888), Homer Alvan Rodeheaver (pronounced: ROH-duh-hay-ver) was born in Hocking County, Ohio, on 4 October 1880 in an area known as Simco Hollow, a few miles from Union Furnace and about fifty-five miles southeast of Columbus.<sup>3</sup> A year after his birth, Rodeheaver's family moved to Newcomb, Tennessee, where his father ran a sawmill, subsequently moving a few miles north to Jellico, Tennessee, when the mill burned. Rodeheaver's older brother by twelve years, Yumbert Parks Rodeheaver (1868–1950), opened a music store in Jellico and taught Homer to play the bass drum and, later, cornet, baritone horn, and valve trombone.<sup>4</sup>

At the age of fifteen, Homer Rodeheaver, at the urging of his family, followed his brother Joseph Newton Rodeheaver (1878–1946) to Delaware, Ohio, where he entered the Preparatory (or Academic) Department of Ohio Wesleyan University. This department

allowed students who were not yet ready for University study—particularly those who attended classes part-time or irregularly due to the need to work—to take classes as a “special student.”<sup>5</sup>

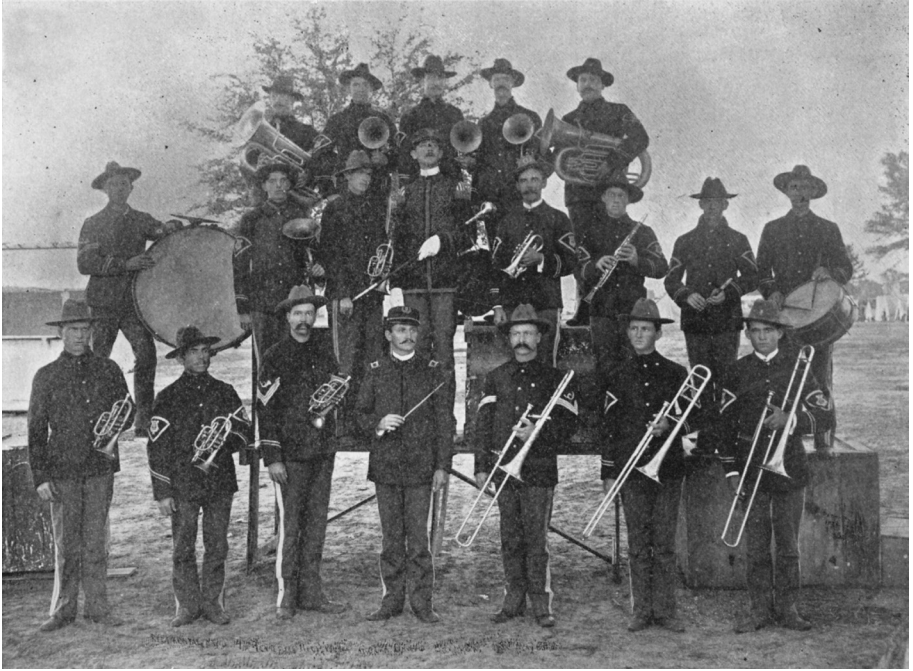


**Figure 1:** Ohio Wesleyan University Cadet Band, 1901.  
Homer Rodeheaver is seated in the second row, third from the right.  
Courtesy of Ohio Wesleyan University Historical Collection.

The first reference to Homer Rodeheaver’s study at Ohio Wesleyan comes from 1896, when he is found playing “1st tenor” in the University Cadet Band.<sup>6</sup> By the end of the 1896–97 school year, he was playing slide trombone in the band.<sup>7</sup> He pursued studies sporadically at Ohio Wesleyan until 1905, returning home to Jellico when he needed to work to raise money to finance his ongoing education,<sup>8</sup> and finally enrolling in the university for one year of full-time study in 1900–01. There is no record of his having taken trombone lessons.<sup>9</sup> Rodeheaver also played trombone in the Fourth Tennessee Volunteer Regiment Band for six months during the waning days of Spanish-American War; he never saw combat.<sup>10</sup>

Homer Rodeheaver came of age during what is known as the “third great awakening,” a period dating roughly from the end of the American Civil War in 1865 to around 1933 when the Christian gospel message was being propagated from church pulpits and in large and small-scale outdoor meetings. Itinerant preachers crossed the country and their message was both readily embraced and greeted with hostility.

After his discharge from the Fourth Tennessee Volunteer Regiment Band in 1899, Homer Rodeheaver began part-time Christian evangelist work that included preaching,



**Figure 2:** Fourth Tennessee Volunteer Regiment Band, Spanish-American War, 1899.

Homer Rodeheaver is standing in the front row, far right.

Courtesy of University of Tennessee, Hodges Library Special Collections.

leading choirs and congregational singing, singing solos, and playing solos and accompanying singing on trombone. In 1900 he embarked on an evangelistic tour of the American Midwest, assisted by Henry Fillmore, whose father owned Fillmore Brothers Company, a publisher that had many hymnals and sacred song books in its catalog.<sup>11</sup>

Around this same time evangelist R.A. Walton employed Rodeheaver as song leader for two weeks of meetings on the recommendation of administrators at Ohio Wesleyan University, who cited Rodeheaver's work leading crowds as a school "yell" leader<sup>12</sup> and in 1907 he collaborated with noted evangelist James B. Ely (1865–1941), with whom he worked at the Lemon Hill Summer Service in Philadelphia, where he led singing and played trombone solos.<sup>13</sup>

In 1907 Rev. William Edward Biederwolf (1867–1939) engaged Rodeheaver as his song and chorus leader/soloist;<sup>14</sup> the first evangelistic meeting at which they worked together was held 27 November 1907 in Ottawa, Kansas.<sup>15</sup> His trombone repertoire at Biederwolf meetings was varied, including sacred songs such as *Abide with Me*<sup>16</sup> and *Beyond the Gates of Paradise*<sup>17</sup> as well as operatic arrangements, including the "Intermezzo" from Pietro Mascagni's *Cavalleria rusticana*.<sup>18</sup>



**Figure 3:** Postcard: “Biederwolf’s and Rodeheaver’s Great Union Revival Chorus, Newton, Kansas, 2 October to 2 November 1908.” Homer Rodeheaver is in the front row, left, trombone in hand. Courtesy of Winona History Center, Winona Lake, Indiana.

In addition to his work at various evangelistic meetings, Homer Rodeheaver sang and played trombone at recitals and concerts, drawing from the same audiences that attended Biederwolf’s meetings. Rodeheaver also took part in civic celebrations, including the centennial celebration of Abraham Lincoln’s birth in Topeka, Kansas (1909), where he played *The Battle Hymn of the Republic* as a trombone solo.<sup>19</sup>

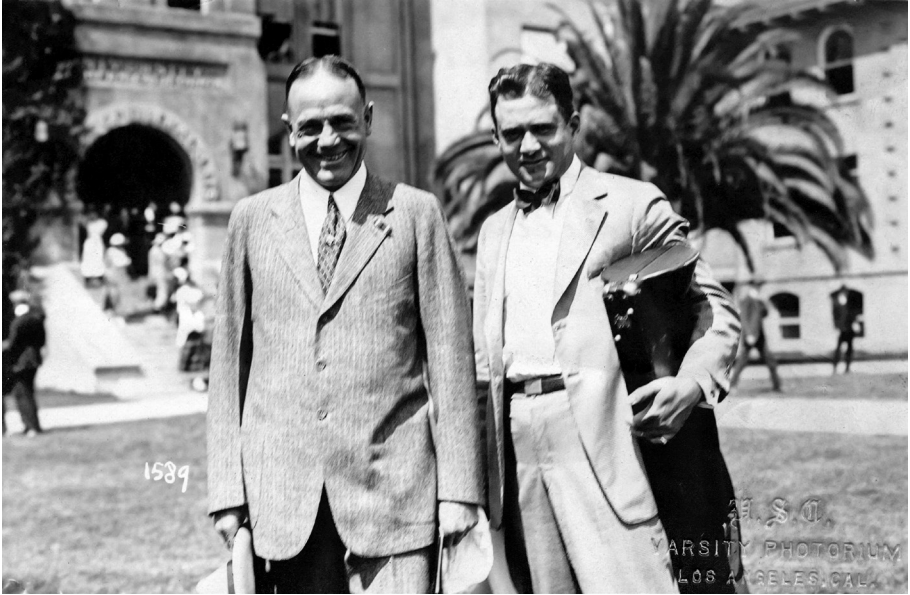
### Billy Sunday’s Song Leader

While not yet a household name, Homer Rodeheaver’s fame increased dramatically through the first decade of the twentieth century. His work with William Biederwolf and other evangelists as well as his performances as vocal and trombone soloist at concerts and public meetings led to regular appearances of his name in newspapers in towns large and small. Reviews of his song leading, singing, and trombone playing were uniformly positive, thus his services were increasingly in demand on the summer Chautauqua circuit. Founded in 1874 at Lake Chautauqua, New York, Chautauqua meetings were gatherings that included lectures and musical performances, with the goal of engaging audiences in discussion of timely social, religious, and cultural issues.<sup>20</sup> Rodeheaver’s multi-faceted musical abilities combined with his winsome personality found him organizing more of his own concerts and programs and working outside the evangelistic realm.<sup>21</sup>

In the summer of 1909 Rodeheaver took part in Chautauqua meetings in Winfield, Kansas, where he led a children’s chorus.<sup>22</sup> On 15 July Rev. “Billy” Sunday, “a very forceful and earnest orator,” gave a lecture at the Winfield Chautauqua meeting at Island Park entitled, “Forces That Win”; Rodeheaver “furnished a fine program at the close of Rev. Sunday’s lecture.”<sup>23</sup>

The life and career of William Ashley “Billy” Sunday (1862–1935)—baseball player, evangelist, and political firebrand—has been copiously documented with accounts that have



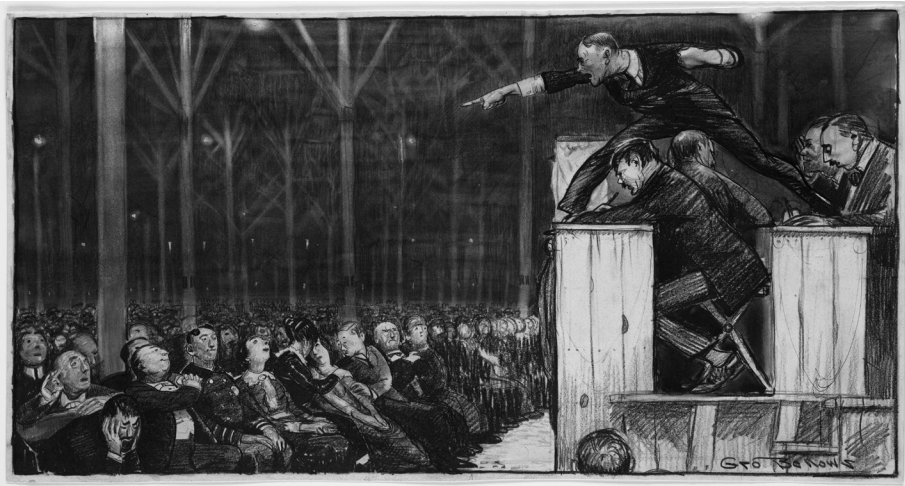


**Figure 4:** Billy Sunday and Homer Rodeheaver, Los Angeles, 1917.

Courtesy of Winona History Center, Winona Lake, Indiana.

been variously sympathetic,<sup>24</sup> critical,<sup>25</sup> and balanced.<sup>26</sup> He was both revered and reviled, a driving force behind Prohibition, a friend of presidents, an entertainer par excellence, and one whose name, from 1908 until his death, was known throughout urban and rural America.

Billy Sunday's professional baseball career included stints with the Chicago White Stockings (1883–87), Pittsburgh Alleghenys (1888–90), and Philadelphia Phillies. He appeared in 499 games in all, earning a modest batting average of .248. He was converted to Christianity in 1886 after attending a Sunday-afternoon meeting at Chicago's Pacific Garden Mission.<sup>27</sup> After gaining his release from the Phillies on 17 March 1891, he turned down an offer from the Cincinnati Reds for a salary of \$500 a month to take a position with the Chicago YMCA for \$83.33 a month, working as the assistant secretary of its religious department.<sup>28</sup> In 1893 Sunday accepted a position for \$40 a week as an assistant to evangelist J. Wilbur Chapman, working with him until December 1895, at which time Chapman abruptly ended his itinerant evangelistic ministry. Faced with unemployment, Sunday considered returning to baseball until clergy in Garner, Iowa, contacted him about leading revival meetings.<sup>29</sup> Sunday accepted, and these meetings, from 8–15 January 1896, launched Sunday's career as an evangelist.<sup>30</sup>



**Figure 5:** George Bellows, *Preaching: Billy Sunday*, 1915.

Courtesy of Boston Public Library Print Department, accession no. 1943.1.6, file 06\_05\_00009.

Billy Sunday developed a style of preaching that combined social moralizing, conservative Christian theology, and entertainment that had wide appeal in an era before radio and television. William Firstenberger described Sunday's manner at his meetings:

During the sermon, Sunday spoke from behind the pulpit, in front of the pulpit, and his favorite place, on top of the pulpit. His original sermon notes in loose-leaf binders show the oversize typeface and all-caps printing style that he used for his handwritten notes so that he could easily view the text as he sprinted past the pulpit. He smashed his fists on the top and sides of the pulpit, attempting to break off a small piece, if he was lucky, for dramatic effect. He leaped from pulpit to piano, ran up and down the aisles, slid on the stage as if he were sliding into home plate, and often smashed an ordinary chair to bits. He performed these physical feats to drive home his points of theological fundamentalism and simultaneously kept his audience spellbound.<sup>31</sup>

Early Billy Sunday meetings did not include music—Sunday himself famously did not sing well<sup>32</sup>—but in January 1900 he engaged Fred G. Fischer as his musical assistant. Fischer organized a choir for each set of meetings, played piano, and sang solos and duets. After working alongside Homer Rodeheaver at the Chautauqua meeting in Winfield, Kansas, Sunday persuaded Rodeheaver to join him as his full-time music director. Rodeheaver began working with Billy Sunday at meetings in Everett, Washington, on 15 July 1910 and the two men collaborated regularly for the next twenty years.<sup>33</sup>

Sunday and Rodeheaver could not have had more different personalities. William McLaughlin described Rodeheaver's role in Sunday's meeting as that of a "jollier." He was, in many respects, the perfect foil for Sunday. Rodeheaver's easy-going manner, ability to tell a humorous story or perform a magic trick for the audience stood in stark contrast to Sunday's high-strung demeanor. One observer noted:

The glorious Rodeheaver trombone was a weapon of the Lord, marshaling the troops in song. Rody<sup>34</sup> played, sang, chatted, gave announcements, told stories, and his feel for the crowds seemed uncanny—always the right tone, always able to whip up enthusiasm and spirit. . . . Starting a Billy Sunday revival without Rody would be like starting a minstrel show without a brass band. Rody lugs the trombone around the stages as if it were glued to him; he points it, twirls it, tucks it under his arm, and, at last, plays it.<sup>35</sup>

Rodeheaver's own words describe the effect his trombone had on audiences:

A trombone.

Its voice, resonant, silver toned and clarion clear, rings through the big, hastily raised tabernacle smelling of raw pine lumber and sawdust<sup>36</sup> and the damp earth that has been scuffled and stamped by hundreds of thousands of feet. It sounds through the throng of sixteen thousand and more men and women who are packed shoulder to shoulder along the planed benches, who crowd the aisles, who elbow for standing room about the platform.

As its sound swells, all along the ranks there is a stir, a shifting, a quieting of voices, a quick intake of breaths.

And after that a silence that is, to me at least, more inspiring than the full thunder of a great crowd's applause.

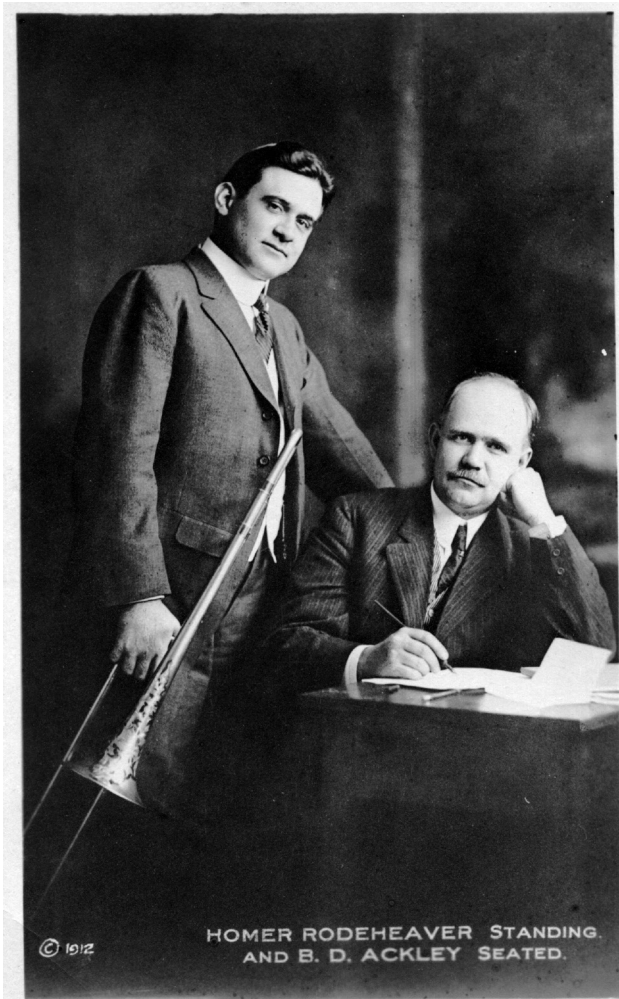
For I am the man with the trombone.<sup>37</sup>

In advance of Sunday's 1917 New York City Campaign,<sup>38</sup> during which Sunday and Rodeheaver reached over one million people<sup>39</sup> and over 98,000 conversions were reported,<sup>40</sup> *The New York Times* described Rodeheaver's effectiveness in leading singing:

Most prominent outside the Sunday family is undoubtedly Homer A. Rodeheaver. 'Rody' is usually one of the most popular members of the party. Schoolboys like him tremendously; so do grown men; nor are the ladies backward. Rodeheaver is musical director. He leads the singing, 'lining out' the hymns, getting the left half of the house to sing the first line of a stanza, the right half the second line, the choir the third and the whole congregation the fourth. He can sing himself, in an oily resonant voice—a good voice, as gospel singers go. And he plays the trombone to lead the choruses with devastating effect. Rodeheaver is a man of immense value. Whatever he gets

for his services, he is worth it. A man with his mixing ability and his capacity for molding a crowd into just the right state of mind in preparation for Sunday's arrival would be worth a fortune to a political leader.<sup>41</sup>

Rodeheaver's value to Sunday was inestimable. Theirs was a symbiotic relationship, each feeding off the other as they presented the message of the gospel to ever-growing numbers of people, all the while amassing small fortunes themselves. Sunday earned over \$600,000 during the years 1914–17 (his net worth in 1920 was calculated by Dun and Bradstreet at



**Figure 6:** Homer Rodeheaver and Bently DeForest Ackley, 1912, postcard. Author's collection.



\$1,500,000<sup>42</sup>) and Rodeheaver was bringing in huge sums of money through the sale of song books published by his firm, the Rodeheaver Hall-Mack Company.<sup>43</sup> With offices in Winona Lake, Indiana, Chicago, and Philadelphia, Rodeheaver's company began buying copyrights to some of the most popular gospel songs, which he then included in his songbooks. Among these were George Bennard's *The Old Rugged Cross*, Charles Gabriel and Ina Duley Ogdon's *Brighten the Corner where You Are*, C. Austin Miles's *In the Garden*, and Adam Geibel and George Duffield's *Stand up, Stand up for Jesus*. Rodeheaver also established and owned a recording company, Rainbow Records, which was active ca. 1920–26. It featured vocal and trombone solos and spoken word by him and others. Merchandise booths that featured postcards and photos of members of Sunday's team, song books published by Rodeheaver (records indicate that there were over 280 publications issued by Rodeheaver's publishing company), 78 RPM recordings made by Rainbow and Victor Records, and collections of sermons by Sunday were found at every Billy Sunday meeting. If the sale of over 60,000 song books during meetings in Philadelphia were any indication—unlike other evangelists of the time, Sunday allowed Rodeheaver to keep all of the proceeds from his concession sales—Rodeheaver brought in much more income from book sales than he did from the salary Sunday paid him.<sup>44</sup>

While Sunday and Rodeheaver were a potent duo, signs of strain in their relationship began to show in the 1920s. This culminated in a letter Rodeheaver wrote on 3 July 1927 to Sunday's wife and closest confidant, Helen Amelia "Nell" Thompson Sunday, popularly



**Figure 7:** Homer Rodeheaver (with trombone) and Billy Sunday (in a white suit, singing, behind Rodeheaver's trombone), August 1931, Winona Lake, Indiana. Courtesy of Winona History Center, Winona Lake, Indiana.

known as “Ma.”<sup>45</sup> While expressing gratitude for all that Billy Sunday had done for him and the cause of the Christian gospel, Rodeheaver raised a number of issues that he felt had led to a decline in the popularity of Sunday and his message. In gentle but direct language, he talked about Sunday’s increasing irritability on the platform,<sup>46</sup> mistreatment of his staff that resulted in a high turnover—especially of musicians—excessive length of sermons, and a growing obsession with the size of nightly offerings.<sup>47</sup> Nell Sunday, however, told Rodeheaver that she could not pass the letter on to her husband, feeling it would only make the situation even more difficult.<sup>48</sup>

Two years later Sunday, who had by then sensed the growing discontent among members of his team, wrote to Rodeheaver, accusing him of ingratitude. Rodeheaver replied with a letter directly to Sunday<sup>49</sup> that addressed the latter’s criticisms and once again raised his own concerns about changes in Sunday’s manner and way of operating.

Rodeheaver’s letter signaled the effective end of his regular working relationship with Sunday, although the two remained friends.<sup>50</sup> While Sunday did take some of Rodeheaver’s criticism to heart and Rodeheaver continued to offer his former partner encouragement, Sunday’s health slowly declined and his meetings became fewer. His last sermon was preached in Mishawaka, Indiana, on 27 October 1935. Rodeheaver had been scheduled to lead the meetings but was called away to Washington D.C. on pressing business and he asked his old friend if he would deputize for him. Sunday suffered a heart attack the following week and died on 6 November 1935.

While Homer Rodeheaver’s twenty years with Billy Sunday defined his reputation as a trombone-playing song leader, his association with Sunday gave him a platform from which he engaged in other activities that increased his profile and made him one of the most famous people in America.

### **Homer Rodeheaver with the YMCA during World War I**

When the United States declared war on Germany on 6 April 1917, a wave of patriotism swept the country. Many civilian organizations provided services to assist both the Allied armed forces and prisoner of war camps. The Red Cross performed most relief work but what was then called “welfare work”—setting up leave areas for soldiers, providing entertainment, cigarettes, and chocolate, and otherwise attending to needs of soldiers beyond what the military could offer—was undertaken by religious organizations. These included the Salvation Army, Jewish Welfare Board, National Catholic War Council, Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA), the Knights of Columbus, and the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA); the YMCA provided ninety percent of wartime relief work.<sup>51</sup>

Two days after the United States went to war, Billy Sunday scored a major public-relations coup when he announced that the entire free-will offering collected during his New York City campaign (8 April–19 June 1917) would be given to the Red Cross and the YMCA for their relief and welfare efforts; \$120,500 was collected.

**RODEHEAVER HELPED TO CHEER  
THE BOYS IN FRANCE  
WITH HIS SONGS, AND THE SAME SONGS WILL  
IMPROVE AND ENLIVEN YOUR SERVICES IF YOU USE**

**SONGS FOR SERVICE**

OR

**AWAKENING SONGS**

Approval Copy on Request

Made in Three Bindings

Manila 22c Limp 25c Cloth 35c Postpaid

Or in quantities—Manila 18c Limp 22c

Cloth 30c NOT PREPAID



**SONG STORIES OF THE SAWDUST TRAIL**  
By Homer A. Rodeheaver, with an endorsement and  
foreword by Rev. Wm. A. Sunday

A wonderfully fascinating series of incidents resulting directly from a number of the songs as used by him in his evangelistic work. The stories will be very helpful to ministers, speakers and chorus directors, in making their sermons, talks and song services more effective. A splendid suggestion for a gift book. The songs are presented complete with the narratives connected with them.

218 pages, handsomely bound in red cloth, with gilt title.  
\$1.00 per copy; 10c extra for postage if sent by mail.

**PENNY OBJECT LESSONS**

25 object lessons for children, compiled by Rev. C. H. Woolston, Frank B. Lane and Homer A. Rodeheaver, who are unsurpassed in this line of platform work. Arranged under five sub-jets "How to Catch the Eye," "How to Reach the Heart," "How to Convince the Mind," "How to Simplify the Truth" and "How to Remember the Message." 25c per copy.

PENNY OBJECT LESSONS, No. 2 in preparation, ready soon.

**WORTH WHILE POEMS**

Selected by Homer A. Rodeheaver

A splendid collection of the very choicest poetical gems selected from his private scrap-book, and used so effectively by Mr. Rodeheaver in his talks and song services.

64 pages, exquisitely printed on fine paper, with beautiful cover. 25 cents.

**SOME EXTRA USEFUL PUBLICATIONS**

**THE GOSPEL CHOIR**—A monthly journal devoted to the interests of choirs, chorus conductors, singing evangelists and others. Twenty pages of music each month. Send for sample copy.

**JOASH, A Scripture Cantata for Choirs**.—The story of Joash is admirably told. Contains 20 musical numbers: Solos, duets, recitatives, choruses, etc. 50c per copy, \$4.80 per dozen.

**RODEHEAVER'S ORGAN VOLUNTARIES**—A 16-page collection of easy selections. 25c postpaid.

**RODEHEAVER'S LADIES' VOICE COLLECTION**—If your choir lacks male talent you need this. 32 pages, 35c.

**THE LATEST SOLDIER SONG.**

"Goodbye France! Hello Miss Liberty!" (The girl with the lamp in her hand) by Rodeheaver.

A GOOD CHAUTAUQUA SONG now being sung with great success by Mr. Rodeheaver on his concert tour, and with much delight by the returning soldiers. 100,000 distributed by the Y. M. C. A. in France.

Also two very pleasing sentimental songs just issued:—"Lonesome" and "Messenger Star" both by Rodeheaver. 15c postpaid.

1100 Monon Building  
CHICAGO

**THE Rodeheaver  
COMPANY**

700 Commercial Building  
PHILADELPHIA

Figure 8: Advertisement. Source: *The Gospel Choir* (Chicago: The Rodeheaver Company, August 1919). Courtesy of Winona History Center, Winona Lake, Indiana.

Whether out of genuine patriotism or cognizant that it would make a powerful impression, Sunday allowed Homer Rodeheaver to leave his team to travel to France. At first, Rodeheaver announced he would be heading overseas to drive an ambulance,<sup>52</sup> but by the summer of 1918, the ambulance had been shelved in favor of Rodeheaver's trombone, and his new mission was to "make a specialty of recitation, song, song leading, trombone and solo works, feats of magic, slight-of-hand entertainment and addresses."<sup>53</sup>

By 2 September 1918 Rodeheaver was at sea aboard the French liner *Espagne* and upon his arrival, spent three weeks in Paris.<sup>54</sup> While there, he went up in an airplane on several occasions:

After a ride or two like this, I conceived the idea of taking my trombone up in the air. The first time I tried it, it was on the field near Clermont Ferrant. Lieutenant Powell took me up in his "Liberty." We took the trombone, and blew it over the flying field and the surrounding towns. It cannot be heard higher than about five hundred feet. When we would go up about a thousand or fifteen hundred feet, and then shut off the motor and glide down, I was told they could hear it beautifully. This was the first attempt of the kind, and I very likely have the only trombone that was ever up in an aeroplane....<sup>55</sup>

They were those open cockpit Jennies in those days and the first time I leaned out of the plane to blow the trombone I headed it into the wind and almost got blown out of the plane. Then I pointed it to the rear and everything worked out fine.<sup>56</sup>

On 29 September, Rodeheaver left Paris for the front, accompanied by Dr. Howard G. Taylor, stopping to meet with troops in Fleury, Neuville, Les Islettes, Varennes, Rachecourt, and Souilly. As Rodeheaver reported,

I was walking along a row of batteries just over the hill from the little town of Varennes in the Argonne Forest, carrying my trombone in my hand. The fellows would come out from the dugouts in the side of the hill and yell for a tune. I would stop and play for them, then pass on to the next group.<sup>57</sup>

Officially, the YMCA reported Rodeheaver's encounters with soldiers as being wholly positive:

The men attended religious services only of their own volition. I believe the only occasions when they were brought to meetings of this sort in entire units were when they had the opportunity of listening to Homer A. Rodeheaver, the famous song-leader who, with his songs and smiles and stories and his trombone, completely won their hearts.<sup>58</sup>

But not all soldiers' hearts were won. Frank L. Thompson, who served as 1st Lieutenant in the 348th Machine Gun Battalion, 91st ("Wild West") Division during the War, kept a diary

while overseas and had a very different reaction when Rodeheaver and Taylor encountered his battalion in October 1918 as they were returning from the front:

The men in the last stages of exhaustion, and fed up on the sights of the past week or so, nerves shattered, etc., were dreaming for the billets we were en route to, when up came a rattling Ford with two individuals in the back seat. They wore that same asinine watery-eyed smirk, adopted by the rustics of our glorious republic who make religion their fad, and shout “Glory Hallelulia,” then with their eyes rolled Heavenward, cheat their neighbor out of a good horse or eject a widow with three children for non-payment of the rent. Incidentally they voted for the Prohibition Ticket when their MEN were away making the world unsafe for the Democratic Party. One of these blatant imbeciles introduced himself as “Rodeheaver, the right hand man of Billy Sunday,” and drawing forth a brassy trombone played “Right in [*sic*: Brighten the] Corner Where You Are”, and “Down Along the Wabash.” We had to ask them to remain to lunch, and I thought of Irvin S. Cobb’s article called “A Fool Proof War.” This isn’t one.<sup>59</sup>

Homer Rodeheaver left France on 29 December 1918 and arrived in New York on 17 January 1919. His wartime service was immediately leveraged into advertising by The Rodeheaver Company to sell songbooks and other publications. But the advertisement above (Figure 8) highlights another important aspect of Homer Rodeheaver’s marketing for his recordings, songbooks, and other publications: His trombone was ubiquitous; it was his talisman. He took it everywhere and in a sense it was as important to him as a visible part of his identity as it was a musical instrument. Photos of Rodeheaver with his trombone appeared in countless advertisements for Rodeheaver’s products although nothing was offered for sale that had anything to do with the trombone.

### **Beyond Billy Sunday: recitals, tours, and collaborations**

The business of holding evangelistic meetings was not a year-round activity; they were not usually held during the heat of the summer, when tents or wooden tabernacles would become unbearably hot. Rodeheaver had many opportunities to engage in other activities that allowed him to promote the resources of his publishing company and continue to raise his public profile.

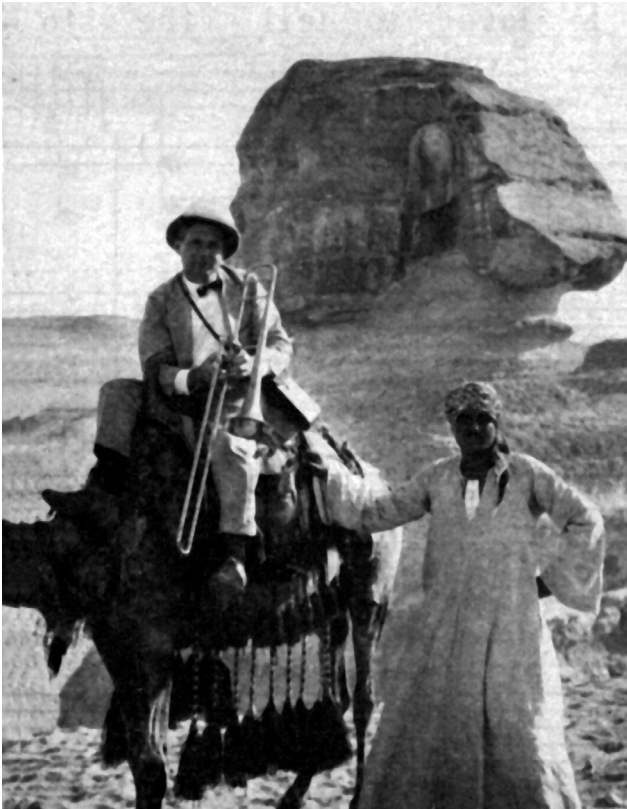
As was mentioned earlier, Rodeheaver was active on the Chautauqua circuit, giving recitals and leading singing at meetings around the country. Programs from 1917 and 1918<sup>60</sup> show Rodeheaver—as reader, baritone soloist, and trombonist—collaborating with two other members of the Billy Sunday party, George A. Brewster (tenor soloist and pianist) and Robert L. Matthews (pianist). Rodeheaver’s trombone playing was extravagantly promoted in these brochures by The Coit-Alber Chautauqua Company, a leading



promoter of Chautauqua Circuit entertainers: “Few trombone soloists have appeared before the American public under any auspices equipped with a clearer tone and finer technique than Mr. Rodeheaver possesses.”<sup>61</sup> More than happy to capitalize on their association with Sunday, the trio was nevertheless known as “The Rodeheaver Party,” and their concerts were a potpourri of sacred, patriotic, and popular solos and duets, readings, trombone solos, and, as always, an opportunity to purchase the latest publications offered by The Rodeheaver Company.

Critics were uniformly effusive in their praise of Rodeheaver’s concert performances at this time:

The Rodeheaver musical concert at the First Methodist Church last night was a colorful and enthusiastic affair principally because Homer Rodeheaver himself has an unusual personality and has his own adventurous way of doing



**Figure 9:** Homer Rodeheaver in Egypt, 1924. Source: “Homer Rodeheaver in Foreign Lands,” *Rodeheaver’s World’s Greatest Collection of Sacred Songs* (Chicago: M.M. Cole, 1933), 32. Collection of Kevin Mungons.

things. With his waving, glistening trombone, his silk lapelled dress coat and white trousers, and his genial smile fitted to his insinuating voice, he put himself at once on good terms of intimacy before a good-sized audience.... His own trombone solos were full of big, round, sustained notes, followed by tender, mezzo tones that resembled a faint echo. His favorite, according to the applause of his audience, was "The Holy City" by Adams.<sup>62</sup>

On 8 September 1923 Rodeheaver took an extended leave of absence from working with Billy Sunday and embarked on a nine-month-long world tour, accompanied by William Biederwolf, his brother, Joseph Rodeheaver, and writer and illustrator Florence Hay; Theodore Thomas Frankenberg was the tour's photographer. Sailing from Los Angeles, the group visited Hawaii, Japan, China, Korea, the Philippines, Siam (Thailand), Ceylon, India, Australia, Egypt, and the Holy Land.<sup>63</sup> The tour was expressly a missionary effort, with meetings scheduled in all countries, and Rodeheaver recorded gospel songs in Japanese and other languages. Upon his return Rodeheaver incorporated stories from his trip in meetings during the 1924 Chautauqua season, with advertising for his programs promoting his upcoming lectures as "Around the World With the Gospel Horn."<sup>64</sup>

In 1936 Rodeheaver left for a missionary tour of Africa, accompanied by Arthur J. Moore, Missionary Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, in London. In an interview in which he discussed the trip, Rodeheaver related,

I step up in the dark of the moon in a strange village. I got no guides, no gun bearers, except my little old trombone of the Lord. I slip into *Walk in Jerusalem Just Like John*, slow at first, and then faster ... and before long, without my asking, "Will you abide with me or sing with me?" they are doing a shuffle and a-humming, repeating just that phrase. Soon they're surprised I got nothing to sell. So I sell them, for nothing, the Negro spirituals. I got no chart to show, no list of converts, no promise of future missions.<sup>65</sup>

In a *Time Magazine* story devoted to Rodeheaver's Africa trip, the man with the trombone who did not graduate from college and was neither seminary-trained nor ordained,<sup>66</sup> asked that he be referred to with a new title:

Last week Religionist Rodeheaver turned up in Manhattan, told newshawks about a trip he had made in the Congo with Methodist Missionary Bishop Arthur James Moore. Inviting his interviewers to call him "Reverend Trombone" or at least "Homer," Mr. Rodeheaver explained that Negro spirituals had taken him to Africa.... In the Congo, in which he traveled 1,500 miles by Ford, bicycle, canoe, litter and on foot, Missionary Rodeheaver played hymns and spirituals on his battered trombone, often starting alone in a clearing and eventually attracting 1,000 or so black heathens. Sending word of his imminence by their signal drums, the Negroes called him "White

Song Man,” dubbed Bishop Moore “Biscuit” or “Wangi Bischoff” (Yankee bishop). For the trombone they could think of no descriptive word.<sup>67</sup>

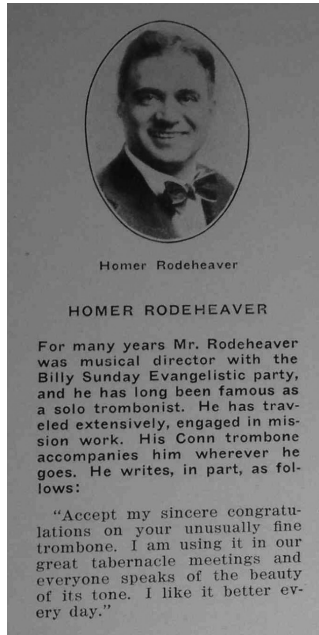
### **Rodeheaver’s trombones**

While various accounts imply that Homer Rodeheaver used the same trombone throughout his life<sup>68</sup> and he did not discourage this view as part of his life’s narrative, evidence from the photographic record tells us otherwise. As many as nine trombones are known to have been associated with Rodeheaver during his lifetime but the whereabouts of only two are known with certainty.<sup>69</sup>

1. Homer Rodeheaver’s first trombone, ca.1897; maker unknown (Figure 2).
2. Trombone used while at Ohio Wesleyan University, 1901; maker unknown (Figure 1).
3. Trombone used while at Ohio Wesleyan University, ca. 1903; maker unknown.
4. Trombone ca. 1908; Lyon & Healy. Figure 10 is the only known photo of Rodeheaver with this instrument.
5. Trombone used from 1909 to ca. 1920; York (Figures 4, 6, 8, 14).
6. Trombone used ca. 1920 to 1952; Conn (Figures 7, 9). This was Rodeheaver’s favorite trombone and by around 1925 he was endorsing Conn. Rodeheaver said that “an old German artisan at the Conn musical instrument factory engraved the top of the bell with a picture of a Billy Sunday tabernacle. And over the tabernacle was the picture of an angel and two cherubs.”<sup>70</sup> This instrument was stolen in 1952 when Rodeheaver was participating in meetings in Vandalia, Illinois.
7. Trombone used 1952–55. Conn 6H, gold-plated, serial number 407961 (Figure 12). Conn engraved the bell with Rodeheaver’s name and his musical trademark, a musical rainbow with the words “Every cloud will wear a rainbow, if your heart keeps right.”<sup>71</sup>
8. Trombone acquired ca. 1919. Buescher model 37, serial number 61200. Given to Garrett Wright; subsequently sold and now on display in the lobby of Rodeheaver Auditorium on the campus of Bob Jones University, Greenville, South Carolina.<sup>72</sup>
9. Olds “Opera” model (Figure 13). A 1947 photo of Homer Rodeheaver with evangelist Billy Graham shows him holding an Olds Opera model trombone, but there is no other record of Rodeheaver playing or owning an Olds. It is likely that this belonged to Graham’s longtime friend and coworker Clifford Barrows, and loaned to Rodeheaver for the purpose of the photograph.
10. Clifford Barrows also owned a trombone that Rodeheaver had given to him, but its make and whereabouts are unknown.<sup>73</sup>



**Figure 10:** Homer Rodeheaver, ca. 1908.  
Courtesy of Winona History Center, Winona Lake, Indiana.



**Figure 11:** C.G. Conn Slide Trombone Catalog endorsement by Homer Rodeheaver, ca. 1928. Courtesy of National Music Museum, Vermillion, South Dakota.



**Figure 12:** Detail of bell engraving, Homer Rodeheaver's 1952 Conn 6H trombone. Winona History Center, Winona Lake, Indiana; on loan from Bruce Howe. Photo by Kevin Mungons.





**Figure 13:** Billy Graham and Homer Rodeheaver, Winona Lake, Indiana, 1947.  
Courtesy of Archives of the Billy Graham Center, Wheaton, Illinois.

### **Homer Rodeheaver's recordings with trombone**

While Homer Rodeheaver played trombone before as many as 100 million people during his lifetime<sup>74</sup> and he made scores of recordings as a vocalist for a number of labels,<sup>75</sup> his commercially available recorded legacy as a trombonist is miniscule, limited to the release of *Safe in the Arms of Jesus* on his own label, Rainbow Records. Three different record-

ings were released of this gospel song—recorded around 1920, in May 1922, and in late 1922<sup>76</sup>—with the same catalog number, Rainbow Records 1001-A.<sup>77</sup> Several recordings

Every cloud will wear a rainbow. If your heart keeps right.

**Rainbow**  
**PHONOGRAPH RECORDS**

Made by  
Homer  
Rodeheaver

and other  
well known  
Artists

**ALPHABETICAL LIST**

**The RODEHEAVER COMPANY**  
CHICAGO 218 So. Wabash Ave. PHILADELPHIA 721 Arch St.

**Figure 14:** Source: *Rainbow Records Catalog IV*, September 1924.  
Courtesy of Winona History Center, Winona Lake, Indiana.



with Rodeheaver playing trombone solos were made on Victor Records in 1916 but not released,<sup>78</sup> and several sides of test pressings made in 1948 never came to market. Apart from a handful of live performances that were recorded near the end of his life,<sup>79</sup> Rodeheaver's recorded output remains but a small part of his legacy as a trombone soloist.



**Figure 15:** Label of Rainbow Records 1001-A (matrix 924), *Safe in the Arms of Jesus*. Recorded between July and October 1922, Rodeheaver Labs, Chicago. Homer Rodeheaver, trombone solo; Ruth Rodeheaver, soprano solo; pianist unknown. Author's collection.

### Homer Rodeheaver's later years

From 1930 until his death in 1955, Homer Rodeheaver devoted himself to several particular pursuits: preaching, leading singing and playing trombone in churches and evangelistic meetings around the country, supervising the work of his publishing company,<sup>80</sup> taking part in the Winona Lake, Indiana, Bible Conference, leading the Rodeheaver School of Sacred Music, and founding Rainbow Ranch (later called Rodeheaver Boy's Ranch) in Palatka, Florida. He made his home on what he called "Rainbow Point" in Winona Lake as early as 1912<sup>81</sup> and was by all accounts a vibrant part of the town's civic and spiritual life.

In 1938 Rodeheaver preached and led singing in the Spring Methodist Church Rally Day in Pottstown, Pennsylvania; the program also included a performance by the Lititz Moravian Trombone Choir.<sup>82</sup> Notwithstanding the long tradition of Moravian Easter sunrise services, Rodeheaver took credit for popularizing the tradition after leading the Winston-Salem, North Carolina, Moravian Easter service during meetings there with Billy Sunday in 1925, where “the idea first came to him of greeting the sunrise with a song across the nation.... Thus, in the lively imagination of this Trumpeter of the Lord, was born the sunrise service as a national phenomenon.”<sup>83</sup>

As Rodeheaver aged, he recognized that times were changing. In 1943 he admitted,

Billy Sunday couldn't repeat his old-time spectacular meetings today. Emotion will always be a vital part of religion, but rolling around on the floor, kicking up heels and similar antics are out of date. The new approach is a combination of the mental and emotional, and the emotional will not be supreme....

I play [trombone] to reach people, and so I don't play over their heads. There's such a thing as being too sweet and low. You've got to attract people before you can convert them. One good blast is worth a dozen soft toots.<sup>84</sup>

Yet Rodeheaver did find himself out of step with the times, his brand of jolly leading of ragtime-inspired gospel songs falling out of favor beyond an increasingly smaller circle of conservative “old-time religion” churches. He remained popular in Winona Lake, where he “rested violently” in the summer months, “riding surfboard, playing tennis, swimming, diving, playing, driving his speedboat recklessly, entertaining as many friends and passersby as can crowd under his roof.”<sup>85</sup> But even there, strain was beginning to show between Rodeheaver and those outside the Winona Lake “bubble.” Radio station WMBI, the flagship Christian radio station associated with the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, Illinois, broadcast meetings from Winona Lake for many summers. A memo from Walter Carlson, chief announcer and news director for WMBI from 1942 to 1983, to WMBI announcers who were working at the 1950 Winona Lake Bible Conference described the dilemma they had in working with Rodeheaver in his later years:

Unfortunately, the feeling between Dr. Rodeheaver and M.B.I. is not wholesome. A number of reasons are involved, one being ... his lack of musical ability. In certain past years we have refused to broadcast the 10:45 services [on Sunday mornings] when he directed the music. Our reasons for this were simply that:

- a. His singing and playing were below our standards.
- b. The musical talent he put on the air usually failed to meet our standards.
- c. His talk was objectionable, due to blarney and extreme promotion of his School of Music.

As a friendly gesture, however, we have in recent years lowered our standards for a part of the Conference and put him on the air.<sup>86</sup>

While some were forgiving of Rodeheaver's decreasing musical skills,<sup>87</sup> he had clearly come to the place where his very credibility as a performer had begun to suffer outside his most faithful circle of friends and supporters.

Homer Rodeheaver died on 18 December 1955, of a cerebral hemorrhage brought on by a heart attack. His obituary in the *Warsaw (Indiana) Times-Union* spoke of his indefatigable spirit in his final years:

Dr. Rodeheaver first became ill with a heart condition two years ago. Though in his early seventies, he steadfastly refused to reduce a most rigorous business pace despite warnings from doctors and pleadings by family members and close business associates. To death Dr. Rodeheaver maintained a business schedule which would have literally broken the backs of most men many years his junior.<sup>88</sup>

### Legacy

Homer Rodeheaver's use of the trombone to play solos and lead singing at Christian evangelist meetings inspired many imitators to follow in his footsteps. Most of them have long been forgotten, although several found their way into contemporary news accounts. Horace Erwin, considered "a trombonist of note,"<sup>89</sup> published postcards of himself with his trombone, patterned after cards Rodeheaver had made of himself and sold at Ely, Biederwolf, and Sunday campaigns (Figure 6). Ted Ness had a "golden trombone" like Rodeheaver's and used it to lead "many choruses and old time hymns which have in days past played important parts in stimulating Christian experience."<sup>90</sup> Burton [B.B.] Bosworth was a trombone-playing revivalist who frequently partnered with his brother, preacher, and cornetist Fred Bosworth and, like Rodeheaver, published songbooks to use and sell in his meetings.<sup>91</sup> Joe Talley conducted evangelistic meetings titled "Music With a Message," playing his "golden trombone, electric steel guitar, banjo and electric tenor guitar."<sup>92</sup>

Not all trombone-playing evangelists from Rodeheaver's tree of influence reflected positively on the Christian gospel message. Rev. Walter J. Bateman, who toured playing "trombone solos prefacing his sermons" was charged with bigamy after deserting his wife, establishing a new identity, and marrying another woman as Rev. Robert Warwick. Arrested after meetings at which he joined evangelist Uldine Utley, he told police, "Well, I guess you've got me. I was just in love and didn't stop to think about the consequences."<sup>93</sup>

If release of the film *Angel Baby* in 1961—with its fictional, critical exposé of the faith-healing movement complete with a drunk trombonist, Ben Hays (played by Henry Jones) as sidekick to Hoke Adams, an unscrupulous promoter who staged phony heal-





**Figure 16:** Youth for Christ Rally, Los Angeles, 1949. Left to right: unknown, Robert Cook, Billy Graham, unknown, George Beverly Shea, unknown, Cliff Barrows.  
 Courtesy of Archives of the Billy Graham Center, Wheaton, Illinois.

ings<sup>94</sup>—represented the nadir of the image of the trombone-playing evangelist inspired in large part by Rodeheaver, its zenith came in the person of Clifford (“Cliff”) Barrows.

Cliff Barrows (born 1923) was educated at Bob Jones College where he received his B.A. with Honors in Sacred Music in 1944; unlike Rodeheaver, he was a trained trombonist. He joined with evangelist Jack Shuster for meetings in January 1945 where, with his first wife Billie (d. 1994), he was immediately compared with Homer Rodeheaver, whom he had first met while a student at Bob Jones:

The Barrows’ specialize in piano and trombone arrangements, and their duets and solos have made them friends of everyone who has attended their performances. It was ventured by one who attended the great Billy Sunday campaigns that Mr. Barrows is the equal of Homer Rodeheaver, song-leader for the late evangelist, so skillfully does he lead the large crowds in congregational singing of hymns and choruses.<sup>95</sup>

Barrows met Billy Graham at a Youth for Christ Rally in Asheville, North Carolina, in 1945 and the two began a collaboration that continued into the twenty-first century. Rodeheaver met with Graham and Barrows at the Winona Lake Bible Conference in 1947 (see Figure 13) and offered the young evangelistic team advice on conducting large-scale evangelistic meetings, leading singing, and organizing a ministry.<sup>96</sup> From 1947 to 1954 Barrows used his Olds Opera (Figure 16) or J.W. York trombone to lead and accompany singing on the early crusades of Billy Graham's ministry.

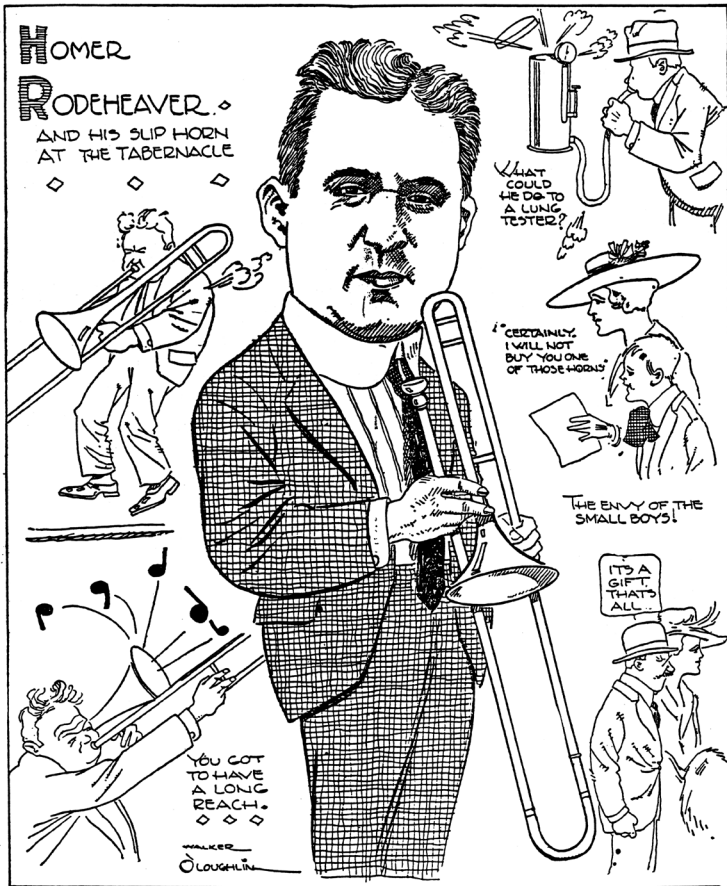


Figure 17: Homer Rodeheaver, cartoon. Source: *Los Angeles Morning Tribune*, September 1917.

When Cliff Barrows put down his trombone around 1957, it marked the effective end of the trombone-playing, song-leading evangelist. Yet the influence of Homer Rodeheaver—the man who wanted to be called “Reverend Trombone”<sup>97</sup>—continued. The

cartoon in Figure 17 reminds us that children were paying attention to his trombone, that shiny, brassy sounding “slip horn.” While it is not possible to calculate the number of people who took up the trombone due to Rodeheaver’s inspiration, there is no doubt that many did so. He certainly raised the profile of the trombone, albeit in a different way from the acknowledged masters of the instrument such as Arthur Pryor. In fact, while Pryor’s artistry may have had the effect of discouraging people from picking up the trombone, Rodeheaver’s trombone playing was simple and accessible. His gentle, folksy style made an impact on those who conflated his trombone playing with the emotional fervor of the moment where they “walked the sawdust trail” in a Billy Sunday meeting. The trombone, the singing, the preaching, the spiritual conviction, and the spectacle all combined to a single package of experience that could not be separated.

Pundit Will Rogers summed up what many felt about Homer Rodeheaver and his trombone:

You all know “Rody,” the great slide trombone player who always led the music in the Billy Sunday revivals. Rody has slip-horned more sinners into the Kingdom of Heaven than any of the old timers with their trumpets.... You know, nobody ever thought about saving anybody with a trombone before. They have tried tom toms, and organs and harps, and even bass drums. You naturally are set and kind of guard yourself against being led down the trail by those instruments. But when something breaks out [with the trombone], you think you are following your first minstrel show parade down the street! Say, Rody sure gave that old instrument a Holy standing, and any revised edition of the Bible has sure got to give Rody and his Slip Horn a chapter.<sup>98</sup>

After he left Billy Sunday, and with a quarter of a century of life ahead of him, Rodeheaver reflected on his sense of purpose with the trombone in his hand while summing up what would become his greatest legacy:

What was this thinking that I was trying to do? And who was I to accomplish it?

And then, quick as a flash would come the reassuring thought, that I had with me to accomplish it one of the greatest aides in the world, the power of music. It wasn’t I, Homer Rodeheaver, who was going to do this thing. It was music, itself. The music that was here in my trombone, that was waiting in the throats of the choir massed on the platform waiting for my signal; above all, the music that was waiting in the hearts of all of those men and women before me, and that I had somehow, only to release.<sup>99</sup>

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*Douglas Yeo (yeodoug.com) is professor of trombone at Arizona State University; from 1985 to 2012 he was bass trombonist of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. A graduate of Wheaton College (Illinois) and New York University, he is a leading exponent as a scholar, author, and performer of historical bass brasses, including sackbut, buccin, serpent, and ophicleide. Recipient of the International Trombone Association's 2014 ITA Award, he has performed and given master classes on five continents, published dozens of chapters and articles in books, periodicals and peer-reviewed journals, and his playing on numerous instruments is heard on museum audio guides around the world. This article is dedicated to the memory of trombonist Bill Pearce (1926–2010).*

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Billy Graham and others have employed the word “crusade” to characterize their large-scale evangelistic meetings; in this context, “crusade” is construed as a mission to preach the Christian message of salvation through Jesus Christ. Today, the word has fallen out of favor among many in Christian circles, with its negative connections to the violence and coercion of medieval-era religious crusades.

<sup>2</sup> The word “gospel,” a translation of the Greek εὐαγγέλιον or *euangélion* (“good news”), has come to represent, in Christian parlance, the teachings of Jesus Christ.

<sup>3</sup> *The Gospel Choir*, September 1921, 4.

<sup>4</sup> Homer Rodeheaver, *Singing Down the Sawdust Trail: The Life Story of Homer A. Rodeheaver* (Part One: Sourwood Mountains), 30. Photocopy of an undated (ca. 1930) typewritten manuscript on deposit at the Winona History Center with handwritten corrections; the location of the original manuscript is unknown.

<sup>5</sup> *Fifty-Eighth Catalogue of Ohio Wesleyan University* (Delaware, Ohio, 1902), 60–61.

<sup>6</sup> *The College Transcript*, 31 October 1896.

<sup>7</sup> *The Bijou* (published by the Junior Class of Ohio Wesleyan University), spring 1897, 153.

<sup>8</sup> *The College Transcript*, 12 January 1901.

<sup>9</sup> Transcript of Homer A. Rodeheaver. Ohio Wesleyan University, 1900–01. Courtesy of the Registrar of Ohio Wesleyan University.

<sup>10</sup> Rodeheaver enlisted in the Fourth Tennessee Regiment on 18 November 1898 and was discharged on 6 May 1899. Homer Rodeheaver [*sic*], *Certificate in Lieu of Lost or Destroyed Discharge Certificate*, 4 April 1940. Winona History Center Archives. However, Rodeheaver’s enlistment date is given as 12 November 1898 in *Spanish-American War Records: Service Record of Those Serving with the First*,

*Second, Third and Fourth Tennessee Regiments of Infantry, United States Volunteers* (Copied from the original "Muster-Out Rolls" now on file in the office of the Adjutant General of Tennessee, Nashville). Compiled and typed as part of a "W.P.A. Project" sponsored by the Adjutant General of Tennessee, 1938–39. Tennessee State Library and Archives.

<sup>11</sup> Paul E. Bierley, *Hallelujah Trombone! The Story of Henry Fillmore* (Columbus: Integrity Press, 1982), 22–26.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Henry Porter, "Homer Alvan Rodeheaver: Evangelistic Musician and Publisher" (D.Ed. diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1981), 32; Terry White with Steve Grill, *Winona at 100: Third Wave Rising* (Winona Lake: BMH Books, 2013), 120.

<sup>13</sup> *The Christian Work and The Evangelist* 83, no. 2113, 17 August 1907, 201. Rodeheaver also conducted the Lemon Park meetings by himself when Ely was unable to be there.

<sup>14</sup> "Dramatic Sermon by Biederwolf," *The Coffeyville Daily Journal* (Coffeyville, KS), 20 January 1909: "The music was especially fine. There was a large chorus out, not so large as there could be but one of pleasing numbers. A number of new hymns were sung. There was a sweet solo by Miss Laird, a duet by Mrs. Estes and Miss Laird, a trombone and cornet, and a duet by Miss Laird and Mr. Rodeheaver." Also, "Meeting at Tabernacle Sunday Biggest Day Yet," idem, 25 January 1909: "One of the special musical numbers at the service was the playing of "The Holy City" by Mr. Rodeheaver on the trombone, with the chorus choir singing the chorus. The effect was magnificent."

<sup>15</sup> "He Has A Press Agent," *The Ottawa Daily Republic* (Ottawa, KS), 27 November 1907. However, a later media report states that Rodeheaver first worked with Biederwolf during meetings in Springfield, MO. See "You Wouldn't Think Rhody Was a Sawyer," *The Syracuse Herald*, 14 November 1915.

<sup>16</sup> "Rodeheaver Solos Please Big Crowd," *The Coffeyville Daily Journal*, 14 January 1909.

<sup>17</sup> "Last Night's Meeting," *The Parsons Daily Sun* (Parsons, KS), 6 May 1909.

<sup>18</sup> "Visitors Pleased: Coffeyville Excursionists Glad to See Biederwolf and His Men Again." *The Parsons Daily Sun*, 5 May 1909.

<sup>19</sup> "To Celebrate Centennial of Lincoln's Birth," *The Topeka Daily Capital* (Topeka, KS), 12 February 1909.

<sup>20</sup> See Andrew Chamberlain Rieser, *The Chautauqua Moment: Protestants, Progressives, and the Culture of Modern Liberalism, 1914–1920* (Columbia University Press, 2003).

<sup>21</sup> "Evangelists are Gone," *The Coffeyville Daily Journal*, 3 February 1909.

<sup>22</sup> "Winfield's Chautauqua is Very Successful," *The Wichita Daily Eagle*, Wichita, KS, 9 July 1909.

<sup>23</sup> "Billy Sunday Delivers Lecture at Winfield," *The Wichita Daily Eagle*, 15 July 1909; "Billy Sunday: Tomorrow the Great Evangelist Will Be at the Assembly," *Arkansas City Daily Traveler* (Arkansas City, KS), 14 July 1909.

<sup>24</sup> Theodore Thomas Frankenberg, *Spectacular Career of Rev. Billy Sunday, Famous Baseball Evangelist* (Columbus, Ohio: McClelland, 1913); Elijah P. Brown, *The Real Billy Sunday: The Life and Work of Rev. William Ashley Sunday, D.D., The Baseball Evangelist* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1914); William T. Ellis, *"Billy" Sunday: The Man and His Message* (Philadelphia: John. C. Winston, 1914); Homer Rodeheaver, *Twenty Years With Billy Sunday* (Winona Lake: Rodeheaver Hall-Mack, 1936); Melton Wright, *Giant for God: A Biography of the Life of William Ashley ("Billy") Sunday* (Boyce, VA: Carr, 1951).

<sup>25</sup> Lyle W. Dorsett, *Billy Sunday and the Redemption of Urban America* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1991).

<sup>26</sup> William G. McLoughlin, Jr., *Billy Sunday Was His Real Name* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955); Roger A. Bruns, *Preacher: Billy Sunday and Big-Time American Evangelism* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992); Robert F. Martin, *Hero of the Heartland: Billy Sunday and the Transformation of American Society* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002); William Andrew Firstenberger,



*In Rare Form: A Pictorial History of Baseball Evangelist Billy Sunday* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2005).

<sup>27</sup> For a comprehensive treatment of Billy Sunday's baseball career and conversion, see Wendy Knickerbocker, *Sunday at the Ballpark: Billy Sunday's Professional Baseball Career 1883–1890* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2000).

<sup>28</sup> McLoughlin, *Billy Sunday Was His Real Name*, 8.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 10–11.

<sup>30</sup> William Andrew Firstenberger, *In Rare Form*, 114.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 37–38.

<sup>32</sup> Theodore Thomas Frankenberg, *Billy Sunday: His Tabernacles and Sawdust Trails* (Columbus, OH: F.J. Heer, 1917), 82.

<sup>33</sup> Frankenberg, *Spectacular Career*, 93–94.

<sup>34</sup> Homer Rodeheaver's nickname has been variously spelled "Rody," "Rodey" and "Rhody."

<sup>35</sup> Bruns, *Preacher*, 103–04.

<sup>36</sup> Sawdust was used to cover the dirt floors of Billy Sunday's "tabernacles," temporary structures where he conducted his evangelistic meetings. Those who went forward to the podium (where they received a pamphlet about Christianity from Sunday) to make a profession of faith were said to "walk the sawdust trail."

<sup>37</sup> Rodeheaver, *Singing Down the Sawdust Trail*, 1.

<sup>38</sup> Billy Sunday's New York City Campaign began on 8 April 1917, two days after the United States entered World War I, and ended on 19 June 1917.

<sup>39</sup> Dorsett, *Billy Sunday*, 93.

<sup>40</sup> Firstenberger, *In Rare Form*, 122.

<sup>41</sup> "Sunday's 19 Aids Draw Trail-Hitters," *The New York Times*, 28 January 1917.

<sup>42</sup> McLaughlin, Jr., *Billy Sunday Was His Real Name*, 115–16.

<sup>43</sup> Founded in 1910, Rodeheaver's publishing concern was first known as Rodeheaver-Ackley Company, then Rodeheaver Company. See Dorsett, *Billy Sunday*, 118.

<sup>44</sup> Porter, "Homer Alvan Rodeheaver: Evangelistic Musician and Publisher," 93. It is estimated that Sunday paid Rodeheaver between \$80,000 and \$90,000 during the years 1910–30.

<sup>45</sup> Letter from Homer Rodeheaver to Mrs. Sunday, 3 July 1927. Billy Sunday Collection, used with permission from Archives & Special Collections, Morgan Library, Grace College & Seminary, Winona Lake, IN.

<sup>46</sup> Rodeheaver wrote, "Until the last year he did not even walk on the platform while I was singing, but during this last year he not only walks on the platform but up on his platform, moving his chair around, sitting down, and showing his nervousness to the crowd while I have been trying to sing." Letter from Rodeheaver to Mrs. Sunday, 3 July 1927, 2.

<sup>47</sup> Billy Sunday was frequently criticized for his ostentatious lifestyle, including an extravagant taste for fine clothes and traveling first class by train. There were also serious problems with three of Sunday's four children, who brought embarrassment to Sunday and his wife due to poor life choices and their mismanagement of money. Homer Rodeheaver was hardly alone or the first to make this criticism of Sunday; none of this escaped the media's notice. See Dorsett, *Billy Sunday*, 115–23.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 134–38.

<sup>49</sup> Letter from Rodeheaver to Billy Sunday, 20 October 1929. *Billy Sunday* Collection, used with permission from Archives & Special Collections, Morgan Library, Grace College & Seminary, Winona Lake, IN.

<sup>50</sup> Rodeheaver wrote a positive, complimentary book about his collaboration with Sunday, *Twenty Years With Billy Sunday* (Winona Lake: Rodeheaver Hall-Mack Company, 1936).

- <sup>51</sup> For a comprehensive account of the YMCA's work during World War I, see *Service with Fighting Men: An Account of the Work of the American Young Men's Christian Associations in the World War*, ed. Howard Taft, managing ed. Frederick Harris (New York: Association Press, 1922).
- <sup>52</sup> "Rody Going to War to Drive Ambulance," *Chicago Daily News*, 9 April 1918.
- <sup>53</sup> *Rodeheaver's Musical News*, (Chicago: Rodeheaver [September] 1918), 1.
- <sup>54</sup> Porter, "Homer Alvan Rodeheaver: Evangelistic Musician and Publisher," 39.
- <sup>55</sup> Homer Rodeheaver, "My Overseas Experiences," *The Christian Herald* 42, no. 30, 26 July 1919, 798.
- <sup>56</sup> "Rodeheaver still Longs for His Old Billy Sunday Slide Trombone," *Baptist Bible Tribune* 2, no. 45, 13 June 1952.
- <sup>57</sup> Rodeheaver, "My Overseas Experiences," 797.
- <sup>58</sup> Harold C. Warren, *With the Y.M.C.A. in France or Souvenirs of a Secretary* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1919), 104–05.
- <sup>59</sup> Frank L. Thompson, diary typescript, entry for 8 October 1918, p. 21 (Frank L. Thompson file). World War I Veterans' Survey Project, U. S. Army Military History Institute, Army Heritage and Education Center, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, PA. See Sebastian Hubert Lukasik, "Military Service, Combat and American Identity in the Progressive Era" (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 2008), 290–92.
- <sup>60</sup> *The Rodeheaver Party*, Chautauqua Season ca. 1917. University of Iowa Digital Archives, Collection MSC0150, <http://digital.lib.uiowa.edu/cdm/ref/collection/tc/id/16338>; *The Rodeheaver Party*, Chautauqua Season 1918; University of Iowa Digital Archives, Collection MSC0150, <http://digital.lib.uiowa.edu/cdm/ref/collection/tc/id/39183> (accessed 14 September 2014).
- <sup>61</sup> *The Rodeheaver Party*, Chautauqua Season ca. 1917, 4.
- <sup>62</sup> "Homer Rodeheaver and Entertainers Score a Hit," *Lancaster Daily Eagle* (Lancaster, OH), 31 August 1927.
- <sup>63</sup> "Missionaries To Circle The World," *Lancaster Daily Eagle*, 19 September 1923.
- <sup>64</sup> "Hagerstown Chautauqua, August 27–31, 1924," *Hagerstown Exponent* (Hagerstown, IN), 3 July 1924.
- <sup>65</sup> "Musical Missionary," *Time*, 28, no. 26, 29 June 1936, 27.
- <sup>66</sup> Rodeheaver's only educational credential was an Honorary Doctor of Sacred Music, conferred in 1942 by Bob Jones College, Cleveland, TN; in 1947 the College moved to Greenville, NC and became Bob Jones University.
- <sup>67</sup> "Musical Missionary," 26.
- <sup>68</sup> "[Rodeheaver] purchased his trombone for seven dollars [*sic, recte* \$4.50] from a friend in dire need of cash. This was the instrument he carried with him to the Spanish-American War, playing with the Fourth Tennessee Band in Cuba. During World War I he used it in France while he was engaged there in YMCA work. He also used this trombone in various revival meetings, on the radio, in the Orient, and in the Billy Sunday campaigns." Bert H. Wilhoit, *Rody: Memories of Homer Rodeheaver* (Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University, 2000), 4–5.
- <sup>69</sup> I am grateful to Steve Dillon for his considerable assistance in helping to identify the makers of several of Rodeheaver's trombones.
- <sup>70</sup> "Rodeheaver Still Longs For His Old Billy Sunday Slide Trombone," *Baptist Bible Tribune*, 3 June 1952.
- <sup>71</sup> This phrase is from the chorus of *If Your Heart Keeps Right* ("If the dark shadows"), Lizzie DeArmond (lyrics) and Bentley DeForest Ackley (music), 1912. Public domain; formerly owned by The Rodeheaver Hall-Mack Company.

- <sup>72</sup> E-mail communication from Paul Jantz, Director of Musical Activities, Bob Jones University, 19 March 2014. E-mail communication from Steve Dillon, 20 March 2014.
- <sup>73</sup> Telephone interview with Clifford Barrows, 1 April 2014.
- <sup>74</sup> Dorsett, *Billy Sunday*, 93.
- <sup>75</sup> Recordings of Rodeheaver as vocal soloist are found on labels such as Edison Blue Amberol, Victor, Rainbow, Columbia, Gennett, Champion, Herwin, Vocalion, and Silvertone.
- <sup>76</sup> A recording of Rainbow Records 1001-A-3, *Safe in the Arms of Jesus*. Rainbow Records 1001-A (matrix 924). Recorded between July and October 1922, Rodeheaver Labs, Chicago. Homer Rodeheaver, trombone solo; Ruth Rodeheaver, soprano solo; unknown pianist; may be heard at the author's website: [www.yeodoug.com/Rodeheaver/Rodeheaver\\_Safe\\_in\\_the\\_Arms\\_Rainbow\\_1001A.mp3](http://www.yeodoug.com/Rodeheaver/Rodeheaver_Safe_in_the_Arms_Rainbow_1001A.mp3)
- <sup>77</sup> For a comprehensive discography of recordings made from 1920–26 on Homer Rodeheaver's own label, Rainbow Records, see David N. Lewis, "The Rainbow Records Discography: 1920–1926," *Association for Record Sound Collections Journal* 39, no. 1, spring 2008, 41–79.
- <sup>78</sup> For full information about Rodeheaver's Victor trombone recordings, see *Discography of American Historical Recordings* (DAHR), [http://adp.library.ucsb.edu/index.php/talent/detail/55208/Rodeheaver\\_Homer\\_A.\\_instrumentalist\\_trombone](http://adp.library.ucsb.edu/index.php/talent/detail/55208/Rodeheaver_Homer_A._instrumentalist_trombone) (accessed 27 September 2014).
- <sup>79</sup> A live recording of Rodeheaver playing *The Holy City* in 1953 at the Billy Sunday Tabernacle at Winona Lake, IN, may be heard on the website of Wheaton College, Wheaton, IL: <http://www2.wheaton.edu/bgc/archives/docs/Rodeheaver/intro.htm> (accessed 15 February 2015).
- <sup>80</sup> The Hall-Mack Company merged with The Rodeheaver Company in 1936, becoming The Rodeheaver Hall-Mack Company. It was sold to Word Publishing in 1969.
- <sup>81</sup> For detailed accounts of Homer Rodeheaver's connection with Winona Lake, see Wilhoit, *Rody*, 17–20; White with Grill, *Winona at 100*, 123–24.
- <sup>82</sup> "1600 Crowd M. E. Church to Hear Dr. Rodeheaver," *Pottstown Mercury* (Pottstown, PA), 10 October 1938.
- <sup>83</sup> Karl Detzer, "Brighten the Corner," *The Christian Herald*, April 1939, 16.
- <sup>84</sup> Carl F. Henry, "Gabriel, Blow Your Horn," *The Sunday School Promoter*, December 1943, 27–28.
- <sup>85</sup> Detzer, "Brighten the Corner," 17.
- <sup>86</sup> Walter Carlson, "Directions for Announcers, Winona Lake Nemos [*sic*, Memos?], 1950," 2–3. Courtesy of Moody Bible Institute Archives, Winona Lake folder.
- <sup>87</sup> Eugene Bartlett, Jr.: "[Homer Rodeheaver's] playing and singing of the gospel was done in a spirit where it didn't make any difference whether he played in tune or sang in tune. We were still inspired. This is a trait that, of course, can not be taught but somewhere along the line he learned how to do this." From an interview, 12 September 1980, quoted in Porter, *Homer Alvan Rodeheaver*, 191.
- <sup>88</sup> "Homer A. Rodeheaver Dies; Funeral to be Tuesday," *Warsaw Times-Union* (Warsaw, IN), 19 December 1955.
- <sup>89</sup> "In Revival at First Methodist Church," *Miami Daily-News-Record* (Miami, OK), 16 February 1930, 5.
- <sup>90</sup> "Rally Speaker Ted Ness Here," *The Daily Inter Lake* (Kalispell, MT), 26 January 1946, 4.
- <sup>91</sup> James Opp, *Lord for the Body: Religion, Medicine and Protestant Faith Healing in Canada, 1880–1930*, McGill-Queen's Studies in the History of Religion, series 2, book 36 (Toronto: McGill Queens University Press, 2007), 151–53.
- <sup>92</sup> "Hear the Best in Gospel Music," *The Austin Daily Herald* (Austin, MN), 10 June 1957.
- <sup>93</sup> "Evangelist Jailed on Bigamy Charge Blames Love Urge," *The Salt Lake Tribune*, 11 September 1933.

<sup>94</sup> Larry Langman and David Ebner, *Hollywood's Image of the South: A Century of Southern Films* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), 162.

<sup>95</sup> "Shuler-Barrows Revival Is Said Making History," *Statesville Record & Landmark* (Statesville, CT), 26 June 1945.

<sup>96</sup> Telephone interview with Clifford Barrows, 1 April, 2014.

<sup>97</sup> See n. 67.

<sup>98</sup> Will Rogers, "You Can Hear Holy Trombone at Winona," *El Paso Evening Post*, 11 August 1928, 4.

<sup>99</sup> Rodeheaver, *Singing Down the Sawdust Trail*, 3–5.