

Kolkata Metro Region

GORDON E. CHRISTO

Gordon E. Christo, Ph.D. in Old Testament and Adventist Studies (Andrews University). Christo is retired and working on contract as assistant editor of the *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists* and assistant editor of the *Seventh-day Adventist International Biblical-Theological Dictionary*. He is currently setting up a heritage center for Southern Asia Division. Some of his research on Adventist history can be seen at <https://sudheritage.blogspot.com/> and <https://www.facebook.com/SUDHeritage/>.

Formerly part of South Bengal Section, Kolkata Metro Region is a part of Northern India Union Section in the Southern Asia Division of Seventh-day Adventists. It was organized in 2018, and its headquarters is in Kolkata, West Bengal, India.

Territory: The districts of Howrah and Kolkata (Calcutta until 2001).

Statistics, as of June 30, 2020: churches 3, membership 276, population 19,279,368.

Address: Kolkata Metro Region of SDA; 36 Park Street, Kolkata, West Bengal, India.

Oldest Adventist Church in India¹

The importance of the city of Kolkata is that it was the port of entry for Pastors Haskell and Magan who were sent to scout the territory of India in 1890. In 1894-1895 Captain and Mrs. Masters of New Zealand canvassed in Calcutta, while their son George worked in Hyderabad. Health issues prevented the Masters couple from staying long, but they were present to welcome the first Adventist missionary, Georgia Burrus. She landed in Calcutta early in 1895 and commenced the study of Bengali while selling literature to support herself. The first ordained minister, D. A. Robinson, arrived in Calcutta with his family at the end of that year and lived at 154 Bow Bazar Street, opposite the Sealdah Railway Station, along with other missionaries who followed. Medical work in India began in Calcutta when Dr. O. G. Place set up treatment rooms in 1896. The first school and orphanage were opened in 1897 at 155 Bow Bazar Street. In 1899, when the orphanage moved to Karmatar, a school for European and Anglo-India children took its place.²

Though there is no record, it is likely that Robinson, who was the only ordained minister, organized and pastored the first church for all the workers and their families who amounted to more than 20 people in 1896.³ The first baptisms took place in 1896 and those baptized would have needed to join a church. Various reports confirm the existence of a church. Colporteur F. O. Raymond was a member of the Calcutta church from the time he arrived in India in 1901.⁴ Reference is made to "sisters connected to the Calcutta church,"⁵ and the financial report of the Calcutta Church for the year ending December 31, 1907, is on record.⁶

First Indian Church

In 1908 the first Indian church was organized in Calcutta with L. G. Mookerjee ordained as elder of the church.⁷ Mrs. Mookerjee wrote in 1909 that the Bengali church had new visitors each week and that the most urgent need was of a meeting hall.⁸ L. G. Mookerjee apparently functioned as worship leader for several years as he reported regularly for the *Eastern Tidings* and also conducted meetings. The meetings took place at the home of his grandfather, Lal Chand Mookerjee.⁹

Soon a proper hall for meetings, with rooms for offices and a dwelling place for the pastor, was found in a central part of the city, which could serve as the headquarters for Bengali work. At that time about 30 attended Sabbath School.¹⁰

First Full-time Pastors

The membership of the English church in Calcutta suffered a little when the Watchman Press moved to Lucknow in 1909. In 1910 J. C. Little remarked on the dwindling membership when he visited the Bengali church at their meeting hall on Dharamtalla Street and the English church where he participated in communion.¹¹ After the India Union Mission administrative office moved to Lucknow in 1911-1912, and all the union workers transferred to the new headquarters, it was realized how little had been done, and that "the time had arrived to begin work in Calcutta." This remark was made by G. W. Pettit with reference to the impending arrival of J. M. Comer, the first full-time pastor-evangelist assigned to Calcutta.¹²

At the end of Comer's meetings in the Royal Theatre, which were attended by several hundred people, seven were baptized in 1912. Pastor Comer worked in Calcutta for several years going from house to house. During this time 39 were baptized and two joined on profession of faith. In 1918 the Comers went on furlough and Pastor Frank Wyman took his place as pastor of the Calcutta church.¹³ Pastor H. M. Peak was assigned to Calcutta in 1929.¹⁴

Development of 36 Park Street

The church congregation met for a time at 75 Park Street in rented quarters. The press and sanitarium were located in various rented quarters on 42 Upper Circular Road, 38 and 39-1 Free School Street, 50 and 51 Park Street, and 6 Dehi Serampur Road.

Finally, in 1923, property was purchased at 36 Park Street.¹⁵ While decisions were being made regarding the use of the property, renovations were undertaken so that the church could meet in a hall there.¹⁶ The property was initially intended for medical work.¹⁷ When that idea was abandoned, the next plan was to use it for a church and for the union headquarters.¹⁸

Finally, the property was handed over for residences and a church, as the union headquarters could be accommodated much more economically in Ranchi and living quarters would ensure the church large financial savings. In 1926 a detailed schedule was set for building in phases, with rent savings for the completion of the project.¹⁹ There would be office space, school rooms on the ground floor with a guest room for English workers at the rear, and living quarters on the upper floors. A separate building would provide garages and guest rooms for local workers.

The buildings were completed in 1929. The school started promptly with Miss Meister as the first teacher.²⁰ Surpassing expectations, the school attracted 40 students within a couple of years.²¹ The new church was dedicated on the first Sabbath of 1930. At the dedication service G. G. Lowry commented that the believers in Calcutta had been worshipping in rented halls and homes for more than 30 years. The dedicatory sermon was delivered by Pastor Lukens, who was visiting from North America.²²

Pastors at 36 Park Street Church: The Next Fifty Years²³

P. L. Jelowitz (1930-1932); G. A. Hamilton (1932-1933); Horace M. Peak (1933-1936); H. G. Woodward (1936-1939); Ray L. Kimble (1939-1940); Archie E. Rawson (1940-1942); J. C. Dean (1942-1946); H. M. Peak (1946-1947); Charles A. Boykin (1947-1950); Oliver W. Lange (1950-1952); Harold T. Burr (1952-1953); David K. Down (1953-1955), R. Linwood Burns (1955-1956); C. A. Larsen (1956-1959); Andrew Farthing (1959-1960); Peter Cooper (1960-1963); R. G. Christiansen (1963-1966); Peter Cooper (1966-1967); Cecil B. Hammond (1967-1970); W. Gordon Jenson (1970-1973); Wesley F. Olfert (1974-1976); Noni Gopal Mookerjee (1976-1978); Shishpal Chand (1978-1980).

Organizational History

When the Southern Asia Division was formed in 1919-1920, Calcutta was part of the West Bengal Mission.²⁴ In 1952 the Bihar Mission and the West Bengal Mission were combined in accordance with the recommendation of the division and Calcutta thus came under the new East India Section.²⁵ In 1996 the state of West Bengal was again organized into a separate section,²⁶ and in 2000, the southern part of the state, around Calcutta where growth was slow, was reorganized into the separate South Bengal Region.²⁷

In anticipation of K 19, when evangelism would focus strongly in Kolkata, in 2018 the city was removed from the South Bengal Region and formed into the Kolkata Metro Region.²⁸ There are three churches in the region: 36 Park Street, Dum Dum Cantonement, and Ramchandrapur. There are also three companies in Batanagar, Naihati, and Sorsuna.

Directors

Sujal Kisku (2018-present).

SOURCES

36 Park Street Church Golden Jubilee Celebration Souvenir.

"Biennial Conference Actions." *Eastern Tidings*, Jan 1 and 15.

"Errata." *Eastern Tidings*, Apr 1908.

"Financial Report of the Calcutta Sabbath School." *Eastern Tidings*, March 1908.

"Firsts." *Eastern Tidings*, Pioneer Number Extra, May 8, 1941.

"News Notes: Calcutta Church School." *Eastern Tidings*, May 15, 1932.

Eastern Tidings, Sept 1912.

India Union Tidings, Aug 15, 1918.

Little, J. C. "Field Reports." *Eastern Tidings*, June 1910.

Lowry, G. G. "New Church in Calcutta." *Eastern Tidings*, Mar 1, 1930.

Menkel, H. C. "Calcutta." *India Union Tidings*, Feb 1918.

Minutes of the Northeast India Union Mission Committee, relevant dates. Northeast India Union Mission archives, New Delhi, India.

Minutes of the Northeast India Union Committee, relevant dates. Northeast India Union Mission archives, New Delhi, India.

Minutes of the Southern Asia Division Committee, Nov 12, 1923 and Nov 18, 1926. Southern Asia Division archives, Krishnagiri District, Tamil Nadu, India.

Mookerjee, L. G. Mrs. "Progress in Calcutta." *Eastern Tidings*, Apr 1909.

Mookerjee, L. G. "Calcutta Bengali Work." *Eastern Tidings*, May 1911.

Raymond, F. O. "Calcutta." *Eastern Tidings*, June 1913.

Watson, A. G. "Notes and News." *Eastern Tidings*, July 1904.

Wyman, F. A. "Calcutta English Work." *India Union Tidings*, July 1, 1919.

NOTES

1. F. A. Wyman, "Calcutta English Work," *India Union Tidings*, July 1, 1919, 2

2. Firsts," *Eastern Tidings*, Pioneer Number Extra, May 8, 1941, 13.
3. A photograph from 1896 of workers and their families shows about twenty.
4. F. O. Raymond, "Calcutta," *Eastern Tidings*, June 1913, 5.
5. A G Watson, "Notes and News," *Eastern Tidings*, July 1904, 28.
6. Financial Report of the Calcutta Sabbath School, *Eastern Tidings*, March 1908, 4. Note that an apology in the *Eastern Tidings*, Apr 1908, 6, informs us that the heading should have been "Calcutta Church" instead of "Calcutta Sabbath School."
7. Firsts," *Eastern Tidings*, Pioneer Number Extra, May 8, 1941, 13.
8. Mrs L. G. Mookerjee, "Progress in Calcutta," *Eastern Tidings*, Apr 1909, 2.
9. L. G. Mookerjee, "Calcutta," *Eastern Tidings*, Dec 1911, 4.
10. L. G. Mookerjee, "Calcutta Bengali Work," *Eastern Tidings*, May 1911, 3-4.
11. J. C. Little, "Field Reports," *Eastern Tidings*, June 1910, 1-2.
12. *Eastern Tidings*, Sept 1912, 4.
13. H. C. Menkel, "Calcutta," *India Union Tidings*, Feb 1918, 4. See also *India Union Tidings*, Aug 15, 1918, 1.
14. "Peak G – Location at Calcutta," Minutes of the Northeast Committee #944, Dec 2, 1929, 698
15. "Medical Work, Calcutta," Minutes of the Northeast India Union Mission Committee # 141, Nov 19, 1923, 31.
16. "36 Park Street," Minutes of the Southern Asia Division Committee #1140, Nov 12, 1923, 304. "Meeting Hall," Minutes of the Northeast India Union Mission Committee # 141, Nov 19, 1923, 31.
17. "Medical Work, Calcutta," Minutes of the Northeast India Union Mission Committee # 71, July 18, 1924, 14.
18. "Calcutta Church and Union Office," Minutes of the Northeast India Union Mission Committee # 15, Feb 18, 1924, 2.
19. "Calcutta—36 Park Street Property –Subcommittee's Report," Minutes of the Southern Asia Division Committee # 1836, Nov 18, 1926, 506-507.
20. The appointment of Mrs Meister as the school teacher is in the index of the Division minutes for 1929, but the relevant pages with the minutes is missing.

21. "News Notes: Calcutta Church School," *Eastern Tidings*, May 15, 1932, 5.
22. G. G. Lowry, "New Church in Calcutta," *Eastern Tidings*, Mar 1, 1930, 3
23. This list is taken from the *Golden Jubilee Celebration* booklet, celebrating the construction of the church building at 36 Park St.
24. "Biennial Conference Actions," *Eastern Tidings*, Jan 1 and 15, 23.
25. "Local Missions," Minutes of the Northeast Union Committee #5943, Jan 14, 1952, 588.
26. Formation of North Frontier Region as West Bengal Section," Minutes of the Northern India Union Committee # 96-105, July 30-31, 1996.
27. "Renaming Calcutta Metro Region as South Bengal Region," Minutes of the Northern India Union Committee # 2000-025, Jan 24, 2000.
28. "Formation of Kolkata Metro Region," Minutes of the Northern India Union Committee #2018-52, June 5-6, 2018.

encyclopedia.adventist.org is an official website of the [Seventh-day Adventist World Church](#)

© 2020 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists 12501 Old Columbia Pike Silver Spring , MD 20904 USA 301-680-6000