

Edwards, Sanford Palmer Stillman (1873–1965)

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.



Dr. Sanford P. S. Edwards

Photo courtesy of Ellen G. White Estate, Inc.

Dr. Sanford P. S. Edwards was prominent in Adventist medical missionary work during the first decade of the 20th century. Despite debilitating health problems that prevented him from sustaining full-time labor after 1908, he found a variety of ways to continue enhancing the mission of the church and the well-being of society.

Early Years

Sanford Palmer Stillman Edwards was born at Westerly, Rhode Island, on December 10, 1873, to Solomon Lorenzo Edwards and his wife Sarah Jennie (Bailey). His father was a farmer. He had two older brothers, namely Charles Herbert (b. 1867) and Willie (b. 1869).¹ His paternal ancestors claimed descent from the Waldensians of northern Italy. His father had been a Seventh Day Baptist before joining the Seventh-day Adventists on baptism by Joseph Bates.²

As a teenager Sanford worked briefly in the New England Conference, first in evangelistic work as a tent master during the summer of 1891 and later, in 1893, as a canvasser of books.³ In 1892 he graduated from South Lancaster Academy in Massachusetts and then proceeded to the American Medical Missionary College (AMMC), Battle Creek, Michigan, to train as a physician. He was in the first graduation class, completing his course in June 1899.⁴

On September 16, 1899, Sanford married a fellow medical graduate, Maria Hallingsworth Stewart (or Steward). Maria was raised in a Society of Friends home, the family uniting with the Seventh-day Adventist faith after learning the value of health principles.⁵ She was the widow of Adventist pioneer J. N. Loughborough's son, Delmer, who died in 1894.⁶

Physician, Educator, Medical Missionary Advocate

Immediately after graduation both Sanford and Maria were appointed to teach in AMMC,⁷ Sanford specializing in general science.⁸ They taught at the former Battle Creek College during its first year and a half in a new location, Berrien Springs, Michigan, with a new name, Emmanuel Missionary College (EMC). Sanford served as a member of the Michigan Conference executive committee while at both AMMC and EMC.⁹

For the first five months of 1903 Sanford Edwards served as medical missionary secretary of the General Conference.¹⁰ He and Maria toured the West Michigan, East Michigan, Wisconsin, Nebraska, Minnesota and Kansas conferences, lecturing to local congregations about health principles. Sanford reported their activities at the April 1903 General Conference session in Oakland, California, and urged that each conference appoint an individual to carry the portfolio of Medical Missionary secretary in order to advance health reform.¹¹

Sanford's promotion of health principles under the auspices of the General Conference was brief. In May 1903, the Drs. Edwards were asked to take charge of the fledgling Tri-City Sanitarium in Moline, Illinois. Initially they were the only physicians at the institution.¹² Sanford was also a member of the Northern Illinois Conference and Lake Union Conference executive committees, served as the Lake Union Conference medical secretary, and was an ex-officio member of the General Conference Medical Missionary Council.¹³ The pressure of work brought about a breakdown in Sanford's health in May 1907, a stroke that left him suffering petit mal seizures and migraine headaches.¹⁴ He was never again able to hold a responsible leadership position in the church but was able to accomplish part-time assignments provided he was not subjected to high stress. His older brother, Charles H. Edwards, experienced a similar debilitating breakdown when he was president of the Greater New York Conference.¹⁵

In early 1908 the Edwards moved to California where Sanford sought treatment at St. Helena Sanitarium and Maria joined the medical faculty of the institution.¹⁶ Soon after she became secretary of the Medical Department of the Pacific Union Conference and a member of the General Conference Medical Council.¹⁷ She was also active in the Women's Christian Temperance Union.¹⁸ Tragedy struck when Maria suffered a fatal stroke, passing away on February 26, 1911, at the age of 45. It was an unexpected blow. She was laid to rest in the Saint Helena Cemetery.¹⁹

Service Despite Disability

On November 30, 1911, Sanford remarried.²⁰ His new spouse was Dorothy (commonly Daisy) Warden, who had recently been baptized and was training as a nurse.²¹ Daisy had earlier married twice and had a son from each union, James Ellison Brown (b. 1906)²² and Forest Ford Wissner Ferguson (b. 1909).²³ The boys were not included in her home with Sanford. She and Sanford later had one son, Robert, born April 3, 1911.²⁴

Sanford Edwards returned to the classroom, teaching physiology at the College of Medical Evangelists, Loma Linda, California, from 1914 to 1916. While conducting a Week of Prayer meeting in the nearby Redlands church he suffered another epileptic attack which prevented him from further public responsibilities in denominational work. Later, when the Spanish influenza epidemic swept through the area in 1918-1919, Dr. Edwards treated some cases privately and didn't lose a patient.²⁵ Working at his own pace he also did some casual work as a bookkeeper and at a local tinsmith.²⁶ He suffered another major health breakdown in 1932 and had to restrict himself to light manual work.²⁷ Nonetheless from that time until 1954 he functioned as health officer for the city of Ontario, California, and sanitation officer for Loma Linda Sanitarium. While in the latter role he improved the sanitarium's water supply, sewerage system and flood control.²⁸

Final Years and Legacy

At the age of 85 Sanford reflected on his long struggle with a fragile nervous system, saying he felt like one "wounded in the battle."²⁹ At that time he was very lonely, having lost Daisy on January 3, 1954. She had suffered lung cancer which metastasized aggressively to the brain.³⁰

During his last years Sanford became deeply distressed about his dire financial resources and sank into a psychosis, needing constant care.³¹ He passed away at Loma Linda exactly eleven years after Daisy, January 3, 1965, aged 91. They are interred alongside each other in the Montecito Memorial Park, Colton, near Loma Linda.³²

Dr. Sanford P. S. Edwards made noteworthy contributions to the early development of Adventist educational and medical missionary work. During the many decades in which his disabilities curtailed his functioning, he persisted in doing what he could for the benefit of others. In addition to his contributions to public health, he drew on memories of his close association with major Adventist leaders, including A. G. Daniells, John Harvey Kellogg, David Paulson, and Ellen G. White, to illuminate church leaders and historians seeking a better understanding of issues in the church's past.³³

SOURCES

Borg, S. T. "Charles Herbert Edwards obituary." *Pacific Union Recorder*, January 29, 1931.

"Daisy K. Warden." FamilySearch. Accessed June 11, 2021.

<https://www.familysearch.org/tree/pedigree/landscape/G9QW-JP5>.

"Dr. M. L. Edwards, secretary . . ." *Pacific Union Recorder*, January 13, 1910.

"Dr. Maria L. Steward [sic] Edwards." *Find A Grave*. Memorial ID No. 47812440, February 8, 2010. Accessed May 7, 2021. <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/47812440/maria-l-edwards>

"Sanford Palmer Stillman Edwards." *Find A Grave*. Memorial ID No. 123730440, January 19, 2014. Accessed May 7, 2021. https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/123730440/sanford-palmer_stillman-edwards

Edwards, S. P. S. "An Educational Health Campaign." *General Conference Bulletin*, April 14, 1903.

Edwards, S. P. S. "A Physician's Viewpoint." *Pacific Union Recorder*, February 3, 1910.

"Edwards, S. P. S." Sustentation Files, RG 33. General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland, U.S.A.

"John Victor Hadley Ferguson." *FamilySearch*. Accessed June 11, 2021.

<https://www.familysearch.org/tree/pedigree/landscape/G9QX-HN7>.

"Maria Hallingsworth Stewart [Edwards] obituary." *Pacific Union Recorder*, March 16, 1911.

"Sanford Palmer Stillman Edwards." *FamilySearch*. Accessed May 7, 2021.

<https://www.familysearch.org/tree/pedigree/landscape/GW63-5FR>

"Sanford Palmer Stillman Edwards obituary." *ARH*, March 4, 1965.

Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook. General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Online Archives.

<https://www.adventistyearbook.org/>.

"The freshman class, which will finish . . ." *Pacific Union Recorder*, November 24, 1910.

NOTES

1. "Sanford Palmer Stillman Edwards obituary," *ARH*, March 4, 1965, 24; "Sanford Palmer Stillman Edwards," *FamilySearch*, accessed May 7, 2021, <https://www.familysearch.org/tree/pedigree/landscape/GW63-5FR>.
2. Sanford P.S. Edwards to Sustentation Committee, September 17, 1958, S.P.S. Edwards Sustentation File, RG 33, GCA.
3. Sustentation Fund Application, August 26, 1930, S.P.S. Edwards Sustentation File, GCA.
4. "Sanford Palmer Stillman Edwards obituary."
5. "Maria Hallingsworth Stewart Edwards] obituary," *Pacific Union Recorder*, March 16, 1911, 5-7.

6. "Dr. Maria L. Steward [sic] Edwards," *Find A Grave*, Memorial ID No. 47812440, February 8, 2010, accessed May 7, 2021, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/47812440/maria-l-edwards>.
7. "Maria Hallingsworth Stewart Edwards] obituary."
8. "Sanford Palmer Stillman Edwards obituary."
9. Sustentation Fund Application, August 26, 1930, S.P.S. Edwards Sustentation File, GCA .
10. Ibid.
11. S.P.S. Edwards, "An Educational Health Campaign," *General Conference Bulletin*, April 14, 1903, 213-215.
12. "Tri-City Sanitarium," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*, 1904, 98, <https://documents.adventistarchives.org/Yearbooks/YB1904.pdf>.
13. Sustentation Fund Application, August 26, 1930, S.P.S. Edwards Sustentation File, GCA; "General Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*, 1908, 13, <https://documents.adventistarchives.org/Yearbooks/YB1908.pdf>.
14. "Maria Hallingsworth Stewart [Edwards] Obituary"; S.P.S Edwards to C.S. Prout, February 6, 1931, S.P.S. Edwards Sustentation File, GCA.
15. S.T. Borg, "Charles Herbert Edwards obituary," *Pacific Union Recorder*, January 29, 1931, 7.
16. "Maria Hallingsworth Stewart [Edwards] obituary."
17. "Dr. M.L. Edwards, secretary . . .," *Pacific Union Recorder*, January 13, 1910, 4; "General Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*, 1910, 15, <https://documents.adventistarchives.org/Yearbooks/YB1910.pdf>.
18. "Maria Hallingsworth Stewart [Edwards] obituary."
19. "Dr. Maria L. Steward [sic] Edwards," *Find A Grave*.
20. Sustentation Fund Application, August 26, 1930, S.P.S. Edwards Sustentation File, GCA.
21. "The freshman class, which will finish . . .," *Pacific Union Recorder*, November 24, 1910, 2.
22. "Dorothy K. Warden," *FamilySearch*, accessed June 11, 2021, <https://www.familysearch.org/tree/pedigree/landscape/G9QW-JP5>.
23. "John Victor Hadley Ferguson," *FamilySearch*, accessed June 11, 2021, <https://www.familysearch.org/tree/pedigree/landscape/G9QX-HN7>.
24. Sustentation Fund Application, August 26, 1930, S.P.S. Edwards Sustentation File, GCA.

25. Denominational Work Record of Dr. S.P.S. Edwards, S.P.S. Edwards Sustentation File, GCA.
26. F.F. Abbott to S.P.S. Edwards, September 24, 1930, S.P.S. Edwards Sustentation File, GCA.
27. W.C. Raley to J.J. Ireland, December 16, 1932, S.P.S. Edwards Sustentation File, GCA..
28. S.P.S. Edwards to Sustentation Committee, February 10, 1964, S.P.S. Edwards Sustentation File, GCA .
29. S.P.S. Edwards to Sustentation Committee, c. January 1959, S.P.S. Edwards Sustentation File, GCA.
30. S.P.S. Edwards to Sustentation Committee, October 25, 1953, S.P.S. Edwards Sustentation File, GCA.
31. Harold L. Maddox to R.H. Adair, April 7, 1961, S.P.S. Edwards Sustentation File, GCA.
32. "Sanford Palmer Stillman Edwards," *Find A Grave*, Memorial ID No. 123730440, January 19, 2014, accessed May 7, 2021, https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/123730440/sanford-palmer_stillman-edwards.
33. See, for example, S.P.S. Edwards, M.D. to F.D. Nichol, November 24, 1957, in Ellen G. White Estate Q. & A. File No. 34-B-2, accessed December 6, 2021, ellenwhite.org; Sanford P.S. Edwards to Emmett K. Vande Vere, July 28, 1957, excerpted in *Windows: Selected Readings in Seventh-day Adventist History* (Nashville: Southern Publishing Association, 1975).

encyclopedia.adventist.org is an official website of the [Seventh-day Adventist World Church](https://www.adventist.org)

© 2020 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists 12501 Old Columbia Pike Silver Spring , MD 20904 USA 301-680-6000