

Maberly, Frank Thomas (1921–1998)

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Pioneer Missionary, pastor and church administrator, Frank T. Maberly served the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the South Pacific for thirty-eight years. He gave ten years to mission service in Papua New Guinea followed by twenty-eight years in various roles in Australia. His pioneering mission work in the late 1940s among the Enga population opened the Wabag region of the Central Highlands of Papua New Guinea and laid a secure foundation for the remarkable growth of the Church in this region.

Family Background and Education (1921-1943)

Frank T. Maberly was born in the beachside suburb of Waverly in Sydney, New South Wales, on April 5, 1921, the eldest son of New Zealanders Egbert (Bert) Henry Maberly and Mabel Isabel Florence Gisby. Frank Maberly was the fifth of eight siblings that included four older sisters and three younger brothers. Both of Maberly's parents were the descendants of British families who had migrated to New Zealand in the mid-19th century. Bert Maberly's family traced their origins to Owlesbury in Hampshire and Mabel Maberly's family hailed from Nottingham.¹ They married in Auckland in April 1913 and shortly afterwards moved to Sydney where Bert Maberly engaged in home construction work. About this time the couple became acquainted with the Seventh-day Adventist Church and joined the recently established Woollahra congregation in eastern Sydney.² In 1925,



Frank Thomas Maberly

Photo courtesy of Adventist Heritage Centre, Australia.

when Frank Maberly was four-years of age, his parents returned to New Zealand, settling in Penrose, Auckland, where Bert Maberly established himself as a builder and cabinet maker. The family became actively involved with the Remuera Seventh-day Adventist Church not far from their home.

Frank Maberly earned his high school education at the recently opened government co-ed Otahuhu College. He completed year eleven in 1936 with the successful passing of the public service entrance examination gaining him a "Senior Free Place Certificate."³ The following year he took up employment as an office clerk with the North New Zealand Conference. Two years later, at the commencement of 1939, he enrolled at New Zealand Missionary College (NZMC) in Longburn to undertake the Intermediate Ministerial Certificate training program. He completed the two-year certificate at the end of 1940, but apparently stayed on for a further year at the college.⁴ In 1942, he crossed the Tasman Sea for another two years of study, graduating in December 1943 from the full ministerial training program at the Australian Missionary College (AMC) in Cooranbong, New South Wales. In February 1944, he was assigned as a ministerial intern to work with W. P Claus in the Kaitaia district of North New Zealand where the team found some early success in developing an interest among the Maori population.⁵ Summer vacations during these four years of study were spent in colporteur work in various places in New Zealand and Australia. In the summer of 1940, for example, he teamed up with a college friend to motorcycle to distant parts of the South Island selling books, while the summer of 1944 he partnered with NZMC friend Cyrus Adams, canvassing in Longreach and travelling by train to other remote towns in outback Queensland.⁶

During his ministerial study at AMC, Maberly met and fell in love with fellow student Liela May Thrift who had been born in Poona, India, on May 2, 1922, the daughter of Australian missionaries Richard and Ethel Thrift. Liela Thrift's parents had returned to Australia soon after her birth to take up pastoral work in Tasmania followed by assignments in Queensland, West Australia, and New South Wales. Following her graduation from the AMC teacher-training course in 1943 Liela Thrift was assigned to Warburton to teach. The couple, already anticipating mission service together, were married in Wahroonga on May 24, 1945, at a service conducted by A. W. Anderson.

Missionary (1945-1955)

Four months after their wedding in September 1945, Frank Maberly departed for Papua New Guinea where he had been appointed district director at Omaura, 300 kilometers north-west of Lae in the Central New Guinea Highlands. Housing was not yet ready and the territory had just been opened up by the civic administration following the end of World War II. The location was not at first considered a safe place for women. However, Liela Maberly joined him within seven months.

Two years later, in November 1947, and three months after the birth of their first child, Rhondda, who had been born at Port Moresby, Frank and Liela Maberly accepted the challenge of opening brand new mission work in

the Wabag Valley. A further 800 kilometers to the west, no mission work had previously been attempted in this remote highland region with its scattered population group of about 100,000. The local Enga language was yet undeciphered, stone axes and bows and arrows were still in use, and Liela Maberly and her baby daughter were the first white women the people had ever encountered. According to H. W. Nolan, the new location was “the most isolated” mission in Papua New Guinea and probably in “the entire Pacific area.”⁷ In his role as a “first contact missionary,” Maberly built strong relationships with tribal chiefs and successfully brokered a lasting peace between the large warring Lenkis and Rakamanda tribes. The church steadily attracted adherents even as it struggled to understand how to relate to the strong cultural appeal of traditional *sing* dances.⁸ Baptisms came slowly after long preparation with the first candidates being baptized in 1954.⁹ Over time, the Wabag Valley was to become an important Adventist center, producing many strong leaders for the wider Adventist Church in Papua New Guinea.

Three years after establishing mission work in Wabag, in 1950 Maberly and his family were transferred back to the newly established Highlands Mission School at Kabiufa near Goroka in the Central Highlands where he served as principal for two years. During this time, two sons were added to the family, Clifton, born in 1948 while the family were on furlough, and Glenn, born in Lae when the family lived at Kabiufa.¹⁰

In 1952, the developing needs of mission took Maberly and his family to Manus Island, the largest island of the Bismarck archipelago, 350 kilometers off the coast of mainland Papua New Guinea. From this base Maberly, quickly mastered necessary mariner’s navigational skills to operate his mission ship, and again had the opportunity of opening up new mission work in the scattered Islands of Ninigo and Aua, 300 kilometers further west of Manus on the rim of the archipelago.¹¹

In 1953, Maberly was appointed president, first, of the Eastern Highlands Mission based in Goroka, and then of the newly organized Western Highlands Mission with its headquarters at Mount Hagen. He oversaw the work he had established in the Wabag Valley several years earlier, and in 1955 he organized the first Western Highlands camp meeting at Wabag. Five hundred people camped on the grounds during the six days and more than two thousand “enthusiastic tribesmen” attending during the weekends. Large baptismal classes resulted from this initiative.¹² Maberly was also able to oversee the establishment of a new mission at Paglum at the northern end of the Wabag Valley where there was a population of 100,000. With his team, he initiated plans for the opening of new work in the even more remote and rugged Tari Valley in the Western Highlands, also with a population of 100,000, even though mission work at first had to be restricted to the “controlled area”–territory immediately surrounding the newly opened Australian-administered civil headquarters.¹³

Pastor and Church Administrator (1955-1981)

Family health problems necessitated a permanent return for Maberly to Australia in late 1955. He was assigned to the rather remote coastal city of Geraldton, 400 kilometers north of Perth in Western Australia. Here, making

rapid cultural adjustments, he became involved in innovative new approaches to local church evangelism.¹⁴ Further pastoral assignments saw the family moving to the Manjimup church, 300 kilometers south of Perth in the far southwestern corner of Western Australia where Maberly also cared for the rural Kulicup church.

In 1959, Maberly was elected to the presidency of the West Australian Conference. During his three two-year terms in office as president he encouraged innovative approaches to public evangelism such as the big-city mission in Perth by George Burnside that he arranged in 1962. The program gave away free bibles as an incentive for attendance and attracted, "a very fine class of people."¹⁵ Maberly took a specific interest in promoting mission initiatives for the aboriginal community and fostered improvements in the school system. During Maberly's administration, he also oversaw the securing of a new nine-and-a-half-acre property eight miles from Perth at Rossmoyne on the Canning River for the development of Sherwin Lodge, an aged care facility. The fifty-seven-bed residential care unit today functions as part of a larger seventy-two home retirement village. The main street of the village is named "Maberly Crescent."

In late 1965, Maberly was called to the presidency of the South Australian Conference arriving to take up his new appointment in Adelaide in early 1966. He served in that capacity for less than a year. At the General Conference Session held in Detroit, in June 1966, Maberly was appointed to serve as Australasian Division Secretary alongside Division President Laurence C. Naden. This was a period of rapid church growth and missionary expansion. When Maberly took office, he assumed responsibility for 250 European missionary families serving in the Pacific island territories as well as an increasing number of national missionaries working across union mission boundaries. With increasing requests also coming from other divisions, Maberly estimated that "one missionary family every five days left our shores" to serve overseas. The administrative support required for this effort was large.¹⁶

During Maberly's five years as division secretary, the union mission territories saw a 30% increase in membership. The number of church employees in the mission territories expanded from 1,761 to 1,864 and for the first time in 1969, the proportion of membership in the mission (56.2%) exceeded the membership in the home fields. Maberly reported that he had coordinated the sending out of 370 missionaries who "left the home base for overseas mission service compared to 274 during the previous quadrennium." The average rate of departure now involved one family leaving every four days instead of every five days.¹⁷ A highlight of his term in office was the opening of a new "inter-union college" at Sonoma, near Rabaul, on the island of New Britain in Papua New Guinea.¹⁸ In 1968, Maberly had been diagnosed with mild initial stage Parkinson's disease. At the 1970 General Conference Session with the appointment of a new president and administrative team, Maberly accepted an invitation to serve as the president of the Greater Sydney Conference, taking up his duties in September of that year.

For the next six years, Maberly once more focused on the needs of his homeland constituents, fostering evangelism and meeting the needs of an expanding educational system. During his administration in Greater

Sydney, he oversaw the establishment of a new wave of ethnic churches to meet the needs of Hispanic and Southeast Asian immigrants making their way to Australia as refugees. He also found himself leading out in the development of facilities for aged care and oversaw the development of additional nursing care facilities at Kings Langley in 1974.

In 1977, increasingly conscious of the limitations placed on him by his illness, he requested to step down from the administrative cares of conference leadership and accepted the pastoral care of the Arcadia-Galston church in northwestern Sydney. For four years, he attended to the pastoral needs of the growing church leading them in the development of a large modern church facility on an expanded property in Galston. Ill health led to Maberly's withdrawal from full-time ministry in 1981, at the age of 60, and he retired to his home in Thornleigh. In 1989, the Esther Somerville home in Kings Langley became his residence as his increasing limitations required the need for more specialized care. He died in 1998 and was buried in the Avondale Cemetery at Cooranbong.

Contribution

Frank Maberly served in Papua New Guinea at a critical time when the mission field was opening up to new opportunities following World War II. He helped establish the work of the Church in areas that have since contributed much to the welfare and growth of the Church in other parts of Papua New Guinea. His work in administration contributed to the growth of the Church in three conferences and at the division level, always with an eye to an expanding mission.

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NOTES

1. Mabel's father had settled in New Zealand sometime in the 1870s. See <http://www.gisby.org.uk/>. Frank's great Grandfather, George Alfred Maberly had been born in Owsley, Hampshire, and moved to New Zealand also sometime in the 1870s. See <https://www.geni.com/people/Egbert-Maberly/6000000009526751839>, accessed May 6, 2019. Named, Frank Thenore at birth, Frank later changed his second name to Thomas.
2. R. P. Brown, "Egbert Henry Maberly obituary," *Australasian Record*, April 7, 1969, 15.
3. Frank Thomas Maberly Biographical Records, South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives, folder: "Maberly, Frank Thomas," document: "Workers Biographical Record, August 11, 1944." The standard of the "Free Place Certificate" is explained at <https://teara.govt.nz/en/primary-and-secondary-education/page-4>, accessed May 6, 2019.
4. C. S. Palmer, "New Zealand Missionary College," *Australasian Record*, February 2, 1942, 3.
5. "Word from the Waikato District," *Australasian Record*, November 20, 1944, 8.
6. "Not Cast Down," *Australasian Record*, February 2, 1945, 4.
7. H. W. Nolan, "'The Right Arm' and the Central Highlands of New Guinea," *Australasian Record*, December 3, 1947, 3.
8. Frank T. Maberly, "Central New Guinea Camp Meeting," *ARH*, June 2, 1955, 1, 25.
9. Frank T. Maberly, "Advances in Central New Guinea," *ARH*, July 29, 1954, 16, 17. The first seven Western Highlands candidates were baptized in mid-1954.

10. Frank Thomas Maberly Biographical Records, South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives, folder: "Maberly, Frank Thomas," document: "Workers Biographical Record, August 11, 1944."
11. "Life Sketch of Pastor Frank Maberly," 1998, held in the personal collection of the author.
12. Frank T. Maberly, "Central New Guinea Camp Meeting," *ARH*, June 2, 1955, 1, 25.
13. Frank T. Maberly, "New Guinea's Newest Mission Field," *ARH*, July 19, 1956, 23, 24.
14. Alan G. Thrift, "Success of Experimental Spear-Head Evangelism," *Australasian Record*, January 23, 1956, 3.
15. F. T. Maberly, "Consolidating Perth Mission Gains," *Australasian Record*, November 26, 1962, 1, 2.
16. F. T. Maberly, "Secretary's Report," *Australasian Record*, December 5, 1966, 3.
17. F. T. Maberly, "Secretarial Report," *Australasian Record*, September 7, 1970. 3-5.
18. Ibid.

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