

Leedy, George Clingman (1891–1985)

TERESA COSTELLO, AND FAI LEONG

Teresa Costello, born in the southwest United States, has served as a missionary in the Pacific under the Far Eastern Division and southeast Asia under the Southern Asia-Pacific Division (SSD) for more than 15 years. With bachelor of arts degrees in English and religion and a master's degree in curriculum and instruction, she served in the SSD Communication department from 2012-2017 and is currently (2020) the *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists* editorial assistant for SSD. With a background in education, journalism, communication, and public speaking, she is a storyteller who enjoys gathering life experiences from those she meets during her travels with her family.

Fai Leong began his pastoral ministry in Kuala Lumpur in 1980, after he graduated from Hong Kong Adventist College. At the time of writing, he was the president of the Peninsular Malaysia Mission.

George Clingman Leedy served as the Malay States Mission president in the Far Eastern Division from 1922 to 1928. He also served as a colporteur and teacher in the Pacific Northwest of the United States.

Early Life

George Clingman Leedy was born March 18, 1891,¹ to Jessie Eleanor (Bear) Leedy and George Franklin Leedy² in Pueblo, Colorado.³ He had two brothers, Roscoe and Harold Earling, and one sister, Florence Mildred Leedy.⁴ The family moved from Pueblo, Colorado, to Spokane, Washington, in March 1907.⁵ In April 1907 George F. Leedy purchased land on what was then known as the Yakima Indian Reserve.⁶ George C. Leedy gained denominational experience as a colporteur in southern Idaho as early as 1914⁷ through 1917.⁸

Education and Marriage

George attended Walla Walla College in College Place, Washington, for his ministerial training in 1918.⁹ Beatrice Baldwin, born April 4, 1898, to George W. Baldwin and Eva Lee (Crowley) Baldwin in Meacham, Umatilla County, Oregon, also attended Walla Walla College at that time.¹⁰ Beatrice worked as a summer colporteur to pay for her education.¹¹ In 1921 they were recruited as missionaries to Malaysia.¹² Thus, they left their schooling and were married on June 28, 1921, in Milton, Oregon.¹³

Ministry

The day after their wedding, they applied for U.S. passports¹⁴ so they could go to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, to relieve Pastor and Mrs. G. A. Thompson, pioneering Adventist missionaries there, who were scheduled to leave on furlough.¹⁵ The Leedys originally planned to depart on November 8, 1921, from the port of San Francisco, California, U.S.A., aboard the S.S. Nile.¹⁶ They spent a few weeks in Loma Linda, California, for their medical

procedures prior to departure.¹⁷ However, they were delayed until December 10¹⁸ when they were then able to sail from San Francisco to Singapore. They arrived in Shanghai, China, on January 4, 1922, and a few hours later they sailed to Hong Kong and then Singapore.¹⁹

A few weeks after their arrival, the Thompsons left and the Leedys were immersed in a heavy workload with George serving as the Malay States Mission (MSM) director (president) and Beatrice as the mission secretary and treasurer.²⁰ They faced a variety of challenges, including few Adventist workers, a number of language barriers, and unexpected health issues.²¹ The Leedys later estimated there were only four workers when they arrived.²²

Communication was a challenge as there were numerous languages and dialects in the local Malaysian, Chinese, and Indian communities.²³ Additionally, shortly after the Leedys arrived, they both contracted a severe case of malignant malaria, also known as cerebral malaria.²⁴

The gospel work in Kuala Lumpur began in 1914 with mainly government servants of the Tamil-speaking community.²⁵ As it was quite impossible for them to obtain Sabbaths off from work, the outreach efforts changed focus to the Chinese community prior to the arrival of the Leedys.²⁶

To make his ministry more effective, Pastor Leedy intently studied Swatowese (Chao-zhou dialect), one of the main dialects among the Chinese community in Kuala Lumpur at the time, particularly among the business community.²⁷

Pastor Leedy felt that the original outreach approach yielded slower results compared to a combination of public evangelistic efforts and personal Bible study.²⁸ Therefore, he changed the ministry strategy by engaging and training more national Bible instructors to reach out to the three main language groups in the territory.²⁹ With that approach, the ministry to the Tamil-speaking community flourished in the mid-1920s, alongside the ministry to the Chinese-speaking community. He then invited evangelists from other lands to speak to the respective ethnic groups.³⁰

During Pastor Leedy's tenure of leadership in Peninsular Malaysia, progress was made in the areas of health, literature evangelism, education, and church expansion. With Pastor Leedy's colporteur experience, the MSM literature evangelism program increased during his term of service.³¹

In terms of health evangelism, Dr. Earl Gardner set up the first Adventist healthcare institution in Malaysia at 108 Muntri Street in Penang on December 12, 1924.³² The clinic featured a large "Poor Treated Free" sign, indicative of Dr. Gardner's life-long devotion to helping those most at-risk in society.³³ This humble dispensary developed into the 250-bed Penang Adventist Hospital of today.³⁴ With the presence of the dispensary, the MSM baptism figures doubled by 1925.³⁵ This gave new courage to the whole team in the Malay States and they focused on improving their evangelistic efforts.³⁶

Pastor Leedy tried to establish church schools wherever there was a sizeable congregation.³⁷ He established three church schools while he was the MSM director.³⁸

Under the leadership of Pastor Leedy, a plot of land was purchased in Kuala Lumpur as the location for a church and a mission office.³⁹ Initially, the government gave approval regarding the location, but later rescinded the approval, so another piece of land had to be acquired.⁴⁰ The church building project materialized only after Pastor Leedy's mission term ended.⁴¹

January 20, 1927, marked the birth of their first child, Gordon Carol Leedy, at the Maternity Hospital in Kuala Lumpur.⁴² A little more than four months later, the Leedys and their son left Malaysia on furlough, sailing home on the *S.S. Empress of Canada* from Kuala Lumpur. They arrived in Vancouver, Canada, on June 19, 1927.⁴³ During their year-long furlough, Pastor Leedy completed his Walla Walla College education⁴⁴ and their daughter, Helen Louise Leedy, was born May 7, 1928, in College Place, Washington.⁴⁵

Later Life

Due to misunderstandings regarding the Adventist building project and other issues in Malaysia,^{46 47} such as missionary/worker budget cuts,⁴⁸ the Leedy family did not return to the mission field and Pastor Leedy struggled initially to find employment.⁴⁹

According to the 1930 United States census records, the Leedys lived separately during this period. Mrs. Leedy reported that she was without an occupation and lived with the children in Monmouth, Oregon, as a "lodger" in the home of Dora E. Hall.⁵⁰ Meanwhile, Pastor Leedy reported that he was pursuing medical work and lived in a Milton, Umatilla, Oregon, boardinghouse as a lodger,⁵¹ along with boarders Effie and John Nerness, a ministerial couple.⁵²

Even though Pastor Leedy was unable to return to Malaysia as a missionary, perhaps he inspired the Nerness couple, because approximately six years later they accepted a mission call to the same union where the Leedys had served. On January 13, 1937, the Nerness family arrived in Singapore⁵³ where Pastor Nerness was named the director and secretary-treasurer of the newly formed Sarawak Mission, comprising Sarawak and Borneo.^{54 55}

By 1931 Mrs. Leedy was listed among the Upper Columbia Conference church school teachers.⁵⁶ In 1933 five new church schools were added to the Upper Columbia Conference, and the Leedys were assigned to the Grandview School in Grandview, Oregon.⁵⁷ Pastor Leedy continued his ministry by visiting and giving Bible studies to interested people in local communities after work.⁵⁸ The following year, the Leedys were transferred to the school at Naches, Washington.⁵⁹

According to family records, the Leedys divorced around 1939.⁶⁰ Beatrice remarried in 1944,⁶¹ while George later married Wierie Marguerite (Rader) Hamp, a missionary widow,⁶² on June 3, 1945, in Pierce, Washington.⁶³ Marguerite, born January 17, 1900, to George W. Rader and Dora (Compton) Rader in Marion, Indiana,⁶⁴ was an experienced Adventist teacher and missionary.⁶⁵ She taught for one year with her first husband, Glenn George Hamp, at the Indianapolis Boarding School.⁶⁶ In 1925 she and Glen were called to China to serve as missionaries

in education under the Far Eastern Division,⁶⁷ the same division in which George C. Leedy had worked. The Hamps worked in education there for nine years while Glenn simultaneously served as the secretary-treasurer for the Adventist work in Changsha, Hunan.⁶⁸ During that time the work in China was split from the Far Eastern Division.⁶⁹ For their final two years in China, they served at the North China Industrial Institute.⁷⁰ After Marguerite and Glenn nursed their youngest son, Melvin, through an almost fatal case of scarlet fever, Glenn developed pneumonia and suddenly passed away three days later on February 11, 1937, in Peiping, China.⁷¹ Marguerite and their two sons returned to the US where she later met George C. Leedy. They were married for a little more than ten years before she passed away on June 22, 1955, in Stanislaus County, California, United States.⁷²

Leedy then married Maude Ragan on April 27, 1957, in Stanislaus County, California.⁷³ Leedy lived more than 30 years after his retirement and passed away at the age of 95 on November 19, 1985, in Ceres, California.⁷⁴ His wife Maude is believed to have passed away in the same area in 1991.⁷⁵

Contribution

As one of the pioneering Adventist foreign missionaries in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, George C. Leedy led as the Adventist church's presence expanded in the region. An Adventist dispensary/clinic and three Adventist schools were established during his tenure. Additionally, the literature evangelism work strengthened, and the evangelistic activity of local church members increased.

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