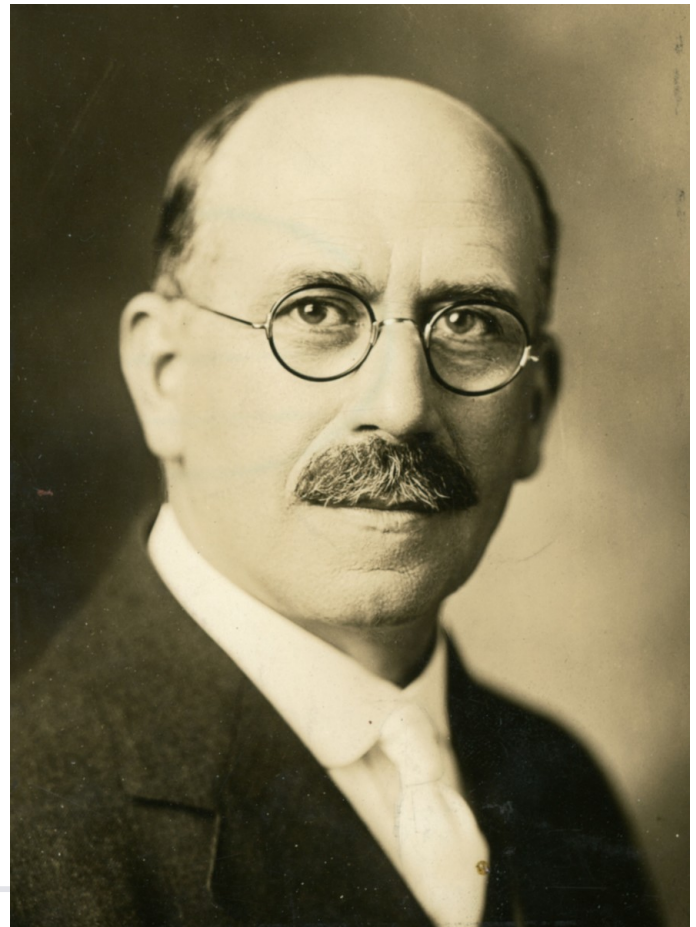


Böttcher (Boettcher), Julius Theodor (1865–1931), and Nellie Loreana (Beebe) (1864–1921)



Julius T. Böttcher, c. 1930. Courtesy of the Review and Herald Publishing Association Photographic Collection, General Conference Archives. Shared by Ashlee Chism.

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Julius and Nellie Böttcher worked as teachers and missionaries, and Julius was an administrator for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the United States, Germany, Switzerland, and what was then the Russian Empire.

Early Life

Julius Theodor Böttcher was born on April 8, 1865,¹ in Lindenwerder, province of Posen, Prussia, to Lutheran parents. Young Julius was confirmed in the Lutheran Church at the age of 14. Unfortunately, his father and mother died in 1879 and 1880, respectively.² As a result, Julius immigrated to the United States of America (U.S.A.) to live with his sister, Mary Just, in Minnesota. During that time, he worked on a farm and attended a public school.

In 1885, W. B. Hill conducted an evangelistic series in Minnesota, and Julius and Mary both accepted the Advent message. Immediately after, Julius wanted to share the Advent message with others as well. He traveled to Battle Creek, Michigan, and attended school there in the German Department led by August Kunz.³

Ministry

By 1887, Böttcher was already working as a lay pastor in Ohio under the Cleveland mission⁴ led by H. W. Cottrell, E. H. Gates, and Julius Swift. In Ohio, Böttcher met Nellie L. Beebe. Nellie Loreana Beebe was born in Norwalk, Ohio, on October 19, 1864. At the age of 12, she was baptized. After her education, she joined the pioneer Bible workers in Ohio Conference, recording marked success. It was in this capacity of mission that she and Böttcher met. They married on November 2, 1887, with R. A. Underwood officiating. "From this union one daughter was born, Olivia Lorena," later known as Mrs. Linden Lockwood.⁵

In the winter of 1888/89, the Böttchers attended an institute (training) for German workers held in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. In April 1889, they accepted a call to Hamburg, Germany.⁶ In Hamburg, the Böttchers joined Jakob Erzberger and Ludwig R. Conradi in organizing several evangelistic series with success. For instance, by November 1889, Conradi reported the "good interest" generated by the lectures held by Erzberger and Böttcher in the city of Barmen.⁷ The next year, on August 25, 1890, Böttcher was ordained to the gospel ministry in Oberweil, Switzerland, with H. P. Holser, J. Erzberger, and L. R. Conradi officiating.⁸ During the cholera outbreak in Hamburg⁹ (1892), Böttcher was asked to lead the mission in Hamburg. At the same time, he started serving as the president of the German-Russian Sabbath School Association Officers.¹⁰

In June 1893, Böttcher and Johann G. Obländer held a tent meeting in Schleswig, Germany. Since this was the first tent meeting ever held in Germany, several people came merely out of curiosity. Nevertheless, a number took an interest in the Advent message, leading to the organization of a church there.¹¹ Another church was organized at Harburg, five miles from Hamburg, after some lectures by Emil Frauchiger and Böttcher. Emil Frauchiger was the one principally working in that area, but because Böttcher was in charge of the mission in Hamburg, he joined efforts with Frauchiger.¹² Hence, Böttcher was an instrumental element in the founding years of Adventism in Germany.

The next year, 1894, after Böttcher served for a short time as the vice president for the German-Russian Tract Society,¹³ the Böttchers returned to the United States. They worked mainly in Minnesota and Ohio as evangelists. Soon Böttcher was called to teach at Union College in Nebraska, where he led the German Department for about seven years, training workers who were preparing for cross-cultural mission work outside the United States.¹⁴

In 1901, the Böttchers returned to Europe. This time, Böttcher served as president of the newly organized German-Swiss Conference in Basel, Switzerland.¹⁵ Nellie began working as matron in the Basel and Gland sanitariums. At the same time, she mastered the German and French languages, which became useful in the

mission.¹⁶ In the autumn of 1901, Böttcher planned a series of evangelistic meetings in Zürich, together with Erzberger. This was to be held as the first mission advance of the new conference. However, Böttcher was also requested to visit the Adventist community in Russia.¹⁷ After he returned, he held lecture series at Grossbasel and Kleinbasel simultaneously. He did not do this work alone; teams were used to facilitate the lectures.¹⁸ These types of lectures, combined with colporteur work, Bible studies, and visitation as the means of mission advance, continued under Böttcher's leadership.¹⁹ Böttcher also led out in the organization and reorganization of several churches that contributed to the already formed foundation of the Adventist denomination among German-speaking Swiss people.²⁰

In 1905, the Böttchers were transferred to the South German Conference,²¹ where he led out as president until 1907. While in South Germany, Böttcher had to deal with the lack of religious liberty suffered by the denomination in that area. Especially in the city of Nürnberg, there was a fine imposed on Free Churches who baptized, celebrated the Lord's Supper, or held any meeting whatsoever. Once, a policeman entered the Adventist place of meeting, took "the name of each member present, and reported the same to the court; each person so reported was fined."²² When Böttcher spoke personally with the minister of interior, he was told: "We do not want you in Bavaria."²³ As a result, Adventists in that city began meeting secretly.

In 1907, when the new Russian Union Conference was created, Böttcher was elected president of the Russian field (covering the Russian Empire except for Finland) in Europe with headquarters in Riga. At the same time, he served as the president of the Baltic Conference.²⁴ Working in the Russian field was riddled with difficulties: the government imposed all kinds of religious restrictions,²⁵ several times the local police prevented Adventists from meeting, permissions were needed but hard to come by, Russian was the only language to be used in religious meetings, offerings were prohibited,²⁶ imprisonments were constant,²⁷ and so on. But these difficulties did not deter Böttcher.

Böttcher's passion hinged upon the spread of the Advent message under his jurisdiction as well as training indigenous workers. His zeal for the Advent message brought him once to speak among the delegates of the Russian Orthodox missionary congress held in Kiev in the summer of 1908. Although he was not an invited guest, he went to the congress venue and pressed the organizers until he got the opportunity to address the congress. After that, he was given an audience to present a lecture on the "immortality of the soul" at the Orthodox Ecclesiastical Seminary as well as a private meeting with the Orthodox Church missionaries.²⁸ In other developments, Böttcher facilitated several public evangelistic meetings, recruitment of colporteurs, the opening and organizing new fields,²⁹ and the establishment of local churches in the vast territory he led.³⁰

In 1911, Böttcher was elected vice president of the European field, although he continued his work in Russia.³¹ Böttcher had a fair amount of success as a leader. By 1913, there were already 223 churches with a membership of 5,528 in Russia.³² In the city of Riga, there were only about 60 members when "Böttcher arrived in that field, but in 1914, when the war broke out, there were more than 600 members."³³

World War I and Later Life

When World War I broke out, Böttcher had to flee to the interior of Russia for safety. At the same time, his wife, Nellie, and their daughter, Olivia, returned to the U.S.A. so that Olivia could attend school there.³⁴ Böttcher later settled in Saratov, from where he continued his administrative duties and mission work. During this time, Nellie Böttcher traveled around the United States, holding lectures and promoting the mission needs as well as the need for educational advancement in Russia.³⁵

In May 1916, Böttcher had to leave Russia because the American embassy could no longer “promise him protection as an American citizen and could not grant him any further passport to travel in Russia.” He traveled back to North America, arriving in British Columbia on June 20, 1916.³⁶

He was able to reenter the United States, and he spoke at camp meetings and visited churches in the U.S.A. and Canada for a few months. In 1917, he was appointed the Bible teacher at Clinton Theological Seminary in Missouri, U.S.A., where the Böttchers made their home. At the same time, in 1918, Böttcher was appointed assistant secretary of the North American Foreign Department in charge of the German work in that region.³⁷ The department was also known as the German Department of the Bureau of Home Missions. As superintendent, he coordinated the employment of workers and organized churches, education, and publishing among the German population in North America.³⁸

About 1921, Nellie fell ill and underwent an operation. On June 15, 1921, Nellie died.³⁹ She was buried at the cemetery of Forest Lawn in California.⁴⁰ Some time later, Böttcher married Clara M. Yeager.⁴¹ In 1930, as a result of his failing health, Böttcher retired. Not long after, he died on January 15, 1931.⁴²

Contribution

The lives of Julius and Nellie Böttcher portray the stark commitment of a husband and wife who served their denomination through thick and thin in mission at home and abroad. Their labors as pioneer missionaries contributed to the founding years of Seventh-day Adventism in Germany and in some cities in Switzerland. As an administrator, Julius Böttcher’s motivation and zeal helped propel the Advent message in Germany, Switzerland, and what was then the Russian Empire. Böttcher’s work in the United States among Germans gave the denomination the opportunity to reach that group in their own context as immigrants. As a teacher, Böttcher contributed to the education of missionaries and workers who, in turn, served their denomination.

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NOTES

1. David Voth, "Elder J. T. Boettcher," *ARH*, February 12, 1931, 28. This is the definitive biography of Julius T. Böttcher. Hence, some of the information will be based on this citation.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. See "Ohio," *Seventh-day Adventist Year Book* (Battle Creek, Mich.: Review and Herald Publishing House, 1888), 6.
5. See R. A. Underwood, "Mrs. Nellie B. Boettcher," *ARH*, July 28, 1921, 22; Voth, "Elder J. T. Boettcher," 28.
6. The call was earlier made by the General Conference for J. S. Shrock to go to Germany. However, Shrock declined, and in his stead, Julius T. Böttcher was recommended. See "Synopsis of the Proceedings of the General Conference Committee," *ARH*, April 9, 1889, 235.
7. Ludwig R. Conradi, "The Hamburg Mission," *Signs of the Times*, December 16, 1889, 11.
8. Voth, "Elder J. T. Boettcher," 28.
9. This was a major cholera outbreak recorded in 1892 in Hamburg, where about 8,600 died. There was even a riot in 1893. See "Cholera Riot in Hamburg," *New York Times*, October 11, 1893, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1893/10/11/109711447.pdf>.
10. See Voth, "Elder J. T. Boettcher," 28; "German Mission Field," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Battle Creek, Mich.: General Conference Association of Seventh-day Adventists, 1893), 37.
11. See Ludwig R. Conradi, "Our First Tent Meeting in Germany," *ARH*, July 4, 1893, 426; Voth, "Elder J. T. Boettcher," 28.
12. See Conradi, "Our First Tent Meeting," 426.
13. "German Mission Field," *Seventh-day Adventist Year Book* 1893, 41.

14. In early Adventist magazines, this college was referred to mainly as Union College. Voth, "Elder J. T. Boettcher," 28.
15. See Karl Waber, *Streiflichter aus der Geschichte der Siebenten-Tags-Adventisten in der Schweiz 1901–1929* (Zürich: Advent-Verlag, 1999), 9.
16. Underwood, "Mrs. Nellie B. Boettcher," 22.
17. Waber, *Streiflichter aus der Geschichte der Siebenten-Tags-Adventisten in Der Schweiz 1901–1929*, 10.
18. For instance, David Voth, a former student at the Union College in Nebraska, was around to help. See J. T. Böttcher, "Anzeige für die Schweiz," *Zions-Wächter*, November 18, 1901, 144.
19. See a detailed report in J. T. Böttcher, "Die Schweiz," *Zions-Wächter*, September 2, 1901, 100; Waber, *Streiflichter aus der Geschichte*, 11–12; J. T. Böttcher, "Anzeige für die Schweiz," *Zions-Wächter*, December 16, 1901, 160.
20. For example, in 1902, Böttcher went to reorganize the St. Gallen Church, a rather weak church in mission, where David Voth had been working. See J. T. Böttcher, "Schweiz," *Zions-Wächter*, April 7, 1902, 57, 65.
21. "South German Conference," *Year Book of the Seventh-day Adventist Denomination* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1906), 73.
22. Julius T. Böttcher, "The Message in Stone," *ARH*, November 2, 1905, 11.
23. The report appeared in later years when Böttcher was in the U.S.A. See Julius T. Böttcher, "Religious Liberty Coming in Other Lands," *Signs of the Times*, August 4, 1924, 5–6.
24. "Russian Union Conference," *Year Book of the Seventh-day Adventist Denomination* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1908), 111.
25. Julius T. Böttcher, "The Gospel to the Russian," *Life Boat*, September 1914, 265–266.
26. Julius T. Böttcher, "Russia—Conferences at Zarazin, Nowrossisk, and Odessa," *ARH*, December 9, 1909, 12–13.
27. "Progress Amid Difficulties," *Central Union Outlook*, February 6, 1912, 8.
28. Julius T. Böttcher, "A Meeting with Russian Priests," *ARH*, November 12, 1908, 12–13.
29. See "Writing briefly from . . .," *ARH*, April 29, 1909, 24; J. T. Böttcher, "Russia," *ARH*, December 2, 1909, 12.
30. Julius T. Böttcher, "The Annual Meetings in Russia," *ARH*, December 17, 1908, 13–14.

31. Voth, "Elder J. T. Boettcher," 28.
32. Julius T. Böttcher, "The Message: Its Proclamation in all Lands a Sign of the End," *ARH*, November 13, 1913, 13–14.
33. Voth, "Elder J. T. Boettcher," 28.
34. Minutes of the General Conference Committee, October 14, 1915, 324, General Conference Archives,
<http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Minutes/GCC/GCC1915.pdf>; Underwood, "Mrs. Nellie B. Böttcher," 22.
35. Underwood, "Mrs. Nellie B. Böttcher," 22.
36. Voth, "Elder J. T. Boettcher," 28; cf. "Our Work and Workers," *Central Union Outlook*, September 21, 1915, 8.
37. "Report of General Conference Missionary Volunteer Department," *ARH*, May 2, 1918, 10.
38. Julius T. Böttcher, "German Department of the Bureau of Home Missions," *ARH*, May 29, 1922, 13.
39. Minutes of the General Conference Committee, June 16, 1921, 1106, General Conference Archives,
<http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Minutes/GCC/GCC1921.pdf>.
40. "California Conference," *Pacific Union Recorder*, March 17, 1932, 3.
41. Voth, "Elder J. T. Boettcher," 28.
42. "Death of Elder J. T. Boettcher," *ARH*, February 5, 1931, 32.

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