

CHAPTER 15

Entering a Neglected Field

It was not until the 1890s that substantial Seventh-day Adventist penetration of the southern United States began. Early Seventh-day Adventists followed the general American trend of migrating westward from their first bases in New England and New York. Even if they had wanted to move south, their abolitionist beliefs would have made them unwelcome in an area wedded to a slave economy.

With the end of slavery Adventists might have joined other evangelical churches during the late 1860s and 70s in sending teachers south to open schools for the freedmen. The 1865 General Conference did recognize that “a field is now opened in the South for labor among the colored people and should be entered upon according to our ability.” Unfortunately during these years that ability was not very great. Both ministers and funds were in short supply.¹

Early Efforts in the South

During the 1870s several individual Seventh-day Adventists made transitory efforts to help former slaves obtain a basic education. In Texas Eddie Capman began a night school which met three times a week in a small twelve-by-fourteen-foot cabin. Twelve blacks, ranging in age from eight to forty, attended. Some months later two experienced teachers from Ohio, Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Clarke, went to Texas with General Conference blessing, but at their own expense, to expand Capman’s work. Soon Clarke was calling for a licensed preacher to come and organize churches.²

In 1877 Elder R. M. Kilgore responded to this plea. Kilgore’s eight years of labor in Texas were not without difficulties; several times he was

threatened with lynching, and on one occasion his tent was burned down. Public opposition may have led to the curtailing of the church's unofficial educational work for blacks. As an ex-Union officer, Kilgore was sensitive to the charge that Adventists were "Yankees" come "to preach nigger equality"; a charge he denied. Opposition from prejudiced whites may also have contributed to the early demise of a school for freedmen begun in 1877 by Mrs. H. M. Van Slyke in Ray County, Missouri.³

From the start Seventh-day Adventist preachers were puzzled over how to relate to Southern attitudes toward race. It was E. B. Lane who in 1871 answered the first call from the South for an Adventist minister. During his initial evangelistic series, held in a railroad station, Lane acceded to local custom by preaching from the doorway between adjoining waiting rooms in which black and white listeners were seated separately. Only one church was organized at the close of this series, in Edgefield Junction, Tennessee, however, and it included about a dozen black believers. Similar procedures were followed during later evangelistic efforts in Kentucky and Virginia.

During the General Conferences of 1877 and 1885, the question of whether or not to bow to Southern prejudices by establishing separate work and separate churches for blacks was debated. Most speakers believed that to do so would be a denial of true Christianity since God was no respecter of persons. In 1890, however, R. M. Kilgore, the Adventist leader with the most experience relative to the South, argued for separate churches. D. M. Canright had urged this policy as early as 1876 during a brief period of labor in Texas. Eventually their recommendations prevailed, but the policy was never defended on grounds other than those of expediency.⁴

Charles M. Kinney

Charles M. Kinney, the first Afro-American ordained as a Seventh-day Adventist minister, had rather definite convictions on the relationships that should prevail between black and white Adventists. Although Kinney looked upon separate religious services for the two groups as "a great sacrifice" on the part of blacks, he believed this preferable to segregating Afro-Americans in back pews of churches. If there were only a few black believers in an area, Kinney favored their integration into a church with whites. But as soon as numbers warranted, he believed blacks might well be organized into a separate church. Eventually all black churches should join in a conference that would "bear the same relation to the General Conference that white conferences do."⁵

Kinney was an interesting person. Born a slave in Richmond, Virginia, he worked his way west after the Civil War. In 1878, at the age of twenty-three, he attended an evangelistic effort conducted by J. N. Loughborough in Reno, Nevada, and became a charter member of the small church organized there. Kinney's service as secretary of the Nevada Tract and Missionary Society convinced conference leaders he had the potential to

become a valuable church worker. They sponsored him for two years of study at Healdsburg College. From Healdsburg Kinney went at General Conference request to labor among the blacks who had begun migrating to Kansas in substantial numbers in 1879. Later Kinney worked in St. Louis, Missouri, where he apparently encountered his first taste of racial prejudice among fellow Adventists. For more than two decades he labored across the upper South, organizing black churches and becoming the first major Adventist spokesman of Afro-American aspirations.⁶

It was nearly two decades after Lane's initial series of meetings at Edgefield Junction that Kinney became pastor of the first separately organized black Seventh-day Adventist church in this same village. During the intervening years Adventist work in the South had largely been confined to Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, Arkansas, and Texas. In 1873 a feeble flicker of interest appeared in Alabama as the result of the work of J. M. Elliot, a Southern white who had been blinded while fighting in the Union Army. Elliot had accepted Adventism during a stay in the North, but returned to Alabama at war's end. His sharing of his new faith with old friends led them to call for the services of an Adventist minister, but there seemed to be no one to send.

C. O. Taylor

The call to Alabama was finally answered four or five years later when Elder C. O. Taylor, an old Millerite preacher, spent the years from 1876 to 1879 roving through the Carolinas, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana. Taylor went primarily to areas where interest in Adventism had been aroused by literature sent by friends. Although he kept on the move too much to build up any major congregations, several of the families he converted played important roles in later Adventist evangelism.⁷

During the 1880s interest in Adventism throughout the Southern States was promoted largely by laymen, some newly arrived from the North, and by itinerant colporteurs. Regular preachers appeared only spasmodically. The New Orleans Exposition of 1884-85 seemed an opportunity to gain publicity for Seventh-day Adventist views; so R. M. Kilgore and H. W. Cottrell spent some weeks in the city preparing a display of literature. A city mission followed. Similar city missions were opened in Atlanta, Georgia, and Birmingham, Alabama. In each, colporteurs played a key role. Their income came entirely from sales commissions, although when the General Conference approved of C. W. Olds's moving his family to join him in Birmingham, they did promise that if he "got into a tight place, we will try to help him some."⁸

Ellen White Counsel

It took an earnest admonition from Ellen White to jolt Adventists into realizing their duty to share their faith with Afro-Americans. Even then

the jolt was a delayed-action one. On March 21, 1891, Mrs. White read a "testimony" before a group of thirty top Seventh-day Adventist leaders assembled for the biennial General Conference session. Although recognizing that her message would cause controversy, Ellen White felt impelled to speak frankly on the subject of church race relations. She implied that the preceding General Conference had erred by capitulating to white prejudices against integrated churches and church services.

"The color of the skin does not determine character in the heavenly courts," Mrs. White affirmed. Blacks were to have "just as much respect as any of God's children." She went on to say that Jesus made no difference between whites and blacks "except that He has a special, tender pity for those who are called to bear a greater burden than others." To slight a brother because of color was the same as to slight Christ. Calling for more missionary work among all classes in the South, Ellen White indicated that this applied particularly to blacks. "Sin rests upon us as a church because we have not made greater effort for the salvation of souls among the colored people," she declared. Both white and black Adventists were to be trained to educate the millions of Afro-Americans who had been so long oppressed and "downtrodden."⁹

James Edson White

Although Mrs. White's appeal was soon printed in tract form, it took nearly three years for anyone to pay much attention to it. Then suddenly its message found a very receptive audience in Ellen's oldest living son, James Edson White. Edson, as he was customarily called, had many of his father's characteristics although he lacked his acumen. "Creative, resourceful, and energetic" in the various enterprises that enlisted his interest, he was also somewhat undiplomatic, unpredictable and, at times, "a bit eccentric." Trained as a printer in his youth, Edson had worked at both the Review and Herald and the Pacific Press before launching his own printing business, devoted chiefly to the publication of hymnbooks and Sabbath School materials.

During the late 1880s, Edson transferred his printing business to Chicago. Success in business eluded him; his debts increased, and at the same time his spiritual condition deteriorated. Then in the late summer of 1893 he went through a spiritual crisis during which he determined to reenter denominational service. At this opportune time he chanced to hear a talk by Professor C. C. Lewis on the needs of black Americans in the Southern States. Edson thought of offering himself for evangelistic service in Tennessee. Before he could act on this tentative plan, however, he met Will Palmer, an old friend and associate who had also recently experienced a spiritual rebirth and was back in Battle Creek attending a Bible Institute at the college. At Palmer's urging Edson and his wife, Emma, decided to return to Battle Creek and enter the Bible Institute.¹²

A contact during the Institute with Dr. J. E. Caldwell, who had been

laboring among blacks in Knoxville, Tennessee, increased Edson's interest in such work. Caldwell told Edson about his mother's 1891 appeal, but later inquiries concerning it among General Conference officials failed to uncover anyone who seemed aware of its existence. Then a casual discussion with a painter in the Review and Herald plant revealed that this man had observed some of the forgotten tracts in an unused office. Reading his mother's appeal thoroughly confirmed Edson's determination to begin educational and evangelistic work among Southern blacks.

Steamship Evangelism

After Edson persuaded Will Palmer to join in his plans, Edson's entrepreneurial instincts blossomed. The two men speedily put together a simple religious reader, entitled *The Gospel Primer*, to fulfill a threefold purpose: (1) its sales would finance their mission project, (2) it would be simple enough for use in teaching illiterates to read, and (3) it would convey Bible truths in clear, simple language. Such a book had been envisioned by the General Conference officers for use among blacks nearly five years earlier but had never been produced. *The Gospel Primer* was an instant success, and White and Palmer immediately commissioned the building of a river steamer to use as headquarters for their projected work in the South.

By this time the two men had learned enough about Southern society to know that teaching blacks what were regarded as "strange" religious ideas might well make it difficult for them to secure accommodations among whites. Yet lodging with blacks would be considered a major breach of social mores and probably would lead to their being forced out of the area. Having their own living accommodations on a boat seemed an ideal answer. Since Edson had worked for a time on riverboats on the upper Mississippi River, he was doubly drawn to such a solution for their needs.¹¹

Ironically, it almost proved easier to build the boat, soon christened *Morning Star*, than to get the blessings of the General Conference on their plans. Both White and Palmer possessed mechanical skill. Now they built their own boiler while a local church member donated his labor in putting together the ship's engine. Within five months the steamer was completed. After considerable misgivings the General Conference Committee agreed to send the two men with missionary credentials and the promise of eight dollars per week salary for each, but with no money for the expenses of the *Morning Star*. The Committee also appointed another worker, H. S. Shaw, to have general supervision of the work for blacks throughout the South. White and Palmer were to work in an assigned area and engage in "no new schemes . . . without their plans being first submitted to the General Conference Committee."¹²

It took another six months to get the *Morning Star* down the Kalamazoo River, across Lake Michigan in a storm, and down the Illinois and Missis-

ssippi Rivers to Vicksburg, Mississippi, where the party was to begin labor in an area where blacks outnumbered whites by a substantial margin. In the process White recruited several additional crew members, secured government approval of the ship's construction, and providentially managed to have dismissed a \$500 fine for navigating the Mississippi with an unlicensed black pilot.¹³

About a year before the January 1895 day when the *Morning Star* steamed into Vicksburg, an independent black preacher who had learned some Adventist truths from reading *Bible Readings for the Home Circle* had come to the city from Arkansas. He proved a powerful preacher, but his fearless denunciation of sin led community leaders to turn the people against him. Before falling martyr to an angry mob Alonzo Parker warned that God would give them "just one more chance" by sending messengers with a "stricter message." His prophecy made a deep impression on Vicksburg's black community, many of whom saw its fulfillment in the arrival of Edson White and his party.

The *Morning Star* group received a cordial welcome from the black Mt. Zion Baptist congregation. Katie Holston, one of the members, invited the newcomers to attend a prayer group in her home; soon they were visiting Sunday Schools in a variety of churches. Sensing the eagerness of black adults to learn, Edson and his helpers began an evening school two nights per week. More than fifty attended the first night; soon this number had doubled. Fearful of arousing prejudice, Edson held back from introducing the Sabbath, but the little band of missionaries met each Saturday for services on the *Morning Star*. Before long there were questions concerning this practice. Some of the black leaders, finding White's explanations satisfactory, changed days of worship. This aroused the hostility of local pastors, and before long the *Morning Star* group were not welcome in any of the area churches.

Edson's troubles multiplied. The closing of the churches meant that he would have to hire a hall to continue the night school. At the same time the Review and Herald manager decided to discontinue publishing *The Gospel Primer* in favor of a similar work upon which they could gain larger profits. This was catastrophic, as royalties from the *Primer* paid the operational expenses of the *Morning Star*. Palmer was dispatched to Battle Creek to reason with General Conference leaders. Rather grudgingly, the General Conference, which published some materials independently, agreed to back one edition of 20,000 of the *Primer*.¹⁴

A Chapel in Vicksburg

A church of their own in Vicksburg seemed vital to the small band of missionaries and their recent converts. With much sacrifice and the help of friends in the North, their dreams became a reality. For \$160 they constructed a small unpretentious chapel, twenty by forty feet in size. At first local authorities seemed determined to prevent the building of this

church; but persistence and prayer paid off, and on August 10, 1895, General Conference president O. A. Olsen was on hand to preach the dedicatory sermon.

Olsen's interest in work for blacks seemed to be increasing, perhaps because of Ellen White's extensive series of articles in the *Review* during late 1895 and early 1896. In this series she repeatedly called for greater efforts in evangelizing the South, particularly its black population. Forced by the difficult climate of Vicksburg to spend at least some of the summer months in Battle Creek, Edson likewise actively promoted work among the Southern blacks. He also completed arrangements for some of his mother's writings on the life of Jesus to be published in simplified book form as *Christ Our Saviour*. Mrs. White assigned the royalties from this book to help support Edson's work. Such financial aid was vital to the expanded plans Edson envisioned.¹⁵

When Edson and Emma White returned to Vicksburg, it was without the help of the Palmers; Will had been asked to promote the publishing interests of the General Conference Association. Before expanding his operations geographically Edson determined to strengthen his Vicksburg base. The night school was reactivated in the new church; an evangelistic series, advertised by colorful handbills printed on the little press the Whites had brought from Battle Creek, was begun. Yet the people seemed reticent to attend until prejudice was dispelled through the kindly ministrations of Dr. and Mrs. W. H. Kynett and nurse Ida Wekel, who arrived to support Edson's program through medical missionary work. Again the night school was crowded as 150 students jammed the little church built to hold 100.

As an aid in organizing and promoting their expanding operations, Edson and his associates organized the Southern Missionary Society. Sale of stock in this new organization would help to provide funds for its work. It could also receive and disburse gifts and hold title to any properties acquired. Acutely aware of the economic difficulties facing Afro-Americans, Dr. Kynett, the society's first vice-president, planned to begin a laundry, a bakery, and a weaving business. Meanwhile Edson White, as president, was appealing to Northern Adventists to share serviceable used clothing with his needy black friends. As the night school continued to grow, an addition to the church building became necessary. This also housed a thousand-volume library Edson collected for use by his students and church members.¹⁶

Up the Yazoo River

With the work in Vicksburg progressing nicely Edson prepared to move up the Yazoo River, which joined the Mississippi a few miles north of Vicksburg. The Yazoo wound through a heavily populated black area. First it was necessary to refit and expand the *Morning Star*. In addition to enlarged living quarters, a chapel, reading room, and printing office were

added. Edson was also busy writing another simplified doctrinal book, *The Coming King*, whose sales would help finance his work.

Deterred by fever and shortage of funds, it was not until December 1897 that Edson was able to head the *Morning Star* up the Yazoo. He was accompanied by Elder G. A. Irwin, the newly elected General Conference president. At Yazoo City they held services with a woman who had accepted the Advent message in Alabama. On the next trip up the Yazoo, the *Morning Star* was detained for a week near an isolated plantation by mechanical difficulties. Both whites and blacks attended services on the boat, but they sat separately. At first the blacks were assigned back seats, but later Edson ran a curtain down the center of the chapel and preached simultaneously to both races from the front.

Edson disliked segregated services but felt that something was being accomplished in getting whites even to attend services with blacks. Soon, however, even though he had unwillingly switched to entirely separate services, he was threatened with ostracism and possible lynching if he continued educational work for the blacks living on the big river plantations. Such racial prejudice continued to be difficult for Adventist leaders to understand. In a letter to W. C. White in 1895, O. A. Olsen had indicated disapproval of separate work for the two races in the South. He believed the gospel should overcome prejudice and pointed to the seeming success Catholics experienced while ignoring the color line.¹⁷

During Edson's trips along the Yazoo he discovered 240 acres of timberland for sale. Convinced that here was another chance to earn money to finance his work, he ignored his mother's counsel against becoming involved in business ventures and made a deposit on the land. Logging operations were begun and an extensive strawberry bed set out; then came a disastrous spring flood. Although the *Morning Star* crew won praise for helping to evacuate threatened residents and their livestock, Edson's real estate venture was dealt a death blow. Chastened, he decided to stay, in the future, with evangelistic and educational work.

Malaria, yellow fever, and preoccupation with financing his projects took Edson White away from Mississippi for months at a time. Yet capable assistants remained behind, and the work prospered. New schools were begun; a portable chapel was built in Battle Creek and shipped south for use along the Yazoo. Since the financial distress of the General Conference (along with a latent distrust of some of Edson's ventures) limited the official support given Edson's work, he determined to appeal directly to rank-and-file church members. Soon two small power presses on the *Morning Star* were turning out the first issues of the *Gospel Herald*. It advertised the work in the South and carried liberal selections from Ellen White's testimonies favoring work among blacks. Ten thousand copies of the first issue were sent out along with a call for regular subscriptions. Gradually the *Herald* changed into a regular evangelistic journal for the South and was finally absorbed into *These Times*.¹⁸

Financial pressures continued to plague the work in Mississippi. As a result of Ellen White's articles in the *Review*, the Sabbath Schools collected nearly \$11,000 in the first half of 1896 to forward the work in the South. Yet Edson's group failed to receive any of this amount. Again the entrepreneurial side of his father's character appeared in the son. The *Herald* advertised a variety of goods for sale, from sewing machines to rubber stamps. Profits were used to build churches and schools and to provide the expenses of Edson's associates and of operating the *Morning Star*. Interested Adventists who could not buy, or donate cash, were encouraged to send grains, dried fruits, or canned vegetables and fruit to Vicksburg and Yazoo City.

Edson's solicitation of food and used clothing was not for himself and his helpers alone; he was constantly aware of the pitiful conditions under which thousands of black sharecroppers existed. With a near failure in the cotton crop during 1898 a bad situation became worse. The crew of the *Morning Star* distributed over seventy-five barrels of clothing as well as free cornmeal, flour, and molasses. All the while Edson was urging the farmers in the area to diversify their crops: to plant peanuts, potatoes, and garden vegetables. Unfortunately this had no appeal to white landlords interested only in a cash crop they had known for years: cotton.¹⁹

Late in 1898 the arrival in Yazoo City of F. R. Rogers and his family from Walla Walla, Washington, provided Edson with the strong and imaginative support he had missed since Will Palmer returned to Battle Creek. Rogers gave the next fourteen years of his life to teaching and preaching among Southern blacks. His disregard for personal comforts and health eventually made him a martyr to this work.

Rogers arrived none too soon. Both Edson and Emma White were seriously ill that winter. Edson lost twenty-five pounds in a few weeks. Funds continued to be in short supply. As if this were not enough, white vigilantes threatened to blow up the *Morning Star* and close the schools the Southern Missionary Society had begun throughout the Yazoo delta.

A leave of absence in Battle Creek improved the Whites' health, but scarcely had they returned to Mississippi before violence erupted. Dan Stephenson, a native white Mississippian teaching in one of the Adventist schools for blacks, was escorted out of town by determined men. One of the black Adventist leaders, N. W. Olvin, was viciously whipped; his wife shot in the leg. The books, maps, and supplies of the Calmar school were burned and a threatening notice affixed to the schoolroom door. As Edson wrote his mother, it was "Ku Klux days all over again." Small wonder that Ellen began to suggest more caution in avoiding antagonizing the racial prejudices of the Southern power structure. It would scarcely be wise to jeopardize the lives of workers and face the possibility of being entirely shut out of the area.²⁰

In an effort to diffuse antagonism toward the Southern Missionary Society's education work Edson made F. R. Rogers superintendent of

education and depended almost entirely upon black teachers to staff the growing number of schools. By the early years of the twentieth century the society had nearly fifty schools in operation. But for Edson White the front-line days in Mississippi were virtually over. The Yazoo City newspapers kept inciting opposition to his projects. And then N. W. Olvin was imprisoned on a trumped-up murder charge. As he considered these facts and also the adverse effect of the malaria-infested lowlands on his health, Edson decided to move the headquarters of the Southern Missionary Society to Nashville. In this city there were a number of educational institutions for blacks, and racial prejudices were not so virulent as they were farther south.²¹

In 1901, not long after Edson transferred the Southern Missionary Society headquarters to Nashville, Adventist leaders in the Southern States organized the Southern Union Conference. The society became the branch of the union conference specifically charged with educational, evangelistic, and medical work among blacks. In 1909 its activities were transferred to the newly created General Conference Negro Department. By that time it was sponsoring fifty-five primary schools with more than 1800 pupils in ten of the Southern States. It had also opened medical facilities for blacks in the Nashville and Atlanta areas and had succeeded in increasing the number of black Adventists in the South to more than 900. There had probably been less than fifty when Edson White had conceived his "mission to Black America" some fifteen years earlier.²²

Oakwood College

A few months after the *Morning Star* first arrived in Vicksburg, the leading officers of the General Conference decided to develop an industrial school for blacks that would draw in the best students from primary schools like those Edson White was inaugurating. Following counsel from Ellen White, they began a search for land in the area of Nashville, Tennessee, or northern Alabama. The locating committee, composed of General Conference president O. A. Olsen, treasurer Harmon Lindsay, and George Irwin, superintendent of the Southern district, paused in their search at Chattanooga. There in a special prayer session they pled with tears for divine direction. Proceeding to Huntsville, Alabama, they learned of an old 360-acre plantation for sale. The mother of the agent handling the property had been a patient at the Battle Creek Sanitarium. Through this favorable contact the committee secured the estate for only \$6700, a thousand dollars less than the original asking price.²³

Impressed by the large number of huge oak trees on the estate, Olsen and Irwin decided to name the new school "Oakwood." The early months of 1896 were spent in clearing brush from the run-down land and in attempting to get the dilapidated manor house, barn, and nine old "slave" cabins in usable shape. S. M. Jacobs, a successful Iowa farmer, came down to manage the property. A visit by Irwin and others to Booker T.



Partial View of the Campus of Oakwood College

Washington's Tuskegee Institute helped confirm the founders' views that Oakwood should place heavy emphasis on vocational training.

The top Adventist leadership was eager to get the Oakwood property in shape for school to open in the fall of 1896. Elders Olsen and Irwin spent several weeks helping repair the manor house; Olsen plastered, while Irwin acted as "tender, mixing mortar and carrying it upstairs." Later, Olsen spent some time in plowing the fields, while Irwin wielded a paintbrush. Several would-be students had already arrived and were quickly put to work. From the start Olsen had decided that Oakwood would run a year-round, rather than just a nine-month, school program; only in this way could the school make proper use of the farmland and give the practical instruction in agriculture which he felt was vital.²⁴

During the first summer there was considerable prejudice among surrounding farmers, not just against the idea of having a black school in the area, but because Mr. Jacobs was regarded as another know-it-all Yankee who had come down to teach them how to farm. When Jacobs marshaled his small farm crew to help several neighbors through periods of difficulty, a more favorable image was created—one that was to last.

Even before school opened officially in November 1896, Mr. Jacobs's son and daughter held evening classes for the eager students. The sixteen boarders who were present on opening day increased to twenty-three in two months' time; another fifteen attended as day students. By the start of 1898 there were facilities to accommodate fifty boarding students at Oakwood. These young people studied half of each day and worked the other half to pay for board and tuition. In addition to agriculture the boys at Oakwood learned masonry and carpentry, while the girls received instruction in cooking, sewing, laundering, and gardening.

Over the next two decades a wide variety of buildings were added to the campus, with most of the building being done by the students themselves. Even so, facilities could not be enlarged rapidly enough to meet the demand. When the century closed, fifty-five students jammed the dormitories, while half that many were turned away for lack of room. Because the first students had had so little opportunity for education, instruction at Oakwood during the initial decade was given at the secondary level. In 1917 the school was elevated to junior-college status.²⁵

Madison College

Less than a decade after the founding of Oakwood for blacks, another school for whites was established as the result of Ellen White's continued calls for Seventh-day Adventists to devote more attention to the neglected Southern States. The key personalities were Edward A. Sutherland and Percy T. Magan, who in 1901 had led in the relocating of Battle Creek College at Berrien Springs, Michigan. Both men were educational reformers and firm believers in the guiding messages continually issuing from Ellen White's pen. They determined to resign their posts in Berrien

Springs and establish a school in the South where students could be trained to serve as self-supporting missionary teachers. They would prepare their students to combine evangelism with better farming methods and correct health principles. Thus they could minister to all the needs of the deprived hill people of the South.

Sutherland and Magan intended to locate their school in the mountains of eastern Tennessee or in the western section of the Carolinas, but at Mrs. White's urging they agreed to explore the area around Nashville. After unsuccessful weeks of hunting for a site the two men accepted an invitation from Edson White to cruise up the Cumberland River on the *Morning Star* with his mother and some others. About ten miles north of Nashville the *Morning Star* broke down. While waiting for repairs, Ellen White and Will Palmer went ashore. As they began walking over a run-down farm, Ellen suddenly became excited; the place resembled an area she had seen in vision. She urged Sutherland and Magan to buy the property.

Dismay filled the hearts of the would-be school developers. They pointed to the run-down buildings, the eroded land, and the asking price for the farm, which they were sure was much too high. Mrs. White was unperturbed. Whom were they expecting to help? she asked. The answer was "the poor farmers in the hill regions." Then, Mrs. White replied, would it be well for your demonstration farm to be on good-quality land so much different from that of the people you propose to help? As far as funds were concerned, they should trust the Lord to meet their needs. She would call upon the people to help them. She urged Mrs. Nell Druillard, Sutherland's aunt and a woman who had shown pronounced financial abilities through the years, to join these "boys" in their new enterprise.

Still Sutherland and Magan hesitated, but finally they decided Ellen White's urging was a clear test of their belief in her divine inspiration. Sensing a chance to make more money from these "Yankees," the farm's owners suddenly raised their price by \$1000. All but Mrs. White interpreted this development as a way out of a situation they had been hesitant about from the first. She insisted they still should buy the place, and buy it they did. By the time they obtained possession, October 1, 1904, the founders had incorporated the new enterprise as the Nashville Agricultural and Normal Institute; its proximity to Madison, Tennessee, soon led it to be known as the "Madison School." Ellen White further demonstrated her support by accepting a position on the institute's board of directors, the only time she served in such a capacity.²⁶

There were only eleven students on hand when the first term of the Madison School began in the fall of 1904—idealistic young people who had followed Magan, Sutherland, Mrs. Druillard, and M. Bessie De Graw down from Berrien Springs. The school was operated as a big family, with students and teachers joining together in morning and evening worship. Throughout the day all participated in the work necessary to make the farm pay. It was not unusual for the dean [Magan] to drive the mule team

for plowing while one of the lady teachers set off to town in a cart to market "the butter made by the president [Sutherland] in the lean-to creamery." In the evening, around the big fireplace, there were "mingled discussions of folklore and pedagogy and balanced rations with needlework and knitting and administration of bran poultices to chapped hands."²⁷

Only the simplest furnishings were provided at Madison; plank tables and dry-goods-box dressers were the rule. Food was largely restricted to what could be produced on the farm. The philosophy of the founders was that the more closely conditions in the school approximated the conditions students would face when they went out to teach, the more easily would they adjust to their vocations. There was no steam heat, no electricity, no expensive farm machinery of the kind not used by the Southern farmers the school hoped to serve. As the numbers of students increased, they were put to work constructing simple residence halls; thus the art of building was added to the science of farming.

There were many unconventional features in the educational system inaugurated at Madison. Student labor, rather than cash, was accepted for tuition. This meant that cash necessary for operating expenses must come from the sale of school products or from patrons, like Mrs. Josephine Gotzian, who believed in the purposes for which Madison had been founded. Ellen White made numerous appeals to those with means to "help the work at Madison."

The governing body at Madison was not the faculty or a president's council, but the entire school family sitting in session, called the "Union Body." Working together in this group, students and teachers jointly made rules, enforced discipline, planned for needed improvements, and directed the various departments of the school. Only matters requiring cash expenditures were referred to the board of directors. One night each week was set aside for a meeting of the Union Body.

Each student at Madison studied only one major subject per nine-week term; he received three hours of class instruction per day and was allowed an equal time for preparation. Part of the students studied in the morning, the rest in the afternoon. The average student needed to put in six hours of labor daily in one of the school industries to meet school expenses. Working side by side with teachers in the garden and dairy or in the field or poultry house brought a close spirit of fellowship. All knew that these departments were vital to produce cash for the institution's needs. Frequent changes in work assignments allowed all to acquire proficiency in a variety of areas.

The Madison School made no provision for organized athletics or for clubs, classes, or other groups which might encourage rivalry and competition. Students were expected to be adult enough to find recreation in intellectual and spiritual pursuits. Sutherland and Magan recognized that the kind of school they were operating was not for everyone, but only for those motivated by a consuming love for Christ and a desire to see His

love revealed to others. Theirs was designed to be truly a "missionary school."²⁸

The vast majority of students coming to Madison expected to be teachers or health workers in rural communities. They studied Bible, history, science, or grammar during the regular nine-week terms. Short, three-week sessions devoted to practical skills like carpentry, cobbling, or blacksmithing were offered between regular terms. The first year Mrs. Druillard offered a one-year course in practical nursing and hydrotherapy. Later, when a sanitarium was added to the school in 1907, this course was lengthened to two years. In all subjects the emphasis was on teaching the student to be proficient enough to teach the same subject matter when he went out on his own.

Expansion in the South

It was about a year and a half after Madison opened that the first members of the school family left to start "out-schools." Fifteen miles from Madison three members of the original group purchased 250 acres of land and developed the Oak Grove Garden School. They came as settlers, but at the community's request were soon operating a three-teacher school for seventy-five to eighty children. With the Oak Grove Garden School firmly established, two of the founders moved twenty miles east, where in the hills above Gallatin they began the Fountain Head School, which later developed into Highland Academy.

By 1915 there were thirty-nine of these self-supporting groups spread across Tennessee, Alabama, and North Carolina. More than three quarters of them had already begun free primary schools. Back at Madison, Magan, already forty-four years of age, and Sutherland, forty-six, decided to take the medical course to strengthen the school and sanitarium complex they were operating. Commuting to Nashville by motorcycle, they studied at the University of Tennessee and received their medical degrees in 1914. Although the following year Dr. Magan left to become dean of the College of Medical Evangelists (now Loma Linda University Medical School), Dr. Sutherland directed the Madison complex for another thirty years.²⁹

Even before the Madison School was begun, Ellen White had in 1903 urged the founding of a similar school for blacks in the Nashville area. During the next few years she repeated this recommendation several times. In studying these statements O. R. Staines, Oakwood's business manager, became impressed that he should resign and start such a school. After consulting with Magan and Sutherland and securing Mrs. White's approval, he began the search for a suitable location.

At last a run-down, but promising, farm was located six miles from the center of Nashville. Staines and his mother used their available cash for a down payment, and Staines immediately left for Michigan to canvass friends and relatives for help in paying the balance and in securing livestock and equipment to begin the new institution, which he had

named the Hillcrest School. Michigan Adventists gave cows, horses, buggies, and an assortment of farm machinery—enough to fill a railroad car. For nearly a year Staines traveled through Iowa, Wisconsin, and Michigan, raising funds to complete paying for the land.

It was late in 1908 when the first three students from Mississippi arrived at the Hillcrest School, but classes did not actually begin until January 1909. By the fourth year there were twenty students, all determined to go out as teachers of their own people. These students were housed in five small cottage-type units rather than in regular dormitories. Hillcrest was close enough to Madison so that several of the teachers of practical arts there could assist in instruction at Hillcrest.

Sadly, the Hillcrest School did not survive long enough to do the extensive work that its founders envisioned. During its few years of operation, however, it helped prepare several dozen young people for effective service under the most difficult of circumstances. One example will illustrate this fact. The mission school started for black children at Ellisville, Mississippi, was about to close when Watt Bryant, a Hillcrest student, decided to keep it going. Moving his family to a nearby forty-acre farm, he fought drought that burned up most of his corn and sorghum. Yet he stayed on and provided a home for a mission-minded black teacher, Lily May Woodward. Without conference support, Lily May had to charge her students ten cents per week tuition. This gave her enough to pay the Bryants \$1.25 a week for board and room, and \$1.50 to support an orphaned brother and sister in Atlanta, pay her tithe, and have forty cents left each week for personal expenses. Yet the school was saved, and this demonstrated that the money invested in Hillcrest would bear fruit abundantly.³⁰

Suggested Reading:

By starting with E. G. White's *The Southern Work* (1966), the student can get a feel for the stirring messages that propelled Edson White into opening the first extensive S.D.A. work for Afro-Americans. Edson's work is well told in R. Graybill's *Mission to Black America* (1971). For a full understanding of Ellen White's later statements on black-white relationships see the same author's *E. G. White and Race Relations* (1970). Valuable background material and insights, which are even more helpful for a later period, may be gleaned from J. Justiss, *Angels in Ebony* (1975). The unpublished manuscript "Light and Shades in the Black Belt" (1913) prepared by A. Spalding for Ellen White's office contains much valuable material, but is marred by the racial stereotypes of the period. A good, fairly contemporary, picture of the Madison School, which captures the excitement of the founders, is Spalding's *The Men of the Mountains* (1915). The small collection of E. G. White materials originally published as *Special Testimonies, Series B., No. 11* and republished (1946, 1958,

1971) as *The Madison School*, provides a good view of Mrs. White's enthusiasm for the Madison experiment. In A. Spalding's *Origin and History of Seventh-day Adventists* (1962), see II: chapter 18 and III: chapter 10.

1. *Review and Herald*, May 23, 1865, p. 197.
2. *Review*, May 25, 1876, p. 166; December 14, 1876, p. 192; April 5, 1877, p. 111.
3. *Review*, February 22, 1877, p. 59; September 6, 1877, p. 86; A. Spalding, *Origin and History of Seventh-day Adventists* (1962), II: 184, 185.
4. J. Justiss, *Angels in Ebony* (1975), p. 18; Spalding, II: 171, 172, 187, 188; *Review*, December 5, 1871, p. 198; April 1, 1875, p. 110; March 9, 1876, p. 78; December 14, 1876, p. 192.
5. Report of an interview between Elder R. M. Kilgore and C. M. Kinney, October 2, 1889, in Reports, Narratives, ca. 1890-1901 folder, presidential document file, Record Group 11, General Conference archives.
6. R. Graybill, lecture at Andrews University, February 11, 1975; S.D.A. General Conference Committee minutes, March 22 and April 16, 1888.
7. Spalding, II: 172, 173, 179-182.
8. General Conference minutes, April 4, 1888; S.D.A. *Encyclopedia*, pp. 22, 74, 75, 235, 236, 466, 467, 504, 505, 727-729.
9. E. White, "Our Duty to the Colored People," in *The Southern Work* (1966), pp. 9-18.
10. R. Graybill, *Mission to Black America* (1971), pp. 13-15.
11. Graybill, pp. 16-22; General Conference Committee minutes, November 9, 10, 1889.
12. Graybill, pp. 23-26; General Conference Committee minutes, April 20, 1894; J. E. White to A. G. Daniells, April 21, 1921, Daniells's incoming correspondence, General Conference archives.
13. Graybill, pp. 7-9, 27-39.
14. Graybill, pp. 41-55; O. A. Olsen to A. O. Tait, January 8, 1896, Olsen letterbooks, General Conference archives.
15. Graybill, pp. 56-65; E. White, *The Southern Work*, pp. 25-65; General Conference Association minutes, October 31, 1895, presidential file, General Conference archives.
16. Graybill, pp. 66-76; S.D.A. *Encyclopedia*, pp. 1396, 1397.
17. Graybill, pp. 76-86; O. A. Olsen to W. C. White, April 18, 1895, Olsen letterbooks, General Conference archives.
18. Graybill, pp. 87-103; General Conference Committee minutes, October 21, 1896, May 3, 1898; S.D.A. *Encyclopedia*, p. 525.
19. Graybill, pp. 106-119.
20. Graybill, pp. 116, 117; 120-132. See also R. Graybill, *E. G. White and Church Race Relations* (1970), especially pp. 53-69.
21. Graybill, *Mission to Black America*, pp. 133-144.
22. S.D.A. *Encyclopedia*, pp. 1394, 1395; [A. Spalding] "Lights and Shades in the Black Belt" (1913), pp. 301-304; O. Edwards, "Origin and Development of the Seventh-day Adventist Work Among Negroes in the Alabama-Mississippi Conference," unpublished M.A. thesis, S.D.A. Theological Seminary (1942), pp. 65-71.
23. General Conference Association minutes, October 31, 1895, in presidential file, Record Group 3, C. C. A. Folder, General Conference archives; G. A. Irwin to O. A. Olsen, November 26, 1895 (copy); O. A. Olsen to W. C. White, January 28, 1896, E. G. White Estate, incoming files; A. Knight, *Mississippi Girl* (1952), pp. 208, 209.
24. G. A. Irwin to L. T. Nicola, April 15, 1896 (copy), E. G. White Estate, incoming files; O. A. Olsen to W. W. Prescott, November 28, 1895, Olsen letterbook, General Conference archives; Justiss, p. 72.
25. [Spalding], pp. 255-258, 262-264; Justiss, pp. 72-74; G. A. Irwin to O. A. Olsen, January 21, 1897 (copy); Irwin to E. G. White, January 30, 1898, and October 27, 1899, E. G. White Estate, incoming files; S.D.A. *Encyclopedia*, pp. 1017, 1018.
26. W. Sanborn, "History of Madison College," unpublished Ed.D. dissertation, George Peabody College for Teachers (1953), pp. 6-15; A. Spalding, *The Men of the Mountains* (1915), pp. 149-151; S.D.A. *Encyclopedia*, pp. 827, 828.
27. Spalding, *The Men of the Mountains*, pp. 152, 153.
28. Spalding, *The Men of the Mountains*, pp. 153-159.
29. Spalding, *The Men of the Mountains*, pp. 166-174; S.D.A. *Encyclopedia*, pp. 828, 1442.
30. [Spalding], "Light and Shades," pp. 329-359.