

# Seitz Simmons, Marion G. (1907–2002)

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## SABRINA RILEY

Sabrina Riley was born in Auburn, New York and raised in Dowagiac, Michigan. She received a B.A. in history from Andrews University and an M.A. in information and libraries studies from the University of Michigan. Riley was a member of Andrews University's library staff from 1998 to 2003, library director and college archivist at Union College from 2003 to 2016, and is presently a freelance researcher, author, and information professional.

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Marion G. Seitz Simmons was an Adventist educator for more than fifty years. At various times, she served as education superintendent, elementary supervisor, and associate secretary at the local, union, and division conference levels.

## Early Years

Marion G. Seitz was born in Rochester, New York, on September 14, 1907. Her father, Frank Albert Seitz (1874-1940), was of German and Dutch heritage; her mother, Edith (Briddon) Seitz (1880-1954), was born in England!<sup>1</sup> Frank worked as a school janitor and later became a sanitation engineer. Frank and Edith retired in Union Springs, New York. Marion's siblings included an older sister, Ruth E. (1901-1988), who became a church school teacher and married minister John Frederick Bohner,<sup>2</sup> and a younger brother, Melville Frank (1914-1947), who served as an Adventist mission doctor and died in Baghdad, Iraq.<sup>3</sup>

## Education

Marion Seitz began high school at Fernwood Academy in Tunesassa, New York (also known as Quaker Bridge<sup>4</sup>). After this school burned in 1921, she enrolled at Union Springs Academy in Union Springs, New York, from



The youngest delegate, Terry Lambert (20) of Australia, a mime, meets the oldest woman delegate, Marion Seitz Simmons (83), former educator and missionary in the U.S. and the Far East.

Marion Seitz Simmons (on the right)

From *Adventist Review*, July 12, 1990, p. 25.

which she graduated in 1923.<sup>5</sup> Beginning in 1924, she began attending summer school at Atlantic Union College, but she did not complete the normal (teacher training) course until 1933.<sup>6</sup> Seitz completed a bachelor's degree at Madison College, near Nashville, Tennessee, 1943. As Madison College was unaccredited, she took her final nine or ten credits from Peabody College in Nashville in 1944 to "establish" her Madison College degree.<sup>7</sup> In 1953 she earned a Master of Arts from the University of Maryland.<sup>8</sup>

## Early Career

Seitz accepted her first teaching position, in the Buffalo, New York, church school, upon graduation from high school.<sup>9</sup> It is uncertain what credentials enabled her to teach as she did not begin coursework at Atlantic Union College until the following summer. Between 1923 and 1937, she continued to teach in the New York Conference, including Adventist elementary schools in Rochester and Union Springs Academy, and the Greater New York Conference.<sup>10</sup>

Mistakenly believing that Seitz had already completed a bachelor's degree, in 1937, the Alabama-Mississippi Conference invited Seitz to become its educational and Young People's Missionary Volunteer (MV) secretary.<sup>11</sup> Her responsibilities included oversight of the conference's elementary schools and the MV program. In 1940, Seitz was one of only four women serving in such a capacity in the United States.<sup>12</sup> When MV secretaries were called upon to become leaders in the Medical Cadet Corps as part of the Adventist Church's response to World War II, Seitz became the first woman to train with the men.<sup>13</sup>

Although little noted at the time, Seitz attended the training camp sponsored by the Columbia Union Conference from August 18 to September 1, 1940, at former Civilian Conservation Corps camp<sup>14</sup> in Birdsboro, not far from Reading, Pennsylvania. According to Everett Dick, who also attended this camp, Seitz was

... very excellent. So much so that I very shortly made her squad leader and the rest of the fellas called her the "Petticoat Corporal." The men in the officer training respected her because she was excellent. A few months later when she invited me to come and inspect her corps that she had raised in the Alabama-Mississippi Conference I found she had a very excellent corps going there in Birmingham.<sup>15</sup>

Seitz herself remembered being one woman among about thirty men, a few of whom found it difficult to salute her. Sorensen also "well remember[ed]" that Seitz was the only woman.<sup>16</sup>

Seitz's tenure with the MCC was of short duration. On May 3, 1941, she presented certificates to the thirty-three cadets in the first MCC graduation at Oakwood Junior College.<sup>17</sup> Thereafter, the evidence disappears.

## Later Career

Seitz graduated from Madison College in absentia in 1943 because she had already moved to the Georgia-Cumberland Conference, where she also served as educational and MV secretary until the spring of 1946.<sup>18</sup> In the spring of 1946, Seitz married James Douglas Simmons (1899-1963),<sup>19</sup> a businessman from Chicago who had a second career as credit manager of Adventist sanitariums in Madison, Tennessee; Washington, D.C.; and Florida.<sup>20</sup>

After her marriage, Seitz Simmons<sup>21</sup> continued her career in education. In 1951 while her husband worked at the Washington Sanitarium in Takoma Park, Maryland, she earned a master's degree from the University of Maryland and chaired the education department at Columbia Union College (now Washington Adventist University). When they returned to Madison College, from 1954 to 1959 she served as chair of the Education Department.<sup>22</sup> She also became a student educational consultant for Southern Missionary College (now Southern Adventist University) in 1960 and associate secretary for education in the Florida Conference in 1962.<sup>23</sup> Throughout these years, she also furthered her education with special courses at Andrews University, the University of Tennessee, and University of Florida.

In 1965, Seitz Simmons, now a widow, returned to the Atlantic Union Conference to serve as elementary supervisor for the union. Three years later, she accepted a call to the Far Eastern Division in Singapore where she served the division for nearly six years as an associate in the education department.

## Later Years and Legacy

Seitz Simmons retired in 1974, a still highly regarded and respected education administrator. In 1972 she was awarded the Certificate of Excellence by the General Conference Education Department and was Woman of the Year in 1975.<sup>24</sup> Thus, when she agreed to join Sustentation Overseas Service (SOS), a program which allowed retired denominational employees to provide assistance in international fields, she was in demand. As an SOS worker, Seitz-Simmons traveled to "Ceylon [Sri Lanka], Pakistan, India, Guam-Micronesia Mission and two times [to] Bangkok, Thailand." Her experiences ranged from "pastor of the Adventist Hospital Church" to "House Mother for 130 student nurses at Bangkok Adventist Hospital."<sup>25</sup> In the mid-1980s, she retired to Hendersonville, North Carolina. Marion G. Seitz Simmons passed away on June 11, 2002, in Fletcher, North Carolina.<sup>26</sup>

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### SOURCES

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<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/226051592/edith-seitz>

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"Melville Frank Seitz obituary." *ARH*, December 25, 1947.

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## NOTES

1. "Marion Seitz Simmons obituary," *Southern Tidings*, September 2002, 29; "Frank Albert Seitz," *Atlantic Union Gleaner*, June 26, 1940, 7; and "Edith Briddon Seitz," Find A Grave, 2024, accessed August 19, 2024, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/226051592/edith-seitz>.
2. "Ruth S. Bohner obituary," *Atlantic Union Gleaner*, June 2, 1988, 22.
3. "Melville Frank Seitz obituary," *ARH*, December 25, 1947, 31.
4. The town no longer exist. The site is now the location of the Highbanks Campground operated by the Seneca Nation of Indians.
5. Marion (Seitz) Simmons, "Honor Classes: 1943," *Madison Survey and Alumni News*, September 1983, 9.
6. O. M. John, "Atlantic Union College Closing Exercises," *Atlantic Union Gleaner*, May 31, 1933, 8.
7. Marion (Seitz) Simmons, "Honor Classes: 1943," *Madison Survey and Alumni News*, September 1983, 9; Marion (Seitz) Simmons, "Honor Classes: 1943," *Madison Survey and Alumni News*, September 1997, 11.
8. Marion Seitz Simmons, "A History of the Home Study Institute (Seventh Day Adventist Church)" (M.A. thesis, University of Maryland, 1953).

9. "New York Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1925), 24.
10. See for example "Union Springs Academy," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1935), 251; "Greater New York Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1937), 25.
11. Marion (Seitz) Simmons, "Honor Classes: 1943," *Madison Survey and Alumni News*, September 1983, 9.
12. "Alabama-Mississippi Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1941), 65.  
See also entries for the Southern Union Conference Colored Department, Greater New York Conference, and East Pennsylvania Conference.
13. Correspondence between Marion G. Seitz Simmons and Chris P. Sorensen, January 25 and 29, 1985, Box 6834, Christian P. Sorensen Collection, MS 76, Rebok Memorial Library, Silver Spring, Maryland. Also corroborated by Everett Dick in his audio recorded memoirs in the possession of the author.
14. This location is now French Creek State Park. In 1940 Adventists were already familiar with it as the rented location for the Eastern Pennsylvania junior camp.
15. Everett Dick Memoirs, audio recording in the possession of the author.
16. Chris P. Sorensen to Marion G. Seitz Simmons, January 29, 1985, Box 6834, Christian P. Sorensen Collection, MS 76, Rebok Memorial Library, Silver Spring, Maryland.
17. Seitz, Marion G. "Medical Cadet Corps Graduation," *Southern Tidings*, May 14, 1941, 2.
18. Marion (Seitz) Simmons, "Honor Classes: 1943," *Madison Survey and Alumni News*, September 1997, 11; "News Notes," *Southern Tidings*, July 3, 1946, 4.
19. "New Notes," *Southern Tidings*, July 3, 1946, 4.
20. Marion (Seitz) Simmons, "Honor Classes: 1943," *Madison Survey and Alumni News*, September 1997, 11.
21. After her marriage, Marion G. Seitz Simmons combined her maiden and married surnames without a hyphen.
22. Marion (Seitz) Simmons, "Honor Classes: 1943," *Madison Survey and Alumni News*, September 1983, 9.
23. Marion (Seitz) Simmons, "Honor Classes: 1943," *Madison Survey and Alumni News*, September 1997, 11; Vern C. Hoffman, "Nurses, Teachers Needed," *Southern Tidings*, February 3 1960, 13; and Ward Scriven, "New Educational Supervisor," *Southern Tidings*, August 29, 1962, 16.
24. Deborah Hardin, "Forty Graduate in AUC Summer Graduation," *Atlantic Union Gleaner*, September 13, 1983, 5.

25. Marion (Seitz) Simmons, "Honor Classes: 1943," *The Madison Survey and Alumni News*, September 1983, 9; "The Church's International Call for Volunteers," *ARH*, April 23, 1987, 15.

26. "Marion Seitz Simmons obituary," *Southern Tidings*, September 2002, 29.

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