



Alfred and Mary Chapman with their children.

Photo courtesy of Adventist Heritage Centre, Australia.

Chapman, Alfred George (1924–1983) and Mary Elizabeth (Betty) (Easterbrook) (1928–2011)

BARRY J. WRIGHT

Barry J. Wright, Ph.D. (University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia). Wright retired in 2009 and has served the church as a teacher and high school administrator (1972-2004), finishing his time as an ordained Pastor of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In retirement, he has continued to serve in both teaching and pastoral ministries. An Australian by birth, he is married to Margaret and has three daughters, 15 grandchildren, and two great grandchildren.

Alfred George Chapman was an Australian educator and missionary who made a notable contribution to education in Papua New Guinea.

Early Years

Alfred George Chapman was born on June 14, 1924 at Peterborough, South Australia. He was to be the first of three sons and the second of six children born to Walter (1897-1974) and Ida Violet [Inman] Chapman (1894-1982).¹ Chapman was a third generation Seventh-day Adventist whose grandparents Alfred (1865–1905) and Mary Ann [Gibbs] (1876-1909) were introduced to the Seventh-day Adventist Church by F. W. (William) Reekie, a colporteur in the Preston River district of Western Australia.²

Chapman's father entered the ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1920 but was forced to retire four years later because of ill health. It was then that the family settled on a farm at Carnamah in the wheat belt of Western Australia. In this unique environment Alfred George learned the skills necessary not only to assist with work on the farm, but also skills that later proved invaluable in his future overseas mission service in Papua New Guinea.³ Though isolated from any church activity, through the family's reading of the church's *Missionary Leader* magazine, a strong interest in mission service was fostered and shared with the children.⁴

Because of the high value that Chapman's father placed on education, after exhausting the potential of the one room school at Billaroo near the farm, in 1937 Alfred George was sent to stay with relatives so he could attend the Bunbury State High school.⁵ After achieving his junior certificate in 1938 he spent one year back at the farm before being sent to West Australian Missionary College (now Carmel Adventist College) where he completed his high school studies (1941) and basic teacher training (1942).⁶

In 1943, Chapman was called up for military service. He joined the survey corps as a non-combatant. However, after one year he withdrew from the service to renew his teacher training at Australasian Missionary College (now Avondale College of Higher Education), graduating in 1945.⁷

His first teaching appointment (1946) was to the Leederville School in Western Australia.⁸ His father offered him a partnership in the family farm at the end of that year, but Chapman decided to continue with his teaching career.⁹ He continued in the Western Australian Conference until the end of 1950, teaching in the Church's schools at Bickley and Victoria Park.¹⁰

Marriage

At Avondale College, Alfred met Mary Elizabeth (Betty) Easterbrook and on January 2, 1947 they were married by Pastor George Rollo in the Perth Church, West Australia.¹¹

Born in South Melbourne, Victoria to Frederick William (1879-1958) and Margaret [Marquis] (1884 -1935) Easterbrook, Betty was to spend her early life from the age of seven in foster homes after the tragic death of her mother.¹² Betty was introduced to the Seventh-day Adventist Church by her Aunt Mary. Through the interest and encouragement of pioneer missionary Mrs. Alma Wiles, daughter of Pastor and Mrs. Butz and widow of missionary Norman Wiles of Malekula, New Hebrides, she was baptized by Pastor A. L. Pascoe at the Auburn Church, Victoria on July 1, 1944.¹³ Betty was disowned by her family for this decision. Pastor H. W. Hollingsworth assisted her, making arrangements with Pastor H. J. Halliday to transfer her from the Victoria Conference Office, where she worked as a secretary, to the Avondale College Office, Cooranbong, New South Wales.¹⁴

After Chapman graduated from the Avondale teaching course in 1945, both he and Betty received appointments to West Australia, Betty working for Mr. Sid Grieve at the Sanitarium Health Food (SHF) retail office.¹⁵ It was while in Perth that their first two children were born. Margaret Joy [Wright] and Kenneth John (1949- 2015).¹⁶

Mission Service

At the end of 1950 the family was appointed to the Bautama Training School on Bootless Bay, east of the city of Port Moresby in Papua New Guinea (1951-1955). It was while here that their third child Delys Lorraine (1953-) was born in the Port Moresby hospital.¹⁷

Chapman's appointment to Bautama commenced nearly 20 years of mission service (1951-1969) and, with his wife Betty, provided hundreds of young people with the opportunity of a Christian education. Apart from teaching, his work involved numerous building programs, the training of teachers, and the establishing of farms. This latter enterprise saw him introduce the cultivation of dry rice which proved successful for many years.¹⁸

The need for higher standards of education in the Papua New Guinea saw Chapman continue his studies with the University of Western Australia, graduating with a bachelor's degree in 1955.¹⁹ Appointed principal of the Kabiufa School in the Eastern Highlands at Goroka in 1956 by the Coral Sea Union Mission, he oversaw the expansion of the institution into the church's senior school in Papua New Guinea instead of the Bautama Training School. Along with the responsibilities of principal, he also taught, ran the farm, and continued the operation of the sawmill in order to reduce some of the school's considerable debts.²⁰

In 1959 the family moved to the Gulf of Papua to work at the Belepa School with Chapman being appointed as principal in 1961. In this very isolated area, Betty homeschooled her children, operated a full-time dispensary for the community, ran the government immunization program, and had the responsibility for supervising forty students in the girls' dormitory.²¹

Nearly twenty years of mission service culminated in their final mission appointment back to Kabiufa as headmaster in 1962. This appointment came at the time when Kabiufa was being upgraded to a secondary school. It was the first Seventh-day Adventist School in Papua New Guinea to offer senior secondary school

classes. The upgrading of Kabiufa High School was an ambitious project for the Church and Chapman was heavily involved in making this project succeed.²² While carrying a full load of teaching, Chapman also cared for the farm and mechanical needs, totaling as much as 80 hours per week. During this time, when educational qualifications were becoming more important in Papua New Guinea, Chapman was being recognized for his public service with invitations to serve on many government committees.²³ Betty supported the program at the school teaching home economics and sewing to Forms 1- 4, and supervising the new dining room that involved cooking three meals a day for over 200 students.²⁴

Later Years

In 1968 Chapman developed a melanoma necessitating a return to Australia in 1969. His first appointment was as a teacher at Avondale High School on the Avondale College Campus at Cooranbong where he remained for two years (1970-1971).²⁵ In 1972 he was appointed to the Avondale College Library as Assistant Librarian, obtaining his Library Associateship in 1976. He was appointed Acting Librarian in 1980 and Associate Librarian in 1981, continuing in that position until his death on April 18, 1983 aged 59 years.²⁶

While at the college, Chapman submitted a thesis to meet the final requirement for the masters' qualifying course at the University of Queensland entitled "Seventh-day Adventist Education in Papua New Guinea 1908-1941." This work has provided the definitive history of those years of development for the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It demonstrated that the Church has made a notable contribution to education in Papua New Guinea.²⁷

In June 1985 Chapman was posthumously awarded the master of arts degree (UQ) for his thesis. The thesis described the ongoing contribution to education by the Church during the period, its relationship to the Australian New Guinea Administration Unit (ANGAU), its reasons for refusing to join the 1970 teaching service, its initiatives in education philosophy, and its benefits to students and society.²⁸

While living in Cooranbong Betty became involved in setting up the Avondale College 'Swap Shop' to aid struggling married students. This venture commenced in 1972 and led to the establishment of the Cooranbong Community Services Centre that has provided much needed support to the local community.²⁹

After Chapman's death, Betty remained in Cooranbong, volunteering her services as secretary of the College Music Department from 1983-1992 and sharing her hospitality with many people from all walks of life until she died on September 3, 2011.³⁰

Contribution

The positive recognition and high profile given to the Church's education program by the Papua New Guinea government is in part due to the work of pioneer missionaries like the Chapmans who worked selflessly throughout the early post-war period from 1951-1969.

Their lasting contribution is demonstrated by the lives of those who came to know them, with many of their students continuing to fill positions in the church, community and government.³¹

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