

# Nicola, Benn Eugene (1865–1943)

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## 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.

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Benn E. Nicola was a minister and educator who served as principal of Oakwood Industrial School and Battle Creek Industrial Academy. He then became a physician, devoting the second half of his career to sanitarium work and finally private practice.

## Heritage and Education

Benn Eugene Nicola, son of Zalmon and Mary (Kinsey) Nicola, was born in Pilot Grove, Iowa, on June 12, 1865. Zalmon Nicola was a teamster who later turned to farming. Benn had three brothers: Amos Zalmon (b. 1860), Charles Chesterfield (b. 1867) and Daniel Kinsey (b. 1874).<sup>1</sup>

As a boy Benn attended the Pilot Grove church, the first Seventh-day Adventist group to be organized west of the Mississippi River and in which his parents were charter members.<sup>2</sup> His elementary education took place in public schools and he began academy in a private institution in Mt. Pleasant, near Pilot Grove in southeastern Iowa. In June 1884 he was baptized by Ira J. Hankins at Mt. Pleasant. He then entered Battle Creek College, graduating in 1893 with a bachelor of science. In the summers he had canvassed books or assisted evangelistic efforts as tent master.<sup>3</sup>



Dr. B. E. Nicola

Benn Eugene Nicola

Photo courtesy of Center for Adventist Research.

On June 14, 1894, Benn married Hattie Mae Case (1868-1927). William W. Prescott performed the ceremony at Augusta, near Battle Creek and her home at Ross Township. It was a double wedding, sister Minnie Case being married to Marion Cady at the same time. Benn and Hattie had six children: Tesla Case (b. 1896), twins Aileen Janua and Bertha E. (b. 1898), Shirley June (b. 1900), Audrey Zalmon (b. 1902) and Quintus C. (b. 1905).<sup>4</sup>

## Minister and Educator

Nicola first joined the ministerial team in Iowa, assisting in tent meetings throughout the 1890s. During the winters of 1894-1895 and 1895-1896 he taught classes at the General Conference Bible School, College View, Nebraska. He remained there to teach full-time at Union College until 1898. He returned briefly to ministerial work in Iowa where he was ordained to the gospel ministry in June 1899 by James H. Morrison and I. H. Evans.<sup>5</sup>

In 1899, Nicola began a five-year term as principal of Oakwood Industrial School, the denomination's fledgling school for Black youth in Huntsville, Alabama, that eventually became Oakwood University.<sup>6</sup> He transferred to Michigan in 1904 to be principal of Battle Creek Industrial Academy and earn a master of science degree from Battle Creek College (the school that opened in 1903 under the auspices of Dr. J. H. Kellogg, not the original Battle Creek College).<sup>7</sup>

## Medical Career

Nicola then earned a doctor of medicine degree at American Medical Missionary College in Battle Creek, graduating in 1910.<sup>8</sup> He was briefly associated with the Boulder-Colorado Sanitarium prior to becoming superintendent of the independently-managed Attleboro Sanitarium in Massachusetts. During his eight years at Attleboro, Dr. Nicola was also on the teaching staff of Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston. In 1919, he transferred to the Nebraska Sanitarium in College View, Nebraska, closely associated with Union College.<sup>9</sup> The sanitarium closed as a college-affiliated institution in 1920, but Dr. Nicola opened a small institution in the same locale that continued operation as College View Sanitarium.<sup>10</sup> His wife, Hattie, passed away on January 4, 1927, and was interred in College View Cemetery.<sup>11</sup>

On July 30, 1929, Nicola married 39-year-old Dr. Blanche Olive Noble (1890-1967) in Davidson, Tennessee. Dr. Edward Sutherland performed their ceremony.<sup>12</sup> They established a medical practice in the mountains at Owens Valley, California, and later in North Hollywood, suburban Los Angeles, California. Nicola helped to organize a church community at North Hollywood and often preached there and in the neighboring churches. He passed away at his North Hollywood home on November 17, 1943,<sup>13</sup> and was later interred with Hattie in College View Cemetery, Nebraska.<sup>14</sup>

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## NOTES

1. Marion E. Cady, "Ben Eugene Nicola obituary," *ARH*, March 23, 1944, 20; "Ben Eugene Nicola," *FamilySearch*, accessed January 27, 2023, <https://www.familysearch.org/tree/pedigree/landscape/KZJL-SDB>. Although his given name often appeared as "Ben," Nicola spelled it "Benn" in his own handwriting on an original document, a spelling confirmed by some public records.
2. Cady, "Ben Eugene obituary."
3. Benn Eugene Nicola Biographical Information Blank, August 27, 1905, Secretariat Missionary Files, RG 21, Record 114934, GCA.
4. "Benjamin Eugene Nicola," *FamilySearch*.
5. "Benn Eugene Nicola," Biographical Information Blank.
6. Leslie N. Pollard, Samuel London, Mervyn A. Warren, Cheryl A. Galley, Lela Gooding, Nigel Barham, and Simone Wells, "Oakwood University," *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists*, January 29, 2020, accessed March 24, 2023, <https://encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=AFWD>.
7. Ibid.

8. Benn Eugene Nicola in *California, U.S., Occupational Licenses, Registers, and Directories, 1876-1969*, Ancestry.com.
  9. Cady, "Ben Eugene obituary." Attleboro was one of several sanitariums listed in the Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook for 1912 and for 1913 under the heading "Privately Owned or Managed, and Not Under Conference Supervision."
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