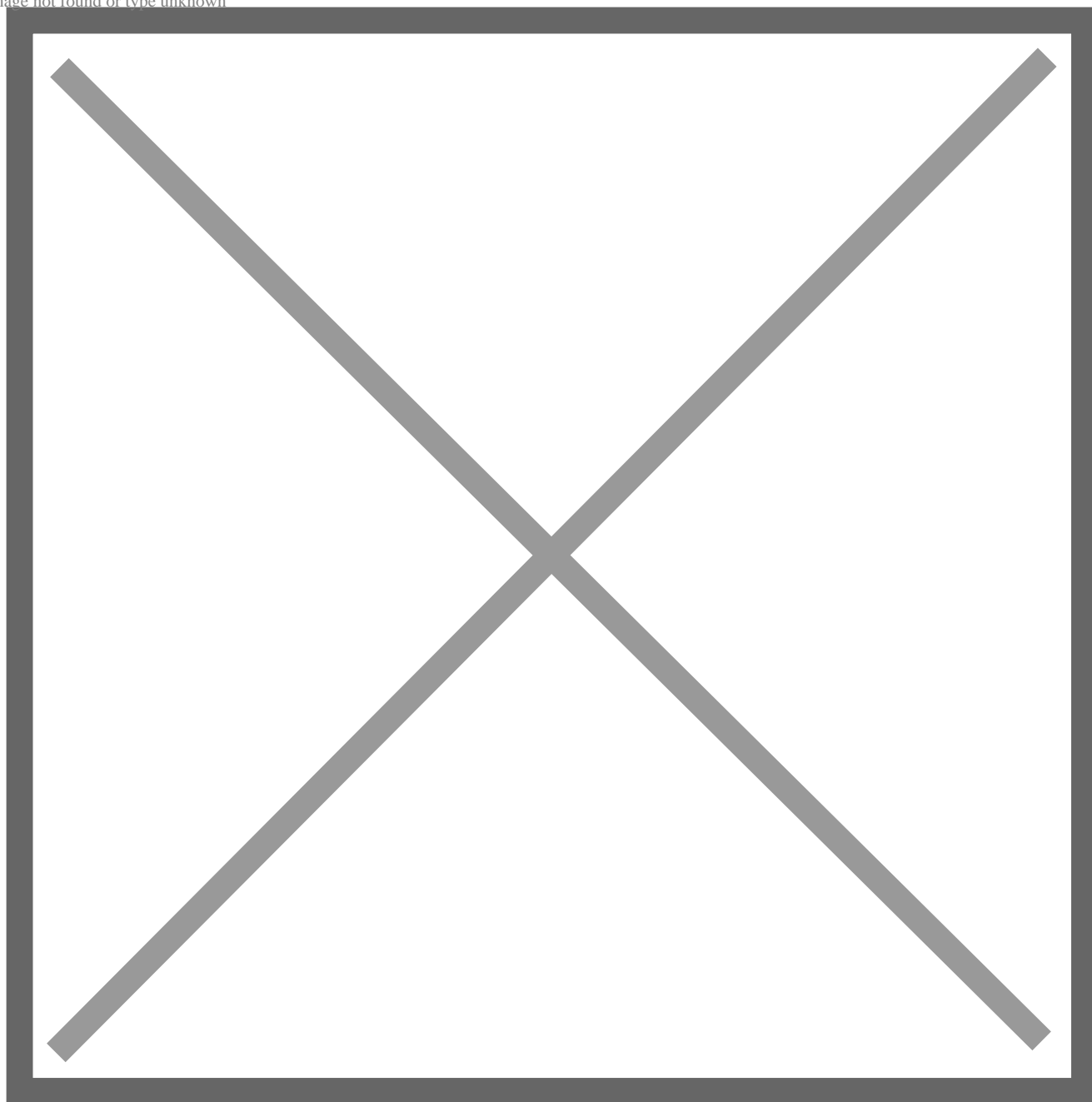


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**Borrowdale, Robert James (1894–1978)
and Leonora Champion (1896–1987)**

CHERYL CHRISTO HOWSON

Cheryl Christo Howson earned a graduate diploma in computer aided interior designing at the Dr. Bhanuben Nanavati College of Architecture for Women in Pune, India. She co-founded an interior design company in Sri Lanka and worked as a copywriter. She contributed to the morning devotional published by Women's Ministries at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, the *Shepherdess International Journal* magazine, and the *Adventist Review*. She has written several plays. Currently (2020), she lives in Hosur, India while preparing for a piano exam.

Robert James Borrowdale was an early pioneer missionary who served the Seventh-Adventist church along with his wife, Leonora, in Northeast India in the Southern Asia Division.

Early Life, Education, and Marriage

Robert James Borrowdale was born on May 4, 1894 in Plymouth, England to Mary Jane (Sowden) and Robert James Borrowdale. He had two brothers, Lorenza J. and Thomas.¹

In 1894, Robert immigrated to the United States at the age of 16, and settled at Melrose, Massachusetts. He initially took a nursing course, but later decided to become a minister.²

Robert Borrowdale and Leonora Champion were married on November 17, 1917 in Fresno, California. Leonora was born on January 11, 1896 in Plymouth, Devon, England to Emma Crocker and John Champion³

They had two daughters: Phyllis Charlotte B. Higgins (September 9, 1918-October 4, 2003) born in Fresno, California, and Esther Leonora B. Hare (May 14, 1921-2016) born in Mussoorie, India⁴

Ministry

Three years after their marriage, the Borrowdales decided to serve as missionaries to Burma. They sailed with their baby girl from the United States on October 1920.⁵ When they arrived in India, however, they were invited to Karmatar, India. They studied Santali and by November 1921, Robert had passed his first exam and was able to speak in the language.⁶ Then began many years of village evangelism conducted by R.J. Borrowdale and W.B. Votaw throughout Bihar, and part of Northeast India.⁷

While on the SDA Mission, Karmatar, in 1922, Robert was placed in charge of the Santali Boys School, and Leonora, the Santali Girls School. R.J. Borrowdale was then appointed the superintendent of the South Bihar Mission and the hospital at Karmatar in 1927.⁸ They worked there until 1932, when R.J. Borrowdale became the director of the Babumahal Station, Katoria, while C. Jensen was on furlough. The Santali-Hindi Elementary Girl's Boarding School moved to Babumahal with Mrs. Borrowdale.⁹ In 1937, the Northeast India Mission was re-organized into mission fields; the Bihar Mission Field was one of them.¹⁰ The schools at Babumahal and Karmatar were then combined into one institution at Karmatar,¹¹ but the Borrowdales remained at the Babumahal station until their furlough to America around May 1938.¹²

Upon their return to India, they were appointed to Karmatar in November 1939, due to Pastor Larson's failing strength. R.J. Borrowdale became the superintendent of the Bihar Mission, working among the Santhal people. The Borrowdales also had charge of the Bihar Mission high school, Raymond Memorial High School, with N.G. Mookerjee as the headmaster.¹³ Pastor Borrowdale was the principal of Raymond Memorial High School from 1939-1940 and from 1942-1946.¹⁴ The Borrowdales stayed at their post during the war years, despite riots during the Quit India Movement of 1942 and were the only Europeans left on the Karmatar station. From the roof of their house they could see the smoke of burning buildings around them. Despite a greatly reduced staff, the work in Northeast India carried on.¹⁵ Leonora was the preceptress, industrial supervisor, business manager and the acting principal of the school. By 1944 the school had forty-seven Santalis, nineteen Mundas, ten Oraons, two Bengalis, one Kharia, and one Muslim studying under eight teachers.¹⁶

When the Borrowdales arrived at the Bihar Mission in the 1920's, there was only one church with a membership of 28. Because of the efforts of village evangelism by R.J. Borrowdale, W.B. Votaw and others, by 1946, there were twelve organized churches with a membership of 508 divided as follows: Santals 173, Oraons 65, and 235 Mundas!¹⁷

Elder and Mrs. Borrowdale went on furlough to America in March 1946, and their daughter, Mrs. Esther Hare took over the Karmatar school's matron work from her mother.¹⁸ After the end of the hot season, they arrived in Calcutta in early November 1947 and continued their work in the Northeast India Union, this time at Baragain, Ranchi.¹⁹ The Borrowdales then moved to Calcutta in 1948 when Pastor Robert was appointed secretary-treasurer of the Northeast India Union Mission.²⁰

Meanwhile, Pastor Borrowdale continued evangelistic work in the Northeast: in February 1948 it was reported that he had baptized 7 more people from the Garo tribe; and in January 1949, when he was in the Lushai Hills, ten men were baptized, the first large baptism there, with Pastor Jensen.²¹

In 1950 the Borrowdales moved to Ranchi where Elder Borrowdale was president of the Bihar Mission Field. In 1951, he took on the responsibilities of treasurer as well.²² The East India Mission was re-organized again in 1952, to include Bihar, Orissa, West Bengal, and the Goalpara District of Assam. Pastor Borrowdale was appointed president.

The Borrowdales then moved to the South India Union Mission in 1954, where Elder Borrowdale served as the Kerela Mission President.²⁴

Upon their personal request, Elder and Mrs. Borrowdale were recommended for permanent return by the Southern Asia Division, which was granted at the General Conference Committee on March 17, 1955²⁵

Pastor and Mrs. Borrowdale returned to the USA, where he worked for 12 years in the Northern California Conference as pastor of several churches including Yreka, Healdsburg, Middletown and Calistoga²⁶

Later Life

The Borrowdales made their home in St. Helena in 1961. A few years later, in 1966, Elder Borrowdale retired²⁷

Following a long illness, R.J. Borrowdale passed away in his home at St. Helena, California, USA, on May 17, 1978, at the age of 84 years.²⁸ Mrs. Borrowdale continued living in California until her death on April 26, 1987.²⁹

Contribution

Pastor Borrowdale's work among the Santals led to government approval, and in this connection, he was appointed magistrate.³⁰ During the 34 years they ministered in India, Pastor and Mrs. Borrowdale were greatly beloved by the Santal people among whom they labored for so long. This was evident by a dozen or so of the children throughout the Santal field having been named "Robert" in honor of their superintendent. And each day they drew water from the "Borrowdale Memorial Well."³¹

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