

Ottosen, Carl Jacob

(1864–1942)

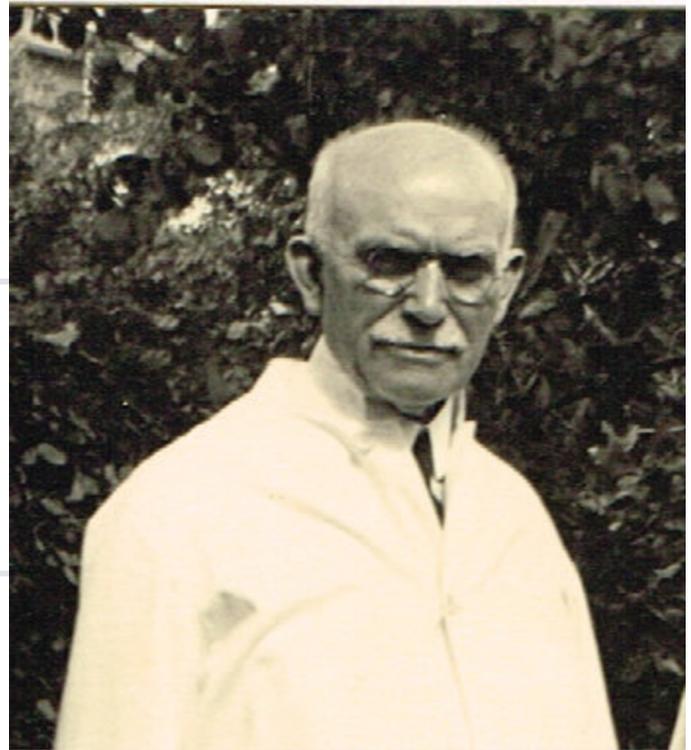
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Sven Hagen Jensen, M.Div. (Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, USA) has worked for the church for over 50 years as a pastor, editor, departmental director, and church administrator in Denmark, Nigeria and the Middle East. Jensen enjoys reading, writing, nature and gardening. He is married to Ingelis and has two adult children and four grandchildren.

Dr. Carl Ottosen was a founder, promoter, and leader of the Seventh-day Adventist health work in Scandinavia. Together with his wife, Johanne Pauline, he founded Frydenstrand Sanatorium and Skodsborg Sanatorium in Denmark, following Dr. John Harvey Kellogg's model from Battle Creek in America.¹ His influence and groundbreaking work set a new trend for preventive and curative health work in Denmark and earned him the respect of his colleagues and the order of Knight of Dannebrog from the Danish king.² He was a strong supporter and participant of the Adventist church work in his home country, Denmark.

Early Years

Carl Jacob Ottosen was born on July 26, 1864, on the farm *Vester Sortkær* in Elling parish, Vendsyssel, Denmark. He was the son of Otto Christian Jensen and Ane Johanne (née Christensen) and the fifth among eight children. When he was four, the family moved to Engen about 7 km from the city of Frederikshavn, where his father was the parish executive officer and ran his 70 acres farm with much skill. Freedom, the urge to progress, and the fear of God governed in the home, which was open to people from different denominations and confessions. Otto was chairman of one of the first temperance societies in the country and, like his father, Carl joined the temperance movement at the age of 17 and became one of its eager spokesmen. As a child, Carl was different from the other children because he was not satisfied with only going to school two days a week, which was the norm at that time. He was allowed to follow the teaching in a neighboring school and thus made four days of learning each week. He did not desire to be a farmer like his parents and his brothers. After his confirmation, he moved to Copenhagen to prepare to be a veterinarian.³



Carl Ottosen.

Photo courtesy of the Historic Archive of Seventh-day Adventists (HASDA) in Denmark.

It was during his study period in Copenhagen that he came into contact with the Danish-American Seventh-day Adventist pioneer, Pastor Knud Brorson (a descendant of the well-known Danish hymn writer and bishop Hans Adolph Brorson), who led him to the Adventist truth. Ottosen was baptized and accepted into the newly Adventist organized church in Copenhagen in 1885. In 1886 he became a member and secretary of the church board. From this time on the energetic young man got involved in the work of his church, preaching, lecturing, and organizing church choirs and youth societies both locally and in the work of the conference.⁴ In 1888 he received a ministerial license and was elected secretary of the Danish Conference with Ole A. Olsen as president and Carl C. Hansen as treasurer.⁵

Through Pastor Brorson Ottosen heard about the Adventist denomination's great sanatorium in Battle Creek, Michigan, and Dr. John Harvey Kellogg. The use of physical therapy and especially vegetarian diets gave good results in the treatment of the chronic sick. A great emphasis was laid on a healthy lifestyle as an important preventive remedy against sickness. While Ottosen worked for the conference, he was allowed study leave, in 1889, so that he could visit Battle Creek Sanatorium for a few months and familiarize himself with the principles of Dr. Kellogg's treatments. While there he also taught at the Scandinavian School. Ottosen had earlier broken his strong tobacco habit and was trying to practice a healthier lifestyle, which he gave as the reason for his astonishing ability to work.⁶ When he went to America, he decided to give up veterinary studies and change to pastoral ministry and evangelism. But Dr. Kellogg convinced him that he should study medicine.⁷ And when he returned to Denmark, he threw himself into the study of medicine with great energy.

Some of the Scandinavian students from America followed Ottosen back to Denmark, where he continued to teach them. Of these, some stayed in Denmark and were employed by the church and did excellent work. Others returned to America. It became a busy time for Ottosen. He studied medicine, held evangelistic meetings in Copenhagen, led out in choirs (he liked singing and music), and taught at the denominational high school "Filadelfia".⁸ M. M. Olsen had returned from the United States in 1890 and had together with Ottosen received the assignment to set up the "Filadelfia" school. While Pastor Olsen was the headmaster and primarily managed the school-home together with his wife, Ottosen took a leading role in the teaching, which took the form of courses. From 1898-1903 Ottosen took over as headmaster in addition to his many other responsibilities.⁹ If ever there was a time when the expression "multitasking" made sense, it was when Ottosen handled his many tasks.

On a summer day in 1891 Carl Ottosen held one of his first health lectures in a big tent in Engen on his father's field at Frydenstrand, where the Adventists held their camp meeting. Here his close colleague and successor as medical director at Skodsborg Sanatorium, Dr. A. Andersen, remembers meeting him for the first time and being inspired by his eagerness and enthusiasm.¹⁰

In 1896 Ottosen completed his medical degree in Copenhagen and went back to Battle Creek Sanatorium, where he worked more closely with Dr. Kellogg and developed a lifelong friendship with the famous professor. When

he was at Battle Creek, he met the Norwegian born nurse and masseuse, Johanne Pauline Norderhuus. They married on April 10, 1897. They continued their studies in the United States, after which they traveled to Germany where they looked at various water treatment resorts.¹¹

Founding and Running of Health Institutions

The Ottosens spent some time in Stockholm, Sweden, to learn more about massage and physiotherapy. Early in the summer of 1897 Carl Ottosen took the initiative to found *Skandinavisk Filantropisk Selskab* (Scandinavian Philanthropic Society) in Oslo, Norway, with Pastor O. A. Olsen¹² as the chairman. On September 10, 1897, the new society with Dr. Ottosen as the driving force opened the first European Adventist sanatorium *Frydenstrand Badesanatorium* in Frederikshavn, Denmark, close to where Ottosen grew up. The same autumn the society also acquired some buildings at Skodsborg, north of Copenhagen, and opened the next health institution *Skodsborg Badesanatorium* (Skodsborg Sanitorium) on May 4, 1898.¹³

The new methods of treatment in these institutions were at first met with some opposition from the established medical profession in the country, but after some years won their support and approval. Ottosen introduced steam baths, electric tubs, massage and exercise rooms, light treatment, heat packs, and sun and air baths, always with a qualified male or female nurse.¹⁴ The vegetarian diet, which was an important part of the setup, was met with much skepticism. Skodsborg Sanitorium was nicknamed "Persilleslottet" (the Parsley Castle) in the popular press. Both sanatoriums, however, got off to a good start and their capacity was quickly filled and there was a need for expansion, which took place over the following years.¹⁵

In 1901 Dr. Ottosen shared his philosophy of medical missionary work through sanatoriums in a powerful article in *Review and Herald*.

First of all, the sanitorium must be a school for the education of medical missionaries who shall go out not to establish new sanatoriums, but to bring the blessed gospel of Jesus Christ, the gospel of soul and body, to everyone who is sitting in darkness. Dear brethren and sisters, Europe is a large field, and it is white for the harvest.... Pray that we all who are connected with the medical missionary work here in Europe may have wisdom and grace so to illustrate the gospel in our work that hundreds and thousands of souls may be turned into the light and rejoice in the salvation of their God.¹⁶

At the General European Conference in 1904 in Friedensau, Germany, Dr. Ottosen "expressed his thankfulness for the privilege of seeing his patients converted to the message, and alluded to the many representative men of the country who had been guests at Skodsborg – government officials of high standing; physicians of influence, who formerly scoffed at our principles but who are now using some of these methods themselves; pastors; leading educators; and well-known merchants."¹⁷ By 1928 the Skodsborg Sanitorium had developed to be the largest sanatorium in the denomination. "It has grown from a small building with a few patients and workers to

a magnificent institution with many large buildings, accommodating over 400 patients at a time and employing 245 workers. The buildings are all kept pure white and viewed from a distance the place looks like a marble palace."¹⁸ The spiritual influence was strong. Many of the patients became interested in religion and not a few accepted the Adventist message.¹⁹ Dr. Ottosen was the medical director at Frydenstrand from the beginning and became later its owner. At Skodsborg Sanatorium he served as medical director from 1900-1936 and for part of that time as the administrative director as well.²⁰

In the same year as the opening of Skodsborg Sanatorium, 1898, Ottosen was instrumental in establishing the Danish health food factory, *Den Sanitære Fødevarefabrik* (The Sanitary Food Factory), later to be known as the *Nutana Food Factory*. It started as a bakery but developed to be one of the major health food producers and providers in the Scandinavian countries.²¹

In 1901 Ottosen opened his own clinic, *Fysisk Kuranstalt* (Physical Health Center), in the center of Copenhagen with its 16 rooms for doctor's consultation, baths, massage, and other different kinds of treatments.²² According to Dr. Ottosen, "A place for the healthy and sound to maintain and improve their vitality and work ability and increase their resilience against disease attack; and for the half healthy to help them to better health and full wellbeing; and then also for the elderly and old, who were worn by the harshness of life, to find an appropriate treatment to regain strength."²³ This philosophy also applied to the earlier sanitoriums.

It was on Ottosen's initiative, that the Skodsborg Sanatorium began a course in nursing and physical therapy and a school for natural food service. *Skodsborg Fysioterapiskole* (the Skodsborg School of Physical Therapy) has graduated more than 1,000 young physical therapists, who have served in many private clinics and public hospitals in the Nordic countries and in the mission fields around the world.²⁴

Other Contributions

Dr. Ottosen was a sought-after speaker and held thousands of lectures in the Nordic countries. "He lectured to crowded houses in Copenhagen, Oslo, Stockholm, and other leading cities, and thus got in touch with a large number of the best people."²⁵ His meetings were always well attended by enthusiastic listeners.²⁶

For more than 40 years (1898-1942) Ottosen was the editor of the Danish and Norwegian health magazine *Sundhedsbladet*, which was sold by literature evangelists in both countries. He was himself a good example for others in practicing the principles he taught. He would start every morning with 5 minutes of Muller's program and cold mitten rubs.²⁷ His literary effort also included numerous articles and pamphlets in the popular science area. He wrote several books and his last book *Hold dig ung* (Stay Young), which contained the essence of his health program, was the most sold book in Sweden the year he died and had a large distribution in Denmark, too.²⁸

As already mentioned, Ottosen had, from his youth, been a strong advocate for temperance. In 1906 he became a member of the board for *Danmarks Afholdforening* (the Danish Temperance Society), and in 1924 he was elected chairman – a position he held for eleven years. In the church, education had his great interest, and he was very active on the conference, union, and European boards that he was a member of.²⁹ From 1896-1904 he was a member of the GC committee.³⁰

Dr. Ottosen was busy in the local community as co-founder and member of the Skodsborg and Surroundings Municipality Association, chairman of the Cooperating Health Associations, and a member of several boards, including the animal welfare association “Svalen” (the Swallow) and several vegetarian societies.³¹

Partnership and Family Life

While at Battle Creek, Carl Ottosen's wife, Johanne Pauline, studied nutrition and dietary supplements and had started the study of medicine but had to stop because of failing health. In Denmark, she became a strong partner to her husband in promoting health and establishing the two new sanatoriums, in both of which she functioned as the matron. She also helped create different health foods and a good number of vegetarian meat substitutes, which were set in production at the health food factory in Copenhagen. She authored a couple of vegetarian cookbooks, among them *Rational Nutrition and Cooking* (1908). Together with her husband she traveled in the Nordic countries and lectured on nutrition.³² In her last years, she was seriously ill and passed away in August 1921.³³

On July 5, 1923, Dr. Ottosen remarried. This time to the public-school teacher from Copenhagen, Carla Rasmussen (1887-1959). Her excellent talents and great skills became a good help to him. She took an active part in the administration of the institutions, lectured on temperance, and wrote vegetarian cookbooks and a *Guidance in the Cooking Art of the Diabetes Diet*³⁴ One of Dr. Ottosen's friends told Mrs. Carla Ottosen: “Yes, Madam, you have an exceptionally clear view of your husband's work, and so had his first wife. Strange by the way, that he should strike such luck twice.”³⁵

Dr. Ottosen had no children of his own, but many children and youth (at a given time seven at the same time) stayed for years in his home, where they received the necessities of life and got help for their education. He could play and have fun with these youths as if he was one of them, and the home resounded with music and song, which he loved.³⁶

Encouragement from Ellen G. White

During repeated stays in the United States Dr. Ottosen became well acquainted with the leadership in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, among them Mrs. Ellen G. White and her son Willy White. Many times, he was a guest in Mrs. White's home, and in his archive are many personal letters from her, of which he especially

appreciated the one where, at a time of crisis for Skodsborg Sanatorium, she wrote: “Be of good courage! Help is coming, I have seen angels go through Skodsborg Sanatorium – seen them put their hands on the sick and heal them.”³⁷

Personality and Health Philosophy

Carl Ottosen was a treasured leader and worker in the Seventh-day Adventist church. His nephew, David Ottosen, expressed it this way, “He was independent in his thinking and way of life and in possession of a will and a faith that made imagination a reality. He was the man of ideas and realities – two qualities that are seldom united in one person.”³⁸ A colleague wrote of him,

Dr. Ottosen’s medical experience, his ability to empathize and understand, was great. It was felt in the consultation and maybe even more by the sick bed, where he with his kind heart, his bright optimism and his strong Christian faith on no rare occasion made despair and discouragement give way to confidence and hope, until the forces of life won the victory over sickness and sorrow.³⁹

One of the basic ideas of his health philosophy was not to give up on recovery, even if the patient was advanced in age. He believed all ought to take up the fight against sickness and the pessimism that it is so prone to evoke. One of his slogans was, “No matter how busy you are, do not forget every day to do something for your health.” He tried to live the principles that he taught, but on one point, he did not measure up. He rarely took time to rest. One of the famous sons of Denmark, Captain J. P. Jespersen, summed up his personality this way: “The greatest truth certainly lies in the fact, that Carl Ottosen was a god-fearing man. It was this view of life that was decisive for his interests and actions.” About himself, Carl Ottosen said: “I am the little doctor in the Great Doctor’s hand.”⁴⁰

Legacy

With his pioneering work in health Carl Ottosen became known as the “health apostle of the North.” He set a new trend in the Nordic countries in nutrition, preventive and curative health, that was first met with ridicule and opposition, but later was widely accepted and showed that he was way ahead of his time. His kind disposition, caring attitude, and enterprise, as well as the results of his treatments, won him many friends not the least among the higher society. Actors, writers, military officers, politicians, and members of the royal family were among his patients.⁴¹ For his church he helped break down prejudice and make health work an asset in the evangelistic program. In the garden before the modern *Skodsborg Kurhotel* (Skodsborg Hotel and Health Resort) on Strandvej 139 stands a bust⁴² of Carl Ottosen, and in Frederikshavn in an attractive residential area, a road⁴³ carries his name as a reminder of this remarkable man.

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