



School teachers and publishing workers at the Matariah School building.

Photo courtesy of Nabil Mansour.

Matariah Mercy Home

NABIL GABRIEL MANSOUR

Nabil Gabriel Mansour, M.A. (Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan), is a retired pastor living in Australia. During his diverse denominational career, Mansour worked as translator and editor at Middle East Press (Beirut, Lebanon), teacher, dean of men, and church pastor at Nile Union Academy (Egypt), accountant/cashier at the Egypt Field Office and director of the Matariah Mercy Home. During his years of service in the East Mediterranean Field, Mansour taught at Middle East College and, later, at SDA Amman High School.

Matariah Mercy Home was an orphanage operated by the Egypt Field of Seventh-day Adventists to provide care for underprivileged village children from 1947 to around 1990.

Background

In 1923, between World Wars I and II, the Adventist publishing work and a training school were opened in Matariah, a suburb in Cairo, Egypt. C. H. Rickman, who had been sent to Egypt earlier to learn Arabic, was called to lead the publishing work.¹ In 1927, the Arabic Union Training School began operations sharing the publishing house's building. E. Toppenberg, a nurse from the Abyssinian Mission at Asmara, was appointed director of the school with Ibrahim El-Khalil as a teacher. However, the school was discontinued a few years later.² In 1938, just before World War II started, most of the missionaries were evacuated with a few remaining, namely: Erna Kruger, a nurse; Ibrahim El Khalil, an educator; and Youssef Berbawy and Selim Moujie, who were translators.

In 1946, the Egypt Training School mainly for intermediate and secondary schoolboys was established on a 65-acre farm in an oasis area at Fayoum, Upper Egypt.³ Shortly after, the Egyptian government, impressed by the growing educational work of the Adventist Church, requested help in caring for orphans and underprivileged children.⁴ In response, in 1947, an orphanage was established in Matariah under the direction of A. G. Zytkoskee, president of the Arabic Union Mission. This orphanage would be established in what was once the Arabic Union Training School.

Establishment

Matariah Mercy Home was located in Matariah, a suburb in Cairo, Egypt. Cairo is built on the location which was once known as Heliopolis, one of the oldest cities in ancient Egypt. In Bible times, the city was called On (Genesis 41:45). The city is famous for its spring, in which tradition says Mary washed baby Jesus's swaddling clothes and bathed him.⁵

Matariah Mercy Home started its operation on the premises of the publishing house that had been operating since 1923. Two weeks before the orphanage opened in 1947, thieves broke in and stole all the beds, mattresses, and blankets that were ready for the children's arrival. This delayed its opening a few days until new equipment was purchased. The orphanage initially received orphans and children between 5 and 10 years of age that came from poor families. It started with a few boys and girls, but the numbers soon increased. At first, an elementary school was opened for the approximately 30 children who lived there; unfortunately, it was closed. Medical assistance was supplied to the children, many of whom had trachoma and other diseases.

Erna Steinmanns, a German missionary nurse, had come to Egypt in 1930 and married Emil Kruger. In 1934, within six months of each other, she had lost both her husband and her infant son. Instead of going back to Germany, Erna chose to stay and dedicate her life to mission service. "Mamma" Kruger, as she came to be

known, soon had more children than she could have dreamed of as she was put in charge of the orphanage as matron of Matariah Mercy Home.⁶

Before taking charge of the orphanage, Erna Kruger, who specialized in massage and physiotherapy, was engaged in the limited medical missionary work developing during the 1940s in Cairo. Dr. Maher Bishai operated a small clinic in Heliopolis, a suburb in Cairo, in 1953; and his brother, Dr. Youssef Bishai, operated a small clinic in Maghagha, Upper Egypt, for a few months in 1956. Both doctors were local members of the Adventist Church. For years, they carried out this type of medical work in hope that it would break down prejudices of the non-Christian majority. These medical institutions proved helpful, and people were more ready to hear the Adventist message.

History

Students from Matariah Mercy Home, after completing primary education, attended a secondary school with Principal Shafik Ghali behind the Adventist church building. In 1953, it was decided to move the Egypt Training School to a place near Cairo.⁷ It was relocated to Gabal Asfar, ten miles northeast of Cairo, and is now the Nile Union Academy (NUA). However, before boarding facilities were arranged at NUA, students would stay at Principal Ghali's secondary school. Once the Egypt Training School was ready to accommodate students at its new location, Principal Ghali's secondary school was moved to Zeitoune and operated as an elementary school. To complete their secondary education, students from the Egypt Training School and Matariah Mercy Home attended NUA.⁸

Over time, the building that housed Matariah Mercy Home and the adjacent matron's bungalow started to deteriorate. Plans were laid to rebuild the orphanage and increase its capacity. Until the rebuilding was completed, a large house in the Zeitoune area was rented to accommodate the children. In 1963, the orphanage was rebuilt and enlarged with funds from a 13th Sabbath offering, and its capacity was doubled. The new building had two separate dormitory wings, one for girls and one for boys. A kitchen and a large dining hall were also added.

In July 1963, Mokhtar Nashid Yacoub, grandson of the first native Seventh-day Adventist in Egypt, was appointed business manager for Matariah Mercy Home. Plans were laid for a program of vocational instruction, but the program failed to materialize. In 1964, the modernized Matariah Mercy Home was completed and dedicated. The government expressed great satisfaction with the work done by the care home and school.⁹

Erna Kruger worked at the home from its inception, and it closed shortly after her retirement.* "Mamma" Kruger continued as a missionary in Egypt for over 45 years, mastering colloquial Arabic and working far beyond retirement age. She was the matron of Matariah Mercy Home from 1955 to 1989, when she returned to Germany and retired in a care home in the city of Aibling. Even there, she continued to serve those less able to help themselves until passing away in 1999.¹⁰

After Erna Kruger departed for retirement in Germany, Matariah Mercy Home received few newcomers. The orphanage was turned into a school for students from the neighboring community and needy Egyptian and Sudanese Adventist youth, who were given free accommodation on the property. The property included the school, a dormitory, a church, and homes for two retired Adventist couples. A trust fund under Kruger's name was managed by the Egypt Field to continue helping needy Egyptian students, and this continued well into the 1980s.

Legacy

Matariah Mercy Home served as a basis for the education of prominent present members of society. Erna Kruger was instrumental in rearing young deprived Egyptians who now hold leadership positions in the Middle East Union. Matariah Mercy Home provided the basic education for those who would become ordained Adventist pastors, university professors, nurses, psychiatrists, business managers, translators, and editors who served and still serve the Adventist Church and its institutions in Egypt and around the world.

SOURCES

Brannan, Heather, and Nabil Mansour. "Erna 'Mamma' Kruger Dies in Germany." *Adventist News Network*. November 1, 1999. <https://news.adventist.org/en/all-news/news/go/1999-11-01/erna-mamma-kruger-dies-in-germany/>.

Brauer, C. V. "Activities in Egypt Today." *ARH*, July 16, 1959.

Christian, L. H. "Our Work in Cairo, Egypt." *ARH*, April 28, 1927.

Douglass, Herbert. "Sabbath, April 26: The Day in Dallas." *ARH*. General Conference Bulletin no. 9, May 1, 1980. <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Periodicals/GCSessionBulletins/GCB1980-09.pdf>

Land, Gary. "Historical Dictionary of Seventh-day Adventists, No. 56." In *Historical Dictionaries of Religions, Philosophies, and Movements*, edited by Jon Woronoff. Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2005.

Olsen, Mahlon Ellsworth. *A History and Progress of the Seventh-day Adventists*. Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1925.

"Our Lady of Matarieh." Roman Catholic Saints, 2011. Accessed October 8, 2019. <https://www.roman-catholic-saints.com/our-lady-of-matarieh.html>.

Rebok, D. E. "Plans Laid for a New School in Egypt." *ARH*, December 10, 1953.

Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia. Revised edition, 2 volumes. Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing, 1996.

NOTES

1. L. H. Christian, "Our Work in Cairo, Egypt," *ARH*, April 28, 1927, 21.
2. Mahlon Ellsworth Olsen, *A History and Progress of the Seventh-day Adventists* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1925), 515; and Christian, 21.
3. *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (1996), S. v. "Egypt, Arab Republic of"; D. E. Rebok, "Plans Laid for a New School in Egypt," *ARH*, December 10, 1953, 24.
4. Erna Kruger, interview by author, Matariah Mercy Home, Cairo, August 30, 1971; and *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (1996), S. v. "Matariah Mercy Home."
5. "Our Lady of Matarieh," Roman Catholic Saints, 2011, accessed October 8, 2019, <https://www.roman-catholic-saints.com/our-lady-of-matarieh.html>.
6. Herbert Douglass, "Sabbath, April 26: The Day in Dallas," *ARH*, General Conference Bulletin no. 9, May 1, 1980, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Periodicals/GCSessionBulletins/GCB1980-09.pdf>.
7. Gary Land, "Historical Dictionary of Seventh-day Adventists, No. 56," in *Historical Dictionaries of Religions, Philosophies, and Movements*, ed. Jon Woronoff (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2005), 90.
8. C. V. Brauer, "Activities in Egypt Today," *ARH*, July 16, 1959, 21.
9. Ibid.
10. Heather Brannan and Nabil Mansour, "Erna 'Mamma' Kruger Dies in Germany," *Adventist News Network*, November 1, 1999, <https://news.adventist.org/en/all-news/news/go/1999-11-01/erna-mamma-kruger-dies-in-germany/>.

encyclopedia.adventist.org is an official website of the [Seventh-day Adventist World Church](#)

© 2020 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists 12501 Old Columbia Pike Silver Spring, MD 20904 USA 301-680-6000