

Snyder, Elwin Winthrop (1865–1919)

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Elwin Snyder was a missionary in Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay, and Cuba with his wife, Jane Ketring, and was one of the first canvassers sent from the United States to South America.¹



Elwin Winthrop Snyder

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Work in the United States (1865–1891)

Elwin Winthrop Snyder was born on February 26, 1865, in Vineland, New Jersey, United States² He grew up in an Adventist family, and from the age of 18 years old was interested in missionary work.³ At age 19, he became a Bible instructor in the New England Conference, United States.⁴ From 1885 to 1888, he worked under the direction of the New England Conference as a general consultant.⁵ Then he was director of the canvassing work in Pennsylvania, United States, until 1891. In that year, he accepted, with two more young people, the invitation to go to South America.⁶

First Works in South America (1891–1894)

E. W. Snyder was sent to South America together with Clair A. Nowlen (1865–1961) and Albert B. Stauffer, as self-supporting missionaries, and Snyder acted as the leader of the missionary team.⁷ He had to make a living by selling books, even though there were no Adventist books in Spanish then. They had to find buyers who could read English, German, or French. They landed in Montevideo, the capital of Uruguay Republic, on December 10, 1891. Upon arrival, they encountered some difficulties: there were not many English-speaking inhabitants, the price of food was high, and only authorized people could sell books. None of the three knew how to speak the Spanish language. After gathering information, they decided to cross the River Plate (with only 16, 50 dollars) to

the Argentine Republic, where there were about five thousand English-speaking inhabitants in Buenos Aires, in addition to other provinces with thousands of other immigrants, including Germans.⁸ Immediately after disembarking in Argentina, the team of canvassers separated. Stauffer went to the German colonies in the north of the country, while Nowlen and Snyder stayed in Buenos Aires.⁹

In addition to selling publications, these canvassers measured part of their success by the number of converted people. In Argentina, a young English immigrant named Lionel Brooking, 21, after buying from Snyder the book *The Great Controversy* by Ellen G. White, studied the Bible and started to work as a canvasser in July 1892. He did it at first among the French-, English-, and German-speaking communities.¹⁰ Another of the first converts was John McCarthy, in 1893, who was the director of a home for sailors in Buenos Aires.¹¹

After working for some time in Argentina, Snyder went to Brazil. In 1893, he and other canvassers couldn't work because the book *Patriarchs and Prophets* did not arrive in the estimated time. Then Snyder boarded the Brazilian ship *Júpiter* with three suitcases of books in English and planned to work for two months in Rio de Janeiro. Revolutionaries hijacked the ship and sailed to Rio Grande do Sul, the first major Brazilian port north of the border with Uruguay. Snyder continued toward Rio de Janeiro, having lost all his books.¹² However, not everything was a loss. At the Sailors' Home in Rio de Janeiro, Snyder met a young German named Alberto Bachmeyer who had converted to Christianity a few months earlier in Liverpool, England. Snyder taught Bachmeyer Adventist doctrines and prepared him for canvassing.¹³

Marriage and Service in Paraguay and Argentina (1895–1905)

In January 1895, Snyder returned to the United States to attend the General Conference Session. A few months later, on May 21, 1895, he married Estelle Jane Ketring, with whom he traveled later to South America, where they remained for four years.¹⁴ In June 1897, he participated in the founding of the paper *El Faro* [The lighthouse], with Frank H. Westphal, John McCarty, Jean Vuilleumier, and Nelson Z. Town, which was a success from its inception.¹⁵

On July 18, 1900, after vacation, the Snyders went to the Republic of Paraguay to officially and formally begin the work in response to a request. Before that trip, Snyder was ordained as an evangelical minister. They remained in that country for two and a half years.¹⁶ Some people accepted the Adventist message as a result of their evangelizing work and the distribution of publications, but the first to be baptized in Paraguay were five people from Colonia Nacional at the end of 1901, including Samuel Hein and others who had the last names Mondelli and Bashumar.¹⁷ Due to health problems, Snyder had to return to Buenos Aires in 1903 and was given charge of the Buenos Aires office. In 1904, Pastor Snyder served as secretary and treasurer in the River Plate Conference.

¹⁸ At that time, he also participated in the humble beginning of the Adventist publishing house, currently the South American Spanish Publishing House, with many other pastors and missionaries.¹⁹ The Snyder couple

returned to the United States in 1905 to attend the General Conference Session.

Work in Cuba and the United States (1905–1914)

In 1905, the General Conference invited the Snyders to go to Cuba. They did, and Pastor Snyder was the director of the Cuban Mission, and when necessary, also filled the role of secretary and treasurer. He remained in Cuba until the tropical climate undermined his and his wife's health, making it necessary for them to return to the United States in 1912. Their condition became so precarious that their doctor insisted that they stop working in the islands, so they decided to go to southern California. During 1913 and 1914, Snyder was in charge of the work among Mexican residents in the city of Los Angeles. His ability with languages made his work in that city especially valuable. Then, he tried to resume pastoral work in Georgia, but health problems did not let him continue.

Health Problems and His Last Years (1915–1919)

During 1915, Pastor Snyder was in charge of the Pacific Press publications exhibition at the Panama Exhibition in San Francisco, California. For several years he made strong efforts to regain his physical strength, so weakened because of his long stay in the tropics. Toward the end of 1918, he felt impelled again to carry out pastoral work in connection with Dr. Hayward's Sanitarium in Georgia, United States, where, shortly after, he fell victim to an influenza epidemic. Snyder died in Glendale, California, on February 15, 1919, at age 54.²⁰ His wife was ill in another part of the United States at that moment.

Elwin W. Snyder has left to the following generations an example of missionary spirit through the work done in Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay, Cuba, and the United States. He combined the ministry of publications with pastoral and evangelizing work.

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NOTES

1. Don F. Neufeld, ed., *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, 2nd rev. ed., vol. 11 of the Commentary Reference Series (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1996), s.v. "Snyder, Elwin Winthrop"; Mario H. Utz Goltz and Nilda T. Portes Maschmann, *La Iglesia Adventista en el Paraguay: Origen y Desarrollo, 1892–2010* [The Adventist Church in Paraguay: Origin and development, 1892–2010] (Buenos Aires: South American Spanish Publishing House, 2013), 27–28.
2. George Thomason, "Elwin Winthrop Snyder," *ARH*, April 24, 1919, 21.
3. Jorge Tomason, "Necrología" [Obituary], *La Revista Adventista* [Adventist review], November 20, 1919, 18.

4. Héctor J. Peverini, *En las huellas de la Providencia* [In the footsteps of providence] (Buenos Aires: South American Spanish Publishing House, 1988), 92.
5. K. C. Russell, "Pennsylvania," *ARH*, February 5, 1889, 90.
6. Tomason, "Necrología," 18.
7. Peverini, *En las huellas de la Providencia*, 42.
8. "The bookmen's quick departure from Uruguay reflected their unpreparedness, which was not all their fault. The Mission Board first intended to send two teams, each consisting of four to six colporteurs. One group would go to Brazil, the other to Argentina. After casting about for two months, the board could find only three men with satisfactory records who were willing to go. Further search was fruitless, so the mission leaders conveniently concluded that three experienced men could "test" the work better than a larger number, anyway, and sent the men on their way." Floyd Greenleaf, *A Land of Hope: The Growth of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in South America* (Tatuí, S.P.: Casa Publicadora Brasileira, 2011), 29; Peverini, *En las huellas de la Providencia*, 41.
9. Greenleaf, *Land of Hope*, 30.
10. Peverini, *En las huellas de la Providencia*, 41–42; Greenleaf, *Land of Hope*, 31.
11. Peverini, *En las huellas de la Providencia*, 42–43. Greenleaf, *Land of Hope*, 31.
12. E. W. Snyder, "The Present Situation in Brazil," *ARH*, September 19, 1893.
13. Peverini, *En las huellas de la Providencia*, 44.
14. Greenleaf, *Land of Hope*, 47n23. E. W. Snyder, "The Present Situation in Brazil," *ARH*, September 19, 1893.
15. Peverini, *En las huellas de la Providencia*, 92.
16. Tomason, "Necrología," 18; Walton John Brown, "A Historical Study of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Austral South America" (Ph.D. diss., University of Southern California, 1953), 106; "Notas" [Notes], *El Faro* [The lighthouse], August 1900, 23. Emma E. Howell mentions another date: "In 1898 the Snyder spouses arrived in the 'very' Catholic Republic of Paraguay. One or two people from Asunción had begun keep the Saturday, convinced by some publications they had received. This small principle served as a stimulus for them." Emma E. Howell, *El gran Movimiento Adventista* [The great Adventist Movement] (Buenos Aires: South American Spanish Publishing House, n.d.), 208. Coinciding with the date mentioned first, Snyder claims to have arrived in Asunción on August 1, 1900. E. W. Snyder, "The Work in Paraguay," *ARH*, June 11, 1901, 12.

17. Peverini, *En las huellas de la Providencia*, 73. Don F. Neufeld, ed., *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, vol. 10 of the Commentary Reference Series, rev. ed. (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1976), s.v. "Paraguay: SDA Work"; E. W. Snyder, "Paraguay," *Missionary Magazine* 14, no. 1 (January 1912): 41; Ramón Flores, *Una historia de servicio* [A history of service] (Posadas, Misiones: self-pub, n.d.), 9; cited in Utz Goltz and Portes Maschmann, *La Iglesia Adventista en el Paraguay*, 28.
18. Tomason, "Necrología," 18; "River Plate Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1904), 73.
19. In the meeting of River Plate Conference held in Humboldt, Santa Fe, Argentina, in October 1902, it was agreed to begin with the construction of the printing press, although only in 1904, at the meeting in San Jerónimo, Santa Fe, were definite measures taken to do so. Cited in Peverini, *En las huellas de la Providencia*, 100. Funds were raised (US\$160 and 236.50 Argentine pesos were collected).
20. Tomason, "Necrología," 18; Utz Goltz and Portes Maschmann, *La Iglesia Adventista en el Paraguay*, 27; George Thomason, "Elwin Winthrop Snyder obituary," *Pacific Union Recorder*, April 3, 1919, 7.

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