

The First Fifty Years



The history of the first 50 years is documented in the book *Fifty Years in Congo*, by Herbert Smith. The missionaries pictured here are those whose term of service began during the first fifty years and extended past 1949. The dedicated and sacrificial service of the pioneers made possible the rapid expansion of the mission program which occurred during the sixth decade.



Alumbaugh, Goldie Ntula (1920-56)

Miss Goldie Alumbaugh, a nurse, started her work at Lotumbe in 1920. When the station was opened at Wema she was chosen to be the nurse there, where she served for 17 years. She also worked at Ifumo. She was often responsible for maintaining hospital function in the absence of doctors. Supervising leprosy facilities was also in her domain.



Baker, Donald Bongelemba

Baker, Lelia Nsombo (1931-60)

Dr. Baker was the physician and surgeon at Shotwell Memorial Hospital in Mondombe. He established and supervised dispensaries all through back country villages in his area. He carried on a crusade for better health through promoting better foods, urging gardening, and encouraging the construction of more substantial and more sanitary houses. He considered the medical work to be a practical, apparent, and convincing example of applied Christianity. Mrs. Baker taught in the schools and supervised a dormitory of 155 teenage school boys in addition to caring for their four children.



Bateman, Martha Bokafa (1919-1956)

Along with her educational work, which included training and developing a teaching staff as well as writing many of the textbooks in Lonkundo, Martha Bateman helped in the evangelistic work of the outlying villages to which she traveled by bicycle and on foot. These trips also furnished the materials for a textbook on animal and plant life which Martha wrote for use in the Congo schools.



Bateman, Georgia Bombolo (1927-1960)

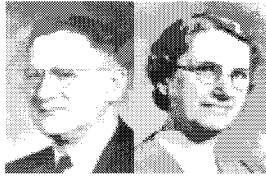
Georgia Bateman was in charge of the medical work at Bolenge since there was no doctor. She was famous for delivering children and was loved by all for her willingness to care for everyone even in the middle of the night.



Boyer, Elmer George Elima

Boyer, Beatrice Amba (1921-1951)

Mr. Elmer Boyer served in educational work, handling of finances and supervising the industrial work at Bolenge. Mrs. Beatrice Boyer enjoyed her work in the office and with the women and girls at Bolenge, but she especially enjoyed traveling in the interior to give encouragement and supervision to the young Christian leaders. They soon received a call to go to the more remote Mondombe area where a Christian center was being formed. Later in 1932 they were glad to be chosen to work at the still newer venture at Wema. Experience during their 19 years at Wema convinced the Boyers that educational and evangelistic work must go together. This, Mr. Boyer emphasized, was especially true in those days in back country villages. He wrote, "Every evangelist going out in recent years also went as a school teacher, that the Christians might be able to read the Bible for themselves. Most of the converts come as a result of learning the scriptures in school. About nine out of every ten inquirers have come through the daily school conducted by the evangelists. Religion was always a part of the school program."



Byerlee, David Lokulokoko, Is'Ekila
Byerlee, Victoria Ann Mintala (1920-58)

Mr. David Byerlee was actively involved in translation, and was in charge of printing at the press in Bolenge. The press provided materials for both church and school activities as well as regular news publications and was a major factor in the success of the mission. He also was in charge of electrical, plumbing and all mechanical equipment in Bolenge. Mrs. Byerlee had considerable training in the field of music. She was very involved in translation work but also in the teaching field, particularly in music and the education of girls. Hymnals still used in Congo reflect the tireless hours which she spent in translating hymns into Lonkundo. These weren't literal translations which would have little meaning to the local people, but were efforts to convey the spirit and meaning of the hymns so that they would still fit the tunes which originally were printed in the old shaped notes. Many of the Congolese singers give credit to Mrs. Byerlee for their interest and training in church music. She was director of the girls' school in Bolenge for many years including the dormitory. She also was active in women's work and Sunday School.



Cardwell, Walter Inano, Is'e'ondange
Cardwell, Sue Boemba, Nyang'e'ondange (1945-58)

Mr. Cardwell lived in Bolenge and did evangelistic work, traveling extensively in the back country, with responsibility for churches in 350 towns and villages. At times he took over supervision of the printing press and the carpenter shop. He served as the first director and teacher of the *École de Prédicateurs* (Preachers School) in Bolenge which began in 1952. He was involved in developing materials in Lonkundo for pastors, including manuals and commentaries. He supervised the steamship *Oregon* in its last years. After returning to the U.S. he was asked to come back to Zaïre in 1969 for 10 weeks to do a series of seven training conferences with village pastors and again in 1972 for two pastors' training seminars. Mrs. Cardwell taught in secondary school, directed the work of girls and women at Bolenge and in out-stations, helped her husband in evangelistic work and took over his responsibilities when he was away. She helped out in numerous other duties in the absence of other missionaries. Bolenge was very short handed at times. In their last term she helped in the teaching at the *École de Prédicateurs*.



Clarke, Virginia Bokajwa (1927-1960)

Mrs. Virginia Clarke spent her first term at Lotumbe, but then was assigned to Bolenge. For many years she taught French, pedagogy, Bible, music and hygiene at ICC. In 1951 she started a primary school to provide practice teaching for students there.



Cobble, Robin Bofengo (1931-56)
Cobble, Alice Bondomba (1932-56)

Mr. Robin Cobble was in charge of evangelism at Monieka and traveled extensively in the back country. On one of these trips he was riding a motorcycle and ran into a goat, sustaining injuries which proved fatal. Mrs. Alice Cobble served in Monieka where she helped in women's work, and traveled in the back country with her husband.



Conwell, Donald (1947-52)

Dr. Donald Conwell worked at Wema during the absence of Drs. Howard and Marjorie Horner, and when they returned he went to Mondombe to work while Dr. Baker went home on furlough. During his furlough in 1950-51 he received a Master's degree in public health from Harvard School of Public Health. He returned to Congo for 9 months and was assigned to the new medical facility IME Kimpese.



Edwards, Donald Bofeko, Is'Ofei

Edwards, Ruth Luta, Nyang'e'Ofei (1943-52)

Donald Edwards was the son of missionaries Mr. & Mrs. W. H. (Edna) Edwards. Ruth Edwards was the daughter of missionaries to China. Assigned to Bolenge their first term Don was involved in many industrial jobs and Ruth worked at the dispensary.

However illness of staff at ICC required their presence there and during the rest of their service they taught numerous subjects at ICC. Having been in Congo as a child Donald spoke Lonkundo very well.



Harris, Louis Bokunge

Harris, Ola Mam'Ola (1947-1966)

Mr. Louis Harris worked in the evangelistic field in Bolenge from 1947 to 1956 when he went to Brussels, Belgium, for a year of study. In 1958 he taught at the Bolenge ministerial school at ICC until it was transferred to Luluabourg where he continued to

teach until 1966. Mrs. Ola Harris worked with her husband. From 1958 to 1963 she taught in the ministerial training school at ICC in Bolenge. At the United Theological School in Luluabourg she was director of women's courses from 1963-1966. These courses, given by all the faculty wives, were for the wives of the student preachers and were designed to help them make better Christian homes and become leaders in their churches and communities.



Hobgood, H. Clay Efoloko, Is'ea Mbunga (1921-54, 62-64)

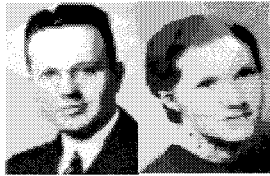
Hobgood, Tabitha (Toby) Mboyo, Nyang'ea Mbunga (1921-54)

Mr. H. Clay Hobgood worked primarily in evangelism, mostly at Lotumbe. He was an excellent linguist and was involved in the initial translation of the Bible into Lonkundo and also in a later revision. In addition to helping her husband Mrs. Tabitha Hobgood worked in the schools



Hobgood, Wilma Jaggard Kandasi (1921-64)

Mrs. Wilma Jaggard taught school in Monieka, assisted her husband with medical trips in the back country, and translated books into Lonkundo. She and her husband returned to the US at the time of his retirement in 1944. After Dr. Jaggard died in 1951 she returned to Congo and served there in the education programs at Lotumbe, Bolenge and Monieka until her retirement in 1960. She married Clay Hobgood in 1961 and they returned in 1962 for two years to work on an updated translation of the Lonkundo Bible.



Horner, William Howard Longemba
Horner, Marjorie Mpembe (1939-54)

Dr. William Howard Horner worked for three terms at Wema. He did a lot of surgery and building and traveled a lot to outlying villages and plantations. Dr. Marjorie Horner's special field of interest was the care of infants. During their service the hospital buildings were considerably improved and a leprosy colony was initiated. They also were responsible for the construction of a new residence for themselves.



Hurt, Ambra Nyang'ea Litoko (1921-48, 54-58)

From 1921 Mrs. Ambra Hurt and her husband worked in evangelism and education in five different areas, returning to the States in 1948. After Mr. Hurt's death she returned to Congo in 1954 and supervised and taught at Congo Christian Institute, Ecole Moyenne, and the Preacher's School at Bolenge. She had also served for a time at Monieka.



Lewis, Ellsworth Ibuka, Is'ea Ntela
Lewis, Lillian Nyang'ea Ntela (1945-57)

Ellsworth Lewis was made secretary of the mission and became legal representative. Mrs. Lillian Lewis was mission treasurer. She taught Sunday classes in Coquilhatville. A great deal of the credit for the transition to an autonomous church body from the former mission status can be given to the Lewises. Although they had completed their service prior to the autonomy of the church, they nevertheless helped to make it possible. They were highly respected by national friends as well as by the Belgian administrators of the area.



McCracken, Faith Botunga (1929-39, 54-69)

In Bolenge Faith McCracken organized the school into a grade system, supervised dormitories, and did bookkeeping. At Ifumo she supervised a large Christian school and was in charge of 12 schools in nearby villages. During her last term of service she was principal of the secondary school for girls in Bolenge and taught at the senior high school.



McMillan, Fern Ifono (1946-65)

Fern McMillan taught in Disciples schools at Monieka, Mbandaka and Bolenge. For a time she was also station treasurer at Bolenge. She was a good worker and fit in well wherever needed, filling in for other missionaries when they were on furlough.



Mitchell, Hattie Besau (1922-59)

Hattie Mitchell was assigned to Mondombe. She worked as station treasurer and was active in education, evangelism, church and school music programs. She was at times the only missionary on the station and was capable of dealing with machinery, construction, and even burning kilns of bricks. She especially loved traveling in the back country for it gave her an opportunity to be in close contact with the people.



Musgrave, Ruth Lokole (1918-57)

During her 40 years of service Ruth Musgrave often traveled in the back country. She served at Lotumbe where she was involved in teaching and women's work. She was well-known and remembered for the prayer meetings held in her home. A beautiful story of her life entitled "Drum Beats In The Congo" was written by Beulah G. Squires after her retirement.



Paget, Albert
Paget, Della (1948-51)

Mr. Albert Paget was assigned to Bolenge. He helped at various stations wherever he was called to help with electrical installations and construction.



Pearson, Ernest Is'e'asanga (1917-33, 48-52)
Pearson, Evelyn Nyang'e'asanga (1919-33, 48-52)

Dr. Ernest Pearson first served as a missionary in Liberia under the Christian Women's Board of Missions. He was the brother of Mrs. Emory Ross. The Pearsons were married in Lotumbe in 1919. They spent most of their time in Congo at Mondombe, and returned to the U.S. in 1933 to educate their children. Because of the shortage of doctors they returned to Monieka in 1948 until retirement in 1952.



Poole, Edna Imongo (1931-63)

Edna Poole spent her service working in Bolenge and Lotumbe in the boys' primary school. She also taught in secondary school and traveled often in the back country supervising schools and doing evangelistic work. In the 1960s she supervised 170 Congolese teachers at 85 schools in and around Bolenge.



Roberts, Ned Lianza, Is'Enkanga
Roberts, Jewell Nyang'Enkanga (1939-54)

Except for brief periods at Bolenge and Monieka during the war Mr. and Mrs. Ned Roberts were assigned to evangelistic work at Mondombe. Mr. Roberts was an excellent preacher and widely respected throughout the territory. In addition he was involved in building, counseling and teaching. Mrs. Roberts taught her three children but also taught in the station school, supervised the boarding school of almost one hundred boys, and had station administrative responsibilities.



Ross, John Likiyo, Is'ea Yonjwa
Ross, Mabel Bondala, Nyang'ea Yonjwa (1948-71)

Dr. John Ross spent 21 years building and developing the hospital at Lotumbe. He was a pilot, a certified aircraft mechanic and had his own Cessna 180. He made extensive use of outboard motor boats. The mission received national publicity when he was featured in a TV special, "Monganga", sponsored by Smith, Kline & French Laboratories in cooperation with the AMA and first shown on NBC-TV in November 1956. Mrs. Mabel Ross was active in women's work at Lotumbe. She helped in bookkeeping and accounting for the hospital and building programs. She published a book of Lonkundo proverbs.



Russell, H. Gray Is'Eoto

Russell, Lois Nyang'Eoto (1924-55)

After early years at Mondombe Mr. and Mrs. H. Gray Russell worked many years at Bolenge where they shared in the development of ICC and continued there in teaching and administration during the rest of their Congo years. Mrs. Lois Russell led

in developing new methods in women's work and in directing the inherent musical and dramatic ability of the students.



Shoemaker, Gertrude Bitoko (1926-60)

Gertrude Shoemaker lived many years at Mondombe where she directed the schools and the boys' dormitory. She also served at Lotumbe, Monieka, and Bolenge and taught at ICC. In addition to teaching she was active in evangelism and itineration.



Smith, E.B. Likamela

Smith, Elizabeth Bokonda (1929-63)

Mr. E.B. Smith served in evangelism, education and agriculture. Almost continuously he and his wife helped carry on the work in Lotumbe. They were there except for short assignments in Monieka and Ifumo and for furloughs. He listed his activities as

teaching, supervising and demonstrating better ways of making repairs and erecting new buildings, interspersing the lessons of brotherhood with labor. He used his knowledge of farming to good advantage by teaching and demonstrating to the Congolese how little patches of garden could best be cultivated to produce more food for the family. Along with introducing fruits and vegetables previously unknown to them Mr. Smith taught the people how to improve their small livestock resulting in a better breed of rabbits, goats, and larger chickens. He had charge of the boys' dormitory and the primary school, and was station treasurer. He also supervised evangelistic work and village visitation. Mrs. Smith worked with her husband, supervised French classes, taught Bible and home arts. She served as counselor for women's and children's groups in addition to teaching and raising her own four children.



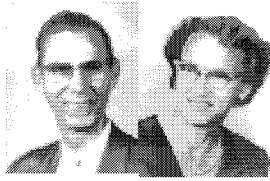
Snipes, Esther Bonkonge (1926-35, 45-60)

After many years of working in schools Esther Snipes was appointed principal of the Ecole Moyenne in 1950 and also was engaged in translation and women's work. At one time she was field secretary for the DCCM. Her last years of service were in Bolenge teaching at ICC.



Stober, Buena Rose Mputa (1923-60)

Buena Stober served as head nurse of Mondombe Hospital and operated it whenever the doctor was absent. At various times she also worked in Lotumbe, Bolenge, Monieka and Wema. She was renowned for rendering dental services.



Tillery, Ralph Ngolomba

Tillery, Merle Amba (1946-68)

Mr. Ralph Tillery worked in Lotumbe and Bolenge doing evangelism and was the second director of the Preacher's School in Bolenge. In 1961 he was assigned to Monieka to direct and teach in the preachers' school. In Lotumbe and Bolenge Merle

Tillery had sewing classes for girls and for women, taught in the school and trained choirs for churches. She also did educational evangelistic work with her husband. In 1949 in Bolenge she taught music and also taught in the training school for preachers. In 1961 she became director of the Junior High School for missionaries' children in Monieka.



Ward, Myrle Malaka (1929-48, 1957-58)

During the first 50 years Myrle Ward was assigned to Wema where she was active in education and evangelism. She returned to Coquilhatville in 1957 for one year to serve as mission secretary and treasurer during the furlough of Ruth Peterson.



Weeks, Claylon Bofola

Weeks, Helen Ncimbo (1945-84)

Claylon Weeks was first assigned to Wema in education and evangelism. Helen Weeks was in charge of education of women and girls and served as treasurer. After Independence they went to Mondombe. From 1964 to 1968 they directed the hostel for

children of missionaries in Kinshasa. Then they were assigned to Mbandaka and Bolenge in the evangelism department and pastor training. At the theological school in Bolenge Claylon taught courses in Church History, Philosophy, and English. He also helped supervise the program of Practical Theology as well as Physical Education. Helen taught English in the school as well as special courses to the wives of the regular students. Mr. & Mrs. Weeks returned to Mbandaka in 1975 where Claylon worked as counselor for the office of the ministry. He worked through the Church Printing Press in the preparation of materials in Christian Education, Bible helps and Church office supplies. He also taught classes in the program of Continuing Education for pastors. Mrs. Weeks worked with her husband in leadership training and also handled and distributed educational materials for youth and adults in the area.



Whitmer, Joseph Engondolo

Whitmer, Veneta Bombenga (1943-58)

During first term Joseph Whitmer did evangelistic work in Lotumbe and Bolenge. Second and third terms were at Lotumbe and Ifumo. Mrs. Veneta Whitmer was active in writing and preparing materials for women and girls and giving help for

programs and church leadership. She wrote regularly for the quarterly paper of the Disciples mission.

Summary of History

The first missionary establishment of the Disciples of Christ in Congo was at Bolenge, on the Congo River at its confluence with the Ruki River. This site had been selected by Dr. Harry N. Biddle and Mr. Ellsworth Faris, who were sent by the Foreign Christian Missionary Society, and had spent some two years searching for a suitable location. The Bolenge station had been established by the American Baptist Foreign Christian Missionary Society. There were at that time only three Christians there.

Dr. Biddle became seriously ill of dysentery and malaria shortly after arriving at Bolenge, and was obliged to leave for the States. He died enroute and is buried at Las Palmas, Grand Canary Island. Mr. Faris remained and successfully negotiated with the Congo elders and the American Baptist Society for the purchase of the station. Dr. and Mrs. Royal J. Dye arrived at Bolenge on April 17, 1899 to replace Dr. Biddle. They brought with them the papers of transfer which officially established Bolenge Station. The Bolenge station and equipment were acquired for \$2,500.

Although the first convert was not baptized till 1902 the work soon expanded rapidly. A second station was established at Longa in 1908 and a third at Lotumbe in 1910. In that same year the steamboat *Oregon* was placed in service. Monieka was the next station, started in 1912. At each station there was a church, a school, and medical care. Africans were trained to help in all these. It was not long till Africans were given the responsibility of traveling in the back country to preach and teach. It was 1920 when the first African pastor, Mark Njōji, was ordained and became the pastor of the Bolenge church.

The next station to be opened was Mondombe in 1920, and that year John Inkima became captain of the *Oregon*. In 1926 stations were opened in Wema and Coquilhatville. In 1928 the first high school was established in Bolenge called Congo Christian Institute. Its graduates gave the school an excellent reputation.

The work was considerably hampered by the great depression in the early 30's and again during the second world war. Following the war the number of missionaries began to increase again. The Ubangi-Ngiri field, which had been under the care of the Bolenge station for most of fifty years, had been persistent in asking for missionaries. Finally in 1945 it was possible to open a station at Bosobele with Mr. and Mrs. W. H. Edwards in charge. Also in 1947 Mr. & Mrs. Clay Hobgood were able to go to the Monkoto area and establish a station at Ifumo.

From its small beginning in 1899 the mission had grown to the extent that in 1949 it was able to report church membership of 17,275 with 1,063 church congregations. There were 441 schools enrolling 8,193 students. Hospitals with doctors in charge existed at Lotumbe, Monieka, Wema and Mondombe with ten dispensaries giving 332,192 treatments the last year. Fifty nine missionaries were on the field serving at Bolenge, Coquilhatville, Monieka, Wema, Mondombe, Lotumbe, Bosobele, Ifumo and the Congo Christian Institute.

Missionary Life At The Beginning of The Second Fifty Years

In many ways the life for missionaries in Congo had changed since the days of the early pioneers. The travel to get there was markedly different. Instead of an ocean voyage lasting weeks and months, it was only necessary to take an airplane flight across the Atlantic to Europe one day, and the next day a long flight to Leopoldville. Even the upriver travel by crowded boat could be avoided by a Sabena flight from Leopoldville to Coquilhatville requiring only a couple of hours. One result of the improvement in transportation was a shortening of the term expected of missionaries. In the early years they were asked to stay in Congo seven years, but by 1949 the usual term was four years, and this was eventually shortened to three years in later decades.

After World War II the government undertook a major road building program, even extending to the interior of Equator Province. This permitted travel by truck gradually to replace the trips by canoe and bicycle in many instances. Lotumbe had no roads leading to



Dr. Ross with outboard motor boat

Coquilhatville so Dr. Ross depended on outboard motors and had several small boats that were very useful in the work there. At other stations outboard motors were often mounted on dugout canoes by placing a vertical board at the rear of the canoe. These means of transportation were more rapid than paddled canoes and especially important for long trips.

Coquilhatville had become a well developed European style city with paved streets, a city water supply and sewer system, and 24 hour electricity. Stores operated by Belgian and Portuguese business people were a source of food items including fresh meat and vegetables, and most items for house keeping such as clothing and hardware. Automobiles were fairly common. Native markets had a steady supply of locally grown food.

Life on upriver stations had not changed as much. Missionaries stationed there were quite isolated, going to Coquilhatville perhaps once a year for the annual missionary conference. Once or twice a year a large order of food and basic supplies was made through the Indianapolis office, and arrived by river boat to be stored in the missionary's house till needed. Rain water was collected from the metal roof and stored in cisterns in the ground. Most houses had a pump which lifted the water into barrels in the attic, permitting gravity flow to faucets in the kitchen and bathroom. This water often became warm during the day so that a late afternoon shower was quite pleasant. Flush toilets, showers, and bathtubs were standard appliances.

Water for drinking was first boiled then filtered through a ceramic filter. Most families had an African employee who did the basic kitchen work such as boiling water, making bread, cleaning and preparing local products, and washing dishes. A second employee was often used to clean the house and do the laundry. These men were paid the equivalent of about \$10 a month. School boys were often hired to keep the lawn looking nice.

Electricity on upriver stations was supplied by a diesel generator. One of the missionaries was responsible for keeping it working, and starting it each day as needed. Because of the expense these were usually operated only for a few hours in the evening or when required at the hospital for surgery. It was necessary to have a good supply of kerosene or gasoline lanterns for those times when the electrical supply was broken down.

One by-product of isolated upriver life was a close family relationship. In the evening parents and children played table games and read books. Mothers were usually responsible for teaching their children in the early grades. Families on the same station became close friends. Children usually addressed other missionary adults as "Aunt" or "Uncle".

All mission stations were on a river. Swimming was a common recreation. Crocodiles had largely been hunted out of the areas nearby, so swimming was considered safe. Since the rivers drained large swamp areas where decaying leaves added their products, the water was tea colored, but not yet contaminated by any tropical diseases.

Most missionary houses had been built of burned brick which was permanent as long as protected from the rain. Wooden floors and interior structures were often victims of termites and had to be repaired or replaced periodically. Because of the constantly warm weather most houses had a wide verandah making the interior usually rather pleasant. Screens on the windows kept insects out. At night it was usually cool enough to sleep comfortably with just a sheet for cover.

Health problems were much less than they had been in the early years. Malaria, a universal disease among the Africans, was prevented by taking prophylactic medicine regularly, and missionaries seldom became ill from this disease. Each missionary was required to have a medical examination annually. The mission doctors were available for medical care and consultation and the mission hospitals kept adequate supplies of the medications needed to treat most illnesses. Extensive medical screening of missionary candidates avoided having people on the staff with serious chronic problems.

Mail came as far as Coquilhatville and Boende by air. Although it was slow, mail, especially air letters, usually came through, though packages sometimes failed to arrive. Upriver stations received mail on the commercial riverboat, Otraco, which usually came once a week. Lotumbe and Ifumo, on a different river, often had river boats only every two weeks. Everyone anticipated the arrival of the boat for it was the main contact with the outside world.

One mission rule was that each missionary should take a vacation each year. Since travel made this rather difficult a vacation most often consisted of visiting another mission station. Such a visit not only provided rest and relaxation but served to create bonds of friendship among the mission personnel.

On each station a missionary was in charge of the finances. This was one job most people found unpleasant for it often involved controversy with employees who questioned their pay. The salary scale for most workers was determined by the government, and was very low by American standards. Each station also had someone assigned as mission secretary to carry on legal correspondence which was often necessary with the government. Communication with the mission board was also a part of the official duties.

Missionaries always played an active role in the church. By this time all the churches had Congolese pastors who did the usual preaching. Their knowledge of the language, and their skill at story telling, made them very effective in the pulpit. The missionaries attended the church services but usually as part of the audience. For their own spiritual enrichment they usually gathered in a home on Sunday evening for a worship service in English, with the different individuals taking turns bringing a devotional message

Once a year the missionaries gathered for several days of fellowship and conducting the business of the mission, assigning personnel, dividing the budget, and planning programs. These talented people worked well together and had brought about, during the first fifty years, the building of a solid basis for the work that would continue on into the second fifty.