



Maun Medical Hospital

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Maun Medical Hospital was an institution of the Zambesi (Zimbabwe) Union Mission of Seventh-day Adventists, situated in Bechuanaland (Botswana) from 1937 to 1945.

Events That Led to the Establishment of the Institution

In 1934, Colonel Charles Rey, resident British commissioner of the Bechuanaland Protectorate, interviewed missionary J. van der Merwe in Mafeking requesting that the Seventh-day Adventist Church establish a hospital in the Lake Ngami area of the country, home to a native population of approximately 50,000 people. There was no medical facility within a radius of over 300 miles. The government promised to provide £4,000 for the hospital buildings and homes. A further grant of £1,000 was to be paid annually towards the maintenance of the hospital. The only proviso in the offer was that the church must guarantee to place two doctors and a nurse at the proposed hospital. The good will engendered by the well-established hospital at Kanye may have influenced the government to make this offer. In the face of a world depression, it was a miraculous offer to the Church. In addition, the General Conference granted \$5,000 for the new medical mission.¹

Another meeting was held later at Maun, involving the resident commissioner, Colonel Rey, A. E. Nelson, treasurer of the Southern African Division, Dr. A. N. Tonge, and J. van de Merwe. At that meeting, the chief's consent regarding the establishment of the hospital was solicited and his reply was positive. The resident commissioner had already dealt with the efforts of the London Missionary Society that had frustrated the attempts of Seventh-day Adventists to enter the country. The next step was to choose a suitable site for the medical mission. A site farther away from the government camp was selected where a plot of land eight hundred by four hundred yards was laid out, and their request for the land was left with the chief to decide. The next day, Magistrate Potts and four others visited the village to discuss the size of the plot of land. Feeling that the marked off land was too large, they finally settled for a site with four hundred yards from the river frontage, extending back 350 yards on one side and 200 yards on the other side.²

Another item that was discussed at the meeting mentioned above was the establishment of a school. The colonel stated that the government was going to work with the Adventist Church as it did with other missionary societies. The local people were to erect the school building and the government would pay the teacher. The request for a school was motivated by a lack of satisfaction brought about by the fact that after seventy years of work in Bechuanaland, the London Missionary Society had established only one school. Additionally, since the colonel believed in liberty of conscience, the Church was given full liberty with regard to evangelistic work.³

Founding of the Institution

After nearly three years of negotiations and the erection of the buildings, Maun Medical Hospital was officially opened on Monday, February 15, 1937.⁴ In attendance at the opening ceremony was Captain Potts, the district commissioner appointed by Colonel Rey to represent His Majesty's government to deliver a message of greeting and goodwill from the resident commissioner. Others who spoke on the occasion were the assistant district commissioner, the paramount chief, and J. F. Wright, president of the Southern African Division. Others present at the opening event were about forty Europeans and nearly three hundred local people.⁵ The hospital interior

with all its equipment—beds and bedding, bath tub, doors, and windows—was a never ending source of wonderment to some of the local people.⁶ Like the Congo Union Mission, which had acquired a second medical mission in the 1930s, the Zambesi Union Mission under which the Bechuanaland Protectorate region fell, now had acquired another medical mission in addition to the hospital at Kanye.⁷

American missionary doctors, C. Paul Bringle and J. G. Foster took up their duties in the hospital with an official bed capacity of twenty for the natives and four for Europeans.⁸ Assisted by nurses Misses P. Hovig and Fourie, they carried on regular hospital work as well as out-station dispensaries for a number of years treating many cases of sleeping sickness, malaria, and other diseases.

One of the outstanding needs at the hospital was a home for Dr. Foster. J. F. Wright, president of the Southern African Division, wrote in 1940 expressing appreciation for the Thirteenth Sabbath overflow received from the second quarter of 1939, of which the division's portion was \$6,814.44. Some of these funds were used to erect a home for Dr. Foster at Maun Medical Mission. For two years, Dr. Foster and his family had waited patiently, living in a two-roomed structure that was later to serve as a dispensary after the new home was completed.⁹

Meanwhile, after the hospital had been officially opened in 1937, it was found to be impossible to persuade anyone but the bravest to consent to any surgical procedure. The local people's conservatism and fatalistic attitudes led them to react negatively whenever a necessary surgical operation was proposed. Their common response was, "We can't help this sickness; it is from God. We never heard of natives being treated in this fashion. We would rather wait and see what happens."¹⁰ As such, although the hospital had twenty beds when it was opened, the average number of in-patients per day was less than ten. Almost no surgery was being done.

The turning point came through an accident to one of the most prominent young men of the ruling tribe. He was rushed to the hospital soon after he had developed a strangulation of a loop of small intestine which ruptured. Being educated and intelligent, he readily agreed and even begged the doctors to do the necessary operation as soon as possible. But his mother and the relatives argued and hesitated to have him undergo the operation for thirty hours while the patient waited under the influence of the opiates. Finally, his mother and aunt left the hospital in disgust and anger, saying "Stay here and die, then!" Thereafter the operation was conducted under a light of gasoline and flashlights. The medical staff prayed earnestly that God would overrule. And God did bless. Within two days his mother was all smiles and she remained a staunch friend of the hospital until her death not long afterward. Her son was able to resume his work of bricklaying within two months. Thereafter, the number of surgical cases gradually increased. Not long afterwards, seven more new beds were ordered, bringing the total number of beds to twenty-seven.¹¹

According to G. R. Nash, Maun Medical Hospital was the only one within the radius of three hundred miles. Although it had a bed capacity of twenty-three beds for Africans and four for Europeans, in 1942 the hospital cared for up to one hundred and forty bed patients at one time, and it averaged one hundred and twenty-one another month. Consequently, surgeries, stoeps, the dispensary room, and all of the halls were converted into

improvised wards for African patients, thus making it necessary for Dr. Foster and his staff to see the dispensary patients under the trees outside. The Bechuanaland government provided twelve tents for the use of ambulatory patients.¹²

During that same year (1942), 318 sleeping sickness patients were hospitalized. Two hundred and three of these were discharged from the hospital to return to their homes either as cured or to go to a camp for further observation. By 1943, Dr. Foster reported that the daily patient admissions averaged sixty-nine, which was almost three patients for each bed they had. This made conditions in the hospital very crowded as patients were lying on the floor, in every available space, even in the European section. The European patients had to be cared for in the doctor's house. The medical department of the Bechuanaland Protectorate Government secured a loan of twelve tents (mentioned above) and these were all occupied at the time of reporting.¹³ In addition to the regular daily dispensary conducted at the hospital, three trips were made each year to Ghanzi, Kalkfontein, Karakobis, Olifants Kloof, Makunda, Kooli, and Nojane in the Ghanzi district; and Kechikau, Mongu, Sekunwana, and Kasane in the Chobe district.¹⁴

Maun Medical Hospital regularly received general support from the Columbia Union Conference in the United States. As early as July 1937, the hospital was visited by H. J. Deltwiler. During his visit, a baptism of only one person was held. The candidate's name was Isaac Tsapo, the first convert to receive the Adventist message from among the local people in Ngamiland. He had been a laborer at the new hospital since 1935. In February 1936, he visited the hospital with the express intention of showing the hospital staff their errors and converting them to his religion. After a few months, he resigned from his church and joined the Bible class to prepare for baptism.¹⁵ Later, after his baptism, his wife was also baptized and his young daughter became a faithful Sabbath School member, while two other relatives began to keep the Sabbath and were studying for baptism.¹⁶

According to a report in 1938, the spiritual side of the work was found to be encouraging; the baptismal class was growing. The first baptism of a local convert had taken place. The great need at Maun was for a church building. The hospital kitchen-dining room that was being used at the time was entirely inadequate for Sabbath meetings.¹⁷ In 1943, one hundred people joined the Bible class through the evangelistic work of a native evangelist, Philemon Kgasa, who was connected with the hospital. However, it was difficult for the mission staff to look after the interests in their district.¹⁸ Mrs. Bringle narrated the challenges faced by the boys and girls of the Sabbath School at Maun:

Our first Sabbath school was held on a little porch on the edge of the river bank. So many came that we had to move to a larger place—the front stoep (screened porch) of the doctor's house. It became necessary then to move to the garage. Then it was held under a reed shelter until that blew away, and then we had to move back to the garage. Now that the garage is being used as a kitchen, the children's Sabbath school has moved back again to the doctor's stoep. In the wintertime this place becomes very cold...¹⁹

Later in 1943, a young man by the name of Motateng became very ill and went to the hospital at Maun. While there he became interested in spiritual things. After being discharged from the hospital, he stayed in Maun for a few weeks and received Bible studies from Philemon Kgasa. Although Motateng had never attended school before, he learned to read the Bible. Afterward he requested to leave in order to go and tell his friends and family in the Chinoga District what he had learned about Jesus. God blessed his efforts in that he won over forty persons to the Lord and was calling for someone to be sent there to teach them more about the Bible.²⁰

The hospital was also looking for sufficient funds to place at least two native families out in centers away from Maun to operate medical dispensaries, giving treatments and simple medicines. Similar services were already being given with success at Kalkfontein. What the mission was not granted permission to do was to conduct the educational work, in spite of the earlier proposals. A school would have been a very real source of strength to their mission work.²¹

According to one report, the three most common diseases of patients admitted in the hospital were trypanosomiasis [sleeping sickness], malaria fever, and syphilis, making up seventy-eight percent of the patients admitted. Meanwhile, there was a decided drop in the number of surgical cases at the hospital due to lack of space. Many patients had to be turned away because of the crowded conditions. Only emergencies or very urgent cases were operated on. About this same time, Dr. and Mrs. Ralph Royer joined the staff at Maun Hospital, increasing the number of doctors to two once again in addition to the two graduate nurses also on the staff.²²

Handing Over of the Hospital to the Government

Maun Medical Hospital was a morale booster to the Zambesi Union Mission during a spell of financial difficulties in the 1930s. However, it became a disappointment when the Bechuanaland government liquidated the institution in 1945 due to its post-war development plans and allowed the church to run only a small mission in its place. Monageng Mogalakwe states that “by the early 1940s Bechuanaland was already experiencing balance of trade deficits, as a result of a slowdown in domestic production brought about by the outflow of production labor to the mines.”²³ Consequently, with the closure of Maun Medical Hospital the Zambesi Union Mission retained only one main medical institution at Kanye.²⁴

In 1945, after the government had taken over the Maun Medical Mission and had given the church a site alongside the former mission property, a house was built for the European missionary and one for the African pastor.²⁵ They now began to conduct a regular mission station under the leadership of I. B. Burton. The year before, sixty-six people were baptized in the area making a total of 684 adherents.²⁶ For some time they had no builder to erect the church, until D. T. Burke arrived and began construction with the help of African workers. They built the church near the center of the village on a site donated by the local tribe authorities. On March 11,

1950, on a Sabbath morning, a new church building was dedicated at Maun. The occasion was one of great joy for the believers who had been worshipping in a little reed enclosure on the banks of the river under the shelter of a tree. The new church building could accommodate between 200 and 250 people. It was hoped that the work at Maun would continue to grow and be a light which would shine in the surrounding districts:²⁷

List Of Directors

C. Paul Bringle (1937-1939), J. G. Foster (1940-1945).

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1. Editorial, "Another Hospital Opened," *The Church Officers' Gazette*, October 1937, 31.
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4. J. F. Wright, "Opening New Hospital—Maun, Bechuanaland Protectorate," *Southern African Division Outlook*, March 15, 1937, 2.
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6. Morrie Stockil, "A Hospital in South Rhodesia," *Lake Union Herald*, March 26, 1935, 3.
7. Ronald Charles Lloyd Thompson, *A History of the Growth and Development of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Southern Africa*. Ph.D. Dissertation, Rhodes University, 1977, 185.
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9. J. F. Wright, "Thanks! Thanks! Thanks!" *The Columbia Union Visitor*, May 16, 1940, 1.
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11. *Ibid.*, 1, 2.
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13. H. M. W[alton]. "Maun Medical Hospital," *The Ministry*, August 1943, 31.
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21. C. Paul Bringle, "Financial Needs in N'Gamiland, Africa," 2.
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