

Bowers, Lyman Irving (1893–1987) and Ella Mae (Chatterton) (1891–1940)

ALITA BYRD

Alita Byrd, M.A. (London School of Economics and Political Science, London, England). Byrd, a fifth-generation Adventist, is Interviews Editor for *Spectrum* and a freelance writer. She has been a staff writer and editor for magazines and publications in the United States, South Africa and Europe. She is married with four children.

Lyman Bowers, a printer, accountant, and institutional manager, and Ella Mae (Chatterton) Bowers, a teacher, served together as missionaries in Asia for 25 years.

Early Lives (Birth-1916)

Lyman Irving Bowers was born June 13, 1893, in Worcester, Massachusetts. His parents, George Whitemore Bowers (1862-1945) and Nellie Perry Bowers (1864-1945), were from New England. He was the third of four children: Cora Mae Bowers was born in 1888, Fred Perry Bowers in 1891, and George Winfield Bowers (who later became the longest-serving president of Walla Walla College from 1938 to 1955) in 1895.

Lyman's parents took Bible studies and became Adventists when Lyman was about three years old!¹ When Lyman's father George became an Adventist and would no longer work on Sabbath, he lost his job. The family rented a farm, and through that time and several more moves during Lyman's childhood, he and his siblings had to work hard to help feed the family.²



Lyman and Ella Mae, newly married, 1916.

Photo courtesy of Eloise Murdoch.

Ella Mae Chatterton was born on January 1, 1891 in Lockport, New York to Harry Burton Chatterton (1867-1951) and Ida L. Daniels (1870-1958). Ella Mae's parents joined the Adventist church in 1898, when Ella Mae was seven years old. Ella Mae was baptized in 1908.³ Like Lyman, she was one of four children.

Lyman grew up in Massachusetts and attended South Lancaster Academy (which became Atlantic Union College in 1918), where he studied business.⁴ Like many young Adventists at that time, Lyman went out colporteur -- knocking on doors and selling Adventist books and literature. This was an undertaking that he continued his whole life, wherever he was.

On September 1, 1913, Lyman and Ella Mae got engaged. But Lyman felt they did not have enough money yet to get married.⁵ In 1913 and 1914 Lyman spent three different periods of several months each working as an administrative assistant at the Maine Conference office in Portland, Maine, especially helping with the accounting.⁶ Ella Mae studied to be a teacher at South Lancaster Academy, and following her college graduation in 1914,⁷ she taught at the Leominster Adventist church school.⁸

In early 1916, Lyman made plans to travel as a General Conference missionary to Asia.⁹ He was asked to sail to China (in what was then called the Asiatic Division) in August where he would enter evangelistic work.¹⁰ Two months before sailing, on June 1, 1916, Lyman and Ella Mae were married at the South Lancaster Church.¹¹

Mission to China and Korea (1916-1932)

The newlyweds made their way across the country to San Francisco, where they would board the steamship *SS China* with about 50 other Adventist missionaries on their way to different countries in Asia. A farewell service was held at the Napa camp meeting at the end of July for the "largest party of Seventh-day Adventists ever sent out at one time."¹² They sailed on August 1, 1916, focused on mission -- as the rest of the world was entrenched in the first world war.

Upon arrival in China, Lyman and Ella Mae went to Shanghai, on China's central coast, where Lyman was named treasurer of the Signs of the Times Publishing House, the Adventist press in Shanghai.¹³ At that time, Shanghai was the capital of publishing in China, and a crucial component of the Adventist mission strategy was to make their publications easily accessible.¹⁴

But less than a year after their arrival in China, the Bowers' were called to Korea. During these years, the Adventist work in Asia was just getting started, and in April 1917, the Asiatic Division Conference formally organized several union conferences to help divide up responsibilities. Lyman Bowers was asked to be secretary-treasurer of the new East Asian Union Conference, headquartered in Seoul, Chosen (as Korea was called while under Japanese control).¹⁵

The young couple arrived in Seoul in the summer of 1917.¹⁶ Bowers wore several hats: in addition to serving as secretary-treasurer of the East Asian Union Conference, he was also secretary-treasurer of the local Chosen

Conference (headquarters of the Adventist church in Korea), as well as manager of the Chosen Mission Press.¹⁷ He and Ella Mae also worked hard to learn the Korean language.¹⁸

Ella Mae and Lyman's oldest child Naomi was born in Seoul, Korea on December 1, 1917, soon after they reached the country. Their second daughter Elizabeth Marie (Betty) was born five years later on January 5, 1922.

¹⁹ Ella Mae was very sick following Betty's birth,²⁰ and when Betty was nine months old, they made the long journey home to the United States so that she could recuperate.²¹ Ella Mae was hospitalized at the Washington Sanitarium in Takoma Park, Maryland, where she had an operation.²² This first furlough, six years after they arrived in Asia, lasted from October 1922 to February 1924,²³ allowing Lyman and Ella Mae opportunity to introduce their daughters to their families at home for the first time.

When Ella Mae had regained her health, the family returned to Korea, sailing on the SS *Tayo Maru* from San Francisco on January 19, 1924.²⁴ In 1926, when their daughters were four and eight, the Bowers family moved about 200 miles north from Seoul to the village of Soonan, where a mission, together with a school, press, and hospital had been established 20 years earlier by the first Adventist American missionary in Korea, William R. Smith.²⁵ (Soonan is near Pyongyang, and now is part of North Korea.)

Lyman Bowers was asked to serve as industrial manager of the training school in Soonan (while continuing to serve as union secretary-treasurer). It was Bower's job to run Soonan Food Products, a farm and food factory that produced health food and employed students of the school (primarily girls), thus making it possible for them to pay their tuition fees.²⁶ Tomatoes, corn, peas, beans, grapes, peaches, pears and apples were grown on the farm and canned in the factory.²⁷ He also helped to develop recipes for gluten and other types of vegetarian protein which could be sealed in containers for a long shelf life. The products produced at the Soonan school were sold to stores in big cities in Korea, Japan and China.²⁸

Helping students learn a practical skill was always important to Bowers, and he earned a reputation in Soonan as diligent and efficient, as enrollment at the school continued to rise.²⁹ He also always made it a priority to train local workers to manage the work, so they could take over from foreigners like himself. "I am very much interested in helping students to get an all-round education which will fit them for a place in giving the gospel to their own people," he said.³⁰

Four years after the move to Soonan, in July 1929, Ella Mae left early with her daughters for a second furlough that would allow them a full school year in the United States.³¹ In January 1930, Lyman followed, traveling overland across Siberia.³²

This trip home was shorter than the previous one -- after receiving satisfactory medical reports the Bowers family members were all cleared to return to service in Korea in June 1930.³³ It was a good thing the family traveled when they did, because as the effects of the Great Depression began to be felt more severely by the world church, all furloughs were deferred and wages were cut three times as cost-saving measures.³⁴

Mission in Singapore and Borneo (1932-1940)

In the early days of 1932, Lyman and Ella Mae Bowers were asked to move to the Malayan Union Seminary in Singapore, where Lyman would be the superintendent of industries at the school, which included the Adventist publishing house.³⁵ After 15 years in Korea, the family packed up their home in Soonan and moved 3,000 miles south to Singapore.

As press manager, Lyman worked long hours every day making sure the printing orders of the Malayan Signs Press were delivered on time, as well as managing the weaving shop, where the girls of the school were employed, mainly making towels.³⁶ Again, he was able to help the students earn part of the cost of their education, while helping them learn a trade. Ella Mae, who had an education degree, was on the teaching staff at the Malayan Seminary.³⁷

The two Bowers daughters, Naomi and Betty, moved to Shanghai, China to attend the Adventist Far Eastern Academy there, with other children of missionaries around Asia.³⁸

Seven years after their previous furlough, in the summer of 1937, the Bowers family once again traveled home to the United States to visit family. The Far Eastern Division asked Lyman to work at one of the large Adventist presses in California or Maryland during his furlough to gain experience in the United States. But due to a lack of communication between the Far Eastern Division and the General Conference,³⁹ Bowers was given a job at the small college print shop at Atlantic Union College. He worked long hours, but complained he was not learning anything new.⁴⁰ Finally the mix-up was corrected, and before returning to Singapore, Bowers was able to spend a few months working at the Pacific Press in Mountain View, California.⁴¹

When the family boarded a ship to return to Singapore, 20-year-old Naomi stayed behind in the US to study elementary education at Pacific Union College.⁴² Lyman, Ella Mae, and Betty landed back in Singapore on June 18, 1938.⁴³

In 1939, Bowers spent several months in Saigon, in what was then called French Indo-China, helping to install equipment for and set up the Indo-China Signs Press.⁴⁴ It was complicated work to create a typesetting machine to print Vietnamese, which had six tonal marks on each vowel.⁴⁵

Bowers had a reputation for being able to get things done when no one else could. "He is a capable man. Those who know him tell me that he is capable of doing almost anything about one of our institutions — one of those men who is gifted mechanically in different lines," one General Conference administrator said.⁴⁶ "He was ingenious in repairing equipment when no spare parts were available," a friend said.⁴⁷ Bowers could also knit, sew and cook -- his mother had taught all her children these domestic skills -- and he was happiest when he was busy.⁴⁸

Lyman and Ella Mae's oldest daughter Naomi married George Munson in California on August 18, 1940. Her parents could not travel from Singapore for the wedding, so Naomi's grandfather George Bowers gave her away.⁴⁹ Naomi's sister Betty came home to be a bridesmaid, and stayed in California to begin her first year of college at Pacific Union College.⁵⁰

Ella Mae's Death in Borneo and War Evacuation (1940-1942)

In 1940, Lyman and Ella Mae were asked to go from Singapore to the Adventist mission station in British North Borneo for a year to relieve the Youngbergs, fellow missionaries who were going on furlough.⁵¹ Bowers acted as director of the North Borneo Mission, and the Dusan Training School was opened on his watch, in October 1940.⁵² Less than nine months after arriving in Borneo, Ella Mae contracted two serious forms of malaria simultaneously.⁵³ She died in the evening of Sunday, June 22, 1941, in Jesselton, less than a week after she took ill.⁵⁴ (Jesselton is now Kota Kinabalu in Malaysia.)

The funeral service was conducted in Malay and attended by local Adventists at the mission. A telegram was sent to the General Conference via the Malayan Union in Singapore,⁵⁵ and an associate secretary at the General Conference in turn informed members of Ella Mae's family in the US via June 24 telegrams.⁵⁶ The telegram Lyman sent to his daughters was delayed and did not reach them until July 2 -- 10 days after Ella Mae died.⁵⁷

Ella Mae was 50 years old when she died. She and Lyman had just celebrated their 25th wedding anniversary.

"In battle many times a soldier falls, this time it was my comrade -- God bless her, for she was a wonderful wife and precious mother," Lyman wrote to his friend at the General Conference.⁵⁸

After Ella Mae died, Lyman continued his work in Borneo until Gus Youngberg could get back in August, then went back to his post at the Malayan press in Singapore.⁵⁹

In December 1941, at the same time as the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Japanese also invaded Malaya. They began taking British territory in the Pacific and reached Singapore at the beginning of February 1942.

Along with other missionaries and foreigners, Bowers was evacuated from Singapore just ahead of the advancing Japanese. He had offered to stay with the mission, but the American consul ordered him to leave and he was on the last ship that left Singapore, on January 30, 1942.⁶⁰ In April, he reached the United States via the port of New Orleans. Bowers first traveled to the Washington Sanitarium in Maryland to receive treatments for an extreme foot fungus he had been fighting for many months. Next, he went to South Lancaster, Massachusetts to visit his in-laws "and tell them the story of the death of their Ella Mae." Then he stopped off for three days with his parents, and finally reached Angwin, California to see his daughters.⁶¹

Later Years (1942-1987)

Lyman spent the summer of 1942 doing literature evangelism with his daughter Betty before she started college again in the autumn. He turned down several jobs the General Conference offered him, and got a position working at Pacific Press, where he could be near his girls.⁶²

In a 1944 letter to the General Conference, asking to be considered when another mission post in Asia came up after the war, he said he had been working 60-hour weeks on the night shift on the *Signs* and hadn't been sick for a single day. "My heart is in the mission field and I am ready to go," he said.⁶³ He didn't know he would live and work in the U.S. for the rest of his life.

On December 5, 1944, after both of his daughters were married (Betty married Harold Clark in September 1944) and had graduated from college, Bowers married Delphine Canman in Redwood City, California.⁶⁴ He continued working for the Pacific Press for another 28 years but retired in 1972 because Delphine was ill. She died on May 23, 1977.

Lyman moved in with his brothers George and Fred (whose wives had died) and sister Cora (who had never married) in Yucaipa, California. In 1979, the four of them moved in with his daughter Naomi and her husband George to El Sobrante, just north of San Francisco,⁶⁵ where they spent their final peaceful years, still giving Bible studies to neighbors, surprised that the Lord had not come.

Lyman died on August 7, 1987, at the age of 94, and was buried in the St. Helena Cemetery in Napa County, California. The inscription on his tombstone reads: "Awaiting the Resurrection."⁶⁶

Contribution

Lyman and Ella Mae Bowers were among the earliest Seventh-day Adventist missionaries in Korea, Singapore and Borneo. Lyman was not a preacher, but his practical skills in printing and other machinery -- as well as his competence and integrity in accounting -- were vital in advancing the mission of the Adventist church in these places.

SOURCES

Bowers, L. I. Secretariat Missionary File, RG 21, Record 45285, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland.

Crisler, C. C. "At Our Korean Headquarters." *ARH*, November 25, 1926.

"Ella Mae Chatterton Bowers obituary." *Atlantic Union Gleaner*, July 9, 1941.

"Ella Mae Chatterton Bowers obituary." *Far Eastern Division Outlook*, August 1, 1941.

Frost, S. L. "Chosen Union Educational Advance." *Far Eastern Division Outlook*, April 1, 1928.

General Conference Committee, January 19, 1916, General Conference Archives. Accessed April 1, 2020, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Minutes/GCC/GCC1916.pdf>.

Gjording, J. G. "A Glimpse at Headquarters." *Far Eastern Division Outlook*, February 1, 1933

Letters from Lyman Bowers to Betty Bowers Clark and Rachel Byrd, his granddaughter, as well as letters written to the family, in the personal collection of Rachel Byrd.

"Lyman Irving Bowers." U.S. Find a Grave Index 1600-Current. Accessed June 16, 2020. <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/47730933/lyman-irving-bowers>

Miller, H. W. "Our Medical Work in Korea." *ARH*, March 15, 1928.

Moon, E. A. "The Dusan Training School." *Far Eastern Division Outlook*, December 1, 1940

Munson, George. *More Than Conquerors*. Fort Oglethorpe, GA: TEACH Services, Inc., 2007.

"Northwestern California Bids Missionaries Adieu." *Pacific Union Recorder*, August 2, 1916.

Religious Publishing and Print Culture in Modern China. Edited by Philip Clart and Gregory Scott. Boston, Berlin, and Munich: Walter de Gruyter, Inc., 2015.

"The Formation of Union Conferences." *Asiatic Division Outlook*, July 1, 1917.

Torrey, C. L. "Progress in Indo-China." *Far Eastern Division Outlook*, December 1, 1939.

Weeks, C. E. "Itinerating in the East Asian Union Conference." *Asiatic Division Outlook*, September 1, 1917.

NOTES

1. Lyman Bowers to Rachel Byrd. August 12, 1974, private letter, personal collection of Rachel Byrd.
2. Ibid.
3. "Ella Mae Chatterton Bowers obituary," *Atlantic Union Gleaner*, July 9, 1941, 6.
4. Naomi Munson, interview by Rachel Byrd, Loma Linda, California, June 12, 2015.
5. Lyman Bowers to Betty Bowers. October 22, 1941, private letter, personal collection of Rachel Byrd.
6. "Maine: Our Conference Office," *Atlantic Union Gleaner*, September 16, 1914, 3-4.
7. "Ella Mae Chatterton Bowers obituary."
8. "Items," *Atlantic Union Gleaner*, July 12, 1916, 3.

9. General Conference Committee, January 19, 1916, General Conference Archives, accessed April 1, 2020, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Minutes/GCC/GCC1916.pdf>.
10. "Items," *Atlantic Union Gleaner*, February 16, 1916, 8.
11. "Items," *Atlantic Union Gleaner*, June 7, 1916, 8.
12. "Northwestern California Bids Missionaries Adieu," *Pacific Union Recorder*, August 2, 1916, 2.
13. "Mission Board Items," *North Pacific Union Gleaner*, December 7, 1916, 1.
14. Philip Clart and Gregory Scott, eds, *Religious Publishing and Print Culture in Modern China* (Boston, Berlin, Munich: Walter de Gruyter, Inc., 2015), chapter two. In 1916, there were 10,000 subscribers to the Adventist publication *Signs of the Times* in Chinese.
15. "The Formation of Union Conferences," *Asiatic Division Outlook*, July 1, 1917, 13-15.
16. C. E. Weaks, "Itinerating in the East Asian Union Conference," *Asiatic Division Outlook*, September 1, 1917, 4.
17. "Publishing Houses," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1918), 207.
18. "For two months. . ." *Asiatic Division Outlook*, January 1, 1920, 8.
19. Seoul, Chosen. Report of Birth of Children Born to American Parents, Elizabeth Marie Bowers, American Consular Service. Accessed via Ancestry.com.
20. "A Word from Korea," *Asiatic Division Outlook*, October 15, 1922, 7.
21. Naomi Munson, interview by Rachel Byrd, Loma Linda, California, June 9, 2015.
22. "Mrs. L. I. Bowers. . ." *Asiatic Division Outlook*, December 15, 1923, 8.
23. Information on Returning Missionaries form, L.I. Bowers, October 1, 1929, GCA, Secretariat Missionary Files, RG 21, Record 45285..
24. "Brother A. B. Cole. . ." *Pacific Union Recorder*, January 24, 1924, 8.
25. Mrs. W. R. Smith, "The Regions Beyond," *North Pacific Union Gleaner*, January 24, 1907.
26. C. C. Crisler, "At Our Korean Headquarters," *ARH*, November 25, 1926, 13.
27. H. W. Miller, "Our Medical Work in Korea," *ARH*, March 15, 1928, 15.

28. S. L. Frost, "Chosen Union Educational Advance," *Far Eastern Division Outlook*, April 1, 1928, 15.
29. Ibid.
30. Lyman Bowers to E. D. Dick, January 10, 1944, L.I. Bowers, Secretariat Missionary File.
31. Bowers, Returning Missionaries form, October 1, 1929.
32. Bowers, Returning Missionaries form, L.I. Bowers, January 30, 1930, Secretariat Lyman Bowers Missionary File.
33. Unsigned letter from General Conference to Lyman Bowers, April 10, 1930, L.I. Bowers, Secretariat Missionary File.
34. "High Points of the Winter Council," *Far Eastern Division Outlook*, March 1932, 4.
35. Ibid.
36. J. G. Gjording, "A Glimpse at Headquarters," *Far Eastern Division Outlook*, February 1, 1933, 7.
37. "Ella Mae Chatterton Bowers obituary," *Far Eastern Division Outlook*, August 1, 1941, 7.
38. "On March 9. . ." *China Division Reporter*, March 1, 1937, 8.
39. C. L. Torrey to A. W. Cormack, December 6, 1937, L.I. Bowers, Secretariat Missionary File.
40. Lyman Bowers to A. W. Cormack, November 10, 1937, L.I. Bowers, Secretariat Missionary File.
41. A.W. Cormack to Lyman Bowers, January 19, 1938, L.I. Bowers, Secretariat Missionary File.
42. Memorandum from the General Conference Secretary to the Treasury, December 13, 1937, L.I. Bowers, Secretariat Missionary File.
43. "Division Notes," *Far Eastern Division Outlook*, July 1, 1938, 8.
44. C. L. Torrey, "Progress in Indo-China," *Far Eastern Division Outlook*, December 1, 1939, 5.
45. Rowland Howlett letter to the Bowers Family on the occasion of Lyman Bowers' death in 1987.
46. H. T. Elliott recommendation letter regarding Lyman Bowers, July 22, 1942, L.I. Bowers, Secretariat Missionary File.
47. Leonard F. Bohner to Betty Bowers, August 24, 1987.
48. Naomi Bowers, telephone interview with Rachel Byrd, June 8, 2015.

49. George Munson, *More Than Conquerors*, (Brushton, New York: TEACH Services, Inc., 2007), 111, 112.
50. Munson, 112, 116.
51. "General News Items," *Far Eastern Division Outlook*, September 1, 1940, 8.
52. E. A. Moon, "The Dusan Training School," *Far Eastern Division Outlook*, December 1, 1940, 4.
53. Report of the Death of an American Citizen, Singapore, July 31, 1941, L.I. Bowers, Secretariat Missionary File.
54. "Ella Mae Chatterton Bowers," *Far Eastern Division Outlook*, August 1, 1941, 7.
55. RCA Radiogram to "Adventist," signed "Malayan Union," June 23, 1941, Lyman Bowers Missionary File.
56. Western Union Telegrams to various recipients, signed "Cormack, General Conference," June 24, 1941, L.I. Bowers, Secretariat Missionary File.
57. Western Union Telegram deferred cable to Mrs. George Munson, July 2, 1941, private collection of Phyllis Slattery.
58. Lyman Bowers to A.W. Cormack June 30, 1941, L.I. Bowers, Secretariat Missionary File.
59. "Division News Notes," *Far Eastern Division Outlook*, September 1, 1941, 8.
60. Naomi Munson, interview by Rachel Byrd, Loma Linda, California, June 8, 2015.
61. Lyman Bowers to H. T. Elliott, May 8, 1942, L. I. Bowers, Secretariat Missionary File.
62. Lyman Bowers to H. T. Elliott, May 13, 1942, L. I. Bowers, Secretariat Missionary File.
63. Lyman Bowers to E. D. Dick, January 10, 1944, L. I. Bowers, Secretariat Missionary File.
64. Redwood City, California. Marriage Record. Lyman I. Bowers, 51, of Mountain View married Delphine Canman, 41, of Los Altos on 5 December 1944. San Mateo County Marriages 1853-1948.
65. Eloise Murdoch to the author, April 13, 2020.
66. "Lyman Irving Bowers," U.S. Find a Grave Index 1600-Current, accessed June 16, 2020, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/47730933/lyman-irving-bowers>.

© 2020 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists 12501 Old Columbia Pike Silver Spring , MD 20904 USA 301-680-6000