

Addis Alem

MENGISTU ADDISU

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Addis Alem is a town located in the west Shewa zone of the Oromia region, west of Addis Ababa, central Ethiopia. It has an elevation of about 2,360 meters above sea level and an estimated population of 18,000¹. Addis Alem is known for the Basilica Church of St Maryam with an adjacent historical museum which burned to the ground in 1997 but has since been rebuilt.²

History

Addis Alem, a name which was picked by Empress Taytu Betul, was founded in 1900 by Emperor Menelik II to be the new capital city of the country. But in 1903 he decided to keep the capital at Addis Ababa, and he used Addis Alem as his summer palace during the years that followed.³ The first paved road in Ethiopia was constructed between Addis Alem and Addis Ababa. Road construction began in 1903 and it was in quite usable condition the following year.⁴

Around 1930 most of the wood for the buildings and furniture in Addis Ababa was cut from the forests near Addis Alem. During the Italian occupation of Ethiopia, a factory for the production of slaked lime was established there and in its first year of production it turned out 30,000 hundred weights of the material. On December 2, 1940, the *Arbegnoch*, led by Admiqe Besha, attacked the Italian garrison which lost 78 men and 2,007 rifles, cannons, and hand grenades. On April 3 of the following year the Italians sent a cavalry regiment of 450 men to recapture Addis Alem, but it was promptly cut to ribbons by the *Arbegnoch*, and only 50 Italian men escaped.⁵

Adventist Work in Addis Alem

Missionary work in Ethiopia had its beginning in the northern part of the country through the revelation of Shaik Zakaria, a Muslim leader. In the vision, he said, into his hands he was given a Bible and a Quran. He believed the dream was from God and he accepted it. The revelation from God led him to start a religious group and soon he had a following. Later some of his followers visited Eritrea to see missionaries who were teaching what was revealed to Shaik Zekaria. One of his students found the Seventh-day Adventist missionaries who taught what was revealed to Zekaria in the vision. Zakaria's students returned to Addis Alem with Adventist missionaries who soon built schools and clinics. From there missionary work spread to other parts of the country. The missionaries opened a new station at Addis Ababa. Kebena Adventist School was opened with a dormitory for

boys and another one for girls. When the school was flooded with students, the missionaries built another school at Ginfile at Addis Ababa. The second school did not flourish, so they looked for another location for it, which they found in Addis Alem. "In 1922, Mr. & Mrs. Sorenson who had joined the young mission about a year before to take charge of Kebana school at the capital of Ethiopia, were asked to move to Addis Alem and take charge of the new school for boys while the German team was to move farther west and open up the work in Wollega."⁶

Sorenson accepted with enthusiasm the challenge of building the boys' school, and he made a significant contribution to the development of the school. According to Sorenson, the school facilities at Addis Alem were rather limited in scope and primitive in nature. The kitchen and dining room were very humble and the food served very simple. The dormitory was overcrowded with students. There were four classrooms which were full to capacity. "There was also a very small clinic serving the school family and the community. In those days the requirement to serve as medical person seemed to have been not so much formal medical training but a good dose of common sense and civilized guessing."⁷ The objectives of the school were to train workers for the mission who could serve as teachers, evangelists, and medical assistants in one of the health institutions.

Closure of the Work in Addis Alem

In 1938 the Italians ordered that the school be closed down. That forced the Sorensons to abandon Addis Alem and move to Addis Ababa to wait with the other missionaries in some obscure place until the country was liberated in 1941.⁸ The liberation and restoration of the Ethiopian empire in 1941 brought a new day and fresh opportunities to all missions including that of the Seventh-day Adventists. The Sorensons were interested in going back to Addis Alem to reopen the school there, but the daughter of Mayor Kentiba Geburu, the man who had contracted the property to the mission, was not interested in returning the property to the mission. The Sorensons dropped the idea of going back to Addis Alem and instead established missionary work in Akaki. Since then the church has not been able to go back and begin mission work in that particular place.

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1. "Ethiopia," *Lonely Planet*, accessed March 19, 2020, <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/ethiopia>.
2. Matt Philips and Jean-Bernard Carillet, *Ethiopia and Eritrea*, third edition (n.p.: *Lonely Planet*, 2006), 237.
3. "Local History of Ethiopia," The Nordic Africa Institute, accessed March 19, 2020, <https://nai.uu.se/>.
4. Richard Pankhurst, *Economic History of Ethiopia (1800-1935)* (Addis Ababa: Haile Selassie I University Press, 1968), 288f.
5. Truneh Woldeselassie, *Adventism in Ethiopia* (Ethiopian Adventist Press, 2005), 234.
6. *Ibid.*, 267.
7. *Ibid.*, 347.
8. *Ibid.*, 178, 284.

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