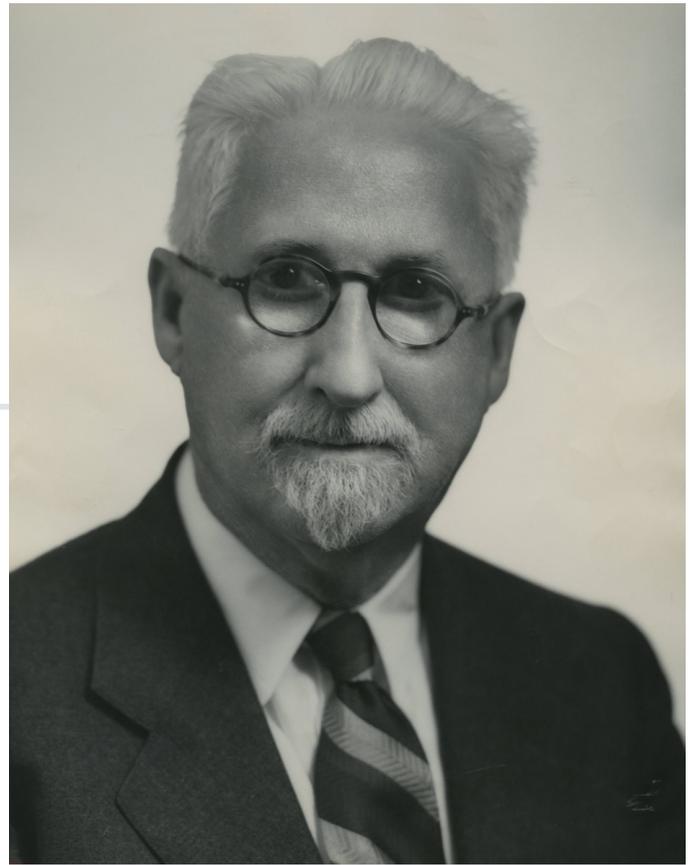


Anderson, William Harrison (1870–1950)

RON REESE, AND DOUGLAS MORGAN

Ron Reese has authored close to 150 articles for Adventist publications, including *Guide Magazine*, *Primary Treasurer*, *Adventist Review* and *Signs of the Times*. He has written biographical articles on Fernando and Ana Stahl and Anna Knight, and a series on the life of J. N. Loughborough for *Primary Treasurer*.

Douglas Morgan is a graduate of Union College (B.A., theology, 1978) in Lincoln, Nebraska and the University of Chicago (Ph.D., history of Christianity, 1992). He has served on the faculties of Washington Adventist University in Takoma Park, Maryland and Southern Adventist University in Collegedale, Tennessee. His publications include *Adventism and the American Republic* (University of Tennessee Press, 2001) and *Lewis C. Sheafe: Apostle to Black America* (Review and Herald, 2010). He is the ESDA assistant editor for North America.



William Harrison Anderson

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W. H. Anderson was a leading pioneer of Adventist mission to the indigenous peoples of southern

Africa. His achievements and his ability to communicate passion for mission did much to generate interest among American Adventists in the church's nascent work on the African continent.

Education and Call to Africa

William Harrison Anderson was born in Mexico, Indiana to Elijah and Naomi Pierson Anderson on June 25, 1870. After growing up on the family farm, Harry, as he became known, attended Battle Creek College where he accepted the Seventh-day Adventist message and was baptized in 1889.¹ Feeling the pull of overseas mission at a time when the Adventist work was just beginning to become truly global in scope, Harry organized a student foreign mission band at the college during the early 1890s.²

While at Battle Creek College, Harry met Nora Haysmer (1867-1908), a fellow student from Fenwick, Michigan who also joined the student volunteer mission band. She graduated from the college in 1893, and the couple married later that year on October 24, 1893. They would have one daughter, Naomi Anderson (Hively), born in

Africa in 1899.³

The Andersons were among the first group of missionaries the Foreign Mission Board called to the Matabele Mission (later renamed “Solusi”) near Bulawayo in the colony of Southern Rhodesia (now the nation of Zimbabwe). The mission was located on 12,000 acres of land granted to the church in 1894 by Cecil Rhodes’ British South Africa Company from the large swathe of southern Africa that the company had brought under its control. Prior to this, Adventist mission in Africa had been directed to the mostly Protestant English and Afrikaner-speaking white settlers. The acquisition and development of Solusi Mission marked the beginning of mission to the non-Christian, indigenous peoples of Africa. Over the next five decades W. H. Anderson, probably more than anyone else, blazed the trail for an expanding mission throughout the southern third of the continent.⁴

Solusi Mission

Harry and Nora Anderson, along with George and Mary Tripp and their son George, sailed from New York on April 10, 1895. Dr. A. S. Carmichael departed on April 14 and joined the others at Cape Town, South Africa. From there, on May 22, the group began their journey northward to the mission station. After reaching the end of the rail line, they traveled another seven weeks by ox-drawn covered wagons, arriving July 26.⁵

A struggle for survival dominated the early years at Solusi. Torrential rains thwarted efforts to raise buildings for the station. One of the mud walls of the Andersons’ home collapsed, burying the wood stove that Harry had just constructed in inches of mud. Disease almost entirely wiped out the cattle on the land, reducing the population from more than 100,000 heads to 500. The Matabele rebellion against colonial rule brought the mission station under siege throughout the first half of 1896, necessitating risky night-time ventures by Anderson and Tripp to obtain supplies. When the war abated and the siege came to an end in July 1896, the Solusi mission remained intact, while many mission centers operated by other groups had been looted and burned.⁶

Malaria exacted an enormous toll during the early years at Solusi. Dr. Carmichael first succumbed to the disease on February 26, 1898, soon followed by both George B. Tripp and his twelve-year-old son. The disease also devastated a larger group of missionaries that arrived in 1899. By 1901 all had either lost their lives, become disabled, or had been driven away by the disease, leaving Harry and Norma as the only active workers at Solusi, with full responsibility for the mission, including management of its farm and school. The Andersons’ survival was aided by taking quinine obtained in Bulawayo, in contrast to fellow missionaries who regarded the drug as dangerous and would not use it.⁷

In 1900, while the second round of missionaries were still at work, a church was constructed and the conversion of 13 young people reported, seven of them through Anderson’s labors. It was not until December 1, 1900, however, after nearly six years of operation, that the mission saw its first baptism – that of Jim Mainza, who

became a teacher, colporteur, and evangelist, ordained to gospel ministry in 1922.⁸

On the Trail of Livingstone

The advance of Adventist mission further into the interior of Africa began in 1901 when Frank and Mary Armitage journeyed some 150 miles northeast from Solusi to establish the Somabula Mission. Renamed Lower Gwelo Station, it became a base for widespread mission outposts.⁹

It was as the preparatory stage for a similar initiative that Harry Anderson, in 1903, accomplished the feat for which he would become best known. He journeyed northward, crossing the Zambezi River into present-day Zambia, seeking prospective sites for mission stations. Assisted by a few young African workers from the farm at Solusi, Anderson traveled 1,000 miles in four months, all on foot, covering much of the territory that the famed British missionary David Livingstone had been the first European to explore.¹⁰

A bout of dysentery brought Anderson near death during the journey. Among other perils, tensions between the Africans and colonial authorities remained a potential source for violent conflict if inflamed. The authorities saw the missionary's endeavor as beneficial to their purposes. Anderson later wrote that Cecil Rhodes once told him that "he found missionaries to be much better for keeping the natives quiet than soldiers, and certainly a good deal cheaper." In that vein, the colonial administrator at Kalomo recommended that Anderson go to the region ruled by Monze, chief of the Batonga tribe who had led an armed uprising a year before. The official wanted Anderson to monitor Monze's activities and "report any disorders that might occur in his district."¹¹ Though the Batonga had previously resisted Christian missions, Chief Monze treated Anderson with civility. After the missionary explained his purpose, Monze provided a guide who led Anderson to a site perfectly suited for establishment of a mission station and industrial school.¹²

In 1904, after his return to Solusi, Harry received news that his father had passed away. Granted a year-long furlough, the Andersons returned to the United States. In addition to dealing with family matters, Anderson spoke at various Adventist gatherings "rousing the homeland" to support "the missionary drive up into the heart of Africa."¹³ These "talk missions," as they would be called, made Anderson one of Adventism's best known promoters of world mission in addition to being one of its leading pioneer practitioners.¹⁴

Rusangu Mission

When the Andersons arrived back at the site of the new mission in the territory of the Batonga tribe (then referred to as Barotseland) in September 1905, Harry envisioned devoting two years to learning the language and building the mission. Within a month, though, forty young Africans arrived, pleading for an education. After initially resisting, Anderson agreed to give basic instruction, including Bible teaching, in the evenings, doing the best he could while gradually learning the Tonga language. During the day he oversaw construction of buildings

and development of the farm.¹⁵ Initially, water had to be carried from the Magoye River, a mile away from the mission. To resolve that problem, Anderson used funds from a \$1000 General Conference appropriation for the mission's development to pay the expenses of digging a borehole. The opportunity to draw water became another feature attracting local inhabitants to the mission.¹⁶

The industrial school at Pemba, renamed Rusangu, became "the center of a satellite system of self-supporting schools." The industrial school model, with its emphasis on practical, vocational training proved very attractive to the region's inhabitants while also gaining the approval of colonial administrators. In time the schools would produce a "significant cohort of Adventist entrepreneurial farmers."¹⁷

After living again in a mud house for the first two years at Rusangu, Harry, Nora, and eight-year-old Naomi were set to experience the relative comfort of a newly-completed brick house. Unfortunately, Nora would have little if any opportunity to enjoy the experience. She had worked diligently beside her husband through manifold deprivations for more than a decade, surviving the dangers of war, famine, and disease. But, she contracted black-water fever on November 24, 1907, and succumbed after a two-month struggle on February 4, 1908, while receiving care at Plumstead Sanitarium in South Africa. When she realized that she was nearing death, Nora sent her final request to Harry: "Take care of Naomi; stay by the mission and make it all we have planned, under God, it should be."¹⁸

Anderson served for twelve years (1905-1917) as director of the Rusangu Mission. On May 10, 1910, he married Mary Elizabeth Perin, who would be his companion and co-worker for the remainder of his life.¹⁹

Wider Service

After completing a vivid account of his mission experiences published as *On the Trail of Livingstone* (Pacific Press, 1919), Anderson pioneered Adventist mission in a third locale in southern Africa – present-day Botswana, at that time the Bechuanaland Protectorate. He served as superintendent of the Bechuanaland Mission field until 1924 where he was instrumental in opening a hospital in addition to several mission stations.

Moving to the west, he did similar work for the next nine years as superintendent of the Angola Union Mission (1924-1933). In 1934 Anderson began his final decade of mission work, serving as field secretary for the Southern Africa Division. This role, which involved opening new mission stations, teaching and encouraging church workers at institutes and camp meetings, advising new missionary recruits, and raising money, seems a fitting capstone to fifty years of ministry devoted entirely to the people of Africa.²⁰

Harry and Mary Anderson joined a gathering of more than 2,000 for the Golden Jubilee commemoration held at Solusi on July 26, 1944. The celebration began with the Andersons riding into the compound in an old-fashioned wagon pulled by sixteen oxen, evoking the final, seven-week stretch of the journey that took Harry and Nora there fifty years before.²¹

Legacy

The Andersons returned to the United States upon retirement in 1945 and moved to Claremont, North Carolina. They maintained a vigorous travel schedule to camp meetings and churches, relating their mission experiences, and conducting evangelistic meetings.²²

On June 26, 1950, the day after celebrating his 80th birthday in “fraternal fellowship” with members of Claremont’s Lutheran church, and the day before he planned to leave for San Francisco, California, to serve as a delegate to the 1950 General Conference session, W. H. Anderson died suddenly from a heart attack. He was survived by his wife, daughter and one sister.²³

The scope of Adventism’s twenty-first century presence in Zambia is but one slice of Anderson’s legacy, albeit a telling one. As of 2020, the combined membership of the Northern Zambia Union and Southern Zambia Union stands at 1,374,177. The church operates three hospitals in Zambia and a publishing house. A grade school, high school, and a fully-accredited university with approximately 4,000 students – Rusangu University – operate on the site of Rusangu Mission.²⁴

Missiologist Russell Staples describes W. H. Anderson as “a lifelong popularizer of missions.” In the final chapter of *On the Trail of Livingstone*, one of his most powerful popularizing tools, Anderson gave an emotional depiction of the final illness and death of his first wife, Nora. His concluding words reflect another dimension of his legacy – the spirit of gospel-inspired, self-sacrificing idealism that he both exemplified and stirred in others:

I have given my money, my strength, my wife, and I intend to give the rest of my poor self to finish the work God has given me to do. I want you who read these lines to ask yourself that question, “Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?”²⁵

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4. R. W. Schwarz, *Light Bearers to the Remnant* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1979), 361; Arthur Whitefield Spalding, *Origin and History of Seventh-day Adventists*, Vol. 4 (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1962), 11-13.
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10. Ibid, 15-21.
11. W. H. Anderson, *On the Trail of Livingstone* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1919), 173.
12. Spalding, *Origin and History*, Vol. 4, 16-18.
13. Ibid.
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15. Spalding, *Origin and History*, Vol. 4, 19-21.
16. Andrew McChesney, "Borehole Helps Change Zambia Forever," Adventist Mission, accessed January 27, 2020, <https://www.adventistmission.org/borehole-helps-change-zambia-forever>.
17. Staples, "Anderson, William Harrison (B)"; Schwarz, *Light Bearers*, 361.
18. Anderson, *On the Trail of Livingstone*, 351; Anderson, "Nora Haysmer Anderson obituary."
19. "William Harrison Anderson obituary," *ARH*.
20. This and the preceding paragraph based on "William Harrison Anderson obituary," *ARH*; Staples, "Anderson, William Harrison (B)"; and *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, 2nd rev. edition (1996), s.v. "Anderson, William Harrison."
21. Robinson, *The Solusi Story*, 130.
22. "William Harrison Anderson obituary," *ARH*.
23. "Attack is Fatal to Missionary," *Statesville Daily Record*, June 26, 1950, 9; Kneeland, "William Harrison Anderson obituary."
24. Information drawn from *Seventh-day Adventist Online Yearbook*, accessed April 8, 2021, [adventistyearbook.org](http://ru.edu.zm/); "Welcome to Rusangu University," accessed April 8, 2021, <http://ru.edu.zm/>; McChesney, "Borehole Helps Change Zambia Forever."
25. Anderson, *On the Trail of Livingstone*, 351.

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