



Tri-City Sanitarium

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Tri-City Sanitarium (1900–1923)

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The Tri-City Sanitarium was a Seventh-day Adventist health facility located in Moline, Illinois. The city of Moline is 179 miles west of Chicago (a four-hour train ride) thanks to railroad access. The local population in 1900 consisted of approximately 100,000 people from the collective populations of Moline, Rock Island, and Davenport, thereby providing a significant source of patients needing care.¹

The health institution began as an outgrowth of medical literature circulated by several workers under the direction of Dr. John Edwin Froom (1865-1931) about 1900. Initially, the sanitarium began with “very modest bathroom facilities in a private residence.”² This residence was initially located in the C. R. Stephens home on Nineteenth Street, about a block south of Seventh Avenue. As patronage increased, by 1902, new facilities were procured through the generosity of Mary E. Stewart (1832-1920), a local church member also known for her work as a suffragette and temperance leader. She spent \$16,900 (including paying off a \$10,000 mortgage) to purchase the 19-room home on 1213 Fifteenth Street, which had formerly been the home of industrialist and banker Charles F. Hemenway (1846-1912).³ She asked church leaders to raise an additional \$5,000 for improvements and to provide an annuity. Mary’s motivation was to purchase the facility as a memorial for her late husband, Dr. Jacob Stewart (1824-1900), who had practiced medicine and who had also founded the village of Stewartville to provide affordable housing just south of Moline. The Hemenway home was one of the largest homes in town at the time, and it was located on the highest point in the city, on a high bluff overlooking the Mississippi River. Sanitarium workers and patients moved into the facility on March 1, 1902, and soon a forty square-foot, two-story addition was announced on August 6, 1902.⁴ One early patron would soon donate funds for an elevator, too.⁵ The new facility was officially dedicated on November 30, 1903.⁶

The sanitarium during this formative time was affiliated with Dr. J. H. Kellogg (1852-1943) and the Battle Creek Sanitarium. A selection of health foods produced from Battle Creek were “kept for sale in the pleasant waiting room in the front of the basement of the sanitarium building.”⁷ When the Battle Creek Sanitarium burned to the ground on February 18, 1902, some of the patients and personnel were transferred to the Tri-City Sanitarium.⁸

The first medical superintendent was John E. Froom, M.D. (1865-1931) who, with his spouse, Christina Nielsen (1865-1918), worked closely together to organize these early efforts into a well-established medical institution.⁹ In 1904, the obligations of the Tri-City Sanitarium were assumed by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, and all contributions from the International Medical Missionary & Benevolent Association (under the aegis of Kellogg) were reimbursed (including annuities due to Mary E. Stewart).¹⁰ The facility was listed officially as a denominational hospital in 1904 with Drs. Sanford Palmer Stillman¹¹ (1873-1965) and Maria Hallingsworth Stewart¹² (1865-1911) as the next two physicians.¹³ The sanitarium was legally incorporated as “Northern Illinois Medical Missionary and Sanitarium Association.”¹⁴

In 1905, Ellen White visited the sanitarium on her way from Lincoln, Nebraska, to Battle Creek, Michigan. “We were pleased with the location and appearance of the sanitarium,” she wrote.¹⁵ “As I rode through the streets and parks of Moline, I thought, Verily this is a place where the truth should be firmly established. The Lord will work here if those who are placed in positions of trust will work and watch and pray.”¹⁶ Lorenzo D. Santee (1845-1919) later remembered how, during Ellen White’s visit, she was reported to have stated: “If the right course is pursued here, this will be an easy field to work in.”¹⁷ Local church leaders noted how the sanitarium, with support from Bible workers, contributed to baptisms in the nearby congregation.¹⁸ Later, Ellen White would promote the Tri-City Sanitarium in a directory of Adventist sanitariums in the back of her magnum opus on

health, *The Ministry of Healing* (1905).

When Kellogg later distanced himself from the denomination and ultimately took the Battle Creek Sanitarium away from denominational affiliation, leaders organized their own health-food company to sell and distribute their own line of health products. Continued growth of the Tri-City Sanitarium also meant additional administrative governance. By early 1906, the Illinois Conference elected a board of seven trustees to oversee management of the sanitarium.¹⁹ A report highlighted that during 1906, they treated between 300 and 400 patients, attaining gross earnings over \$12,000 with a net gain of \$1,182.18.²⁰

Over the next decade, the hospital became known regionally for contributing to medical cures for poliomyelitis (polio) and rheumatism. The health facility also established a track record for training nurses. The last class of five women to complete the nursing course graduated on December 20, 1922.²¹

By early 1923, however, church leaders voted to close the facility, citing mounting debts accumulated over a dozen previous years (especially during World War I) along with aging facilities that had become a fire hazard and additional administrative changes that collectively contributed to a loss of prestige. Also, it was located somewhat near the Hinsdale Sanitarium, which also needed significant remodeling, so church leaders opted to invest in updating only the Hinsdale facility with the limited funds available.²² "Everything that the brethren could devise to save the sanitarium was tried," the conference president at the time wrote. He added that they felt the only responsible action was "to close the doors."²³ Dr. Frank Otis announced in August 1923 that the institution was closing permanently.²⁴ On September 1, 1923, the doors closed for the last time as an Adventist health institution, and the building was subsequently turned into an apartment complex.²⁵

Superintendents: J. E. Froom (1900-1904); S. P. S. Edwards (1904-1909); W. H. Warner, M.D. (1908-1909), Frank J. Otis (1910-1917), L. E. Elliott (1918-1920), Elmer Otis (1921-1922), Frank J. Otis (1923).

Manager: W. C. Foreman (1904-1915), H. H. Todd (1916-1917), L. E. Elliott (1918-1920), H. O. Butler (1921-1923).

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