

Andross, Elmer Ellsworth (1868–1950)

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Elmer Ellsworth Andross was an evangelist, administrator, educator, author, and missionary. The end of the 19th century was a period of significant losses for the Seventh-day Adventist church with the death of pioneers James White, J. N. Andrews, and Uriah Smith; the apostasies of bright lights such as Albion Fox Ballenger and John Harvey Kellogg, and losses of institutional buildings to fire. This period has also been described as the turning point toward unity, reform, solvency, and ardent evangelism, and Elmer Andross was an integral part of these changes.

Early Life

Elmer Ellsworth Andross was born April 8, 1868, in Ottawa, Le Sueur County, Minnesota, where he lived until he was eight years old. He was the second youngest of nine children born to William Henry Andross (1825-1905) and Sophronia Wilson (Winegar) Andross (1827-1900).¹ His father moved the family to Oregon, where Elmer was baptized into the Methodist Church at the age of 15. Elmer Andross lived in Oregon until he was 23 years of age.²



E. E. ANDROSS
President

BRITISH UNION CONFERENCE
1905 ————— 1908

Elmer Ellsworth Andross

Photo courtesy of British Union Conference Archives.

The family joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Milton, Oregon in 1885, following tent meetings led by Elder Henry W. Decker.³ Elmer was also baptized during those meetings, but there is no evidence his siblings joined at that time.⁴ Elmer's parents' faith in the Advent message was said to be unswerving to the last.

Andross gave an interesting account of his childhood, and decision to become a minister, in an article he wrote to young men and young women:

I ... was ambitious, filled with pride, and had set my earthly goal high. Though I came of humble parentage and had nothing by inheritance of which to boast, yet on one side there was wealth and on the other side some of my relatives had obtained preferment both in military and political life. This was sufficient to fill my young mind with visions of wealth, of fame, of power. Two of my school friends were sons of a United States Senator, while the fathers of others were in various professions. This helped to fire my imagination, and in my heart my aspirations were high.

I chose the profession of law with the idea of making that the path to political preferment. I resolved that I would pay any price in the way of hard labor and sacrifice, that I might win the coveted prize.

Perhaps you will ask, 'After having thus firmly resolved upon the course to be pursued, why did you abandon it?' It ... came in answer to the prayers of my godly mother, who had formed for me plans vastly different from those that I had conceived; though not till long after I had entered the ministry did she tell me of her expectations. Shortly after I had reached my decision regarding the course I would follow in life; I was unexpectedly led to the point of surrendering my heart to God.

A voice was heard, not audible but clear and distinct, calling me to give my life to the ministry of the gospel. This was in every way so vastly different from my cherished plans that it seemed impossible to make the change. But with the passing of time the conviction grew till it became deep and strong that God was calling me to proclaim to lost men the glorious gospel of the blessed God.

I counted the cost, fully realizing that to follow my convictions I must surrender my ambition for wealth and accept a life of poverty; instead of popularity and power there might be ignominy and persecution⁵

Education and Marriage

Andross married Sophie Philene Miller on May 1, 1889. Sophie was born at Windsor, near Healdsburg, California, on March 25, 1869, to Aaron and Samaria Miller. The Miller family had attended the second series of Seventh-day Adventist meetings held on the Pacific Coast, conducted by Elders John Norton Loughborough and Daniel T. Bourdeau. Sophie's father accepted the Advent Message just before her birth, and her mother soon afterward. They became early Adventist pioneers in Oregon when Sophie was about two and a half years old⁶

From childhood Sophie was spiritually inclined. At 15 years of age, she was organist for Elder George W. Colcord during his summer series of tent meetings, and the following season she continued as organist for Elder Henry W. Decker, at Summerville. It was during these latter meetings that she met Elmer Andross, who, at that time, was attending college in preparation for ministry.⁷

Following their marriage, they had two sons, Celian Emerald Andross in 1891 and Ellsworth Matner Andross in 1896.

Sophie suffered many of the ailments common to those days that were to influence Andross' early ministry moves. She contracted tuberculosis, and the family was forced to return to California. During special prayer for her, Sophie pled with the Lord to spare her just long enough to raise her two boys. The desire was granted. But the tuberculosis returned, and in 1917 she died at their home in Glendale, happy that Celian and Ellsworth had reached manhood.⁸

In 1920 Andross was re-married to Anna Matilda Erickson. She was born February 10, 1880, in Aalborg, Denmark, and immigrated to the United States with her family while still a child. A 1907 graduate from Union College, Matilda moved to Washington, D. C. to work as assistant secretary for the Young People's Missionary Volunteer Department under M. E. Kern.⁹ When she married Andross, she had become assistant secretary of the Missionary Volunteer department of the General Conference.¹⁰ They had a large wedding in Washington, with many friends and co-workers in attendance.¹¹ Matilda died February 9, 1957, in Glendale, California, following injuries sustained in an automobile accident.¹²

Early Ministry

Andross began his active evangelistic work in Oregon in 1888, as tent master with Elder Henry W. Decker, continuing until he was ordained to the ministry in 1891 at Walla Walla, Washington, by Elders Henry W. Decker and William Warren Prescott.¹³

Following ordination he was called to Southern California in autumn 1891, initially in San Diego, and later in Los Angeles, continuing in evangelistic work until 1894. Then followed two years as Bible teacher at Healdsburg College (now Pacific Union College). This sedentary work was a little hard on his health, and he much preferred more active service, so he returned to evangelistic and pastoral work in San Francisco from 1896 to the spring of 1899, with Sophie serving as Bible worker.¹⁴

Great Britain

Early in 1899 Andross accepted a call from the General Conference Foreign Mission Board to serve in Great Britain. On May 3 that year the family sailed from New York on the steamer *St. Louis* for their new field.¹⁵

With the rapid expansion of the church overseas, Andross' qualities had always been in demand for him to work as a missionary. In 1897 the Foreign Mission Board had passed on an invitation for Andross to be a minister to Samoa as they needed a man "young and able to readily acquire the language".¹⁶ Andross turned down the invitation in favor of going to Great Britain.¹⁷ This did not deter the Board from unanimously passing a motion in May 1890 recommending "in case E.E. Andross returns from England, he be invited to take the superintendency of the work in Japan".¹⁸ It was some years before he found himself in Japan, but it would be in a different role.

The Ellsworths' journey to England commenced two days after their 10th wedding anniversary. Together with their boys, they joined "the largest company of mission workers of our people that ever sailed at one time" on the United States steamship *St. Louis* to England. They were led by Elder Ole Andres Olsen (former General Conference president from 1888 to 1897). Of the 32 in the group, 15 went to the British Field.¹⁹

Despite their missionary fervor it was something of a financial risk for the missionaries. The Foreign Mission Board recorded that though they were sympathetic to the work in Great Britain, they could not guarantee financial support to Andross and the four elders going there as missionaries.²⁰ However, this did not dampen the faith and enthusiasm of Andross and the group.

Their faith was abundantly repaid when, in June 1899, a month after arriving in England, Andross' former ministerial associates in the California Conference voted \$1,000 (valued at approximately \$31,000 today) to the work in England, with the understanding that "from it Elder Andross, who has gone to that field, would be sustained."²¹

After spending a little time in London, Andross and family spent the winter of 1899 in Liverpool, where he assisted in organizing "an earnest, working church of about forty members." In spring 1900 he spent a few weeks visiting churches and companies, winning souls and organizing churches in the English Midlands. Following these successes, in early May 1900 he was asked to move to Birmingham, where he pitched a tent and began meetings, assisted by the incumbent Brother Hall. By the end of July, they had 16 new Sabbath keepers, and interest was increasing.²²

On April 11, 1900, his mother Sophronia Andross died and was buried in Walla Walla, Washington, with him being unable to attend because of the time that would have been required to travel back to the United States.²³

Andross, together with Ole A. Olsen and John Loughborough, were invited to the Central European Conference and an inspiring campmeeting in Switzerland, meeting President Conradi at Chaux-de-Fonds on July 27, 1900.²⁴

Though life was rarely cozy, and the British weather at times unrelenting, the enthusiasm of the people continually buoyed up Andross' spirits. In October 1900 he reported, "... about thirty persons have promised to keep the Sabbath as the result of our tent work here . . . The weather has been very cold and stormy, so that we have had to take our tent down; but we shall continue the effort in a hall as soon as we can secure one. I never saw people who seemed to enjoy the truth more than these people do. They recognize it as the voice of God to

their souls. Truly the angels have prepared the way before us. We are sure that we are in the path of duty and are happy in his service."²⁵

The following year Andross was a delegate at the 1901 General Conference session in Battle Creek, Michigan. The day before the official opening Ellen White declared, "God wants a change . . . right here . . . right now." This focused the session on the reorganization of the administrative structures of the church to be a facilitator rather than an inhibitor of mission.²⁶ One result was the creation of union conferences throughout the world church.

As a result of this organizational change, at the August 1902 camp meeting in Leeds, England, the British Mission was reorganized as the British Union Conference. Norwegian-born Ole A Olsen, who had led the British Mission since 1901, was elected president.²⁷ The newly formed North England Conference was put under the leadership of Andross, a position he held until 1905, when he was called to be British Union Conference president.²⁸

Whilst North England Conference president, in 1903, Andross was instrumental in formulating Britain's first Conference Constitution.²⁹ He assisted in evangelism at Nottingham, organizing a church of 18 members, and began evangelism in Derby, baptizing thirteen adults who eventually organized into a church. During Andross' leadership of the North England Conference the membership grew from 301 to 544 (80 percent) and the number of churches from six to 17.³⁰

In 1905 Andross had been voted as BUC vice president, while continuing as North England Conference president, with O. A. Olsen as British Union Conference president.³¹ In May Andross attended the 36th General Conference session, held at Takoma Park, U.S.A. Whilst there he was included in a deputation to visit the White House on May 22 to present an address giving thanks for civil government and religious liberty, which was printed on a scroll and presented to United States President Theodore Roosevelt.³² In July Olsen left the British Union Conference for the friendlier climate of Australia. Andross continued as British Union Conference president while remaining as NEC President.³³

Not long after returning to England from the General Conference session, a British Union Conference general meeting of North and South England Conferences and the Welsh Mission took place on August 15, 1905. This meeting recommended Andross be returned as the North England Conference President. Andross' name was suggested with the idea that he should retain the position only until someone could be provided to take his place to leave him free for his duties as president of the British Union Conference.³⁴ No response seemed to have been received, and it was not until March 1906 that a leader from Scotland, William Dalry MacLay, was elected to take over the presidency of the conference.³⁵

As British Union Conference president, Andross vastly improved the organization's financial standing to the point that he could announce that, if the rate of progress continued, they would soon not need financial support from the General Conference.³⁶

While Andross was British Union Conference President, the union purchased and dedicated Stanborough Park as its headquarters in 1907.³⁷ The publishing house, sanitarium, school, and health food business were also started.³⁸ Duncombe Hall College (predecessor to Stanborough Missionary College and Newbold College of Higher Education) continued to develop and flourish with Andross' supportive leadership as union president.³⁹

During his leadership, the British Union Conference saw a membership increase of 42 percent (though with former reports having been inaccurate the net increase appears much smaller than it should).⁴⁰ The number of organized churches also grew, from 31 to 52.⁴¹

The United States Again

The year 1908 was one of tumultuous change for the Andross family. Spending almost nine years in the damp British climate "brought upon Sister Andross an attack of bronchial pneumonia, and physicians advised them to return to America. This they did in March 1908."⁴²

Soon after returning to the United States, on June 10, 1908, Andross was elected president of the Columbia Union Conference.⁴³ He served for about six months, but his wife's declining health

made it necessary for the family to move to the drier and warmer climate of Southern California. There he was elected president of the Southern California Conference, serving until 1912.⁴⁴

In order to educate his two sons in Adventist schools, Andross moved his family to Pacific Union College in 1912, but after almost two years at the college, the climate again proved too much for Mrs. Andross' health. She contracted tuberculosis, so the family returned to Southern California.⁴⁵

At the sixth session of the Pacific Union Conference on March 26, 1912, Andross was elected union president.⁴⁶ That year Andross published a book, *A More Excellent Ministry*, on the ancient sanctuary service.⁴⁷ His term of service came with a period as associate editor of the *Pacific Union Recorder*, and he regularly authored articles for many church periodicals. As a popular speaker he was invited to provide graduating addresses, camp meeting sermons, and assistance at evangelistic meetings throughout California.⁴⁸

Sophie Andross, however, continued to experience poor health. During special prayer for her, she pled with the Lord to spare her just long enough to raise her two boys. Her prayer was answered, and the family stayed on in California a few more years. Her tuberculosis eventually returned, and in 1917 Sophie Andross died, happy that God had granted her request.⁴⁹

Andross was a friend of and welcome visitor to Ellen White in her last years. Following one group visit on March 17, 1915, her son William C White wrote, "Mother was pleased to meet these old friends, and spoke words of cheer regarding the goodness and mercy of God to her, and the abundant blessings and grace bestowed upon his people."⁵⁰ Ellen White died four months later on July 16, and as president of the Pacific Union Conference Andross was responsible for a memorial service at Richmond, California the day after her funeral at Elmshaven.

At the General Conference session of 1918, Elder Andross was elected vice president of the General Conference for North America, serving for four years. He was involved in extensive travel during this time, literally encircling the earth, visiting the Philippine Islands, China, India, and South Africa.⁵²

Asia and Africa

Two months before the end of the First World War, in October 1918, the General Conference Committee requested to the Indian Union that Andross be able to visit India and Burma during the “approaching cool season”.⁵³ He was planning to be in Japan in time to attend a meeting and make short visits to missions in Eastern Asia, but most of his time would be reserved for his visit to the India Union.⁵⁴

Andross’ personal documents record his meticulous financial accounts and extensive travels, covering almost 20 towns and cities across Singapore, Sri Lanka, Burma, and India.⁵⁵ He spent four months in India attending general meetings and giving counsel in reference to the advance of the Adventist message in that field until February 17, 1919. Being an avid photographer, he took many pictures of his Asia trips, and in later years he innovatively used a Stereopticon⁵⁶ to enhance his missionary presentations. Before leaving Asia, the General Conference voted that Andross be requested to extend his journey and travel from India to southern Africa to attend the session of the South African Conference.⁵⁷

The South African Conference was grateful for Andross’ presence, counsel, and experience at their biennial meeting in Bloemfontein, March 27 to April 6, 1919.⁵⁸

Continuing his travels around South Africa, Andross visited Nyasaland and Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) until his intended departure date in July 1919. However, his boat was delayed for several weeks. This delay proved providential, as it provided an opportunity to encourage the churches on the Cape Peninsula and give invaluable help to the Union Conference Committee in Kenilworth held July 13-22.

On the Sabbath, July 19, the Cape Town church was filled as Andross gave interesting talks on his travels in Asia, Rhodesia and Nyasaland. Sunday evening was similarly full for a public evening service.

Sunday afternoon, July 27, was a great occasion for the newly built Salt River church. The building had been completed for several months, and members had been awaiting a favorable opportunity for its dedication. Elder Andross’ delay provided for them a General Conference vice president to preach the dedicatory sermon, which made a deep impression upon all present.⁵⁹ He preached and ministered the following Sabbath morning and afternoon to the united Parow church and Salt River company.⁶⁰

On Thursday afternoon, August 7, a large company of believers gathered to bid farewell at the East Pier as the S.S. *Cap Polonia* finally took Andross on his journey back to the United States of America via England.⁶¹

Arriving in England, Andross attended the South British Conference in London, September 4-8. Later he visited the Welsh Midland Conference, and also gave presentations on his visits to China, the Philippines, India, and Africa.⁶² Andross returned to the United States late in 1919 and continued his duties as General Conference vice president.

In 1920 Andross married Anna Matilda Erickson, who was assistant secretary of the Missionary Volunteer department of the GC.⁶³

Inter-American Division

After having already accepted a call to serve as field secretary of the China Division in 1922, Andross was asked to go instead to Inter-America, to organize the territory of that new division.⁶⁴ At the time this area covered the West Indian Mission Field, comprising Central America, the Bay Islands, the West Indies, and northern South America, including Guyana.⁶⁵

They did not move to Inter-America immediately, staying on in Takoma Park for a while as Matilda continued working in the General Conference MV Department. In October 1922 they sailed from New York to start visiting across the new division, arriving a week later in Port-of- Spain, Trinidad. By the end of May 1923, they had visited Venezuela, Puerto Rico, the Canal Zone, Guatemala, Salvador, and Honduras.

The task before the Andross family was not easy, and travel was by a mixture of automobile, muleback, train, and boat. The work in Inter-America had grown rapidly but was widely scattered. Travel from one place to another required crossing wide expanses of water, climbing rugged mountains, or walking through jungles of tropical growth. The people were largely poor, and periodically all that had been built up would be suddenly destroyed by a hurricane or earthquake. The division included many governments, languages and dialects, with a strong Roman Catholic influence flourishing in an environment of little education and much superstition. On top of this tropical diseases caused a frequent turnover of missionaries.⁶⁶ This, however, did not dampen Elmer's enthusiasm or diminish his faith.

Matilda was a crucial, unswerving partner, enhancing Andross' ministry with her extensive work writing for and training young people, especially on the history of the Seventh-day Adventist church. When traveling to the 1926 General Conference session with Andross she reported that Inter America showed a 75 percent increase in MV membership in less than four years.⁶⁷

A tribute to Andross in the *Inter-American Division Messenger* recalled "the thrilling days of the establishment of the Inter-American Division, under Elder Andross' able direction. Again and again his sermons in the churches, and his counsel at committee meetings, directed the vision of God's people to the great things expected of them in heralding the Advent message to tropical America. Thus, may we say that winning evangelism was the keynote of our first president's ministry through the field. Under such vision and leadership, the field more than

tripled its church membership from 1922 to 1936, increasing from 8,146 to 29,161.⁶⁸

Whilst visiting San Francisco for the 1930 General Conference session both Andross and his son, Celian Andross, were both preparing to undergo surgical operations.⁶⁹ Though determined in his work, Andross suffered several painful accidents. He recalled that in Bogota, Colombia, on April 5, 1932, “a street car passed very rapidly from behind, striking me and throwing me violently to the concrete walk...the X-ray revealed a fracture of the posterior and anterior pelvic bones on the right side”. Yet, with the aid of crutches, he continued his work.⁷⁰

Later Life

In 1936 Andross was called to serve as a field secretary of the General Conference, thus concluding fourteen years in the Inter-American Division. As field secretary he would visit Europe, South America, and other parts of the world field.⁷¹ However, he always maintained a deep interest in the work and workers of the Inter-American Division.

At the General Conference session of 1941 Andross retired, at the age of 73. That same year he was called back to active service in Inter-America, to serve as Caribbean Union President. He and Matilda sailed through submarine-infested seas following the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, to the union headquarters in Trinidad, British West Indies. Andross remained in the Caribbean Union for more than a year, when he resigned, concerned for Matilda's health.⁷²

Back in Takoma Park Andross spent his time writing, preparing articles, and a series of seven quarters of Sabbath School lessons on the life of Christ. His particular joy in retirement was to respond to requests to preach in small rural churches that were infrequently visited by ministers, and to give Bible studies to non-Adventists.⁷³

During his last years, Andross read the Bible many times. Despite impaired eyesight, he completed his last reading of the entire Bible between November 17, 1949, and February 7, 1950. Even after that, he read the well-worn pages of his Bible, going over many marked passages, to the book of Luke, until he was no longer able to read. During the last afternoon of his life he uttered, though feebly, with his wife a few words of the blessed hope.⁷⁴

During his lifetime Andross had suffered many accidents and operations, and whilst in the Inter-American Division he also suffered from Parkinson's disease, yet he spared nothing of himself in the development of his mission work.⁷⁵ A severe fall around 1948 started his decline in health. His final illness in early June 1950 held him practically bed-bound until his death.⁷⁶

Elmer Ellsworth Andross passed away peacefully at the Washington Sanitarium in Takoma Park on Tuesday, August 22, 1950, at the age of 82.

Legacy

Andross' legacy lies not only in his constant work to win people for Christ, his leadership in the British Union and his establishment of the Inter-American Division, but also through his descendants.

Celian Emerald Andross, Elmer's oldest son, shared his love of soul winning and executive administrative skills. He became president of the South Caribbean Conference, established the Adventist college in Trinidad, originated the branch Sabbath School, and later served as president of the Jamaica Conference, president of the Arizona Conference, and president of the Hawaiian Mission. Ellsworth Andross became a professor at Takoma Academy.

Elmer Ellsworth Andross' great-grandson through Celian was Robert Folkenberg, who as a pilot christened a mission plane in Central America *The E.E. Andross*.⁷⁷ In 1990 Folkenberg was elected president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

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