

Wade, Trula Elizabeth (c. 1891–1995)

SAMUEL LONDON, AND FRED PULLINS

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Fred Pullins is a retired Oakwood University employee. He served in various capacities and most notably as the director for Oakwood Memorial Gardens. He was a close friend of Ms. Trula Elizabeth Wade.

Trula Elizabeth Wade was a pioneer teacher, educator, and residence hall dean at Oakwood College (now a university).

Trula was born in Harrison, situated in Hamilton County, in the foothills of Tennessee. She was the youngest of three girls born to Samuel and Fannie Wade. The date of Trula's actual birth is unknown (she chose March 13 as the day to celebrate her birthday). Research indicates her birth could have been as early as 1891 or as late as 1898.¹ Around the age of three, shortly after the death of her mother, Trula was taken to Chattanooga to live at the Steele's Home for Disadvantaged Negro Children— operated by Almira Steele.²

Around the year 1885 Mrs. Steele joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church and began incorporating Adventist teachings into daily life at the orphanage. From the seventh-day Sabbath to the sanctuary service and health reform, she embraced and shared the truths of God's Word, but not without resistance. She was accused of not providing proper food for the children. "They say I give them a coarsest kind of food; instead of pork and beef, I give them peanuts, apples, bananas, oranges, prunes. Look at our health records—unlike other institutions, we have never had a case of typhoid fever, scarlet fever, diphtheria, or even grippe, no stomach or bowel troubles, and no nervous prostration. Will anyone disprove my statement?"³



Trula Wade

Photo courtesy of Oakwood University Archives.

Undoubtedly Trula learned about the seventh-day Sabbath and vegetarianism at the orphanage. Research indicates that she officially joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church upon her baptism in 1915 at Oakwood in Huntsville, Alabama.⁴

Mrs. Steele would play an important part in Trula's future. Almira was herself a teacher who paid assistants to teach the children Bible, English, grammar, simple etiquette, and practical skills such as gardening, sewing, and cooking. Although Steele, a white woman, met much resistance for her work to benefit black children, she persisted in her efforts to protect, nurture and educate her disadvantaged charges. Gratefully Trula Wade was privileged to be under her care and tutelage. Trula was taught to do her chores dependably and meticulously. It was in the Steele orphanage that her passion for learning and sharing her knowledge with children was kindled. Around the age of 14 she began her lifelong career in education, performing assignments related to instructing younger children.⁵

Just prior to leaving the Steele orphanage, Trula had her mind set on becoming a government worker. However, G. E. Peters persuaded her to become a teacher in the Adventist school system. Her first assignment was in Augusta, Georgia. She taught for five years in this city. Records also indicate that she served from 1916 to 1932 as an elementary teacher in the Southern Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, teaching in Chattanooga, Tennessee; Birmingham, Alabama; Atlanta, Georgia; Fayetteville, North Carolina; and the state of Florida. Between the years of 1920 and 1932 she attended teacher training sessions and summer school at Oakwood Junior College to sharpen her instructional skills.⁶

Wade worked at Oakwood as a teaching assistant, teacher, and staff worker before she received her diploma in the 1920s. In 1932, when James L. Moran became the first black president of Oakwood Junior College, he invited her upon the recommendation of Anna Knight (the educational superintendent of the Southern Union Conference) to join the full-time teaching staff at Oakwood Elementary School.⁷ She accepted, and joined the Oakwood elementary faculty in 1933.⁸

In 1950 Wade received her degree in elementary education with a minor in Bible from Oakwood College. In 1962 she earned her master's degree in guidance and counseling from Boston University.⁹

For fifty years, beginning in 1916, Wade served as an elementary and academy teacher, college instructor, and, most notably, dean of girls/women. During her career as an educator, she taught English, social studies, home economics, and physiology. Wade was a role model for young women and a mentor to a plethora of students and dormitory residents. She encouraged and inspired countless others by her unwavering determination to uphold Christian and Institutional standards.¹⁰

She never married, choosing instead to dedicate her life to God's work. This included her role as a surrogate mother to the dormitory residents of Henderson Hall on the campus of Oakwood College, which she affectionately referred to as "my girls."¹¹

Wade retired in 1966 after serving Oakwood for 33 years. In appreciation of her stellar service, the college named its newly built flagship women's residence hall the Trula E. Wade Residence Hall for Women in January 1991.¹²

On March 14, 1995, Trula Wade died in Huntsville, Alabama; she was about 100 years old. Her funeral service was held at the Oakwood College Church on March 17.¹³

Trula Wade inspired others by her determination to rise and soar above the misfortunes she suffered in her early life. She used her energy and talents to serve and benefit others, especially the scores of young women who occupied Henderson Dormitory and her heart.

SOURCES

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NOTES

1. "Obituary: Trula Elizabeth Wade," Oakwood University Archives.
2. Minneola Dixon, "Biography: Trula Wade," Oakwood University Archives.
3. Loretta Parker Spivey, "Before the Morning Star: The Almira S. Steele Story," *Message*, May/June 2011, accessed September 5, 2018, <http://messagemagazin.vibrantlife.com/index.php/message-magazine-2011-mayjune/152-before-the-morning-star-the-almira-s-steele-story>.
4. Trula Elizabeth Wade, "Department of Education, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Teacher Information" (February 20, 1957), Oakwood University Archives.

5. Minneola Dixon, "Building Named for Trula Wade," *Oakwood Magazine*, Winter/Spring 1992, 5.
6. Dixon, "Biography: Trula Wade."
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid. *Oakwood Junior College Bulletin 1933-1934*, Oakwood University Archives.
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10. Dixon, "Biography: Trula Wade."
11. Ibid.
12. Dixon, "Building Named for Trula Wade."
13. "Obituary: Trula Elizabeth Wade."

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