

# Lowry, Gentry G. (1884–1942) and Bertha (Burrow) (1886–1975)

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Bertha and Gentry Lowry at the 1909 camp meeting in Tennessee.

Photo courtesy of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Archives.

Gentry G. Lowry was a teacher, preacher, organizer, author, executive, and president of the Southern Asia Division where he ministered with his wife, Bertha.

## Early Life

Gentry G. Lowry was born June 3, 1884, in Springville, Tennessee, U.S.A. During the early days of the Adventist movement, Gentry's father was a pioneer minister in the southern United States. Thus, a strong belief was imparted to the four sons, out of which Gentry and two others served as missionaries, although one died in service in Burma. As a child, Gentry went to a primary school near his home, after which he attended Hazel Academy in Kentucky.<sup>1</sup>

## Education and Marriage

Eager to spread the gospel as his father had done before him, Gentry received his ministerial training at the Southern Training School, Graysville, Tennessee (now Southern Adventist University) from which he graduated in 1908.<sup>2</sup>

On May 5, 1908, Gentry G. Lowry was united in marriage with Bertha Burrow, whose father was also an Adventist minister.<sup>3</sup> Bertha was born January 28, 1886, at Leach, Tennessee, and began denominational service as a teacher and Bible instructor in 1906.<sup>4</sup>

The couple adopted a son, Willis G., who had been born in 1909,<sup>5</sup> and later, while serving in Bangalore, Roscoe Sydney was born to them on January 4, 1918.<sup>6</sup>

## Ministry

The field of Gentry's early ministerial labors was in the states of Tennessee, Mississippi, and Kentucky. He was also principal of an academy in Amery, Mississippi.<sup>7</sup>

Life was about to change drastically for the young couple. During the General Conference Committee meeting in January 1909, it was voted to invite the Lowrys to labor in India.<sup>8</sup> Gentry and Bertha had only been married for one year, but together they accepted the challenge to pioneer gospel work. That summer, at a Mississippi camp meeting, Gentry was ordained to the gospel ministry with Pastors Magan, Shafer, and Gentry's father officiating. A few months later the Lowrys sailed to India on the same ship as the families of S. S. Wellman, A. G. Kelsey, and R. B. Thurber.<sup>9</sup> The Lowrys arrived in Nazareth on December 3, 1909, and joined the meager force of workers in the South India Field.<sup>10</sup> Their first task was to master the local language, Tamil, which Pastor Lowry learned quickly through diligent study. He then used it to serve in various capacities as teacher and evangelist.<sup>11</sup> Mrs. Lowry carried responsibilities of her own. She was principal of the first denominational girls' school in South India, opened in 1909.<sup>12</sup>

In those days, church services mainly consisted of a sermon, but on January 7, 1911, the first Sabbath of the new year, Brother Gentry decided to conduct the very first Sabbath School in South India.<sup>13</sup>

Early in 1911, Gentry and Bertha Lowry opened up work in the city of Trichinopoly which was a great center of Catholicism and Hinduism.<sup>14</sup>

Church leaders in South India felt the need for further training of students who finished the lower grades at Nazareth. And so, in July 1915, J. S. James, Gentry Lowry, and E. D. Thomas ventured into Malyalam country for the first time, traveling by train and mostly by bullock cart, to pick a suitable location for the training school. They finally settled on Coimbatore, South India. Thus, the South India Training School, the forerunner of the present Spicer Adventist University, was born, with Pastor G. G. Lowry as the very first principal. The school opened with only 14 students, but in a few weeks the enrollment rose to 70.<sup>15</sup>

Pastor Lowry was elected superintendent of the Tamil Mission in 1918, during which time Bertha was the principal of the girls' school in Bangalore, which had separated from the South India Training School. She was eventually relieved as principal by Miss Appleton.<sup>16</sup>

At the Ranchi Conference in 1919, when the Southern Asia Division was organized, five union missions were formed, one of which was the South India Union Mission of which Pastor Lowry was the head. Mrs. Lowry served as the Sabbath School and MV departmental secretary.<sup>17</sup> The Lowrys were then transferred to the Northeast India Union, where Roscoe served as superintendent from 1926 until 1932. For a time, he served as leader in both Northeast and Northwest India, with headquarters at Lucknow until 1933. Mrs. Lowry carried on the responsibilities of Sabbath School and MV departmental secretary for that union as well. From 1933 to 1936, he was superintendent of the Northwest Union.<sup>18</sup>

In 1933 Gentry underwent an appendectomy that, while solving one of his health problems, created another resulting in an abdominal hernia. Subsequent surgery in 1935 failed to correct it,<sup>19</sup> and the matter became critical by 1936 requiring surgery either in England or America.<sup>20</sup> The Division committee meeting on February 10-12 that year voted an early furlough for the Lowrys recommending they leave in spring. The committee also appointed Lowry a delegate to the coming General Conference Session.<sup>21</sup> Although the doctors had recommended that for health reasons Lowry should not return to Southern Asia,<sup>22</sup> the operation was apparently successful and in October the Division committee voted his return, after a regular twelve-month furlough.<sup>23</sup>

Returning in late 1937, Lowry acted for a few months as principal of the Meiktila Training School in Burma. He was then elected to the leadership of the South India Union, now grown to be by far the largest union in the division.<sup>24</sup>

At the 1941 General Conference Session, Lowry was elected president of the Southern Asia Division. This came as a surprise to him, but he humbly accepted the call. After a fond farewell in Bangalore, Gentry and Bertha Lowry were welcomed on July 28, 1941, to Salisbury Park, where they served until Elder Lowry's death in 1942.<sup>25</sup>

## Later Life

In the months leading up to Elder Lowry's death, the war-time dangers that threatened and seemed to be endangering his life work were a great burden on his heart and mind. Adventist workers had been evacuated from Burma and Ceylon. The results of nearly 50 years of labor and sacrifice, and the lives of many workers, were in jeopardy. Momentous decisions had to be made. Uncertainty and anxiety were in the air. It was in the midst of the hottest season Poona had experienced for 50 years.

During the last months of his life Lowry had to deal with several threats. Japanese army began invading Burma in December of 1941. Lowry's New Year's message referred to war clouds, death, and destruction.<sup>26</sup> The Biennial Council that was scheduled for January 1942 was postponed. Appointments were deferred.<sup>27</sup> A full Division committee met but Elder Meleen, president of the Burma Union and father-in-law of Lowry's son Willis, could not attend. Several missionary families heeded the call from the American Counsel to evacuate, but others preferred to avoid international travel.<sup>28</sup> The Division committee met daily from February 22-26 and reviewed the new developments. Rangoon fell at the end of February. On March 23 the committee designated April 11 as

a day of special prayer in view of the serious conditions.<sup>29</sup> On April 6 Lowry's devotional message at the opening of the committee meeting referred to the "darkest days" filled with "perplexities."<sup>30</sup> On April 8 the committee voted to recommend that Anglo-Indians and foreigners, especially wives and children, leave the large cities and move to safe retreats such as Bangalore, Poona, Musoorie, Mahabaleshwar, Yellagiri, and Kodaikanal.<sup>31</sup> Lowry's wife Bertha, his son Roscoe and his wife Jessie moved to Mahabaleshwar, not far from Poona, at the end of April and looked forward to Gentry joining them for the first weekend of May.

Gentry joined his family at the hill station of Mahabaleshwar. It was there, on a Sabbath, that he first felt a headache, which was followed by a stroke from which he did not recover. He passed away peacefully on May 4, 1942, after being unconscious for 57 hours. He was 57 years and 11 months old. He passed away one day before his and Bertha's 34<sup>th</sup> marriage anniversary.<sup>32</sup>

His was the gift of tongues, supplemented by earnest study. Pastor Lowry was proficient in Tamil, Malayalam, Telugu, Kanarese, and Urdu, and conversed and preached in Hindi and Bengali. He knew more languages than any other foreigner on the staff in the division.<sup>33</sup> He organized the first Sabbath School in South India and wrote the first Bible lessons used in Adventist schools in that field. He wrote books and tracts and many articles descriptive of life and work in India and expositive of present truth.<sup>34</sup>

Widowed in 1942 by the premature death of her husband, Bertha continued to serve in Southern Asia, beginning as a Bible instructor in Lahore. She later worked as preceptress and matron at Spicer Memorial College (now Spicer Adventist University) from 1943-1952, during which time many girls benefitted from her motherly understanding care. Beginning in 1945 she also served as food matron and oversaw the artistic and decorative work of the compound, seeing that the lawns, flowerbeds and shrubs were well kept. For the last two years of her service in Southern Asia she was matron at Vincent Hill School.<sup>35</sup>

After 43 years of selfless service in India, Bertha Lowry retired to Loma Linda in 1955 where she provided a home base for her grandchildren while they pursued their education and their parents remained in mission service. Although her eyesight failed rapidly, she helped regularly with work at J. L. Tucker's "Quiet Hour" office.<sup>36</sup> In 1973, her son, Dr. Roscoe S. Lowry, took her back to Poona where she was given 24-hour nursing care. Bertha Lowry died peacefully early in the morning of April 30, 1975, at the age of 89. She was laid to rest in the same vault with her husband at Salisbury Park, Poona.<sup>37</sup>

## Contribution and Legacy

During his 33 years of unstinted service, Pastor Lowry was known as an inspiring leader, a warm and loyal friend, and an understanding counselor. His rich Christian experience and lovable nature endeared him to those of all communities, indigenous and foreign alike.<sup>38</sup> Mrs. Lowry stood loyally by the side of her husband in all his many appointments, and together they gave a distinctive mold to the early work in the Southern Asia Division.<sup>39</sup>

While the details of their lives may be fading from memory, a realization of their vision and self-sacrifice lives on in the things named after them: Lowry Memorial College, on the location where Elder Lowry began the South India Training School; and Bertha Young Ladies' Club, the name of the ladies social club at Spicer Adventist University where Mrs. Bertha Lowry was preceptress for many years.

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