

# Stahl, Ana (“Ana” or “Annie”) Christina (Carlson) (1870–1968)

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Ana Stahl.

Photo courtesy of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Archives.

Ana Stahl was a nurse, an educator, and a pioneer missionary with her husband, Fernando (1874-1950), to South America for three decades. The Stahls helped found numerous chapels, clinics, and schools. They are credited by sociologists and anthropologists with helping to empower Peru’s indigenous people. Ana Stahl was remembered as the “Florence Nightingale of the Peruvian jungle.”<sup>4</sup>

## Early Life

Ana was born November 22, 1870, in Vexiar, Sweden, to Peter (1858-1939) and Martha (d. 1886) Karlsson (also spelled “Carlson” or “Carlsson”).<sup>2</sup> She grew up in a Swedish Lutheran family. Not much is known about her early childhood. Her parents emigrated to America in 1886 where her mother soon afterward died. She joined her father three years later, and they settled in Minneapolis, Minnesota.<sup>3</sup> Her father remarried Alma (1868-1939) later that same year, and they had five more children.

Ana worked in a restaurant in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where she met her future husband, who frequently came there to eat. On August 5, 1894, Ana married Ferdinand A. Stahl (also known as Fernando) in Minneapolis,

Minnesota. In 1900 Fernando and Ana began Bible studies with Emma Thompson Anderson who, along with her husband, Jacob Nelson Anderson, were under appointment to go as missionaries to China. When Emma left for China, the Stahls continued studies with James Campbell, who was the elder of the Milwaukee Seventh-day Adventist Church.<sup>4</sup> They were baptized by Pastor O. C. Godsmark in March of 1901.<sup>5</sup>

Soon after their marriage Ferdinand spent one year pursuing the nursing course at Madison, Wisconsin, and soon went to Battle Creek, Michigan, where Ferdinand took the missionary nursing course at the Battle Creek Sanitarium. Together, their goal was to do missionary work. Ana wanted to attend, too, but their oldest child, Frenita (1893-1980) was young and initially they did not let her enroll. The matron intervened and allowed Ana to start classes. Then, they received a call to assist a small sanitarium branch clinic in Cleveland, Ohio. Ana was able to complete her training as she was granted credit for work experience in Ohio.<sup>6</sup> While there, Ana contributed her own money in 1905 to a fund for their church in Cleveland, Ohio.<sup>7</sup> Thanks to the Stahl's hard work they were able to build it up into a growing health center and purchased their first home. The couple had a second child, Wallace (1905-1981), while they were in Ohio.

## Lake Titicaca

While in Ohio, the Stahls had a growing sense that God had called them to serve as missionaries overseas. In 1909 the Stahls sold their treatment rooms in Cleveland, Ohio, and attended the General Conference session offering to go to the "most needy field"<sup>8</sup> and "hardest place."<sup>9</sup> In preparation they consulted with Ellen White and other church leaders.<sup>10</sup> They left directly from the General Conference session with their two children along with seven trunks for Bolivia at their own expense to assist the mission in La Paz on the shores of Lake Titicaca ministering to the Andean Indians (Aymara and Quechua).<sup>11</sup> The next year Fernando became mission director, and they both are listed in the 1910 *Yearbook* as having missionary credentials for the first time.<sup>12</sup>

The diminutive five foot, 3 ½ inches, dynamo with dark brown hair and gray eyes<sup>13</sup> went quickly to work making friends and ministering to people in the community. She utilized her "intuition" and "care" to befriend others, thereby playing a significant role in the success of their missionary work.<sup>14</sup> Ferdinand described her significant role in their outreach efforts:

Mrs. Stahl devoted a great deal of her time to the Indian women and children, also nursing in the homes of the best people of Bolivia and Peru. She went from the hovels of the Indians to the palaces of the rich, thus gaining for us many powerful friends among people of influence, who afterward favored us in our work for the Indians.<sup>15</sup>

Early on she befriended an American minister to Bolivia and arranged to take his daughter back to the Battle Creek Sanitarium for treatment. While back in America, she used the opportunity to plead for a teacher and nurse to return to help them.<sup>16</sup> In response, Laura Barr (1882-1958) traveled back with her to teach and engage in Bible work.<sup>17</sup> Laura recalled on the return journey how Ana would leave tracts for people on the seats of train

and watch interested persons read them.<sup>18</sup> The Stahls noted that initially “most of the people” were “very much prejudiced,” but as they continued to treat the sick, the “people began to appreciate the work we started.”<sup>19</sup>

The Stahls were versatile missionaries not only providing medical care, but giving advice on the best agricultural and sanitation practices, obtaining government aid, mediating conflicts, and establishing a network of mission stations with their own schools and churches. As Ferdinand traveled extensively in building up missionary work, this made it difficult for her to leave the mission station. She treated hundreds of Indians for medical conditions and provided education; plus, she was responsible for training new missionaries who periodically arrived.<sup>20</sup> She also struggled with the high mountain elevation and climate. Her husband wrote how it took “some time before my wife became accustomed to the high altitude and the rigorous mountain climate.”<sup>21</sup>

Early on she had taken in a young man into their home, Luciano Chambi, who became their first convert. Chambi would play a key role in helping them establish their first permanent mission station on the Peruvian side of Lake Titicaca. Ana also coordinated many of the day-to-day logistics and provided stability at their home base. In 1913, they built a mission headquarters, school, and dispensary. The following year, these facilities were enlarged. Some of the Indians they had converted worked with them, helping to transport lumber and other materials by donkey from Puno, the nearest railway station.<sup>22</sup>

In 1912, Ana Stahl became critically ill from typhoid, and physicians pronounced her case hopeless. She became delirious, and her hair and fingernails began to fall out. Ferdinand was traveling, so Chambi nursed “Mama Stahl” and young Wallace, who had also become sick, back to health.<sup>23</sup> She wrote afterward to fellow church members who had prayed for her:

Dear brethren and sisters: I am glad for another opportunity to bear my testimony. God has done so much for me. It was with increased joy that I returned to my work among the Indians. I love this work. I believe time is short, that Jesus is soon coming; but it seems that there is still much to be done. Remember me, with these people, in your prayers.<sup>24</sup>

Ana Stahl was a formidable force in her own right. At one time, when faced with a mob, Ferdinand, riding on his trustworthy mule, Samson, lunged through the crowd as clubs hit the mule’s flanks. Ana went through calmly and unmolested without a single man willing to raise their club at her. “Your husband is not long for this world. He is soon going to die,” they threatened. She faced them calmly: “You say my husband is not long for this world and that he will soon die. I want to tell you that every one of you will die long before my husband.” It was noted that they appeared startled and did not trouble the Stahls any more at that time.<sup>25</sup> Her biographer noted that Ana was “never afraid” because she was too busy to worry, and because, she knew that people “usually respected American women.” She did, however, worry about her husband’s safety.<sup>26</sup>

## Mentor of Missionaries and Promoter of Missions

Barbara Westphal remembered her as a remarkable woman who inspired other women to become missionaries. In this capacity she was her husband's "confidante" as well as "companion" and "a constant source of encouragement and strength." She taught other missionary women how to live incarnationally, sitting "in church among the Indians instead of beside other American missionaries." She managed a household, creatively came up with substitutes to serve "tasty American dishes," and then ministered to many who came to her home. She visited the sick and delivered babies.<sup>27</sup> Their missionary service was commended in the *Missionary Review of the World* for living "in abject poverty" as part of their missionary outreach. They set a "most Christ-like" example in "healing the sick and helping the needy."<sup>28</sup> Ana Stahl wrote into the *Review and Herald* educating the wider Adventist public about the needs of their mission.<sup>29</sup>

In 1918 the Stahls returned to the United States on furlough. At the 1918 General Conference session, the "congregation greeted them with clapping of hands."<sup>30</sup> Five years later (1923) they were happy to report that they had 5,000 church members and 78 schools with 3,700 pupils, taught by almost 100 local teachers.<sup>31</sup> By 1923, Ana Stahl had organized a "Young Mothers' Society" for missionary women raising children. "Rearing children in a foreign field is real problem," wrote another missionary wife and mother, "and their later education a very serious one for every parent." Ana Stahl expressed her ardent support for such a group wishing she could have had such a group when her children were small.<sup>32</sup>

The Stahls had a heart to see the Adventist missionary work continue to grow into new areas. As the Lake Titicaca Mission was firmly established, they pioneered new work. In October 1921, they establish the Metraro mission station on the Perene River. The site selected was near a coffee plantation. Ana stayed at the plantation and supervised the construction of their new home.<sup>33</sup> An urgent need for a nurse took Ana back to a mansion in Lima while Ferdinand worked to secure formal permission for the mission. Upon her return, he had an important visit from Sárate, a great chief, who inspected their mission with fifty warriors. They welcomed him, and Ana quickly prepared a meal for them. This was a turning point for their relationships with the people of the area.<sup>34</sup> On another occasion, as Ana was teaching children at the school, she stepped away, telling the students to be good while she left on an errand. She heard a racket in the classroom and returned to find a snake that looked like a "pincushion" from all the arrows in it. Ana was now thankful that they brought their bows and arrows to school.<sup>35</sup> Ana was often alone managing the mission as her husband frequently traveled distributing literature and building up a network of churches and schools.<sup>36</sup>

While he was away, Ana had an attack of malaria. It was so virulent that she with the assistance of her friend and translator, Manuela, picked out a burial spot. Manuela fed her venison, gave her a concoction of herbs, and bathed her every day until she recovered. When Ferdinand returned, he took her to the hospital in Callao where she received injections, but she would suffer from attacks of malaria the rest of her life.<sup>37</sup>

In 1926 the Stahls went on furlough going once again as delegates to the General Conference session.<sup>38</sup> They subsequently gave inspiring camp meetings talks together.<sup>39</sup> They brought with them Chave (or "Chavita" as they

called her) Mariano (b. 1914?), an Indian girl, whom they adopted.<sup>40</sup> She had been accused of witchcraft and marked for death.<sup>41</sup> They spent two weeks at Hindsale Sanitarium. They used such opportunities both to fund raise and recruit more personnel for their work.<sup>42</sup> They then spent more time at Emmanuel Missionary College before leaving January 4, 1927.<sup>43</sup> At the request of the General Conference, they were asked to go to Europe to promote missions. They visited Ana's family members that were still in Europe and spent some time at Skodsborg Sanitarium touring through several European countries. While visiting family, Ana discovered that her parents had left an inheritance for her that had been accumulating over the previous forty years. She decided that when they returned to the Amazon, they would have a home of their own, for the first time, with indoor plumbing and a bathroom.<sup>44</sup> They also returned with Ana Jensen, a nurse from Denmark, who came to assist them with their missionary work.

After their return from traveling to the United States and Europe, the Stahls went deeper into the Amazon jungles. In October 1927, they established another mission station deeper into the Amazonian jungles. They were joined by William Schaeffler, as well as Henry and Barbara Westphal. With donated funds (and part of Ana's inheritance), they purchased a new mission site for ministering to the Campa Indians. The next year they purchased a wood-burning steam boat named Auxiliadora ("Helper") that assisted them in making longer mission trips up and down the rivers. They kept their home open for people at all times of the day and night. The people affectionately referred to her as "mama." Ana mentored and supported many of the missionaries as well as local people. For example, Ana went to help fellow Adventists, Carmen and Bernabé Chavez, who lived in a town ten days upriver from Yurimaguas, to help her with her delivery of her second child. While there, the prefect of the town banned them from worshipping on Sabbath. Despite technically having religious protection, they eventually took Bernabé to jail. Ana's telegrams and intercession led to him eventually being released.<sup>45</sup> The Stahls served as missionaries until March 1938 when poor health forced the Stahls to begin planning their retirement near family in the United States.

## Later Years

In 1939, as World War II began, they returned to Paradise, California. While there, they spent time working with the Klamath tribes. After her husband's death in 1950, Ana continued to be a delegate at General Conference sessions in 1954<sup>46</sup> and 1958.<sup>47</sup> The Stahls remained deeply loved in South America. Songs were sung about them, and children were named after them. Numerous churches, schools, and missions were named in their honor. In her later years, she was an Adventist celebrity headlining major church events, such as the 1962 North Pacific Union Youth Congress.<sup>48</sup>

W. F. Jordan, a representative of the American Bible Society, was impressed when he heard about the work that the Stahls were doing in ministering to the native peoples. "It seems to me that the Adventists," he wrote, "are using the logical and Scriptural method of approach. Preaching, unless it carries with it sympathetic help for the

body as well, cannot be expected to accomplish much among this needy people.<sup>49</sup> Her biographer noted that the Stahls were some of the most well-known Seventh-day Adventists in the world.<sup>50</sup> On June 16, 1963, at the age of 93, she attended the dedication of the Helio Courier plane named after her late husband, *Fernando Stahl*. After the plane was christened with a bottle of orange juice, she rode on its inaugural flight.<sup>51</sup>

Ana died on October 5, 1968, in Paradise, California. She is buried in the community cemetery.<sup>52</sup> Today in Iquitos, Peru, the eponymous hospital, Clínica Adventista Ana Stahl, continues Ana's legacy of health ministry and desire to uplift the peoples she devoted her life to serving.<sup>53</sup> In 1992 La Sierra University opened the Stahl Center for World Mission<sup>54</sup> where researchers can peruse a significant collection of artifacts and documents from their lives and other medical missionaries.<sup>55</sup> Most of all Ana was remembered as someone who had "a large, kind, motherly heart" whose patients and students all loved her.<sup>56</sup> Ana Stahl helped inspire a new generation of young people to serve God.

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## NOTES

1. Charles C. Case, "Our Medical Work in the Upper Amazon Mission," *ARH*, September 8, 1960, 16.



2. For a genealogical tree with detailed records, see: Ancestry.com, <https://www.ancestry.com/family-tree/tree/192089149?cfpid=392504245148>, accessed January 27, 2024.
3. The date of Ana's emigration is based upon the 1900 United States Federal Census.
4. Obit. *Lake Union Herald*, May 25, 1937, 10.
5. Ferdinand Anthony Stahl, Biographical Information Blank, September 29, 1912. General Conference Archives.
6. Barbara Westphal, *Ana Stahl of the Andes and Amazon* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1960), 19-20.
7. See list of contributors which includes \$15 from Fernando Stahl and \$10 from Ana Stahl, *The Welcome Visitor*, October 25, 1905, 3.
8. Emma E. Howell, *The Great Advent Movement*, rev. ed. (Takoma Park, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1941), 190.
9. See editorial, *Youth Instructor*, July 20, 1954, 2.
10. F[erdinand]. A. Stahl to Ellen G. White, February 4, 1909, Ellen G. White Estate Document File #3042.
11. Note: the original inhabitants of South America are referred to as "indian" in the article because in publications during the Stahls' time they were referred to as such. Not all the names of the people groups are listed in extant publications, so it is difficult to trace the names of the groups that the Stahls worked with. As problematic as the term "indian" is, it is the term that has nonetheless endured and is used by some of the original inhabitants of the Americas to refer to themselves in English. The author recognizes the problematic nature of this term and uses the name that the people refer to themselves by when such information is available.
12. *1910 Year Book of the Seventh-day Adventist Denomination: The Official Directories* (Takoma Park, D.C.: Review and Herald, [1911]), 126.
13. See "Passport Application," August 18, 1917, in *U.S., Passport Applications, 1795-1925*, Ancestry.com, accessed July 14, 2023.
14. Westphal, *Ana Stahl*, 71, 72.
15. F[erdinand]. A. Stahl, *In the Land of the Incas* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1920), 85.
16. See "Notes," *ARH*, May 26, 1910, 17.
17. See note on the back page, *ARH*, June 2, 1910, 24. She later married James Bodle, and they went to Guatemala as missionaries.
18. Laura Buff, "From Washington, D.C., to Bolivia, South America," *Youth Instructor*, March 21, 1911, 4-5; March 28, 1911, 3-4.
19. F. A. Stahl, "The Medical Work Makes Friends," *ARH*, May 2, 1924, 11-13.



20. Westphal, *Ana Stahl*, 57.
21. Stahl, *In the Land of the Incas*, 67.
22. Mahlon E. Olsen, *Advent Message Wins Hearts in the Neglected Continent*, *The Signs of the Times*, October 9, 1923, 9.
23. Westphal, *Ana Stahl*, 43-45.
24. "Lake Titicaca Indian Mission, Peru," *ARH*, November 28, 1912, 13.
25. H. B. Lundquist, "Beginnings of Adventism in Old Peru," *ARH*, January 13, 1972, 18-20.
26. Westphal, *Ana Stahl*, 41.
27. *Ibid.*, viii.
28. "Words of Commendation," *ARH*, January 27, 1916, 6. Reference is to Gerhard J. Schilling, D. D., Methodist missionary in South America. "Unevangelized South America," *Missionary Review of the World*, Vol. 38, No. 11 (November 1915), 186.
29. [Ana] Stahl, "The Indians of Bolivia," *ARH*, November 3, 1910, 15.
30. "One Scene in the Conference," *ARH*, April 25, 1918, 13.
31. P. E. Brodersen, "Thirteenth Sabbath Offering Overflow," *ARH*, December 27, 1923, 14.
32. A. W. Spalding, "In the Wilds of the Amazon," *Home and School*, July 1924, 27.
33. Westphal, *Ana Stahl*, 75.
34. *Ibid.*, 80-81.
35. *Ibid.*, 84.
36. *Ibid.*, 85.
37. *Ibid.*, 86.
38. See list of delegates under "South America," *ARH*, May 27, 1926, 10.
39. Cf. E. K. Slade, "Southern New England Camp Meeting," *ARH*, August 19, 1926, 17-18.

40. F. H. Robbins, "Chesapeake Camp-Meeting," *ARH*, September 23, 1926, 20.
41. Westphal, *Ana Stahl*, 87.
42. "The Pioneer Nurse to the Peruvian Indians Visits Hindsale," *The Life Boat*, 8-11.
43. "Emmanuel Missionary College," *Lake Union Herald*, January 12, 1927, 8.
44. Westphal, *Ana Stahl*, 100-101.
45. *Ibid.*, 117-119.
46. See list of delegates: *ARH*, May 25, 1954, 12. Ana Stahl sat in a special reserved section just under the speaker's desk for special guests at the session.
47. See list of delegates, *ARH*, June 20, 1958, 10 (pg. 9 lists her as a special delegate under the General Conference).
48. See advertisement, *North Pacific Union Gleaner*, February 26, 1962, 9.
49. J. V. Wilson, *Glimpses of Indian America: Illustrating Present-day Life in Mexico and Parts of Central and South America* (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell, 1923), 125.
50. Westphal, *Ana Stahl*, 70.
51. J. R. Ferren, "Beginning a New Era in World Missions," *ARH*, August 8, 1963, 1, 9.
52. <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/75490164/ana-christina-stahl>, accessed July 14, 2023.
53. [https://www.facebook.com/anastahl.pe/?locale=ko\\_KR](https://www.facebook.com/anastahl.pe/?locale=ko_KR), accessed December 13, 2023. See announcement in *ARH*, March 11, 1954, 21.
54. <https://lasierra.edu/stahl-center/>, accessed January 27, 2024.
55. "Mission Sabbath Begins New Tradition: Stahl Center Opens on La Sierra University Campus," *Adventist Review*, July 30, 1992, 19.
56. A. W. Spalding, "In the Wilds of the Amazon," *Home and School*, July 1924, 27-29.

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