

Magan, Percy Tilson (1867-1947)

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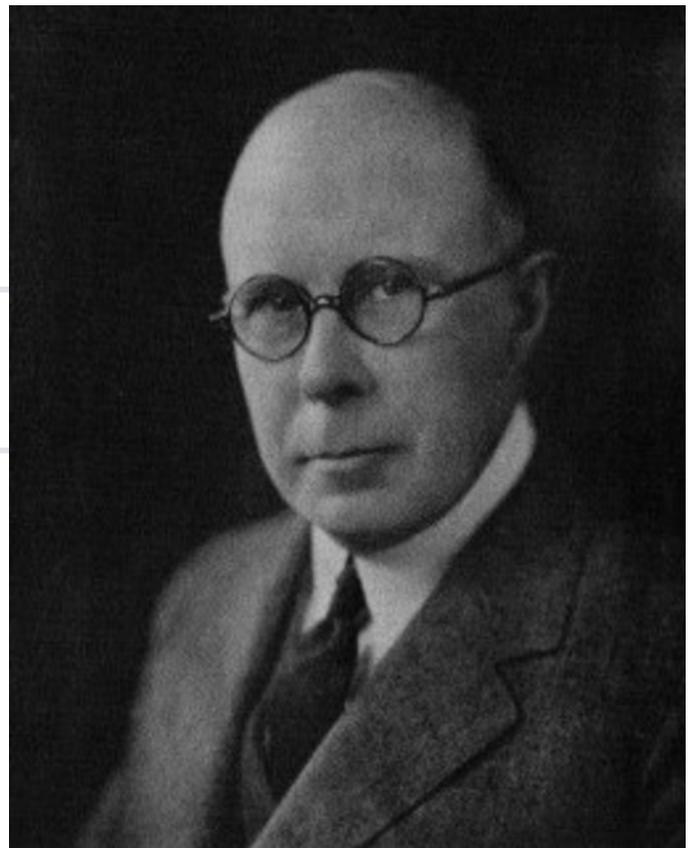
Percy Tilson Magan was an Adventist educator, physician and institution-builder.

Early Life

Percy Tilson Magan was born November 13, 1867, in Ireland to parents Percy Magan and Catherine Richards Magan. The family emigrated to the United States in 1884. He had four sisters (Emily, Rachel, Muriel, and Violet) and a younger brother, Arthur. Percy became an Adventist in 1886 after attending public meetings in Nebraska where he was doing farm work.¹

Education and Marriage

In 1888, he began study at Battle Creek College, and met Ellen White while attending the General Conference session in Minneapolis that year. When she moved from California to Battle Creek after the General Conference meetings, White invited Percy to live in her home, which he did for some months, forming a lifelong bond with the White family.² White suggested that Magan join Stephen Haskell who was making a global tour of possible Adventist mission sites in 1889, and this mentoring experience instilled in Magan a commitment to promoting education.³ He returned to Battle Creek to finish his education, while teaching part time on the faculty. He served as head of the Bible and history department at the college from 1891 to 1901. In 1896 he received a Bachelor of Philosophy degree. Later in his career, he completed a medical degree at the University of Tennessee in 1914.⁴



P. T. Magan

Photo courtesy of Center for Adventist Research.

On June 14, 1892, Magan married Ida May Bauer. They had two boys, Wellesley (b. 1893) and Shaen (b. 1896). Ida died in 1904 after a long illness, and her mother took care of their boys in California for several years. In 1905 Magan married Lillian Eshleman, a physician at Battle Creek Sanitarium. They had one son, Val O'Connor, born in 1912.⁵

Ministry, Educational Leadership, and Madison

During his early years as an educator, Magan formed a strong relationship with Edward A. Sutherland, with whom he shared an energetic concern for Adventist education and institutions. They both believed strongly in the inclusion of vocational and practical training in the Adventist colleges. After Sutherland and Magan took on the leadership of Battle Creek College in 1897 they became convinced that to implement the needed changes, the school would need to be moved out of Battle Creek to a rural location. The college's \$80,000 debt stood in the way, thrusting Magan into the role of fundraiser. With the denomination as a whole likewise facing a crisis of indebtedness, Ellen White offered to donate the royalties from her book *Christ's Object Lessons* as a new source of revenue. Magan was placed in charge of the Relief of Our Schools Project, a denomination-wide campaign to mobilize and coordinate sales of the book. In addition to benefitting Adventist schools overall, the success of the campaign was critical to gaining support at the 1901 General Conference for transfer of the college to Berrien Springs, Michigan. Magan and Sutherland oversaw the daunting task of moving the school within a few short months and opening it for the 1901 Fall semester with a reformed curriculum and a new name, Emmanuel Missionary College.⁶

As a history teacher Magan wrote extensively in the 1890s, especially about the role of the state. He wrote *The Peril of the Republic* in 1899, rushing it to print in opposition to the Spanish-American war, denouncing the action of the United States in the Philippines as "colonial greed and rapacious lust."⁷ His strong ideas about the role of state structures and power came into play when he joined the medical faction at the 1903 General Conference in opposition to the restructuring and centralizing bureaucracy led by Arthur Daniells. When their opposition was overruled, Magan worked with Sutherland to get the two sides, led respectively by Dr. John Harvey Kellogg and Daniells, to reconcile.⁸ Magan was scolded by Daniells and other church leaders and asked to resign from his General Conference positions for not having supported Daniells sufficiently during the 1903 crisis.⁹

It was this attitude against institutional consolidation which provoked Sutherland and Magan to go to Tennessee to start the Nashville Agricultural and Normal Institute (also known as the Madison school) in 1904 as an example of independent ministries, with strong support from Ellen White and her son Willie White.¹⁰ Magan worked with his physician wife, Lillian Magan, the Sutherlands, and a dozen other workers to make Madison into a self-supporting health and evangelism organization. According to one historian, Madison was notable for "its equalitarian, group-governed culture, celebration of rural living and agriculture, emphasis on practical skills over book learning, and high idealism about the possibilities of social transformation."¹¹

Magan spent a great deal of time working to create positive feelings about Madison in church leaders and raising money, on top of the constant work to handle the regular crises at Madison. In 1908 a smallpox epidemic threatened the community at Madison and Magan's letters to the Whites and other church leaders reveal their constant cooperation with the public health officials in the Nashville and Madison area as well as their widespread adoption of vaccination.¹² Eventually, church leaders allowed the folks at Madison to fundraise within the churches.¹³

Medical Studies and Leadership at CME/Loma Linda

It was clear that the medical work needed more personnel and support, and in 1910, Sutherland and Magan made the choice, despite their age, to enter the University of Tennessee's medical school (then centered in Nashville).¹⁴ Just as Magan graduated, medical schools around the country were being put to the test by the Flexnor accreditation system, by which educational institutions were graded and ranked. The College of Medical Evangelists at Loma Linda California was not faring well and Magan was asked to negotiate with the medical establishment and to bring the school up to the required standards. During his medical studies he had established effective relationships with national leaders in medical education which made him especially qualified for the task. Daniells and Magan developed a rapprochement and both worked to make sure that enough money was raised to provide the required infrastructure and personnel so that the CME (later Loma Linda University School of Medicine) could become accredited.¹⁵ In 1915 he was made dean of the CME and in 1928 he was asked to become the president, serving in that capacity until his retirement in 1942.¹⁶

Magan's leadership in fundraising was vital, but so was his negotiation with the United States' government over the draft status of the young men studying at Loma Linda during World War I.¹⁷ He also served as a one-man reference machine for the General Conference, writing countless letters evaluating various graduates of Loma Linda as to their fitness to be missionaries internationally.¹⁸ He also worked to find people to fill the administration roles at the Adventist hospitals around the United States.¹⁹ Most importantly for the future of the medical school, he served as a liaison between the CME and the American Medical Association and the California State Board of Medical Examiners, cultivating respect of the medical establishment and attempting to keep the school up to the standards of education as well as research in the 1920s and 1930s.²⁰ It was deeply important to Magan that Adventist doctors and nurses be able to get their training at specifically Adventist schools.²¹

The accreditation visit of 1936 was an especially fraught time, as the evaluators wanted fewer students accepted, longer educational preparation, and more scholarly faculty. Their recommendations were in tension with Magan's vision of practical education crafting a work force for evangelistic and mission work around the world. He remained concerned that church workers were more worried about good grades and degrees than preparing for a life of service.²² But Magan bent with the new realities and embarked on more fundraising and

reorganization of the school. He consistently argued that there would be more doctors to go as missionaries if the GC would alleviate their debt, defending against allegations that the graduates of the medical school were too mercenary.²³ He regularly served as the mediator between the ministry concerned with evangelism and those in the medical work.²⁴ When World War II began, he was able to reinstate the plans from the Great War for training medics. In the middle of the war, in June 1942, Magan, at the age of 75, finally retired from leadership of the CME.²⁵

Legacy

Magan's health had been frail during the last 10 years of his leadership. However, after his retirement he continued to travel for speaking engagements and to write articles for the journal, *Health*, that he had helped to found. He died of a heart attack on December 16, 1947.²⁶

While Magan wrote three books on the dangers of church domination of the state, and the role of the United States' government in prophecy, his primary legacy remains two-fold. First, the model of the self-supporting institution with its focus on practical labor and evangelism has a continued appeal within the church, and it inspired the establishment of many of Madison-like training schools and health-care centers. Second, Magan helped the Adventist church decide to invest in the professionalism required of all medical-degree conferring schools at a time when many religious organizations chose to withdraw from training doctors and nurses. While his concern about strong centralized government power remained through the end of his life, he was both committed enough to health evangelism and pragmatic enough to adapt to the requirements of medical accreditation and to cooperate with government needs in wartime.

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NOTES

1. E. A. Sutherland, "Percy Tilson Magan obituary," *ARH*, January 29, 1948, 20; Merlin Neff, *For God and CME* (Omaha, Nebraska: Pacific Press, 1964), 2-3, 15, 18, 24.
2. Neff, *For God and CME*, 29.
3. P. T. Magan, "Around the World," *Youth's Instructor*, May 21, 1890, 1-2; Neff, *For God and CME*, 33.
4. Sutherland, "Percy Tilson Magan obituary"; Neff, *For God and CME*, 55, 154.
5. Sutherland, "Percy Tilson Magan obituary"; Neff, *For God and CME*, 55, 91, 99-101, 127.
6. P. T. Magan, "How Should the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, in a Substantial Manner, Maintain Schools for Its Children?" *Advocate of Christian Education*, August-September 1901, 213-216; Neff, *For God and CME*, 65-72
7. Percy Magan, *The Peril of the Republic* (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell, 1899), 109-120; Douglas Morgan, *Adventism and the American Republic* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2001), 68-70; Ron Osborn, "A Brief History of SDA Pacificism", unpublished paper, in the library of the author.
8. Benjamin McArthur, *A.G. Daniells: Shaper of Twentieth Century Adventism* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 2015), 177, 189, 197.
9. McArthur, *A.G. Daniells*, 208. In addition to his college responsibilities, Magan, in 1902, was an officer of the General Conference with the title of Financial Secretary, a member of the General Conference Education Department executive committee, the Publication Committee, and the General Conference Association board; see "Directory of the Seventh-day Adventist Denomination," in *General Conference Bulletin*, Second and Third Quarters, 1902, 2. By 1904 he retained only the last mentioned of these roles, although he remained in denominational positions outside the General Conference; see *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* for 1904.
10. *Ibid.*, 299.
11. *Ibid.*, 305.
12. P. T. Magan to E. A. Sutherland, February 25, 1908, GCA.
13. McArthur, *A.G. Daniells*, 305.

14. Sutherland, "Percy Tilson Magan obituary"; Neff, *For God and CME*, 147.
15. P. T. Magan to T. E. Bowen, January 30 and March 30, 1917, GCA; P.T. Magan to A.G. Daniells March 29, 1917, RG 11, Box 6, GCA; McArthur, *A.G. Daniells*, 344.
16. Sutherland, "Percy Tilson Magan obituary."
17. P. T. Magan to T. E. Bowen, November 20, 1917, GCA.
18. J. L. Shaw to P. T. Magan, January 5, 1917, GCA; P.T. Magan to A. G. Daniells, November 20, 1917, GCA.
19. P. T. Magan to L. L. Jones, September 26, 1919, GCA.
20. P. T. Magan to T. E. Bowen, April 10, 1917, GCA; Neff, *For God and CME*, 269-275; Shaw to Magan, January 5, 1917; P.T. Magan to W. A. Spicer, May 3, 1927, RG 11 Box 6, GCA.
21. Magan to Bowen, April 10, 1917.
22. Magan to Bowen, January 30, 1917.
23. P. T. Magan to W. A. Spicer, February 5, 1926, RG 11, Box 4, GCA.
24. P. T. Magan to W. J. Stone, August 31, 1927, RG 11 Box 6, GCA.
25. Neff, *For God and CME*, 286-289, 301-302.
26. *Ibid.*, 304.

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