

Vinkel, Martin Hansen (1898–1964) and Sarah (Mayer) (1903–1958)

MILTON HOOK

Milton Hook, Ed.D. (Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, the United States). Hook retired in 1997 as a minister in the Greater Sydney Conference, Australia. An Australian by birth Hook has served the Church as a teacher at the elementary, academy and college levels, a missionary in Papua New Guinea, and as a local church pastor. In retirement he is a conjoint senior lecturer at Avondale College of Higher Education. He has authored *Flames Over Battle Creek*, *Avondale: Experiment on the Dora*, *Desmond Ford: Reformist Theologian*, *Gospel Revivalist* the *Seventh-day Adventist Heritage Series*, and many magazine articles. He is married to Noeleen and has two sons and three grandchildren.

Martin Vinkel and his wife Sarah pioneered Changchun Dispensary and Mukden Sanitarium in Manchuria and, later, the Northwest China Sanitarium and Hospital, Lanchow, Gansu Province, and a medical mission outpost at Tachienlu, Sichuan Province, for the benefit of Tibetans.

Heritage and Education

Martin Hansen Vinkel was born on January 8, 1897, in Horselunde, a small village surrounded by farms in eastern Denmark.¹ His parents, Nis Hansen Vinkel and his wife Dorthea Marie (Andersen) Vinkel, moved to another farm in Obbekær, western Denmark, where Martin spent his childhood and teenage years. Nis and Dorthea had eight children: Inge Marie (b. 1889), Marcus Hansen (b. 1891), Benedicte (b. 1893), Hans Petersen (b. 1895), Martin Hansen (b. 1897), Nissine Dorthea (b. 1899), Marie (b. 1902) and Kristine (b. 1905).² The family were not Seventh-day Adventists at the time. They emigrated to America in 1914.³

Martin converted to Adventism in 1917 and was baptized at a camp-meeting in Iowa. He attended Hutchinson Theological Seminary, Minnesota, an institution established for the training of European immigrants. He advanced to the College of Medical Evangelists, California, graduating in the class of 1929. Prior to his graduation, on June 12, 1928, he married Nurse Sarah Mayer at Glendale, California.⁴ Elder Frederick Paap conducted the ceremony.⁵ Martin and Sarah had two children, Edward Gordon (b. 1931) and Betty Lou (b. 1932).⁶

Mission Service in the Orient

In 1929, Martin and Sarah accepted an overseas appointment to China. On arrival in November, they attended the language school in Peking, remaining there until June 1930.⁷ Plans were made to open medical mission work in Manchuria. In November 1930, Martin and Sarah opened a dispensary in Changchun, Jilin Province. This was

short-lived. The following year they transferred their work to Mukden (Shenyang) and established a dispensary-hospital that opened in December 1931.⁸ During February through May 1934, Martin assisted at the Shanghai Sanitarium while others took care of the patients at Mukden. He was pleased to know of the advances made at Mukden. The facilities that he had pioneered for more than two years were dedicated as the Mukden Sanitarium on May 25, 1934.⁹

Martin and Sarah could not be present at the May dedication of the Mukden Sanitarium because they were travelling to a new assignment, the establishment of a hospital at Lanchow, Gansu Province. It was reported in April 1934 that a site in Lanchow was being developed.¹⁰ In May, the Vinkel family were making their way into the interior of China, pausing at Sianfu or Tianfu (Chengdu, Sichuan Province) to briefly assist the nurses at a little dispensary located just outside the western gate to the city.¹¹ On November 22, 1934, Martin reported that five inpatients were being treated “even though neither doors nor windows were finished” and there was no furniture except beds.¹² A dedication service at the Lanchow Hospital was finally held on June 16, 1935.¹³ The institution flourished and soon came to be known as the Northwest China Sanitarium and Hospital!¹⁴

Late in 1936, Martin and Sarah returned to America on furlough. Martin made good use of the time, doing some post-graduate studies.¹⁵ They returned to Lanchow in 1937. Some improvements were made to the hospital in the form of better tiles on the roof to stop it leaking in heavy downpours. In other respects, the staff continued to endure hardships. Their water supply had to be carried almost five kilometres by mule cart from the Yellow River, and limited funds would only allow the x-ray machine to be used once a week.¹⁶ Statistics showed that during 1940 there were as many as 150 outpatients each day. Martin wrote, “If business keeps on increasing at this rate, we shall have to call for more help.”¹⁷

War conditions brought hazardous conditions to China. Lanchow was not directly affected, but while Martin was visiting Chongqing in Sichuan Province, mid-1940, he found himself sheltering from bombing raids at close quarters.¹⁸ Twelve months later, the Vinkel family were transported south,¹⁹ close to the border of Tibet at Tachienlu where they established a little hospital.²⁰ Martin acted as the director of the Tibetan Mission,²¹ distributing Tibetan Adventist literature in conjunction with his medical endeavours.²² For three years, late 1941 through late 1944, they remained at this mission outpost before returning to America.²³

Permanent Return to America

On his return to America, Martin established a private practice in Mount Vernon, Ohio. Later, he transferred his practice further north to Crestline, Ohio.²⁴ Sadly, Sarah passed away at Crestline on May 2, 1958, at the age of only fifty-five. She was interred nearby in Greenlawn Cemetery.²⁵

In September 1962, Martin married divorcee Reba Ester (Siler) Huffman. He retired from his medical practice in April 1963 and moved to Dayton, Ohio, where they attended the New Carlisle SDA Church.²⁶ Martin passed away on December 23, 1964, and was interred alongside Sarah in Greenlawn Cemetery.²⁷

Reba was remarried to a man named James Allen Jones, who passed away in 1983. She lived to be eighty-six years of age, passing away in October 1991. She rests in Dayton Memorial Park Cemetery with James Jones.²⁸

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