

Going on God's Errand

(Pre-1920)

1

1800's

Believe it or not, youth ages 10–15 have always been an important, contributing part of the movement known as the Seventh-day Adventist Church. At times, that importance has been placed in the shadows, but it has been there nonetheless. The courage, leadership, and dedication shown by leaders such as James and Ellen White, Uriah and his sister Anne Smith, John Loughborough, John Andrews and so many others did not simply appear when they were older. Those traits were all there from the time they were still young. An incident in the life of John Andrews will illustrate: John was about 10 years old; his family had just recently heard and chosen to follow William Miller's preaching. Small groups of "Millerites" gathered Wednesday evenings after the day's hard work in the fields to study their Bibles.



John Andrews with daughter Mary

John loved to attend these evenings because he had not been able to attend school more than three or four years. One evening he was on his way to meeting with an older man—Mr. Davis. They came to a small bridge over a stream and were met by a group of bullies. Their leader had a big bull whip and intended to "whip some sense" into Mr. Davis. When John realized what was happening he immediately stepped between the two men and demanded that if Mr. Davis was to be whipped then he must be whipped first. The bully was ashamed to whip a boy, relented and allowed them on their journey.

In 1879 Luther Warren, a 14-year-old, was part of the team that organized the very first society in the church that dedicated itself to reaching the spiritual needs of fellow youth. For Luther, this was but just a beginning of his leadership role in the church. Later, he was to work in South Dakota and had more "firsts." His entire life was dedicated to working with the youth of the church. Although never elected as such, he was in many ways the first leader of



Luther Warren, age 14 or 15

the church's youth. His biography is interestingly written in a now-out-of-print book by Sharon Boucher.

As leaders grew older, they realized the next generation needed guidance and encouragement, and so in 1890 the weekly magazine called, *Our Little Friend* made its appearance under the editorship of W. N. Glenn. At first this magazine focused on those ages from 6–12, but later this was split into two groups with a new magazine taking the 10–14 age group—*Junior Guide*—and the *Friend* covering ages 4–9. In 1957 *Primary Treasure* was introduced for ages 6–10 and *Friend* went to ages 0–5.



W. N. Glenn
at his editorial desk.

1901–1907

For the first several decades, juniors and early teens were an integral part of the total youth program that was slowly emerging in the church. They were involved in all of the early efforts at organizing youth societies in the various conferences and were considered part of the picture when in 1901 the General Conference voted to establish a specific recognized organization for youth that was temporarily placed under the Sabbath School leadership until such a time as it would be wise to give wings of its own. During these early years, many older members of the church had somehow forgotten what it was like to be a young person, and they resisted any and all efforts to provide activities and outlets for the energy that young people naturally bring to the table. Especially juniors and younger children were supposed to be seen and not heard. They “might be fit for service some time in the future, not now.” Any effort at giving this age group any kind of active role was deemed to be from the devil. Fortunately, there were a few older folks who at key times and in key places would rise and defend the young and provide them with the guidance and oversight to participate and succeed. The official recognition given by the General Conference in 1901 went a long way toward overcoming those initial ill notions.

Enter Flora Plummer, the Director of the Sabbath School Department for the world church. She was given the responsibility of putting together some kind of effective package of activity that would ignite the youth of the church to service and to a new level of spiritual growth and understanding. Apparently she was more than amply qualified for the job. She lit into her new assignment with such energy and enthusiasm that within but four years the new *Missionary Volunteers Societies (MV)* had sprung up on nearly every continent and many islands of the oceans. (Read more about this in the book, *The AY Story*,

or online at youth.gc.adventist.org.) The work expanded so quickly that Luther Warren was brought into the department to focus just on the MV movement.

1907–1919

By 1907 it had become clear that the youth work of the church would require a department of its own, so at the mid-term council held in Switzerland that year the General Conference voted to establish the Young People's Department under the leadership of Milton Kern, who had been a teacher at Union College in Nebraska and longtime promoter of youth ministry. More important for junior youth was the naming of Matilda Erickson as his assistant. She spent much of her time developing materials for juniors. During the next few years a number of programs specifically designed to enrich the devotional growth of the younger ages were introduced—programs that are still an integral part today of Pathfinder ministry.

Often questions are raised—“What is meant by the statement in the Pathfinder Law that says ‘Keep the Morning Watch?’” The *Morning Watch* is a short daily devotional plan that was first tried in the Central Union (now Mid-America Union) in 1907. It was so successful its very first year that the very next year it became a part of the world youth curriculum. “Keep the Morning Watch” simply means to maintain the habit of daily personal devotional reading. Each year the church publishes a devotional book with 365 short Bible-text-based readings for juniors and early teens just for this. One may also find a daily reading on the General Conference youth web page, or one may choose any number of other ways to spend a few minutes each day in spiritual growth and prayer.

The year, 1908, was the first year that a *Junior Reading Course* was issued. Our church has always taught what enters our minds is what we become; therefore, it is essential to select with care that which we read. The reading courses select on an annual basis a few of the very best books appropriate to the age of the reader to encourage them to read quality books that will expand their view of the world around them in a wholesome fashion. The Pathfinder classes today still carry this tradition within their requirements.

In 1909, a small pamphlet was issued setting the foundations for organizing the first JMV Societies, and reports began to arrive at the world headquarters almost immediately. Many of these Societies were organized in our church schools, where Wednesday mornings became a traditional JMV meeting time. While a further challenge



Flora Plummer

for youth, called the Standard of Attainment, was first introduced in 1907, the junior edition first appeared in 1915. This program was to become the forerunner of the Progressive Classes—Pathfinder Classes. It consisted of a set of requirements that covered Bible knowledge, church history, healthful practices and outreach activity.

Today’s annual Pathfinder Sabbath began as well in 1907—at first called Young People’s Day; it was soon changed to Missionary Volunteer Day.

The Junior Bible Year—a plan whereby children could read 365 key chapters of the Bible during the course of a year—was introduced in 1917, and in October of the same year, the *Primary Reading Course* was introduced for those under the age of ten. Ella Iden-Edwards assembled all these early materials and concepts into the first administrative manual for junior work in 1918 and titled it the *Manual on Junior Methods*. Many, many evolutionary stages later we now use the Pathfinder Administrative Manual.

A. W. Spaulding, a man who was a true mentor for the youth of his church, was living in Tennessee around 1919 and organized a small group of boys into a little club he called “Mission Scouts.” They went off camping on occasion and were involved in “doing good deeds” in their community. They even put together a pledge and law to live by. While this little club soon died when Spaulding moved away, the pledge and law caught on and became the pledge and law for the JMV’s and only slightly modified, still lives today as the guiding light of the Pathfinder Club.



A. W. Spaulding



The Central Union Morning Watch of 1907



Left to right:

- First edition to be called the *Junior Missionary Volunteer Manual 1918*
- *The 1963 Junior Devotional* by Henry Bergh