

Griggs, Frederick

(1867–1952)

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Frederick Griggs, academy principal, college president, division president, and General Conference educational secretary, was one of the most influential people in the creation and growth of the worldwide Adventist educational system. He was born March 23, 1867, in St. Charles, Saginaw County, Michigan. His parents were Ezra S. Griggs (1834-1896) and Diantha Mansfield Griggs (1840-1899). He had one younger sister, Emma Griggs Sanderson (1868-1923).¹

Frederick grew up in a Seventh-day Adventist home. His father was an Adventist pastor and evangelist who worked with James and Ellen White. Elder and Mrs. Ezra Griggs, on at least one occasion, hosted the Whites in their home.² Frederick Griggs attended Battle Creek College, Chicago Normal School, the University of Buffalo, and Washington Missionary College, receiving bachelor's and master's degrees.³

Frederick Griggs was musically inclined. As a boy, he played the guitar.⁴ On at least one occasion, May 13, 1909, he sang a solo at a General Conference session. The song he sang was "How Can I Keep from Singing?"⁵ He also sang at Ellen White's Battle Creek funeral on Sabbath, July 24, 1915. The song he sang then was, "Rest for the Tiling Hand."⁶

He married Blanche Eggleston (1871-1939) on August 16, 1892. After she passed away on January 12, 1939,⁷ he married Mabel Rebecca Shaffer (1881-1974)⁸ in 1940.⁹



Frederick Griggs

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

Battle Creek College Preparatory School

Griggs served as principal of the Battle Creek College Preparatory School from 1890 to 1899, and it eventually consisted of grades 1 through 12.¹⁰ However, in 1895, the school only offered 10 grades and accepted children as young as five years old. The enrollment at that time was 400, with 330 regularly attending. The faculty consisted of 10 regular classroom teachers as well as the gymnasium director and art, music, and Sloyd teachers.¹¹ Griggs defined Sloyd as meaning “to make.” Although woodworking was generally considered the heart of the Sloyd program,¹² at Battle Creek Preparatory School, it included various types of construction ranging from projects using cardboard to dressmaking.¹³ Griggs declared, “We endeavor to make the Bible and its teachings the great theme through all our work.”¹⁴

Griggs was one of the pioneers who supported Battle Creek College President E. A. Sutherland’s vision of a large network of Seventh-day Adventist elementary schools.¹⁵ He hoped to make his school a model for other Adventist schools,¹⁶ and he advocated the creation of a “normal department” or teacher training school at Battle Creek College. Despite the opposition of some faculty members, the plan was adopted.¹⁷ Preparing to head the new department, Griggs and two of his teachers took a leave of absence to undertake graduate work at the University of Buffalo School of Pedagogy.¹⁸

The normal school was launched in 1896, with Griggs, E.A. Sutherland, and Bessie DeGraw as its main teachers.¹⁹ From then until 1899, Griggs was leader of both the normal school and the preparatory school.²⁰ Before long, at the urging of Sutherland and Griggs,²¹ Battle Creek was sending out church school teachers to various villages and hamlets.

The *Christian Educator* Articles

Meanwhile, Griggs expounded his philosophy of Christian education in the pages of *The Christian Educator*. Proclaiming that divorcing religion from education would give children erroneous ideas, he said the Christian educator “needs to conduct his work on Christ’s methods,” which included focusing on the child’s current needs and interests.²²

He believed that “the concerns of this life and the Bible are the complements of each other in obtaining a true education.” Arguing that “only God’s written word can give us the true meaning of all other things,” he said, “The Scripture will throw a true light upon his other study, and his other study in turn will enlighten his understanding of the written word of God.”²³

Although the Bible, according to Griggs, was “the guide to the study of all other books,” it “should not take the place of the other books.” Subjects such as history, arithmetic, spelling, reading, writing, grammar, and geography should not be taught solely from the Bible. “If at the beginning of each day’s work in school, the Bible is carefully and prayerfully studied, and given more time than is assigned to any other lessons during the day,

we may be certain that its spirit will pervade all the other work, and that the child will correlate its teachings with all the other lessons."²⁴

Although much of what he wrote seems to be in harmony with the writings of Ellen White, she was concerned that some of his writing seemed to be "espousing humanistic philosophy."²⁵ In 1898, she wrote to him and *Christian Educator* Editor Frank W Howe, "Your minds do not see all things clearly." Declaring, "You do not know what it means to be sanctified, elevated, ennobled." She described those who exalt so-called "higher education" over knowledge of God as "aping the inhabitants of the Noachic world" and "yielding to the temptation of Satan" to eat the forbidden fruit. "The great Teacher who came down from heaven has not directed you to any of the supposed great authors," she said, telling Griggs and Howe, "You need not feel that you must mingle the common with the sacred. You have done this so continuously in the past that your spiritual eyesight is obscured, and you cannot discern between the sacred and the common."²⁶

When Griggs replied with a conciliatory letter, Ellen White responded, "I thank the Lord that He has enlightened you by His Holy Spirit, and I beg of you to walk circumspectly."²⁷ Griggs would be a supporter of Ellen White throughout the remainder of her life.²⁸ In 1911, he would write to her, saying, "I cannot tell you how thankful I am every day that God has given to us the gift of the Spirit of Prophecy and that we have the wonderful expositions of truth which have come to us through your writings."²⁹

South Lancaster Academy

In 1899, Griggs left Michigan for Massachusetts, where he became the sixth principal of South Lancaster Academy, which had been founded in 1882.³⁰ In addition to administering the school, he taught classes in pedagogics (teacher education).³¹ He remained in that position until 1907, but in 1904, he assumed the additional responsibility of being the secretary for the General Conference Educational Department,³² administering that department from South Lancaster.³³

When he arrived in South Lancaster, Griggs discovered that the academy was drowning in debt, so much so that selling off all their property would not produce enough money to clear the indebtedness. Meanwhile, accumulating interest was continually increasing the amount of that debt. The school reduced employee wages and reduced the staff to a barebones minimum and took other measures to reduce expenses. The conference was helping out a bit, but the constituents, discouraged by the school's previous financial mismanagement, were not inclined to contribute to the institution. At Elder S. N. Haskell's suggestion, Griggs wrote to Ellen White, hoping to take advantage of her offer to donate the book *Christ's Object Lessons* to pay off the indebtedness of Adventist schools on the condition that the publishing houses forgo their profit and that church members sell the book without receiving a commission.³⁴

South Lancaster Academy was a forerunner of Atlantic Union College (AUC). Myron Wehtje, retired AUC historian, describes Frederick Griggs as “an able and energetic principal.” During the Griggs administration, South Lancaster Academy took its first baby steps toward becoming a college by offering some post-secondary classes.³⁵

Takoma Park

In 1907, he left South Lancaster Academy and moved to Takoma Park to devote himself full-time to the leadership of the General Conference Educational Department. By this time, his title was chairman of the department.³⁶ In this capacity, he launched the Fireside Correspondence School, later known as the Home Study Institute.³⁷ Even later, it was renamed Griggs University in honor of its founder.³⁸ He used his position as an officer of the General Conference to advocate for the establishment of a full-fledged medical school in Loma Linda³⁹ and for reinstating and enlarging the program of selling *Christ's Object Lessons* to relieve Seventh-day Adventist schools of debt.⁴⁰

Union College

His next assignment was the presidency of Union College in Nebraska, a position he held from 1910 to 1914. In addition to his administrative duties, he taught classes in philosophy.⁴¹ He wrote to Ellen White, “It was with much dread and fear that I undertook the work here. There were many problems hard of solution but at every step of the way the dear Lord has gone before me and blessed and helped me.”⁴²

According to Union College historian Everett Dick, as president, Griggs almost always “took personal charge of the chapel” programs.⁴³ He was especially interested in the college's annual Week of Prayer meetings. His 1911 letter to Ellen White said, “Last year at the Week of Prayer the Lord drew very near, but this year he has drawn nearer. During this past Week of Prayer, a large number of students who have for years been indifferent to the grace of God upon them have given their hearts to him, gone forward in baptism, and are fully determined to press the battle in the Christian warfare to the gates.”⁴⁴

Everett Dick reports that Griggs vigorously promoted a vocational emphasis in the college. One of his academic innovations at Union was the introduction of the elective system in general education.⁴⁵

Back to Takoma Park

By the time Griggs resumed the leadership of the General Conference Educational Department, the title of chairman of that department was dispensed with, and the highest ranking individual in each General Conference department was designated as secretary.⁴⁶

In addition to his routine work as an administrator, Griggs traveled widely in the United States and overseas, going as far as Australia, New Zealand,⁴⁷ and Asia.⁴⁸ One of the American campuses he visited was that of Oakwood Junior College.⁴⁹

He also wrote numerous articles for the *Review and Herald*. Some of these articles were reporting on what was happening in the worldwide Adventist educational system,⁵⁰ some of them were reporting on other areas of his responsibilities, including the ministerial reading course (a systematic program encouraging lifelong learning for ministers and “gospel workers”),⁵¹ some of them were calling for closer cooperation between parents and teachers,⁵² and some were explaining aspects of his philosophy of education.⁵³

At the 1918 General Conference session, Griggs reported that Adventist school enrollment worldwide had increased from 25,491 in 1912 to 36,142 in 1916, “a gain of nearly 42 percent.” He said that despite the ongoing war, what we now know as World War I, Stanbrough Park Missionary College in England had seen very little decline in attendance. Declaring that his department’s goal was that all the children from all the Adventist churches be enrolled in Adventist schools, he lamented that only about half of them were.⁵⁴

Emmanuel Missionary College

In 1918, Griggs moved back to Michigan to take charge of Emmanuel Missionary College (EMC), forerunner of Andrews University (AU). The late AU historian Emmett K. Vande Vere described the time when Frederick Griggs was president of EMC as a “golden age” for that school. Numerous buildings were constructed, a radio station was launched, the college was accredited by both the state of Michigan and the North Central Association, and enrollment passed the 500 mark for the first time. Griggs left the college in good shape financially.⁵⁵ In addition to being president, Griggs taught classes in philosophy some years⁵⁶ and in “Evidences of Christianity” in other years.⁵⁷

Despite EMC's progressivism in so many areas, Griggs was reluctant to embrace the 20th Century in at least one area. Being “somewhat fearful that the students gravitated toward ‘worldliness,’” Vande Vere says Griggs “resisted” any relaxation in the area of social relations.⁵⁸

Meanwhile, he continued writing for the *Review and Herald*. A couple of these articles were about what was happening at Emmanuel Missionary College;⁵⁹ however, most of them were about theology, focusing primarily on the seventh-day Sabbath.

Laying the foundation for his articles on the Sabbath, he wrote about the importance of God's law. Although people are saved by grace, not law, Griggs pointed out that Jesus kept his Father's commandments. He said that the law is a transcript of God's character and that it shows us our need of grace.⁶⁰ He then pointed out that the seventh-day Sabbath was part of the moral law, the Ten Commandments, and that the ceremonial law – not the moral law – was abolished at the cross. The Sabbath, he said, was given in Eden and was, as Jesus said, given for

man. God requires observing it “so that we may not forget him as our Creator.”⁶¹ Citing Jesus’ statement that He was the Lord of the Sabbath, Griggs indicated that the New Testament portrays the Sabbath in a positive way.⁶² In the fourth article of the series, he declared that the Sabbath was not changed by Christ or his followers. He quoted Roman Catholic sources which stated that their church was responsible for the change of the Sabbath.⁶³ In the final article of the series, he stated that the Sabbath was God’s seal. The fourth commandment, he said, contained all the historic ingredients of a sovereign’s seal: the name of the ruler, his official title, and the extent of his dominion. He quoted Exodus 31:17 that the Sabbath was “a sign” or “a seal,” and quoted Isaiah 58 on the importance of observing the Sabbath. If the seventh-day Sabbath is the seal of God, what will constitute the mark of the beast? Griggs suggested that the answer could be found in the writings of several Roman Catholic leaders who indicated that the change of the Sabbath was a sign of their church’s authority, an authority which was implicitly acknowledged by nearly the whole Protestant world who observe Sunday, an observance for which there is no authorization except that of the Roman Catholic Church.⁶⁴

Far Eastern Division

In 1925, Griggs moved to Shanghai, China, where he served on the executive board of the Far Eastern Division and on that division’s Educational and Young People’s Missionary Volunteer committee and was chairman of the Home Commission (organized to promote the interests of Asian “women, mothers, and homes”)⁶⁵ and was at first assistant secretary and then secretary of the Ministerial Association. In 1927, he was given the additional title of field secretary of that division.⁶⁶

At the 1930 General Conference session, the Far Eastern Division was divided into two parts, one retaining the name Far Eastern Division and the other part being titled the China Division. Griggs was elected president of the Far Eastern Division.⁶⁷ In addition to being president and continuing to serve on the same committees as before, he continued to head the Ministerial Association and the Home Commission.⁶⁸ Since Shanghai was no longer in the Far Eastern Division, assuming the presidency of that division involved moving to Manila in the Philippines.⁶⁹

By 1932, the division had moved its headquarters to Bagnio in the Philippines and had eliminated the Home Commission and Educational and Young People’s Missionary Volunteer committee. Griggs continued to head the Ministerial Association until the end of his Far Eastern Division presidency.⁷⁰

Back to China

Griggs moved back to Shanghai in 1936 when he was elected president of the China Division. This time he was freed from the responsibility of departmental leadership. The China Division had retained the Home Commission, and Griggs was a member of that committee, but he wasn’t the chair. He also belonged to the Division Building Committee, but someone else was the chairman.

By 1938, with mainland China torn by war, the China Division and all its employees, including Griggs, relocated to Hong Kong.⁷¹ By 1939, it would be back in Shanghai⁷²—at least for the time being!

General Conference Field Secretary

When “health conditions in his family necessitated” his return to the United States⁷³ in 1939, he was about 72 years old, but he continued to serve the denomination for the next 11 years as a general field secretary, having the responsibility of chairing the board of the College of Medical Evangelists (now Loma Linda University)⁷⁴ and president of Pacific Press.⁷⁵ He made his home in Los Angeles, California.⁷⁶

He also contributed several articles to the *Review and Herald* during the 1940s and 1950s. With the exception of an article about inflation in Korea⁷⁷, these articles were about practical Christianity. One of these articles, “Radiant Christianity,” says if Christ is in our heart, His radiance will automatically shine forth in our lives.⁷⁸ Two articles were about prayer, discussing how to pray, the role of faith and prayer, and the Holy Spirit’s role in the prayer life.⁷⁹

“Happy Family Relations”

Two articles on “Happy Family Relations” were adapted from a sermon Griggs gave at the White Memorial Church in Los Angeles on April 15, 1950. In the first, he emphasized the importance of the fifth commandment, but suggested that “the responsibility for its observance falls first upon the parents. He asked how children can sincerely honor their parents unless the parents are “honorable--worthy of honor.” He said he “was most fortunate in being born in a godly home” where morning worship regularly came before breakfast. The rule was “No worship, no breakfast.” He told about his father asking his forgiveness when the father had spoken to his son sharply. Griggs fondly remembered that, when as a young man he was flirting with agnosticism, he heard his father’s “most earnest” prayers for him” when he thought only God was listening.”

Declaring “most disagreements between husband and wife are trivial in the beginning,” he said we should “guard well the trivialities of our own lives. They go far toward making or breaking happy homes.” He suggested that one spouse’s smile might “dispel the other’s frown.”⁸⁰

His second article on family relationships began by saying, “Love is the ruling power of heaven, and, too, it is the ruling power of every true, healthy home. Warm, true love is the life-blood of the healthy home.” He added, “In a home where the atmosphere of love is continually breathed it is quite natural for children to honor and obey their parents.” He also said, “When father and mother love and serve as Christ does the church, it goes far toward making that home a paradise--a little touch of heaven on this earth.”⁸¹

End of a Long, Productive Life

Frederick Griggs passed away at 7 A.M. on Sunday, August 10, 1952, at the White Memorial Hospital on the Los Angeles campus of the College of Medical Evangelists. Funeral services were held on August 16, 1952, in Paulsen Hall on that campus.⁸² When reporting on his death, V. T. Armstrong, one of his successors as president of the Far Eastern Division,⁸³ said of Griggs' time in that division, "His inspiring leadership proved a great blessing to the field and the work grew and expanded during the six years he served as the leader." Armstrong described Griggs as a kind, understanding man, one who made friends wherever he went, and greatly endeared himself to the constituency where he labored.⁸⁴ In the abstract of his doctoral dissertation on Frederick Griggs, Arnold Colin Reye summarized his administrative qualities: "In leadership style, Griggs was open, collegial, and democratic. As an administrator he demonstrated competency in such important administrative processes as planning, organizing, leading, and controlling. Likewise, he revealed skill in handling the technical, human-relations, and conceptual demands of his work."⁸⁵

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