

# Chapman, Ernest

## (1895–1922)

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### MILTON HOOK

Milton Hook, Ed.D. (Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, the United States). Hook retired in 1997 as a minister in the Greater Sydney Conference, Australia. An Australian by birth Hook has served the Church as a teacher at the elementary, academy and college levels, a missionary in Papua New Guinea, and as a local church pastor. In retirement he is a conjoint senior lecturer at Avondale College of Higher Education. He has authored *Flames Over Battle Creek*, *Avondale: Experiment on the Dora*, *Desmond Ford: Reformist Theologian, Gospel Revivalist*, the *Seventh-day Adventist Heritage Series*, and many magazine articles. He is married to Noeleen and has two sons and three grandchildren.

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Chapman brothers

Photo courtesy of Milton Hook.

Ernest Chapman was the firstborn of Alfred and Mary Ann (Gibbs) Chapman. He started life on December 22, 1895, on a farming property at Lowden, near Donnybrook, in the south-west of Western Australia. He had two younger brothers, Walter (b. 1897) and Charles (b. 1904). The Chapman family were among the first Seventh-day Adventist converts in Western Australia, becoming believers as a result of reading literature sold to them by pioneer colporteur Frederick Reekie in the 1890s.<sup>1</sup>

When Ernest was only ten years old his father suffered a fatal accident on the farm, tripping and falling under the wheels of a horse-drawn dray loaded with bricks. A further tragedy occurred when his mother died of tuberculosis in 1909. Relatives rallied to care for the three sons during the troubled times<sup>2</sup>

Ernest had been raised in the Seventh-day Adventist faith and as a teenager he attended the Darling Range School at Carmel, Western Australia, as a boarding student, 1911 through 1915, working on the school orchard to subsidize his fees. He did well at his studies and advanced to the Australasian Missionary College, Cooranbong, New South Wales, where he continued his education during 1916 and 1917.<sup>3</sup>

At college, Ernest met a South Australian student, Elsie Ruth Ross, who was training to be a Bible worker. Neither of them graduated but in the thinking of church officials that did not hinder their prospects for employment. Evangelistic staff were in urgent demand and long courses of study were often curtailed. Ernest and Elsie, therefore, married in Kapunda on October 31, 1917, and joined the Victorian Conference ministerial team in

November.<sup>4</sup>

## Active Service

The Victorian Conference granted a missionary license to Ernest Chapman<sup>5</sup> and appointed him to be a member of Elder James Kent's evangelistic crusade team in the city of Melbourne for 1918.<sup>6</sup> The crusade continued into 1919 but attendance numbers dropped due to the Spanish influenza pandemic.<sup>7</sup> In 1920 Ernest was allocated to nurture the Geelong church<sup>8</sup> and at the same time he was upgraded with the granting of a ministerial license. Elsie was given a missionary license, indicating she was enlisted to do Bible work in the Geelong area as Ernest's assistant.<sup>9</sup>

Towards the end of 1920 the Southern Asian Division officers made a plea to the Australasian Division for missionaries to be appointed to India. Their desperate need was caused by a reluctance on the part of the Indian government to allow American missionaries an entry visa.<sup>10</sup> Ernest and Elsie Chapman were among a small group selected to advance the mission cause in India, Ernest specifically chosen to learn a foreign language and do translation work.<sup>11</sup> It was, undoubtedly, a long-term assignment.

Ernest and Elsie sailed from Sydney on the S.S. "Ormonde" on October 16, 1920,<sup>12</sup> arriving in India on November 9.<sup>13</sup> They found suitable lodgings in Calicut (now Kozhikode), Kerala, south-west India.<sup>14</sup> In January 1921 the superintendent of the South India Union Mission, Elder Gentry Lowry, visited and found them engrossed in their studies of the Malayalam language and of good courage.<sup>15</sup> However, the oppressive heat in Calicut, over 30°C all year, coupled with the high relative humidity of over 80 percent during the monsoon season, June through August, was detrimental to their health. It was reported in August that both were quite ill,<sup>16</sup> perhaps for different reasons for Elsie was in the early stage of pregnancy. Medics advised they seek respite in the cooler altitudes of Bangalore and there another fellow missionary, Floyd Smith, helped to nurse them.<sup>17</sup> However, alarming signs developed with Ernest's health, several haemorrhages of the lungs occurring.<sup>18</sup> Within days the decision was made to quickly return to Australia and having travelled to Colombo without incident Ernest and Elsie boarded a passing steamer to Fremantle, Western Australia, on December 5, 1921.<sup>19</sup>

## Home in Western Australia

Immediately on arrival in Western Australia Ernest was admitted to Wooroloo Sanitarium near Perth, a specialist institution for tuberculosis sufferers. He was tenderly nursed until he passed away on Friday, January 6, 1922. On Sabbath he was laid to rest in the rural environs of Wooroloo Cemetery.<sup>20</sup>

Two months after Ernest's death Elsie gave birth to a daughter on March 4, 1922, in Subiaco, suburban Perth. She named her Ernice, her feminine version of Ernest.<sup>21</sup> Elsie did not remarry. She trained as a nurse and worked in that capacity until her early death aged forty-eight on February 11, 1945, in Sydney, New South Wales.

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