

Woodman, Ira

James (1888–1980)

MILTON HOOK

Milton Hook, Ed.D. (Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, the United States). Hook retired in 1997 as a minister in the Greater Sydney Conference, Australia. An Australian by birth Hook has served the Church as a teacher at the elementary, academy and college levels, a missionary in Papua New Guinea, and as a local church pastor. In retirement he is a conjoint senior lecturer at Avondale College of Higher Education. He has authored *Flames Over Battle Creek*, *Avondale: Experiment on the Dora*, *Desmond Ford: Reformist Theologian, Gospel Revivalist* the *Seventh-day Adventist Heritage Series*, and many magazine articles. He is married to Noeleen and has two sons and three grandchildren.

Ira J. Woodman was a minister in Michigan and Illinois before serving as a conference president, associate secretary in the General Conference Medical Department, and finally as general manager of Pacific Press Publishing Association.

Early Years

Ira Woodman was born in Ashley, central Michigan, on November 16, 1888,¹ to James and Alice (Cogswell) Woodman. He was the youngest of four children raised on the family farm, his older siblings being Laura (b. 1875), Effie (b. 1878), and Floyd Allanson (b. 1885). Their father passed away prematurely in 1898.²

Ira supported himself financially beginning at age 14. Baptist and Methodist influences had combined in his upbringing, but contact with Seventh-day Adventists eventually led to his enrollment at Adelpian Academy in Holly, Michigan. There he learned carpentry skills in addition to his regular studies. He was baptized in March 1907 by Elder Justus G. Lamson.³ He married Etta Alvina Keiser at Prattville, Michigan, on June 17, 1909. Elder A.R. Sanborn performed their ceremony. Their two children were Vera Genevieve (b. 1910) and Vaughn "Von" Lorraine (b. 1911).⁴



I. J. Woodman

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

Minister and Conference President

After their marriage Ira and Etta gained further training at Nashville Agricultural and Normal Institute (later Madison College). They also engaged in self-supporting ministry at Pikesville, Tennessee, until 1911, then at a school in Rockford, Alabama, for a year. Returning to his home state in 1912, Woodman joined the ministerial team in the East Michigan Conference. At a camp meeting in Holly, Michigan, in June 1914, he was ordained by Ira H. Evans, Justus G. Lamson, and Lewis H. Christian.⁵

In 1917, Woodman accepted a call to Chicago, where he engaged in pastoral and evangelistic ministry until 1919.⁶ He experienced what he described as “fair success” as an evangelist and was a participant in the landmark Convention of Evangelists held in May 1919 in Washington, D.C., for the purpose of strengthening Adventist work in large cities.⁷

The administrative phase of Woodman’s ministry began in 1919 when he was elected president of the South Wisconsin Conference. In early 1925 he accepted a call to the Northwest to serve as president of Western Oregon Conference, renamed Oregon Conference in 1929 (the Southern Oregon Conference remained a separate entity until 1932 when it was absorbed into the Oregon Conference).⁸ By recommendation voted at the North Pacific Union Conference session in March 1932, Woodman moved from Portland to Seattle to serve as president of the Washington Conference, exchanging positions with E. L. Neff, who moved to Oregon.⁹

GC Medical Extension Secretary

In 1934, Woodman was appointed associate secretary of the General Conference Medical Department, assigned the role of liaison between local conferences and graduates of the College of Medical Evangelists (CME) in southern California. This position was sometimes titled “medical extension secretary.” It involved recruiting medical school graduates to locate in conferences throughout the United States and working with the conferences in arranging favorable placement for the graduates.¹⁰

The arrangement offered benefits to young physicians, who received loans from the conferences to help set up their practices. The conferences, in turn, benefited both from the ways in which doctors tended to build up local congregations and from the boost in revenue brought by their tithes. This was a full-time responsibility, and thus Woodman’s office was located on the Los Angeles campus of CME, not at General Conference headquarters in Washington, D.C. He was pleased to report to the 1936 Autumn Council that, in contrast to 1922, when only five of the 22 medical school graduates located outside of California, a much wider distribution was realized in 1936 with 37 out of 79 doing so.¹¹

Pacific Press Manager

Woodman moved from medical department administration to publishing administration in 1941, being appointed as associate manager of Pacific Press Publishing Association in Mountain View, California. He was elected general manager at the association's constituency meeting on January 28, 1952, and served in that capacity until early 1961.¹²

Amidst the general post-World War II prosperity, Pacific Press experienced an era of growth under Woodman's management. A newspaper feature that appeared in the business section of the *Daily Palo Alto Times* a few months before his retirement reported that circulation of *Signs of the Times*, the publishing house's lead periodical, had increased from 234,000 during the previous year to 270,000. A new, 30,000-square-foot building had just been completed at the Mountain View plant in 1959 to house foreign language publication after the press closed the plant previously operated for that purpose in Brookfield, Illinois. Other recent expansions of the physical plant included a new pressroom, a book department building, photo studios, and a second floor addition to the engraving facilities.¹³

A major addition to the Pacific Press's product line took place in 1955 with the transfer of Chapel Records from the Pacific Union Conference.¹⁴ During 1960, Woodman's final year as manager, the retail value of Pacific Press's books, tracts, and magazines, along with Chapel recordings, was the highest yet in its history, totalling \$7,279,000.¹⁵

Ira J. Woodman's varied service spanned half a century by the time of his retirement in 1961. He passed away on June 28, 1980, aged 91, at his home in Santa Clara, California. His wife, Etta, died in Santa Clara on April 4, 1982, at the age of 94.¹⁶

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NOTES

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2. "Ira James Woodman," *FamilySearch*, accessed January 27, 2023, <https://www.familysearch.org/tree/pedigree/landscape/L4W8-NQF>.
3. Ira James Woodman Biographical Information Blank, May 1, 1934. Secretariat Appointee Files, RG 21, Record 114954, GCA.
4. "Ira James Woodman," *FamilySearch*.
5. Woodman Biographical Information Blank, May 1, 1934 (GCA).
6. In his 1934 Biographical Information Blank (GCA), Woodman indicated that he began work in Chicago in 1915, but the *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* lists him with the East Michigan Conference through 1917.
7. Woodman Biographical Information Blank, May 1, 1934 (GCA); "A Convention of Evangelists," *ARH*, June 5, 1919, 2; Howard B. Weeks, *Adventist Evangelism in the Twentieth Century* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1969), 113-114.
8. J.L. McConaughey, "A Change of Personnel in Western Oregon Workers," *North Pacific Union Gleaner*, April 9, 1925, 9; *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, 2nd rev. edition (1996), s.v. "Oregon Conference."
9. J.L. McElhany, "Union Conference Changes," *North Pacific Union Gleaner*, March 8, 1932, 2.
10. M.E. Kern, "The Autumn Council for 1934—No. 3," *ARH*, December 27, 1934, 12; I.J. Woodman, "The Physician's Assets," *ARH*, March 18, 1937, 16.
11. General Conference Committee, October 26, 1936, 137, General Conference Online Archives, accessed April 24, 2023, <https://documents.adventistarchives.org/Minutes/GCC/GCC1936-10.pdf>.
12. "Ira James Woodman obituary"; "Changes in Leadership," *ARH*, February 14, 1952, 24.
13. Don Webster, "Pacific Press: big publishing house," *Daily Palo Alto Times*, April 6, 1960, 31.

14. "Chapel Records," *ARH*, April 28, 1955, 29.

15. Richard H. Utt, "R.P. Rowe Elected Pacific Press Manager," *Pacific Union Recorder*, February 27, 1961, 4.

16. "Ira James Woodman," *FamilySearch*.

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