

Tarr, Alfred Floyd (1896–1980) and Edna May (Davies) (1902–1983)

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.

Albert Floyd Tarr served the Seventh-day Adventist Church as an editor and administrator, while his wife Edna May served as an editor and musician in the South African Division, Southern Asia Division, Northern Europe Division, and later at the General Conference.

Early Life

Alfred Floyd Tarr was born November 11, 1896, in Grahamstown, South Africa, to Virginia Olive Phillips and David Fletcher Tarr.¹ Alfred had four brothers: Orellton Percy, Philip Harvey, Hazel Raymond, and Wilfrid Atherton Fletcher.²

David Fletcher Tarr and his cousin, Albert Davies, were among the first English-speaking South African believers, having been convinced by Pieter Wessels' arguments for the Bible Sabbath. In 1980 David went to America to study at Battle Creek College (now Andrews University), where he met and married Olive Phillips.³

After attending a couple of public and private schools, Alfred attended high school at Claremont Union College (now Helderberg College), South Africa, in 1907, graduating in 1913. He was baptized there in 1911 by Elder I. J. Hankins⁴

Education and Marriage

Alfred enrolled at the Metropolitan Business College, South Africa, from 1914 to 1916. Later he registered for extension courses at the University of Cape Town and correspondence work at the Home Study Institute from 1933 to 1936.⁵

On June 8, 1925, he married Edna May Davies in Bloemfontein, South Africa. Edna was born January 18, 1902 in Grahamstown, South Africa, to Dr. (Mrs.) Hester Wessels and Dr. J. T. Davies. They had one other daughter, Dr. Josephine Davies.⁶

After graduating from Victoria High School, Grahamstown, in 1918, Edna May attended the University of Cape Town from 1919 to 1922, where she obtained a B.A. and Secondary Teacher's Certificate. She was baptized in 1922 in the Cape Town Church by O. K. Butler. At the South African College of Music, she finished her Teacher's (1938) and Performer's (1939) Licentiate certificates in singing.⁷

While in Bloemfontein, the Tarrs had two sons: Dr. John Desmond Floyd (of Pasadena, California) born in 1929, and Dr. Eric Gordon (Newport Beach, California) born in 1930.⁸



A. F. Tarr.
Photo courtesy of the General Conference of Seventh-day
Adventists Archives.

Career and Ministry

Alfred began working for the church in January 1914 in Cape Town, Cape Conference, South Africa, as an office assistant. During World War I he served in the army in the South African Medical Corps from August 1917 until May 1919. After the war he went back to work in June 1919 as a bookkeeper at Sentinel Publishing Co. He served as the secretary-treasurer of Cape Conference (April 1920-December 1921), and then the South African Union Conference (1922-1931). Edna May began work as a teacher at Spion Kop College in 1923 and then, after their marriage, she worked as the conference Sabbath School secretary from 1927 to 1928.⁹

Alfred F. Tarr was ordained in 1932 in the Claremont Church in South Africa by Elders J. F. Wright, E. C. Boger, and N. C. Wilson.¹⁰

From 1932 to 1934 Pastor Alfred F. Tarr was secretary of the Southern African Division. He also served as the division Sabbath School secretary and editor of *The Southern African Division Outlook*.¹¹ Tarr was appointed president of the South African Union Conference from 1934 to 1941, and Edna May was the Conference Home Commission secretary from 1938 to 1939.¹²

The General Conference decided to send Alfred to the Southern Asia Division as the secretary-treasurer, replacing Pastor A. E. Nelson, who had returned to America.¹³ On Christmas day 1941, Pastor and Mrs. Tarr arrived in India with their sons. It was a turbulent time during the days of World War II, when travelling by sea was difficult to arrange and extremely dangerous.¹⁴ They got to work almost immediately. Edna May began proof reading in the publishing house in 1942, then served as editor of the *Eastern Tidings* beginning in 1943, and later worked as a book editor.¹⁵

Alfred was present at a time when his special abilities were needed. Following the British decision to transfer power to India on August 15, 1947, the division committee sent a delegation consisting of Pastors L. G. Mookerjee, A. F. Tarr, and R. L. Kimble to meet the leaders of the new governments of India and Pakistan while they were framing their constitutions. Among the leading government officials, they met were Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Mr. Jinnah, and M. K. Gandhi, enlightening them on the fundamental and peculiar features of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.¹⁶

After nine years of service in Southern Asia, Pastor and Mrs. A. F. Tarr sailed from Bombay on November 4, 1950, to London. He had been appointed president of the Northern European Division then located at Edgware, Middlesex, England,¹⁷ where he served from 1950 to 1962.¹⁸ During this time Edna traveled with him among the people, while also serving at Edgware as the first editor of *Northern Light*.¹⁹ Its forerunner, the *Advent Survey* had ceased in 1941 due to war conditions. *Northern Light*, the organ of the Northern European Division at the time, began publication in 1951.²⁰

In 1962 Elder Alfred F. Tarr was called to the General Conference in Washington D.C. where he served as an associate secretary for four years.²¹

Later Life and Legacy

Elder Tarr was recognized for his service of more than 50 years when he retired at the 1966 General Conference Session.²² Pastor and Mrs. Tarr then moved to Laguna Beach, California, where he passed away on August 11, 1980, after a long and painful illness, at the age of 84.²³ Edna May passed away a few years later on August 23, 1983.²⁴

Their love for the Lord and for God's people, their kindness, and vast experience in the work of God in the South African Division, Southern Asia Division, Northern Europe Division, and later at the General Conference, made the Tarrs trusted and valuable church workers and understanding friends.²⁵

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