

Blandford, Claude Lockyer (1892–1968) and Ida Mae (Matson) (1889–1922); later Lillian Louise (Thompson) (1895–1986)



Claude and Lillian Blandford in China, c. 1924.

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GORDON E. BLANDFORD

Gordon E. Blandford was born in Boston, MA. Graduated from Atlantic Union College in 1975. Pastored for 30 years. His years of service included work in Maine, New Jersey, and more than 20 years in the Florida Conference. In 1973, he married Kathy Yeary. They have two grown daughters.

Claude Lockyer Blandford was a pastor, administrator, and pioneering missionary to China.

Early Life

Claude Lockyer Blandford () was born March 2, 1892, in St. John's, Newfoundland, to Captain Archibald Blandford and Sarah Mary Lockyer Blandford. Their first child, John Sabbin Blandford, died in infancy. Claude was the third-born, following Katie Cecelia. Younger siblings were: Maxwell, Mona, Reginald, Austin, Eloise, John A., Archibald P. Blandford, Jr., and Kenneth.¹

As a result of the lay-ministry influences of Mr. and Mrs. E. A. Parker and Mr. and Mrs. L. T. Ayers in bringing the Adventist message to Newfoundland in 1883, Mrs. Blandford joined the fledgling Seventh-day Adventist church in St. John's.² Her husband, a sea captain in a long lineage of sea captains and fishermen, neither joined her nor

prevented her from bringing their children to the church nor, later, in educating some of them in the newly-formed church school in the home of Anna Pippy, an early convert.

Claude Blandford was baptized in 1900 at the age of eight.³ From early on, his dream was not to follow his heritage to be a fisherman or boat captain, but to cross the seas to become a “fisher of men” for Christ in faraway places.

Education and Marriage

After completing elementary school in St. John’s, Claude attended the Adventist academy in Williamsdale, Nova Scotia. He took leadership roles in the Missionary Volunteer Society, the American Temperance Society, and in raising funds for China missions.⁴

Following graduation, Claude worked as a colporteur in Ecum Secum, Nova Scotia. At age 20, he emigrated to the United States. The summer of 1912 found him in Lowell, Massachusetts, assisting with tent meetings⁵ On July 1, 1914, he married Ida Mae Matson of Fitchburg, Massachusetts. They moved to Takoma Park, Maryland, and enrolled in the Foreign Seminary Department at Washington Missionary College. In 1916 they accepted the call of the General Conference to serve the Lord in China.⁶

Ministry

On July 26, 1916, Claude and Ida sailed on the steamship *China* with the largest company of missionaries ever sent out by the denomination to the Asiatic Division.

China always seemed to me the land of greatest need,” wrote Claude in a statement co-signed by Ida Mae while in route. “Today we are satisfied that the need in China is greater than we ever anticipated. And to have the opportunity of laboring for these people is a joy indeed. Our ideas of hardship in this field have vanished. It seems that our pathway lies in pleasant places. While we expect to meet with great difficulties, our help is sufficient. It is God’s work. He will not forsake it. Why should we?”

Early Work in China

Soon after the group of missionaries arrived in Shanghai, the Blandfords and Dr. and Mrs. J. N. Andrews were sent about 900 miles west to Chunking in the province of Szechwan, the largest province in China—a vast area with a population of close to 70,000,000 and the commercial and industrial center of China. Elder and Mrs. M. C. Warren headed the denomination’s only established mission there.

After several months of linguistic and cultural study, the Blandfords gathered their belongings and headed to Chengdu. Claude describes their journey:

It is distant from Chungking, our nearest mission station, about 400 miles by road but, in point of time, it is farther than from Boston to San Francisco. The mode of travel is by sedan chair or on horseback. The dangers of travel in the province at the present time are very great. On November 12, 1917, accompanied by Mrs. Blandford, a native evangelist, his family, and a Bible worker, we started from Chungking to Chengdu. I rode my horse, while the others rode in sedan chairs. With six chairs, and about thirty men carrying our combined goods, we formed quite a caravan.⁸

After 11 days, the Blandfords arrived to find that their house, although newly built, had paper windows. After building a chimney and installing glass windows, one of their first acts was to place a notice in the daily newspaper inviting those interested in Bible study to call on them. Soon, at all hours of the day, they could hear the native evangelist, Brother Li Fah Kung, giving studies on the Sabbath, the Second Coming, and the books of Daniel and Revelation.⁹

Reorganizing West China Union Mission

The West China reorganization meeting opened May 16, 1919, in Chungking. Brother and Sister C. L. Blandford, with a delegation of four besides evangelist Li and his family, came from Chengdu down the Min and Yangtze Rivers by houseboat. During this meeting, the Szechwan region was reorganized into three missions. These were: East Szechwan Mission, population about 35,000,000, headquarters in Chungking, Elder Warren as acting superintendent; West Szechwan Mission, headquarters in Chengdu, with about 25,000,000 population, C. L. Blandford as superintendent; and Tibetan Mission, the border land, 8,000,000 population, Dr. J. N. Andrews as superintendent, headquarters in Tatsienlu.¹⁰ In commenting about this event, China Division President, W. A. Spicer, said,

I was glad to find Brother and Sister Blandford looking hardy and strong, and to note their courage in the work. It seemed hard, however, to bid them goodbye as they started back to the populous Chengdu Plain with no evangelist to go with them. Evangelist Li, who has pioneered the way with them, has failed in health, and must return to his Hunan home. There was no one to take his place. There is a little church of believers in Chengdu; but they do need help. I wish to share Brother Blandford's pleas, 'Send us an evangelist, someone who knows how to preach the message among these millions.'¹¹

Two years later, at the West China Union meeting, September 3-13, 1921, Claude L. Blandford and Hsu Ru Lin were ordained. During the meeting, Claude reported that the membership in Chengdu had grown to 22. Besides that, there was one outstation with a small company of believers. A boys' school of primary and higher primary grades was established with an enrollment reaching 62. Furthermore, a piece of land in the city was purchased with the plan to house the headquarters offices and homes of the workers.

Claude and Ida Blandford labored alone in Chengdu for nearly four years, through sickness, war, and plague, hoping that help would soon come. Finally, at the 1921 West China Union meeting, Mr. and Mrs. S. H. Lindt were assigned to minister with them in Chengdu.¹²

Death of Ida Mae Blandford

The Blandfords returned to Chengdu with the Lindts. The total workforce of the foreign missionaries in West Szechwan had doubled.

Ida Blandford, with her bubbling personality, served as secretary of the West Szechwan Mission Sabbath School. She also taught four classes in the Primary Mission School and was deeply loved for her dedicated service to the Chinese children and their families.

Suddenly, at age 32, she was struck down by illness. She developed pleurisy, which turned into pneumonia, which became complicated by meningitis. In spite of desperate medical attempts to save her, she died on May 5, 1922, and was buried in a little cemetery just outside the city.^{13, 14}

Second Marriage and Return to China

After Ida Mae died, Claude continued working at Chengdu for another nine months. Tribal wars had ravaged the territory and Claude often preached three times a day to encourage the people. With broken heart and broken health, he returned to the United States for furlough and medical care.

While under treatment at the New England Sanitarium and Hospital, he was often assigned to nurse Lillian Thompson (). He became impressed with her skills and compassion and she with his stories of China and his sense of humor. They continued to see each other after his discharge from the hospital and started planning a life of service together in China. They married in May 1923.

They sailed from Vancouver on July 31, 1924, to resume the work at Chengdu. Two years later, Claude gave a detailed report in the *Far Eastern Division Outlook* of the many changes that had taken place during the period from 1925 to 1926.

He noted that great changes had occurred in the city of Chengdu. The streets were widened and paved. Several thousand rickshaws, as well as motor buses, were running across the city and to other towns. These changes certainly helped to advance the work of the church in West Szechuan. A trip to a nearby town that usually took a whole day on horseback now took only a little over two hours by bus.

The progress of the church in West Szechuan had been encouraging. Seventeen believers were baptized, including a German businessman who had been in China for 24 years. New interests were opened in three places. The literature returns for 1926 were expected to surpass 1925 fourfold. All departments made significant

gains and the tithe for 1926 was expected to more than double that of 1925.¹⁵

On account of ill-health the Blandfords had to lay down the work in Chengdu. The committee voted that they should return to America. However, after their arrival in Shanghai, Mrs. Blandford's health improved and they were transferred to Peking in 1926, where Claude served as superintendent of the North China Union Mission until 1933.¹⁶

Blandford Opened Work in Dairen, Manchuria

In 1933, Blandford opened an office in Dairen, a location that the church had never been able to enter before, but viewed as a key outpost in spreading the gospel to Manchuria.¹⁷ Thereafter, the Blandfords were often recognized as pioneers to Manchuria.

Blandfords Joined China Training Institute

After some time in Dairen, Claude and Lillian were invited to join the staff of the China Training Institute in Chiao Tou Tseng. Lillian taught music, while Claude served as the Bible and History teacher. Their time of service was cut short, however, when the Japanese occupation forced the evacuation of staff on September 2, 1937.¹⁸

The Blandfords chose to take their furlough with the intent of returning in 1938 but, due to the continued occupation, their return was delayed and sadly their time of service in China ended.

From 1916 to 1937, Claude's ministry in China included service as a mission director, pastor, evangelist, editorial assistant, chaplain, and professor.

Return to USA

Upon returning to the USA in 1937, the Blandfords bought a small farm in Atkinson, New Hampshire, where he hoped to regain his health and strength to return to his beloved China. While on furlough and physically able to fulfill the role, Claude served as chaplain at the New England Sanitarium and Hospital. In 1939, Lillian joined the staff of that institution. Soon after, Claude fell from a roof, breaking two vertebrae and three ribs, dashing their hopes of further foreign mission service.¹⁹

That did not dampen their fervor for the gospel. Wherever they were, Claude and Lillian poured themselves into service for the Lord. In 1943, Blandford accepted a call as pastor of the Philadelphia Temple Church, a group that, at the time, had no church building. On the centennial anniversary of the Great Disappointment (November 23, 1944), the Temple Church dedicated the beautiful building they had acquired that year.²⁰ Two years later, Pastor Blandford was broadcasting portions of the Sabbath services over radio station WNAR.

This brought new interests and increased attendance at the church. So, the next year Blandford started another radio program called "The Bible Answer Man," offering a Bible correspondence course at the end of each session and a "book of the month" to be given free.

Even in retirement, he and Lillian served frequently in local churches, in particular the Haverhill and Amesbury, Massachusetts, churches. Pastor Russell Burrill shares how, at age 15, he met Pastor Blandford at the Haverhill Church.²¹ He had been taking the Voice of Prophecy Bible lessons, to which his parents were strongly opposed. Blandford was teaching the adult Sabbath School lesson and, even at his age, Burrill appreciated the depth of biblical understanding Blandford conveyed.

The Blandfords took personal interest in the teen, his younger brother, Ken, and later in his whole family as they overcame their opposition through the thorough study of the Bible. Russell went on to become a pastor himself and, when C. L. Blandford died, he gave the graveside eulogy, citing Edwin Markham's poem:

And when he fell in the whirlwind, he went down
As when a lordly cedar, green with boughs,
Goes down with a great shout upon the hills
And leaves a lonesome place against the sky.

He closed the service with these words of conviction about Claude's life:²² "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but to all them that love his appearing" (2 Tim. 4:7, 8, KJV).

Claude L. Blandford died March 24, 1968, in Grasonville, Maryland, and was buried in Moosup, Connecticut. He was a minister for more than 50 years and served 21 years in China. He was survived by his wife, Lillian, and adopted son, Elder Gordon T. Blandford, pastor of the Grasonville, Maryland, SDA church, and grandson, Elder Gordon E. Blandford.²³ The three generations of Blandford pastors' combined service totals more than 130 years.

Lillian, who continued to make herself useful wherever she was, lived to age 90, passing peacefully away on February 7, 1986. She was buried in Moosup, Connecticut, beside her beloved husband.

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NOTES

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