

Gospel Herald

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The *Gospel Herald* was a monthly periodical published from 1898 to 1923 to inform readers about the Adventist work among the Black population of the American South and promote the advancement of that mission.

Origins

Shortly after a personal, spiritual revival, J. Edson White (1849-1928) read an appeal that his mother Ellen White, prophet and cofounder of the Seventh-day Adventist church, issued in 1891 entitled "Our Duty to the Colored People." He became convicted that he should respond to that call by undertaking a mission to the South, then home to 90 percent of the nation's Black population, largely untouched by the Adventist message. For this task, he had a small steamboat, christened the Morning Star, constructed in Michigan and launched on the Mississippi River in 1894 to serve as a base.¹

In May 1898, White began publishing the *Gospel Herald* onboard the Morning Star at Yazoo City, Mississippi. Its initial purpose was to report developments in the Adventist mission work in the Black South and serve as a fundraising tool.²

History

The periodical was issued by the Gospel Herald Publishing Company, the publishing arm of the Southern Missionary Society (SMS), the self-supporting organization set up under White's leadership to coordinate the work of planting schools, churches, and clinics throughout the South. White served as its editor until 1901. For the first year and a half it was printed on two steam-powered presses on the lower deck of the Morning Star.³



First issue of the *Gospel Herald*, May 1898.

Then, from August of 1899 through December 1900, it was published in Battle Creek, Michigan.

At the end of 1900, the SMS publishing entity, its name now shortened to Herald Publishing Company moved to Nashville, Tennessee, first to an estate rented on behalf of the SMS by Louis Hansen for use as a “treatment room” (small clinic), then in March 1901 to a two-story brick store purchased by the SMS.⁴ Shortly thereafter, in June 1901, the Herald Publishing Company became the Southern Publishing Association (SPA)⁵ This entailed a change of management from the SMS under Edson White’s direction to the Southern Union Conference, also newly formed that year as part of an overall denominational reorganization.⁶

The organizational changes of 1901 were accompanied by a change in editorial policy. The *Gospel Herald* was repurposed as a general evangelistic journal for the South with reports on the Black mission issued separately as supplements. In 1902, publication frequency increased to weekly, with C. P. Bollman serving as editor. After the fifth issue came out in 1903, the Gospel Herald was absorbed into the SPA’s periodical, *Southern Watchman* (later, *These Times*).⁷

The *Gospel Herald* would have a second incarnation once again as the SMS’s organ for reporting and promoting the Black Adventist work, edited by J. E. White. But for the five issues published during the remainder of 1903 and the first in 1904, the periodical would be entitled the Southern Missionary. The title then changed back to the Gospel Herald with the second issue published in 1904.⁸

The SMS was subsumed into the North American Negro Department established by the General Conference in 1909. This new department became the publisher of the Gospel Herald in its final phase, 1910 to 1923, with the publication office located in Huntsville, Alabama (starting with the February 1911 issue)⁹

Content and Features

For much of its history, the paper’s design remained simple. However, it was attractively illustrated with line drawings and photographs and rarely showed typographical errors, a testament to Edson’s skill and experience with printing.¹⁰ The first section initially contained a portion of quotations from Ellen White. This was sometimes followed by a story. During its early history, the *Gospel Herald* reported the activities of the Morning Star. Typically, some treatise on a scriptural passage or message was included as well. Elements of the book *Bible Readings for the Home* sometimes formed a part of this. Poems were also occasionally added. The final pages were reserved for announcements and news.

The original subscription price was 25 cents a year.¹¹ By 1908, this had changed to a mere 10 cents.¹² For the final year of publication, 1923, the price was again the same as for its first – 25 cents.¹³

Legacy

Though the *Gospel Herald* ceased publication in 1923, its work would continue. After a gap that stretched far too long, its function of reporting and promoting the Black Adventist work would be taken over by the North American Informant when its publication began in 1946. The evangelistic role would be taken up by *Message* magazine, which SPA began publishing in 1934. More than 85 years later, publication of *Message* continues.

Throughout its years of publication, the *Gospel Herald* served to advance the Adventist cause among African Americans, particularly in the South. For many decades, countless Black pastors, Bible workers, teachers, and workers of all kinds could trace the beginnings of their service for Christ to the Gospel Herald and the work it supported.

Lists

Titles: *Gospel Herald* (1898-1903, 1904-1923), *Southern Missionary* (1903-1904)

Publishers: *Gospel Herald Publishing Company* (May 1898-May 1899); *Southern Missionary Society* (August 1899-December 1900, 1904-February 1910); *Southern Publishing Association* (June 1901 - 1903); *North American Negro Department* (March 1910-August 1923).

Editors: J.E. White (1898-1901; 1904-1910), C.P. Bollman (1902-1903), A.J. Haysmer (1910-1913), T.H. Jeys (1913-1916), C.J. Boyd (1916), W.L. Bird (1916-1923), J.A. Tucker (1923).

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NOTES

1. Michael W. Campbell, "White, James Edson," in *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, ed. Denis Fortin and Jerry Moon (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2013), 554-556; accessible online as "James Edson White," Ellen G. White Estate, <https://ellenwhite.org/people/110>.
2. Samuel G. London, *Seventh-day Adventists and the Civil Rights Movement* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009), 45.
3. London, *Seventh-day Adventists and the Civil Rights Movement*, 45-46.
4. Jerry Moon, "Southern Missionary Society," *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, 1181, and Gerald Wheeler, "Southern Publishing Association," in *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, 1181-1182.
5. "Incorporation and Organization of the Southern Publishing Association," unpublished manuscript, May 6, 1901, Manuscript, Del E. Webb Memorial Library, Loma Linda University, Loma Linda, CA.
6. Campbell, "White, James Edson."
7. *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, 2nd rev. edition (1996), s.v. "Gospel Herald [1]."
8. *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, 2nd rev. edition (1996), s.v. "Gospel Herald [2]."
9. Delbert W. Baker, "The Evolution of the Gospel Herald to the *Message Magazine*, 1898-1934," in Delbert W. Baker, ed., *Telling the Story: An Anthology on the Development of the Black SDA Work* (Atlanta and Nashville: Black Caucus of SDA Administrators, 1996), 480.
10. Ronald D. Graybill, *Mission to Black America: The True Story of Edson White and the Riverboat Morning Star* (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press, 1971), 59.
11. *The Gospel Herald*, May 1, 1898, 12.
12. *The Gospel Herald*, January 1, 1908, 4.

13. *The Gospel Herald*, August 1, 1923, 4.

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