

# Chamberlayne, Vere Fitzroy (1905–1998)

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Vere Fitzroy Chamberlayne was a literature evangelist of English origin. Converted to Adventism in Patagonia, Argentina, through contact with the canvassing program to which he then dedicated his life.<sup>1</sup> He worked for the Magellanes Mission in southern Argentina and also on the Falkland Islands.<sup>2</sup>

## Early Years, Conversion, and Call to Service

Vere Fitzroy Chamberlayne, best known as Roy Chamberlayne, was born November 20, 1905, in Argentina, but was nationalized in England around 1906.<sup>3</sup> He studied at Stanborough College, in Watford, Hertfordshire, England.<sup>4</sup> In 1924, when he was 18 or 19 years old, he traveled to the Land of Fire in the southern Argentina Republic.<sup>5</sup> The purpose of his trip was to become a sheep breeder, the reason he stayed at a Cuellen River farm. Around 1927, a young man named Ovidio Juárez asked Roy for a place to spend the night and during Saturday. A student from an Adventist school in Chile, he went from farm to farm selling books to earn a scholarship.<sup>6</sup> The thing that most shocked Roy was that the young man wouldn't work on Saturdays. They spoke a little during lunchtime, but somehow the young man always led Roy to talking about the books he was selling. Soon Roy purchased *Daniel and Revelation*, *United States in Prophecy*, *Heralds of the Morning* and *Practical Guide to Health*. But the books sat unread on his shelf for six months. When winter arrived and work was scarce on the isolated farm, Roy decided to read the books. When he finished the last one, he felt convinced by what he had read and determined to follow it.<sup>7</sup>

After a while an Adventist man named Andersen visited Chamberlayne and studied the Bible with him. In early 1928, after he attended Andersen's church, he decided to return to England to share his new religious understandings with his family, but they were indifferent.<sup>8</sup> His father, a wealthy Englishman, threatened to disown him if he persisted in his faith. After being baptized in England and attending Stanborough, Roy determined to return to South America and share what he had learned with others. However, he didn't have the address for the Adventist Church headquarters in Buenos Aires, Argentina, so he went to Asunción, Paraguay. There he met a Pastor Pergande, a field missionary secretary of the Austral Union, who was on a recruitment trip for literature evangelists. Pergande encouraged Roy to become one, which he did in 1929.<sup>9</sup>

## Missionary Work (1929-1936)

Chamberlayne had actually started his work soon after his conversion in 1928.<sup>10</sup> While waiting for some books in Villarrica, Paraguay, he made contact with a young man who, accompanied by his wife, father-in-law, and his mother, had been observing the Sabbath for three years since they had read the book *Nuestro siglo* (*Our Century*). And so they decided to accept the Adventism.<sup>11</sup> His first work was in northern Argentina in 1930.<sup>12</sup>

In 1930 Chamberlayne arrived in Trelew, Chubut. "Afterwards he followed the young man David Hall Rhys to the city of Esquel, where he helped him selling books so that he could study in the River Plate Adventist Academy."<sup>13</sup> Until the end of 1933, Roy visited a great number of farms in Chubut, both inland, on the coast, and throughout the rest of the Argentinian Patagonia, selling Adventist books. From Esquel, he traveled to Sarmiento, Chubut, and later on he would work in Ushuaia, Land of Fire.<sup>14</sup> The English people living there came to know him well.<sup>15</sup> Roy made his tours on foot, by bicycle, on horseback, and by car. During them he would enter the most elegant houses wearing a suit and fancy shoes, as well as the humblest country house dressed in working clothes, thus always identifying with those whom he wanted to reach.

On his trip to the Falkland Islands at the end of 1933 and the beginning of 1934, he distributed Adventist publications in the capital of Port Stanley.<sup>16</sup> He stayed in the house of an old widow. After he sold her books, she accepted the Sabbath and the Bible teachings that he followed. As far as it is known, she was the first person to accept the Adventist message in that place. In some of the houses that Roy visited he found copies of Ellen G. White's *The Great Controversy* that literature evangelist C. A. Nowlin<sup>17</sup> had left 40 years earlier. Despite some difficulties, Roy succeeded in selling both big and small books.<sup>18</sup> In a letter dated from July 5, 1934, Chamberlayne commented about *Daniel and Revelation*: "This book gave me an opportunity to hear testimonials of people who read the book which contains the truth, and that gave me the opportunity to open the Bible with them."<sup>19</sup>

During 1934, while he worked for the Magallanes Mission, Chamberlayne found a family interested in the Bible, but could not attend Adventist meetings due to the distance to them.<sup>20</sup> During the summer of 1935, eight years after his conversion, he went on a trip around the Land of Fire.<sup>21</sup> In the summer of 1936 he helped a Canadian shepherd to study the Bible, who then decided with his two sons to join a small group that met at the Magallanes Church in Chile.<sup>22</sup> From that date on, no records survive about him, although it seems that he continued canvassing.

## Final Years

During the last year of his life, Chamberlayne settled in a Welsh colony, living in the country home of David Ivor Rhys and Edith Hall de Rhys. The couple gave Roy part of their land, where he made a humble house.<sup>23</sup> He never got married, perhaps because of his shyness. When he was around 78 years old, he stopped his long annual tours through Patagonia and devoted himself to the region of the Black River Valle, where he not only canvassed, but also helped the students working there to earn scholarships. He also served as a church

treasurer in the central church of Trelew, Chubut. On May 9, 1999, he died at the age of 93.<sup>24</sup> A great number of those he had visited through the years attended his funeral. Even years after his death, many continued to remember him for his kindness, sensibility, and humbleness.

Roy Chamberlayne was a passionate missionary who devoutly carried the Adventist message to a huge and distant region of southern Argentina through the publications he sold.

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## NOTES

1. The Rhys family helped Chamberlayne in Buenos Aires during 1982 to avoid his deportation. Because of the war between it and the United Kingdom over the Falkland Islands, the Argentine government had begun expelling people of English origin. Research found that Roy had been born in Buenos Aires, due to his father being one of the shareholders involved in developing the Argentine railroad system. Apparently, his mother gave birth to Vere Fitroy Chamberlayne in 1905, but the family did not obtain a National Identity Document (DNI) for him, because they wanted him to be an English citizen. Pablo E. Ceballos telephone interview with Evelyn Rhys, on June 4, 2018.
2. Daniel Oscar Plenc, "*El adventismo y las Malvinas*" [Adventism and the Falkland Islands], *Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review] October 2016, 9. The Magallanes Mission existed from 1927 to 1941, later becoming the Patagónica Mission, Southern Argentina Mission, and South Argentina Association. The Magallanes Mission included Southern Chile, the Land of Fire, and the Santa Cruz and Chubut region in Argentina, and the Falkland Islands.
3. Information obtained during the process to obtain Roy's national identity document (DNI) in 1982, according to the testimony of Evelyn Rhys, granddaughter of David Ivor Rhys and Edit Hall de Rhys, who provided Roy Chamberlayne with a fixed place to stay after his long working tours. It is known that he arrived in Patagonia in 1924 at age 18. See: W. A. Ernenputsch, "After Many Days," *South American Bulletin*, July 1929, 6, 7. See: "After Many Days," *Pacific Union Recorder*, October 1929, 1-2. Chamberlayne gives his date of birth in a letter addressed to the Register of Persons of Hurlingham, Province of Buenos Aires, written in Trelew, Chubut, on July 28, 1982.
4. A. W. Howard, "Adventist broadcast from world's most southerly city", *British Advent Messenger*, July 1944, 7. See: "Adventist broadcast from world's most southerly city," *Australian Record*, November 1944, 4, 5. On the other hand, Evelyn Rhys said he could have studied at Watford when he returned to England to tell his family his decision. Apparently, it didn't take too long for him to decide to follow the Adventist faith and be disinherited by his father.
5. Sailing from England, he passed the Falkland Islands and the Strait of Magallanes before reaching his destination.
6. Fernando A. Mammana, *Historia del colportaje y la distribución de los impresos adventistas en la República Argentina desde 1891 hasta 1943* [The canvassing story and the distribution of the Adventist publications in the Argentina Republic from 1891 to 1943] (Thesis for degree in theology, River Plate Adventist Academy, 2005), 124.
7. W. A. Ernenputsch, "After Many Days", *South American Bulletin*, July 1929, 6, 7. See: "After Many Days", *Pacific Union Recorder*, October 1929, 1, 2. "About Chamberlayne," *La Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], July 16, 1929.
8. *Ibíd.*
9. Fernando A. Mammana, "*Historia del colportaje y la distribución de los impresos adventistas en la República Argentina desde 1891 hasta 1943*" [The canvassing story and the distribution of the Adventist publications in the Argentina Republic from 1891 to 1943] (Thesis for degree in theology, River Plate Adventist Academy, 2005), 124.

10. W. A. Ernenputsch, "After Many Days," *South American Bulletin*, July 1929, 6, 7. See: "After Many Days", *Pacific Union Recorder*, October 1929, 1, 2.
11. W. A. Ernenputsch, "Our Religious Books do the Work," *South American Bulletin*, February 1930, 7, 8.
12. Fernando A. Mammana, "*Historia del colportaje y la distribución de los impresos adventistas en la República Argentina desde 1891 hasta 1943*" [The canvassing story and the distribution of the Adventist publications in the Argentina Republic from 1891 to 1943] (Thesis for degree in theology, River Plate Adventist Academy, 2005), 124.
13. *Ibíd.*
14. *Ibíd.*
15. F. Sittner, "Notes from the Austral Union," *South American Bulletin*, March 2, 1932.
16. Lesta Rhys de Calvo a Fernando Mammana, July 2002, in: Mammana, 145.
17. F. Sittner, "Notes from the Austral Union," *South American Bulletin*, March 1932, 2. J. L. Brown, "El primer observador del sábado en las Islas Malvinas" [First Sabbath keeper in the Falkland Islands], *La Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review] no. 15, 1934, 9, 10.
18. John L. Brown, "First Sabbath keeper in the Falkland Islands," *ARH*, August 1934, 12, 13.
19. W. E. Murray, "New notes from the Austral Union," *South American Bulletin*, September 1934, 7, 8.
20. N. P. Neilsen, "From the Far South," *South American Bulletin*, November 1931, 6, 7; Emmenegger, "Problems in the Magallanes Mission," *South American Bulletin*, May 1934, 6.
21. Roy Chamberlayne, "A British colporteur in the Tierra del Fuego," *British Advent Messenger*, October 1936, 5, 6.
22. W. F. Miller, "A day at the Magellan Mission, Magallanes Chile," *South American Bulletin*, October 1936, 1, 2.
23. At first, he gave away the land so that Roy could make his home, but Roy certainly decided to pay for the property.
24. Information researched by Dr. Ron Galante in a private cemetery in Trelew, Chubut March 9, 2019.

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