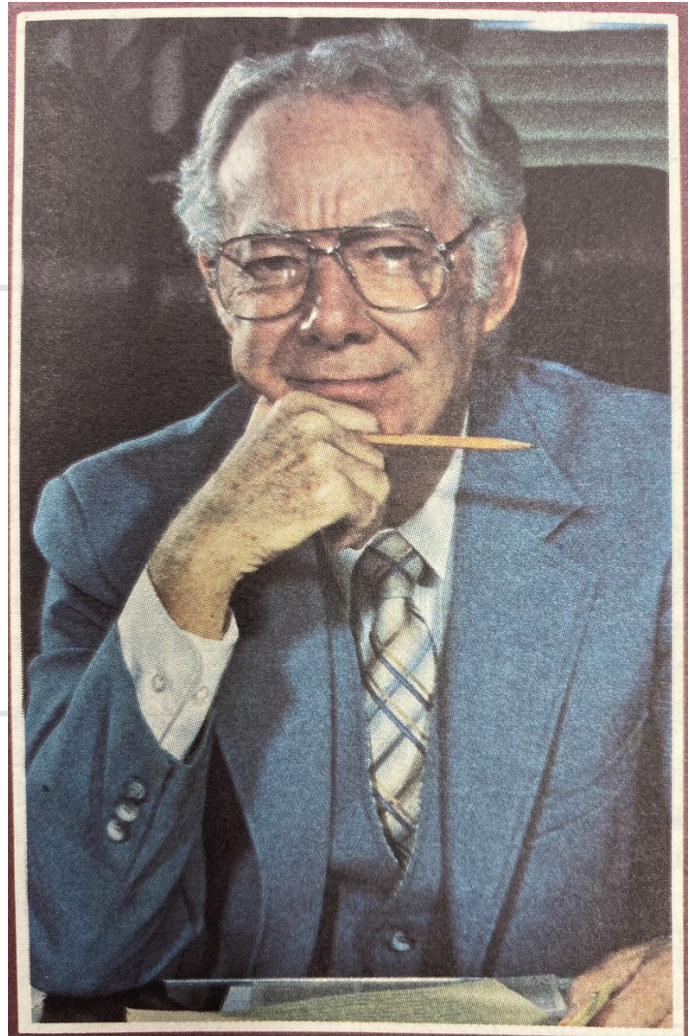


Wood, Kenneth H., Jr. (1917–2008)

MICHAEL W. CAMPBELL

Michael W. Campbell, Ph.D., is North American Division Archives, Statistics, and Research director. Previously, he was professor of church history and systematic theology at Southwestern Adventist University. An ordained minister, he pastored in Colorado and Kansas. He is assistant editor of *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia* (Review and Herald, 2013) and currently is co-editor of the forthcoming *Oxford Handbook of Seventh-day Adventism*. He also taught at the Adventist International Institute for Advanced Studies (2013-18) and recently wrote the *Pocket Dictionary for Understanding Adventism* (Pacific Press, 2020).

Kenneth H. Wood, Jr., served as editor of the denomination's flagship periodical, *Adventist Review* (1966-1982), and chair of the Ellen G. White Board of Trustees (1980-2008). His influence in these positions of high responsibility served as a conservative counterweight to forces that he regarded as detrimental to the church's historic beliefs and mission.



Kenneth Wood

From *Adventist Review*, September 3, 1981.

Early Life

Born at the Red Cross Hospital in Shanghai, China on November 5, 1917, Kenneth H. Wood, Jr. was the second child of missionaries Kenneth H. Wood (1891-1964) and Florence Nightingale Whipple Wood (1884-1967).

Kenneth's older sister and only sibling, Janet Evangeline Wood (Chalmers) (1915-2011) was also born in China!¹

Their parents had met in southern California where Florence, recently graduated from Union College in Nebraska was working as a bookkeeper at Glendale Sanitarium. Kenneth was an orderly at the Battle Creek Sanitarium who moved west to engage in soul-winning work. They married in 1912 and soon afterward left for mission service in China. Wood served as director of the Kiangsu Mission, then later as superintendent of the East China Union and Manchurian Union. Florence served as Sabbath School secretary. They remained in China until 1941 when war-time conditions necessitated their evacuation.²

During his youth, Kenneth, Jr., learned to speak Shanghainese and Mandarin fluently. In later years he attributed his firm commitment to the Adventist message and Ellen White's writings to his early mission experience. Work in print media, a theme of Kenneth's life, began early when he was given the task of setting type for the *China Division Reporter*, working directly under missionaries C. C. Crisler (1877-1936), and his wife, Minnie (1874-1963), who was also his English teacher.³

During furlough his family attended the 1926 General Conference session held in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Upon his return to China, Kenneth, at age nine, became one of the first boarding students at the newly formed Far Eastern Academy. But the trip to the United States had awakened in his heart a love for education back home. He attended Southern California Junior College (1933-1934) for his senior year of high school and then graduated from Pacific Union College in 1938 with a major in Bible and minors in speech and French. He credited Dr. Mary McReynolds' "Spirit of Prophecy" course at PUC with nurturing his interest in Ellen White's writings. His memorable professors included the notoriously conservative W. R. French and biologist Harold Clark, one of Adventism's leading champions of creationism.⁴

While in a freshman English class, Kenneth met another student, Miriam G. Brown (1918-2008), with whom he struck up a friendship as they worked together on campus editorial projects. Wood became editor of the *Campus Chronicle* and worked at the College Press. Together the two revived the *Diogenes Lantern*, the school annual, that had gone dormant.

Pastoral and Departmental Ministry

Upon graduation Wood served as a ministerial intern in Fresno, California. The following summer Kenneth, Jr., and Miriam were married on July 27, 1938, in a service officiated by J. E. Fulton.⁵ Miriam graduated with a degree in history and English and became a high school English teacher throughout her working years. Miriam would also become a prolific author. The couple remained in California, working together in evangelism for the first four years of their married life. Their first child, Janet F. Stoehr was born in 1939.

From January to March 1942 Wood studied for a term at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, located in Takoma Park on the Maryland-Washington, D.C. border. That summer at camp meeting he was ordained to the gospel ministry.⁶ He would go on to serve as a pastor in West Virginia where their next child, Carole Miriam Xander (1943-2017), was born. After further pastoral ministry in Cleveland, Ohio, Wood accepted a call to the New Jersey Conference in 1947 to serve as secretary (director) of the Home Missionary, Sabbath School, Temperance, and Press Relations departments. Then, in 1951 he was elected Sabbath School and Lay Activities director for the Columbia Union Conference, comprising the mid-Atlantic region.⁷

Early Years at the *Review*

In 1955 Wood approached Francis D. Nichol (1897-1966), editor of the *Review and Herald*, about the possibility of editorial work. A short time later, Nichol, “the chief” as he was known among his staff, invited Wood to join the editorial team as an assistant editor. Two years later he became an associate editor.⁸ During these formative years, Nichol and Wood developed a close “father-son” relationship with the senior editor grooming the latter to become the next editor. Wood fondly remembered how Nichol pushed him to seek excellence by taking “great care in words.”⁹ Wood simultaneously continued work on his master’s degree in systematic theology and Greek from the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, completed in 1959.

Wood’s position at the denomination’s headquarters as a *Review* editor gave him close proximity to a series of historic consultations between Adventist theologians and influential American evangelicals, principally Donald Grey Barnhouse, editor of *Eternity* magazine, and author Walter R. Martin. Their principal concern was what Adventists taught about the deity of Christ, the finality of the atonement made at Calvary, and the authority of the Bible. The responses on these central issues given by a small group of Adventist leaders authorized by the General Conference administration, published in 1957 in the book *Questions on Doctrine (QOD)*, satisfied Barnhouse and Martin that they should regard Adventists as fellow Christian believers, despite serious disagreements with them on other points of doctrine.¹⁰

Though widely celebrated as a breakthrough toward better public understanding of Adventists, the rapprochement with evangelicals exposed and exacerbated a theological divide within Adventism. Wood, along with a sizable contingent of Adventist pastors and teachers, held strongly to the theology that M. L. Andreasen (1876-1962) articulated in books, issued by denominational publishing houses, that won a wide readership in the 1930s and 1940s. These Adventists contended that *QOD* contradicted or undermined teachings central to Adventism: that Jesus had a sinful human nature but achieved sinlessness through constant reliance on God; that there was a sense in which Christ’s work as High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary was needed to bring atonement to completion; and that Christ would return when a final generation of believers demonstrated the victory over sin that Jesus modeled and had shown to be possible for sinful humans.¹¹

Wood believed that Andreasen should have been included in the “evangelical conferences” and that without him the Adventist representatives, however well-meaning, “just gave away the store.”¹² He contended that language used in expressing points of agreement “meant something very different” in the Reformed theological heritage shared by Martin and Barnhouse than they did to Seventh-day Adventists.¹³ As Wood saw it, the Adventist church had been “very united” prior to the dialogue with evangelicals but unfortunately that unity had been “lost” as a result of the publication of *QOD*, which remained as “a kind of thorn in the flesh” for the denomination.¹⁴ The church leaders involved in producing *QOD* saw much in the Adventist theological heritage that supported their positions, but Wood saw advocacy for the sinful human nature of Christ and “last generation theology,” as it became known, as necessary for the restoration of an historic Adventist unity that had been disrupted.

Review Editor as Conservative Counterweight

In 1966, Wood's influence in the denomination would be heightened. When F. D. Nichol died suddenly just ten days before the General Conference session, C. E. Palmer (1900-1989), general manager of the Review and Herald Publishing Association asked Wood if he would produce the *General Conference Bulletins* during the session. Wood agreed and thereby became acting editor of the *Review*. The Sunday after the session was over, the *Review* board met and elected him as editor, a position he held until his retirement from full-time denominational service in 1982.¹⁵

Wood worked closely with Robert H. Pierson (1911-1989), who was elected General Conference president in 1966, the same year that Wood took the helm at the *Review*. They met on a weekly basis for lunch, often in the president's office until Pierson's retirement in 1978. Wood admired Pierson's spiritual and pastoral leadership of the world church.¹⁶ Thus, there was a strong affinity between the two leaders' outlook on the church and problems that must be met.

Though he benefitted from his good rapport with the GC president, Wood also cherished the editorial independence that the *Review* had held from its beginnings. Thus, he believed that as editor, it was his responsibility to address developments that endangered the spiritual health and mission of the church. For example, he was concerned that plans to place a new Veteran's Hospital on the campus of Loma Linda University could lead the church toward a dangerous enmeshment with government funding and control. He applied pressure through print, and the new facility ended up being located near the campus instead of on actual school property. Late in his tenure as editor, Wood called the church to greater ethical accountability when the Davenport bankruptcy exposed financial conflict of interest and unsound procedures on the part of some conference and union conference officials in the investment of church funds.¹⁷

Similarly, Wood took sides in the theological controversy stemming from the 1950s, in which passions ran much more deeply. In the 1970s conflict intensified between the heirs of Andreasen's last generation theology and those who, continuing in the course charted by *QOD*, affirmed an evangelical soteriology that lifted up justification by faith and saw proclamation of this gospel as the key to fulfillment of Adventism's mission to the world. Australia became an arena of particularly sharp conflict that centered on the question of whether "righteousness by faith" confers salvation based solely on God's free declaration of "justification" or whether it is also partly based on "sanctification" in which the believer experiences power from the Holy Spirit to overcome sin.

When the General Conference convened a group of scholars and church leaders at Palmdale, California, in 1976 to thrash out the issue, Pierson, seeking to avoid a direct conflict, was satisfied with an outcome nebulous enough to allow both sides to claim affirmation.¹⁸ Wood, on the other hand, published a special issue of the *Review* setting forth what he characterized as the correct "historic" and "balanced view" of the controverted issue, namely that righteousness by faith is both "imputed and imparted and involves both justification and

sanctification.”¹⁹

The conflict became a major crisis in 1979 when Australian theologian Desmond Ford, already the most influential and controversial advocate of the “justification only” position, openly challenged historic Adventist teaching about the final phase of Christ’s high priestly work in heaven beginning in 1844. Wood used the full force of the denomination’s general church paper to defend the church’s traditional teaching against Ford’s influence.²⁰

Continued concern on Wood’s part about Ford and related issues was the backdrop for perhaps the most controversial editorial of his tenure, “Colleges in Trouble,” which appeared in February 1980. It addressed a drift toward secularization that he perceived at Adventist colleges. This contributed to what he described as “the strange wind of doctrine” blowing “on some campuses.” Accompanying such heterodoxy, he saw troubling evidence of “lax moral standards.”²¹ This editorial generated significant backlash, including a response from the union presidents of North America who requested a change in editorship. The strong reaction ultimately contributed to his decision to retire in 1982.²²

Controversy aside, Wood’s editorship was also marked by a change in the publication’s name from *Review and Herald* to the *Adventist Review* in 1978.²³ Overall, he would contribute more than 1,300 articles and editorials to the periodical.²⁴

White Estate Leadership

At the same time that Wood was elected *Review* editor he was also elected a lifetime member of the Ellen G. White Estate Board of Trustees. He would hold this position until his death in 2008. In 1980 he was elected chairman of the Board of Trustees and became the longest serving person to date to hold that position.²⁵ Even as an octogenarian he was known to come in several mornings each week. Wood’s position meant that he remained an *ex officio* member of the General Conference Executive Committee.

During these years Wood helped to supervise a number of compilations put out by the Ellen G. White Estate. Other significant projects included supervising the installation of Alfred Lee’s “Christ of the Narrow Way” painting in the White Estate visitor’s center at the General Conference. Wood also published an accompanying picture book explaining the significance of the mural.²⁶

Wood’s leadership of the *Review* and involvement with the White Estate Board of Trustees occurred at a particularly tumultuous time for Adventism. In the 1970s, Wood had strongly opposed the work of historian Ronald L. Numbers and his 1976 book, *Prophetess of Health: A Study of Ellen G. White*. Wood believed that the central problem with Numbers was that he “left out . . . the inspired element entirely.”²⁷ This assessment did not deter Wood’s commitment about making Ellen White’s writings more accessible. Under Wood’s leadership a number of branch offices and research centers of the White Estate were opened around the world. It was also

during his leadership that some major shifts occurred that resulted in greater access to Ellen White's unpublished writings such as eliminating the "Z" file, a collection of sensitive, unpublished letters, in 1987, so that these documents were no longer restricted.²⁸

Legacy

In 1979 Andrews University conferred on Wood an honorary Doctor of Letters degree, befitting for a man who loved letters. Miriam and Kenneth Wood both died in 2008 and are buried next to one another.²⁹ Each was a recognized author in their own right using their pens as a tool to communicate to the world church. Kenneth Wood, Jr., a stalwart conservative who embraced the role of "defender of the faith,"³⁰ leveraged his influence to protect, as he thought best, the theological heritage of Seventh-day Adventism.

Books by Kenneth H. Wood, Jr.

The Christ of the Narrow Way: A Heroic Mural Based on the First Vision of Ellen G. White Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1991.

His Initials Were F.D.N.: The Life Story of Elder F. D. Nichol, For Twenty-One Years Editor of the Review and Herald (with Miriam Wood). Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1967.

Meditations for Moderns: Three-Minute Devotional Readings for Daily Inspiration Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1964.

Short Essays on Relevant Religion. Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1972.

SOURCES

"Biographical Sketch of Kenneth H. Wood." *ARH*, January 22, 2008. Accessed December 15, 2020, <https://www.adventistreview.org/archive-1620>.

Blackmer, Sandra. "The Life and Times of Kenneth H. Wood." *ARH*, January 22, 2008. Accessed December 15, 2020, <https://www.adventistreview.org/2008-1503-8>.

Kellner, Mark A. "Former Adventist Review Editor Wood Dies at 90." Adventist News Network, May 26, 2008. Accessed December 15, 2020, <https://adventist.news/en/news/former-adventist-review-editor-wood-dies-at-90>

Land, Gary. "Kenneth S. [sic] Wood." *Historical Dictionary of the Seventh-day Adventists*, 2nd ed. New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015.

Schudel, Matt. "Kenneth H. Wood; Adventist Editor." *Washington Post*, June 25, 2008.

"A Tribute to Elder Kenneth H. Wood." Ellen G. White Estate. Accessed December 15, 2020, <https://whiteestate.org/legacy/issues-khwood-asp/>.

Wood, Kenneth H. Interview transcripts. April 11-12, October 13, and November 22, 2005. Oral Histories, Archives and Special Collections, Heritage Research Center, Loma Linda University.

NOTES

1. "Kenneth H. Wood obituary," *ARH*, October 8, 1964, 25; "Florence Nightingale Wood obituary," *ARH*, July 6, 1967, 30; "Janet Evangeline Chalmers," Find A Grave, Memorial ID no. 210395029, accessed December 19, 2020, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/210395029/jane-evangelina-chalmers>.
2. Kenneth H. Wood obituary"; "Florence Nightingale Wood obituary."
3. Kenneth H. Wood interview, April 11, 2005, Oral Histories, Archives and Special Collections, Heritage Research Center, Loma Linda University, 2, 7, 9.
4. *Ibid.*, 9, 21.
5. Kenneth H. Wood interview, April 12, 2005, 29.
6. *Ibid.*, 36.
7. *Ibid.*, 47.
8. *Ibid.*, 50; "A Tribute to Elder Kenneth H. Wood (1917-2008)," Ellen G. White Estate, accessed December 15, 2020, <https://whiteestate.org/about/issues1/ref-lib/add-docs/kenneth-h-wood/>.
9. Kenneth H. Wood interview, April 12, 2005, 51, 53.
10. George R. Knight, *A Search for Identity: The Development of Seventh-day Adventist Beliefs* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 164-166.
11. *Ibid.*, 167-171.
12. Kenneth H. Wood interview, April 12, 2005, 41.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*, 42, 45.

15. Ibid., 41-42, 45.
16. Kenneth Wood interview, October 13, 2005, 7.
17. Kenneth H. Wood interview, April 12, 2005, 54-55. See for example Wood's editorial, "The Davenport Loans," *AHR*, October 22, 1981, 3, 13.
18. Kenneth H. Wood interview, October 13, 2005, 43-44. See also Gilbert M. Valentine, "Palmdale Conference (1976)," *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists*, accessed April 20, 2021, <https://encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=39XL>.
19. Kenneth H. Wood interview, October 13, 2005, 49.
20. Gilbert M. Valentine, "Glacier View Sanctuary Review Conference (1980)," *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists*, accessed April 19, 2021, <https://encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=79CV>.
21. Kenneth H. Wood, "Colleges in Trouble," *ARH*, February 21, 1980, 3.
22. Based on personal knowledge of the author from restricted oral history interviews.
23. Gary Land, "Kenneth S. [sic] Wood," *Historical Dictionary of the Seventh-day Adventists*, 2nd ed. (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 376.
24. Search results for "Wood, Kenneth, H." at the *Seventh-day Adventist Periodical Index* list a total of 1,368 articles and editorials; accessed December 18, 2020, https://encore.andrews.edu/iii/encore/search/C_SWood,%20Kenneth%20H.__Ff:facetcollections:1:1:SDA%20Periodical%20Index::__Orighresult__U__X0?lang.
25. "Officers of the White Estate Board," About the White Estate, accessed April 20, 2021, <https://whiteestate.org/about/estate/#faq8af45115-68de-4a45-a58e-ea0ce62c7947>.
26. *The Christ of the Narrow Way: The Christ of the Narrow Way: A Heroic Mural Based on the First Vision of Ellen G. White* (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1991).
27. Kenneth H. Wood interview, November 22, 2005, 31.
28. Merlin D. Burt, ed. *Understanding Ellen White: The Life and Work of the Most Influential Voice in Adventist History* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2015), 219.
29. Mark A. Kellner, "Former Adventist Review Editor Wood Dies at 90," Adventist News Network, May 26, 2008, accessed December 15, 2020, <https://adventist.news/en/news/former-adventist-review-editor-wood-dies-at-90>.
30. Matt Schudel, "Kenneth H. Wood; Adventist Editor," *Washington Post*, June 25, 2008, B7.

encyclopedia.adventist.org is an official website of the [Seventh-day Adventist World Church](#)

© 2020 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists 12501 Old Columbia Pike Silver Spring , MD 20904 USA 301-680-6000