BACK to the FUTURE
STANDING ON THE EDGE OF TOMORROW
17–19 August 2012
CELEBRATING A 100 YEARS OF OVERSEAS MISSION

1912 – 1936

There have been dozens of Tabernacle missionaries over the years, who've gone out to serve with many different missionary societies. In fact a Tab member instigated the founding of the NZBMS a century ago. He was Rev Charles Carter. You can see a plaque on the wall in the Tabernacle auditorium is to his memory. He was an amazing man. He served a lifetime in Sri Lanka, then retired to New Zealand. He was one of several who founded the NZBMS in 1885. It was only two years later that the first BMS missionary Rosalie McGeorge went to East Bengal. A companion was needed for her and an Australian Annie Newcomb offered and left after becoming a member of the Tab. There's a photograph in the Tab library of a Miss Nellie Kendon, who went to China (China Inland Mission, 1911; she became Mrs Gibb). It says she was the first missionary and that is true because Annie Newcomb who went as a companion for a Baptist missionary lady. The Tabernacle was asked to adopt and support her. But Nellie was in fact the first sent from the Tabernacle as a missionary.

Nellie went to the CIM school which was in Chefoo. It was there that she taught Stan Conway who later became Tab Elder. As a five year old missionary's kid, he attended the China Inland Mission's Chefoo School in North China. She was a gentle, gracious, little lady who married Rev George Gibb, the General Director of CIM (which today is known as OMF International), in Shanghai. She was interned as a prisoner of war by the Japanese in the early 1940s. In 1946 she returned to live in Auckland with her sister Eva. She served on the Tab mission committee, in fact, she may even have started.

From then Tab members went all over the world. Harry Taylor to China (CIM, 1925), Miss Wighton to Africa, Miss A. Pitt to the Pacific Islands (South Seas Evangelical Mission, 1926; she became Mrs Fisher), Eunice Ogilvie to India (NZBMS, 1927), Hazel Fountain went to India (Zena Bible and Medical Society, 1927; she became Mrs Perry), Norah Conway, Rita Dobson (she became Mrs A. Rouse), and Mr and Mrs Cyril Petchett all went to China (CIM, 1928). Charlie Barton and Rona Smeeton both went to Africa (Sudan Interior Mission, 1928).

The legendary Myrtle Paulsen left in 1929 (Latin America Prayer Fellowship). She stayed at her post for just under 65 years, running a children's orphanage in Mexico, finally coming home at the age of 90 in 1993. She received the Queen's Service Order in a subsequent Honours' List for her outstanding work. Also in 1929, two workers left for an island mission station off the Papua New Guinea coast: Bessie Mill and our first short-term worker, Henry Massam (Kwato Extension Association).

Even then a worker with a specific skill would go for a short time, to fill a gap or to accomplish a project. Henry Massam went to Kwato soon after he graduated. One weekend, he heard of the urgent need for an accountant, met the mission's leader, and was appointed. Kwato was an industrial mission where Papua New Guineans were trained in skills like boat-building. There were several trading ventures which supported the mission, and he kept the books for these ventures. When he returned another Tabernacle accountant Jack Smeeton replaced him (in 1931).

In 1930 Molly Jenkins left for Solomon Islands (SSIM). There she married Stuart Mill. When they had to return they settled in Sydney and set up the Gospel Recording Studio. From there, record players and gospel records went out in their millions to many countries, repeating the gospel message in hundreds of tribal languages on simple hand-wound gramophones. That same year, 1930, left for India (Ceylon and India General Mission). The next year, 1931, Ruth Grey went to India (Zena Bible and Medical Mission), and Margery Bush joined the Baptists in what is now Bangladesh (NZBMS).

Also in 1931, Cliff Mitchell left for Ethiopia (SIM). Cliff was the brother of Professor E.M. Blacklock's wife, Kathleen. He soon became involved in the translation of the Gospels into the Gallo dialect. He was to become the Tabernacle's first missionary martyr. Before he went to Ethiopia Cliff Mitchell had known that bitter toil awaited him and that there was little romance in the missionary call. "If I should die," he told Professor Blacklock, "do not let them talk of me. Use my death to speak of Christ."

1937 – 1962

Almost all of the next group of missionaries left for China. They were involved in outreach and church planting before the Japanese invasion in 1937, and some stayed until the Communist takeover in 1947. The tide began to flow in the late twenties: two in 1927, five in 1928, four in 1929. This tide became a flood in the early 1930s, when 29 were sent out in just five years!

Mr and Mrs Doug Neilson went to India (Ceylon and India General Mission, 1931). Howard Knight started 50 years of active service, first in China from 1931 to 1951 (CIM), then after four years as a pastor he was appointed Home Director of OMF in Australia until 1970. He then went on to serve with the Australian Evangelical Alliance and TEAR Fund until 1980. Leaving New Zealand in the same group of missionaries as Howard Knight was Myrie Wood (CIM). She later married Jack Beck in China, who was from the Ashburton Baptist Church. When they had to leave China in 1948, they returned and pastored several churches.

In 1932 Gertrude Wise left for India (NZBMS). Another group of four left for China with CIM. There was Bill Taylor and his fiancée Kathleen Barry. (Their daughter became Dr Phyllis Taylor, well known for her work with The Leprosy Mission.) The others were Joyce Ellingham, who married Ron Grubb in China, and Nancy Tucker, the fiancée of Howard Knight. When these young ladies left they received such a large number of bouquets at the wharf and people...
In 1959 an older couple Mr and Mrs Albert and Janet Windsor went to Japan where Albert served as General Director of their mission (CIM) and they supervised the headquarters departments. In the early 1960s Allan Knight, an accountant at Farmers and Mutuals, left for Japan as a young man, where he met his wife Shirley, his administrative gifts were recognized and he was asked to move to Singapore to handle the international finances of OM at their headquarters, which he did for many years. Back home in 1979 he became registrar of the Bible College in Palmerston North, Mrs Joyce Shearer, nee Craig, (Lebanon Evangelical Mission), joining the Tabernacle, as did her husband Peter, later on.

1962—1987

1962 Ben Siaki from Niue Island left for the Philippines (Philippines Crusades), working as a powerful evangelist. He had run away from school at 12. The island where his father was a schoolmaster and his mother a teacher, was a small place with a population of 8,000. After many years in the Philippines they returned to Niue Island.

Others who went out from the Tabernacle in the 1960s were Robin Little who went to Venezuela (WEC, then Christian Literature Crusade), and who married fellow-Kiwi Elizabeth Harding who later joined Robin. They specialized in church planters and in 1960s Missions journal. After six years in Venezuela, as he continued his work to the Urban Poor.

For years the Plummer family had been an open home to the family constantly brought home. In the 1970s, two doctors, Dr Alisa Barker went to Indonesia (OMF, 1972) where she married Martin O’Keeffe. They worked in the slums of Jakarta, and Dr Joanna Plimmer, who had been in China, transferred to Malaysia (CIM/OMF), followed by David Beard who went as a physiotherapist to Afghanistan (Interserve) in 2002.

1987—2012

Tim Forester (Navigators) went to Ethiopia in 1988, and after marrying Annie (a doctor from UK) later moved to Tanzania. They both worked for the Navigators, firstly in Tanzania, then in Uganda, and later in the Philippines. The next year they moved to the States where he now teaching a Masters course in Transformational Urban Leadership at Azusa Pacific University.

The conflict in Ethiopia brought tragedy. In October 1935 Italy invaded Ethiopia, overrunning province after province. The SIM (Sudan Interior Mission) missionaries decided to stay at their posts, but as the danger increased their director Dr Lambie advised the evacuation of women and children to the capital Addis Ababa. Tabernacle missionary Cliff Mitchell was a medical missionary in Addis Ababa, and his fiancée Joyce became so ill en route that she was flown back to New Zealand where she later died. Harold Smith had died in Brazil, by this time he had recurrent malaria. He died only a month after their wedding.

In the decade of the 1930s, war interrupted many plans. Civil War broke out in Spain, diverting many from plans to overseas service. In 1937, Margery Coward (WEC) left for Papua New Guinea. The next woman missionary was Dorothy Mitchell, after a time in Bangladesh, moved to a training role with the School of the Bible in USA in 1997.