



Noah Wilson Allee

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Allee, Noah Wilson (1848–1907)

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Noah Wilson Allee was an effective church leader in the South and Upper Midwest of the United States.

Early Life (1848-1877)

Noah Wilson Allee was born on May 14, 1848, to Jacob Allee (1819-1899) and Catherine (Wilson) Allee (1820-1892) in Hancock County, Indiana.¹ Catherine Wilson was a Quaker prior to her marriage to Jacob Allee, which occurred on April 18, 1839, but was then quickly “disown[ed] from being a member” because she “accomplished her marriage contrary to [the Quaker] discipline”² -- probably because Jacob Allee was not a Quaker.

Jacob and Catherine Allee remained devout in their faith, raising ten children--six boys and four girls--in a Christian home. Noah Allee was their fifth child, and grew to manhood on a modest-sized farm that his father owned and cultivated. Jacob Allee was a diligent worker and steadily improved his farm throughout his lifetime; between 1850 and 1870 his real estate value increased nearly six-fold. Jacob Allee also taught his sons the art of farming and, like his brothers, Noah Allee seemed destined to continue with this line of work.

Shortly after the Civil War broke out, the regular routine on the Allee farm was broken. On July 30, 1862, the Allee's third child, John W., enlisted as a Corporal in Company F of Indiana's 84th Infantry. John served in the Union Army for nearly two years before being wounded in the Battle of Kolb's Farm near Marietta, Georgia, on June 22, 1864. John Allee died from his wounds the next day and his family was left to mourn the loss of their son and brother.³

Shortly after the Civil War, when Noah was about 19 years old, Jacob and Catherine Allee decided to move their family to Kingston, Caldwell County, Missouri. The Allees joined with two other families from Indiana, the Forts and the Clarksons, and started for Missouri by wagon. The group grew from about six or seven wagons to sixteen or seventeen as more families joined the wagon train. The travellers followed a regular routine during their estimated one month long journey: “they all stopped on Saturday afternoon, baked, bathed and did their washing with no Sunday travel.”⁴ Once Jacob and Catherine Allee had settled in Kingston, they remained there for the rest of their lives.

Shortly after Noah Allee arrived in Missouri, he was baptized into the Christian church.⁵ He continued to work on the family farm until he married Rebecca C. Lake on March 8, 1871.⁶ Within about a year, the Allees had their first child, whom they named Jacob. About two years later, a second child, Philip Edgar, was born.

Around 1874, Noah Allee became ill and traveled to Battle Creek, Michigan, to take treatment at the Western Health Reform Institute (later Battle Creek Sanitarium). While living as a patient at the Institute, Allee became interested in Seventh-day Adventism and began to receive denominational literature during the summer of 1874. Shortly thereafter, he joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church and moved to Towanda, Butler County, Kansas.⁷

Since few Adventists lived in Butler County, Allee (with the help of Henry C. Main) began an attempt to organize all Sabbath-keepers in the vicinity. By 1877, the Whitewater church had organized in Towanda and Allee was

ordained as the local elder in the spring. Since the congregation had no meetinghouse, church services were held alternately in Allee's home and the nearby Holden schoolhouse.⁸ Allee continued to accept church responsibilities and became the Sabbath School superintendent for District No. 9 in the Kansas Conference that summer.⁹

Farmer-Preacher in Missouri (1878-1891)

Allee remained a farmer while he served his local church in Whitewater, other congregations in Sedgwick and Butler counties, and the Sabbath schools in District No. 9. When he moved his family to Missouri in 1878, he purchased another farm and continued to work the land during his fourteen-year sojourn in this state. Allee became a circuit preacher while in Missouri as well. On September 5, 1878, the Missouri Conference granted Allee his first preaching license, and within a few more days he became the director of District No. 2 in the Missouri Tract and Missionary Society and a member of the Missouri Sabbath School Association's executive committee.¹⁰ In time, Allee was elected president of both of these societies and, though he worked in other conferences as well, he remained associated with them throughout his life.

In September 1882, Allee was added to the Missouri Conference executive committee and held this office through the end of 1891.¹¹ On October 13, 1884, he was ordained to the gospel ministry.¹² Allee also served on the executive committee for the Missouri Health and Temperance Society in the 1880s, and was elected vice president in September 1887.¹³ Throughout the 1880s, Allee gained a wide variety of administrative experience through his service for a variety of Adventist societies and associations. He also honed his skills as a traveling preacher and evangelist, serving as the superintendent for the *Signs of the Times* canvass and speaking at various churches and camp meetings. As Allee took on more responsibilities and his family grew again (his only daughter and final child, Effie B., was born on December 25, 1881), he realized that it was time for a change. In 1891, he retired as a farmer and put his 160-acre farm up for sale, along with his crops, stock, and tools so that he could devote himself to fulltime ministry.¹⁴

Minnesota Conference Leadership (1892-1896)

After his farm sold, Allee moved his family to Minnesota, arriving in late 1891 or early 1892. In May 1892, Allee was elected to the Minnesota Conference executive committee, only to be appointed president by the General Conference in March 1893 because the previous president, A. J. Breed, was called to serve at denominational headquarters.¹⁵ The timing of this appointment was crucial as a severe economic depression, known as the Panic of 1893, began to sweep the nation in February. Throughout this crisis, Allee maintained a balanced budget in the Minnesota Conference and fought to pull the Minnesota Tract Society out of debt. By the summer of 1894, the all of the workers were paid and the Tract Society debt was reduced.¹⁶

The General Conference noticed Allee's skillful management of the Minnesota Conference during the Panic of 1893 and appointed him to serve as an auditor with the General Conference Committee in 1896, and throughout the next biennial period. Allee was worn and stressed, however, and asked to "be relieved from the care of the management of a large conference."¹⁷ Though he hoped to have fewer responsibilities, Allee's services had become too valuable to be reduced and, to the contrary, his sphere of influence increased.

District No. 2 Superintendent (1897-1901)

In early 1890, the Adventist Church had adopted a new level of organization, known as General Conference Districts, to supervise local conferences and fields within the United States and portions of Canada. Each district included a different section of North America and was overseen by a superintendent, who, by extension, was also a member of the General Conference executive committee. In the spring of 1897, Allee became the superintendent of District No. 2, which included nine southern states: Kentucky, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana.¹⁸ At this time, there were only two organized conferences with District No. 2, the Tennessee River Conference (organized in 1879) and the Florida Conference (organized in 1893). On September 14, 1900, Allee oversaw the establishment of the Cumberland Conference, which became the third and final Adventist conference to be added to this region before denominational reorganization in 1901.¹⁹

N. W. Allee was a valued counselor and assisted the General Conference directly as a member of the executive committee. He also served as an invited counselor on the Foreign Mission Board in 1896 and between 1898 and 1900.²⁰

Soon after Allee began his work in the southern field with its unique challenges surrounding the "color line," personal tragedy struck. On December 15, 1897, shortly after he moved to Tennessee, his son, Edgar, died suddenly in Savannah, Georgia.²¹ Edgar Allee was serving as secretary of the Southern Tract Society at the time of his death, which came as a shock to his parents and caused a brief interruption in the tract ministry.

In spite of his grief, Allee persisted with vigor in his new position. Primarily, he sought to systematize the work in the south by uniting its various enterprises, which essentially operated independently, primarily due to racial challenges that swelled after the Civil War.²² Nevertheless, Allee witnessed colporteurism and evangelism advances in most sectors of his district. By 1899, every state within District No. 2 held its own annual camp meeting.

James Edson White established the Gospel Herald Publishing Company in Nashville, Tennessee, which began to print *The Tennessee River Watchman* in early 1900. Allee supported this endeavor, and by the spring of 1901 the venture was reorganized as the Southern Publishing Association, officially incorporated in June. Allee was concerned with medical missionary work as well and stressed that more small sanitariums should be organized in the southern states. As a result, he helped establish the Nashville Colored Sanitarium and Training School for

Missionary Nurses, which opened its doors in 1901, touted as “the first institution of its kind ever established for the exclusive treatment of colored patients.”²³

Allee also built up the educational system in District No. 2 by supervising the establishment of more small schools, many of which were operational by the end of 1900. Furthermore, in 1899 the General Conference appropriated \$3,000 to the Southern Industrial School (later Southern Adventist University) for whites and \$5,000 to Oakwood Industrial School (later Oakwood University) for blacks to help establish them as the central schools in the segregated South. Graysville Academy had reopened in October 1898 as the Southern Industrial School with Charles W. Irwin serving as the new principal, and with an increased enrollment that grew to 124 students by the end of the school year. A new business department was established, the curriculum strengthened, new teaching faculty secured, existing buildings renovated, and a new four-story dormitory for women was nearly completed.

Similarly, the Oakwood Industrial School buildings and land were cleaned up and a new barn was built, which enabled the institution's farm to begin covering the school's operational costs and produce a small profit. In 1899, Oakwood had about thirty students enrolled and B. E. Nicola became the third principal (the first to stay beyond two years) in the fall. The curriculum was also significantly improved at this time and school began offering a two-year diploma. Significantly, Allee ensured that all improvements at both schools took place without incurring any debt. Spiritual revivals also coincided at both schools in 1898-1899 due to the implementation of literature evangelism classes. Allee, himself, served as one of the canvassing teachers.²⁴

Racial prejudice made evangelizing blacks in the South very difficult, if not dangerous, yet Allee pushed forward on this front as well. By 1900, there were seventeen fulltime employees of the General Conference who worked almost exclusively in evangelizing African Americans. In addition, there were around ten others that worked part time and several others who donated their services. One of the prominent black leaders on this front with which Allee worked was Lewis C. Sheafe, who pastored in District No. 2 in the late 1890s.²⁵

South Dakota Conference President (1901-1903)

At the thirty-fourth session of the General Conference in April 1901, unions and union missions were organized and the General Conference Districts were dissolved. Due to these changes, Allee was moved from the former District No. 2 and appointed president of the Dakota Conference in June 1901.²⁶ This action also made Allee a vice president of the Northern Union Conference, which completed its organization in May 1902 and governed the conferences and mission fields of Nebraska, Iowa, Minnesota, Dakota, Manitoba, and the Northwest Territory. At the same time, the Dakota Conference was separated into the South Dakota and North Dakota conferences and Allee took the presidency of South Dakota.²⁷

Tennessee River Conference President (1903-1905)

Allee served as president of the South Dakota Conference until April 1903. At this time the General Conference transferred him to the presidency of the Tennessee River Conference.²⁸ Upon returning to the South, Allee resumed his efforts in strengthening evangelism, medical missionary work, and the educational system. He had helped to establish the Hazel Industrial School in Hazel, Kentucky, in 1901, and now helped it grow. In 1904, Allee obtained eighty acres of land for the school and a new building was soon under construction. Before the end of the year, Allee also moved the conference headquarters from Nashville, Tennessee, to Hazel, Kentucky, so that the school would receive more attention.²⁹

Allee's further efforts to develop the South were halted when he contracted consumption in late 1904 or early 1905. In April 1905, he chose to take treatment at the Nashville Colored Sanitarium even though he was white. Though now largely inactive, Allee's mind remained clear and he was still sought as a counselor. For this reason, the conference insisted that he serve another year in spite of his illness. Unable to meet these demands, however, Allee was forced to retire to a dryer climate in Keene, Texas, in the fall of 1905 in hope of recovery.³⁰

Allee spent the final two years of his life in poor health in Keene, Texas. Though his work was cut short, he had helped the Tennessee River Conference become "the strongest [and] largest conference in the Southern Union" during his two years there. For this reason, George I. Butler, president of the Southern Union, believed that "Elder N. W. Allee's labors [had] been blessed of God."³¹

Noah Wilson Allee died peacefully at his home in Keene on September 3, 1907. His funeral was held the next day in the Keene Seventh-day Adventist Church and he was buried in the Keene Cemetery later that afternoon.³²

Contribution

N. W. Allee was an important leader within the first generation of Seventh-day Adventism. His leadership skills were strengthened by years of experience as he was entrusted with greater responsibilities. He shrewdly managed the finances of the Minnesota Conference during the Panic of 1893, which enabled him to better serve the General Conference and District No. 2 throughout the late 1890s and early 1900s. Allee also remained strong in his faith and all three of his children remained in the denomination. He was firm in his conviction that Adventism needed to grow and expand and devoted countless hours to evangelism through the Tract and Missionary Society, the Health and Temperance Society, and the Foreign Missions Board. Allee insisted that Adventist education and medical mission work was vital to the success of the church and sought to strengthen the schools and sanitariums within his sphere of influence. Allee also worked to strengthen black institutions and churches within his district and conference. With tireless effort Allee established himself as a well-rounded, trusted leader in the early Adventist church whose counsel was sought by peers and superiors alike.

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