

Andross, Anna Matilda (Erickson) (1880–1957)

SABRINA RILEY

Sabrina Riley was born in Auburn, New York and raised in Dowagiac, Michigan. She received a B.A. in history from Andrews University and an M.A. in information and libraries studies from the University of Michigan. Riley was a member of Andrews University's library staff from 1998 to 2003, library director and college archivist at Union College from 2003 to 2016, and is presently a freelance researcher, author, and information professional.

Anna Matilda Erickson Andross was an Adventist author and the first assistant secretary of the General Conference Young People's Missionary Volunteer Department as organized in 1907 (the predecessor of the present Adventist Youth Ministries Department). She was also the founding editor of the *Inter-American Division Messenger*.

Early Life

Anna Matilda Erickson, known as Matilda, was born to Peter Christian Ericksen (1838-1908) and Inger Marie Jensen (1835-1915)¹ on February 10, 1880, in Aalborg, Denmark. Inger joined the Adventist church in Denmark through the influence of Adventist evangelist and missionary John G. Matteson² before Matilda's birth. The Ericksons immigrated to the United States in 1880 and became naturalized citizens in 1908.³ They settled in Shelby County, Iowa, where Matilda attended public elementary school. Matilda's siblings included Jensine (1862-1940), Christina Marie (1874-1974), and Carrie Marie (1876-1962). Christina and Carrie were both nurses. Carrie was among the earliest Adventist missionaries to China.⁴



Anna Matilda (Ericksen) Andross, second wife of E. E. Andross.

Photo courtesy of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Archives.

Education

Between 1896 and 1908, Matilda Erickson attended Union College in Lincoln, Nebraska, irregularly. She was baptized by Professor Boettcher around 1897. In 1907 Erickson graduated from the literary course with a Bachelor of Arts degree.⁵ She also enrolled in the two-year nurse's training course at the Nebraska Sanitarium around 1901.⁶

When at college, Erickson was active in the College View Young People's Missionary Volunteer Society⁷ She also wrote for Union College's student publication, *The Educational Messenger*. Her favorite topics of discussion were personal evangelism and soul-winning. In 1906, she was among the delegates from Union College who attended the Missionary Volunteer convention in Nashville, Tennessee.⁸

Young People's Missionary Volunteer Department (1907-1923)

In the spring of 1907, Matilda Erickson moved to Takoma Park, Maryland,⁹ where she became secretary of the newly organized General Conference Young People's Missionary Volunteer (MV) Department, working under M. E. Kern, who was the chairman.¹⁰ Two years later, her job title was corresponding secretary.¹¹ In 1913, she briefly held the position of North American Division MV secretary.¹² By 1916, Kern's title had changed from chairman to secretary, and Erickson then became assistant secretary of the department.¹³

Regardless of her job title, Matilda's work included authoring many MV program guides which were published in the *Youth's Instructor*, the magazine for Adventist youth.¹⁴ These guides were intended for local MV societies to use in their weekly meetings. She also wrote articles on temperance, self-improvement, church history, and missions, as well as devotional and motivational pieces encouraging young people to join MV societies. Her duties included reports of MV Council meetings. All of these articles made her a significant contributor to the *Youth's Instructor* from 1907 to 1922.¹⁵

Erickson also wrote, edited, or compiled a number of books and pamphlets for young people. *Temperance Torchlights*¹⁶ was a compilation of stories, songs, poems, and other information on temperance topics. It attracted the biting sarcasm of noted journalist H. L. Mencken of the Baltimore, Maryland, *Evening Sun*, who found the material she selected to range from "wild absurdities" to "doggerel."¹⁷ In contrast, her devotional books, *Alone with God*¹⁸ and *The Life that Wins*,¹⁹ were commended as "very forceful, spiritual volumes" by the editors of the *Signs of the Times*.²⁰ In 1922, she was asked to write a booklet on Adventist church history for use by youth working toward the MV "Standard of Attainment." The resulting manuscript was *Story of the Advent Movement*, published in 1926.²¹ Other works included devotional books and manuals for MV leaders.

Although Matilda was primarily an author, she also spoke at youth congresses and provided training for regional and local MV leaders.²² In 1922 she was a delegate-at-large at the General Conference session.²³ She was invited

to the North American Division educational council meeting in Colorado Springs, June 5-19, 1923.²⁴

Inter-American Division (1923-1936)

In 1920, Erickson married Elmer Ellsworth Andross, a widower with two grown children.²⁵ Two years later, E. E. Andross was called to serve the Inter-American Division (IAD) as president. Matilda Erickson Andross was asked to lead the Missionary Volunteer and Sabbath School departments in the IAD.²⁶ The Androsses made their home in Balboa, Canal Zone, near Panama City. From their arrival in late 1923 until they departed in 1936,²⁷ they exerted great effort in their respective roles. Matilda promoted MV and Sabbath School programs across the division, frequently traveling to the other countries in the IAD.

One of the Androsses' first initiatives upon assuming duties in the Inter-American Division was the establishment of the *Inter-American Division Messenger* in April 1924. Matilda served as editor until 1936. A Spanish edition titled, *Mensajero*, began publication in January 1927. Matilda also edited this edition.²⁸

Between the risks of tropical disease and the heavy workload Matilda undertook, the General Conference was concerned for her health by 1929. The General Conference executive committee strongly urged "that Mrs. Andross accompany her husband as he comes to the Autumn Council." Furthermore, they counseled her "to remain in the States until the time of the General Conference, carrying on her work here by correspondence, thus assuring health for another term of service."²⁹

By the time Matilda left the IAD in 1936, she was "known as a personal friend of the many thousands of young people in all [the] Inter-American countries."³⁰

Later Years

Upon the Androsses' return to the United States in 1936, Matilda did not hold any new positions within the denomination, although she remained on the MV council for several years. She continued to be a speaker at local MV meetings where she shared mission stories from her own experiences as well as those of others.³¹

Meanwhile, E. E. Andross served as general field secretary, in which role he frequently traveled. He served as president of the Caribbean Union Conference from 1941 to 1943.³² Matilda accompanied her husband to Trinidad, but their term of service was short due to poor health. In 1943 they returned from Trinidad, with the request "that on account of their condition of health they be allowed to go to Arizona for the remainder of the winter, rather than to return to their home in Takoma Park during the cold weather."³³

During these years Matilda also wrote at least one book, *Sunshine and Shadow in Southern Europe*, which was part travelogue and part mission story, narrating the development of the Adventist Church in southern Europe.

³⁴ She was invited to participate in the fortieth anniversary celebration of the MV department at the youth congress held in 1947.³⁵

After four years of failing health, Elmer E. Andross died on August 22, 1950, in Takoma Park, Maryland.³⁶ Following his death, Matilda remained in Takoma Park. However, in early 1957, she was visiting her sisters in Glendale, California, when she was seriously injured in a freeway automobile accident. She died on February 9, 1957, in Los Angeles, California, and was buried on February 13, 1957, in the George Washington Cemetery in Takoma Park, Maryland.³⁷

Legacy

For nearly forty years, Matilda Erickson Andross's leadership and prolific writing for young people helped shape the Missionary Volunteer program. When she left the IAD in 1936, she was credited with having "very ably carried the young people's work in the division."³⁸ The same was true of her entire career.

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