



Inez and Ezra Leon Longway

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Longway, Ezra Leon (1895–1987) and Inez Ruth (Miles) (1899–1973); later Florence Ione (Nagel) (1910–2008)

MILTON HOOK

Milton Hook, Ed.D. (Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, the United States). Hook retired in 1997 as a minister in the Greater Sydney Conference, Australia. An Australian by birth Hook has served the Church as a teacher at the elementary, academy and college levels, a missionary in Papua New Guinea, and as a local church pastor. In retirement he is a conjoint senior lecturer at Avondale College of Higher Education. He has authored *Flames Over Battle Creek*,

Avondale: Experiment on the Dora, Desmond Ford: Reformist Theologian, Gospel Revivalist, the Seventh-day Adventist Heritage Series, and many magazine articles.
He is married to Noeleen and has two sons and three grandchildren.

Ezra Leon Longway, known to his Chinese friends as Luó Wēi (罗伟), was a pioneer missionary to Thailand for several years and later devoted his ministry to administration in the China Division, the South China Island Union Mission, and the Far Eastern Division. The period included the eventful years of the Japanese occupation of China, World War II, and the Communist takeover of mainland China.

Heritage and Education

Ezra Longway was born on September 16, 1895, in the Theresa/Oxbow region of Jefferson County, upper New York State. His parents were Henry and Delaphine (Danks) Longway. Henry was of French heritage. Their children were Leonard Edmond (b.1887), Eva Lucinda (b.1891), twins Herbert and Armina or “Minnie” (b.1893), twins Ezra Leon and Ernest Leo (b.1895), and Margarete (b.1908).¹

In the course of farming, the Longway family moved from Theresa to Watertown, Rutland and Vienna during Ezra’s childhood and teenage years. As a young man he found work as a mill hand in St Lawrence County, upper New York State, the area being renowned for its timber logging, fishing, and farming.² He attended South Lancaster Academy, 1912 through 1918, learning bookbinding and completing a ministerial course and a literary course. During his studies, in May 1913, he was baptized by Elder Herbert Hartwell.³ On completion of his studies, he married fellow student Inez Ruth Miles on May 22, 1918. Elder Henry Preiner, the Bible lecturer at South Lancaster Academy, performed the ceremony.⁴ Inez was born on March 5, 1899, at South Lancaster, Massachusetts, and received her education at South Lancaster Academy, Washington Missionary College Academy, and Lancaster Junior College.⁵

Mission Service

After their marriage Ezra and Inez were appointed to overseas mission service in the Far East, a move that became the most defining event of their lives. They departed from San Francisco on October 10, 1918, bound for Siam (now Thailand).⁶ The long journey aboard the S.S. “China” took them via Honolulu, Manilla, Hong Kong, and Shanghai and thence south by the S.S. “Lushan” to Bangkok, arriving on Christmas day 1918.⁷ Ezra served as the pioneer secretary/treasurer and Home Missions secretary of the Siam Mission.⁸ At the same time he studied the Siamese language and Shantou, a derivation of the Chinese language, with the aim to conduct public crusades in these tongues. By 1920 he was conversant enough to conduct evangelistic meetings.⁹

Eva, the first child of Ezra and Inez, was born at a Bangkok nursing home on March 20, 1919, and Myrtle arrived December 5, 1920 While Inez focused primarily on the family, Ezra assisted with colporteur ministry and sold Chinese-language literature. On one trip his cash was stolen from his open suitcase while he slept.¹⁰ Two

Chinese graduates from the Singapore Training School came to the Siamese Mission and assisted in the establishment of the Chinese church in Bangkok. He and Inez remained in Siam until the northern spring of 1922 and then transferred to China.¹¹

In China Ezra served as the publishing secretary and the Home Missions secretary of the Honan Mission with headquarters in Yancheng, selling Chinese literature on foot and collecting funds to enlarge the Yancheng Dispensary/Hospital.¹² Inez taught English and sewing classes at the Honan Intermediate School. They held these roles for two years and then transferred to the Central China Union Mission located in Hankow (now Wuhan), Hubei Province, where they did similar work until 1931. Ezra was ordained to the gospel ministry in Yancheng by Elders Harry Miller, Nathan Brewer, and Liu Djen Bang in May 1931. In 1932 he was appointed the superintendent of the West China Union Mission, a sprawling mountainous territory that included Tibet. His head office was located in Changping, Sichuan Province.¹³ Much of his time during these years was spent training and directing teams of colporteurs, some individuals pioneering new territory deep within the west and southwest of China.¹⁴ Two of his courageous workers lost their lives on a book-selling trip to the most westerly region, Xinjiang Province. (See article Jinjian, Bai and Djeng Hsiang-pu.)

In 1933 Ezra transferred to Shanghai to serve as the Home Missions secretary for the China Division. The organization of the annual Harvest Ingathering was one of his chief responsibilities. The campaign had taken place in principal cities in earlier years. Ezra expanded the campaign coverage with the help of many laity who solicited Chinese businessmen, Tibetans, Mongolian princes, Manchurian officials, and Mohammedan leaders. He was not averse to accepting donations from the British-American Tobacco Company and its staff.¹⁵

Ezra was appointed in 1937 to be secretary of the Publishing Department of the China Division. This assignment coincided with the onset of civil unrest with hostilities growing worse during World War . By 1939 the east, south, and central regions of China were badly affected and known as "the occupied zones." At one time more than 15,000 refugees were living on the campus of the Wuhan Sanitarium. Ezra was heavily engaged with providing them with food and shelter through the China Division Relief and Uplift Committee. In addition he drove truckloads of literature and hospital supplies from Shanghai through battle lines to the western and northern provinces.¹⁶

War conditions deteriorated in 1941, and the Shanghai church headquarters were abandoned. Ezra and Inez and their two teenage sons still at home, Ralph and David, together with some of the other leaders, found refuge in the Philippine Islands. Others were not so fortunate and were detained in a concentration camp at Kowloon near Hong Kong. When the Japanese forces overran the Philippine Islands, Inez and her two boys were placed in a Japanese prisoner-of-war camp in the mountains at Baguio until American forces recaptured the territory in 1944.¹⁷

Early in 1942 General Conference officers in America elected Ezra to be the provisional president of the China Division, other men being marooned on furlough in America or imprisoned in China.¹⁸ Ezra had remained in

China and drove to Burma to rescue five families who were engaged in language study. He managed to get them back to Chongqing, Sichuan Province, an area still regarded as “free China,” and from there he safely administered his territory.¹⁹ Burmese civil authorities had demanded that all vehicles be adapted to charcoal burners because of the scarcity of gasoline. These adaptations did not give enough power for transporting heavy loads through the mountains. However, the military gave Ezra an exemption for his five mission trucks, enabling maximum loads to be carried over the mountains into China.²⁰

Provincial mission activities throughout China were continued by national leaders during the war, even within the occupied zones. Ezra communicated with these men as best he could and except for the northern region known as Manchukuo some limited supplies were carried behind enemy lines. The major training school that had temporarily shifted to Hong Kong was moved yet again to Dabao near Ezra at Chongqing. The publishing house was also re-established near Ezra’s headquarters.²¹ Everything was conveniently situated away from the theater of war, but Ezra was cut off from his family for three years, and his only corridor for escape from Chongqing in the event of enemy expansion was through Muslim territory further west.

When hostilities subsided, Inez and her two boys safely returned to America after their ordeal as prisoners-of-war. Approximately twelve months later Ezra was able to leave Shanghai by plane on October 22, 1945, flying west via Casablanca, Morocco. He eventually arrived in New York two weeks later, in time to report at the Autumn Council held in Washington, D.C.²²

Ezra returned to Shanghai to convene a major China Division meeting, March 10--28, 1946. Delegates from all over the territory brought their reports of activities during the war years. He collated their reports and carried them back to the General Conference Session in Washington, D.C., June 5-15, 1946. His presentation was a mixture of good and sad tidings. He reported that some national staff had lost their lives in the bombings and at the hands of the invading forces. Church property in Changsha, Hunan Province, was destroyed. The invading army had taken over the North China Sanitarium at Kalgan. On the other hand, the Canton Sanitarium (now Guangzhou) and church buildings in Wuhan sustained no damage. Baptism statistics, 1941 through 1945, were encouraging. For example, West China Union Mission reported 655 and South China Union Mission reported 607 for the five-year period.²³

Following the war Ezra was appointed to resume his leadership of the colporteurs and their denominational book distribution, his official portfolio titled Field Missionary secretary for the China Division. He was stationed in Shanghai and at the same time served as the pastor of the English church in Shanghai. In December 1948 he was given charge of the Voice of Prophecy Bible School. Mission activities were increasingly restricted under the communist regime, and from 1949 onwards leadership once again gravitated to national men. In 1952 Ezra became actively involved in raising funds for the Tokyo Sanitarium, Japan.²⁴

In 1953 Ezra was elected to serve in the fledgling South China Island Union Mission. The territory included Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau. He began with the portfolios of Home Missions, Publishing, and Voice of

Prophecy.²⁵ The following year he was acting president²⁶ and then served as elected president, 1955 through 1963.²⁷ The island territories quickly blossomed. Ezra reported in 1955 that the baptized membership had risen to 1,563 during its four-year history. Two training schools, one in Hong Kong and another in Taiwan, were flourishing with enrollments of 180 and 160 respectively, and the new Taiwan Sanitarium was opened on March 20, 1955.²⁸ Inez accepted the position of assistant matron at the sanitarium. Ezra's time as president witnessed the first ordinations in Taiwan when on February 2, 1957, James Tsao Chun-kai, Fu Ru-chang, and Su Tong-o were welcomed into ministry.²⁹

From 1964 through 1971 Ezra served as General Field Secretary for the Far Eastern Division. His territory included Japan, Korea, Taiwan, the Philippine Islands, Indonesia, the Malay Peninsula, and Thailand. The head office was located in Singapore,³⁰ but Ezra was located in Hong Kong.³¹ At the end of World War II, statistics told of approximately 735 churches with a membership of over 33,000. By 1965 the number of churches had risen to 1,139, and the membership was approximately one hundred seventy-five thousand. Ezra was responsible for the ongoing instruction and assistance to the ministerial team of 900 individuals.³² He was also heavily involved in raising finances for the Hong Kong Sanitarium and Hospital, apparently a task he did not relish, for he spoke disdainfully of it as "grubbing money."³³

Return From Overseas Mission Service

In 1970 Inez began to develop breathing difficulties caused by the onset of pulmonary fibrosis. She and Ezra returned to America in 1971 and eventually located in California. Sadly, Inez deteriorated. She became bedridden and passed away on March 14, 1973, in the Corona Community Hospital east of Los Angeles.³⁴ She was interred in her Miles family plot in Eastwood Cemetery, Lancaster, Massachusetts.³⁵ Inez had given 54 years of her life to mission service.

Eight months after his bereavement Ezra married Florence "Flossie" Ione (Nagel) Winton on November 11, 1973.³⁶ She was the daughter of well-known China missionaries, Sherman Albertus and Mary Hanson Nagel, who pioneered the Adventist mission in the Hakka region from Waichow (Huizhou), where they spent some 14 years.³⁷ As a result, Florence learned Chinese as a child and was fluent in both Cantonese and Hakka. Ezra and Florence returned to Hong Kong in March 1974, Ezra as an SOS worker continuing with his fund-raising activities for the hospital in Taiwan and the two hospitals in Hong Kong, while Florence was in charge of the medical laboratory at the Hong Kong Adventist Hospital.³⁸ In 1975, Ezra Longway was honored at the Vienna General Conference Session as the longest serving worker in continuous service (68 years) in the denomination at that time.³⁹

Finally, for Ezra's health reasons, the Longways had to return to the United States. They remained very active during their late retirement years. Ezra and Florence traveled extensively in the US for several years raising funds, \$5 million USD by themselves (in addition to the \$15 million earlier that he raised with Harry Miller and

Melvin Milne) for the hospitals in Hong Kong. It was also during this time that he did a lot of translating. Ezra passed away on September 24, 1987, aged ninety-two. He was laid to rest in the Saint Helena Cemetery.⁴⁰ His five children, Eva, Myrtle, Delbert, Ralph, and David survived him.⁴¹

Ezra's command of the Chinese language enabled him to translate twenty-six of Ellen White's books during his lifetime.⁴² He also published some of his experiences in China under the title *Dangerous Opportunities* (1974).⁴³

After Ezra's death, Florence married Kenneth Fisher on February 24, 1990. He passed away nine years later, and Florence married for the fourth time. At eighty-nine years of age, she married Rolland Howlett. She passed away on July 22, 2008, and was laid to rest alongside Ezra in Saint Helena Cemetery.⁴⁴

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