

# Bollman, Calvin Porter (1853–1943)

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During his lengthy career as an editor and author, Calvin P. Bollman was connected with all three of the major Seventh-day Adventist publishing associations then operating in North America and helped edit several leading periodicals, including *Signs of the Times*, *Review and Herald*, and *Liberty*. He also contributed in multiple ways to the early development of denominational institutions in the American South.



Calvin Porter Bollman

Source: Center for Adventist Research.

## Family and Early Career (1853-1878)

Calvin was born September 7, 1853, in rural Indiana County, western Pennsylvania, to Samuel Porter Bollman (1818-1896) and Harriet Newell Gamble Bollman (1827-1905). He was the eldest of their seven children.<sup>1</sup> Samuel Bollman's first wife, Margaret McCutchin Bollman, died in 1849. He married Harriet Gamble in 1851 and during that same year graduated from Allegheny Theological Seminary. He pastored the Washington Church in Indiana County for close to 20 years, but during that time was also elected county superintendent of schools for three successive three-year terms (1854-1863).<sup>2</sup>

It was in the Presbyterian church that Calvin, as a teenager, experienced conversion in January 1867. In 1870, the family moved to Fairfax County, Virginia, where Rev. Samuel Bollman changed his affiliation to the Methodist Episcopal denomination. Just a year later, though, he took his family in a covered wagon to Nebraska where they staked a claim on rural land made available by the United States government through the Homestead Act of

1862. Along with developing his land, Samuel Bollman continued his Methodist ministry and involvement in civic life. He was one of the commissioners who organized Boone County in 1871 and was elected county treasurer in 1873.<sup>3</sup>

As a young man, Calvin Bollman worked as a surveyor, taught school, and then, in about 1877, became editor of a weekly newspaper, the *Boone County Argus* (later the *Albion Argus*) in Albion, Nebraska. On September 9, 1877, two days after his 24<sup>th</sup> birthday, Calvin married Philena (“Lena”) Eulain Robinson (1859-1936) in a ceremony at Albion conducted by his father. While still a teenager, Lena became the first public school teacher in the Cedar valley district of Boone County.<sup>4</sup> The couple’s eight children included two daughters who died in infancy—Stella (1882) and Anna (1886)—and Ethel Mae Cox (1878-1980), Milton R. (1887-1967), George Leslie (1888-1973), Edna T. Howard (1891-1990), Calvin Eugene (1895-1977), and Ruby Lena Schofield (1898-1982)<sup>5</sup>

## From Nebraska Minister to Pacific Press Editor (1879-1890)

Bollman had become a Methodist along with his parents, but as a young man joined the Congregationalist church. Another and far more profound change came about just over a year after his marriage. He became convinced by the Adventist message as a result of attending meetings conducted by George B. Starr and Daniel Nettleton in the Boone County village of Rae Valley (or Raeville, later Petersburg). Both Calvin and Lena were baptized as Seventh-day Adventists in early 1879.<sup>6</sup> Later that year, at its second annual session, the Nebraska Conference issued Bollman a ministerial license and placed him in charge of the Albion district.<sup>7</sup>

During the next few years, Bollman engaged in evangelistic ministry, working, for example, with Starr in efforts at Grand Island and Hastings. However, unable to support a growing family on what the conference was able to pay, he resumed work as a surveyor and did not continue in full-time, salaried ministry.<sup>8</sup>

In 1883, Bollman sold his property in Nebraska and moved his family to California. The following year he was hired by Pacific Press, then located in Oakland. Around this time, in September 1884, Calvin’s father, Rev. Samuel P. Bollman, accepted the Adventist message after attending the California Conference camp meeting. The senior Bollman had at first been intensely resistant to his son’s new faith. Through reading his mind opened somewhat, and then at the California meetings he testified, “I found my prejudices giving way, and the light of truth breaking in upon my soul with a subduing power.”<sup>9</sup> After a subsequent move to Springville, Tennessee, Calvin’s father died in April 1896 and his mother, Harriet, passed away in 1905.<sup>10</sup>

At Pacific Press, Calvin Bollman was, as he later phrased it, “foreman of the *Signs* hands,” responsible for overseeing weekly production of the press’s leading periodical, *Signs of the Times*. He later became an assistant editor of the periodical, and from May 1889 to May 1890, co-editor along with Ellet J. Waggoner and Milton C. Wilcox.<sup>11</sup>

## Religious Liberty Advocate (1890-1900)

In mid-1890, Bollman moved to the editorial office of the *American Sentinel*, just after its relocation to the New York City branch of Pacific Press. Launched in 1886, the *Sentinel* was an eight-page weekly devoted to “the maintenance of human rights both civil and religious.”<sup>12</sup> Bollman, identified on the masthead as an associate editor, functioned as resident or office editor under editor Alonzo T. Jones, who traveled widely to preach and lecture.<sup>13</sup>

As did Seventh-day Adventist publications generally, the *Sentinel* addressed the potential danger of papal influence in the American political arena. Yet, it also advocated for the individual rights of American Catholics in opposition to the American Protective Association (APA), an influential nativist organization that proposed compulsory education in public schools. Bollman detected a dangerous religious nationalism behind the APA’s advocacy of compulsory public education for Catholic children and wrote: “We would as soon submit to the despotism of the Papacy as to the despotism that would compel us to educate our children to be citizens, or anything else, first and Christians afterwards.”<sup>14</sup> By far, his top priority, and that of the *Sentinel*, was to counter the influence of Protestant-dominated agencies such as the National Reform Association and the American Sabbath Union that lobbied for federal government measures, such as a constitutional amendment and a national Sunday rest law, in order to establish a formal, legal foundation for America as a Christian nation.<sup>15</sup>

In 1895, Bollman and Jones received admonishment from Ellen White, then residing in Australia, about the caustic rhetoric and hardline absolutism on church-state separation they expressed in the *Sentinel*. The editors had directed their combative language not only against opponents in the public arena, but also against fellow Seventh-day Adventists who accepted a land grant from Cecil Rhodes’ British South Africa Company for the church’s mission in southern Africa. A harsh, condemning style tends to “unnecessarily stir up angry feelings and arouse the enmity of those who do not believe as we do,” wrote Ellen White. She pointed out that God remains active in the world, sometimes moving the hearts of those in power, and urged that He does not want His people to “withdraw from association with others” in a pharisaical manner but instead be “a wholesome, saving element in the world.”<sup>16</sup>

During his time in New York City, Bollman served as elder of the Brooklyn church, preached in response to occasional invitations, and served most years on the Atlantic Conference Committee. He was ordained to gospel ministry in November 1896 by Elders Ole A. Olsen, Alonzo T. Jones, and John N. Loughborough at the Atlantic Conference camp meeting in Jersey City, New Jersey.<sup>17</sup>

In 1898, eight years after moving from the West Coast to the East Coast, Bollman accepted a call to the South and to a different kind of responsibility as president of the Tennessee River Conference. The conference territory spanned the western halves, approximately, of both the states of Tennessee and Kentucky, and included some 400 members in 13 churches.<sup>18</sup> After a year in this position, Bollman resigned in November 1899 and returned to editorial work in the North.<sup>19</sup>

Bollman's new responsibility took him to Chicago, where the International Religious Liberty Association (IRLA), the agency organized in 1889 to foster Adventist advocacy for religious freedom and separation of church and state, had recently moved its headquarters. After transfer of ownership from Pacific Press was finalized, the IRLA began issuing the *American Sentinel* from Chicago under a new title, *Sentinel of Christian Liberty*, with Bollman and Leon Smith as co-editors. Support for the periodical had been waning and this was just the first in a series of changes intended to revive interest that had peaked in the early 1890s. Bollman's co-editorship concluded at the end of 1900, and instability continued until publication ceased in 1904. The Review and Herald Publishing Association started afresh in 1906 by launching *Liberty* magazine, which has continued publication ever since.<sup>20</sup>

## Southern Work (1901-1914)

Meanwhile, Bollman returned to the South where he became involved in development, from the ground up, of the Southern Union Conference, voted into existence at the 1901 General Conference. Though the 1890s had been a decade of innovation and growth, organization of Adventist work in the American South still lagged well behind the North, Midwest, and Far West. High aspirations for rapid development along the varying lines of Adventism's holistic mission led to rapid proliferation of administrative units, institutions, and periodicals, many of them short-lived or soon re-structured. Amidst this flux, the competing interests of entities already in the field—the Southern Missionary Society initiated by J. Edson White to reach the Black South, the International Medical Missionary and Benevolent Association, headed by Dr. J. H. Kellogg, the General Conference, and the local conferences—all jostled with each other and with the new union conference as it sought to bring all facets of the work into a coordinated system. Furthermore, it was during the first decade of the twentieth century that a pervasive system of racial segregation and white supremacy became fully established throughout the South, adding layers of complexity to the church's endeavors to reach both races.

Bollman held a plethora of positions and responsibilities during his 14 years of renewed labor in this rapidly shifting environment. Editorial and publishing work would remain foremost. Yet at the same time, something like an athlete capable of playing well at several different positions as needed, Bollman stepped up to fill a variety of administrative roles.

When organization of the Southern Union Conference was finalized by a constituency meeting in Nashville in January 1902, Bollman became the union's first elected treasurer. He was also named president of the board of directors of the Nashville Sanitarium Association that governed two small initiatives. One, designated for "the white people" was initially called the Battle Creek Sanitarium Branch (later Nashville Sanitarium), while the other was called the Nashville Colored Sanitarium. In 1903, J. Edson White replaced Bollman as president of the association's board.<sup>21</sup>

Bollman's primary responsibilities were at the Southern Publishing Association (SPA), established in Nashville in June 1901. He was editor of its two periodicals, the *Southern Watchman* and the *Gospel Herald*, and was named

vice-president and treasurer in January 1902. The *Southern Watchman* was the union's news periodical, known since 1932 as the *Southern Tidings*. When George I. Butler was elected president of the union in January 1902, he became co-editor along with Bollman.<sup>22</sup> The *Gospel Herald* was initiated in 1898 by the Southern Missionary Society (SMS), then a self-supporting agency, to inform Adventists about the work of the SMS in the Black South and promote support of that work. The periodical was turned over to the Southern Union in 1901 and its purpose changed to that of a general missionary magazine, with reports on the Black work issued separately as supplements.<sup>23</sup>

Ellen White devoted considerable attention to the fledgling institutions developing in Nashville. In 1902, she sent Bollman a "testimony" counseling him to be more collegial in his work at the SPA office. She observed that his tendency to regard himself as "a complete whole," and thus closed to the counsel and judgment of other minds, made him less effective. "Less of self and more of Christ would make you much more useful," she admonished. In fact, Ellen White observed that the entire office in Nashville needed more of the gentle spirit of Christ and less "irritability," "sourness of disposition," and censuring of little mistakes. In sum, she wrote: "Brethren and sisters, sweeten up."<sup>24</sup> Mounting indebtedness, likely one among several sources of tension in the office, nearly led church leaders to shut down the SPA in 1904, but Ellen White's counsel that it be continued despite the forbidding circumstances ultimately prevailed.<sup>25</sup>

From 1905 to 1909 Bollman's responsibilities shifted to the SMS, which had become the Southern Union Conference's agency for work among the colored or Afro-American<sup>26</sup> population of the South. As secretary-treasurer, Bollman provided administrative continuity during a five-year span in which the SMS was headed by two presidents, R. W. Spire (1905) and C. F. McVagh (1908-1909), and between them, a chairman, G. I. Butler (1906-1907).<sup>27</sup>

In this capacity Bollman was not simply a bureaucrat but an advocate. Even though the society was now under the auspices of the Southern Union, Bollman believed that, at times, church leadership—the union leadership as well as that of the local conference presidents and the General Conference—was less than friendly to it. Funds donated by Adventists throughout the nation for the southern colored work seemed to filter slowly and incompletely to the SMS, and the society's efforts to raise funds directly from the people met with resistance from conference officials. Bollman wrote numerous letters to denominational leaders appealing not only for a change in procedures but also in spirit. He wrote, for example, to General Conference president Arthur G. Daniells on February 2, 1905: "We are just now in dire need of funds. . . . But I am not writing this as an appeal for money. What we need more than money is union of feeling and sympathy. We cannot abandon this Colored work. It must go forward."<sup>28</sup>

Though the support probably never reached the ideal repeatedly urged by Ellen White, Bollman played a role in helping the work go forward by holding denominational leaders accountable. He also edited the *Gospel Herald*, which had been returned to its original purpose of promoting the Black work, from 1907 to 1909. In 1908,

Bollman was closely involved in establishing Rock City Sanitarium and served as chair of its board from 1909 to 1911. After the short-lived Nashville Colored Sanitarium closed a few years before, Rock City, operated by Dr. Lottie Isbell-Blake and her husband, Pastor David Blake (soon thereafter also an M.D.), was a second endeavor to establish a sanitarium in Nashville that made Adventist medical missionary work available to the Black population.<sup>29</sup> Additionally, Bollman served on the board of Oakwood Manual Training School (later Oakwood University) in Huntsville, Alabama, 1908-1912. When the Southern Union Mission (SUM) superseded the SMS in 1909 as the organizational entity for the Black work in the Southern Union, Bollman was the SUM's first treasurer and in subsequent years a member of its executive committee. During these same years (1909-1913) he was on the executive committee of the newly formed North American Negro Department.<sup>30</sup>

Throughout his years of service in the South, Bollman was a credentialed minister in the Tennessee River Conference. He took on greater responsibility with the conference from 1906 to 1909, serving as vice president. In 1911 he reprised his role as conference president but once again served only about a year. The only reason he accepted the position, he later said, was "to affect a much needed change" and bring some "new blood" in to the work there.<sup>31</sup> He thus seems to have been quite happy to yield to E. L. Maxwell, elected president in 1912.

In fact, Bollman never seemed to relish or feel himself cut out for top executive leadership positions. "I am not an organizer," he wrote to W. C. White in 1909. By this he meant that he thought others were more capable when "broader plans" for a "larger work" were needed to lead an organization into a new era. However, he seemed to thrive in supporting leadership roles in the management or oversight of institutions.<sup>32</sup> In addition to what has already been mentioned, during the final segment of his years in the South (1909-1914), Bollman served as Religious Liberty Department secretary for the Southern Union Conference and a member of its executive committee, vice president of the Nashville Sanitarium board, a member of the short-lived Nashville Sanitarium Food Factory board, president of the board of Hazel Industrial Academy in Kentucky, and vice-president of the Southern Publishing Association board. All of this was in addition to editing the *Gospel Sentinel* (1909-1911), a short-lived experiment in a shorter and less-expensive evangelistic periodical that could be purchased in bulk for mass distribution, and as associate editor of *The Watchman* (later *These Times*), the SPA's main evangelistic periodical.<sup>33</sup>

## Review and Herald Years (1914-1938)

In 1914 Bollman joined the editorial staff of the Review and Herald Publishing Association (RHPA) in Washington, D.C. He was 60 years old at that point but had nearly 20 years of full-time service yet to give, and five years beyond that of continued service in retirement. Furthermore, the service was not light, in fact he seems to have been something of an editorial workhorse.

Resuming a prominent role in the cause of religious liberty, Bollman served as managing editor of *Liberty* magazine for 20 years (1915-1935). From 1917 to 1934 he was associate editor of *Present Truth*—a four-page

(later eight-page) evangelistic periodical which apparently filled the niche of the defunct *Gospel Sentinel*. Each issue was generally devoted to one doctrinal subject. Bollman also served as a book editor throughout his years at RHPA. Alongside all of these assignments, he was appointed associate editor of the *Review and Herald* beginning in 1920. In 1933, Bollman, at age 79, applied for sustentation from the denomination, in part to devote more time to his wife, Lena, who was seriously ill with cancer.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, he remained active as associate editor of both the *Review* and *Liberty* until the spring of 1938.<sup>35</sup>

Lena Bollman died on November 18, 1936, and was buried in George Washington Cemetery in Adelphi, Maryland.<sup>36</sup> Calvin Bollman, said to be of “rugged constitution and Spartan habits,” remained vigorous enough to tend to his garden until struck by illness that kept him mostly bed-ridden for the final two years of his life. He died on December 10, 1943, at the age of 90, and, with Lena, rests in George Washington Cemetery.<sup>37</sup>

## Legacy

In Bollman’s *Review* obituary, his younger associate editor, Francis D. Nichol, described his senior colleague as “one of those old-fashioned, unpretentious Adventists who give to the church its stability and balance.”<sup>38</sup> If he did not stand in the very front ranks of leadership, Bollman indeed contributed strength and stability to the church’s religious liberty advocacy and its mission to Black America during the early and fragile stages of these endeavors. Along with decades of editorial and administrative work, Bollman left a written legacy that includes hundreds of articles; several tracts, such as *Religious Liberty and the Mormon Question* and *Limits of Civil Authority*, and three short books published by RHPA: *Why I am a Seventh-day Adventist*, *Sunday: Origin of Its Observance in the Christian Church*, and *Heralds of the King*.

Bollman was also a prolific poet whose works appeared frequently in church periodicals and enlivened introductory pages of most issues of the annual *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* during the 1910s, 1920s, and 1930s. The following lines are from a poem he entitled “Everlasting Peace”:

Ah, yes, the sands of time run low;

The sun is sinking in the west;

Sin’s story sad is well-nigh writ;

Christ comes to bring the promised rest,

The rest of everlasting peace.

Then hasten on, thou day of joy,

The cynosure of ages past,

Come, claim Thine own, Thou King of kings,

Of God’s great realm the first, the last,

And to the universe bring peace.<sup>39</sup>

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