

Rangoon Seventh-day Adventist Hospital (1947–1965)

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Suak Khaw Ngin was born in Chin State, Myanmar; he has been a pastor, teacher, principal, departmental director, and a seminary professor. He holds a BA in Religion from the Myanmar Union Adventist Seminary and a MA in Education from the Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, Philippines. He was ordained to the ministry in 2003. Together with his wife, Pau Za Dim, a son and three daughters, he lives in Myaungmya.

The Seventh-day Adventist hospital at Rangoon, Burma (now Myanmar), opened as a self-supporting institution on December 19, 1947. M. O. Manley, Burma Union Mission's superintendent, and Dr. J. C. Johannes, the union's medical director, were instrumental in opening the hospital. The hospital was transferred to the government in 1965.

Development

Seventh-day Adventist missionaries make disciples who, in accordance with 3 John 1:2, "prosper and be in health." Medical work has been a branch of missionary evangelism from the start. Most missionaries who went to Burma (Myanmar since 1989) were nurses. In 1905, L. H. Hansen, a registered nurse and colporteur, and his wife went to Rangoon (Yangon since 1989) and opened a clinic in Insein.¹ The Hansen's "hot and cold" hydrotherapy treatments were popular, and high government officials visited the clinic. Lady White, Myanmar's governor's wife, fell from her horse one unfortunate day, bruising her leg. The royal physician was unable to heal her. They asked Hansen to heal her, which he did with his hot and cold treatment. This made some good friends and helped secure Cowasjee Terrace Hall as a rented space for worship and conducting public evangelism.²

Founding

In 1939, Dr. I. S. Walker established a clinic on the corner of Dalhousie and Oliphant Streets, Rangoon.³ The clinic became famous within and outside the city. Patients from as far north as China's border went there for treatment. Because of World War II, however, the clinic had to close in 1942.⁴ The Walkers walked through the jungle and crossed the border from Rangoon into India, seeking shelter. Dr. Walker died in India some months later. In 1946, missionaries were once again sent to Burma. While rebuilding their church, the missionaries to Burma Mission decided that they needed a hospital as well. Dr. J. C. Johannes and his wife went to Rangoon in

early 1947.⁵

M. O. Manley, Burma Union Mission's superintendent, and Dr. J. C. Johannes, the union's medical director, prayed and sought a suitable location for a hospital in Rangoon. They finally found a choice location on 67 Alanpya Pagoda Road in the center of Rangoon – a hotel owned by a Mr. Jing Hong. The location was purchased with funds from a Thirteenth Sabbath Offering overflow later in 1947.⁶ The property was remodeled, and the hotel was converted into a 60-bed hospital, which opened in December 1947. Prime Minister U Nu officiated the opening ceremony on March 1, 1948.⁷ The hospital became well known among Burma's people as "The American Hospital."

History

The Seventh-day Adventist hospital in Burma opened as a self-supporting institution on December 19, 1947. Only Dr. Johannes, his wife, who was a nurse, and four other nurses worked there. Dr. Johannes had no time to rest since the hospital opened, instead treating all arriving patients. Dr. Eden Smith and Dr. George Richardson, medical surgeons, arrived to help and serve at the hospital.⁸

Burmese, Karenic, Chinese, Indian, and European patients entered the hospital and gradually filled all available beds. Some people of influence, including the wife of the commanding general of Myanmar's army, went there. Through the hospital, some patients entered the Seventh-day Adventist Church.⁹ As patients continued arriving, the hospital needed to expand its staff with indigenous and overseas workers. On December 7, 1953, construction of a new hospital wing began. The old wing was torn down, and a new three-story wing was finished in November 1954.¹⁰ On January 2, 1955, the Seventh-day Adventist hospital at Rangoon opened its new wing at a cost of approximately Rs. 400,000/-. Officiating the event was Honorable U Nu, prime minister of Burma, in the presence of distinguished and prominent people. The archbishop of the Rangoon Diocese of the Roman Catholic Church, the chief judge of the high court, and others of high ranks in the government were present.¹¹

Prime Minister U Nu gave praise to the hospital staff for the service they gave to the Burmese people. He indicated that Burma was proud to have such a fine institution in their community and complimented the Seventh-day Adventists' futuristic vision. The American charge d'affairs in Burma, Mr. Ackley, indicated that the hospital's unselfish service in healing the sick was remarkable. General Conference Secretary Elder W. R. Beach stressed that the hospital's objective was to heal the body, the mind, and the spirit in efforts to prepare humanity to meet God, the Creator.¹² The hospital had 200 beds; emergency, surgery, delivery, maternity, and pediatric intensive care wards; x-ray, laboratory, and physiotherapy departments; and a newly-opened school of nursing and maternity training.¹³

On June 1, 1953, a nursing school directed by Eliada Mann was opened with 17 students. The training curriculum term was three years long, and the first class graduated and was certified in March 1956. By 1963, 75 nurses had

graduated. Dr. Mann was the school's director until July 5, 1965. In November 1956, a midwifery school opened. This school was directed by Dr. B. Y. Stockhausen. By 1963, 40 students had been trained in midwifery.¹⁴

In January 1955, the following doctors worked at the hospital: Dr. Christa Hauck as an obstetrician, Dr. Carl Hauck as a pediatrician, Dr. Robert Shrewsbury as an eye specialist, Dr. George A. Richardson as a goiter surgery specialist, Dr. Robert H. Dunn as a tropical disease surgeon, Dr. Rudy Haak as an anesthesiologist, Dr. H. Dupper as a general physician, and Dr. and Mrs. R. H. Davidson as physiotherapists.¹⁵

The hospital had a short life span, but it fully served the people's needs and saved many lives through treatments, surgery, and nursing care. The doctors, nurses, and teachers prayed for their patients and worshipped with them, teaching them the message of the Second Coming. Donations from all over Burma were given for the hospital, education, and mission to develop. However, the hospital was transferred to the government, and although some continued working at the hospital, others left to serve in the ministry of God, and still others retired. By 1962, with 180 workers and 50 nurses as well as 379,289 outpatients and 3,411 inpatients, the hospital had conducted 462 surgeries.¹⁶

The Rangoon Seventh-day Adventist Hospital transferred ownership on July 5, 1965, to Burma's Ministry of Health's government program. Medical Director Heath Rowsell was the hospital's last director, and U Pein Kyi was the manager when the takeover occurred. Nurses who served the sick and suffering at the hospital continued working there and at other hospitals, spreading their Christian service.¹⁷

List of Medical Directors

I. S. Walker (1939-1942); Joseph C. Johannes (1947-1949); Eden M. Smith (1949-1952); George E. Richardson (1952-1954); Joseph C. Johannes (1954-1955); A. E. Geschke (1955-1956); Robert H. Dunn (1956-1960); Robert H. Dunn (1961-1963); Heath H. Rowsell (1963-1965).

SOURCES

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NOTES

1. Pe Yee, *The Story of Seventh-day Adventists in Myanmar* (Rangoon, Burma: Kinsaung Publishing House, 1986), 45-46, 170.
2. Ibid., 46, 175.
3. *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1965), 1050-1051.
4. Gil G. Fernandez, *Light Dawns over Asia: Adventism's Story in the Far Eastern Division 1888-1988* (Silang, Cavite: Adventist International Institute of Advances Studies, 1990), 285.
5. *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (1965), 1050-1051.
6. Pe Yee, 394; and "Gleanings," *Eastern Tidings*, January 1, 1947, 8.
7. *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (1965), 1050-1051.
8. Pe Yee, 394-395.
9. J. O. Wilson, "Rangoon Hospital Makes Good Start," *Eastern Tidings*, March 1, 1948, 3.
10. Pe Yee, 395.
11. L. C. Shepard, "Opening of the Rangoon Hospital," *Southern Asia Tidings*, February 15, 1955, 1-2.
12. Ibid.
13. Pe Yee, 395.
14. *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (1965), 1050-1051.
15. Fernandez, 289.
16. Pe Yee, 400.
17. Fernandez, 289; Pe Yee, 396; "News of Note," *ARH*, July 22, 1965; and "News," *Southern Asia Tidings*, August 1965.

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