



Soonan Adventist Hospital (after the expansion)

Photo courtesy of Soonan Hospital-Dispensary.

## Soonan Hospital-Dispensary

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The earliest Adventist medical institution in Korea opened in 1908 at Soonan, a town about ten miles north of Pyongyang, the present capital of North Korea. It was operated by the Chosen Union Mission until World War II, but after the war, its control was taken over by the government of North Korea. Soonan hospital was also the predecessor of Seoul Adventist Hospital.

### Founding

It can be said that Soonan Hospital began when William Smith, the first Korean Adventist missionary, requested the General Conference for a medical missionary. In November 1906, a year after Smith entered Korea, his first daughter, Willena, died because of diphtheria.<sup>1</sup> Smith desperately realized the need for medical missions to improve Korea's poor medical environment and requested the General Conference to send a medical missionary. Since the General Conference also regarded the medical business as the core of missionary work, it promoted the dispatch of medical missionaries to Korea.<sup>2</sup> The medical mission of the Adventist Church in Korea began with the history of Soonan Hospital.

## History

The first Adventist medical missionary in Soonan seemed to be the wife of William R. Smith. As a trained nurse, she treated the sick who came to her home. When the first Adventist physician-evangelist, Riley Russell, arrived with his wife in Soonan on September 25, 1908, the sick were waiting for him at the railway station, and he treated his first patients on the porch of the mission house.<sup>3</sup>

Dr. Russell usually took care of the patients mainly through visits and treated the patients at the home of Pastor Smith, which was also used as accommodation, if necessary. But daily treatments of 500 patients required a doctor's office. So, he started using a room at Soonan's youth training school, which was built a year ago as a dispensary.<sup>4</sup> However, the dispensary room was so small that it was overflowing with patients waiting in line. Most of the patients were suffering primarily from infectious diseases or abscesses. A larger clinic was needed to care for the patients.

When the mission headquarters moved to Seoul in September 1909, Missionary Scharffenberg also moved to Seoul. Russell bought Scharffenberg's house for \$20 and used it as a dispensary. The medical work here became widely known, and The Washington Post in the United States reported the news in an article titled "20,000 Patients in a \$20 Building."<sup>5</sup> By 1911 Soonan dispensary became a medical institution where one nurse and two employees, in addition to Dr. Russell, took care of 4,000 patients a year.<sup>6</sup>

In 1913 the Soonan dispensary was built. The General Conference funded \$2,000 for the Soonan hospital, which Russell used to build a 36-foot building. However, this building was not large enough to be accredited as a hospital. At the time, the government promulgated a law that allowed the medical business to be conducted only after obtaining hospital approval. Therefore, the Soonan dispensary needed a building suitable for that level. After figuring out the situation, the General Conference provided a fund of \$7,000 for the construction of the Soonan dispensary from the 13<sup>th</sup> Sabbath School mission donation for that year. With the funds Russell expanded the existing building to a two-story brick building and was approved as Soonan Hospital.<sup>7</sup>

In 1917 Dr. Russell briefly returned to the United States on a sabbatical. During that time Soonan Hospital was in charge of medical treatments by Dr. Kang Byung-chan, Dr. Kim Chang-se, and two nurses. The first Korean doctor to work at Soonan Hospital was Jang Gyeong-rok, who worked for two years from 1913 and passed away.

As his successor, Dr. Kang Byung-chan helped Russell in the medical business.<sup>8</sup> After graduating from the Severance Medical School in 1916, Chang-se Kim worked at Soonan Hospital for about two years, then left for the Adventist Mission Hospital located in Shanghai, China, in June 1918.<sup>9</sup>

On March 1, 1919, the Independence Movement took place in Korea. Especially on March 7, the independence movement took place near Soonan, where several people were injured. They were treated at Soonan Hospital, which led Russell to stand trial at the Pyongyang High Court.<sup>10</sup> This incident became an example of understanding the role of missionaries in Korea's independence movement.

In February 1920 Dr. I. M. Feldcamp visited Korea as a medical missionary, but he soon became ill and returned to the United States several months later. In the summer of that year, the General Conference sent \$10,000 so the Soonan Hospital could reconstruct as a Western style edifice, installing heating systems and expanded the size of the hospital.<sup>11</sup> It was Dr. Russell who made a lot of dedication in the early days for the development of the Soonan Hospital. However, he was permanently returned to the United States in 1922 due to a family illness.<sup>12</sup>

After Dr. Russell returned to the United States, Soonan Hospital was operated without a medical missionary for a while. Then, in the fall of 1923, Dr. H. E. Scoles visited Korea and took over the responsibility of Soonan Hospital.<sup>13</sup> However, he also returned to the United States after a year due to his wife's illness. At this time Soonan Hospital decided to temporarily close its doors until a medical missionary was sent again. Fortunately, this situation did not last long. In March 1925 Dr. Clyde A. Haysmer took office as the hospital's director, bringing Soonan Hospital back to normal operation.<sup>14</sup> He also became famous for stopping and treating a person who was on the verge of dying from falling from a train bound for Pyongyang. However, he was forced to return to the United States in December 1926 after an incident was reported in which he punished a boy who stole an apple in September of that year.<sup>15</sup>

After the Haysmer incident, Soonan Hospital was operated by R. S. Watts, who was appointed as a deputy hospital director in September 1926. Fortunately, in October of that year, a Korean doctor In-Mo Jo was invited, and there were no medical problems.<sup>16</sup> In addition, Dr. L. H. Butka of China's Yeonsung Hospital visited Korea for seven months from June 1927 to January 1928. The following year he helped with medical treatment.<sup>17</sup>

In May 1929 Dr. George H. Rue (Korean name, Ryu Je-Han) entered the country as the director of Soonan Hospital. After graduating from the College of Medical Evangelists, Loma Linda, he served as an intervention doctor for five years before becoming a Korean medical missionary at the recommendation of the General Conference.<sup>18</sup> Within two months of his visit to Korea, Dr. Rue received hospital approval from the government and earnestly led the development of the hospital.<sup>19</sup> However, at that time, Soonan was a part of the outskirts of Korea, so it was necessary to run a hospital business in a larger city. Accordingly, Dr. Rue established a plan to build a hospital in the capital of Korea and opened a clinic in Seoul in the fall of 1931.<sup>20</sup> This clinic became Seoul Adventist Hospital.

In 1934 Soonan Hospital was operated with two doctors, two nurses, one employee, and 75 beds. With Dr. George Ryu focusing on the operation of Seoul Sanitarium and Hospital, Dr. George G. Innocent, who served at Kyungsung Sanitarium, was appointed as the head of Soonan Hospital.<sup>21</sup> The Soonan Hospital was operated by the West Korean Conference in 1941 but was sold to an individual who was not affiliated with the Adventist Church in 1943.<sup>22</sup>

## List of Directors

Riley Russell (1908-1922); H. E. Scoles (1923, 1924); Clyde A. Haysmer (1925, 1926); R. S. Watts (1926-1928); George H. Rue (1929-1941).

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