



East Africa Union Committee at Nakuru 1936, Back row left to right: G. Lewis, A. Allen, Ron Carey, F.H. Thomas, S. Beardsell, W. Raitt. Front row: E.R. Warland, Grace Clarke, Spencer G. Maxwell (superintendent), Dr. George Madgwick, W.W. Armstrong. Photo courtesy of British Union Conference.

Clarke, Grace Agnes (1898–1955)

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Grace Agnes Clarke was a pioneer missionary to Kenya, educator, church administrator, Bible translator, and lexicographer.

Early Life

Grace Clarke was born on September 1, 1898, in Gloucester, the country town of Gloucestershire in southwest England. She was born to Agnes Kate and Herbert David Clarke, both of whom were pioneer Seventh-day Adventists in England who had come to the faith as a result of the work of Pastor Judson S. Washburn and American missionary to England.¹ Herbert Clarke did some denominational work in England and at one time was secretary and treasurer of the South England Conference.² Grace, too, joined the ministry becoming a Bible instructor at the Granose Foods Limited, the health foods firm that had its factory at Stanborough Park, Watford, Hertfordshire.

Missionary service

In 1921 she received a call for mission work in Kenya. She arrived in Gendia with a new group of missionaries that included her former boss at Granose, W. T. Bartlett. It was Bartlett who took over from A. A. Carscallen, who had pioneered the work in British East Africa from the year 1906. She was posted to Wire Hill where she worked for a year before relocating to Kamagambo where she spent the bulk of her time as an educator.

Educator

In 1920 E. R. Warland joined the Kamagambo Training School. He continued the efforts of the school that had started back in 1913 by Carscallen. In 1922 Clarke established a girls' school at Kamagambo. This was the first formal education for girls in the entire region. It was so difficult to get the girls to attend school that Clarke was forced to induce them with pieces of cloth so that they could agree to get an education.³ For the next twelve years, Clarke devoted herself to the school serving as its headmistress.⁴ As she ran the school for girls at Kamagambo, she also went around the villages teaching basic hygiene and important aspects of home-nursing.⁵ On her return from furlough in December 1930, she was accompanied by Ms. C. Schuil, who joined her at the Kamagambo Girls' School as a teacher.⁶ At the beginning of 1934, she moved to Nyanchwa, where she helped establish another school for girls. Nyanchwa is 14 miles away from Kamagambo.

Church Administrator

In 1933 she was incorporated into the administration of the mission and rose to become the secretary-treasurer of the East African Union.⁷ She was the third secretary-treasurer after F. H. Thomas and Ms. M. Wharrie.⁸ She was only the second woman to hold such a position in Africa. The union headquarters moved from Gendia to Nakuru, operating there from 1933– 1937.⁹ Thereafter it moved to Nairobi and has been there since then. Grace Clarke left the position in 1939 paving the way for C. Bannister to take over from her.¹⁰

Translation Work

In the course of her work, Grace gained proficiency in Dholuo, Ekegusii, and Kiswahili languages. In 1944 she moved to Gendia where she took charge of the translation work into Dholuo and Kiswahili. She translated many Sabbath School lessons and Week of Prayer readings. She created and supervised a team of translators and trained them on how the translation work was done. The result of this was that she was appointed to help translate the Old Testament into the Dholuo language. For this work she became a life member of the British and Foreign Bible Society.¹¹ At the same time she also worked on an English-Luo dictionary but died just before she could submit the manuscript for publication.

Lifework

Grace Clarke devoted 34 years of her life to mission service in Kenya. She never found the time to start a family, dedicating her entire life to mission. She endeared herself to the people and took a genuine interest in them. She had a remarkable gift for remembering names, and at campmeeting she would greet so many people by name and would even remember their children by name, including when they were born.¹² She paid school fees for many needy children and at the school for girls that she started; no fee was charged during her entire time as head. She was fondly referred to the Luo and Abagusii people as “Missie Lark” and was known for her approachability and readiness to help regardless.

She died on July 18, 1955, and was deeply mourned by those who knew her. She was laid to rest at the Karura Mission church grounds near Nairobi, far from the people she had endeared herself to. Her funeral service was conducted by Pastor D. K. Short (the manager of the Advent Press where she had devoted many years of service) and Pastor R. J. Wieland, as well as F. E. Schlehuber. She was survived by her sister Margaret Gwynedd Clarke, who was also a missionary in Kenya and her brother, Pastor D. J. Clarke, who was a missionary in Sierra Leone. She also had another brother, G. J. Clarke, who was a businessman in Brazil.¹³

Today the schools she opened at Kamagambo and Nyanchwa are flourishing and are continuing to provide that important service that Ms. Clarke had labored so hard to establish. The East Africa Union where she served as the third secretary/treasurer has since been reorganized into five Unions—the East Kenya and West Kenya Unions, as well as the North Tanzania and South Tanzania Unions and as the Uganda Union.

SOURCES

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NOTES

1. Judson S. Washburn (1863–1955) was an American evangelist who moved to England from 1891 to 1902. He played a leading role in establishing the Adventist faith in England. (See, *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* [1996], s.v. "Judson S. Washburn.")
2. "South East England Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1933), 146.
3. *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (1996), s.v. "Kamagambo."
4. Ibid.
5. E. R. Warland, "Evangelists' Institute Held at Kamagambo Training School, East Africa," *The Advent Survey*, December 1, 1929, 9.
6. Obituary of Grace Agnes Clarke, *The Advent Survey*, February 1, 1931, 8.
7. Conrad T. J. Hyde, "An appreciation," a tribute to Grace Agnes Clarke, *Southern Africa Division Outlook*, September 1, 1955, 7.
8. "East African Union," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1932).
9. Virgil E. Robinson, *Third Angel over Africa* (unpublished manuscript in the author's private collection), 117.
10. "East African Union," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1940), 166.
11. *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (1996), s.v. "Clark G. A."
12. E. D. Hanson, "Clarke, Grace Agnes," obituary, *Southern Africa Division Outlook*, September 1, 1955, 7.
13. Ibid.

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