

Wells, George Washington (1870–1948)

MILTON HOOK

Milton Hook, Ed.D. (Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, the United States). Hook retired in 1997 as a minister in the Greater Sydney Conference, Australia. An Australian by birth Hook has served the Church as a teacher at the elementary, academy and college levels, a missionary in Papua New Guinea, and as a local church pastor. In retirement he is a conjoint senior lecturer at Avondale College of Higher Education. He has authored *Flames Over Battle Creek*, *Avondale: Experiment on the Dora*, *Desmond Ford: Reformist Theologian*, *Gospel Revivalist* the *Seventh-day Adventist Heritage Series*, and many magazine articles. He is married to Noeleen and has two sons and three grandchildren.

An administrator for most of his ministerial career, George W. Wells served as president of four local conferences and one union conference and as a General Conference field secretary.

Early Years

George Wells, son of Franklin and Mary (Perkins) Wells, was born on February 22, 1870, in Bedford, near Cleveland, Ohio. His father was a farmer. His siblings were Cora (b. 1859), Carrie (b. 1864), Lillie (b. 1867), Frank Donald (b. 1880) and Maymie Harriet (b. 1882).¹

At the Ohio camp meeting, September 1884, George was baptized by the conference president, R. A. Underwood. Five years later he began his training as a nurse at the Mount Vernon Sanitarium, graduating in the class of 1891. On completion of his course he married nurse Alda Heichel on July 15. George continued nursing and also did some colporteur work prior to deciding to enter the ministry. For that purpose he attended Battle Creek College during the academic year of 1895-1896 to take an abbreviated ministerial course.²

Ministry in the South



G. W. Wells

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

In 1896 Wells was granted a license to preach and appointed to assist with pioneer mission efforts in Alabama. At the time the territory was not organized as a conference. His first assignment was to join William Woodford in the mining town of Blossburg for an evangelistic campaign. Their efforts attracted 32 converts who quickly purchased land and built their own church.³ Wells was obliged to move on to nurture a fledgling group in Birmingham, the resident minister taking leave for health reasons.⁴ In 1898 Wells had to take a short break to recover his own health.⁵

Wells remained in Alabama until 1899 and then accepted a transfer to the Cumberland Mission that included Kentucky and East Tennessee. He was present at the Harriman camp meeting when the Cumberland Mission was formerly organized as the Cumberland Conference, September 14, 1900. At the time there were 450 baptized members in the territory. Wells was elected as president of the Sabbath School Association and a member of the conference executive committee.⁶ In 1902 he was ordained in Graysville, Tennessee, by Arthur Daniells, president of the General Conference, and George Butler, a former president of the General Conference.⁷

Church Executive

Administrative roles shaped the remainder of Wells' career. From 1905 through 1909 he was president of the Georgia Conference, a small entity of less than 200 members among five churches.⁸ In 1909 he transferred into the presidency of the North Carolina Conference, once again a small unit with only five ministers to nurture the members.⁹ He was elected in 1912 to the presidency of the older and larger Minnesota Conference, a position he held until 1918, followed by the presidency of the California Conference until 1922. He returned east to familiar territory in Nashville, Tennessee, to serve as president of the Southern Union Conference, 1922 through 1926.¹⁰

At the 1926 General Conference session held in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Wells was elected to be one of seven general field secretaries, a position he held until 1941.¹¹ Only occasionally did he publish an article in the denominational periodicals, one being in 1933 titled "The Seal of God."¹²

Final Years

Alda Wells passed away at Takoma Park on February 12, 1939.¹³ Five years later George married widow Jessie Blanche (Seward) Flaiz. They lived in California and Wells assisted with chaplaincy work at Loma Linda Sanitarium and Hospital. He was taken suddenly with a heart attack on June 16, 1948.¹⁴ Jessie passed away on January 6, 1970, at Escondido, California.¹⁵

"George Washington Wells obituary." *ARH*, July 29, 1948.

"George Washington Wells." FamilySearch, Intellectual Reserve, 2021. Accessed July 22, 2021.

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NOTES

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2. George W. Wells Biographical Information Blank, May 14, 1934, Secretariat Missionary Files, RG 21, Record 114592, GCA.
3. W. Woodford, "Alabama," *ARH*, May 18, 1897, 316-317.
4. R.D. Hottel and M.C. Sturdevant, "Alabama," *ARH*, August 10, 1897, 508.
5. W. Woodford, "Alabama Camp Meeting," *ARH*, August 23, 1898, 542.
6. Smith Sharp, "Organization of Cumberland Mission Into a Conference," *ARH*, October 23, 1900, 685-686.
7. Wells Biographical Information Blank, May 14, 1934, Record 114592, GCA.
8. "Georgia Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*, 1908, GCA, <https://documents.adventistarchives.org/Yearbooks/YB1908.pdf>.
9. "North Carolina Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*, 1910, GCA, <https://documents.adventistarchives.org/Yearbooks/YB1910.pdf>.

10. Wells Biographical Information Blank, May 14, 1934, Record 114592, GCA.
11. O. Montgomery, "Fifteenth Meeting," *ARH*, June 4, 1926, 12; Wells Biographical Information Blank, May 14, 1934, Record 114592, GCA.
12. G. W. Wells, "The Seal of God," *ARH*, September 14, 1933, 7.
13. "Necrology," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*, 1940, <https://documents.adventistarchives.org/Yearbooks/YB1940.pdf>.
14. "George Washington Wells obituary," *ARH*, July 29, 1948, 23.
15. "Jessie Seward Flaiz Wells obituary," *Pacific Union Recorder*, February 5, 1970, 7.

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