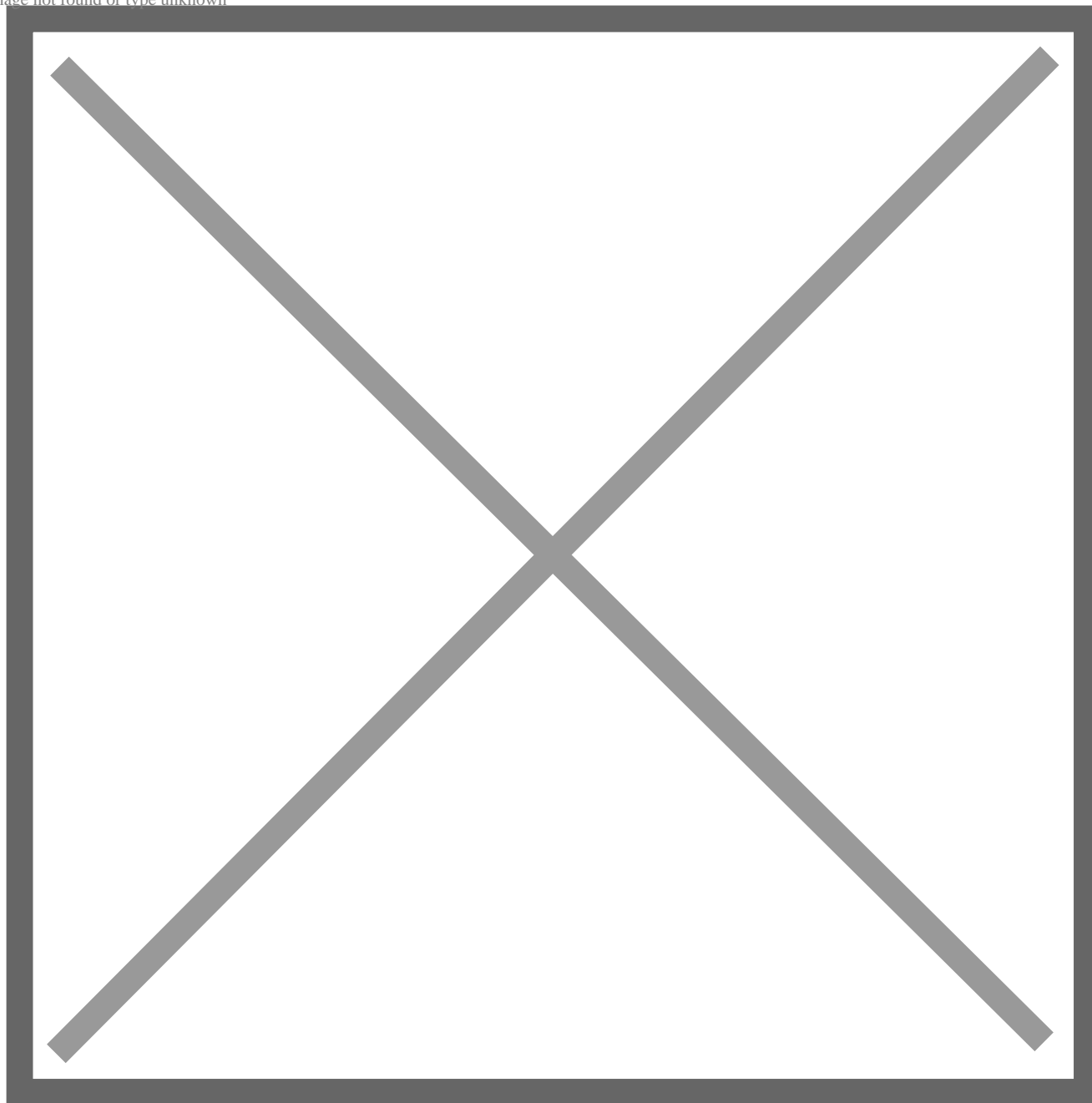


Image not found or type unknown



## Haseneder, Maria (1901–1995)

---

### CHIGEMEZI NNADOZIE WOGU

Chigemezi Nnadozie Wogu, MTS, is a Ph.D. student at the Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, the Netherlands and a research associate at the Institute of Adventist Studies in Friedensau Adventist University, Germany. At Friedensau, he manages the *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventist* research project for some parts of Europe. Wogu is a junior member of the Netherlands School for Advanced Studies in Theology and Religion. He is co-editor to *Contours of European Adventism: Issues in the History of the Denomination in the Old Continent* (Möckern: Institute of Adventist Studies, Friedensau Adventist University, 2020).

---

Maria Haseneder served the Seventh-day Adventist Church for 35 years as a nurse, medical missionary, teacher,

and medical consultant in Ethiopia, Switzerland, the Belgian Congo, Ruanda-Urundi, South Africa, and India.

## Early Life and Education

Haseneder was born on October 2, 1901, in Zürich, Switzerland.<sup>1</sup> Not much is known of her family background and childhood. In 1925 she enrolled as a student at the Waldfriede Adventist Nursing Training School in Berlin.<sup>2</sup>

## Dessie, Ethiopia

In 1928 she was called to go to Ethiopia. She first settled at the mission located at a city outside Addis Ababa, near the Kabana River. Because of the rainy season, she stayed in Addis Abba until the rainy season ended before proceeding to the Dessie mission station, where she then worked. While she waited, Haseneder assumed responsibility of the girls boarding school. She started teaching in the day school, and at the same time, she studied Amharic.

During this time she got the opportunity to dine with the emperor of Ethiopia, Haile Selassie.

When she eventually got the opportunity to move to Dessie, Haseneder made the long trip on mules and caravans with a missionary family, Dr. and Mrs. George C. Bergman. At that time in Dessie, modern means of living had not yet been adopted. Mainland goods were transported through rivers.<sup>3</sup> In fact, as Haseneder reports, the people of Dessie at some point almost fought off development by viewing it with distrust.<sup>4</sup> Yet this did not deter the missionaries.

As a team, Dr. and Mrs. Bergman together with Haseneder set to work. The first operation was conducted in the storeroom of Mrs. Bergman on a man suffering from elephantiasis. The success of this operation apparently opened up the local people to come and seek medical help. Six months later a small hospital was inaugurated. This hospital offered “the only medical help to inhabitants in a radius of about 150 miles.”<sup>5</sup>

After a few patients came for treatment, tragedy struck. A severely ill man was admitted for treatment. However, he died. His death drove the patients away. Moreover, a rumor spread among the locals of Dessie that the medical missionaries cut parts of the sick body in order to eat them. Apparently the witch doctors in that region were losing their market. Consequently, they circulated a terrible rumor: for Whites to maintain their white skin, they need to drink the blood and pus from the natives.<sup>6</sup> Thus it was difficult to have patients come for treatment. The solution according to the medical missionaries was to lure the locals with gifts. This proved to work.

In the meantime, Haseneder went to teach at the boys school in Addis Alem. While there, she would go to the markets to talk especially with the women and tell them stories of Jesus Christ with the help of Picture Rolls.<sup>7</sup> As a result, many learned to read and write. Around 1932, after she left Dessie, she was made director of the girls school in Addis Ababa.<sup>8</sup>

## Back to Europe

In the fourth year of her missionary work in Ethiopia, Haseneder fell ill and returned to Switzerland.<sup>9</sup> Though sick in Europe, she categorically wanted to go back to Africa since she cared about the unfinished work in Ethiopia. She claimed, “I was in Europe, but my heart remained in Africa.”<sup>10</sup> With this type of mindset, she went ahead to prepare herself for further studies. She took a course in tropical medicine in Antwerp, Belgium. From 1933 to 1937 she worked at the Lake Geneva Sanitarium, Gland, Switzerland.<sup>11</sup> While there she was engaged to a German who became an Adventist. The man, however, died.<sup>12</sup>

## Belgian Congo and South Africa

After Haseneder recovered, she returned to the mission field in the spring of 1937. This time Ruanda-Urundi (Belgian Congo) was her destination; she served as a nurse in the Rwankeri mission station, joining fellow missionaries Mr. and Mrs. Henri Monnier to run a clinic.<sup>13</sup> When a girls school was later opened that year in Gitwe, Haseneder was asked to run it. Later she was transferred to Songa mission station in today's Zambia.<sup>14</sup> It was during this missionary stay that she adopted a baby boy whose mother had died.<sup>15</sup>

Sometime later in 1942 Haseneder moved to Nokuphila Hospital in Johannesburg as a surgical nurse and part-time instructor of nurses.<sup>16</sup> While in Johannesburg, Haseneder testified that the Adventist health-care system was so good that surgeons of the European hospital in Johannesburg came to examine the Adventist medical methods in order to introduce them in their own hospitals. For instance, she claimed that “the caudal injection for painless births was first used in Africa in” their hospital.<sup>17</sup> She was there until July 1946, when she returned to Switzerland to take care of her aged mother.<sup>18</sup>

## Belgian Congo: 1957–1961

From 1948 to 1957 Haseneder served in the German Swiss Conference as assistant medical secretary and director of the welfare work.<sup>19</sup> In 1957, after Haseneder, at the age of about 56, had indicated interest to return to Africa as a

missionary, she was called to travel as a missionary to Ngoma Mission Hospital in the north of Ruanda-Urundi<sup>20</sup> Although the leaders of the General Conference were concerned about her age, since she was a little older than the average missionary, her past experience in that mission field quelled those concerns.<sup>21</sup> After a brief period at Ngoma Mission Hospital, she went to work at Songa Mission Hospital and later in a leper colony in Songa. In 1960, as a result of the civil unrest in Congo, the Adventist missionaries were evacuated from Congo through Salisbury<sup>22</sup> to Rhodesia (Zambia), where Haseneder also took care of lepers. In 1961 Haseneder requested to go home on permanent return.<sup>23</sup> This time it was for retirement.

## Later Life and Contribution

Haseneder did not return to Switzerland immediately. She decided to take the opportunity to fulfill her lifelong dream of traveling by ship to India from Durban, South Africa.<sup>24</sup> She spent a year (1962–1963) in India working as a nurse in a leper colony before returning to Switzerland. Her last years were spent in the Oerlimatt Seniors Home in Krattigen. She died on June 16, 1995, at the age of 94.<sup>25</sup>

Maria Haseneder served the Seventh-day Adventist Church as a nurse, medical missionary, teacher, and medical consultant in Ethiopia, Belgian Congo, Ruanda-Urundi, South Africa, and India. Her medical ministry brought healing to many eastern and southern Africans in the regions she served. Worthy of mention is her service among lepers. She was also at the forefront of education, training indigenous nurses that replaced missionaries and treated their own people.

## SOURCES

Bradley, W. P. W. P. Bradley to Maria Haseneder. April 25, 1957. Correspondence. Box 9974, RG 26. General Conference Archives.

———. W. P. Bradley to Marius Fridlin. April 25, 1957. Correspondence. Box 9974, RG 26. General Conference Archives.

Dunbar, E. W. E. W. Dunbar to W. Duncan Eva. April 21, 1960. Correspondence. Box 9974, RG 26. General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland.

Dye, Dorothy. "Exodus from Songa." *ARH*, December 8, 1960.

Eva, W. Duncan. W. Duncan Eva to C. W. Bozarth. September 11, 1961. Correspondence. Box 9974, RG 26. General Conference Archives, Silver Spring

Fridlin, Marius. Marius Fridlin to W. P. Bradley. August 7, 1957. Correspondence. Box 9974, RG 26. General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland.

———. Marius Fridlin to W. P. Bradley, March 20, 1957. Correspondence. Box 9974, RG 26, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland.

General Conference Committee minutes, April 25, 1957, 871. General Conference Archives. Accessed July 3, 2019. <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Minutes/GCC/GCC1957-04.pdf>

Gudmundsen, G. "From Beyond the Rivers of Ethiopia." *ARH*, April 28, 1932.

Haseneder, Maria. *A White Nurse in Africa*. Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1951.

"Here and There." *Quarterly Review*, December 1957.

"Information on Returning Missionaries." July 10, 1946. Correspondence. Box 9858, RG 21. General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland.

Letter to Milton Robinson. January 22, 1937. Correspondence. Box 9858, RG 21. General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland.

Madgwick, G. A. Sheridan. "Nokuphila Hospital in 'Golden City.'" *Missions Quarterly*, Third Quarter 1946.

Niedermaier, J. "Missionarin Maria Haseneder." *Adventecho*, November 11, 1995.

Wright, J. F. "Camp-meetings." *Southern African Division Outlook*, January 15, 1941.

## NOTES

1. J. Niedermaier, "Missionarin Maria Haseneder," *Adventecho*, November 11, 1995, 24.?

2. Maria Haseneder, *A White Nurse in Africa* (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1951), 1.?

3. [Ibid., 26.?](#)
4. [Ibid., 38.?](#)
5. [Ibid., 34.?](#)
6. [Ibid., 37.?](#)
7. [Ibid., 71.?](#)
8. G. Gudmundsen, "From Beyond the Rivers of Ethiopia," *ARH*, April 28, 1932, 395.?
9. Marius Fridlin to W. P. Bradley, March 20, 1957, Correspondence, Box 9974, RG 26, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland.?
10. She explained, "If Ethiopia was not a suitable climate, there were thousands of more suitable places where the need was great. How gladly I would impress the hearts of the young people in Europe with the privilege of being permitted to labor for these people. There are still many gaps to be filled and exceedingly much to do before the gospel which saves is brought to all mankind" (Haseneder, 74).?
11. [Ibid.?](#)
12. As a result, Haseneder was ill for some time. See Letter to Milton Robinson, January 22, 1937, Correspondence, Box 9858, RG 21, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland.?
13. [Haseneder, 74.?](#)
14. J. F. Wright, "Camp-meetings," *Southern African Division Outlook*, January 15, 1941, 2.?
15. [The baby's father brought him to the hospital for the missionary to take care of and then disappeared.?](#)
16. G. A. Sheridan Madgwick, "Nokuphila Hospital in 'Golden City,'" *Missions Quarterly*, Third Quarter 1946, 21.?
17. [Haseneder, 132.?](#)
18. "Information on Returning Missionaries," July 10, 1946, Correspondence, Box 9858, RG 21, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland.?
19. [Marius Fridlin to W. P. Bradley, March 20, 1957.?](#)
20. [W. P. Bradley to Maria Haseneder, April 25, 1957, Correspondence, Box 9974, RG 26, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland; General Conference Committee minutes, April 25, 1957, 871, General Conference Archives, accessed July 3, 2019, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Minutes/GCC/GCC1957-04.pdf>.?](#)
21. [See W. P. Bradley to Marius Fridlin, April 25, 1957, Correspondence, Box 9974, RG 26, General Conference Archives, Maryland. The medical report requested for every missionary did not encourage Haseneder to take the appointment. She became unsure of her health and ability to travel. Nevertheless, after some encouragement from the union workers in Congo, and having heard that she would be located in a station in the highlands with good climate, she decided to go. For instance, she received letters from the president of the Congo Union, insisting she come as soon as possible. Miss Sather, the medical secretary of the Southern African Division, also encouraged her during her trip through Switzerland. See Marius Fridlin to W. P. Bradley, August 7, 1957, Correspondence, Box 9974, RG 26, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland; "Here and There," \*Quarterly Review\*, December 1957, 16.?](#)
22. [See Dorothy Dye, "Exodus from Songa," \*ARH\*, December 8, 1960, 16–18.?](#)
23. [E. W. Dunbar to W. Duncan Eva, April 21, 1960, Correspondence, Box 9974, RG 26, General Conference Archives Silver Spring, Maryland.?](#)
24. [W. Duncan Eva to C. W. Bozarth, September 11, 1961, Correspondence, Box 9974, RG 26, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland.?](#)
25. [Niedermaier, 24.?](#)