

Farnsworth, Vesta Jane (1855–1932)

MARIAN DE BERG

Marian de Berg, secretarial (Avondale University College, Cooranbong, NSW, Australia) retired in 2017 as administration assistant, Ellen G. White/SDA Research Centre, Avondale University College. A New Zealander by birth she has served the church in South New Zealand and Queensland conferences, South Pacific Division, and Avondale University College. In retirement she enjoys guiding at Sunnyside Historic House. She authored the book *Stories from Sunnyside* and wrote several articles for *Record*. She is married to Kevin with 2 adult daughters and 3 grandsons.

Vesta Farnsworth was an author and editor. Farnsworth began early in her career to write articles for *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*.

Early Life

Vesta Jane Cady was born on November 15, 1855 in Poy Sippi, Wisconsin, U.S.A., the eldest of eleven children to Pastor Philander H. Cady (1833-1897) and Mrs. Nancy J. H. Cady (1834-1914). Her mother and father, born in Ohio and Vermont respectively, moved to this frontier state,¹ married in March 1854, and established a home in Wisconsin. Her parents were the only Sabbath keepers in the town when they accepted the Seventh-day Adventist message in 1857.² Vesta Cady attended local schools and spent some years in teaching.³

Marriage and Ministry

In 1877, Vesta Cady commenced writing articles in the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*. In the same year at the age of twenty-two, she married Andrew D. Olsen (1851-1890), a brother to Elder Ole A. Olsen,⁴ who was later to become the General Conference President from 1888-1897.⁵ Andrew Olsen was ordained to ministry in 1880, elected president of the Dakota Conference in 1885, and president of the Minnesota Conference in 1887.⁶ Vesta Olsen worked closely with her husband in evangelism and carried a ministerial license.⁷ In 1889 they moved to Boulder, Colorado after Andrew was diagnosed with consumption. Another sufferer hoping to regain her health in the Colorado climate at this time was Mary Kelsey White. Ellen White visited her daughter-in-law and Andrew Olsen in the spring of 1890. Andrew was greatly blessed by Ellen's message of the Saviour's love. Unfortunately on August 2, 1890 he died at the age of thirty-nine.⁸ When the grave stone was laid, Vesta Olsen wrote: "It was so hard to leave my darling, but he needs me no more...I could but weep as I bowed over that sacred spot."⁹

New Beginnings

Soon after Andrew's death Vesta Olsen moved to Oakland, California and became corresponding secretary of the International Sabbath School Association, a position she held as well as conducting editorial work for *Our Little Friend* and *Sabbath School Worker* from 1892-1893.¹⁰ Three years later, on November 29, 1893, she married Eugene W. Farnsworth (1847-1935),¹¹ a Bible instructor at Union College, and moved to Nebraska. In 1896 the couple accepted an invitation to work in New Zealand and Australia for the next eight years. In 1897 the husband and wife team worked as president and secretary of the New Zealand Conference and Farnsworth later accepted the presidency of the New Zealand Sabbath School Association.¹² Australia beckoned in 1900 and en route to Melbourne Vesta and Eugene felt it a real privilege to stay in the home of Ellen White at Cooranbong.¹³ In May 1902, the Union Conference reported in *The Bible Echo* that Vesta would take up the editorial work on the periodical.¹⁴ However, rather than Vesta's name appearing as editor, her husband's name was listed in the journal as editor from June 16, 1902 to April 4, 1904. Again, at the Australasian Union Conference Committee meetings in September 1903, Vesta Farnsworth was appointed as editor of the *Australian Signs of the Times*.¹⁵ However, again, E.W. Farnsworth's name appeared on the masthead (1903 to mid-1904). The Farnsworths completed their term of service in the south seas toward the



Vesta Farnsworth
Photo courtesy of South Pacific Division Heritage Centre.

end of 1904 and labored in the South England Conference for several months in 1905.¹⁶

Publishing

Vesta Farnsworth continued to publish articles in church papers: Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, The Bible Echo, Union Conference Record, The Youth's Instructor, and the Australian Signs of the Times. She had cared for the section, "Our Sabbath Schools," in the Union Conference Record from September 1899 to January 1902, and was classified as a special contributor to The Youth's Instructor.¹⁷ She also authored several of the Week of Prayer for Children readings.¹⁸ Her practical suggestions on work for juniors was also discussed at General Conferences as well as serving on many of the church's committees.¹⁹ She was the author of three books for children, *The House We Live In* (1900), *Friends and Foes in Field and Forest* (1913) and *Stories Mother Told* (1925). Her book for families, *The Real Home* (1923), was considered a masterpiece.²⁰

Back to the United States

In 1906 Vesta's husband, Eugene W. Farnsworth, was appointed president of the Atlantic Union Conference in South Lancaster, MA.²¹ Several moves followed to Takoma Park, MD, Oakland, CA, St. Helena, CA and then Glendale, CA. Vesta worked tirelessly assisting her husband, leading out in Sabbath School activities, and writing for church papers. The sweetest praise she considered from her husband was when he stated: "Surely you are a homemaker."²² Although she was never blessed with children of her own, she considered the training of the church's youth and children of paramount importance. Four children were accepted into her home so that they could obtain the benefits of a Christian education. Other young people received her help and encouragement to attend Christian schools. Vesta died on July 31, 1932. Her funeral was held in the Glendale Church on Sabbath afternoon, August 6, 1932. Elder Fulton compared her life to that of the Biblical Sarah. She was laid to rest in Forest Lawn Cemetery at Glendale, CA.²³

Contribution

Vesta Jane Farnsworth began early in her career to write articles for *The Advent Review* and *Sabbath Herald*. Her work for the International Sabbath School Association was also a lifetime passion. She contributed to many other church papers over a period of a half century and authored four books, some of which were recommended reading for Junior and Missionary Volunteer courses.²⁴ She worked closely with her husband in several places within the United States, New Zealand, Australia, and England. She was described as a woman of versatile talent, of consecrated life, of prayer and faith.²⁵

SOURCES

"Actions Taken by the Australasian Union Conference Committee." *Union Conference Record*. September 22, 1903.

"Addresses." *ARH*. March 26, 1889, 207.

"At the late Union Conference in Sydney . . ." *The Bible Echo*. May 19, 1902.

"Cady." *ARH*. February 23, 1897.

Cady, Vesta J. "The Work of Victory." *ARH* May 3, 1877.

Cady, Vesta J. "To the Unconverted." *ARH*. May 24, 1877.

"Death of Mrs E.W. Farnsworth." *ARH*. August 25, 1932.

Farnsworth, E. W. and Vesta Farnsworth. Entry in Australian Autograph Album given to Ellen G. White on her departure back to the United States of America. August 29, 1900, 4. Held in the Ellen G White/SDA Research Centre, South Pacific Division, Avondale College of Higher Education, Cooranbong, NSW, Australia.

Farnsworth, Vesta J. "Nancy Jane Cady (Hall) obituary." *ARH*. August 27, 1914.

Farnsworth, Vesta J. "Week of Prayer for Children." *Australasian Record*. April 20, 1914.

Fulton, J. E. "Death of Mrs E.W. Farnsworth." *Australasian Record*. 17 October, 1932.

Fulton, J.E. "Mrs E.W. Farnsworth obituary." *Pacific Union Recorder*, August 18, 1932.

Fulton, J. E. "Mrs Vesta J. Farnsworth." *ARH*. October 6, 1932.

"Gather the Children." *Union Conference Record*, April 4, 1910.

"In Memoriam 1855-1932 – Mrs Vesta J. Farnsworth." Held in the Ellen G White/SDA Research Centre, South Pacific Division. Avondale College of Higher Education. DF 475-a.

"It is expected that . . ." *Union Conference Record*, January 1, 1900.

"Missionary Volunteer Reading Course 1925." *The Youth's Instructor*, June 2, 1925.

"New Zealand Conference Proceedings." *The Bible Echo*. January 25, 1897.

"New Zealand Sabbath School Association." *Union Conference Record*. December 15, 1898.

Olsen, O. A. "Andrew D. Olsen obituary." *ARH*. September 9, 1890.

"Sabbath Schools." *Union Conference Record*. September 1, 1899.

Vesta Olsen's Diary, 1890. Held in the Ellen G. White/SDA Research Centre, South Pacific Division. Avondale College of Higher Education, Cooranbong NSW, Australia. Electronic database.

NOTES

1. J. E. Fulton, "Mrs Vesta J. Farnsworth," *ARH*, October 6, 1932, 958.?
2. Vesta J. Farnsworth, "Nancy Jane Hall Cady," *ARH*, August 27, 1914, 21.?
3. Fulton, 958.?
4. *Ibid.*?
5. Daniel A. Ochs & Grace Lillian Ochs, *The Past and the Presidents* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1974), 75-87.?
6. O. A. Olsen, "Andrew D. Olsen obituary," *ARH*, September 9, 1890, 559.?
7. A Ministerial License held by Vesta J. Olsen for 1883 is held in the Ellen G. White/SDA Research Centre, South Pacific Division Avondale College of Higher Education, Cooranbong NSW Australia, DF 475-a.?
8. Olsen, 559.?
9. Diary of Vesta Olsen, September 26, 1890. Held in the Ellen G. White/SDA Research Centre, South Pacific Division, Avondale College of Higher Education, Cooranbong NSW, Australia.?
10. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Battle Creek, MI: General Conference Association of Seventh-day Adventists, 1893), 18.?
11. Marriage Information for Eugene W. Farnsworth and Vesta J. Cady, Lincoln County Genealogical Society, Book 14, 213.?
12. "New Zealand Conference Proceedings," *The Bible Echo*, January 25, 1897, 29.?
13. See E.W. & Vesta J. Farnsworth entry in the Ellen G. White Autograph Album given to her on her departure from Australia, August 29, 1900, 4. Held in the Ellen G White/SDA Research Centre, South Pacific Division, Avondale College of Higher Education, Cooranbong, NSW, Australia.?
14. "At the late Union Conference....," *The Bible Echo*, May 19, 1902, 168.?
15. "Actions Taken by the Australasian Union Conference Committee," *Union Conference Record*, September 22, 1903, 22.?
16. Fulton, 958.?
17. "Editorial Appointments," *General Conference Bulletin*, April, 1895, 518,520.?
18. "Gather the Children," *Union Conference Record*, April 4, 1910, 7. Vesta Farnsworth, "Week of Prayer for the Children," *Australasian Record*, April 20, 1914, 3.?
19. See General Conference Bulletin, May 22, 1913, 102 and May 29, 1913, 190.?
20. Fulton, 958.?
21. "Atlantic Union Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook 1906*, 18.?
22. J. E. Fulton, "In Memoriam 1855-1932," 22; Held at the Ellen G. White/SDA Research Centre, South Pacific Division, Avondale College of Higher Education, Cooranbong, NSW, Australia, DF 475 -a, 4.?
23. *Ibid.*?
24. See "MV Question Box," *Youth's Instructor*, July 6, 1915, 14, and "MV Reading Course," *Youth's Instructor*, June 2, 1925, 3.?

25. "Death of Mrs E.W. Farnsworth," *ARH*, August 25, 1932, 816.?

encyclopedia.adventist.org is an official website of the [Seventh-day Adventist World Church](#)

© 2020 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists 12501 Old Columbia Pike Silver Spring , MD 20904 USA 301-680-6000