



Left to right: Umlevu (chief of the Mashona tribe), Ovid Bredenkemp, H. M. Sparrow, and W. L. Davy in Solusi in the 1920s.

From *Adventist Heritage*, Vol. 04, No. 1.

Sparrow, Hubert Martin (1891–1960)

GODFREY K. SANG

Godfrey K. Sang is a historical researcher and writer with an interest in Adventist history. He holds a B.A. in History from the University of Eastern Africa Baraton and a number of qualifications from other universities. He is a published author. He is the co-author of the book *On the Wings of a Sparrow: How the Seventh-day Adventist Church Came to Western Kenya*.

Hubert Sparrow was a second-generation Adventist missionary, teacher, pastor, and church administrator in eastern and southern Africa. His ministry included service in ten different countries in Africa where he established several mission stations and opened new mission frontiers.

Early life

Hubert Martin Sparrow was born December 17, 1891, in Grahamstown, Eastern Cape, to Charles and Ellen Sophia Sparrow who were founding members of the Rokeby Park Seventh-day Adventist Church in Grahamstown. His mother Ellen was the daughter of John and Charlotte Butcher. Hubert was the eldest their seven children.¹

He began his early education at Claremont Union College (now Helderberg College), although he left before completing when his family moved to Maranatha Mission in Martindale near his parent's home in Grahamstown. His father was in charge of the Maranatha Mission.² He remained there two years before returning to Claremont where he graduated in 1912 in the Theological Normal Course.³ He then moved to Natal and taught at a church school. Afterwards he moved to Southern Rhodesia where he was stationed at the Inyazura and the Lower Gwelo Missions. He worked there as a teacher and an inspector of outlying schools. In 1916 he married Agnes Mary, the daughter of Albert W. Staples, who together with his own father Charles Sparrow were also founding members of the Rokeby Park Seventh-day Adventist Church (organized in 1889). In 1918 they moved to the Solusi Mission where he became principal of the school. A daughter, Audrey, was born to them in April 1918 and a son Rae was born to them at Bulawayo in May 1920.⁴

Moving to America

In 1921 he was ordained a minister, and in December of that year their daughter Audrey died after a short illness.⁵ In 1924 he moved to the United States where he studied at Emmanuel Missionary College (now Andrews University) and obtained the B.A. and B.Th. degrees before returning to Solusi in 1927. It was while in America, in August 1926, that a son, Albert Charles Sparrow, was born to them. Back at Solusi he took up his old job as principal, working there until 1929 when he was called to be the superintendent of the Southern Rhodesian Mission field. A year later he moved to northern Rhodesia. In 1933 he was appointed president of the South-East Africa Union Mission (EAUM) which was based in Blantyre (today Malawi). He oversaw work in Portuguese East Africa (Mozambique), establishing Lake View Mission in Angoniland and at Mulunguni. In 1941 the difficulties of war caused the EAUM to be moved from the Northern European Division to the Southern African Division whose headquarters were in South Africa. That year he moved to the Tanganyika Mission Field which was under the Northern European Division, but later in the year was transferred to the Southern Africa Division.

In 1942 he moved to Kenya to serve as superintendent of the East Africa Union Mission based in Kisumu. He replaced Spencer Maxwell who was posted to Nyasaland (Malawi) as the superintendent of the South East Africa Union based in Blantyre. The Kenya Union Mission was reorganized and renamed the East Africa Union Mission which now incorporated Kenya, Uganda, Tanganyika, Zanzibar, and and Pemba Islands. H. M. Sparrow now oversaw an area which had a total of 17,264 Seventh-day Adventists—by far the largest portion of the Southern African Division. The number grew significantly during his time.

Retirement and Later Life

Working in Kenya was not easy for the Sparrows. Agnes Mary often fell ill, as did Hubert. She suffered bouts of migraines, and the situation at their Lakeside home meant they had to frequently deal with malaria. American writer Negley Farson, in his 1947 visit, recalls in his book that he called on Mrs. Sparrow and found her lying under a tree suffering from a migraine.⁶ Perhaps the most difficult thing for them was staying away from their son Albert, who was their only surviving child. Working in remote Africa had claimed two of their children (Audrey and Rae), and so they left behind their only child in South Africa as they traveled around Africa in the course of their work.

The Sparrows served in Kenya until March 1950 when they returned to South Africa following ill health. He was 58. He was replaced at the EAU by Elder Duncan Eva. The Sparrows settled in Natal where they carried out further evangelistic work among the Africans in Pondoland. Hubert M. Sparrow died in November 1960, aged 68, and was survived by his wife and son. He was laid to rest at Port Shepstone. Agnes, or 'Nessie' as she was better known, passed away on May 24, 1987 at the age of 97.⁷ She was laid to rest at the historic Rokeby Park churchyard.

SOURCES

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NOTES

1. Godfrey K. Sang, Kili, and K. Hosea, *On the Wings of a Sparrow: How the Seventh-day Adventist Church Came to Western Kenya* (Nairobi, Gapman Publications Ltd., 2017), 34-35.
2. Arthur W. Spalding, *Origin and History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church*, vol. 4 (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1967), 22.
3. *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists* (1996), s.v. "Sparrow, Hubert Martin."
4. *The South African Missionary*, vol. XIX, no. 9, June 15, 1920, Sentinel Publishing, Kenilworth Cape, 8.
5. *The African Division Outlook*, vol. XX, no. 1, January 1, 1922, Sentinel Publishing, Kenilworth Cape, 6.
6. Farson, Negley, *Last Chance in Africa* (London, Victor Gollanz Ltd., n.d.), 174.
7. From an interview with her grandson Michael Sparrow.

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