

Carscallen, Arthur Asa Grandville (1879–1964)



Arthur Carscallen

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Arthur Asa Grandville Carscallen was the first Seventh-day Adventist missionary to Kenya. He was also a missionary to British Guiana.

Early Life and Education

Arthur Asa Grandville Carscallen was born in 1879 in Canada, to George Edward (b. 1844) and Ordella Phillips (b. 1847). Arthur grew up in the United States of America. He was baptized in North Dakota with his parents, his brother Amos and sister Mary, in 1899. As a young man, he worked with his father who taught him many skills including carpentry, farming and metalwork.¹

Formal school for Arthur ended when he was 10 and became an apprentice farmer, carpenter and blacksmith. Although he was keen to learn his father's trade, he was an avid reader and had an ambition to become a teacher. Thus, he attended Union College from 1901 to 1902. He was such a brilliant student that he completed a two-year course in one year. In 1904 he entered Duncombe Hall Training College (now Newbold College), where he completed his course in September 1906.²

Ministry and Marriage

In 1902 Carscallen was recruited by the General Conference President A. G. Daniells to help strengthen the young Adventist Church in Britain, especially its colporteur-evangelism force in Scotland, Wales, and England. The choice of Arthur Carscallen was based on his success in canvassing during the summer breaks while he was at Union College. Carscallen not only did the canvassing work, but also assisted with evangelistic meetings. In one such a meeting there was a young lady, Helen Bruce Thomson, a volunteer pianist from the Glasgow church who was in charge of the music program, and Arthur found himself concentrating more on the music than the sermon. Later Arthur and Helen became husband and wife.³

Upon realizing Carscallen's extraordinary potential, and with the support of Louis Richard Conradi, the European Division president which at the time included all European countries, the British Union voted to ordain him. He was ordained in England in 1906 at the time of completion of his course at Newbold College. He was 27 years of age. The ordination was officiated by Elmer Ellsworth Andross, the British Union president, and assisted by Herbert Camden Lacey, the principal elect of Stanborough College, and Homer Russell Salisbury, principal of Manor Gardens Training College.⁴

After Carscallen's ordination, it was decided to send him as a missionary to British East Africa (Kenya). Between 1906 and 1956 generations of British Adventist youth were brought up with the belief that overseas mission service was the highest form of service to Christ. However, he gave a condition that his fiancée, Helen (the musician) be sent as well after a year. At the same time, Conradi had been impressed by a Mr. Peter Nyambo, a Malawian (Nyasaland in those days) who had gone to study at Newbold College to be a Bible teacher. Conradi asked Peter to accompany Carscallen and help him with the language and African customs. Peter accepted to do so for a short time because he had committed himself to returning to Malawi. The two missionaries sailed from Hamburg Germany on October 1, 1906. Enroute to Mombasa, they met A. C. Ennis at the island port of Tanga, in Tanganyika (present Tanzania) waiting for them. The three left Tanga and arrived in Mombasa on November 27, 1906.⁵ When the local Church Missionary Society agent came across their names on the passenger list, he went on board and greeted them as fellow Christians. This Anglican friend performed an act of practical Christianity by offering to process their heavy baggage through Customs and forward it through his organization's well-established channels to their final destination.⁶

From Mombasa they travelled about 960 km by railway to Winam Gulf, formerly Kavirondo Gulf, in the northeastern corner of Lake Victoria, south western Kenya. It is a shallow inlet, 56 km long and 15 km wide, and is connected to the main lake by a channel 4.8 km wide. The port of Kisumu stands on its northeastern shore of Lake Victoria. They pitched tent at Ogango, and later shifted to Gendia that became the first mission station in Kenya.⁷

On November 27, 1906, several weeks after they arrived, Arthur Carscallen wrote:

Brother Enns, Brother Nyambo and myself took a small launch here and crossed over to the southern shores of the Kavirondo Bay where we pitched our tent close to the water's edge until we could have a look around the

country. After a few days' search we decided to locate on a hill about two miles back from the bay. From this hill we have a fine view in every direction. To the north we can see across the Kavirondo Bay and get a good sweep of the country beyond. To the north-east we see Kisumu, and to the east we have a view of the country for fifteen miles; to the south we can see the hills for about thirty miles and to the west there is a valley spreading out below us for some ten miles, while beyond that the hills loom up one after another for many miles in the distance. We are well favoured by having a good river flowing along the foot of the hill, which winds its way through the valley to the bay. The country here is very thickly settled with a most friendly class of natives. We can stand on our hill and count about two hundred villages, each of the nearest ones sending us a present of at least a fowl. The natives have made friends with us quite quickly, and we now have a good deal of company every day. The chiefs have shown themselves most friendly and have come to see us several times. Whenever they come they bring us some little present. One brought a fine sheep the other day. Another, who wants two boys educated, brought us a fine young bullock, nearly full grown, to pay for the education of the boys. Other missionaries say it is best to take something that way from the chiefs as it makes people feel that the education is worth something. We hope that at least one more chief will be liberal enough to bring another bullock as two will be of use to us later on the mission farm...Later I shall write more with regard to the natives and their customs. Hoping that our people in the homeland will remember us here with their prayers and means, I remain, Yours for the Master A. A. Carscallen.⁸

The following year, the second team of missionaries to Kenya was dispatched to join Carscallen. It included J. Delmer Baker and his wife Ane, both nurses. As Carscallen had requested, Helen Bruce Thomson, Arthur's fiancee from Scotland, travelled with them and arrived in Mombasa, Kenya, on July 27, 1907. Arthur and Helen got married the same day she arrived. Reverend Wright, an Anglican pastor, conducted the wedding in an Anglican Cathedral. Delmer and Ane served the couple as Matron of Honor and Best Man. "They also accompanied the newlyweds on their 'honeymoon' which was next day and comprised one of the most spectacular rail journeys the world has to offer, not only because of the awesome terrain but also because of the teeming big-game, the herds of zebra and antelope, of blue wildebeest, elephant and buffalo, the spectacular acrobatic colobus monkeys and the swarming iridescent bird life."⁹

With a wife who was committed to the mission, Arthur continued with church planting activities. He also realized that there were no books written in Dholuo (language of the Luos). He mastered the language and translated some portions of the New Testament which were published by the British and Foreign Bible Society. He also wrote a Dholuo grammar textbook that was widely used by missionaries and others for many years.¹⁰

In 1908 B. L. Morse and J. H. Sparks joined the growing number of missionaries. Soon Gendia became the parent mission for several other missions. J. D. Baker founded Wire Mission as an outpost of Gendia in 1909, making this the second Adventist mission in South Nyanza and the rest of Kenya.¹¹

“Helen was a capable seamstress and her challenge was not the lack of a written language in Kavirondo but the lack of any clothing at all. The Nilotic Luos were not ‘into clothes’ and Helen sought to change that situation.” So apart from soliciting for garments from the homeland, “she became rather a useful cotton-grower which cotton was used to make clothes.”¹² This industry contributed to the effectiveness of the message.

The first baptism at Gendya took place on May 21, 1911, five years after the arrival of the first missionaries. The baptism of 16 people was witnessed by Brother B. Ohme, the superintendent for German East Africa. Some of the young men who were baptized include: Isaac Okeyo, from Gendia village, John Okello from Kanyaluo, Daudi Abuor from Kobila and Daniel Onyango from Konyango.¹³

Following the first baptism, the mission continued to spread from Gendia to their neighboring Gusii, a Bantu ethnic group of South Nyanza. The new mission stations in order of their opening after Gendia were: Wire Hill (1909), Karungu (1912), Kanyadoto (1912), Nyanchwa (1912), Kamagambo (1913) and Got Rusinga (1913).¹⁴

Virgil Robinson recorded in his extensive chronicles that V. E. Toppenberg called in at Gendia Mission on his way to his 1909 appointment to West Tanganyika. The great Danish Missionary recalled the scene. ‘In the crude Mission School we saw groups of naked boys and girls sitting on the floor around Sisters Carscallen, Morse and Baker.’ When he next visited Gendia some twenty years later he wept with joy to see hundreds of strong young people all true to the Message, and confessed that he had felt doubts as to whether the power of the Gospel could do anything for such degraded people as he had seen on his previous visit. Now he was fully persuaded.¹⁵

The progress of the mission work in Kenya is credited to the British union that not only sent missionaries but also provided funds that sustained the missionary families and funded the mission work. It was not until 1917 when the first U.S. \$2,500 arrived from the General Conference through the United States consul in Mombasa.¹⁶

During World War I many of the missions were looted and damaged, and the workers, except Carscallen and one other, were kept from their stations for nearly two years. Carscallen held the workers together through it all.¹⁷

In 1921 Carscallen returned to the U.S. In the same year his wife, Helen Thomson, died in Oregon. In 1924 Carscallen married Anita Johnson.¹⁸ Meanwhile, other missionaries arrived at Gendia mission at the time of Carscallen’s departure. They included: G. A. S. Madgwick, W. T. Bartlett and W. W. Armstrong. In 1924 Madgwick opened the Kendu mission hospital.¹⁹ In the U.S., Carscallen spent several years in pastoral work in the Dakotas. He then continued his mission exploits in British Guiana from 1931 to 1942, where he became president of the three united Guiana fields and started work in new areas among the natives in the hinterland of the country. In British Guiana, he helped demolish the old Adventist church building in Georgetown and build another, doing much of the carpentry work himself. He also pioneered the work in the interior of British Guiana among the Davis Indians, and produced a 1,698-word dictionary of the Akawaio Indian language from 1938 to 1940. When he retired, he settled in La Sierra, California until he died in 1964.²⁰

Legacy

Carscallen contributed to the colporteur ministry in the British Union. Pastor R. Whiteside, who was acquainted with the pioneer missionary, wrote in his obituary in January 1964: "He gave a wonderful lead to the colporteur ministry in Britain. He worked in Ireland, Wales, Scotland and England. Many students at Manor Gardens College were grateful for the practical instruction he gave them in canvassing which enabled them to carry on their education."²¹

Pastor Carscallen was the first missionary to Kenya and baptized the first converts to the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the country. He spent 13 years pioneering in Kenya as superintendent of the British East Africa Mission. He built the first Adventist schools in Kenya.²² He introduced the commercial farming by growing cotton and translated some portions of the New Testament into Dholuo in 1913. He became the first to initiate some form of transport across the lake from Kendu Bay to Kisumu in the mission schooner.²³

Under Carscallen's direction a string of mission stations was established along the eastern shore of Lake Victoria: Gendia, Wire Hill, Rusinga Island, Kanyadoto, Karungu, Kisii (Nyanchwa), and Kamagambo. In 1913 he set up a small printing plant at Gendia which became Africa Herald Publishing House. From 1910-1914 he wrote a 4,004-term dictionary of the Dholuo, the language of the Luo, on lined paper, hand tied in a cloth notebook with a leather spine.²⁴ He also translated the gospel of Matthew into Dholuo (Injil Mar Mathayo).²⁵

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NOTES

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2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Eric Nyankanga Maangi, "Seventh-day Adventists in Nyanza," *The Contribution and Influence of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Development of Post-secondary Education in South Nyanza, 1971-2000* (Unpublished Dissertation, 2014, UNISA, South Africa), 45, accessed September 20, 2020, <https://www.africansdahistory.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/SDA-IN-NYANZA.pdf>.
6. Mahon, 4.
7. Maangi, 65.
8. Mahon, 5.
9. Ibid.
10. *Seventh-day Adventists Encyclopedia* (1996), s.v. "Arthur Asa Grandville Carscallen."
11. Nehemiah M. Nyaundi, *Seventh-day Adventism in Gusii* (Kendu Bay: Africa Herald Publishing House, Kenya, 1997), 22.
12. Mahon, 3.
13. Nehemiah M. Nyaundi, *Introduction to the Study of Religion* (Eldoret, Kenya: Zapf Chancery Publishers, 2003), 45.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.

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