

Chaney, Frank Lawrence (1872–1963) and Bertha (Shanks) (1875–1955)



F. L. Chaney

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Milton Hook, Ed.D. (Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, the United States). Hook retired in 1997 as a minister in the Greater Sydney Conference, Australia. An Australian by birth Hook has served the Church as a teacher at the elementary, academy and college levels, a missionary in Papua New Guinea, and as a local church pastor. In retirement he is a conjoint senior lecturer at Avondale College of Higher Education. He has authored *Flames Over Battle Creek*, *Avondale: Experiment on the Dora*, *Desmond Ford: Reformist Theologian*, *Gospel Revivalist* the *Seventh-day Adventist Heritage Series*, and many magazine articles. He is married to Noeleen and has two sons and three grandchildren.

Frank and Bertha Chaney were missionary educators who contributed to the development of Adventist schools in Australia and New Zealand and served, in varying capacities, in the United States, the Philippines, the West Indies, and Mexico.

Early Life and Education

Frank Lawrence Chaney was born on April 7, 1872, in Wahoo, Nebraska, to Samuel and Emily (Merryman) Chaney. There were six children in the family, Albert (b. 1862), Mary (b. 1867), John (b. 1869), Frank (b. 1872) and Aurilla (b. 1881).¹ Samuel Chaney was Clerk of the District Court.² Frank attended Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska, and then proceeded to Battle Creek Sanitarium to take a short training course in nursing as preparation for overseas mission work.³

Bertha Shanks, born in Chatfield, Minnesota, also attended Union College, graduating in the class of 1896⁴. She took the same course as Frank in Battle Creek, and they married in that city on April 29, 1897, with Francis M. Wilcox officiating.⁵ While they waited for a mission appointment they taught school in Asheville, North Carolina.⁶ Their first child, Albert, was born in Asheville in 1900.⁷

Avondale and Pukekura

Frank and Bertha were appointed to work in Australia. They arrived in time to attend the 1901 Australasian Union Conference session in the Avondale Church, Cooranbong, New South Wales.⁸ They spent their first eighteen months assisting in evangelism in Queensland and canvassing the book *Christ's Object Lessons* in Maryborough.⁹ This period proved to be an interlude prior to their assignments at the Avondale School for Christian Workers where their talents were better suited.

At the Avondale school, 1903, Frank taught physiology, book-keeping and carpentry in addition to acting as preceptor. On occasion Bertha stepped in as preceptor when Frank was needed to supervise the farm work and the industrial department¹⁰ but when their second son, Donald, was born in 1905 she became preoccupied with her own domestic duties. In addition to his teaching Frank embarked on a major building project on campus. Enrolment numbers were rising rapidly so with the assistance of student labor Frank erected another dormitory for the young women. It had an attractive mansard roof that incorporated attic rooms.¹¹ Named Preston Hall, it was dedicated in 1906 before the finishing touches were applied.¹² Frank also possessed musical talent, playing the cornet in the school brass band, singing with quartets, and rendering solos on special occasions.¹³

Frank proved to be a very competent carpenter and teacher. For that reason, his talents were used to build a major school in New Zealand. He sailed to his appointment early in 1907 to prepare some temporary accommodation and the rest of his family followed two months later.¹⁴ The two-story building first served as classrooms and dormitories sufficient to be opened for the 1908 school year under the title Pukekura Training School, additions being made later. Frank served as principal and Bertha taught language and physiology,¹⁵ also acting as accountant later.¹⁶ They remained at Pukekura until the end of 1910.

Another call for Frank's carpentry skills came in 1911. Permanent living quarters were needed for the relatively new mission enterprise in Papua. The Chaney family sailed north to the tropics where Frank built a mission home in Port Moresby¹⁷ and then another at Bisiatabu where headquarters were established at a cooler altitude. Bertha helped with some elementary classes for the local children and wrote excitedly of their experiences in the lush jungle among a primitive people.¹⁸

The Chaney family returned to Australia early in 1912 to resume teaching duties at the Avondale school!¹⁹ In addition to his carpentry classes Frank added a northern wing to the boy's dormitory during 1912 and 1913.²⁰

It was an era of upheaval at the school with an ideological struggle waging between advocates for increasing the industrial classes versus others who wanted to respond to the insistence of government authorities to raise academic levels.²¹ The Chaney's were torn between the two. Frank favored industrial studies but he and Bertha wanted an academic education for their growing boys. Matters reached a climax in 1915 when Bertha lost a dispute with the school board over her wage level.²² She took her sons back to America but Frank felt obliged to continue teaching at Avondale.

The year 1916 was unusual with respect to school administration. Church authorities experimented by abolishing the office of principal. Instead, a business manager was appointed and Frank acted as headmaster.²³ He served out the year but hurried back to America to rejoin his family immediately after the graduation services.²⁴

Varied Service in America and Abroad

For approximately ten years Frank and Bertha taught at Washington Missionary College, Takoma Park, Maryland (now Washington Adventist University). Bertha led in the Normal Department (teacher training). Frank was versatile, beginning as preceptor (dean) and a teacher of English literature, later as an instructor in woodwork and carpentry and, finally, working in the dual role of carpentry instructor and Bible teacher.²⁵

In 1926 the Chaney's accepted another overseas call, this time to the Philippine Union Mission, headquartered in Manila. Frank served as secretary-treasurer²⁶ and later as Home Missions secretary. He was ordained during this period.²⁷ Bertha served as Sabbath School secretary.²⁸ After five years of service in the Far East, Frank's health deteriorated, compelling a return to the United States.

Chaney returned to the mission field in 1936, volunteering his service to the Inter-American Division on a self-supporting basis. He served as secretary-treasurer of the Jamaica Mission and subsequently as assistant treasurer of the Antillian Union Mission, Havana, Cuba.²⁹

In 1937 Frank returned to Takoma Park where Bertha had remained as an instructor with the Home Study Institute at General Conference headquarters. The Chaney's' marriage came under stress and they were granted a divorce on October 5, 1943.³⁰ Surviving records provide no information on the circumstances.

Bertha Chaney continued in her position at Home Study Institute until 1944. Thereafter she taught French and Latin part-time in various settings and remained active in civic and cultural organizations. She died at her home in Takoma Park, Maryland, on May 21, 1955, at age 80. In addition to the decades of service previously described, her career was distinguished by earning a master's degree from George Washington University in Washington, D.C., and publication of stories in the *Youth's Instructor* and other articles in denominational periodicals.³¹

Though well beyond retirement age, Frank Chaney pressed forward with the activity that would mark his legacy more than any other – building schools to advance Adventist mission. He devoted much of the eighth decade of his life to building and developing thirteen mission schools in the Sonora Mountains of northern Mexico during the years 1942-1951.³²

After Bertha's death Frank married Leonora Lacy Warriner.³³ They resided at Loma Linda, California until early 1962 when they moved to the Crystal Springs Resort near St. Helena Sanitarium in northern California.³⁴

Frank Chaney passed away on September 15, 1963, and was laid to rest in the Santa Rosa Memorial Park north of San Francisco.³⁵ Leonora passed away on March 3, 1966.³⁶

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