



ReportingStaff-Leatherbound-004

Three early reporters: E. E. Gardner, H. E. Rogers, W. E. Cornell. The shorthand notes state: To save time is to lengthen life.

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

Shorthand/Phonography

KEVIN M. BURTON

Kevin M. Burton, Ph.D. candidate (Florida State University). Burton did mission work in the Czech Republic and South Korea and served as chaplain at Ozark Adventist Academy. He currently teaches American history at Southern Adventist University and has published several articles on Adventist history. His M.A. thesis is titled, "Centralized for Protection: George I. Butler and His Philosophy of One-Person Leadership." Burton's doctoral dissertation explores Adventist political involvement in the abolition movement and Civil War.

Though various forms of shorthand have existed since the fourth century B.C., Englishman Isaac Pitman invented modern shorthand in 1837. At this time, Pitman introduced the world to phonography—a word that combines two Greek words (*phóné* and *graphé*) and literally means, "sound writing."

Historical Background

Previous to 1837, all methods of shorthand represented the letters of the alphabet with a briefer sign or symbol. Phonography, however, only represented the sounds of words, which meant that silent letters could be excluded.¹ Phonography enabled people to write at the rate of speech for the first time in history and Queen Victoria, recognizing the value of Pitman's distinct contribution, knighted him in 1894 for his work.

Isaac Pitman's phonography was announced in the United States in the summer of 1842² but American booksellers did not begin to advertise Pitman's *Manual of Phonography* until 1844.³ In the same year, Stephen Pearl Andrews published the first Pitman-based textbook in the country.⁴ Pitman phonography slowly developed and grew in popularity in the mid-1850s. Benn Pitman (Isaac's younger brother) had assisted in developing the system of shorthand in Great Britain, but in 1853 he moved to Cincinnati, Ohio, and established the Phonographic Institute. In 1855, his first work, titled, *Manual of Phonography*, rolled off the press in order to "exhibit the Phonographic system of Isaac Pitman" in America and make the art "as widely known and practiced as it deserves to be."⁵

Phonography enabled writers to produce nearly verbatim reports and in the mid-1860s it began to be used in courtrooms in the United States. In 1865, Benn Pitman took down word-for-word testimonies of those who conspired to kill Abraham Lincoln during the military tribunal proceedings⁶ and soon afterward shorthand entered courts of law. According to Lynette R. Eggers and Laqueta Soule, "The first known use of shorthand in a United States court system took place in 1866, when the verbatim handwritten notes of author Philander Deming were used to establish what was said in a court case in Albany, New York." Prior to this, "United States courts had been following the practice in England of relying on the judge's notes to keep a record of what happened during a trial."⁷

Reporting Sermons, Lectures, and Theological Debates in the Seventh-day Adventist Church

Several Seventh-day Adventist pioneers, including J. H. Waggoner, Uriah Smith, and J. N. Loughborough, began to learn phonography in the 1850s for reporting and preserving sermons, lectures, and theological debates. This task was extremely difficult for numerous reasons. For example, some Adventist ministers spoke at a rate of "about two hundred words per minute . . . with little or no recapitulation or repetition."⁸ Only expert phonographers could write at this speed with maintained accuracy. In order to achieve this ability, stenographers constantly repeated drills so that they could write with scrupulous precision and be prepared for any word, no matter how strange or unusual. In addition to these drills, professional reporters kept up with current events, especially in religion and politics, so that they could instantly recognize every name or technical term that might be spoken, including those in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. Since it was impossible to know exactly what would be said in the heat of the moment, expert reporters would also meet with the speaker in advance, if possible, so that they could diligently practice every difficult name, number, word, or phrase, beforehand⁹

Accurate reporting required sharply trained ears and a clear mind. With eyes fixed on the writing tablet before them, shorthand reporters had only one chance to hear every word as it was uttered from the podium and convert each one into a phonetic symbol. Bernard P. Foote explained, “to write at the rate of only one hundred and fifty words a minute requires the hearing and indicating on paper of about seven hundred [and] fifty sounds each minute, or twelve and one half each second; and each one of these sounds requires a separate mental and physical operation.”¹⁰ This task was further complicated when people in the audience interrupted the speaker with a question or comment. When this happened, statements could overlap, making it much more difficult to accurately record the sermon or lecture.

Since reporting sermons and speeches was extremely intense, the Seventh-day Adventist Church began to regularly employ several stenographers in the 1890s to report during General Conference sessions. Though different reporters sometimes covered different sermons or business sessions throughout each day, the stenographers typically divided up each meeting. While expert stenographers could easily write at speeds that exceeded 150 words per minute, as time passed their speed and accuracy diminished. Therefore, to prevent fatigue and to ensure better accuracy, as many as six reporters would report a single sermon or session, with a stenographer change every fifteen minutes.¹¹

The Rise of Secretaries in the Seventh-day Adventist Church

Though sermons and lectures were reported throughout the last half of the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century, its primary value shifted from the pulpit to the office. In the late nineteenth century, Americans were drawn to big business and secretaries were needed to increase the production of top-level administration. Adventists adjusted their practice accordingly and in 1898 phonography, though it had been taught since 1874 as an elective course, became a regular course in the commercial department at Battle Creek College and a requirement for graduation with a secretarial degree.¹²

When phonography first appeared, men primarily acquired the skill. In the 1880s, about twice as many American men were graduating from shorthand schools than women, but a decade later the number of female graduates became equal to that of men.¹³ By the outbreak of World War I, stenography was considered “the Best Field of Work for a Young Woman”¹⁴ and by 1930 the profession became so closely associated with the female gender that the term “office wife” became a popular nickname for secretaries.

The Death of Shorthand

Seventh-day Adventists, like other Americans, taught phonographic shorthand at various institutions until the 1980s. Between the 1850s and 1980s, Adventists practiced and taught five different methods of shorthand: Pitman Phonography, Graham Phonography, Pernin Phonography, the Success System, and Gregg Shorthand. Though numerous phonographic reports were transcribed and published throughout these decades, hundreds

of pages of Adventist's phonographic writing still await transcription.¹⁵

SOURCES

Battle Creek College. *Twenty-Third Annual Calendar of Battle Creek College: 1898* Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1898.

Burton, Kevin M. "Gender-Specific Steppingstones: A Brief History of Phonographic Shorthand in the Lives of Adventist Reporters and Secretaries." Paper presented at the Andrews Research Conference for Early Career Researchers and Creative Scholars in the Arts and Humanities, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, May 5, 2016.

Eggers, Lynette R. and Laqueta Soule. "Court Reporting Education in the United States National Court Reporters Association, Vienna, Virginia." In *International Steno Education Essay Collection*, edited by the Education Committee of the Intersteno Congress. China: Intersteno Congress, 2011.

Foote, B. P. "Shorthand,—Past, Present, and Future." *The Youth's Instructor*, September 17, 1912.

Foote, Bernard P. and Nathaniel Krum. "Reporter to Presidents, Part Two." *The Youth's Instructor*, January 12, 1960.

Foote, Bernard P. and Nathaniel Krum. "Reporter to Presidents, Part Three." *The Youth's Instructor*, January 19, 1960.

"Phonography." *Washington (DC) Daily National Intelligencer*, August 12, 1842.

"Phonography." *Philadelphia (PA) Public Ledger*, August 15, 1842.

Pitman, Benn. *Manual of Phonography*. Cincinnati, OH: Phonographic Institute, 1855.

Rockwell, Julius Ensign. *Shorthand Instruction and Practice*. Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1893.

Rogers, H. Edson. *The Rogers Compendium of the Graham System of Shorthand: A Practical, Synthetic Method* Lansing, MI: Hammond Publishing, 1905.

Steers Jr., Edward, ed. *The Trial: The Assassination of President Lincoln and the Trial of the Conspirators* Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2003.

"Stenography Recommended as Best Calling for Women." *The Stenographer* 29, no. 7 (July 1913): 1051-1052.

W[aggoner], J. H. "The Sabbath Discussion: Stephenson, Chown and Reporter." *ARH*, August 18, 1859, 97.

Wiley & Putnam. "New Scientific Works, Received Per Hibernia." *New York Evening Post*, May 11, 1844.

NOTES

1. H. Edson Rogers, *The Rogers Compendium of the Graham System of Shorthand: A Practical, Synthetic Method* (Lansing, MI: Hammond Publishing, 1905), 33; Julius Ensign Rockwell, *Shorthand Instruction and Practice* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1893), 5.
2. "Phonography," *Washington (DC) Daily National Intelligencer*, August 12, 1842, 3; "Phonography," *Philadelphia (PA) Public Ledger*, August 15, 1842, 2.
3. Wiley & Putnam, "New Scientific Works, Received Per Hibernia," *New York Evening Post*, May 11, 1844, 2.
4. Rockwell, *Shorthand Instruction and Practice*, 38.
5. Benn Pitman, *Manual of Phonography* (Cincinnati, OH: Phonographic Institute, 1855), v.
6. Edward Steers Jr., ed. *The Trial: The Assassination of President Lincoln and the Trial of the Conspirators* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2003).
7. Lynette R. Eggers and Laqueta Soule, "Court Reporting Education in the United States National Court Reporters Association, Vienna, Virginia," in *International Steno Education Essay Collection*, edited by the Education Committee of the Intersteno Congress (China: Intersteno Congress, 2011), 116.
8. J. H. W[aggoner], "The Sabbath Discussion: Stephenson, Chown and Reporter," *ARH*, August 18, 1859, 97.
9. Bernard P. Foote and Nathaniel Krum, "Reporter to Presidents, Part Three," *The Youth's Instructor*, January 19, 1960, 18.
10. B. P. Foote, "Shorthand,—Past, Present, and Future," *The Youth's Instructor*, September 17, 1912, 4.
11. Bernard P. Foote and Nathaniel Krum, "Reporter to Presidents, Part Two," *The Youth's Instructor*, January 12, 1960, 7-8.
12. Battle Creek College, *Twenty-Third Annual Calendar of Battle Creek College: 1898* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald Publishing Associaton, 1898), 59.
13. Rockwell, *Shorthand Instruction and Practice*, 39.
14. "Stenography Recommended as Best Calling for Women," *The Stenographer* 29, no. 7 (July 1913): 1051-1052.
15. Kevin M. Burton, "Gender-Specific Steppingstones: A Brief History of Phonographic Shorthand in the Lives of Adventist Reporters and Secretaries" (paper presented at the Andrews Research Conference for Early Career Researchers and Creative Scholars in the Arts and Humanities, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, May 5, 2016).

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