



James and Marcella Ashlock

Photo courtesy of Gordon Christo.

Ashlock, James Franklin (1902–1984) and Marcella (Klock) (1901–1997)

CHERYL CHRISTO HOWSON

Cheryl Christo Howson earned a graduate diploma in computer aided interior designing at the Dr. Bhanuben Nanavati College of Architecture for Women in Pune, India. She co-founded an interior design company in Sri Lanka and worked as a copywriter. She contributed to the morning devotional published by Women's Ministries at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, the *Shepherdess International Journal* magazine, and the *Adventist Review*. She has written several plays. Currently (2020), she lives in Hosur, India while preparing for a piano exam.

James Franklin Ashlock served the Seventh-day Adventist church as a pioneer evangelist, teacher, pastor, union president and division secretary in the Southern Asia Division where he ministered with his wife, Marcella, a nurse.

Early Life

In Stanford, the second oldest city in Kentucky, U.S.A.,¹ George Thomas Ashlock (1867-1943) and Lucy Frances Long Ashlock (1880-1965)² welcomed their third son into their family on February 7, 1902, naming him James Franklin Ashlock.³ His two older brothers were George William Ashlock (1898-1956) and Carl Johnson Ashlock (1900-1992).⁴

His parents became Seventh-day Adventists in 1919⁵ while James was studying at Emmanuel Missionary College Academy (Andrews Academy) and not long after, on June 14, 1920,⁶ he was baptized at a camp meeting. He soon followed in his father's footsteps as a literature evangelist, dedicating his time and efforts to selling Christian literature for his tuition with an attitude of "My slogan is pray and work."⁷ He was ordained as a minister in January 1931.⁸

Education and Marriage

Frank attended Southern Junior College (Southern Adventist University), Collegedale, TN, U.S.A., from 1922 until 1925. He graduated with honors⁹ in theology and history from Union College, Nebraska, in 1943. During his furlough in the U.S.A. (1943-1947) he completed his M.A. in theology at the SDA Theological Seminary (Andrews University). While he was there, he decided to do additional studies in theology, homiletics, and missions.¹⁰

On a Thursday evening, July 1, 1926, family and friends gathered in the Adventist church at Lake Charles, Louisiana, to celebrate the marriage of Miss Marcella Klock and Mr. James Franklin Ashlock. W. R. Elliott performed the ceremony. Later that evening, the couple attended a small informal reception at the home of the bride's brother and sister.¹¹

Marcella was born June 27, 1901 in Coffeyville, Kansas, U.S.A., and was baptized after she turned 14. She graduated from Southern Junior College (Southern Adventist University) and the Washington Sanitarium school for nurses (Washington Adventist Hospital).¹²

The Ashlocks had three children: Thomas Morton Ashlock born April 30, 1927 (died 2007), followed by Eva Lynn Ashlock on May 23, 1929 (died 2004), and James William Ashlock on October 9, 1931.¹³

Career and Ministry

James Franklin Ashlock began his service in the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1925 as publishing and youth director of the Alabama Conference.¹⁴ Three years later he moved to Nashville to be the circulation manager of

the *Watchman Magazine*.¹⁵

In 1928 he answered a call to go to India and be the home missionary and Sabbath School secretary for the Southern Asia Division.¹⁶ By January of the next year, he and his family arrived at the division headquarters in Pune and served there until 1934.¹⁷

A new chapter in their lives began June 27, 1935,¹⁸ after he returned from his furlough. Pastor and Mrs. J. F. Ashlock went to Shillong, Assam, (now known as Meghalaya), in northeast India.¹⁹ Regular colporteurs and a few missionaries had visited there previously, but he was the first missionary posted there.²⁰ Pastor Ashlock was instrumental in organizing the Assam Mission that year, and he became its first superintendent.²¹

Since the mission had no church building, Ashlock decided to find a house with enough space for worshipers to assemble. He was able to find a bungalow in a decent part of town for a reasonable price, because of rumors that it was haunted. Parts of this house served as a reading room and meeting hall for worship or Bible studies.²² Pastor and Mrs. Ashlock quickly learned the Khasi language, and by 1936 could conduct religious services in it.²³

Pastor Ashlock and his team (Mr. Rajee, Pastor and Mrs. O. W. Lange, Pastor and Mrs. C. A. Boykin, and Mr. and Mrs. Barlow), conducted six evangelistic meetings in Shillong town, the Jaiñtia Hills, and the Garo Hills District. The meetings resulted in 10 baptisms.²⁴

By 1938 Shillong had 25 baptized believers. Although they did not have a church building, they formed the first official Seventh-day Adventist church in the province of Assam on June 4 of that year.²⁵ By the end of 1939 the membership of the Shillong Church had swelled to 50.²⁶

Soon Pastor Ashlock's home ran out of space for everyone to worship in. And so, the congregation developed a plan for a church building.²⁷ On March 1, 1941, the members dedicated one that could accommodate about 200. It still stands today, although the worshipers in Shillong have grown past 650 baptized members and have erected a new structure.²⁸

Unfortunately, World War II interrupted the Ashlock's work, and they had to evacuate to the United States in 1942. While there, Pastor Ashlock pastored the Collegedale Church²⁹ 1943-1946 and also taught as an assistant professor at Southern Missionary College (Southern Adventist University).³⁰

After the war, in late February 1947, the Ashlocks sailed from New York City on the S.S. *Flying Arrow* to India. He went back to Shillong as the director of the Assam Mission. However, his wife, Marcella, developed a serious eye condition that forced them to make an emergency return to the United States until she recovered. Once more in Collegedale, Tennessee, he served as an assistant professor of theology and homiletics at Southern Missionary College (Southern Adventist University) 1948-1950.³¹

Once his wife's health improved, he returned to India in 1950 and was elected secretary of the Southern Asia Division at its headquarters in Pune, India.³² The 1954 General Conference appointed him the missionary

volunteer and ministerial assistant secretary of the Southern Asia Division. He continued in this role until the 1962 General Conference Session that elected him the general field secretary and public affairs director of the division until his retirement in 1966.³³

Later Life

After attending the 1966 General Conference as a delegate,³⁴ he retired, and he and his wife moved back to Collegedale, Tennessee. He passed away at the home of his son, Tom, in Adelphi, Maryland, on June 17, 1984. R. H. Pierson and D. W. Hunter conducted the funeral service.³⁵ Marcella Ashlock died several years later on November 9, 1997, in Ooltewah, Hamilton County, TN, U.S.A. She was buried beside her husband in Collegedale Memorial Park.³⁶

Contribution and Legacy

The Ashlocks helped establish the Seventh-day Adventist mission in the Khasi and Jaiñtia Hills. During their tenure, the first church group organized and the first church building was constructed. They contributed to the mission's rapid growth, and their influence reached other districts of the province.³⁷

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