

Wood, Anna Amelia Sandell (Nordstrom) (1875–1942) and George Albert (1867–1944)



George and Anna Wood.
Photo courtesy of Adventist Heritage Centre, Australia.

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Anna and George Wood, from Australia, committed their lives in service to the people of Java and Sumatra. After Anna Wood's death, George Wood died in a Japanese prisoner-of-war camp in 1944.

Early Life of Anna Nordstrom

Anna Amelia Nordstrom was born in Ballefors, Sweden, on July 24, 1875. Her family moved south from this farming community in 1888, and lived in the suburb of Skovde, Skaraborgsgatan.¹ Anna Nordstrom left home when she was sixteen, making the brave decision to emigrate alone. She sailed from Sweden on April 26, 1892, bound for Australia.² She lived with a relative, Ethel Nordstrom, at Minyip in the Wimmera district of Victoria. The following year, 1893, tragedy struck when Ethel Nordstrom's dress caught fire while she was standing in front of her stove. She died a week later.³

Training for Mission Service

Anna Nordstrom had settled in Warracknabeal, Victoria, and later moved north to the Adventist community at Cooranbong, New South Wales.⁴ The first nursing class to graduate from the Sydney Sanitarium began their training at Cooranbong in the Avondale Health Retreat, July 1901. Nordstrom was not in that group, but she did live in the neighborhood and attended the Avondale church as early as June 1901. At the end of the Week of Prayer that month, she was baptized at the well-known "Dry Log" in Sandy Creek on the Avondale estate.⁵ She donated £3 when a call was made to pay the debt of £1,600 owed by the Avondale School for Christian Workers.⁶

Nordstrom enrolled in the second nursing class, April 6, 1902. Instruction was given at the Avondale School for Christian Workers and practical training was gained at the Avondale Health Retreat. At the end of 1902, her class transferred to the Sydney Sanitarium, together with the first class. All completed their training in Sydney. It was a course of study and practical training spread over a period of thirty months. Nordstrom graduated with twelve other women on October 11, 1904.⁷

Mission Service and Marriage

For the first two years after graduation, Nordstrom worked in the Pure Food and Vegetarian Café, Sydney, and was then chosen to help establish a similar enterprise in Melbourne in October 1906.⁸ Returning to Sydney, she was placed in charge of the culinary department of the Sydney Sanitarium.⁹ In early September 1907, at the Union Conference council in Adelaide, she was appointed to overseas mission service in Java.¹⁰ This move would shape

the rest of her life.

Nordstrom sailed from Australia on the SS *Airlie* on October 1, 1907, and disembarked at Sourabaya, East Java,¹¹ only to be met by the news that malarial fever had taken the life of a fellow missionary's young son. The fortunes of the Java Mission were slow to recover from this devastating calamity, remedied to some extent by the acquisition of a property named "Soember Wekas" (Well of Blessing) where the altitude provided respite from the tropical heat. Nordstrom began by giving medical treatments wherever needed. She also partnered with Petra Tunheim to distribute free literature and sell *Ministry of Healing* to pay for "Soember Wekas."¹²

In January 1909, George Albert Wood joined Tunheim and Nordstrom at "Soember Wekas."¹³ Wood was born in England in 1867 and trained as a cabinetmaker. He had emigrated from London in 1885 and eventually settled in Newcastle, New South Wales. He took some biblical studies at the Avondale School for Christian Workers in 1900.¹⁴ He then worked as a colporteur in the country towns of New South Wales for six years¹⁵ before enrolling at the Sydney Sanitarium to do a special course in the treatment of tropical diseases.¹⁶ On December 8, 1909, George Wood and Anna Nordstrom were married, according to Dutch law, in a civil ceremony in the Pati Regency, Java, and two days later in a religious service at nearby "Soember Wekas."¹⁷

Both George and Anna Wood learned the Javanese and Malay languages. They continued to distribute literature and give Bible readings in their home. Anna Wood ministered to the sick when the need arose, sometimes travelling to her patients on foot, bicycle, or horseback.¹⁸ On New Year's Day 1912, the Dutch East Indies was transferred from the supervision of the Australasian Union Conference to the Asiatic Division. The East Java Mission was formally organized twelve months later and George Wood was appointed director with Anna Wood secretary/treasurer.¹⁹ At the time, they had been conducting a small English-language school at Weltevreden, a train-stop in south Batavia.²⁰ This was short-lived and they moved back to Sourabaya to take up their new responsibilities. Records indicate George Wood was ordained sometime in 1915 or early 1916.²¹

In late 1918, George and Anna Wood returned to Australia for a furlough.²² When they resumed their mission work they were appointed to Padang, West Sumatra.²³ Once again, Anna Wood was secretary/treasurer and George Wood became the area director.²⁴ In 1927, after another furlough, they were transferred back to their familiar field of Sourabaya and Semarang.²⁵ Later, in 1931, they were appointed to a portion of North Sumatra. It was named the Batakland Mission, a district extending inland to the mountains around Lake Toba. George Wood was the acting superintendent and Anna Wood the secretary/treasurer.²⁶ George Wood secured government permission to hold public meetings. His preaching itinerary would take him away from home for months at a time.²⁷ Anna Wood conducted a home for the blind in addition to a little school and dispensary at their headquarters in Sipogu.²⁸ In 1935, they returned to the coast at Padang for three more years.²⁹

Retirement

By 1938, George and Anna had given seventy-two years of combined service. They retired to the cooler mountain climate of Sipogu in Batakland and did whatever they could to help the mission enterprise. Anna Wood passed away on February 4, 1942, just a few weeks before the Japanese invasion.³⁰ Her death was merciful because she avoided being taken a prisoner of war. George Wood, however, suffered and died in a prison camp in Medan, North Sumatra, sometime in May 1944.³¹ They had no children.

Retrospect

George and Anna Wood were the exception to the norm of Seventh-day Adventist missionaries who generally served comparatively short terms in overseas mission fields and then returned home permanently for various reasons. Having committed themselves to Java and Sumatra, and learned the local languages, the Woods used their years of mission experience to full advantage.

The circumstances of war meant their graves were hundreds of kilometers apart. In 1954, mission authorities exhumed Anna Wood's remains at Sipogu and laid them within a few meters of George Wood's marked grave at Medan Cemetery. An Adventist church in Siantar, Batakland, is named the Wood Memorial Church in their honor.³²

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