

**GERTRUDE ANTONETTE WOODCOCK SEIBERT  
- AND THE FINISHED MYSTERY**



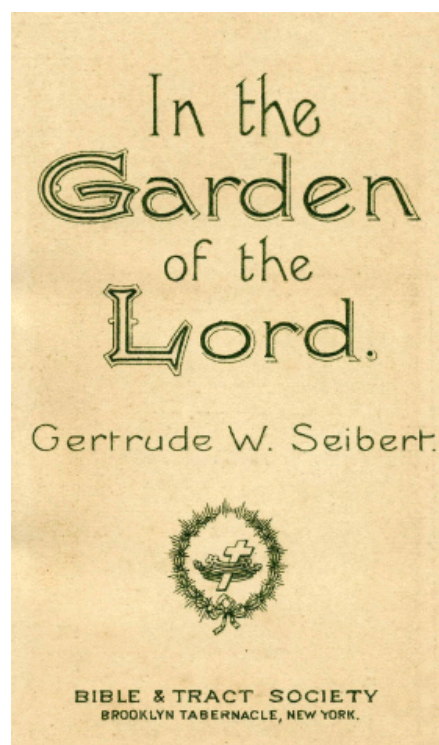
*G.W. Seibert*

Gertrude Antonette Woodcock Seibert (sometimes spelled Antoinette) was born in 1864 and died in 1928. A Woodcock family history written in 1912 briefly summed up her history:

a—Gertrude Antonette Woodcock, b. Nov. 16, 1864; married Robert S. Seibert, Sept. 18, 1890; P. O., Orbisonia, Pa. Mr. Seibert is a finely equipped railroad man and is now President and General Manager of the East Broad Top Railroad. Gertrude is a graduate of Wellesley College and is zealously engaged in religious work.

She started writing verse at any early age. One of her collections contains a poem written when she was nine years old, and her first published poem (not for Watch Tower) was published in 1889.

She became a well-known, high-profile Bible Student in the 1890s and soon became a household name in the Bible Student community for her poetry. Her first known poem published in the Watch Tower was in the December 1, 1899, issue, entitled *The Narrow Way*. She soon replaced other poets like Rose Ball Henniges and Ophelia Burroughs in the magazine columns. Several of her poems were later circulated in booklet form by the Watch Tower Society. *The Sweet-Briar Rose* (1909) and *In the Garden of the Lord* (1913) have been listed in by the Society as official publications. Other collections such as *The Heavenly Bridegroom* (1918) were published directly by her, but widely circulated amongst Bible Students. Various editions of *Poems of Dawn* contained her works, as did various editions of the hymn book *Zion's Glad Songs* where M L McPhail put her verses to music.



Her husband never took to her religion, although it wasn't for Gertrude's want of trying! In a letter to the Watch Tower when he died in 1913 she confessed that "I had witnessed to him daily, hourly almost, for nearly twenty years, without apparent effect." However, long time friend and Bible Student, Clayton J Woodworth officiated at his funeral. (see WT reprints page 5281).

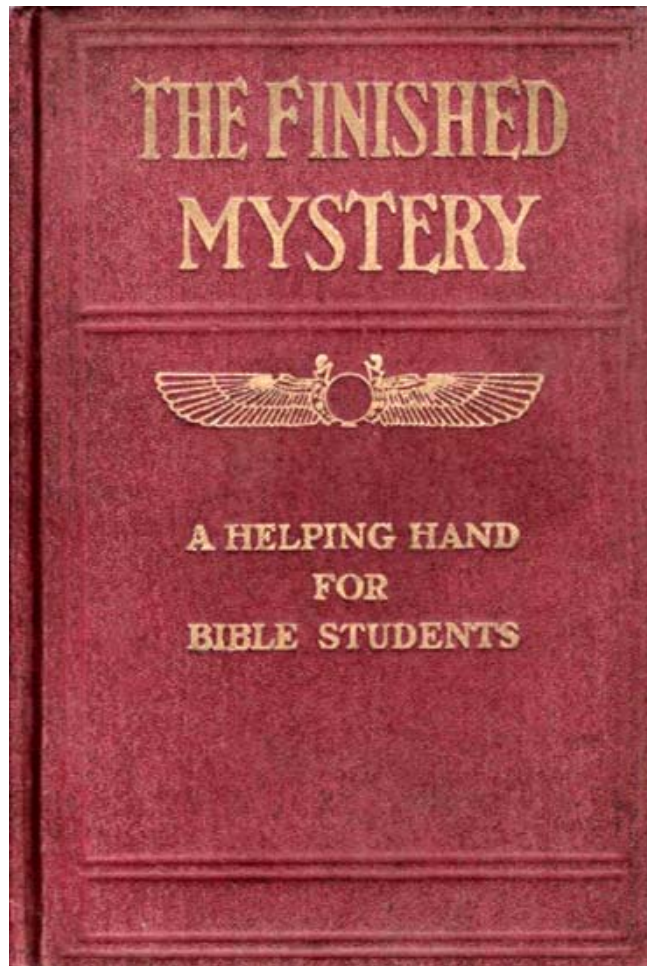
Robert Seibert left her very well provided for, and she was soon traveling with other Bible Students on special trains to conventions, and continued writing poems unabated. When CTR died, her quickly written memorial poem *Gone Home* (dated November 1, 1916) was published in the *St Paul Enterprise* newspaper for November 14, 1916, and a lengthy letter, interspersed with verses was published in the Memorial issue of the Watch Tower for December 1, 1916. The following tribute appeared in the *Woman's Who's Who of America* for 1915-1916.

However, although we may think of her today as a writer of verse, her greater contribution to Watch Tower literature was probably as a compiler. In 1905 *Daily Heavenly Manna for the Household of Faith* was published, with a daily comment from past ZWTs or writings of CTR, compiled by Gertrude Seibert. In 1907 the second edition had extra pages for each date, so that Bible Students could record birth dates and get autographs of their friends. If they wished, they could even send a motto card on the day - and some of Gertrude's poems turned up on those too.

on school questions.  
**SEIBERT, Gertrude Woodcock** (Mrs. Robert S. Seibert), Orbisonia, Pa.  
Writer; b. Altoona, Pa., Nov. 16, 1864; dau. Samuel M. Woodcock (lawyer) and Elizabeth (Etnier) Woodcock; grad. Altoona High School, '80; Wellesley Coll., B.S. '85; m. Altoona, Pa., Sept. 18, 1890, Robert S. Seibert (now pres. East Broad Top R.R. Co., Rockhill Iron and Coal Co., Shade Gap R.R. Co.). Since 1894 engaged in undenominational Bible study, private lectures on religious topics, contributions to various newspapers (religious articles exclusively), writing religious poems and hymns; preparing questions for Bureau of Bible Study since 1894. Compiled *Daily Heavenly Manna for the Household of Faith*, now in 150,000th in English, and translated into German, Swedish and Norwegian; compiled *Instructor's Guide and Berean Topical Index for Berean Bible*, 1907; booklet, *Sweet Brier Rose*, 500,000 printed, 1908; compiled *Poems of Dawn*, 1912. Has done considerable art work in line of decorated and illustrated motto cards; one design of chestnut burrs, illustrating *In Due Time*, edition of 15,000 printed in 1906; booklet (illustrated form): *In the Garden of the Lord*. Active mem. of the International Bible Students' Ass'n. Undenominational. Opposed to woman suffrage on Scriptural grounds.

And then in 1907 came the Watch Tower Bible, a standard Common Version Bible but with four appendices. Two were compiled by Clayton J Woodworth, and two by Gertrude Seibert. As noted earlier, Woodworth would later conduct the funeral service for Gertrude's husband. This special Bible was reviewed in the Watch Tower magazine for October 1, 1907, page 303. Gertrude produced what was called, *Instructors Guide - An Epitome of the Faith Once Delivered Unto the Saints*, which was a detailed subject index to the Dawns and Towers. Her second contribution, *Berean Topical Index*, was a scripture index of subjects. Woodworth's main contribution was a one line explanation for every scripture from Genesis to Revelation that had been used in Dawns and Towers. Both compilers must have searched every page of the Watch Tower magazine and Dawn/Studies volumes to that date to produce such a detailed work. (The whole was then republished in its own separate volume in 1909, entitled *Berean Bible Teachers' Manual*.) This painstaking work of compilation and indexing would set the scene for what proved to be a controversial publication and the main subject of this article - *The Finished Mystery* published in 1917.

## THE FINISHED MYSTERY



The Finished Mystery was advertised as the 7th volume of the Studies in the Scriptures series. The consequences of its publication and circulation were far reaching. The book's contents were a major factor in landing J F Rutherford and seven others in jail on charges of working against the American War effort in World War 1. And although Gertrude's name was generally kept out of the subsequent legal proceedings, the evidence is quite clear that she was directly responsible for the volume's germination and fulfilment.

What follows below is taken from information in the trial transcript RUTHERFORD et al. v. UNITED STATES (1918). Anyone wishing to follow up further simply needs to read the Examinations and Cross-Examinations of George H Fisher and Clayton J Woodworth, and also check through the exhibits. (References will be given for the latter). It might be noted at this point, that the reason why so much detail of The Finished Mystery's genesis was revealed in this trial was because the defense needed to show the book was both planned and written before America entered the war; and - if you included CTR's intentions - some of it was written a long time before the war.

In late 1916 expectations were huge. CTR had died, and the Society was in the temporary hands of an executive committee made up of J F Rutherford, A I Ritchie, and W E Van Amburgh. The war and hopes linked to what was understood as the end of the Gentile Times created an air of expectancy. And an informal conversation in a private home in Scranton, Pennsylvania, would have far reaching consequences.

The home belonged to George Fisher. The Fishers and Seiberts had been friends for some years. In 1910 Gertrude hid an old baking can as a time capsule for future generations during renovations on her home. It was discovered during further building work in 1948, and the contents mention George Fisher and his wife as visitors at the time it was concealed.

This time Gertrude was visiting the Fishers in Scranton in early December of 1916. And late one afternoon, the long-time family friend of both, Clayton J Woodworth, called in for a few minutes on his way home from work. Both he and Fisher worked at The International Correspondence School. Conversation turned to "the seventh volume". CTR had planned to produce it, but never had, and nearing death had declared that someone else would have to write it. Gertrude, who as noted above had already reviewed CTR's comments on scripture for her Instructors' Guide, thought the time was ripe for the seventh volume. She suggested it could be called The Finished Mystery. She also opined that George Fisher could fill in the gaps on CTR's comments on Ezekiel and Clayton Woodworth could do the same for Revelation.

Fired with enthusiasm and now apparently back at Bethel in Brooklyn, N.Y., Gertrude fired off a long letter to the executive committee. It has survived as Defendants' Exhibit L. Her suggestions in Part III of her letter particularly relate to what became The Finished Mystery, but her letter is reproduced here in its entirety. It reads:

Brooklyn, N.Y. Dec. 6, 1916

To  
The Executive Committee  
Watch Tower Bible & Tract Society  
Brooklyn, N.Y.

Dear Friends:

Perhaps it may not be amiss for me to call to your attention a matter which has suggested itself to me, inasmuch as the Apostle exhorts us, saying, "Let him that is taught communicate unto him that teacheth." It is something along this line: A Memorial of Bro. Russell, published in book form, with board covers, and containing some or all of these subjects:

Part I.

- a. Biography of Bro. R. By Bro. Rutherford.
- b. Bro. Nelson's articles on "Pastor Russell's place in the Reformation," as printed in Labor Tribune.
- c. Personal incidents, showing the social side of beloved Pastor's character, composed of, suitable anecdotes contributed by various persons. (I have quite a number in my own memory, and doubtless many others have very interesting little touches to add to the penportrait of our dear Pastor.) And personal Poems.

Part II

- a. Details of the funeral service at N.Y. Temple.
- b. Details of the funeral service at Carnegie Hall, All'y
- c. Photographs of Floral display at N.Y. and Allegheny, also at the grave, and a later one to be taken after the stone is set up.
- d. Various photographs of Bro. Russell during different periods of his life. (Personally I would like to have all the friends of the Truth enjoy that beautiful one which hangs in the dining room behind Bro. R's chair at present, which shows us the fatherly, sympathetic expression which almost all his other photographs lack.

Part III.

THE FINISHED MYSTERY

(This was the title Bro. R. permitted me to suggest for the Seventh Volume, once when we were discussing it, and he thought it was very appropriate.)

- a. The Book of Revelation. (A compilation by someone familiar with Bro. R's comments on this book. I would suggest Bro. Woodworth, as well fitted and in Bro. R's confidence for so many years.
- b. The Book of Ezekiel. Bro. Fisher of Scranton, named in Bro. R's will as an alternative for Board of Editors of Watch Tower, has what seems to me very good ideas on this book.

This book could be advertised or mentioned in the TOWER, and sold for \$1.00 per copy, and it seems to me would be invaluable.

Respectfully submitted by

Yours in His service,

(signed) G.W. SEIBERT.

The letter was likely passed by hand within the Bethel home, because there was an immediate reply that is preserved as Defendants' Exhibit M:

December 7th, 1916

Mrs. G.W, Seibert  
Bethel

Dear Sister:

Referring to your letter of December 6th, addressed to the Executive Committee, we beg to say that if the friends therein mentioned desire to prepare the copy mentioned and submit it to us for our consideration, we will consider it and give our opinion as to the advisability of publication.

Yours in His Service,  
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The suggestions in Parts I and II of Gertrude's letter would wait until the Society published a brochure entitled The Messenger of Laodicea; and a private individual, W H Wisdom, produced his Memoirs of Pastor Russell in 1923, which received negative comment in the WT of September 15, 1923. But the proposed volume on Ezekiel and Revelation was acted on immediately, and there was a flurry of correspondence to get the project in place.

One of Clayton Woodworth's letters has survived as a Defendants' Exhibit E. It is worth reading carefully because it shows in how much regard Gertrude Seibert was held.

Scranton, Pa  
December 11th, 1916

Dear Sister Seibert:

Behold the hand of the Lord! For more than twenty years I have had in mind that the only proper title for the Seventh Volume would be "The Mystery Finished" and now you come along and suggest the identical title, with merely a transposition of the words. You are a grammarian and a logician. Think it over and tell me which is the best form of this title. Is our thought chiefly of the mystery, or is it chiefly of the Finish of that mystery? You shall decide, but my present thought continues as before. We have been considering and studying the mystery all the harvest time; and now has come the finish. Is it not so?

I have read your letters to Brother Fisher over the telephone and he is glad to enter the open door, and I, Oh Glory be to the Name of the dear Lord, I am so happy I can hardly wait the finish of this day to begin the work on which my heart is set. I will mail the letters to Brother Fisher at once.

Nothing was enclosed with my transmission of those letters. I seemed to me I ought not to do more at that time. I merely thought it would strengthen your heart to read them and to feel that you could not be far astray from the blessing of the Lord in doing what you have done. And how wisely you have done it! What a mind you have, and how fully it is in the handmaid of the Lord! How happy you must be that the continued faithfulness you have all along shown, is continually recognized by the Lord of the Harvest and there ere long you, too, shall have your desire fulfilled and be folded to the heart of the Lord, as His Bride, even as Brother Russell has already been thus received.

Dear Sister, nothing has ever given me such joy before, for I know the hand of the Lord will be with us all. And the work will really be yours, for it must go to you, and be fully approved by you before it ever goes to the committee. On that I insist. If you can help me with the summary, which I shall put in as the Seven Plagues, do so, but if not they go in anyway, and come before you for review and edit.

Now can I ask a favor? Do you see your way clear to insert an advertisement in the Labor Tribune, something like the following:

*(Woodworth then inserted a suggested advertisement. It encouraged those with thoughts on the subject to send them in with their name and address to the executive committee at Columbia Heights.)*

If this appeals to you, ask the Executive Committee if they will receive and hand to you any mail thus addressed, and you can then send to me such as you think I should have. Does this appeal to you? I hope so.

Your loving Brother,  
(signed) C. J. WOODWORTH

As noted above, this letter shows us in how much regard Woodworth held Seibert. Woodworth enthuses that the finished product will really be hers, because she is going to vet his work before it goes to the committee. And she is going to have the final say on the title.

Gertrude's position in the genesis of The Finished Mystery is further shown by the advertisement that eventually appeared in the National Labor Tribune. Woodworth's letter suggested that other Bible Students could send in their views and comments on Ezekiel and Revelation to the executive committee, and hoped they could then be filtered through Gertrude and back to him and Fisher. However, the final advertisement asked prospective contributors to send them direct to Gertrude.

It read:



## **Defendants' Exhibit C.**

### **ATTENTION I. B. S. A.**

A committee is now engaged in compiling the comments of Brother Russell on Revelation and Ezekiel, to be submitted to the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society for publication. This committee will be glad to receive from any of the I. B. S. A. members, who are fully consecrated, any comment made by Brother Russell on these two books, other than that contained in the Watch Tower or Studies in the Scriptures. Also their own interpretation of such parts of these books not interpreted by Brother Russell. Such statements should be very brief, legibly written on one side of the paper only, and contain the name and address of the sender.

The book, when published, will contain biographical sketch of Brother Russell, his life as a reformer, and a select number of his sermons.

Please address all such communications to Mrs. G. W. Seibert, Secretary, Hotel Margaret, Brooklyn, N. Y.

It is not known in which issue or issues of the National Labor Tribune the announcement appeared. The graphic above for Defendant's Exhibit C comes from the trial transcript but does not give a date of publication.

The announcement mentioned a committee, and there was also a trial transcript reference to an "association" that worked on the project. It was established in court that both were composed of Woodworth, Fisher and Seibert alone. It was planned that Fisher should send his copy to Woodworth, and Woodworth would then send both his and Fisher's copy to Gertrude acting as coordinator and secretary. Whether this arrangement existed for long is not known because the original forward of the published volume tells it somewhat differently. "While both residing in the same city, they have worked separately and apart from each other, not even comparing notes."

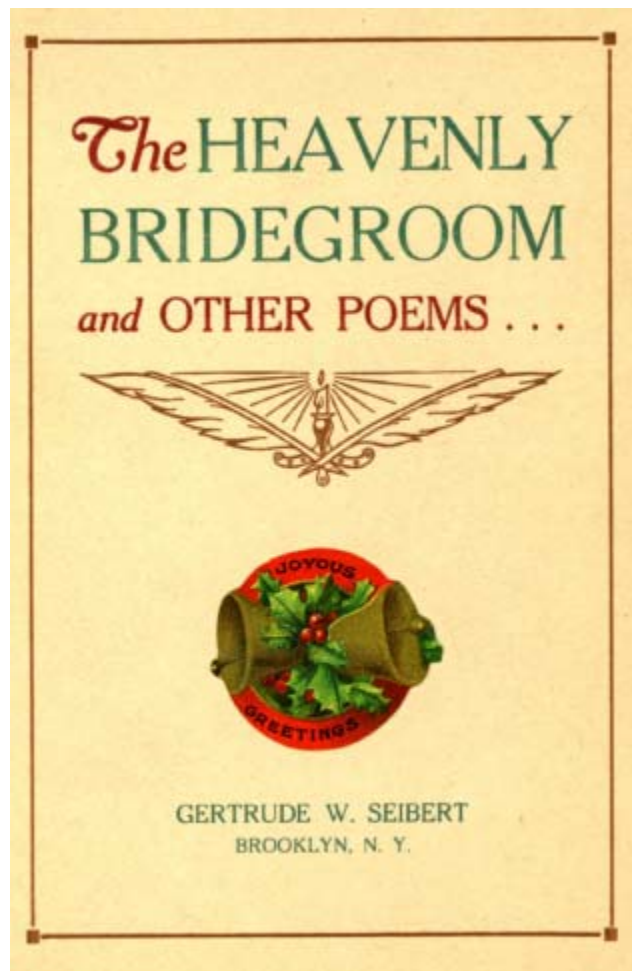
The executive committee that gave the green light to the project was dissolved in January 1917 when J F Rutherford became the second president of the incorporated Society. Fisher and Woodworth completed their work - with or without input from others - by June 1917, and the book was published in the July. It contained a brief biography of CTR in the introduction.

So what Gertrude's ultimate contribution was is unknown. The forward (above) credited Fisher and Woodworth alone (plus "the Lord") and certainly when the book led to divisions and legal problems, Fisher and Woodworth took full responsibility for what had been written, both the new comments and selections from the works of CTR. When it came to the arrests and criminal trial in 1918, this author gets the feeling that they gallantly tried hard to keep Gertrude Seibert out of it. She might have edited, she might have proof-read - a bit like Maria Russell in another disputed literary endeavour - but they were the authors. She was the "third person" when the idea was first discussed, but it was the finished product that caused the dispute with the government and they claimed full responsibility for that.

### **AFTER THE FINISHED MYSTERY**

Gertrude did not disappear from Watch Tower history with The Finished Mystery. As is well known there was a division after CTR's death, but she appears to have stayed in fellowship with the original organization. In the flurry of correspondence in the wake of the publication of Harvest Siftings (and responses to same) she had a letter published in the December 1, 1917, Watch Tower, supporting both the current management and The Finished Mystery volume. She mentioned that she had been almost daily at the Brooklyn Bethel Home for the last four years, which would be since her husband's death. She advised the readership in general that she had personally suggested the Finished Mystery title to CTR and he had approved it as "very good". That the title had been subsequently adopted by the Society strongly convinced her of its worth.

Around 1918 Gertude published a small volume of poems entitled The Heavenly Bridegroom, which included her tribute to CTR, Gone Home.



Then in early 1920 she published a larger collection as *The Sweet Briar Rose and Other Poems*. It ran to 50 pages. Advertisements in the *New Era Enterprise* gave her address as Florida, then Scranton, PA (home of Fisher and Woodworth) and finally in the *New Era Enterprise* for December 27, 1921 her address was c/o the Watch Tower Society, as “the Society is always kept informed of my whereabouts”.

So while a Seibert family history website gives her 1922 address as 124 Columbia Heights, it was probably just a poste restante address.

In September 1920 she obtained her first passport, and became an international traveller. At the turn of the new year she was in Australia, reporting to the *New Era Enterprise* about attending an IBSA convention there. While there, she wrote a defense of CTR and the chronology of the *Gentile Times* for an Australian newspaper.

**DEFENDS PASTOR RUSSELL'S  
TEACHING.**

[The Brisbane (Australia) Courier,  
Jan. 7, 1921.]

By GERTRUDE W. SEIBERT,  
Member League of American Pen  
Women, Jan. 3, 1921.

To the Editor:

Sir—In re the communication from George D. Smith, in your issue of even date, permit me to say that, having been deeply interested in religion since early childhood, and after having investigated almost every known religious teachings, Christian and pagan, I found my every question answered and every doubt settled 26 years ago through study of Pastor Russell's writings.

Shortly afterwards she submitted an article to the New Era Enterprise defending the direction the Society had been taking since J F Rutherford became president. It was published in the issue for February 21, 1922.

**THE NEW ERA ENTERPRISE**

**MOVE FORWARD, CHRISTIAN  
SOLDIERS!**

By G. W. SEIBERT.

**W**HILE reviewing the Scripture Studies I came across such a wonderful weapon of defence against those who criticize the Watch Tower Bible and Tract society's present work that I feel inclined to send it to you, as you may find use for it some day. It shows so conclusively that our beloved Brother Russell was convinced such a work or message would some day be given.

By June 1922 she had visited the West Indies and was on a passenger list travelling from Kingston to Great Britain, giving her London address as c/o 34 Craven Terrace. That was the British Bethel address, next door to the London Tabernacle.

In September 1924, giving her permanent address as Brooklyn, New York, she applied to renew her passport, stating her intention to sail away from Los Angeles in October; her travels this time to include visiting Japan, China, India, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, and Great Britain. But she intended to return within twelve months. However, the following February, 1925, she was back in America, a patient in the Jackson Memorial Hospital, Miami, Florida, writing a poem in praise of nurses.

In 1925 she sent her old friend, Clayton Woodworth, a contribution for The Golden Age magazine, which he now edited. The article The Morning Star was published in the October 7, 1925 issue. Earlier that year another author had written an article entitled Rose Thoughts (GA March 25, 1925) which reprinted her Sweet Briar Rose poem in full.

Around 1926 she offered to update her old Daily Heavenly Manna for the Watch Tower Society's use, to include all new material, but her offer was declined. Times had changed. The explanation given in the book Then is Finished the Mystery of God (1969) pages 145-146 was their application of 1 Timothy 2 v.12. Instead the Society now produced its own text book, changing texts and comments each year as part of an annual Yearbook.

In 1926 Gertrude published her final work, another expanded volume of Sweet Briar Rose and Other Poems. The 1926 edition now weighed in at 97 pages, and carried her photograph in the frontispiece. It was published by the Hefty Press, Miami, Florida, which sounds a bit like an in-joke to this writer.

The dedication page carried the message:

**AS A THANK OFFERING  
TO  
JEHOVAH GOD,  
THROUGH WHOSE TENDER  
PROVIDENCES  
THE VERSES HEREIN CONTAINED  
WERE MADE POSSIBLE,  
THIS VOLUME  
IS  
DEDICATED**

An original of this final edition is highly collectable, but a pdf can be found online if you search for it.

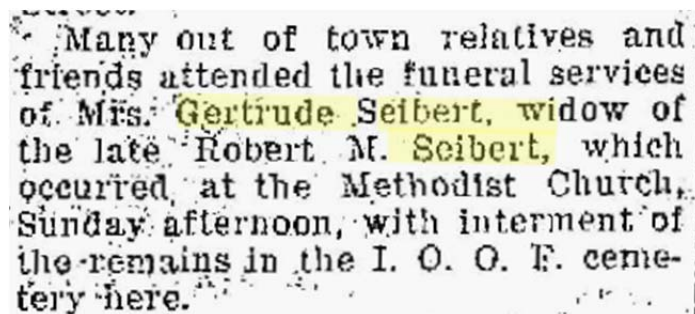
Gertrude appears to have suffered from ill-health in the last few years of her life. She needed an operation while in Australia in early 1922; there is the poem written from hospital in 1925 in praise of nurses which mentions post-operative care, and she died after an operation in 1928.

When she died, The Daily News, Huntingdon and Mount Union, PA, carried a brief notice. Headed "Obituary for Mrs Gertrude W Seibert" it read:

Mrs. Gertrude W. Seibert died in Miami, Florida Wednesday noon, June 12, 1928 following an operation. She is the widow of Robert S. Seibert, President of the East Broad Top Railroad and for a number of years resided at Rockhill. The body will be brought to Mt. Union Sunday afternoon. Funeral service will be held at the Methodist Church 2:30 o'clock standard time in charge of Rev. H. W. Hartsock. The sermon will be preached by Mr. McMillen of Brooklyn, New York. Interment in the I.O.O.F. Cemetery of Mt. Union.

There is probably a slight glitch in the above quotation taken from a family history website, as the Wednesday that week was actually June 13.

There was another brief notice in the paper after the funeral. Dated June 19, 1928



Many out of town relatives and friends attended the funeral services of Mrs. Gertrude Seibert, widow of the late Robert M. Seibert, which occurred at the Methodist Church, Sunday afternoon, with interment of the remains in the I. O. O. F. cemetery here.

One can reasonably assume that the Mr McMillen of Brooklyn, New York, mentioned in the obituary was in reality A H Macmillan of the Brooklyn Bethel family.

The I.O.O.F. Cemetery (Independent Order of Oddfellows) is now generally known as the Mount Union Cemetery, Huntingdon County, PA, and is where her late husband was buried.