

Chapman, George Worth (1895–1966)

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George Worth Chapman was an Adventist educator and missionary who helped establish the Spanish-American Academy in Costa Rica and the Coloveno Industrial Academy in Colombia. This article focuses on Chapman's years in Colombia.

Early Years

George Worth Chapman was born on November 1, 1895, in Nevada, Iowa, to an Adventist family. From his youth his parents planned to give him a distinguished university education. He took his first eleven years of study in the best public schools of the area and attended Oak Park Academy for twelfth grade.¹ He graduated from Union College (Lincoln, Nebraska) in May of 1923.² On August 8, 1923, he married Almeda Laing (1896-1983) in Boone, Iowa, who was also an alumnus of Union College and a nurse.³

Career

Chapman's professional life began in the United States. He taught elementary school in the South Dakota for two years before joining the faculty of Plainview Academy for another two years. Almeda Chapman served as academy matron during this time. In 1927, the General Conference called the Chapmans to serve in Latin American countries. They would ultimately work in Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Colombia, Venezuela, and Mexico. The Chapmans worked at the Spanish-American Academy in San José, Costa Rica for nine years, until 1935, moving to Colombia in 1936.⁴

Chapman first came to Colombia as education secretary of the Colombian-Venezuelan Union, nominated by the Inter-American Division. He was assigned the task of finding an adequate campus to establish a school in Colombia. Henry E. Baasch, then president of the Colombian-Venezuelan Union and who had a great interest in Christian education, personally went to meet the Chapmans when they arrived at Cartagena de Indias, Colombia. Chapman faced numerous obstacles that called for prayer, fasting, heroic effort, sleepless nights, innovation, and sacrifices. Finding an appropriate piece of land for the nascent academy proved difficult. After several tours through various regions of Colombia, Chapman returned, frustrated, to Medellín where he decided to rent a

house for \$50 a month in one of the city's suburbs, Aranjuez, to serve as an academy. In this way, the Coloveno Industrial Academy opened its doors on February 15, 1937. Various courses were taught there and a fundraising (Harvest Ingathering) campaign was launched.

In 1938, the institution had grown so much that it could not remain in its original house. Consequently, Chapman and his colleagues rented a farm in Bello, Antioquia. Several improvements were made at this site where the academy operated from 1938 to 1941. A pick-up truck was purchased, a vegetable garden planted, and a bakery was established. A colporteurs institute was organized, and courses in typing, calligraphy, and solfège were added to the curriculum. A woodworking department was also developed, and a new piano purchased.

In 1940, this educational community experienced both prosperity as well as adversity. Despite enormous challenges and although the Chapmans were on a long furlough when the school year opened, other staff members continued to plan the building program. Campaigns were planned in the director's absence, and when the Chapmans returned after seven months, the "Pro-construction League" campaign was ready to be launched in order to raise funds to equip the school.

An important facet of Chapman's work were the negotiations for this educational project. The El Noral Farm was purchased for \$11,428.57, but it was in need of proper installations for the educational project. The initial farm purchase was made up of twenty-two hectares (54 acres). However, the school leaders were able to negotiate an additional eight hectares for a total of thirty hectares (74 acres).⁵

Pastors Roberts, Raley, and Adams arrived, representing the Inter-American Division in order to begin designing plans for the academy at El Noral Farm. Through the "Pro-construction League" campaign \$358.34 were raised. Even though efforts were focused on the building program, other activities were taking place. The purchase of the *Spanish-American Encyclopedia* for the library, a two-week week of prayer directed by Chapman, and the development of the culinary arts program with the art of cooking class focused on vegetarianism.

In 1941, the academy finally had its own campus, adequate, spacious, and full of promise. On the Sabbath evening of July 19, Chapman happily announced that the buildings were now ready for use. The move into the buildings took place between July 21 and July 23. George and Almeda Chapman were weary but ecstatic that their long-time dream for Colombia had been realized.

Life on the campus of that early academy was demanding and enriching. Both George and Almeda Chapman had held multiple positions, Almeda as matron, treasurer, cook, dormitory dean, and professor. Often, they had to share quarters with resident students. Because of their sacrificial labors they left a significant imprint on their students and coworkers. In 1942, eleven students graduated, the highest number of graduates since 1939 when only one student had graduated.⁶

Records show that the beginnings of stockbreeding with the purchase of the first five cows was a step forward in the midst of the paralysis in the industrial development of the academy. This was due to Chapman's having received notification from the Inter-American Division that his replacement, W. H. Wineland, was on his way. The Second World War (1939-1945) created a considerable setback in the latter professor's ability to assume his new responsibilities.

Chapman remained principal of until 1943, when he was called to become president of the Pacific Colombia Conference. In 1946, he joined the faculty of school in Montemorelos, Mexico.⁷

Later Years

The Chapmans returned to the United States in 1950. George Chapman worked among the Spanish-speaking population in Los Angeles. Almeda Chapman worked White Memorial Hospital in Glendale, California, where she became head nurse. She retired in 1964. George Chapman died on September 4, 1966, in Oxnard, California. Almeda Chapman died November 23, 1983, in Deer Park, California.⁸

Legacy

"The pioneers believed that situating the school in a rural setting would better accomplish the divine goals of Christian education. Consequently, the move to the La América sector, away from the city, was received with much enthusiasm, since it was believed that it was more suitable for study and the harmonious development of the student."⁹ Perhaps this was George W. Chapman's finest vision for Adventist education.¹⁰ In his honor, the school's auditorium bears the name of G. W. Chapman.¹¹

SOURCES

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NOTES

1. Enoc Iglesias Ortega, *Instituto Colombo-Venezolano Corporación Universitaria Adventista: Valores y servicio 1937-2000* (Medellín: Litografía ICOLVEN, 2004), 74.
2. "College of Liberal Arts Class Roll," *Educational Messenger* (Union College), June 1923, 15.
3. "Laing-Chapman," *Educational Messenger* (Union College), August 1923, 25; Iglesias, 74; "Almeda Laing Chapman obituary," *Napa Valley Register* (Napa, California), November 25, 1983, 16.
4. Iglesias, 74-75; "George Worth Chapman obituary," *Inter-American Messenger*, April 1967, 12.
5. Enoc Iglesias Ortega, *En el Nuevo Milenio: Historia de la Corporación Universitaria Adventista, 2010-2017*, vol. II (Medellín: Litografía ICOLVEN, 2018), 401, accessed February 20, 2020, <http://repository.unac.edu.co/handle/11254/650>.
6. Iglesias, 204.
7. "George Worth Chapman obituary," *Inter-American Messenger*, April 1967, 12.
8. Ibid.; "Almeda Laing Chapman obituary," *Napa Valley Register* (Napa, California), November 25, 1983, 16.
9. Enoc Iglesias Ortega, *En el Nuevo Milenio: Historia de la Corporación Universitaria Adventista, 2010-2017*, vol. II (Medellín: Litografía ICOLVEN, 2018), 401, accessed February 20, 2020, <http://repository.unac.edu.co/handle/11254/650>.
10. Tirso Escandón H. and Juan R. Mejía V., *Primera Jornada de la Historia de la Academia Colombo-Venezolana de Medellín, Años, 1937-1940* (Medellín: Imprenta ICOLVEN, 1942), 74-75.
11. Iglesias, *Instituto Colombo-Venezolano Corporación Universitaria Adventista. Valores y servicio 1937-2000*, 158.