

Gauterau, Elizabeth (1838–1894)

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Elizabeth Gauteau.

Photo courtesy of Honduras Union Mission.

Elizabeth Elwin was a missionary to Central America.

Early Years

Elizabeth Elwin was born February 3, 1838, on Roatan, Bay Islands, Honduras.¹ Her parents were Uwins Elwin (1811-1873) and Mary Ann (1819-1888).² She was the eldest of 12 children: Elizabeth, Hellen, Robert, Emma, Henry, John, Priscilla, Mary Ann, Uwins, Thomas, Angelo, and one whose name is not known. Her father was an Englishman located on the island of Roatan and he became the first magistrate in the days of the English colony. Elizabeth was sent by her father to study in Belize, with the understanding that upon her return home she would be the teacher for her siblings.³ But Elizabeth had other plans, and on her return she fell in love with British captain Charles Moses Willats, whom she married on March 5, 1860.⁴

After a brief honeymoon, her new husband returned to his former work as a sea wolf. Shortly after his departure, Elizabeth realized she was pregnant. When her husband returned home, Elizabeth was already holding her daughter, which her father called Alice. A short time later two more children joined the Willats

family: Uwin and Charles. As Mr. Willats' job kept him away from home, Elizabeth was faced with the difficulty of raising her children alone.⁵

Tragedy

In 1864⁶ little Charlie became seriously ill. Elizabeth took care of him all night, but before dawn he died. His father was somewhere between England and the Bay Islands. She had no way of letting her husband know that their son had died. She longed for her husband to be there to comfort her in pain. At dawn of that same day, Elizabeth could see a ship was approaching the Island. It was her husband's ship. But something had happened, since the ship was carrying the flag at half-mast; someone had died. Elizabeth received the news that the deceased was her husband. The next day, father and son were buried together.⁷

New Marriage

A French carpenter, Gauterau, who had arrived on the boat fell in love with Elizabeth and proposed to her. In 1865 Elizabeth married Frank Thomas Gauterau. In 1867 they left for New York City, and in the early 1870s they moved to *San Francisco, California*.⁸

Conversion

While residing in San Francisco, a neighbor of the Gauterau's, Mrs. Able, invited Elizabeth to an Adventist camp meeting. There she accepted Christ and became a Seventh-day Adventist.⁹ For several years Elizabeth sent magazines and tracts to her family in Belize and Roatan.

Journey

After 19 years of absence, on December 9, 1885,¹⁰ Elizabeth undertook the long journey to Belize and the Bay Islands, where she shared her new faith with friends and family.¹¹ She arrived in Roatan on Friday, February 26, 1886.¹² She carried some trunks with books, *Signs of the Times* magazines, and other gift materials on that mission trip. On Sabbath, February 27, 1886, Elizabeth described in her diary: We all got up early and thanks to my Heavenly Father, I found everyone keeping the Sabbath, how my heart was filled with love and joy! Thanks to the Almighty God for all His blessings and for the light He has shown on my dear mother, brother, and sisters who were trying to do His precious will.¹³ In a short while she had managed to share her faith with a dozen

islanders.¹⁴ Elizabeth visited all the villages of Roatan Island, sharing her faith and giving away magazines. In May 1886 she visited Utila which is one of the three islands that form the archipelago along with Roatan and Guanaja.¹⁵ She had little success, since she got sick during that tour. Elizabeth returned to Roatan on June 11 of that same year.

Legacy

Upon her return to San Francisco in August 1886, she tried to convince the church authorities of the urgency of sending missionaries to Honduras. In January 1887, Pastor T. H. Gibbs was commissioned to make an exploratory visit to the Bay Islands, distributing more Adventist literature.¹⁶ On that same trip, Gibbs led a series of meetings at the home of Elizabeth's relatives and there he preached his first Adventist sermon in Honduras, based on Daniel 2. Archippus W. Green, who was the wise man of the village, mentioned Gibbs as someone who started the work in Ruatan, Bay Islands.¹⁷ After his conversion, Green became a faithful layman and contributed mightily to the spread of the gospel through the distribution of literature and magazines.¹⁸

Elizabeth faithfully attended the San Francisco Central Church and there she shared her experience of the work she began in Central America. This was the same church where the parents of a young man named Frank Hutchins attended and were close friends with Elizabeth. They would often share Elizabeth's experiences with their son. In 1891, Frank Hutchins would receive an invitation from the General Conference to work in Honduras.¹⁹

Death

Elizabeth was called to rest on March 9, 1894, at the age of 56. She died in San Francisco, California, in the hope of Jesus' soon return. Her work began the spread of the Adventist message in Central America, Panama, Belize, and the island of San Andres in Colombia.

SOURCES

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1. "Elizabeth Elwin (1838-1894) | Persona | Arbol Familiar | FamilySearch," accessed May 29, 2019, <https://www.familysearch.org/tree/person/details/L7XN-YRH>.
2. *Ibíd.*
3. Jewell Parrilla, *El Rey de la tormenta* (Asociacion Publicadora Interamericana, Santa Fe de Bogota, Colombia, 1998), 31.
4. "Elizabeth Elwin (1838-1894) | Persona | Arbol Familiar | FamilySearch," accessed May 29, 2019, <https://www.familysearch.org/tree/person/details/L7XN-YRH>.
5. Parrilla, 32.
6. "Bay Islands Voice Magazine » Blog Archive » The People That Made Bay Islands," accessed May 29, 2019, <http://www.bayislandsvoice.com/the-people-that-made-bay-islands-200605013667>.
7. Parrilla, 32-33.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*
10. Elizabeth Elwin Willats Gauterau's personal diary (December 9, 1885 - August 6, 1886), transcribed from the original diary by Milton E. Davis (1972), 1, an electronic copy of the diary in the author's private collection.
11. M. Ellsworth Olsen, *A History of the Origin and Progress of Seventh-Day Adventists*, second edition, (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1926), 538.
12. Davis, 12.

13. Ibid., 13.

14. Parrilla, 33.

15. "Roatan," in *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*, May 28, 2019, <https://es.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Roat%C3%A1n&oldid=116278599>.

16. Olsen, 538.

17. Archippus W. Green, "Ruatan Bay Islands," *ARH*, February 6, 1908, 13.

18. Parrilla, 37.

19. Ibid., 21.

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