

Zeidler, Elizabeth (1875–1960)

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Elizabeth Zeidler was a long-serving secretary in the General Conference Secretariat, working through the transition between the headquarters in Battle Creek, Michigan and the headquarters in Takoma Park, Maryland. She served as secretary to several successive General Conference Secretaries and as the recording secretary to the General Conference Committee (now the General Conference Executive Committee).

Early Life

Elizabeth Zeidler was born on December 8, 1875, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, United States to William H. and Elizabeth (Sleights) Zeidler, the eldest of four. Soon after her mother's death in 1887, Zeidler's father, William (1855-1944), was introduced to the Seventh-day Adventist message¹, and he determined to raise his children in his new faith, especially after he married a second time.² Of his four children—John (1877 – Bef. 1900), Dorothy (Zeidler) Conard (1880-1970), and William Frederick (1883-1964)—it appears that only Elizabeth and Dorothy became Seventh-day Adventists. At any rate, William, according to Elizabeth's obituary, sent Elizabeth to Mount Vernon Academy in Mount Vernon, Ohio in 1897; she graduated from that school in 1899³

Career

Zeidler moved to Battle Creek, Michigan, where she was first employed by Joseph Lambert, who was "engaged in the manufacture and sale of peanut butter."⁴ (Lambert was a former employee of the Battle Creek Sanitarium who, along with his wife Almeda, had set up his own production of nut butters.)⁵ Zeidler was invited by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists to work as a secretary, a work she began on October 1, 1900. Her first wage was set at \$7.50 a week.⁶ Part of her wages went into savings, but she also regularly donated to relief funds, something she would do throughout her life.⁷

In Battle Creek, she initially worked as the personal secretary of GC Secretary L. A. Hoopes, who served until 1901, and then she continued that work for GC Secretary H. E. Osborne (1901-1903) and GC Secretary W. A. Spicer (1903-1922).

When the General Conference decided to move away from Battle Creek, Zeidler moved along with her employer and was one of the handful of workers who made the move.⁸ Along with Ethel Edwards, Lela Wilcox, Irene Stuart

(later Walters), and Harold Cobban, she was part of the original stenographic staff who took up their work in the new headquarters based on North Capitol Street and then on Eastern Avenue.⁹ She continued to work as the personal secretary to GC Secretary W. A. Spicer (1903-1922) and then as secretary to GC Secretary A. G. Daniells (1922-1926).

In 1929, Zeidler became the recording secretary of the General Conference Committee (now the General Conference Executive Committee),¹⁰ beginning her work with the August 1, 1929 meeting.¹¹ She served in this position throughout the tenures of General Conference Secretaries C. K. Meyers (1926-1933); M. E. Kern (1933-1936); and E. D. Dick (1936-1952). She regularly worked at Annual Councils (then called Fall or Autumn Council), Spring Meetings, and General Conference Sessions.¹²

The last Executive Committee meeting Zeidler took minutes for was on July 10, 1952,¹³ as Zeidler retired on July 15. She was 76 years old and had served as a secretary at the General Conference for 51 years and nine-and-a-half months. Zeidler described her years of service as having “yielded large returns in the enjoyment I had in my work, and in the wonderful privilege I had of association with the men and women with whom I worked.”¹⁴ Her friends, too, spoke of her high regard for the work she had done, and how Zeidler had not viewed it as “routine”¹⁵ or as a “monotonous grind,” but as “a continual, stimulating challenge.”¹⁶

Later Life and Legacy

Even after retirement, Zeidler would stop by the headquarters to visit those with whom she had labored long and whose work she still found to be of keen interest. Otherwise, she spent her time resting at the home she shared with her sister, Dorothy, likely maintaining the rose bushes she had cultivated in her spare time throughout the decades.¹⁷

In 1954, the Sustentation Committee voted to grant her “the family rate of sustentation” rather than the single worker’s rate, based on her “long and faithful service in the General Conference office.”¹⁸ Zeidler’s response was one of surprise. She wrote, “I cannot tell you how surprised I am. I did not know that single workers were ever eligible for more than the three-fourths of the family rate, except per chance one might have held some responsible official position. I therefore could hardly believe what I was reading.”¹⁹ Those who had worked with her clearly saw what Zeidler seemed not to: that her position had been a “responsible official position” and one which made the work done throughout the world more efficient and effective.

In 1959, Elizabeth Zeidler fell ill and spent time as a patient at the Washington Sanitarium; this illness eventually led to her death on January 15, 1960.²⁰ Her colleague, former General Conference Secretary, E. D. Dick, wrote a life sketch about her, sections of which were greatly condensed for the announcement of her death²¹ and the obituaries about her which appeared in Adventist periodicals.²² In this life sketch, Dick outlined Zeidler’s long career in the General Conference Secretariat and commented that her service as recording secretary was “probably” “her most outstanding contribution” to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Dick wrote:

She possessed the unique ability of being able to summarize committee discussions and conclusions lucidly and concisely, and to recall these actions with marked accuracy. As the work grew, she became the “Information Bureau” of the General Conference office. As the result of her long and intimate acquaintance with the records, she was often able to guide the committees away from actions that would duplicate or conflict with those previously taken. To have stood so near the administration for more than half a century made her an exceedingly valuable worker in the cause she loved and served.²³

Elizabeth Zeidler, as the “Information Bureau” of the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s world headquarters, provided steady continuity in the administration of a rapidly expanding denomination. Her five decades of work—the letters typed and sent, the correspondence received and filed, the minutes recorded, the records referenced and maintained—are her legacy. Her secretarial labor still benefits Church administrators to this day as well any researcher who has ever visited the General Conference Archives (whether in-person or online) to use materials which once passed through her hands to theirs.

SOURCES

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NOTES

1. "William H. Zeidler," *ARH*, April 20, 1944), 20. E. D. Dick's life sketch for Elizabeth Zeidler states that her father joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1894; however, William Zeidler's obituary puts the date as 1889. Since Elizabeth Zeidler or her sister wrote the obituary, the 1889 date is likely more accurate.
2. W. H. Zeidler married Minnie Scott (1875-1964) on February 18, 1898.
3. E. D. Dick, "Zeidler," *ARH*, February 25, 1960, 27.
4. E. D. Dick, "Life Sketch of Elizabeth Zeidler," RG 21, Box WH 2516, General Conference Archives. This life sketch also appears in her sustentation file, which is cited in Endnote 16.
5. Andrew F. Smith, "Peanut butter: the vegetarian conspiracy," *OUPblog: Oxford University Press's Academic Insights for the Thinking World*. Accessed 21 September 2022 at <https://blog.oup.com/2014/11/peanut-butter-vegetarian-conspiracy/>.
6. Mary Paul, Untitled editorial note, *The Keynote*, August 1, 1952, 2.
7. See "Donors to the Relief of the Schools" *ARH*, April 8, 1902, 18; J. L. Shaw, "Hurricane and Famine Sufferers," *ARH*, November 15, 1928, 24; J. L. Shaw, "China Flood Relief," *ARH*, February 4, 1932, 24; A. V. Olson, "Refugee Relief Fund," *ARH*, November 10, 1938, 24; and "European Emergency Relief Fund," *ARH*, February 21, 1957, 27.
8. W. E. Howell, "A Notable Anniversary," *ARH*, August 31, 1933, 24.
9. T. Rose Curtis, "Peering into the past," *The Keynote*, January 1, 1956, 2.

10. Katie Farney, "Elizabeth Zeidler—Long-Time Secretary," *The Keynote*, February 1, 1960, 2.
11. General Conference Committee minutes, August 1, 1929, 908.
12. The first General Conference Session she appears to have assisted with the stenographic and reporting efforts was the 37th Session, held May 13-June 6, 1909. See Unsigned note, *ARH*, May 20, 1909, 18.
13. General Conference Committee minutes, July 10, 1952, 840.
14. Elizabeth Zeidler to W. H. Williams, 18 Aug. 1954, RG 33, Box 9817, Fld. "Zeidler, Elizabeth," General Conference Archives.
15. Katie Farney, "Elizabeth Zeidler—Long-Time Secretary," *The Keynote*, February 1, 1960, 2.
16. E. D. Dick, "Life Sketch of Elizabeth Zeidler," 2, RG 33, Box 9817, Fld. "Zeidler, Elizabeth," General Conference Archives.
17. See "Key Taps," *The Keynote*, September 1, 1939, 2; and "News from This Month and Last," *The Keynote*, June 1, 1944, 4.
18. W. H. Williams to Elizabeth Zeidler, 16 Aug. 1954, RG 33, Box 9817, Fld. "Zeidler, Elizabeth," General Conference Archives.
19. Elizabeth Zeidler to W. H. Williams, 18 Aug. 1954, RG 33, Box 9817, Fld. "Zeidler, Elizabeth," General Conference Archives.
20. E. D. Dick, "Zeidler," *ARH*, February 25, 1960, 27.
21. E. D. Dick, "Elizabeth Zeidler Dies," *ARH*, February 11, 1960, 32.
22. See E. D. Dick, "Zeidler," *ARH*, February 25, 1960, 27, and E. D. Dick, "Zeidler," *Columbia Union Visitor*, March 3, 1960, 7.
23. E. D. Dick, "Life Sketch of Elizabeth Zeidler," 2, RG 33, Box 9817, Fld. "Zeidler, Elizabeth," General Conference Archives.

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