

Venden, Daniel Elvin (1899–1973)

DAN SHULTZ

Dan Shultz, emeritus professor of music, Walla Walla University, has researched and written extensively about Seventh-day Adventist music history and musicians. His publications include *A Great Tradition*—a history of music at Walla Walla University, and the *Adventist Musicians Biographical Resource*—an encyclopedia with biographies of over 1100 Adventist musicians. He founded the International Adventist Musicians Association, serving as its president for ten years and editing its publications and website for over thirty years. Shultz and his wife, Carolyn (nee Stevens), live in College Place, Washington.

Daniel E. Venden, pastor, teacher, singing evangelist, and conference president, was widely known for his dedication and effectiveness as a Seventh-day Adventist administrator and evangelist.

Early Life and Ministry

Dan was born in Stanfold, Wisconsin, on February 6, 1899, the fifth of eight children of Nels Olson Venden, an immigrant from Norway, and his wife Christine Knutson Hovrud Venden.¹ Shortly after the turn of the century, the family moved to the state of Washington. After his father died when Dan was eleven, Christine cared for the children with the help of her oldest son Joseph. She moved the family near Columbia Academy in Battle Ground, Washington so that the children could attend there.² Dan attended Columbia and Laurelwood academies and then graduated from Walla Walla College (now University) in 1923.³ While at WWC, he and his brother, Melvin were active musically, singing as soloists and in the Male Glee Club, a select ensemble.⁴

Following Dan's marriage to Nellie Edna Schnepfer on September 5, 1923,⁵ they accepted teaching positions at Columbia Academy (now Columbia Adventist Academy) where he also served as boys' dean and principal in his second and third year there.⁶ He then served from 1926 to 1930 as Missionary Volunteer secretary in the Oregon Conference.⁷



Daniel E. Venden

Photo courtesy of *Central Union Reaper*, May 23, 1944.

The Venden Brothers

In 1930 the Oregon Conference invited Dan and his brother Melvin to serve as an evangelistic team, initially called "The Venden Brothers, Gospel Singers, Bible Prophecy Lecturers and Evangelists" and later, "The Venden Brothers, Gospel Singers and Evangelists." They held meetings in Oregon, New York City, Philadelphia, and in some of the large cities of Michigan. They moved every year with their families from one city to another, giving a six months series of meetings, usually in an auditorium, five nights a week, along with weekend church services and radio broadcasts. The brothers took turns speaking and leading the music on alternate nights.⁸ They were well known in Adventist circles for their success in evangelism and their singing and were chosen as a team to serve as two of the choristers at the 1936 General Conference session in San Francisco.⁹

Also at the 1936 GC session the Venden brothers were among the prominent evangelists whose advertising was featured in an exhibit, and their handbills were among the winners in a contest in which entries were evaluated for "impressiveness of appearance, appropriateness of title, power of attraction, neatness, balance, dignity, modesty, clarity, style, and technical details" (R. Allan Anderson and H.M.S. Richards were among the others with winning handbills).¹⁰ In his study of Adventist evangelism in the twentieth century, Howard Weeks includes the Venden brothers among the "impressive array of outstanding evangelistic personalities" who thrived during the 1930s and early 1940s.¹¹ Weeks relates two anecdotes highlighting their success:

Among many campaigns conducted during these years by the Venden Brothers (D. E. and M. L.) was a special meeting that filled New York's Carnegie Hall, in the climax of a series of evangelistic services and an intensive program of radio evangelism under the title "Prophetic Searchlight." In Grand Rapids, Michigan, in 1941, the Venden Brothers greatly underestimated their audience appeal and began a campaign in a hall seating only one thousand persons. After a spectacular opening night, when thousands of persons were turned away, the evangelists moved to a larger auditorium seating five thousand, which they very nearly filled!¹²

Administrator, Evangelist, Pastor, Professor

Dan became pastor of the College View Church in Lincoln, Nebraska, in 1943 and a year later became president of the Nebraska Conference, a position he held until 1950. He and Melvin did some evangelistic work in the late 1940s and then from 1950 to 1955 held meetings in California and Arizona until Dan became president of the Central California Conference.¹³

Although he retired after a decade in that position, during the eight years that followed he continued to give Bible studies on Daniel and Revelation on an ongoing basis, pastored the St. Helena and Fairfax, California churches for brief periods, and served a year at Southeast Asia Union College in Singapore as a Bible teacher and pastor of the college church.¹⁴

After several years of being apart, the two brothers and their wives for a time lived a block apart in St. Helena, California, until Dan's health failed and he died on June 30, 1973, at age 74.

SOURCES

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Weeks, Howard B. *Adventist Evangelism in the Twentieth Century*. Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1969.

NOTES

1. 1900, 1920, 1930 United States Federal Census records, Ancestry.com.
2. Marion S. Simmons, "To Ponder" *Far Eastern Division Outlook*, April 1972, 3.
3. "Daniel E. Venden obituary," *ARH*, October 25, 1973, 23.
4. 1922 *Mountain Ash*, Walla Walla College Yearbook.
5. Washington, Marriage Records, 1854-2013 for Dan E. Venden, Ancestry.com.
6. "Principals Honored at Columbia Academy," *North Pacific Union Gleaner*, February 7, 1972, 23.
7. "Daniel E. Venden obituary."
8. "Venden Papers," from *The Venden Story*, unpublished manuscript, 1975, 8; "Daniel E. Venden obituary."
9. Carlyle B. Haynes, "Just This and That at the Conference," *ARH*, June 8, 1936, 204, 205.
10. Howard B. Weeks, *Adventist Evangelism in the Twentieth Century* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1969), 181 (n10).
11. *Ibid.*, 162, 181 (n1).
12. *Ibid.*, 202.

13. "Daniel E. Venden obituary."

14. Ibid.; Social Security Death Index, Ancestry.com.

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