

# Gotzian, Josephine (Schirmer) (1846–1935)

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Josephine Schirmer Gotzian.

Photo courtesy of Ellen G. White Estate, Inc.

Josephine Gotzian was one of the wealthiest and most consistent financiers of early Adventism from the time of her conversion in the early 1880s to the end of her life. She was a close friend and confidant of Ellen G. White.

## Early Experience with Adventism

Josephine Schirmer was born in Germany on July 18, 1846. She married Adam Gotzian<sup>1</sup> (1843-1883), also a German immigrant, in Minnesota, on January 1, 1866.<sup>2</sup> They had a family shoe and book manufacturing business in St. Paul, Minnesota.<sup>3</sup> Sometime in the early 1880s, she attended the Battle Creek Sanitarium for treatment where she was first introduced to Adventism. By early 1881, she gave her first known donation to the Seventh-day Adventist Educational Society.<sup>4</sup> The following summer the Gotzians bought \$70 worth of shares in the SDA Publishing Association.<sup>5</sup> They became early members of the original St. Paul Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Tragically, on November 16, 1883, the Gotzians were involved in a train crash in Jamesport, Missouri. Adam died the next day, and Josephine sustained a broken back. From Adam's will, Josephine received a sizeable fortune.<sup>6</sup> She afterward went to the Battle Creek Sanitarium for treatment. The following summer she had a young colporteur, E. A. Sutherland, stay at her home. As a result of her personal relationship with Sutherland, she later financially supported the work of both Sutherland and Percy T. Magan.

Gotzian sold her home and moved to Portland, Oregon, where she gave generously to help build up the Portland Sanitarium. She was one of the early stockholders of the Rural Health Retreat, later the St. Helena Sanitarium, where she was a frequent guest and patient.<sup>7</sup> At the encouragement of Ellen White, Gotzian loaned the institution funds to assist them in building new facilities at St. Helena.<sup>8</sup> At one point, White purchased H. A. St. John's home, which Gotzian, in turn, purchased when the sanitarium could not afford the house, lived in it for a time, and then sold it back to them when they needed it.<sup>9</sup>

Gotzian was one of the most consistent and generous philanthropists in early Adventism. In 1890, she was listed as contributing \$50 for the Religious Liberty Work Fund.<sup>10</sup> Then, in honor of James White, she contributed \$2,000 toward the James White Memorial Building. Those who gave a \$1,000 or more were listed as "patrons," and she was one of only two contributors to receive that designation. This new facility was designed specifically as a home for orphans and the "friendless aged persons." It was the first Adventist retirement home.<sup>11</sup>

In 1892, Gotzian sold her home near Pacific Press in Oakland, California, along with 160 acres of land in Napa County.<sup>12</sup> During the 1890s, she increasingly spent time assisting the St. Helena Sanitarium. In 1894, she formally became a member of the board of trustees.<sup>13</sup> She continued her philanthropic work for the denomination from this home base. At times when the denomination ran short of funds, they would secure loans from her to keep the denomination solvent.<sup>14</sup>

## Paradise Valley

In 1902, a property first built by Dr. Anna M. Longshore Potts in 1888, became available for sale for \$25,000 in Paradise Valley, CA. The price was lowered to \$12,000. Ellen White went to see it with E. S. Ballenger and Gotzian in the spring of 1903. White expressed the conviction that the church must secure this property. The price was reduced again from \$6,000 to \$4,000. White urged church leaders to secure the property at once. Unable to wait any longer, she personally went to the bank to secure \$2,000. Gotzian supplied matching funds along with her credit which made the purchase of the 54-acre property possible.<sup>15</sup> As Ellen White recalled the story:

In January, 1904, Dr. Whitelock wrote me that the mortgages could be bought for six thousand dollars, and perhaps less. Again I advised our brethren connected with the medical work in southern California to secure the place. But I learned that they were not prepared to act. Then I laid the matter before Sister Gotzian, and she consented to join me in securing the place. Then we telegraphed an offer of four thousand dollars for the mortgages. Two days later a telegram was returned accepting the offer. Meanwhile a letter from other parties in San Diego was on its way to New York, offering six thousand dollars for the mortgages.<sup>16</sup>

In exchange for transferring ownership of the property to the institution, White and Gotzian were given stocks in the sanitarium. She also occupied a small cottage on the sanitarium grounds and served early on as its matron.

## Madison

In 1908, E. A. Sutherland recruited Gotzian to support the newly formed Nashville Agricultural and Normal Institute (often referred to as Madison). She arrived June 30, 1908. The property had been purchased four years earlier. It was built up slowly and formally dedicated during a Convention of Self-Supporting Missionaries on Oct. 18, 1908. About 400 people attended the dedication including several denominational leaders. The “main school building” and chapel, were “the gift of Sister Josephine Gotzian, of California.”<sup>18</sup> This building would remain a significant building on the campus.<sup>19</sup> Now, “for the first time the school” had “a roomy, comfortable home.”<sup>20</sup>

Gotzian herself wrote about the self-supporting gathering and the importance of this kind of work:

The effect of the convention was to strengthen the feeling that in the closing work of the message all God’s people must have some part. Many can not depend upon conference support. Upon many the Spirit will yet rest, and they will answer his call, depending upon God and the work of their hands for support, while they herald the coming of the Saviour.<sup>21</sup>

Gotzian loaned \$5,000 to assist in the purchase a large bakery and health food factory on the railway line between Edgefield and Madison, Tennessee, to start a new Adventist health food company.<sup>22</sup> From here, Gotzian traveled across the south visiting Adventist institutions including the new Florida Sanitarium in Orlando (where she also visited retired church leaders, G. I. Butler and W. H. Hall) before going to Washington, D.C., to attend the 1909 General Conference session.<sup>23</sup>

Gotzian believed in this work because of Ellen White’s strong support:

The Testimonies [Ellen White’s writings] say these schools will be the means of bringing many people into the truth.... I have great confidence in the work of these schools so long as they follow the instruction of the Testimonies. I hope some day the way will open for me to return to the South to help carry out the instruction in what the Lord calls one of the most needy fields in the world.<sup>24</sup>

## White Memorial and Philanthropy Philosophy

After Ellen White’s death, Gotzian spearheaded a fundraising effort to build a new medical center in Los Angeles, California, named after her friend, Ellen White. Hetty Haskell, Emma Gray, and Florence Keller joined her in raising the requisite \$61,000.<sup>25</sup>

John E. Fulton recounted why Gotzian chose to invest in the early work of the denomination:

During the Klondike gold rush [1896-1899], Sister Gotzian was in California and had lent a considerable sum of money to one of our sanitariums, then in great need. Another sister, also blessed with means, reproached Sister Gotzian for putting so much money into the sanitarium, and suggested that Sister Gotzian join her in placing

some money in Klondike gold stock. “Not a dollar; not a dollar!” was Sister Gotzian’s reply; “any money I can spare goes to God’s cause.” To this the other sister answered, “You have lost your money placed in the sanitarium. Why not be prudent, and invest where you will have larger returns?” To this Sister Gotzian replied: “If my money is not returned that I placed in the sanitarium, it is in God’s cause, where it is much needed. In any case, not a dollar of my money goes for investment in mining stock.”

In due time, the sanitarium returned every dollar of the loan, and Sister Gotzian kept placing her money through the years in other institutions and in foreign missions. And the sister who invested her money in mining stock lost it all.<sup>26</sup>

Josephine Gotzian continued to invest in strategically significant church endeavors throughout the early twentieth century. In 1905, for example, she gave \$1,000 of the needed \$100,000 to help the denomination relocate its headquarters from Battle Creek, Michigan, to Takoma Park, Maryland. Once again, her personal contribution was more than four times the next highest benefactor.<sup>27</sup>

In 1924, amid the economic turmoil after World War I, Gotzian contributed \$500 to the “European and Japanese Relief Fund.” Her contribution was the largest contribution by a single individual, giving five times more than the next highest benefactor.<sup>28</sup> Once again, in 1929, she gave \$50 toward the “Hurricane and Famine Relief Fund.”<sup>29</sup>

Denominational leaders deeply appreciated Gotzian’s philanthropic work. She was described as “a generous supporter of this movement.”<sup>30</sup> She is buried in the Spring Hill Cemetery in Nashville, Tennessee.<sup>31</sup> The Center for Adventist Research at Andrews University houses a significant collection of Gotzian materials.<sup>32</sup>

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## NOTES

1. Alternatively spelled "Gatzian" in 1880 US Federal Census.
2. For genealogical details, see: <http://www.ancestry.com/family-tree/tools/tree/185223043/invitees/accept?inviteId=a98a1042-b22f-490c-9c96-19e092196ebd> [accessed 9/24/22]
3. Pictures of the Gotzian Shoe Company Building built after her husband's death by his brother Conrad can be seen on <https://saintpaulhistorical.com/items/show/215> and <https://cassgilbertsociety.org/works/stpaul-gotzian/>.
4. See list of contributors, *ARH*, Jan. 18, 1881, 48.
5. See *ARH*, July 11, 1882, 448.
6. "Adam Gotzian's Will," *The St. Paul Daily Globe*, December 7, 1883, 2; see announcement of settlement of probate court, *The St. Paul Daily Globe*, Dec. 14, 1883, 2.
7. Rural Health Retreat Association Board Minutes, April 30, 1886, 76.
8. *Ibid.*, May 25, 1890, 213.
9. *Ibid.*, October 4, 1891, 233.
10. See contributors, *ARH*, March 11, 1890, 160.
11. "The James White Memorial Building Fund," *ARH*, June 16, 1891, 384.
12. See, for sale notice, *ARH*, October 18, 1892, 655.
13. "The North Pacific Conference Proceedings," *ARH*, July 31, 1894, 493.
14. General Conference Committee Minutes, Spring Council 1894, April 1, 1894, 4.
15. Arthur W. Spalding, *Origin and History of Seventh-day Adventists* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1944), vol. 3, 153; Melvin V. Jacobsen, "Paradise Valley Sanitarium and Hospital," *ARH*, September 3, 1959, 21-22.
16. Mrs. E. G. White, "Notes of Travel—No. 6: San Diego County, California," *ARH*, March 16, 1905, 8.
17. F. M. W[ilcox], "Editorial Correspondence," *ARH*, April 4, 1912, 8-9.
18. Percy T. Magan, "Dedication of the Nashville Agricultural and Normal Institute," *ARH*, December 10, 1908, 15.
19. Cf. *ARH*, January 6, 1921, 28.

20. W. C. White, "The Madison (Tenn.) School and Its Influence," *ARH*, April 1, 1909, 15.
21. Josephine Gotzian, "The Convention of Self-Supporting Workers," *ARH*, Jan. 7, 1909, 17.
22. W. C. White, "Observations at Nashville, Tenn.," *ARH*, March 25, 1909, 16.
23. Josephine Gotzian, "Sojourning in the South," *ARH*, September 16, 1909, 16.
24. Ibid.
25. *The Medical Evangelist*, Feb. 15, 1940, 4. See also, Arthur W. Spalding, *Origin and History of Seventh-day Adventists* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1944), vol. 3, 166.
26. J. E. Fulton, "Dangers Threatening the Church—V: Speculation and Commercialism," *ARH*, December 16, 1937, 6.
27. "The One Hundred Thousand Dollar Fund," *ARH*, July 27, 1905, 20.
28. "European and Japanese Relief Fund," *ARH*, February 28, 1924, 21-22.
29. "Hurricane and Famine Relief Fund," *ARH*, January 17, 1929, 24.
30. See note on back page of *ARH*, April 1, 1909, 32.
31. <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/131610823/josephine-gotzian> [accessed 9/24/22].
32. [https://car.libraryhost.com/repositories/3/archival\\_objects/7742](https://car.libraryhost.com/repositories/3/archival_objects/7742) [accessed 9/24/22].

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