



ALEXANDER WORTHY CLERK- JAMAICAN MISSIONARY TO GHANA

Missionary to Ghana at age 23 - for life

Alexander Worthy Clerk was born in 1820 to Christian Jamaican parents who may or may not have been slaves. His lineage was of West African origin, with his ancestors captured perhaps from modern-day Ghana or Nigeria. In Jamaica, slavery was outlawed when he was 13, and when he was between 18 and 22 years old, he studied theology, ministry, philosophy, homiletics, and education at the Fairfield Teachers Seminary. Clerk also studied German, Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. The aim of the school was to train young Jamaican men in evangelism and the propagation of the Gospel. At that point, the Moravian church had been in Jamaica for nearly 100 years.

In 1842, a team from the Basel Mission Society came to Jamaica seeking missionary volunteers to serve in Ghana. They had been working there for a number of years with no converts, and reportedly a local chief had said that they would not convert until they saw that other Africans were Christians or could read a Bible. The European missionaries died at a rate of 80% within a short time of arrival, and it was thought that the Jamaicans would handle the climate better. Clerk was selected as one of the 23 missionaries to travel to the Gold Coast, now known as Ghana. He departed on a ship at only 23 years old, never to return to the land of his birth.

Clerk settled at the mission station of Akropong, where he was appointed deacon of the church and began teaching the children of the other missionaries and settlers. The missionaries composed new local language hymns, translated church hymns into Ga and Akan from English and German, built stone houses, water wells and schools, set up large farms and taught the local people to read and write, vastly improving literacy in the region. As a result of his hard work, Clerk was nicknamed, "Suku Mansere", a bastardization of "schoolmaster" in the Twi language.

Clerk and the other missionaries trained local catechists and eventually was given the role as instructor of Biblical studies at the new Basel Mission Training College in 1848, which is now the Presbyterian College of Education. Around this time, he married Pauline Hess, the daughter of a Euro-Ghanaian man and a Ghanaian woman, who had been educated at a government school for the higher classes. They eventually had twelve children, establishing a dynasty which still survives in Ghana.

Clerk died in 1906 at the age of 85 and was buried at the old Basel Mission Cemetery near the Botanical Gardens in Aburi. The Presbyterian Church of Ghana today recognizes Clerk and the other West Indian missionaries for their pioneering role. Those churches still use much of the Jamaican church liturgy and format, and have a strong vision for missions. They number about 1 million members, about a quarter of Ghanaian Christian Protestants and about four per cent of the national population.

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