Armitage, Frank Benjamin (1864-1952)

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Frank Benjamin Armitage, his first wife Anna Olsen Armitage and daughter Violet Armitage.

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Frank Benjamin Armitage was an Adventist minister and missionary in Africa.

Frank Armitage was born December 31, 1864, in Darlington, Lafayette County, Wisconsin. After attending Battle Creek College, he married Anna Mary "Annie" Olson (1859-1898) on August 24, 1884, the younger sister of O. A. Olsen (church president from 1888 to 1897). The couple had a daughter, Violet Dena (1887-1945). He was ordained at the Nebraska camp meeting in 1896.[1]

Frank and Annie arrived in Africa on September 1, 1897.[2] Their trip took a month longer than anticipated, causing concerns about their whereabouts. After several weeks news came that a missionary couple had been spotted traveling by donkey cart. G. B. Tripp and W. H. Anderson went in search of them where they found their cart overturned in a mud hole—they were now able to rescue them and two days later arrived safely at the mission.

According to O. A. Olsen, their arrival "was very timely in every way." They helped relieve heavy burdens on the farm, and the next day after their arrival, Frank, who knew how to lay bricks, went to work building homes. A towering six feet, one inch, with a strong build,[3] he was able to lead out in the construction that first year of

three 25 by 26 foot buildings that became the first permanent homes where their family, along with the Anderson and Tripp families, lived.[4] In addition to building new buildings, Frank was in charge of digging the first wells.[5]

Soon after their arrival, the Armitage family took a team of oxen, some trading goods, and with Brother and Sister Lloyd and Brother Chaney, went twenty-five miles north to Umkupavula where they pitched a tent, repaired two huts, and started another mission outpost.[6]

Also within that first year, a terrible malaria epidemic broke out. Other missionaries including Dr. Carmichael died on February 26, 1898, followed by George B. Tripp, his son, as the work at Solusi ground to a standstill. Both Frank and Annie contracted malaria, and while Frank responded to the medicine, the failing health of his wife and daughter caused him to take them to Claremont Sanitarium to get medical attention. On the way Annie's condition worsened; so, they stopped at a nursing hospital at Kimberly where she died.

After his wife's death, Frank married Mary Caroline Mortensen Tripp (1860-1950), the widow of G. B. Tripp, on February 22, 1899, in Bulawayo. With a fresh bunch of missionary reinforcements led by Frank L. Mead, the couple set out in 1901 with ten oxen and a wagon traveling 150 miles northeast. They brought eight students from Solusi with them to establish the Somabula Mission (today the Gwelo Mission). They spent the next three years where they baptized the eight students and a number of other locals with a school enrollment that increased to 40. Due to failing health, the Armitages were replaced at Somabula Mission by Elder and Mrs. W. C. Walston. The couple had two children, Irene R. Allen (1901--1990) and Evelyn R. A. DeBorde (1909–1984) together.

The Armitages returned to South Africa in 1906 where they worked at the Maranatha Mission and established other missionary projects for the Union of South Africa, helping to open the Spion Kop Mission in Natal. From April to November 1913, they left on annual leave to the United States where they attended the General Conference session.

In 1925 the Armitages returned to the United States permanently due to their health. Over the next decade they spent time in ministry in North and South Carolina. They retired in 1934 to live near Paradise Valley Sanitarium. Mary died April 12, 1950. Frank died March 20, 1952. He is buried in Montecito Cemetery in Colton, California.[7]

SOURCES

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Olsen, O. A. "The S. D. A. Mission in Matabeleland, South Africa." *ARH*, March 29, 1898.

NOTES

1. J. H. Durland, “Nebraska Camp-Meeting,” *ARH*, August 11, 1896, 509-510.

2. G. B. Tripp, “Africa,” *ARH*, December 14, 1897, 794.

3. See U.S. Consular Registration Applications, 1916-1925, Box 128, 42600-53099, page 570 [accessed from Ancestry.com 9/18/21].

4. O. A. Olsen, “The S. D. A. Mission in Matabeleland, South Africa,” *ARH*, March 29, 1898, 204.

5. F. L. Mead, “Buluwayo, Africa,” *ARH*, August 29, 1899, 559.

6. Ibid.

7. https://www.ancestry.com/discoveryui-content/view/152070746:60525?ssrc=pt&tid=176202571&pid=292292435318 [accessed 9/18/21].

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