



Ishaka Adventist Hospital  
Photo courtesy of Matte Daniel.

# Ishaka Adventist Hospital

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## KAMIZA JOHN BYAKI

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The initiative to penetrate Uganda with the Adventist message was ignited in a South African Union Conference Council meeting held in Cape Town, South Africa, on March 19-26, 1903. In that meeting, it was decided that it was wiser to plant a few mission stations which were well equipped than to have numerous small stations. The council recommended consolidating the existing Nyassaland Station, and the one planted by the Germans in east Africa, and to plant four others in Abyssinia, Upper Nile, Madagascar, and one more north of the Zambezi!

In executing the council resolutions, Brother Booth, a missionary who was working at the Nyassaland Mission Station, was tasked with making a survey visit to Uganda. It is said that he quickly made a trip to east Africa and Uganda in particular. He met with the authorities in Uganda who offered him not only a warm welcome but also encouragement to establish an Adventist mission station on the industrial plan. "A splendid site for mission station and schools in Uganda, with buildings already erected, was offered on favorable terms."<sup>2</sup> He made a trip back to Cape Town to report this good news, and he immediately left for England on a mission to raise money for the new mission venture.

The last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was characterized by religious and political rivalry in the Buganda Kingdom among the three non-African religions, culminating in the martyrdom of Anglican Bishop Hannington on the order of Kabaka Mwanga, the King of Buganda in 1885, and engulfing the martyrdom of several adherents of the Anglican, Catholic, and Muslim faiths in 1886. The conflict between politics and the three new religions and the rivalry among them soon spread throughout the Uganda protectorate—the colonial state. By the time the Adventist Church was ready with resources to establish a mission, the colonial authorities thought it unwise to add another religious organization to the list of those striving against one another. It was not until 1927 that Nchwanga was established in the western part of Uganda to become the first home of the Adventist mission in Uganda<sup>3</sup> Although the focus of the work shifted to relocate the mission to Kampala, the pivotal center of the country, mission work in western Uganda

continued to prosper. To further accelerate mission engagement in the region, church leaders sought to seize the available opportunities for a hospital in each of the three countries of east Africa<sup>4</sup> and directed the one in Uganda to a location in the west.

## Founding of the Institution (1947-1950)

In 1947 the East African Union president, Elder H. M. Sparrow, and his wife paid a working visit to the Uganda Mission Field. The Uganda Mission Field president, Elder Robert J. Wieland, and the secretary-treasurer, William O. England, together with his wife, had arranged an extended trip to the interior of western Uganda to acquaint themselves with the region for better planning of the general mission work and with particular inclination to the medical mission. Accompanied by Mrs. England and Miss Y. Staples on this trip, the officers led their guests to the region.<sup>5</sup>

The Rwenzori Mission Station was already taking shape at Mitandi near Fort-Portal under the leadership of M. E. Lind, and the news concerning the offer of land on Kyesero Hill by the king of Ankole<sup>6</sup> had excited the leaders in the field. This was the time to inspect the hill and to visualize how the dream for a hospital in the Uganda Mission Field was to be realized. The Uganda Mission Field and the East African Union worked in tandem to facilitate and oversee the construction. Dr. Donald L. Stalson had been appointed in 1947 to superintend the process of construction. This commenced in 1948 when Wieland brought Samson Kanjaru from Kenya, a skilled brick molder who utilized the clay soil abundantly available on Kyesero Hill. By 1950 the structures were ready and the hospital began operation with Stalson as the medical director.

## Early Sources of Funding

The construction work on the hospital was funded by the General Conference through the Trans-Africa Division<sup>7</sup> The Indian community of Ankole, envisioning the usefulness of the facility under construction, resolved to designate some funds from their businesses toward the construction of an Indian ward.<sup>8</sup> To facilitate the opening of the hospital, a team of doctors in California secured an x-ray machine.<sup>9</sup>

## Founding Board of Trustees and Healthcare Workers

The Ishaka Adventist Hospital—then known as Ankole Mission Hospital—was founded by the Uganda Mission Field under the leadership of Robert J. Wieland as the president and William O. England as the secretary. Other members of the executive committee were: W. A. Clerke, G. J. E. Coetzee, R. L. Garber, Simioni Golola, Samsoni Kalette, M. E. Lind, Eriasafu Mwanje, and Donald L. Stalson.<sup>10</sup> M. E. Lind was the director of the Rwenzori Mission Station which had been established in 1946 to administer the work in western Uganda. Uganda Mission Field was supervised by the East African Union presided over by H. M. Sparrow who was stationed at Nairobi, Kenya.<sup>11</sup> Pioneering health workers included Dr. Ronald L. Stalson, Dr. Mildred Stalson, Elsa M. Brandt, and Lona J. Rasmussen.

## Hospital Name Changes

The hospital opened under the name of Ankole Mission Hospital in 1950 and continued under that name until 1961. In 1962 the word “mission” was struck from the name, rendering it Ankole Hospital until 1967. From 1968 to 1988 it was known as Ishaka Hospital. In 1989 the name was changed to Ishaka Adventist Hospital, a name still in use today (2019).<sup>12</sup>

## Services Offered by the Hospital

Ishaka Adventist Hospital offers both in-patient and out-patient medical services which include: general healthcare and specialized care in the pediatric, surgical, maternity, dental, imaging, laboratory, HIV, and lifestyle departments. The hospital endeavors to guide the community and the clients in ways that alter the course of their lives for increased quality and abundant life here and in the hereafter. The hospital initially opened with a capacity of 40 beds in 1950, and by 1955 the capacity had increased to 60.<sup>13</sup> Currently the hospital has 120 beds.

## Awards and Honors

The hospital has received awards from the government of Uganda and other health coordinating bodies, as follows!<sup>4</sup>

1. In 2002 a certificate of appreciation was received from the Health Partners-USAID. In 2013 a certificate of recognition for excellent work was given by the Uganda Protestant Medical Bureau (UPMB), and a certificate of service was received from the Lions Club of Bushenyi.
2. In 2014 received from Lions Club a Certificate of Appreciation.

3. In 2015 received from Rotary Club of Bushenyi a Certificate of Recognition for an active role and positive contributions toward cancer awareness seminars.
4. In 2017 received from USAID a Certificate of Recognition for the active role IAH played in a Maternal and Child Survival program and for the routine immunization program. Bushenyi District HIV and AIDS Networks Forum gave a certificate of excellent performance in HIV and AIDS care and prevention.
5. In 2019 received from the UPMB a certificate of distinguished healthcare services and for timely and accurate submission of UPMB annual hospital reports. Received from the Uganda government Ministry of Health a certificate of appreciation for HIV Basic Preventive Care program.
6. In 2019 received from the Lions Club of Bushenyi a certificate of appreciation for community participation on diabetes care.

## Schools Established by the Hospital

There are two schools which were established by the hospital. The first to be established was the Ishaka Adventist School of Allied Health Sciences in 1998, as a department of the hospital to provide for needed personnel in the laboratory and the theater. In collaboration with other training centers, the school has grown to an accredited satellite center of training offering certificates and diplomas in laboratory technology, diploma in medical technology, advanced diploma in anesthesia, certificate in medical laboratory techniques, certificate in medical techniques, and certificate in pharmacy. The school has an average enrollment of 100 students. The second school to be established was Ishaka Adventist School of Nursing and Midwifery in 2000.<sup>15</sup>

## The Hospital During the Ban

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Uganda agonized through the presidency of Idi Amin Dada (1971-1979). First, he expelled non-Ugandans of British and American origin. E. J. Shidler, who was the medical director, had to leave the country in 1972. In September 1977 the president issued a decree imposing a ban on 27 faith groups in Uganda, including the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The ban was tantamount to closure of all services the church was offering, including health and education. Ishaka Hospital was taken over by the government's Ministry of Health prompting the medical director, Dr. Sam Biraro, a national who had taken over from E. J. Shidler, to flee into exile. Eighteen months later a fierce battle ensued in which President Amin was overthrown. During the war, Ishaka Hospital premises were turned into a military barracks.<sup>16</sup>

When the new government settled in power, Dr. Samson Kiseka—a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and prime minister in the new regime—took upon himself the responsibility of approaching the Ministry of Health on the matter of Ishaka Hospital which was now a government hospital. From the discussion, the ministry resolved to relinquish Ishaka Hospital to the Seventh-day Adventist Church: "I have been informed by my Minister to tell you that we have no intention of looking after the hospital taken from you two years ago. We wish, therefore, that you take over responsibility for this hospital with immediate effect."<sup>17</sup>

During the nine years of the Amin regime, the country was ravaged socially and economically. The liberation war ushered in mass looting of commercial and service enterprises of which Ishaka Hospital was not spared. The hospital lost furniture, equipment, and drugs. Given this awkward predicament, the hospital struggled to resume providing health services to the community. The hospital could not manage to pay the salaries of its employees who returned to resume their work. A resolution was made to lay off some employees and the remaining ones were to work half a day and receive half pay.<sup>18</sup>

In view of the difficult conditions the hospital was going through, selling the hospital was considered. While two prominent prospective buyers were arranging their cash, there was an influx of patients from the neighboring countries—Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (then known as Zaire). Most of these patients required in-patient services due to their distance from home. The hospital administrators, in a bid to respond to the dire needs, gained strength and capacity to continue the services as the hospital was the only functional health facility in the area.<sup>19</sup>

## Relationship with the Church, Community, and Government

Since its inception, Ishaka Adventist Hospital has enjoyed the benevolence of the Adventist world Church. This is manifested in retaining support for the medical staff that is on the inter-division budgets. In 1950, when the hospital was commissioned, it was surrounded by a forest. The hospital attracted settlers to the village, and eventually the place turned into a trading center and now a township with municipal authority.<sup>20</sup> The hospital enjoys a cordial relationship, not only in the region, but also in the country. National health bodies have through the years extended aid in the form of equipment, vehicles (ambulances), bursaries to enhance the competencies of the medical staff, and subsidizing maternity delivery costs by the international body Malistopes. The government of Uganda supports the hospital with delegated funds and ambulances.

## Future Outlook

Ishaka Adventist Hospital services have increased over the years and they are bound to continue. It has withstood the competition that comes with new hospitals in the area. However, it needs better facilities to match the emerging trends of medical services delivery. The population of the municipality where it is located is increasing and so are the rest of the communities the hospital has served over the years. The institutions run by the hospital have continued to send out graduates who are providing outstanding service to the communities where they serve.

## List of Leaders

The medical directors who have shaped Ishaka Adventist Hospital since its inception include<sup>21</sup>

- a. Ankole Mission Hospital: Donald L. Stilson (1951-1961).
- b. Ankole Hospital: W. H. Taylor (1962-1964), R. M. Buckley (1965-1967).
- c. Ishaka Hospital: A. S. Whiting (1968), E. C. Kraft (1969-1971), E. J. Shidler (1972), Samuel I. Biraro (1973-1980), Magdalena Guerrero (1981-1982), E. K. Mpora (1983-1987), Samuel I. Biraro (1988-1991).
- d. Ishaka Adventist Hospital: Tsegaye Fesaha (1992-1993), J. M. Omwega (1994-1995), Alvin B. Rocero (1996-2007), Manuel Isagani (2008-2012), Victor Valenzuela (2013-2015), Jimmy Nyende, executive director (2016-2017), Lydia Komugisha, executive director (2018-present).

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