

Andrews, John Nevins (1891–1980) and Dorothy Josephine (Spicer) (1892–1979)

JONATHAN GOMIDE

Jonathan Gomide is a theology student at the Adventist Seminary in Northern Brazil (SALT Faama).

John Nevins Andrews, M.D., and Dorothy Spicer Andrews pioneered Adventist mission to the people of Tibet.

Early Life (1891-1913)

Born on January 13, 1891, in Battle Creek, Michigan, to Charles Andrews (1857-1927) and Marie Dietsch Andrews (1864-1958),¹ John was the namesake of his

grandfather, John Nevins Andrews (1829-1883), Adventist scholar and first missionary to Europe²

As a young man, Andrews apprenticed in the Review and Herald Publishing Company. Here he learned printing and stenography—skills that would come in handy in later years. After a fire razed the Review and Herald headquarters on December 30, 1902, the Andrews family moved to Takoma Park, Maryland, following the Review's lead.³

Medicine and Marriage (1914-1916)



John and Dorothy Andrews, c. 1916.

Photo courtesy of Center for Adventist Research.

Andrews began his medical training at the College of Medical Evangelists in Loma Linda, California. In 1914, he moved back to Maryland to finish his medical degree at George Washington University. His graduation yearbook declared that he intended to “go to China as a medical missionary.”⁴

On April 3, 1916, John Nevins Andrews married Dorothy Josephine Spicer (1892-1979) in Baltimore, Maryland.⁵ The wedding was conducted in secret, unbeknownst to the parents, for it was unacceptable to marry while still in school. Dorothy, a graduate of the nurses’ training course at Washington Sanitarium, was the daughter of William A. Spicer, then secretary and later president of the General Conference. Soon after the wedding and John’s graduation, the young couple set sail for China, spending a year in Shanghai learning Chinese.

The Mission Field (1916-1932)

John and Dorothy’s first son, Robert, was born in Chungking (Chongqing) in 1917. They would have five children, all born in China. In 1918 Andrews went on an “exploratory trip” with Merritt C. Warren westward from Chungking to Chengtu then to Tatsienlu (Kangding), on the border of Tibet, where Andrews would start a mission clinic with an evangelistic intent.⁶ Despite being shot at by robbers and ordered to stop several times as they sailed up the Yangtze River on the first leg of the journey, they reached their destination—known as the “Gateway of Tibet,” made their investigation, and arrived back in Chungking safely.⁷

On June 10, 1919, John, Dorothy, and their small son embarked on the same journey to Tatsienlu, using “a large house-boat, big enough to carry all our household and mission supplies.”⁸ The China Inland Mission, a Protestant organization, had a small station in Tatsienlu, and its workers welcomed the addition of Adventist medical work and helped the Andrews with temporary quarters after they arrived.⁹

Working in the Tibetan border region was difficult. Besides natural environmental obstacles, the lamas, or priests of Tibetan Buddhism, ruled the region. The Dalai Lama was invested with supreme civil and religious authority, and though China claimed political sovereignty it was only in the border area that it was partially effectual. Conversion to the Christian religion was forbidden, a crime punishable by death. Dr. Andrews gained the trust of the Tibetans who came to his clinic, particularly with the use of his surgical skills. He told of one patient, for example, who said to him, “I have a little pain in my stomach, won’t you cut me open and see what is the trouble?”¹⁰

Besides his wife Dorothy, the only help Andrews had was a “native carpenter.” This was a man “who learned quickly, and who acquired skill in administering anesthetics to those undergoing operations at such times as Mrs. Andrews could not thus assist.” The number of patient calls during those first two years in mission was over 14,000.¹¹

Besides medical work, Andrews busied himself with producing the first Adventist literature in Tibetan. The Review and Herald had donated a printing press to the mission. But besides hauling the machine over the

ragged terrain, the greater challenge consisted in procuring type in the native language. A Mr. Bao, manager of the Commercial Press of Shanghai, filled in this need. "We are happy indeed in getting off this first sheet in this new language," said Andrews, "and are glad also that it is God's law, with the many good texts which it contains. It has taken much hard work by both my lama teacher and me."¹²

Andrews and his family furloughed for the first time in 1923, seven years after coming to China. After they returned to China a year later, an anti-foreign uprising forced them to flee their home and relocate in Shanghai. They returned to the Tibetan mission as soon as the revolt abated in 1928. However, having spent over a decade in pioneering mission work, John and Dorothy Andrews felt that their children needed further schooling. Besides this, Andrews suffered from a physical ailment. Still, he completed one last project, a book in the Tibetan language bringing together "all essential features of gospel truth."¹³

Later Life (1932-1980)

John Andrews and his family returned to the United States in 1932, during the Great Depression, making their home in Rogersville, Tennessee. Dorothy authored a 12-part series of articles about their missionary experiences that appeared in the *Youth's Instructor* from August to November 1934.

After two years in Tennessee, the family moved to Takoma Park, Maryland. Dr. Andrews worked for a time with Dr. Henry Hadley at the Sixth Street Clinic, serving one of the most impoverished areas of Washington, D.C. At the outset of World War II, Andrews opened his own office in Silver Spring, Maryland. Retiring in 1948, he and Dorothy moved to Loma Linda.¹⁴

Dorothy Spicer Andrews passed away on April 17, 1979, aged 86.¹⁵ Dr. John Nevins Andrews lived to the age of 89; he passed away on October 20, 1980, and was buried in Montecito Memorial Park in Colton, California, next to Dorothy.¹⁶

In a 1936 article about the endeavors of John and Dorothy Andrews, C. C. Crisler, secretary of the China Division, wrote that only "when I heard anew from their own lips the story of their struggles and their successes during their first ten years of service for the Tibetans, could I understand in any adequate manner their tenacity of purpose, their singleness of aim, and their selfless devotion to the mission so opportunely founded."¹⁷ Crisler identified the aim that drove Andrews' pioneering mission work. Broader than temporary preaching or physical healing, it encompassed publishing the Adventist message in native languages and exploratory expeditions. These pursuits opened up an enduring field of work for future generations.

SOURCES

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NOTES

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4. *The 1916 Cherry Tree* (Published by the Students at George Washington University, 1916), 110-111.
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6. Clarence C. Crisler, "Our Tibetan Mission: A Challenge," *ARH*, March 19, 1936, 10.
7. John N. Andrews, M.D., "In the Gateway to Tibet," *ARH*, December 18, 1919, 18.
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11. Crisler, "Our Tibetan Mission," 10.
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