

Sisley, Frederika House (1852–1934)

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Frederika House was the youngest and only single person elected as an officer of the General Conference, and one of only three women to serve as a GC treasurer and GC officer.

Early Years

Frederika¹ House was born on October 7, 1852, near Elmira, New York, to Richard and Statira House.² House had seven sisters (including Kate [Lackey], and Hattie House, 1851-1943), and a younger brother, Henry Summer (1855-1935). Not raised an Adventist, House first encountered the faith at age seven when several of her sisters became Adventists, although she did not join them at the time. At 18 she had a stint teaching public school in Iowa for two years, and then matriculated to Battle Creek College.

Administrative Firsts

In her early twenties House was integral to the administration of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, as borne out by developments in August 1875. At the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association (later Review and Herald Publishing Association) session on August 10, House, already a trustee, was elected secretary of the association.³ On August 11, 1875, she was elected treasurer of the Michigan Conference.⁴ Four days later at the 14th General Conference on August 16, 1875, House was unanimously elected treasurer of the General Conference, becoming the

second of three women to hold the position, and one of three women in the history of the church to serve as an executive officer of the General Conference.⁵ Additionally, when elected House was 22 years old and unmarried, thus being the youngest and the only single person ever elected as an officer of the General Conference.⁶ As was the convention at the time, House served as GC treasurer for a one-year term.

Marriage

On October 27, 1875, Frederika House married William Conqueror Sisley, in a ceremony performed by Uriah Smith. William was born on March 28, 1850, in Royal Tunbridge Wells, England, one of eight children born to John and Susannah Sisley.⁷ The Sisley family learned of the Sabbath from William's older brother John, Sr., who had migrated to Michigan and there become acquainted with Adventism. In the autumn of 1863, William, his widowed mother, and sisters, Martha (1846-1921), Mary (Maud Boyd, 2851-1937) and Ellen (Nellie Starr, 1854-1934), immigrated to Michigan, where the family settled on a farm in Convis.⁸

On May 18-21, 1864, the Sisleys attended the second General Conference session, held in Battle Creek, and were purportedly recognized by Ellen White, who indicated that she had seen them in vision. They were introduced to the session as among the first Adventist believers from outside of the United States. At Ellen White's urging, the Sisleys soon relocated to Battle Creek, then the center of the fledgling denomination.⁹ In the proceeding years, the Sisleys would become one of the leading early families in the Adventism, particularly Richard, William, Nellie and Maude. The



Frederika House Sisley
Photo courtesy of Center for Adventist Research.

latter, like her sister-in-law Frederika, accomplished numerous firsts.¹⁰

William and Frederika Sisley had three children: Alice Centennial (White, 1876-1963); Eulalia Statira (Richards, 1878-1956), and Susan Maude (Duffie, 1881-1969).¹¹ Frederika focused on the rearing of their daughters. Perhaps the most outstanding was Eulalia, who became a celebrated anesthesiologist and obstetrician, and with her husband Franklin Richards, also a physician, was a force in the Adventist medical world. They were coauthors of the popular *The Ladies Handbook of Home Treatment*¹²

The multitalented William variously held the following positions: foreman and building superintendent of Battle Creek College, Battle Creek Sanitarium, and Battle Creek Tabernacle (1874-1879); an architect for Union College, Walla Walla College, Keene Industrial Academy, Avondale College, Haskell Home, and Boulder Sanitarium (1879-1918); and manager of the Review and Herald Publishing Association (1894-1899) and Stanborough Press; treasurer for the Central European Conference and British Union Conference; as well as a member of numerous executive boards and committees.¹³

In 1901 William and Frederika Sisley left Battle Creek to do missionary work in William's native country of England. R. B. Thurber, Frederika's eulogizer, characterized her during this period as "always active in secretarial work, teaching, missionary endeavour, and writing extensively for our papers."¹⁴

Later Years

In 1918 the Sisleys returned to the States, to retire in the neighborhood of Bordeaux in Nashville, Tennessee, next door to their daughter Alice's family.¹⁵ William died on September 23, 1932, after 55 years of marriage.¹⁶ Frederika died of heart disease on January 25, 1934, age 81, in Nashville, Tennessee.¹⁷

Contribution

Frederika House Sisley displays the value that the Seventh-day Adventist Church in its early years placed on ability. Even though she was young and unmarried, and it was not common for a woman to hold some church leadership positions at the time, Sisley was elected to key offices because of her proficiency with finances. She also flourished as a wife and mother. Her versatility and willingness were characteristic of nineteenth-century Adventist pioneers.

SOURCES

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1880 United States Federal Census. Year: 1880. Census Place: Battle Creek, Calhoun, Michigan. Roll: 574. Family History Film: 1254574. Page: 80C. Enumeration District: 042. Image: 0162.

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“Sisley, William C.” Document: “Sustentation Questionnaire.”

NOTES

1. Various spelled Frederica, Frederica, Fredericka, and Frederikia.?
2. Tennessee State Library and Archives; Nashville, Tennessee; Tennessee Death Records, 1908-1959; Roll #: 1.?
3. “Sixteenth Annual Session of the Seventh-Day Adventist Publishing Association,” *ARH*, August 26, 1875, 63.?
4. *Ibid.*, 62.?
5. *Ibid.*, 59.?
6. See Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research, *2015 Annual Statistical Report* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists), 3.?
7. 1851 England Census. Class: HO107; Piece: 1615; Folio: 44; Page: 16; GSU roll: 193516.?
8. Maude Sisley Boyd, “Early Experiences,” *Australasian Record*, June 7, 1937, 1.?
9. See Mrs. George B. Starr (Ellen “Nellie” Sisley), “A View Sister White had of the Sisly (sic) Family before They Left England,” Ellen G. White Estate, Document File Number: 496, July 8, 1927, 1-2; “The Sisley Family Seen in Vision,” Ellen G. White Estate, Document File Number: 496, undated and unsigned, 1-4.?
10. See Boyd, “Early Experiences,” 1-3.?
11. 1880 United States Federal Census. Year: 1880; Census Place: Battle Creek, Calhoun, Michigan; Roll: 574; Family History Film: 1254574; Page: 80C; Enumeration District: 042; Image: 0162.?
12. A. G. Stewart, “The Late Dr. Eulalia Richards,” *Australasian Record*, April 16, 1956, 16.?
13. General Conference Archives, Box: 9784; Record Group: 33; Folder: “Sisley, William C.” Document: “Sustentation Fund Application,” 1.?
14. R. B. Thurber, “Mrs. W.C. Sisley,” *ARH*, March 15, 1934, 23.?
15. General Conference Archives, Box: 9784; Record Group: 33; Folder: “Sisley, William C.” Document: “Sustentation Questionnaire.”?
16. Tennessee, Death Records, 1908-1958. Tennessee State Library and Archives; Nashville, Tennessee; Tennessee Death Records, 1908-1959; Roll #: 8?
17. “Tennessee Deaths and Burials, 1874–1955.” Index. FamilySearch, Salt Lake City, Utah, 2009, 2010. Index entries derived from digital copies of original and compiled records.?