



Howard Wright Simpson

February 7, 1882 – July 26, 1928

Howard Wright Simpson, former superintendent of the South Dakota School for the Deaf (SDSD) in Sioux Falls, passed away in July 1928 at the age of 46 following a cerebral hemorrhage.

Simpson was born February 7, 1882, in the Main Building on the campus of the South Dakota School for the Deaf, in what later became known as the Simpson Building. He was the son of James Simpson, the school's founding superintendent, and grew up immersed in the Deaf community and the mission of Deaf education. At age sixteen, Simpson enlisted for service in the Spanish-American War and spent eighteen months in the Philippines. This early experience abroad preceded his later leadership and public service career. He was the first Child of Deaf Adults (CODA) to serve as superintendent of SDSD.



Supt. Simpson, sitting at middle front, with Class of 1916

In 1910, Simpson was appointed the sixth superintendent of SDSD, serving the school for ten years. His leadership marked one of the most significant periods of campus development and educational growth. During his tenure, the main school building expansion was constructed in 1912, providing classrooms, assembly space, vocational facilities, and offices. Additional improvements included expansion of the girls' dormitory, development of a heating plant, construction of agricultural and maintenance buildings, and expansion of the school farm through the addition of more than 100 acres of farmland.

Simpson strengthened vocational and practical training programs, adding instruction in printing, shoemaking, carpentry, domestic science, and sewing so students could gain skills for employment and independent living. His leadership also coincided with the passage of compulsory attendance laws requiring Deaf school-age children to attend school, and he guided the institution through the challenges of World War I, including enrollment declines and staff shortages.

In addition to his work at SDSD, Simpson played an important civic role in Sioux Falls. In 1913 he directed grading and improvements for the new Minnehaha County golf course, helping establish what became the Minnehaha Country Club grounds, a project widely noted in local newspapers at the time.



Simpson in WWI uniform

During World War I, Simpson took leave from SDSD to serve overseas as a field representative and captain with the American Red Cross in France. After the war, he left the school and entered the hotel business, first in Madison, Wisconsin, and later in Wichita, where he managed the McClellan Hotel until his death. He became widely known for his civic involvement, particularly through his leadership in Lions International and other community organizations.

Simpson is survived by his wife, Stella Irene Rigby Simpson; his daughter, Virginia Margaret; his mother; and two brothers.

He is buried at Maple Grove Cemetery in Wichita, KS.

Howard W. Simpson is remembered in South Dakota Deaf history as a leader who guided the school through a critical period of growth, expanded educational and vocational opportunities for Deaf students, and carried forward the legacy begun by his parents in building the state's school for Deaf children.



Class of 1919

