



Aerial View of Songa Mission.

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

Songa Station, East Congo Union, DRC

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Songa¹ Mission is located 600km from Lubumbashi, the second-largest city in the Democratic Republic of Congo. After the closing down of Katanga Mission Administrative Unit in Lubumbashi, missionaries decided to open Songa Mission Training Center in 1921. The very first missionaries who settled at Songa and became the

founders were Christopher Robinson and Raleigh Robinson. These American brothers had been in the Southern Africa region for one year before they arrived at Songa. The land in Songa had been donated by the local and traditional chief called Nshikala de Mwilambwe. The Robinson brothers negotiated with the population and the chief to officially grant them permission to settle and establish the Mission. Their request was granted, and the brothers received an official document of ownership for the land of Songa². The missionaries began with the farm so they could produce their own food.

Background

The colonists were favorable to different missionaries of different faiths, but they did not want to give land to missionaries living outside their borders. Already in 1917, Samuel Konigsmacher had tried to establish a foothold in Sakania in their search for land to start mission stations. The next year, Congolese local chiefs Lumina and Kakompa followed him to Northern Rhodesia (present-day Zambia) to ask him to return and open schools in their respective villages³. That's why Straw and Stockill, officials of the Zambezi mission, were sent in 1918 to discover where to set up the mission. The South Africa Union ordered them to open a station in Congo before the end of World War I⁴. The Adventist missionaries were surprised to discover that other religious confessions were already installed in the Congo. Catholics, Methodists, Garenganze, and Congo Evangelical Mission had already occupied sites and begun evangelizing through schools, churches, and hospitals. The two were told to occupy the land beyond Bukama, which is where the other missionaries had not evangelized. In 1919, they commenced work, starting with the field, the school, and later the dispensary. The South Africa Union Committee, that had been held at Kenilworth one year before, had decided on a temporary study of Katanga by the Union comprising Rhodesia and Malawi. However, Rhodesia had already taken charge of this new territory⁵. Later on, Robinson and Willmore noticed that Straw sent the Land Application Letter to the Belgian Department of Justice. There had been no follow-up.⁶ On June 1, 1921, the Raleigh Robinson party arrived in Songa with their children.⁷

Founding

The work of 1919 resulted in the installation of the first station of Songa in 1921, and the opening of the Katanga station in 1923. However, there were challenges. Animals attacked the fields and ravaged them, and even livestock in the Mission were not spared. This affected their food supplies.⁸ In 1923, the railways reached Kamina and facilitated the delivery of food from Elisabethville to Kamina where the missionaries stocked up for Songa. But there was another problem. There were sorcerers and witch doctors who were not unfriendly to the missionaries, and as time went by, some of them joined the church. Some historians believe that the missionaries used a bicycle to connect from Bukama to Kamina (170km). They also went to Mwilambwe. In a very short time, the people of Mwilambwe accepted and became converted. Among the first converts were

Lukupo Samadia and Joshwa with their wives. Others think Mwema Kyadya-Mukuku was the first convert. He was the father of Paul Nyembo Mwema, the second African president of the Zaire Union Mission. Lukupo became the first native teacher to train youth educators. This stage of training teachers among the natives was unprecedented. Amos Mali-Kidogo and Charles Ngonzo were also recruited as teachers. The first Congolese instructors were Lukupo Samadia, Charles Katombo, and Andrew Mutombo. Later, Andrew Mutombo was appointed to head Songa District. Sadly, he died without being ordained.

Chief Shikala Mwema and his family received the gospel as the first fruits of the Congo. They donated the site for the construction of the Mission. From this family came young Niembo Mwema, who studied at Songa School. Later, he became a teacher, district leader, mission director, and president of Rweze and North Katanga Fields. Because of his humility, he was appointed field secretary of the Division, and then he became the Zaire Union Mission president. Christopher Robinson had brought African teachers and evangelists from Malawi and Rhodesia to serve the community. They functioned as interpreters and teachers of the lower classes. Subsequently, the first pupils also became teachers, and they were sent throughout Lukungu, Mwilambwe, Lubinda, and Lusenja.

Mr. Howard tells the story of how three couples, a young man, a woman, and seven little children came providentially to live in Samba village 28km from Songa Mission. Several years before, a tribe near the west of the Portuguese colony came to attack the areas surrounding Kamina and Songa. They brought with them the captive group mentioned previously. The kidnapers drove them to Angola in the northwestern part of Zambia and Congo. These slaves came into contact with Kaleñe Hill's mission and were baptized. Four of these captives got married. The father and elder were trained instructors. When they returned, they brought the testimonial letters identifying them as Christians. Thus, having learned of the missionaries' presence in Songa, they came into contact with the Mission, accepted the Adventist truths and became a great help to the Mission since they knew the local language and had been educated.⁹

Before Christopher Robinson's family left Songa, Tersha Robinson was invited to visit a missionary's family serving the Methodist Episcopal Church in Kabongo as a doctor. The trip was made possible thanks to a group of 16 carriers. Their wives escorted them to prepare food along the way and so they could enjoy the pleasure of traveling. From Songa, the procession rested at Kampemba. Robinson wanted to use his bike, but the condition of the road did not allow that. Instead, he walked while his wife was in a *machilas*. They camped at Samba. Tersha was distressed at the state of some villages where she made presentations, crying for the loss of life in several villages. They arrived in Kabongo, where Dr. Berry offered them a warm welcome¹⁰.

The development of this station along with the creation of the other stations allowed the higher organization to establish the first mission or association in 1954. This was the South Congo Mission. This association was headed by Bennett, and the social seat was in Elisabethville. This association changed its location in 1958 to serve Kamina while keeping the territory they served. In 1974, it was reorganized, giving birth to another field

named the South Katanga Field, which would take charge of the churches of the old Katanga Station.

Main Institutions Established at Songa Mission

Songa Hospital. It has offered tremendous help to thousands of people within and outside the church. For more information, check out the article about Songa Hospital recommended in Related Content.

Songa Institute. This is a secondary school with boarding facilities. In the beginning, it was just a facility for training evangelists, but later on it became a secondary school.

Songa Nursing School. The nursing school is another important institution that has produced nurses for decades mainly in the Great Lakes Region, including Congo, Rwanda, and even Burundi.

Songa Primary School. While originally intended for the teaching of the workers' children, this school has since been opened to all children in the community.

Impact

The impact of the missionaries working in Songa continues to be great. The hospital swept away the barriers between the population and the missionaries. Some of the important people in the country have gone through the school. A website for Songa alumni has been created, and it has revealed that Songa products are available all over the globe. Songa's products are visible both in and outside the church.

Directors of the Mission

Christopher Robinson (1921-1923); Raleigh Robinson (1924-1926); O. U. Giddings (1928-1929); J. H. Sturges (1930-1931); D. E. Delhove (1932-1935); E. L. Morel (1936); V. C. Norcott (1937); J. G. Siepman (1938); George Hiten (1939-1942); O. Rouhe (1943-1944); T. W. Staples (1945-1946); D. H. Schmehl (1948); J. G. Evert (1949-1950); Henry Marais (1951); Valentine Davies (1952); W. R. Grant (1953); M. Koopmans (1954-1959); Japhet Kanyamihigo (1960); Paul Mwema (1961-1962); Silas Monga (1963-1968)

Presidents of South Congo Field and North Katanga Field

Bennet (1954-1957); P. F. Lemon (1958-1961); Wilson (1960-1962); S. W. De Lange (1964-1967); B. D. Wheeler (1968-1969); T. B. R. Pederson (1970-1972); Simon Muhune Kitule (1973-1975); Paul Nyembo Mwema (1976-1980); Joshua Kilongozi (1980-1985); Louis Kitungwa (1986-1988); Marcel Mukole (1989-1995); Sampatwa wa Kadilo (1996-2002); Kasongo Banza (2003-2005); Mutombe Ngili Muloko (2006-2010); Sangwa Luhunga (2011-2012); Muyombo (2013-2015); Nshimba Mukala (2016); Ngoy Katomba (2016); Kabenga Bondo (2017-).

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NOTES

1. The name "Songa" originates from a small river that waters the area in the Eastern part of the land.
2. Robert Muhune, Historical sketch of song, a write up, October 17, 2017.
3. Samuel M. Konigmacher, "Nothern Rhodesia," *South African Missionary*, July 30, 1917, 8.
4. N. White, "On the Congo Border," *South African Missionary*, January 28, 1918, 3.
5. W. L. Watson, "Mission Rhodesian Committee Council," *South African Missionary*, May 20, 1918, 1.
6. Christopher Robinson and G. L. Willmore, "Songa Mission," *South African Missionary*, October 15, 1920, 5, 6.
7. Ngili Muloko Mutombe, "Adventisme du septième Jour: Histoire et batailles d'expansion en RD Congo," (inédit, 2019), 28, in the author's private collection.
8. Joshua Kilongozi, "History of the Congo Union," unpublished personal notes, Lubumbashi, 1980, in the author's private collection.
9. E. M. Howard, "Good News from the Congo," *The African Division Outlook*, April 15, 1922, 6, 7.
10. Tersha Robinson, "An Interesting Trip in Belgian Congo," *The African Division Outlook*, June 1, 1923, 1, 2.

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