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## Parker Smith, Samuel (1872–1952)

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### ENOC IGLESIAS ORTEGA

Enoc Iglesias Ortega, Ph.D. (University of Morelos, Mexico), is an associate professor at the Adventist University of Colombia and editor of the university journal of studies and research. He has written seven books and has co-authored two others besides having written numerous magazine articles. He has worked for the Adventist Church as university president, academic vice president, and general secretary, as well as university director of admissions and records. He is married to Aura Graciela González Arjona and has two adult children.

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Samuel Parker Smith, known as Parker or S. Parker, was a missionary to the Island of San Luis, Colombia and

Panama.

## Early Years and Family

Samuel Parker Smith was born on January 16, 1872, in Battle Creek, Michigan. He was the fourth of five sons born to Uriah Smith and Harriet Newall (Stevens) Smith (1832-1903; 1831-1911). Parker Smith graduated from Battle Creek College in 1895.<sup>1</sup> In 1899, he married fellow Battle Creek College student, Bessie Frances Stowell (1870-1946). The couple adopted three children after they returned from the mission field in 1910.<sup>2</sup>

Following their marriage, the Smiths settled at Bethel Academy in Poy Sippi, Wisconsin, where S. Parker Smith taught. Later in the year, the Smiths moved to the recently opened Woodland Industrial Academy in Springfield, Illinois, to serve as dormitory deans.<sup>3</sup>

## Missionary Work

In 1901, the Smiths arrived as missionaries on the Colombian Island of San Andrés (Saint Andrews)<sup>4</sup> Apart from a brief interlude in 1906, they would remain in the Inter-American Division until 1910.<sup>5</sup> Parker Smith established a school in San Luis on said island and labored with Pastor Frank J. Hutchins and the Australian doctor, John Eccles.<sup>6</sup> Tragedy struck the Adventist church when both of these missionaries died and the inexperienced Parker Smith had to continue the missionary activities with the assistance of his young wife.<sup>7</sup>

Referring to the Colombian Islands of San Andrés and Providencia, "The last quarter the average attendance of the Sabbath-school has been about thirty-three."<sup>8</sup> Despite this inauspicious beginning, by 1955, one-third of the population of Providencia would become Adventists.<sup>9</sup> Parker Smith's tasks were varied, largely focused on the social, educational, and spiritual aspects of the work in San Andrés, before the Church was organized there!<sup>10</sup> Through the friendship of Captain Theodore (Tim) Robinson, Smith was able to promote his idea of setting up an Adventist school. In addition to Robinson's fruitful support, Smith's and his wife's passion for Christian education was shared by the May, Escalona, Stephens, and Newball families.

Smith's idea that the youth of the islands should go to continental Colombia or other countries to pursue studies left a deep impression on the minds of Adventist parents.

While carrying out his multiple duties, tragedy befell the family. His father, Uriah Smith, died in 1903. Parker Smith learned the fateful news three weeks afterwards.<sup>11</sup> In spite of this significant loss, he continued in his work in Colombia and Panama. Among his highest priorities was fostering the potential he saw in the island's young people. He encouraged the emigration of young men and young women to other countries where they could enjoy better educational prospects. Examples of those who benefitted by this policy were Dr. Zelotes Pusey and Pastor Rudolph T. Newball.<sup>12</sup>

## The Final Years

In 1910, Bessie Smith's health required a permanent return to the United States as she had contracted malaria. Parker Smith accepted a call to teach at San Fernando Valley Academy in California, where he taught science, Latin, and woodworking.<sup>13</sup> He served there in a teaching capacity for eight years. After his wife, Bessie, passed away in 1946, he married Catherine Small in 1952. At the age of 90, Smith passed to his rest in San Fernando, California, August 3, 1962.<sup>14</sup>

## Legacy

Samuel Parker Smith baptized the first Colombian converts to Adventism. The photographer Frank C. Kelley had arrived in 1895 disseminating the Adventist message, but without any visible fruits. The socio-cultural mosaic that characterizes the Colombian islands of San Andrés, Providencia, and Santa Catalina constituted a great challenge for Smith.

Many adverse events point to the fact that the pioneers of the Adventist work in Colombia carried out their work in the midst of hostile circumstances that required dependence on God, prayer, fasting, and the need to intervene with the legally constituted authorities in order to gain respect for Adventist members and institutions and, in so doing, running considerable risks.<sup>15</sup> The threat of confiscation of land and goods, the negative propaganda against Adventists, hearings before state and other authorities reveal the obstacles these pioneers were forced to face. It was not an easy task to be a missionary in this country.<sup>16</sup>

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"Since our last issue, the graduating exercises of the Battle Creek College have been held." *ARH*, June 25, 1895.

## NOTES

1. Mrs. S. Parker Smith, "Colombia," "St. Andrews Islands," *ARH*, December 3, 1901, 12.?
2. "Bessie Frances Stowell Smith obituary," *Pacific Union Recorder*, July 17, 1946, 6.?
3. "S. Parker Smith obituary," *ARH*, October 4, 1962, 25; "S. Parker Smith obituary," *Pacific Union Recorder*, August 20, 1962, 6; "Bessie Frances Stowell Smith obituary," *Pacific Union Recorder*, July 17, 1946, 6.?
4. Daniel A. Duffis, *Blessed Heritage. The History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church on San Andres and Old Providence Islands* (Medellín, Colombia: Litografía ICOLVEN, 2000), 154.?
5. "Fernando College," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1906), 93; "News Items," *Pacific Union Recorder*, September 27, 1906, 2.?
6. Duffis, 154.?
7. *Ibid.*, 26, 154.?
8. Rafael Escandón Hernández, *Monedas de oro. Reminiscencias de la familia Escandón* (Clearlake, CA: Perfect Printers, 2005), 47.?

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*Ibid.*, 154.?

*Ibid.*, 33-34.?

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*Ibid.*, 176.?