

Follett, Orno

(1882–1960)

FRANK W. HARDY

Frank W. Hardy, Ph.D. (University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, New Mexico, 1979) is now retired. He worked at La Vida Mission (Tsaya, New Mexico) 1969-1972, at Southwestern Adventist College 1978-1980, and at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (Silver Spring, Maryland) 1996-2012. He has published two bilingual missionary booklets (Navajo, English): *Christ Bihigíí* [Things That Are Christ's] (Pacific Press, 1978); *Jesus Hol Yiashgo* [Walking With Jesus] (Ellen G. White Estate, 2008). The second is an adaptation of *Steps to Christ* by Ellen G. White.

Orno Follett and his wife, Agnes Gertrude Wammack Follett (1883-1966), pioneered Seventh-day Adventist mission among Native Americans in the American Southwest.

Early Life and Work

Orno Follett was born March 26, 1882, in Coloma, Wisconsin. He studied nursing at St. Helena

Sanitarium in California, but contracted tuberculosis

which forced him to leave school before graduating. Follett moved to southwestern Kansas where he gradually recovered his health and took up colporteur work. There he met Agnes Wammack, who, after attending Union College, had become a church school teacher and then a Bible instructor for the Kansas Conference.¹ Otto and Agnes married in 1909 and went on to have five children: Manoa (1910-1955), Orno, Jr. (1912-1928), Ira (1914-2007), Naomi (1916-2000), and Austin (1919-1950).

The couple engaged in evangelistic work in southwestern Kansas for two years before Follett again contracted tuberculosis in 1912, this time in the throat. The couple had initially planned to serve as missionaries in Africa, but now that dream vanished. A doctor gave Follett six months to live and suggested that a higher, dryer climate might relieve his symptoms during the short time that remained.²

On this advice, the family settled near Santa Fe, New Mexico. Follett worked vigorously out of doors, but could barely speak above a whisper. The Folletts attended a camp meeting in Alamosa, Colorado, in 1915 where Follett



Orno Follett.

Photo courtesy of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Archives.

requested special prayer for his throat. On the way home he started to recover and soon could speak normally.

Lake Grove Indian Mission

The Folletts became interested in reaching Native Americans with the Adventist message, and came to the conviction that this was the mission field to which God was leading them. Follett spoke to the administration of the local New Mexico Conference about serving as a worker among the Navajo Indian people, but no funds were available.³

Follett then corresponded with I. H. Evans, the General Conference vice-president for North America, about support for such a mission. Concerns about Follett's health made church leaders hesitant to endorse the proposal. At the 1916 Fall Council, though the North American Division Conference Committee responded favorably to the "careful report" that Follett submitted based on his five months "on the ground," the council voted that his work continue under the auspices of the Texico Conference (newly formed by a merger of the New Mexico and West Texas Conferences) and formed a committee to finalize plans for developing the mission.⁴

The following April, Evans and J. W. Christian, president of the Southwestern Union Conference, and B. E. Beddoe, president of the Pacific Union Conference, accompanied Follett on a two-day tour of the area in search of an appropriate site for a mission.⁵ The 1917 Fall Council approved a detailed plan calling for purchase of 640 acres of timbered land from the Santa Fe Railroad at \$3.00 per acre. The plan also included "the erection of suitable buildings as a home for the missionaries, a school building, and a dispensary" on the site located a few miles from the Navajo Reservation at Smith Lake and eleven miles northeast of the small town of Thoreau, New Mexico.⁶

The land, according to Follett, was called Tsin-naz-baus-sa or Lake Grove, and that was the name chosen for the mission.⁷ By this time, Follett had "acquired a workable knowledge of the language" and was also able to draw on what he had learned at St. Helena about basic health remedies to build rapport with the Navajo people.⁸ He reported in February 1917 that the mission had won its first convert, a young woman of twenty named Lilikai and educated at government schools, whom Follett described as "exceptionally bright."⁹

The board responsible for administrative oversight of Lake Grove Mission included the presidents of the Southwestern Union Conference, Texico Conference, Pacific Union Conference, and Arizona Conference in addition to the director of the mission.¹⁰ This arrangement would prove foresightful because Follett's mandate would eventually extend beyond Smith Lake, New Mexico, and the Navajo people to include a number of tribes in southern Arizona.

The Folletts remained at Lake Grove Mission for six years (1918-1924), during which Follett's health began to deteriorate. In 1924, the General Conference granted the Folletts a year off with pay. They spent the year at Beaumont, California, but Follett's health still was not strong enough for a return to Lake Grove. Then, tragically,

fifteen-year-old Orno, Jr., was struck with a brain tumor that took his life on January 30, 1928.¹¹

After finally returning to Lake Grove in 1929, the Folletts expanded the mission dispensary into a small hospital, dedicated on December 2, 1930.¹² The mission again flourished under their leadership and Follett was ordained to the gospel ministry in 1930.¹³ However, his health again declined, due primarily to the high altitude (7,240 ft.), forcing the Folletts to leave their mission work at Lake Grove for the last time in 1931.¹⁴

Broader Ministry Among Native Americans

The mission remained open and when Follett returned for a visit in 1938, he found G. B. Boswell and his wife carrying on the work. "We were made happy indeed as Brother Boswell took us from camp to camp of our old Navajo members and friends to find so large a number who still profess faith and hope in the message," Follett reported.¹⁵ Eventually though, the mission property was sold to another Protestant denomination.

The Folletts moved to Arizona in 1931 to continue doing the work they loved among Native Americans on that state's twenty-two reservations.¹⁶ Over time they raised up four churches and one school, working primarily among the Maricopa, Pima, Yaqui, and Yavapai.¹⁷

Between 1923 and 1951, his final year in full-time denominational ministry,¹⁸ Orno Follett contributed 15 articles to the *Pacific Union Recorder*, and many more to the *Review*. In his last article for the *Recorder* Follett reported visiting an elderly Pima woman who had become blind and was quite discouraged. Follett and his two Indian companions talked with her about how Christ had restored sight to the blind and then prayed for her. A few days later her sight began to return and eventually she was entirely healed. A medical doctor, on hearing this, affirmed, "That experience was a real miracle."¹⁹

Though slowed by health limitations, the Folletts continued to engage in labor for the Native American peoples of Arizona, according to a report in the *Review* in early 1953.²⁰ Follett continued as editor of the *Indian Missionary*, a monthly periodical he began in 1944 under the auspices of the Arizona Conference, until 1956. In 1958, the Folletts returned to Kansas where they had met and married half a century before.²¹ Follett died on September 3, 1960, in Oberlin, Kansas, survived by his wife who went to her rest in 1966.

Legacy

In one way or another, Orno Follett influenced every aspect of Seventh-day Adventist ministry to Native Americans in the Southwest. He has been called "the apostle to the Navajoes [sic],"²² but, more than this, he became an apostle to many Indian tribes. In addition to founding Lake Grove Mission, he mentored Marvin Walter before Walter led out in the establishment of both the Holbrook Indian School (1946) and Monument Valley Mission (1951).

Follett's influence was everywhere present in the founding of La Vida Mission in Crownpoint, New Mexico, in 1962. The idea for La Vida Mission derived from a dream experienced by Lilikai Julian Neil, Follett's first convert at Lake Grove.²³ That mission remains as a final testament to the impact of a richly useful life consecrated to the leading and power of God.

SOURCES

"Agnes Grace Wammack Follett obituary." *ARH*, July 21, 1966.

Benton, R.L. "The Lake Grove Indian Mission." *ARH*, October 18, 1923.

Branson, W.H. "Evangelism in North America." *ARH*, June 7, 1934.

Christian, J.W. "Our Indian Mission." *Southwestern Union Record*, May 29, 1917.

Christian, J.W. "Southwestern Union Conference." *ARH*, May 23, 1918.

Follett, Agnes. "Advance or Retreat - Which?" *Southwestern Union Record*, June 17, 1931.

———. "Indian Items." *Southwestern Union Record*, May 27, 1931.

———. "Indians Want Pictures." *Southwestern Union Record*, June 3, 1931.

Follett, Orno. "Approaching North American Indians." *Ministry*, May 1941.

Follett, Orno. "Among the Indians." *Pacific Union Recorder*, May 1, 1935.

———. "Among the Indians." *Pacific Union Recorder*, June 14, 1939.

———. "Among the Indians." *Pacific Union Recorder*, April 26, 1944.

———. "Among the Indians in Arizona." *Pacific Union Recorder*, February 26, 1941.

———. "Among the Indians of Arizona." *Pacific Union Recorder*, October 25, 1939.

———. "Among the Indians of Southern Arizona." *Pacific Union Recorder*, March 31, 1948.

———. "Among the Arizona Indians." *Pacific Union Recorder*, March 20, 1940.

———. "Among the Yuma Indians." *Pacific Union Recorder*, May 25, 1938.

———. "An Indian Program." *Pacific Union Recorder*, June 25, 1947.

———. "Blind Indian Healed." *Pacific Union Recorder*, April 11, 1955.

———. "Clothing for Indians." *Pacific Union Recorder*, January 11, 1923.

———. "Clothing for Indians." *Pacific Union Recorder*, July 13, 1938.

———. "Indian Camp Meeting in Arizona." *Pacific Union Recorder*, May 21, 1941.

———. "Progress Among the Indians." *Pacific Union Recorder*, May 17, 1933.

———. "Progress Among the Indians of Southern Arizona." *Pacific Union Recorder*, December 27, 1933.

Follett, Orno. "Our First Navajo Convert," *ARH*, February 22, 1917.

———. "The Cottonwood Tree Prayer Meeting," *ARH*, March 15, 1917.

———. "How Our Work Started Among the Navajos," *ARH*, October 31, 1918.

———. "Lake Grove Indian Mission," *ARH*, December 25, 1919.

———. "Prayers Answered at Lake Grove Indian Mission," *ARH*, March 26, 1931.

Follett, Orno. "How a Navajoe [sic] Answered the Missionaries." *Southwestern Union Record*, May 28, 1918.

———. "The Navajos." *Southwestern Union Record*, June 16, 1920.

———. "Christmas at Lake Grove Indian Mission." *Southwestern Union Record*, January 21, 1931.

———. "Lake Grove Indian Mission." *Southwestern Union Record*, March 4, 1931.

———. "Indian Items." *Southwestern Union Record*, April 29, 1931.

———. "Among the Navajos." *Southwestern Union Record*, September 14, 1938.

Follett, Orno and Agnes. "Appreciation." *Pacific Union Recorder*, February 26, 1951.

Froom, L.E. "Advance in the Southwest," *ARH*, October 23, 1930.

Lorntz, E.J. "Among the Indians of Arizona," *ARH*, January 15, 1953.

"Orno Follett obituary." *ARH*, October 27, 1960.

"Pacific Union." *ARH*, September 4, 1941.

Reaser, G.W. "The Inter-Mountain Conference and Camp Meeting," *ARH*, October 19, 1916.

Starrett, Barbara. "Circle of Light." La Vida Mission., n.d. Accessed February 20, 2019, <https://lavidam0.securelytransact.com/about/history>.

Wilson, E.T. "The Last Word About the Texico Camp Meeting." *Southwestern Union Record*, August 6, 1929,

NOTES

1. "Orno Follett obituary," *ARH*, October 27, 1960; "Agnes Grace Wammack Follett obituary," *ARH*, July 21, 1966.

2. Barbara Starrett, "Circle of Light, Chapter 1," La Vida Mission, n.d., accessed February 21, 2019, <https://lavidam0.securelytransact.com/about/history>.
3. Orno Follett, "The Cottonwood Tree Prayer Meeting," *ARH*, March 15, 1917, 17; Starrett, 20.
4. Starrett, Chapter 1; North American Division Conference Committee, October 20, 1916, 457, General Conference Archives, accessed February 21, 2019, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Minutes/NAD/NAD1916-10.pdf>.
5. J.W. Christian, "Our Indian Mission," *Southwestern Union Record*, May 29, 1917, 1.
6. J.W. Christian, "Southwestern Union Conference," *ARH*, May 23, 1918, 13; J. W. Christian, "An Indian Mission Near Thoreau, New Mexico," *Southwestern Union Record*, October 9, 1917, 1-2
7. Orno Follett, "How Our Work Started Among the Navajos," *ARH*, October 31, 1918, 9.
8. Christian, "Our Indian Mission."
9. Orno Follett, "Our First Navajo Convert," *ARH*, February 22, 1917, 19.
10. Christian, "Southwestern Union Conference," 13.
11. Starrett, Chapter 10.
12. Orno Follett, "Prayers Answered at Lake Grove Indian Mission," *ARH*, March 26, 1931, 26-27.
13. L. E. Froom, "Advance in the Southwest," *ARH*, October 23, 1930, 28.
14. Mrs. W. T. Jones, "Lake Grove Indian Mission," *Southwestern Union Record*, September 23, 1931, 2.
15. Orno Follett, "Among the Navajos," *Southwestern Union Record*, September 14, 1938, 2.
16. "List of Indian Reservations in Arizona," Wikipedia, April 11, 2018, accessed March 26, 2019, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Indian_reservations_in_Arizona.
17. Orno Follett, "Among the Indians of Southern Arizona," *Pacific Union Recorder*, March 31, 1948, 5-6; "Agnes Follett obituary."
18. "Arizona Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1951), 64. This is the final yearbook in which Follett is included as an "ordained minister."
19. Orno Follett, "Blind Indian Healed," *Pacific Union Recorder*, April 11, 1955, 8-9.

20. E. J. Lorntz, "Among the Indians of Arizona," *ARH*, January 15, 1953, 18.

21. Based on listings in the *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* for the relevant years.

22. E. T. Wilson, "The Last Word About the Texico Camp Meeting," *Southwestern Union Record*, August 6, 1929, 5.

23. The spelling Follett used was "Lilikai," which I think brings us closer to the original (Łíí Łigaii, "White Horse") than the popular spelling "Lilakai."

Either spelling, though, is possible.

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