

James, Judson Spray (1879–1965) and Minnie Louise (Smith) (1874–1969)

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Judson and Minnie James were the first Adventist missionary in South India.

Early Years and Education

Judson Spray James was born on October 9, 1879, in Indianola, Iowa, U.S.A. His father, Otey James (1814–1907), was a Campbellite before he accepted the Adventist message in 1843.¹ He moved from Virginia to Indianola in 1854, where he met and married Catherine Nicola sometime in the 1870s. Catherine had several children from a previous marriage.² Otey was of Welsh descent, and Catherine came from a German and Baptist background.³ Born and raised in an Adventist home, James gave his heart to Jesus in his late teens and credited his mother and a Sabbath School teacher for his conversion.⁴ He was baptized by Henry Nicole at the Battle Creek Tabernacle in May 1897.⁵

James studied in public schools in Iowa, completing his secondary education at what was known as a Commercial High School in 1896. Immediately after high school Judson went to live with his mother in Lincoln,



Judson and Minnie boarding a train in India.

Photo courtesy of the SUD Heritage Center from the J. S. James album.

Nebraska, and there he spent a year studying at Union College. In 1897 he went to Battle Creek Sanitarium, where he worked and studied nursing for a year. However, he abandoned nursing and did canvassing in 1898.⁶ He returned to Union College in 1899 for another term of specialized study.⁷

Marriage and Family

While at Battle Creek, James met Minnie Louise Smith, a nursing student. She was the daughter of Enos Mapes Smith and Dorcas Sarah Ayers and was born on November 20, 1874, in Scotchtown, New York. Minnie was converted at a series of meetings by Elder H. G. Thurston in May 1894 and was baptized by Elder W. W. Wheeler in July 1895 at State Hill, New York. She joined the Battle Creek School for the nursing program in 1896. Upon completion of her studies, she and James were married on August 27, 1898, by Pastor C. S. Dudley at Beatrice, about forty miles from Union College in Nebraska. After their marriage Minnie suspended her career to take care of the home until she and James moved as missionaries to India in 1906.⁸

In India, Minnie worked in the dispensary from 1906 to 1917. While on furlough at College View in Nebraska from 1918 to 1920, she took care of the home. From 1920 to 1926, she worked at the Review and Herald office.⁹

The couple had two boys. Wilbur S. was born in College View, Nebraska, on September 14, 1899, and Russell Boyd was born on September 4, 1902, in Decatur, Illinois. Both sons entered denominational employment, Wilbur in the Nebraska Conference and Russell in the East Pennsylvania Conference. They also served in the mission field, Wilbur as education and MV secretary in the Austral Union and Russell as a teacher at Vincent Hill School and College in Mussoorie, India, from 1932 to 1934.¹⁰

Early Career

From 1898 to 1901,¹¹ James did canvassing in Nebraska and for the last four months in Texas. He spent most of 1902 working in the Illinois Conference and then close to two years in the Southern Illinois Conference of what was then the Central Union (now Mid-American Union).¹² In 1905 he served as the state agent of the West Virginia Conference in the Northern Union, where he was given charge of literature work. In a few years he was elected Field (Missionary) secretary of the Union.¹³

Missionary Service in India

The General Conference commissioned James to promote the publishing work in the India Mission.¹⁴ Judson and Minnie, with their sons, Wilbur and Russell, landed in Bombay on December 23, 1906, and headed straight to Calcutta for the first biennial conference, which began on December 28 and continued till January 12, 1907. In response to G. K. Owen's favorable report of his work among the Tamil Sabbath keepers in Ceylon,¹⁵ it was decided to station James in South India, where he would first learn the language and then work among the

Sabbath keepers in the Tinnevelly (today Tirunelveli) district.¹⁶

Following the 1907 biennial conference, James remained in Calcutta for another two months to participate in the campaign to promote the *Oriental Watchman*, while his wife and sons went ahead with other missionaries to Bangalore.¹⁷ James reached Bangalore on March 15, 1907.¹⁸ During the year of language study in Bangalore, James was asked to also involve in evangelism among the English-speaking population.¹⁹ Overwhelming work left James little time to study Tamil, and so he had to depend on translators, which in turn helped him increase the involvement of local workers in the Adventist mission work.²⁰ In Bangalore, his Tamil tutor was from Tinnevelly, and James obtained valuable contact information of the Sabbath keepers from him.²¹

In December 1907 J. L. Shaw accompanied Judson James and George Enoch on the first visit to the Tamil Sabbath keepers. They spent ten days there and formulated plans for James to move to Tinnevelly.²²

Superintendent of the South India Mission, 1908-1915

James and his family moved to Tinnevelly in March 1908 and began their ministry by improvising a clinic on their back verandah. In May of the same year, James began giving Bible studies.²³ On January 2, 1909, at the biennial conference in Lucknow, James was ordained to the gospel ministry.²⁴

In 1909, the James' dispensary occupied half of the rented dwelling home, and Belle Shryock was hired to assist as a nurse.²⁵ That year James completed the first Adventist building in India, and the building was dedicated on October 14. A week later a group of twenty-five Tamil Sabbath keepers separated themselves from their local church and joined the Adventist Church. The group met initially on the large verandah of the new building that James built.²⁶ In November 1909, James started an Adventist school with 47 students.²⁷

James started regular Bible studies on January 1, 1910, and at a service on April 2, 1910, twenty new members were baptized.²⁸ The Adventists had received two acres of land as a gift, and to this was added more land through a purchase in 1911 for a school and the church. James baptized twenty-five more people in 1910, and another group of twenty-one members in 1913.²⁹

James organized the first colporteur institute in July 1912, which ran for three weeks. He started a 24-page quarterly *The Present Truth*.³⁰ He also published *Steps to Christ* and *Fundamental Principles of SDA*. At first, Judson started his colporteurs on a salary, but then changed it to a 75 percent commission. James established mission stations at Nazareth, Trichinopoly, and Pondichery. Within a couple of years, the South India mission had one day school, one boarding school and orphanage, and 29 workers, out of which 21 were natives.³¹

During the family's first furlough in 1913, James stayed in St. Helena with Ellen White and worked with her on an abridgment of her writings for foreign publications. James and Minnie left the boys in the United States for their education.³²

James is credited with the opening of the work in Andhra and Kerala. He conducted the first colporteur training at Rajahmundry September 4-16, 1916, for fourteen young men, who formed the workforce for the mission work there.³³ James also sent the colporteur Ponniah and his wife to South Travancore (Kerala) to establish the work in the deep south.³⁴

Development as a Senior Leader

In 1913 James briefly oversaw the work of the India Union Mission between the departure of J. L. Shaw and the arrival of H. R. Salisbury.³⁵

At the 1914 biennial conference, with General Conference President A. G. Daniels in attendance, James was appointed the India Union vice president and the South India Mission superintendent.³⁶ During the absence of Salisbury in 1915, when he went to Shanghai and to attend the General Conference session, James served as the Division Committee chairman.³⁷ When it became clear in January 1916 that Salisbury was among the torpedoed boat passengers who lost their life at sea in December 1915, James continued leading the India Union³⁸ for the remainder of the year, until the arrival of W. W. Fletcher.³⁹

In 1917 the India Union Mission was merged with the Australian Union Conference to form the Asiatic Division Conference with headquarters in Shanghai. James was surprised when he was elected vice president of this large division conference. He was asked to remain in Shanghai, while his wife disposed of their household goods and traveled from India to join him in China.⁴⁰ In 1919, when the India Union was reorganized as the Southern Asia Division, the brethren in India asked the General Conference that J. S. James not be sent back to India as an administrator. At that time, James, who left China in 1918, was in the United States on a five-year furlough for the educational needs of his children.⁴¹

In North America

At the beginning of his furlough in 1918, James was appointed Missionary (Field) secretary of the Central Union to strengthen the colporteur work.⁴² James held the first union colporteur convention from February 17 to 20, 1918, and conducted several more during the next two years.⁴³ In 1920 James was elected associate secretary of the Sabbath School Department of the General Conference,⁴⁴ and he proceeded to conduct a number of Sabbath School conventions.⁴⁵ He was known for his stereopticon and lantern lectures at many conventions.⁴⁶

Back in India

In 1926 the General Conference sent James back to India with the belief that his years of experience in India would be an asset to the workers there.⁴⁷ For the next four years James served as the Oriental Watchman Publishing House manager and the *Eastern Tidings* editor.⁴⁸ Minnie worked as proofreader.⁴⁹ The following year,

James was also appointed secretary of the Ministerial Association secretary.⁵⁰ James busied himself in the work of the Salisbury Park local church, conducting baptisms and performing marriages.⁵¹

In 1930 the James family returned to North America, as Minnie required urgent medical attention, which included a series of operations for breast cancer.⁵² No decision on their permanent return was made, with the hope they would be able to return in a few months. When Minnie recovered,⁵³ the Jameses could return for another full term of mission service in India. Since Judson's position in the publishing house had been filled, he was appointed the Western India Mission superintendent at the 1930-1931 Division Council.⁵⁴ The Jameses arrived to take up the new responsibility in June 1931.⁵⁵

When it was officially confirmed that Homer Salisbury had perished at sea, the decision was taken to construct a church in his memory. The church was finally erected on the campus of Salisbury Park, which also bore his name. The church was dedicated by Judson James and G. F. Enoch on December 31, 1932, at the Division Council.⁵⁶ At that 1931-1932 Council, as superintendent of the Western India Union, James reported that a new mission station had been established at Kolhapur with possibly the best bungalow in the Division, which had a garage, a well, and servants quarters.⁵⁷

Due to the economic depression, the Western India Union was one of several units downgraded to mission status to reduce administrative expenses in 1933. James was elected the mission superintendent, and Minnie served as secretary-treasurer.⁵⁸ Unfortunately, in 1936, James became very ill, and the Jameses had to return permanently to the United States.⁵⁹ Judson James died March 21, 1965, in San Diego, California. Minnie James died August 3, 1969.⁶⁰

Legacy

The James family will be best remembered as the first Adventist missionaries to pioneer the Adventist mission work in South India. James Memorial High School in Prakasapuram remains a tribute to their ministry there. James had an excellent camera and photographic skills, which he used to produce invaluable photographs of the Adventist work in India. Many of his photographs appeared in the *Eastern Tidings* and the *Review and Herald* from 1906 to 1916 and from 1926 to 1936. The loving memory of James is also kept alive through many Adventists in south India who were named "James" after him.

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