



Family of Alvin Allen
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Allen, Alvin Nathan (1880–1945)

THE BRAZILIAN WHITE CENTER – UNASP

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Alvin Nathan Allen, pastor, evangelist and missionary, was born in Portage, Wisconsin, on June 25, 1880. Son of George W. Allen and Ann Permelia Cook Allen. He was raised in an Adventist home and was baptized in his adolescence. Allen attended Union College (1898-1899) and Battle Creek College.¹

On July 11, 1901, he married Luella Emily Goodrich, to which union six children were born:² Winifred Allen (Floodman) (1903-1990),³ Esther M. Allen (Rentfro) (1908-1986),⁴ Alvino Arthur Allen, Lulu Allen (Tadlock) (1913-2005),⁵ Victor Allen (born 1915) and Ana Allen (born 1918), the last two not reaching adulthood.⁶ Alvin's career as an Adventist missionary began shortly after his marriage. As a licensed missionary, he joined the work of his wife Luella and her parents in Honduras and the Bay Islands where H. C. Goodrich was one of the mission leaders. There Alvin devoted himself to canvassing, preaching, and teaching. In addition, he took a dentist course to meet the needs of that population.⁷

He remained in the Central American Mission until early 1907, when he returned to the United States on vacation⁸ and attended health improvement courses at Washington Missionary College (now Washington Adventist University) and Battle Creek Sanitarium.⁹ In 1908, he was ordained to the ministry and accepted the call to lead the newly founded Peru Mission with Pastor F. L. Perry.¹⁰ It was in this country that Allen's interest in working among the indigenous began. Among them were the Aymara, possibly Incan descendants who lived in Puno Province, near Lake Titicaca.¹¹

In 1909, Allen traveled with W. R. Pohle, who had replaced Pastor Perry in the Peru Mission, from Lima to the Plateria District, Puno, to meet Aymara Manuel Zúñiga Camacho.¹² Camacho had learned Christianity by receiving a Bible from Adventist Eduardo F. Forga. In 1896, he contacted the Church in Chile and in 1898 he returned to the Andes to establish a school to teach Spanish literacy to the Aymara communities. However, the school, which operated at home, was strongly opposed by local clergy and farmers. As a result, he contacted Adventists for help. The canvasser Fernando Osorio was sent to the region, and his work aroused the interest of more indigenous people in the Adventist message. Through these studies, Camacho began to keep the Sabbath.¹³

It was in this context that Allen and Pohle arrived at Plateria. The path between the Andes was difficult to reach. Nevertheless, by God's providence, they found Camacho. The arrival of the missionaries is reported to have been revealed to the Indian in a dream.¹⁴ A short time later, at Allen's invitation, missionary Ferdinand (or Fernando) A. Stahl arrived. Stahl had been working in the city of La Paz, Bolivia. Subsequently, the mission among the Aymara progressed under Stahl's leadership and became well known in the Adventist milieu, becoming a model at the time for indigenous missions. Allen's work was concentrated in Lima but made regular visits to Stahl in Plateria.¹⁵ He was director of the Peru Mission until 1912.¹⁶

After that, he was sent to be the director of the Cuban Mission from 1913 to 1915,¹⁷ returning later to the United States, where he was president of the South Carolina Association in 1916.¹⁸ In the following years, he was pastor at the River Tennessee Association and secretary of war-related affairs in the Southern Union at the time of the First World War.¹⁹

Allen still wanted to work among the Indians because, in his words, he wanted to "reveal Christ to those who have not even heard of Him." In 1918 and 1919, he wrote letters to W. A. Spicer, secretary of the General Conference, making himself available to continue the work begun by Ovid E. Davis in British Guyana. He had died in the Indian countryside in 1911 as a result of an unknown type of fever, being buried by the Indians themselves. Subsequently, no missionaries had been sent to that area. Despite Allen's willingness, the resources were not sufficient to continue the mission. Fluent in the Spanish language, in 1920 Allen was chosen to serve as a pastor in the Mexico Mission. He worked in the country until 1921, where he was responsible for the southern part of the territory and led out in the construction of a church. There he also worked among the Tehuantepec Indians.²⁰

In 1922 Allen accepted the call to serve as pastor in the Hispanic Division of the General Conference, where he remained until 1925. During this time, he worked in the Arizona Association, United States.²¹ He was one of the directors of the newly founded (1920) Spanish-American Training School in Phoenix and conducted evangelistic series for Hispanic audiences in several cities, including Nogales and Sanchez.²²

At the General Conference session held in Milwaukee in 1926, his name was voted to be a Bible teacher at Brazil College (now Central Adventist University of Sao Paulo). He accepted the call, moved to Brazil, and served in this role for the second half of 1926.²³ Conscious of Allen's experience among the Indians, in early 1927 the commission of the South Brazilian Union proposed the task of starting a mission in the State of Goiás. The Goiano indigenous field was already being worked by the self-supporting missionary Carlos Heinrich who, in October 1925, had requested a missionary to assist him. In response, the union decided that the offerings from Missionary Volunteers (MV) during 1926 would be devoted for the work among the indigenous people in Goiás. Allen's arrival was propitious to begin the mission. There was great anticipation, as Allen had worked with F. Stahl among the Aymara of Peru, and news of the large number of baptisms achieved in the missions subsequently organized by Stahl had reached Brazil.²⁴

Allen left São Paulo for Goiás on April 11, 1927, intending to take his first trip to the Karajás people. After performing baptisms in the cities of Pires do Rio and São José dos Tocantins, he left the city of Goiás in the company of Rubens Anderson, a recent convert and Antônio Pereira, from Brazilian Adventist College, heading to the city of Leopoldina, on the bank of the Araguaia River. In that place, they studied the Bible with several people and on July 14 went down to the Karajás villages.²⁵ Allen reports in his diary that he contacted several villages and was well received by all, despite some difficulties with the language, because the Indians did not know much Portuguese and the missionaries didn't know their language. The villages visited were Dumbá, Monteria, Santa Isabel, Fontoura, and Mato Verde. On this first trip, they saw the need for health care and education.²⁶

Allen followed the river north until he reached the city of Marabá, state of Pará, where he rested for 25 days, being very sick. After an absence of six months, on October 13 he returned to São Paulo. While proposing the creation of

the Indigenous Mission of Araguaia, it had some difficulties. At the time, the goal of the world Church was for Unions and Associations to have financial autonomy. To this end, they should first evangelize the urban centers which, through tithes and offerings, would provide the conditions for missionaries to evangelize regions where minorities lived. Despite this challenge, in 1928 the Araguaia Indigenous Mission was created.²⁷

In August of 1928, Allen and the group returned to the Araguaia. After traveling 216 km, they arrived in Piedade (today São Felix do Araguaia) where they established the mission headquarters.²⁸ At the Tocantins River, they founded an independent school, with the help of his daughter Esther and son-in-law Charles Rentfro. Esther took care of the Karajá children in the morning and Charles taught young people in the afternoon. At night, Ernesto Bergold taught the adults to read.²⁹ Indigenous girls also had the opportunity to learn sewing.³⁰ They made butter, had rice husking, farming, and cattle raising. They offered medical assistance in the region, helping people who got yellow fever, malaria, typhoid fever, and other tropical diseases.³¹

Allen led the Araguaia Mission until 1932.³² Because of the effects of malaria and heart disease, he left in 1933 to serve in the small Goiás Mission where he worked until 1937.³³ After 12 years in Brazil, he returned to his homeland in 1938.³⁴ He was pastor at Winchester (1939)³⁵ and Arlington (1940) in the state of Virginia, and in the Florida Ridge area of Florida (1942-1944).³⁶ He died on December 31, 1945 from a heart attack.^{37,38}

Alvin Nathan Allen left an important legacy for the Seventh-day Adventist Church. As a pastor and missionary, he pioneered the work among the Aymara in Peru and Karajás in Brazil. The work begun by him was continued by other people and resulted in many people won to Christ. Today, there are Adventist churches in Aruanã, Goiás; São Félix do Araguaia, Mato Grosso; Santa Izabel, on Bananal Island, with a Pathfinder club made up of Karajás children; Fontoura, Tocantins; Luciara, Mato Grosso, and other places along the Araguaia River.³⁹

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