

Spalding, Arthur Whitefield (1877–1953)

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Arthur Whitefield Spalding was a noted educator, prolific writer, pioneer of the Home Commission at the General Conference, and co-founder of Fletcher Academy.

Early Experience in Battle Creek

Florence and Solomon Porter Spaulding¹ of Jackson, Michigan, became Seventh-day Adventists in 1877, sometime after the birth of their son, Arthur Whitefield Spalding, on January 24, 1877. He was the fourth of their five children. Soon after the family moved to Battle Creek in 1888, eleven-year-old Arthur Spalding found work as a “messenger boy” for the Battle Creek Sanitarium, going back and forth between the San and Battle Creek College, the Review and Herald, and the General Conference. He worked 10 to 12 hours per day but learned typewriting from the office secretaries in the process. He also studied shorthand and, thus, had the requisite skills when he was hired at the age of 14 as secretary to Robert M. Kilgore, superintendent of General Conference District No. 2, traveling with him throughout the Southern states that comprised the district’s territory.² These early experiences deeply influenced the direction of Spalding’s work for the church.



Arthur Whitefield Spalding.

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

In 1894, Spalding began college preparation courses at Battle Creek, but his studies proceeded only on a part-time basis. With his father incapacitated by illness, Spalding took work at the Review and Herald office to help support the family. Beginning in 1896, Spalding worked for two years as secretary to Dr. John Harvey Kellogg, sometimes accompanying the doctor on his travels throughout the nation. Battle Creek College employed Spalding's services in 1898 on behalf of both the school's president, E. A. Sutherland, and the academic dean, Percy T. Magan.³

For the next three years, Spalding also took classes part-time, focusing on English, botany, and what he called the "science of education." He found in the study of botany and outdoor exploration of nature both a deeper connection with the "spiritual realm" and mental invigoration for working through his ideas about writing and principles of education. His studies were animated by the impact of a revival at Battle Creek College in 1897 that gave him a "crusading spirit" and deepened his interest in the writings of Ellen White.⁴

On June 1, 1899, Spalding married Maud Wolcott, a teacher and writer who would develop curriculum programs and materials for preschool children with emphasis on the study of nature.⁵ After the birth of a stillborn child in 1901, the couple adopted a baby girl named Genevieve.⁶

Educational Innovator

That same year, Spalding assisted in Battle Creek College's move to Berrien Springs, Michigan, where it was reconstituted as Emmanuel Missionary College (EMC). He spent the next two years teaching at the Southern Training School in Graysville, Tennessee, but in 1903 was called back to EMC to chair the English Department. At EMC, Spalding introduced a course of study in biblical literature—the first of its kind in Adventist schools. He used the Bible as the foundation for the study of English rather than the Greek and Latin classics. He also developed a student program for fruit-farming, following the guidance of Sutherland and Magan and letters from Ellen White describing the educational and work-study programs at Avondale College in Australia. In so doing, he contributed to development of a model work-study program for schools in America.⁷

In addition to his teaching and program development at the college, Spalding's career as a prolific author took off. During his three years at EMC, he wrote the first of numerous books on the stories and characters of the Bible, *Man of Valor: A Story of the Life of Jonathan Son of Saul*,⁸ and had twenty-three articles published in the *Review* and the *Youth's Instructor*.⁹

On December 31, 1904, the Spaldings' first son, Ronald Wolcott, was born. A second son, Arthur Winfred, followed on October 7, 1906.¹⁰ In the meantime, the family moved to Arpin, Wisconsin, where Spalding had accepted a teaching position at Bethel Academy. After a year teaching the primary grades, he was appointed principal in 1907. In 1908, the Wisconsin Conference ordained him as a minister of the gospel. At Bethel, he broadened his work-study program to include the primary grades and he developed major aspects of the educational methodology and philosophy that would mark his career.

Convinced of the value of storytelling as an educational tool, Spalding incorporated stories into his teaching of religion, history, and nature study. He became noted for his stories about the Adventist pioneers, creating material that would later be published in his volume entitled *Pioneer Stories of the Second Advent Message*.¹¹ He also gathered his Bible stories into two books called *A Book of Little Bible Boys*¹² and *Hero Tales of the Bible*,¹³ and published a textbook on storytelling, *Christian Storytelling and Stories: For Parents, Teachers, and Students*.¹⁴

In 1908, while at Bethel, Spalding published several articles in the *Review* elaborating on his conviction, derived from his study of Ellen White's writings on Christian education, that the ideal school should be patterned after the home. Doing this, he contended, required schools small enough so that teachers could form an individual relationship with each student, and instruct them through benevolent parental guidance and companionship, not as taskmasters.¹⁵

The Spaldings implemented this method by taking students into their own home. Arthur Spalding described the impact on students in a letter to Ellen White: "The results of the home training upon their characters, in making them more earnest, devoted, and capable, helped us in endorsing the teaching that runs all through the book, 'Education,' that the proper home is the ideal school. This is not a theory of ours: it is a truth presented by the Spirit of Prophecy and proved in our own experience."¹⁶

Spalding supported the educational reform program of his former employers, Sutherland and Magan, who had left EMC to establish the self-supporting Nashville Agricultural and Normal Institute in Madison, near Nashville, Tennessee. In a testimony written in 1908 entitled "An Appeal for the Madison School," Ellen White urged that "schools of the Madison order" be set up "in various parts of the South."¹⁷ Spalding believed that the most effective way of putting his educational principles into practice would be to do just that.¹⁸

Encouraged by openings that seemed providential, the Spaldings, along with Maud Spalding's mother and step-father, moved to Asheville, North Carolina, in 1909 with that purpose in mind. However, Ellen White cautioned him against attempting to start a large-scale enterprise. Spalding accordingly stepped back from aggressive plans, devoting himself to canvassing in the North Carolina mountains while at the same time looking for suitable property on which a school might be opened.

In 1910, Martha Rumbough, co-owner of a tourist hotel in Orlando, Florida, provided \$5,000 for the acquisition of 412 acres near Naples, North Carolina, 15 miles south of Asheville. She made her investment in the project contingent on Sidney Brownsberger, who had been the first president of Battle Creek College and later of Healdsburg College in northern California, joining with Spalding in managing the school. The Naples Agricultural and Normal School opened in the autumn of 1910 with Spalding as president and Brownsberger as business manager and treasurer. However, the two leaders soon clashed over Spalding's "family government" model of education, Brownsberger favoring a stricter "by the book" approach. Also, to curb what he saw as Spalding's poor financial judgment, Brownsberger took unilateral actions that compounded the conflict. After a year,

Spalding concluded it would be best for him to withdraw from the school even though, as Brownsberger acknowledged, most of the students favored Spalding over him. The school was later re-named Fletcher Institute, then Fletcher Academy, a charter member of Adventist-Laymen's Services and Industries (ASI).¹⁹

Author and Editor

While still uncertain as to what to do next, after disconnecting from the Naples school Spalding expressed to W.C. White, Ellen White's son and business manager, the issue that lay closest to his heart—parent education to make the home a school, and the school modeled on the ideal home:

We may preach year in and year out, we may bring men, women, and children "into the truth," we may continue to educate in secular and religious matters in church school and training school; but unless we look into the home life we shall fail to find the secret of that instability, that lack of perseverance and energy which has been the bane of our Southern converts; and unless we reach the home life and train right there in Christian principle and living, we shall fail to find the most comprehensive remedy...But little can be taught by precept,—students and families must come in contact with the living of the principles, for a long enough time to eradicate some evils and imbibe some good; and a school which is a home is best fitted for that work.²⁰

After expressing the need in terms of his locale in the South, Spalding went on to make clear that the need was as great for Northern families.

After a year (1911-1912) teaching school in Alpharetta, Georgia, Spalding took on a project of a different kind. Ellen White and W. C. White, impressed with Spalding's letters and articles in church periodicals, commissioned him to research and write two books on sociological and economic conditions in the South—one dealing with the African American population and the other on poorer classes of white people. The books would then show what had been accomplished by Adventist work toward meeting the needs and promote support for extending those efforts.

Spalding spent several months conducting research, for which he travelled throughout the region, interviewing educators, scholars, and government officials, as well as common people. He then spent the first half of 1913 as part of Ellen White's editorial staff at her Elmshaven home in northern California. During these months he completed the first book manuscript, "Lights and Shades in the Black Belt," which included material on the work of the Southern Missionary Society, initiated by J. Edson White, to educate impoverished African Americans. The second, *The Men of the Mountains: The Story of the Southern Mountaineer and His Kin of the Piedmont; with an Account of Some of the Agencies of Progress Among Them*,²¹ was completed after his return to North Carolina and published in 1915 by the Southern Publishing Association. For reasons that are not entirely clear, "Lights and Shades" was never published as such, though portions of it appeared in articles in the *Review* and the *Youth's Instructor*. Spalding himself did not care for the title and felt that the work suffered as a result of the

need to please differing interests.²²

In the summer of 1914, after completing his project for the Whites, Spalding returned to canvassing Christian literature in the vicinity of his home in the mountains of North Carolina. He wrote of his experiences over the next year in *Hills o' Ca'liny*.²³ Another daughter joined the Spalding family with the birth of Kathrina Elizabeth Victoria on November 1, 1914.

The following year, a call to northern Georgia once again disrupted plans to settle in North Carolina. In keeping with counsel from Ellen White, a California couple, Nathaniel and Emiline Hurlburt, had donated six hundred acres in Georgia with a view towards starting a sanitarium, school, and orphanage similar to the program started by Sutherland and Magan in Madison, Tennessee. Spalding was appointed principal of the new school, and served as pastor of the church. The school later became Georgia-Cumberland Academy.²⁴

Before he left Elmshaven, Ellen White inspired Spalding with a new vision for his work going forward, affirming his convictions about the supreme importance of teaching parents how to train their children. Referring to himself in the third person in a published account, Spalding related his interchange with the 86-year-old prophet after she expressed the wish that she “could go out as I used to do” and teach the people about “the great importance of training their children for God:”

“But, Sister White,” said he, “you have taught them. You have counseled them, and they can read it in your books.”

“Yes, I know,” she answered, “it is written there. But I am afraid our people don't read it. I am afraid they don't understand. And it is so important that they understand and do, more important than anything else.”

“Do you mean that the training of parents to train their children is the most important work we have?”

“Oh, yes,” she answered emphatically, “it is the very most important work before us as a people, and we have not begun to touch it with the tips of our fingers.”²⁵

Ellen White gave Spalding a personal charge: “I feel God is calling you to this work,” she told him.²⁶ Forty years later, near the end of his life, Spalding wrote that her words had remained “graven” upon his mind ever since.²⁷

Greater opportunity to carry out that calling came in 1917, when Spalding joined the editorial staff of the *Watchman* magazine, the evangelistic periodical of the Southern Publishing Association, later called *These Times*. During his four years with the *Watchman*, one as associate editor followed by three as editor, twenty-two out of the thirty-four pieces (articles, poems, and editorials) he wrote had to do with home and parenthood, according to a study by Allan William Freed.²⁸ These articles also led to numerous requests to speak at camp meetings and other church gatherings throughout the nation.²⁹

In response to the growing popularity of Spalding's publications, in 1919 the General Conference created the Home Commission as an interdepartmental committee, comprised principally of the heads of the education,

Sabbath School, home missionary, medical, and young people's departments, to coordinate the work of their departments on behalf of parent education. Then, at the Fall Council of 1921, the Home Commission was established as an agency of the General Conference, ratified by the General Conference of 1922. Arthur Spalding, as field secretary, was the sole full-time officer.³⁰

The Home Commission's purpose was to "help in making our homes all that they should be, in love, companionship, instruction, order, and service," Spalding explained to *Review* readers. "It assumes no authority," he added, but "seeks to lead parents into courses of study and practice which will enable them to meet their own problems successfully, so that their children may be trained as efficient workers for God."³¹

An early goal of the Home Commission built on a proposal made by Mrs. W. L. Bates³² to the General Conference Department of Education before the Home Commission was formed for the organization of societies for young mothers, such as the one she had initiated as a Bible worker in Sioux City, Iowa. In consultation with Mrs. Bates, the Home Commission promoted the formation of study groups called Mothers' Societies. Two hundred were formed nationwide, the precursor to the Home and School Associations that became widespread in the second half of the twentieth century. To supply to the societies with study materials, the Commission launched a monthly publication, *Mothers' Lessons*, renamed *Parents' Lessons* two years later to be more inclusive of fathers. Also, the *Christian Educator*, the monthly journal of the Department of Education, became *Home and School*, jointly published with the Home Commission.³³

Another leading achievement of the Home Commission was publication of the Christian Home Series—instruction books covering all phases of parenthood, beginning with marriage and then the stages of childhood development. Spalding authored the first, *Makers of the Home*,³⁴ Dr. Belle-Wood Comstock authored *All About Baby*,³⁵ and the two collaborated on *Through Early Childhood*,³⁶ *Growing Boys and Girls*,³⁷ and *Days of Youth* (1932).³⁸

Despite his extensive publication output, Spalding spent more than half of his time in the field, speaking at camp meetings, conducting home institutes, organizing societies, lecturing at colleges, and counseling parents and leaders.³⁹

During his years as secretary of the Home Commission, Spalding also helped pioneer Junior Missionary Volunteer Summer Camps. He attended the first denominationally-organized camp held in Michigan in 1926 and thereafter initiated and visited junior camps throughout North America. He also, in this pre-Pathfinder era, formed a Mission Scouts organization adapted from the Boy Scouts program in 1919.⁴⁰

In the fall of 1932, while on a train en route from Texas to California, Spalding suffered severe abdominal pain. During surgery to remove a bowel obstruction, physicians at Loma Linda discovered advanced pancreatic cancer and estimated that he had three to six months to live. However, with believers throughout North America praying for him, he recovered in an apparently miraculous manner and was able to resume work by the end of the year, although lacking in endurance.⁴¹

The Home Commission had thrived during its first decade, but Spalding's illness, combined with the financial pressures of the Great Depression, marked a loss of momentum. Spalding soldiered on despite diminishing resources, but in 1941 the work of the Home Commission was subsumed by the Department of Education. At times, Spalding felt the brunt of resistance from other church leaders whom he felt were unable to face up to the home-based problems that he sought to resolve with parent education.⁴² Yet, looking back on the centerpiece of his life's work, he wrote with conviction regarding its far-reaching, if low-profile impact: "Today, in the uttermost parts of the earth...laboring at their posts of service, the messengers of the faith of Jesus, who as children were first trained in homes that followed the Home Commission course, uphold the banner and wield the sword of the gospel on the great battlefields of Christ."⁴³

Historian of Adventism

The Spaldings returned to Madison in 1941 where they remained for the next ten years. Spalding taught classes in social relations and Biblical literature while Maud Spalding developed a model pre-school program.⁴⁴ Arthur Spalding also continued to write, particularly on Seventh-day Adventist history. The General Conference commissioned him to write a comprehensive history of the denomination, published as *Captains of the Host and Christ's Last Legion* in 1949 and revised posthumously in 1962 into the four-volume *Origin and History of Seventh-day Adventists*. This would be the most substantial overall treatment of Adventist history to appear between publication of Mahlon Ellsworth Olsen's *A History of the Origin and Progress of Seventh-day Adventists* in 1925 and *Light Bearers to the Remnant* by Richard W. Schwarz, published in 1978.

In 1951, the Spaldings relocated to Collegedale, Tennessee. Here Spalding wrote *Golden Treasury of Bible Stories*,⁴⁵ published in the spring of 1953.⁴⁶ Early in December, Maud Spalding became ill and was hospitalized in Chattanooga. After Spalding visited with her on the morning of December 15, he told her he would return to spend the afternoon, but after driving about two miles he suffered a fatal heart attack.⁴⁷

Legacy

Arthur Whitefield Spalding initiated and, for more than twenty years, led the Home Commission at the General Conference, an antecedent to the present Family Ministries department. He worked tirelessly to develop curricula for the Adventist educational system, helped establish two educational institutions, wrote scores of books, articles, and poems on parenting and on the history of the Adventist movement. In honor of his contributions, the Southern Missionary College (now Southern Adventist University) Board, on April 15, 1958 voted to name the primary school located on campus the Arthur W. Spalding Elementary School.

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NOTES

1. After researching his ancestry, Arthur Spaulding dropped the "u" from his name, thereafter spelling it "Spalding." Elisabeth McFadden and Ronald W. Spalding, *A Fire in My Bones: A Biography of Arthur Whitefield Spalding* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1979), 97.
2. Allan William Freed, "Arthur Whitefield Spalding: A Study of His Life and Contributions to Family-Life Education in the Seventh-day Adventist Church" (PhD diss., Andrews University, 1995), 50-51, *Dissertations*, 378. <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/dissertations/378>; McFadden and Spalding, 22-23.
3. Freed, 51-52.
4. *Ibid.*, 53-55.
5. "Maud Wolcott Spalding obituary," *ARH*, May 30, 1957, 26.
6. McFadden and Spalding, 33, 34
7. *Ibid.*, 36-41; Freed, 56-57.
8. Arthur Whitefield Spalding, *Man of Valor: A Story of the Life of Jonathan Son of Saul* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1908).
9. Freed, 57.
10. "Ronald Spalding obituary," *ARH*, April 7, 1983, 30; "Arthur Winfred Spalding obituary," *ARH*, August 3, 1967, 30.

11. Arthur W. Spalding, *Pioneer Stories of the Second Advent Message* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1922).
12. Arthur Whitefield Spalding, *A Book of Little Bible Boys* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1921).
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14. Arthur Whitefield Spalding, *Christian Story-Telling and Stories for Parents, Teachers and Students* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1928).
15. McFadden and Spalding, 64-68; Freed, 57-60.
16. A.W. Spaulding to E.G. White, September 12, 1909, Ellen G. White Estate Incoming Correspondence, ellenwhite.org.
17. Ellen G. White, "An Appeal for the Madison School," Pamphlet 119, 1908, 2, Ellen G. White Writings, egwwritings.org.
18. McFadden and Spalding, 64-65.
19. Freed, 60-73; "The Fletcher Story," Fletcher Academy, http://www.fletcheracademy.com/about_us/history/, accessed February 14, 2019.
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21. Arthur Whitefield Spalding, *The Men of the Mountains: The Story of the Southern Mountaineer and His Kin of the Piedmont; with an Account of Some of the Agencies of Progress Among Them* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1915).
22. Freed, 75-76, 78-80. The "Lights and Shades in the Black Belt" manuscript has been made available in the Online Archives, Office of Archives, Statistics and Research, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Books/LSBB.pdf>.
23. Arthur Whitefield Spalding, *Hills o' Ca'liny* (Takoma Park, Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1921).
24. McFadden and Spalding, 92-93.
25. Arthur Whitefield Spalding, *Origin and History of Seventh-day Adventists*, Vol. 3 (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1962), 201-202.
26. Quoted in McFadden and Spalding, 12.
27. Freed, 77.
28. Freed, 81-82.
29. McFadden and Spalding, 98-103.

30. Ibid., 115.
31. Arthur W. Spalding, "The Home Commission," *ARH*, March 30, 1922, 24.
32. Mary E. Bates was a Bible worker in Sioux City, Iowa. See 1920 United States census, Woodbury County, Iowa, enumeration district 209, roll T625_520, FHL microfilm T625, page 14a, digital image, "Mary E. Bates," Ancestry.com, accessed May 22, 2019, <http://ancestry.com>.
33. A.W. Spalding, *Origin and History*, Vol. 3, 202-203.
34. Arthur Whitefield Spalding, *Makers of the Home* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1928).
35. Belle Jessie Wood Comstock, *All About the Baby: The Beginnings of Human Life with Early Needs* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1930).
36. Arthur Whitefield Spalding and Belle Jessie Wood Comstock, *Through Early Childhood* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1930).
37. Arthur Whitefield Spalding and Belle Jessie Wood Comstock, *Growing Boys and Girls: The Training and Culture of the Child in Pre-Adolescence, From Ten to Thirteen* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1930).
38. Arthur Whitefield Spalding and Belle Jessie Wood Comstock, *Days of Youth* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1932); A.W. Spalding, *Origin and History*, Vol. 3, 203-204; Freed, 31-32.
39. A.W. Spalding, *Origin and History*, Vol. 3, 204; McFadden and Spalding, 129-130.
40. McFadden and Spalding, 129-130; Freed, 175.
41. Freed, 192-93.
42. Ibid., 190-196, 251; McFadden and Spalding, 121-125.
43. A.W. Spalding, *Origin and History*, Vol. 3, 205.
44. McFadden and Spalding, 127.
45. Arthur Whitefield Spalding, *Golden treasury of Bible Stories: Two Hundred and Three Bible Stories from Genesis to Revelation* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1954).
46. McFadden and Spalding, 132-133.

47. Ibid., 139.

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