



Raymond Memorial Higher Secondary School

Photo courtesy of Gordon Christo.

# Raymond Memorial Higher Secondary School

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Located in North Bengal, India, on a strip of land between Bhutan, Nepal and Bangladesh, Raymond Memorial Higher Secondary School is the premier boarding higher secondary institution serving the Northern Union of Seventh-day Adventists.

## Origins

In July 1897, Adventist missionaries opened the “Home for Destitute Indian Children,” and operated it with a school, at 155 Bow Bazaar Street, Calcutta, next door to where they lived and worked.<sup>1</sup> In 1898 this orphanage and school was transferred to rented quarters near the railway station of Karmatar, Bihar, partly in response to the Santal famine of 1895, which had orphaned several children. With the plan of teaching farming and other trades, the institution was renamed “Orphanage Industrial School.” Unfortunately, towards the end of 1899 its director, F.W. Brown, died of smallpox.<sup>2</sup> The school closed temporarily, though an enrollment of 15 (probably day students) in 1901 was still reported.<sup>3</sup>

In 1902 boarding facilities for English students were restored, and Thekla Black and Anna Knight were assigned to “open the school.”<sup>4</sup> In 1905, a small “Training School” was added, which the missionaries hoped would provide indigenous workers for the church organization. The Watchman Press moved from Calcutta to Karmatar so that older students could provide labor while learning the printing trade.<sup>5</sup>

In 1911, several hectares of land, about a mile from the station, were purchased for the school, and a couple of bungalows were added.<sup>6</sup> From 1913 two institutions operated on these premises: a Middle English School and a Santali Girls’ School. The girls’ school was usually cared for by the wife of the missionary who headed the English school.

In 1919 immense changes came to the Adventist church in India. The territory was organized into the Southern Asia Division. The Northeast area was organized into a union mission and Karmatar became the headquarters of the new Santal Mission. The two schools in Karmatar were repurposed and renamed Santali Boys’ School, and Santali Girls’ School. The boys’ school and the girls’ school operated on the two halves of the campus. The church building had two wings to accommodate the two student groups. Soon Hindi was added to the medium of instruction. Meanwhile, the Ranchi School, which had started in 1920, had grown into the Northeast India Union Training School around 1923, and in 1927 the Santali-Hindi Boys’ School merged with the Ranchi School.<sup>7</sup> The Santali-Hindi Girls’ School continued in Karmatar until 1932, though 11 village schools are reported in the *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbooks* of this period.

As a result of the economic depression in 1932 the Northeast Union was downgraded to mission (section) status and the local missions were reduced to stations. The Karmatar Station housed the Hindi Elementary School for boys. The Hindi-Santali Girls’ school moved from Karmatar to the Babumahal Station, and the Northeast India Union Training School in Ranchi was renamed the Northeast India Mission Training School.<sup>8</sup>

The next big change came in 1937, when the South India Training School was renamed Spicer College, and was designated a division institution by the Division Council, which also instructed that no other school in the division should offer instruction beyond the tenth standard.<sup>9</sup> The Northeast Union Training School in Ranchi complied with the Council action and closed. The 1937 Division Council also restored the Northeast to Union Mission status, and the mission stations of Ranchi, Khunti, Babumahal, Karmatar, and Orissa stations were combined into the “Behar Mission.”<sup>10</sup> The high schools of Ranchi, Babumahal, and Karmatar were merged and returned to Karmatar, and renamed Behar SDA Mission High School.<sup>11</sup> Around 1941 the school was changed to Karmatar Secondary Boarding School. By 1945 it acquired the name Robinson Memorial School, honoring the first India Mission superintendent, D. A. Robinson, who had succumbed to smallpox in Karmatar a week after F. W. Brown died. The *SDA Yearbook* entry for the first listing of Robinson Memorial School in 1946 has 1898 as the date of establishment, the date the orphanage moved from Calcutta to Karmatar. The connection of the school in Karmatar and the training school that operated in Ranchi is underlined in this 1945 quote from Division Education Director Pohlman written in 1945:

The Karmatar school has at times served the entire Northeast Union as a senior high school, although at another period the school was at Ranchi not far distant. Now the Robinson Memorial High School at Karmatar (named to commemorate the service of Elder D. A. Robinson, whose grave is near the school) draws students mainly from the Hindi-speaking area of Bihar and Orissa.<sup>12</sup>

## Fulfillment of a Dream

The relocation from Karmatar to Falakata came through the combined interests of Maurice G. Champion and Christian J. Jenson. Champion was principal of the Robinson Memorial High School at Karmatar, an always-cheerful wiry and medium built man, who dreamed of a training school with a large farm, where students could earn their school fees through work and the crops would provide finances for the school and help it attain self-reliance.<sup>13</sup> Jenson, at that time president of the Northeast Union, had discovered the property, a large tract of jungle land, near the small village of Falakata, about 130 km from Siliguri, a business hub for the Northeastern states. The nearest railway station at that time was Dalgaon, about 18 miles from Falakata. Jenson rode his bicycle on a narrow path through thick bushes and tall elephant grass. Huge silk cotton trees were loaded with beehives and a stream flowed with crystal clear water. Pastor Jenson prayed that this property was for sale and sought out the owner of the land, Banshidhar Dubey, a wealthy cloth merchant. Dubey agreed to sell the property, measuring 528.03 acres.

In September 1948 the Northeast Union requested Rs 65,000 to purchase this property.<sup>14</sup> In December the union reiterated the request, and asked the Division Committee to take action.<sup>15</sup> The Division sent a team of three—Borrowdale, Meleen, and Champion, to inspect the land.<sup>16</sup> The Division committee apparently received a report yet failed to record approval. This oversight was acknowledged, and rectified in an action on June 7 to

place on record approval for the purchase of the property,<sup>17</sup> just before the committee approved the site plan.<sup>18</sup> Some type of approval had likely been communicated, because on February 17 the Northeast Union had taken several actions: (1) to send Jenson and Champion to finalize the purchase, (2) to arrange for transportation to Falakata, (3) to purchase a tractor and farm equipment for Falakata.<sup>19</sup>

By this time it is clear that the Southern Asia Division was providing the finances requested by the union from the Raymond Trust Fund, donated by Catherine Raymond, as on February 17, 1949, the union took an action to request a “further Rs 15,000, besides the Rs 65,000 from the Raymond Trust Fund,”<sup>20</sup> and followed it with an action proposing to name the school Raymond Memorial Training School.<sup>21</sup>

Mrs. Raymond was born Catherine M. Gregory in 1868. She had started keeping the Sabbath in Calcutta in 1903,<sup>22</sup> and in 1915 married F. O. Raymond, a colporteur from England. They had no children. Her husband passed away in 1926 while they were in Watford, England.<sup>23</sup> Before her marriage Catherine had assisted J.M. Comer in the church at Calcutta and after her marriage, she supported the colporteur ministry with her husband in Lahore, Rangoon, Shillong, Colombo, Madras, and Ranchi. Both husband and wife were greatly instrumental in the establishment of the first church in Ceylon (present-day Sri Lanka).<sup>24</sup> After her husband’s death she returned to India.<sup>25</sup> A generous person, she contributed to the OWPH extension fund,<sup>26</sup> towards the education expenses of countless students at Vincent Hill School and for the publishing of tracts. In her retirement years she spent summers in Kalimpong and wished to do something for the work in North Bengal. She died in Kalimpong in 1946, less than a hundred miles away from Falakata.<sup>27</sup>

## The Relocation to Falakata

Champion and his wife Dorothy set out to move the staff and student body, which consisted of six tribal girls and 25 tribal boys, from Karmatar to Falakata, a place described by Champion as “a land of milk and honey.”

Champion assembled a convoy of U.S. army staff cars and trailers loaded with tents and other items donated by American troops who left India at the close of World War II.<sup>28</sup> He had the company of C.J. Jenson, Union Secretary-Treasurer Borrowdale and his wife, and Dr. Shearer from the Mission Hospital at Ranchi, who brought his recently acquired ambulance.<sup>29</sup> They packed a generator, and shipped the printing press with boxes of heavy lead type, steel frames and rollers.<sup>30</sup> The nearly 600-mile journey from Karmatar to Falakata began on March 27, and took a week, as they had to wait two days at Bhagalpur for their turn to cross the Ganges by ferry. Despite difficult roads the journey went well, except that just a few hours before reaching their destination a bullock collided with Pastor Champion’s car, knocking the vehicle over. The convoy came to a halt and the students and staff rushed to help Champion exit through the window of the car. They also managed to help his wife out, but one boy, Prabhudas Kindo, was pinned under the heavily-loaded car and badly injured. In spite of the doctor’s efforts, the boy died in half an hour. The body was taken to a nearby village, Chakwakheti, and laid to rest.<sup>31</sup> Since Champion was himself injured, Jenson was asked by the union to stay on for a while to help with settling

down.<sup>32</sup>

The convoy reached Falakata on April 4, 1949.<sup>33</sup> Though oral reports mention that the girls were housed in a nearby dak bungalow (government rest house) the first night, Champion reports three army surplus tents—one for girls, one for boys, and the other for Pastor & Mrs. Champion and three guests. However, rain came through the roof of the tent, and later strong winds brought down portions of their shelter. The group spent several nights in soaking wet beds.<sup>34</sup> The opening date for classes had been announced for July 14, and within those three months the boys constructed twenty thatch buildings<sup>35</sup> while the girls cooked the rice, lentils, and vegetables. In November the union sanctioned the purchase of asbestos cement sheets for the buildings.<sup>36</sup> The area, in those days, was infested with wild boars, leopards, elephants, rhinos, deadly poisonous snakes, foxes, and various poisonous insects and leeches. But this didn't dim the enthusiasm of this band of pioneers who lived in this wilderness, paving the way for the education of thousands of boys and girls who would later walk these paths that were now being cleared by axe and sickle.

There had been many negative comments about the property, that there were no earthworms, the place was full of snakes, the grass was poisonous, the place was unhealthful, and floods would wash them all away. But all of the negativity was disproved. Six weeks after the school opened, Champion reported that the buffaloes thrived on the local grass, and except for the occasional sickness all were in good health. That school year they had 85 students. The river was "clear as crystal," and they had a beautiful view of hills and snows.<sup>37</sup>

Division builder O. L. Hoover was summoned to assist with planning the layout of the school plant.<sup>38</sup> Soon after the group camped on the land, it was duly registered in the name of Indian Financial Association on April 22, 1949.

Eighty acres of the vast property was used for pisciculture. Within two years' time enough ground was cleared and, in addition to jute, which was planted first, the students sowed mustard, sunflower, and sorgujja for extraction of oil; paddy, maize, and barley for food, and a variety of seasonal vegetables. They also planted a variety of fruit trees. Students flocked from the neighboring countries of Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, and Tibet. The institution lived up to its name. Students received training in farming, carpentry, printing, poultry, and auto maintenance. The institution taught dignity of labor along with the importance of classroom studies. Of the 500 acres of land, 300 were under cultivation within a year.<sup>39</sup>

In recognition of the contribution of Pastor Champion and his wife Dorothy, the boys' dormitory is named Champion Boys' Hostel, and the girls' dormitory is named Dorothy Girls' Hostel. Boys proudly called themselves Champion boys and the girls are Dorothians. Union president O. A. Skau visited the school four months later and witnessed the students reciting from the Bible. He reflected, "What better means can we use for such a task than our schools, where prospective workers can be trained for active service for the Lord?"<sup>40</sup>

## Later Developments

In 1951 the Northeast Union held its youth congress on the Falakata campus. This was the largest gathering of youth in the entire division. Youth came from Bihar, Orissa, East Pakistan, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and different areas of Bihar and Bengal. A Nepali and a Naga came. Champion, by this time youth director for the union, and R. S. Lowry, youth director for the Southern Asia Division, were the chief organizers. I. D. Higgins, Spicer College president, was a main resource person. Attendees stayed in newly constructed and temporary shelters.<sup>41</sup>

Significant progress was made in the facilities under building engineer E. R. Streeter in 1952. Champion's bungalow was remodeled and turned into the girls' hostel. All the staff quarters and classrooms were roofed with metal sheets, and work on a new administration building began.<sup>42</sup>

In 1958 the union took an action to upgrade the school to a multi-purpose high school and called Donesky to develop the vocational training unit.<sup>43</sup> In 1960 students the West Bengal Department of Education permitted students to sit for Higher School Secondary Certificate Examinations in Humanities and Agriculture.<sup>44</sup> In 1961 the campus was connected to the Falakata power supply for electrification of the campus.<sup>45</sup>

In 1961-62 about 89 acres of land was leased to North Frontier Railway to lay tracks and construct a railway station. This made it more convenient for students but the station and railway line divided school property into two. At about the same time 17 acres of land that projected into the campus were purchased.<sup>46</sup>

In 1962 a world missions offering enabled the construction of a girls' dormitory. In 1970 the school was accredited to the Division Education Examination so students could write the DSLC exam. Since Bengal was not following the higher secondary system, the school changed to the matriculation level examination in 1972.<sup>47</sup>

In 1975-76 part of the school property was attached to the government under the West Bengal Land Reforms Act. On February 25, 1976, Revenue Office, Jalpaiguri issued an order purportedly for vesting 323.33 acres of the school's land. Since this kind of an institution was not to own more than 25 acres, only 24.33 acres was to be retained by the school. However, legal procedures have been initiated to retain the total registered property. At this time 379 acres still remain under the control of the school by the virtue of being the buyer of the property in 1949.

In 1981 Pastor S. D. Kujur got temporary affiliation to the Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations, New Delhi. In 1985 permanent affiliation was granted and the first batch appeared for the class ten ICSE examination. At this time the school was renamed Raymond Memorial High School. In 1992 the school was upgraded to the plus-two level under Principal Amalendu Bairagee, and the school was renamed Raymond Memorial Higher Secondary School, Falakata.

Raymond Memorial Higher Secondary School has played a pivotal role in educating and training thousands of students from all India and neighboring countries who have proved to be role models for their communities. The school's motto is: *Moralis, Mentalis, and Corporalis*, keeping God first in its aim and delegating duties. In the 2019-2020 academic year enrollment was around 1400 students. The staff has 65 dedicated teachers. About 400



students are Seventh-day Adventists. There are 250 girls and 265 boys in the hostels. Students come from nearby Nepal, Bhutan, and Bangladesh, and also from the northeastern states of India.

There is much potential for further growth. Since there is no English medium senior college nearby there is a call to upgrade to college level. There is also a shortage of good hospitals in the area and developing one to meet that need may enable the church to hold on to its extensive property. Providing vocational courses is another need and development in this area will fulfill the original objective of the Training School.

## Principals

Orphanage Industrial/Training School, Karmatar: F. W. Brown (1898-1899); Quantock (1900-1901); Thekla Black (1902-1903); Anna Knight (1903-1906); J. C. Little (1907-1909); Miss Burroway (1910-1912).

Middle English School/Santali School, Karmatar: L. G. Mookerjee (1913-1914), R. H. Leech (1915-1917); F. W. Smith (1918); C. C. Kellar (1919-1920); H. E. McWhinny (1921); R. J. Borrowdale (1922-1924).

Northeast Union Training School, Ranchi: J. E. Saunders (1924-1925); A. G. Youngberg (1926-1927); L. G. Mookerjee (1928-1931); C. A. Larsen (1932-1933); H. H. Mattison (1934-1936); C. A. Larsen (1937).

Bihar Mission High School, Karmatar/Robinson Memorial High School: C. A. Larsen (1937-1942); S. K. Besra (1943-1945); R. J. Borrowdale (1946); R. N. Dass (1947-1948); M. G. Champion (1949).

Raymond Memorial Training School/Higher Secondary School, Falakata: Maurice G. Champion (1949-1952); Leonard N. Hare (1952-1955); Edward A. Streeter (1956- April 1961); Harold D. Erickson (1961- March 1965); David H. Skau (1965-1967); A. W. Matheson (1967-1971); David S. Poddar (1971-1974); Cecil S. Marandi May (1974-1976); Benjamin Luikham (1977-1978); Michael G. Kisku (1978-1981); Sunderdas D. Kujur (1981-1985); Masih Charan John (1985-1988); Christopher J. David (1988-1990); Amalendu Bairagi (1990-1993); P. K. Gayen (1993-1996); John M. Bara (1996- 1999); Vinod Thamby (1999-2005); Ramesh Fendall January (2006-2016); Benoy Tirkey (2016-2018); Ramesh Fendall (July 2018- ).

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2. See W. A. Spicer, "From India," *ARH*, February 13, 1900, 12, and M.E. Olsen, 520, 521.
3. W. A. Spicer, "The Work in India," *General Conference Bulletin*, April 23, 1901, 433, 444.
4. Minutes of the (India Mission) Advisory Committee of Seventh-day Adventists, February 2, 1902.
5. "Karmatar," *Eastern Tidings*, May 25, 1905, 13.

6. "Karmatar Appropriation," Minutes of the India Union Committee, January 6, 1911.
7. "Realignment of Schools," Minutes of the Northeast India Union Executive Committee, February 1, 1927 moved the Bengali boys from Ranchi to Hoogly; Moved the Bengali girls from Hoogly to Gopalgunj, and then moved the boys from the Karmatar school to Ranchi.
8. *SDA Yearbooks* for 1933-1936.
9. Minutes of the Biennial Council of the Southern Asia Division, January 5, 1937, # 5641, p. 1425.
10. *Ibid.*, January 1, 1937, # 5605, 1397, 1398.
11. Minutes of the Northeast India Union Committee, January 27-30, 1937, #1961.
12. Edward W. Pohlman, "First the Blade, Then the Ear," *Eastern Tidings*, Golden Jubilee Supplement, September 15, 1945, 9. See also Champion, *ARH*, December 1, 1949, 15.
13. Reginald Shires, *The Leopard's Call*, (Authorhouse, 2005, 23).
14. Minutes of the Northeast India Union Executive Committee, September 14, 1948 #4332, 254.
15. Minutes of the Northeast India Union Executive Committee, December 20, 1948 #4369, 261.
16. "Falakatta Land Purchase," Minutes of the Executive Committee of the Southern Asia Division, January 12, 1949, #11058, 2990. The team voted was Borrowdale, Meleen and Champion.
17. "Falakata Property Purchase," Minutes of the Division Executive Committee, June 7, 1949, # 11257, 3034.
18. "Raymond Memorial High School Site and Teachers Quarters Plan," Minutes of the Division Executive Committee, June 7, 1949, # 11258, 3034.
19. Minutes of the Northeast Union Executive Committee, February 17, 1949, # 4433, p 271; # 4427, 272; #4441, 272.
20. "Falakata Land and Equipment," Minutes of the Northeast Union Executive Committee, February 17, 1949, #4434, 271.
21. "Name of the Union High School," Minutes of the Northeast Union Executive Committee, February 17, 1949, #4435, 272.
22. H. M. Peak, "Raymond," (Obituary of Katherine Raymond), *Eastern Tidings*, November 1, 1946, 8.
23. "News Notes," obituary of F. O. Raymond, *Eastern Tidings*, June 15, 1926, 5.
24. On the occasion of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary the earliest members recalled her contribution. See Juanita Jessen, "Personal Reminiscences," *Eastern Tidings*, July 1, 1947, 1; and D. C. Claussen, "A Word from the First Convert in Ceylon, *Eastern Tidings*, July 1, 1947, 2.

25. "Division Notes, *Eastern Tidings*, December 1, 1926, 8.
26. Catherine Raymond, "Successful the Fifth Time," *Eastern Tidings*, April 1, 1923, 8.
27. Peak, 8.
28. See "Falakata Transportation," Minutes of the Northeast Union Executive Committee, February 17, 1949, #4427, 270.
29. M. G. Champion, "North Bengal Training School," *ARH*, December 1, 1949, 15. See Reginald N Shires, "Return to Falakata," *ARH*, Mar 21, 1974, 15.
30. M. G. Champion, "North Bengal Training School," *ARH*, December 1, 1949, 15.
31. "Falakata Road Accident," Minutes of the Northeast Union Executive Committee, November 30, 1949, # 4612, 307, reimbursed the school for the funeral expenses from the Union Emergency Fund.
32. "C. J. Jenson at Falakata," Minutes of a Minority Meeting of the Northeast Union Executive Committee, April 6, 1949, # 4461, p. 278.
33. Champion, "North Bengal Training School," *ARH*, December 1, 1949, 15, recalls that they closed the school at Karmatar at the end of March and left two days later. O. A. Skau, "Here and There in the Northeast," *Eastern Tidings*, September 15, 1949, 2, recalls the arrival in Falakata as on April 4, 1949.
34. Champion, "North Bengal Training School," *ARH*, December 1, 1949, 15.
35. The plan was to have houses with wooden posts, bamboo matting walls, and galvanized iron roofs if available. See Minutes of the Northeast Union Executive Committee, April 6, 1949, # 4460, 278.
36. Minutes of the Northeast Union Executive Committee, November 1, 1949, # 4593, 302.
37. M. S. Champion, "Raymond Memorial Training School, Falakata," *Eastern Tidings*, October 15, 1949, 7, 8.
38. "O L Hoover to Falakata," Minutes of the Southern Asia Division Executive Committee, June 7, 1949, # 11260, 3035. See also Champion, "North Bengal Training School," 3.
39. M. Amirtham, "Raymond Memorial Training School," *Eastern Tidings*, September 15, 1950, 3-4.
40. O. A. Skau, "Here and There in the Northeast," *Eastern Tidings*, September 9, 1949, 3.
41. "Northeast Union Youth Congress," *Eastern Tidings*, January 1, 1952, 4-8.

42. F. E. Spiess, "Northeast News Notes," *Eastern Tidings*, September 1, 1952, p 14.

43. See Minutes of the Northeast Union Executive Committee, July 17, 1958; and also, September 18, 1959, #59-319, p 104.

44. Minutes of the Northeast Union Executive Committee, January 26, 1960, #60-69, 27-28, authorized the institution to negotiate with the government board.

45. Minutes of the Northeast Union Executive Committee, March 29, 1961, #61-159, 62.

46. Minutes of the Northeast Union Executive Committee, January 21, 1962, 62-8, 81.

47. Minutes of the Northeast Union Executive Committee, December 7, 1973, 73-356, 86.

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