

Morning Watch

EDWARD ALLEN, AND RACHEL HAMMOND

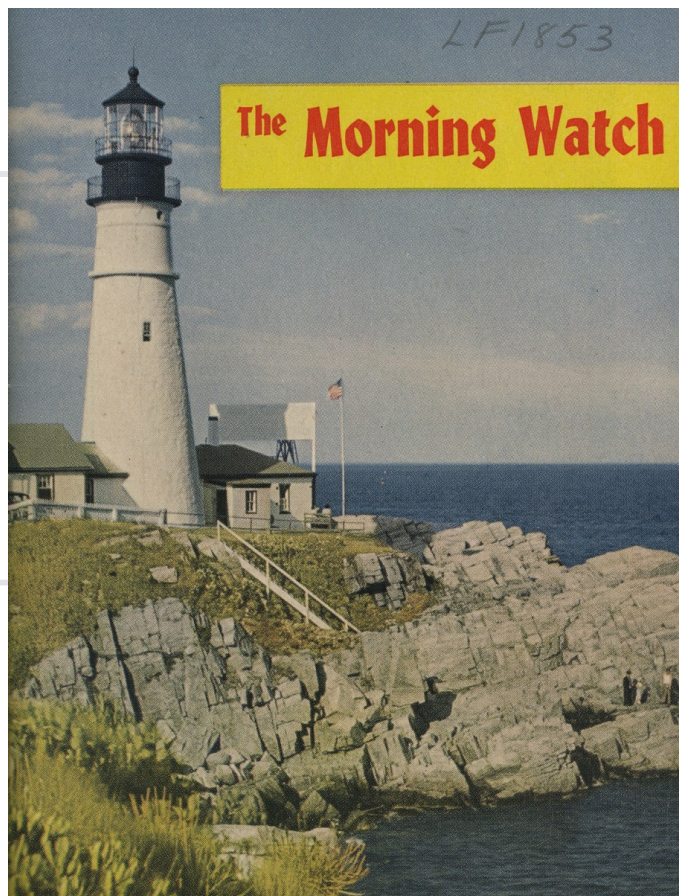
Edward Allen, D.Min., Ph.D., served the Seventh-day Adventist Church as a pastor from 1975 to 2005. In that year he joined the faculty of Union College where he began serving as Chair of the Division of Religion in 2017. His areas of interest are the Sabbath and Church History. His doctoral dissertation at Fuller Theological Seminar was on, "Nicholas Bownde and the Context of Sunday Sabbatarianism."

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The Morning Watch is a devotional exercise adopted by the Young People's Missionary Volunteer Department (today Youth Ministries) at the time of its organization in 1907 and later embraced by the Pathfinder program.

Interest in the Morning Watch on the part of Seventh-day Adventists was aroused through their association with the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions (SVMFM or SVM) in the 1890s. The SVM drew inspiration for the practice from Handley Moule, the principal of Ridley Hall at Cambridge University. Consistently each morning, Principal Moule could be found walking in the garden alone in deep conversation with God. The term "Morning Watch" was chosen for the daily practice, referencing a watchman's shift from 4:00 a.m. to 8:00 a.m. in which the individual remains awake and alert for any signs of the enemy. As a result, the Ridley Hall Morning Watch Union was begun and sustained by students who wanted to pledge themselves to a devotional routine like that of their principal.¹

When John R. Mott, chairman of the SVM, visited Cambridge in June 1894, Dr. Moule recommended the Morning Watch to him. Following this exchange, Mott began to promote the keeping of the Morning Watch within the SVM.² "The source of the power of any spiritual movement is God, and the energies of God are released in answer to prayer," Mott explained.³ Mott believed that missionaries would be empowered and sustained in their working fields as they established a firm relationship with God in direct communication with Him and the reading of His word during the Morning Watch.



The Morning Watch, 1956.

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

The Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions quickly gained the attention of Seventh-day Adventists. Members of a small foreign missions group started at Battle Creek College in 1890 soon began a correspondence with John R. Mott. In 1891, the leader of the Battle Creek group, Frederick Rossiter, attended the first International Convention of the Student Volunteer Movement held in Cleveland, Ohio, along with eight other Seventh-day Adventists associated with Battle Creek.⁴

Similarly, Milton E. Kern was sent as the delegate from Union College to the SVM International Convention of 1898. At this convention, chairman John R. Mott gave an address concerning the importance of keeping the Morning Watch for missionaries around the world. Not only was the Morning Watch practice essential to the work of a missionary, but he argued that it was equally important for any and all Christians seeking to be effective for the cause of Christ.⁵ In its coverage of the convention, the *Review and Herald* highlighted this address.⁶

Kern was on the faculty of Union College when he became the first secretary of the General Conference Young People's Department, officially known as the Seventh-day Adventist Young People's Society of Missionary Volunteers (YPMV) in 1907.⁷ It was in this position that Kern took an active role in promoting the Morning Watch. The three purposes declared by the YPMV at its first convention in 1907 – “to develop devotional life, missionary endeavor, and educational activities” – were similar to those that were observed at the 1898 International SVM Convention.⁸

Utilizing texts selected by YPMV corresponding secretary Matilda Erickson (Andross), Kern published a Morning Watch calendar for 1908 that included “a Bible text to read each morning, and encouragement to follow with meditation and prayer.”⁹ It was also at this time that Kern started selecting books to be included in the Missionary Volunteer Reading Course. The Missionary Volunteer Law developed under Kern's guidance became the Pathfinder Law that begins with a pledge to “Keep the Morning Watch.”

SOURCES

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NOTES

1. John Battersby Hartford and Frederick Charles Macdonald, *Handley Carr Glyn Moule, Bishop of Durham: A Biography* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1922), 98.
2. Brian Stanley, "'Hunting for Souls': The Missionary Pilgrimage of George Sherwood Eddy," *Studies in Church History, Subsidia* 13 (2000): 127-41.
3. John R. Mott, "Prayer and the Missionary Enterprise" in *World-Wide Evangelization: The Urgent Business of the Church* (New York: Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, 1902), 241.
4. Edward Allen, "The Impact of the Student Volunteer Movement on the Seventh-day Adventist Church," Association of Seventh-day Adventist Historians 2016 Conference Papers, accessed April 16, 2020, <http://www.sdahistorians.org/2016-asdah-conference-papers.html>.
5. John R. Mott, "The Morning Watch," in *The Student Missionary Appeal* (New York: Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, 1898), 233-239.
6. W. E. Cornell, "The Volunteer Convention," *ARH*, March 15, 1898, 10-11.
7. Richard Schwarz and Floyd Greenleaf, *Light Bearers: A History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Department of Education, 2000), 320.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid; *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, 2nd rev. edition (1996), s.v. "Morning Watch."

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