

125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary (1895–2020)



# Hail Mount Hermon!



# A TRIBUTE

Jigme N. Kazi

Also by Jigme N. Kazi:

INSIDE SIKKIM: Against The Tide

SIKKIM FOR SIKKIMESE: Distinct Identity Within The Union

THE LONE WARRIOR: Exiled In My Homeland

SONS OF SIKKIM: The Rise and Fall of the Namgyal Dynasty of Sikkim

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Published in India by Prowess Publishing,  
YRK Towers, Thadikara Swamy Koil St, Alandur,  
Chennai, Tamil Nadu 600016

ISBN: 978-1-5457-5318-7

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication

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# Introduction

It was never my intention to publish this book this year (2020). Initially, I made concerted efforts to complete the book before the Hermonites' reunion in Kathmandu in 2017 but failed. It is just a happy and meaningful coincidence that this book is being published as Mount Hermon School celebrates its 125<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary in 2020. When you look back to this period when MH celebrates its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2045 this book would, hopefully, be a prized possession.

I have always been fascinated by history – history of any sort, individuals, communities, nations. A major part of the book records our school's past history. In 1978 when I edited the annual school magazine (Hermonite) my school friend and 1971 batch Hermonite Ved Prakash Agarwal and I did some research work on Queen's Hill School. What we discovered has been a very reliable and valuable source of our school's history of this period (1895-1930) for this book.

As mentioned in my writings MH has gone through a lot in these 125 years. The tragic beginning of the school (Arcadia Girls School) soon after its opening in 1895, when that terrible landslide of September 24, 1899, killed ten of our students, including six children of the Lee family, was a big blow to the school. This tragic incident has been fairly well documented in this book as a reminder for all Hermonites to look back in wonder and awe and derive strength from what happened and how we came through it. My friend and fellow Hermonite Uttam Pradhan (1973 batch) also helped me in compiling the much-needed materials of MH's early history.

The vision and determination of our school's Founder, Miss Emma Knowles, and her deputy Miss C.J. Stahl led to the founding of Queen's Hill School soon after the 1899 disaster in a new location just above the main road near the Darjeeling railway station in the town area. Miss Stahl deserves our gratitude. She was in Arcadia, Queen's Hill School and even lived at the present campus when the school was opened in 1926. She retired as Principal during the period when the school was renamed Mount Hermon School in 1930.

Though he was never our Principal, Bishop Fisher is considered one of our Founders for he was chiefly responsible for the purchase of the present Mount Hermon Estate, where the MH is located. The school was growing and needed more space for expansion. The Estate had around 100 acres in North Point facing Sikkim's mighty Kanchenjunga (Khangchendzonga), the third highest mountain in the world, and the Rangeet valley.

Not many people are aware of the role played by one of our Principals in helping MH sail through stormy times. I'm referring to our Principal Lila Enberg who in the mid-thirties restored a major portion of our main building after the devastating earthquake of January 15, 1934. As a reward the Managing Committee of our school failed to renew her tenure after her term came to an end in 1934! They wanted to get rid of her.

## **Hail Mount Hermon! A Tribute**

While trying to help the school with other Hermonites in the 2012, Lila's daughter Kitty Katzell (Mildred) got in touch with me from the US and sent me her mother's biography (*Lila*), which she authored. She took a lively interest in what was going on in MH and the involvement of the alumni. She was in her eighties then and, unfortunately, died soon after she showed us the way. I'm deeply indebted to her for all her help and inspiration. This book is a tribute to people such as Kitty.

Our fourth Founder, Rev. Halsey Dewey, did a wonderful job in holding on to MH when times were really very difficult after the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, which saw the enrolment dip to its lowest level. The numbers were as low as 86 when Mr. David Stewart took over the school in 1953-54. In the ten years (1954-1964) of his leadership, MH soared to greater heights. Enrolment not only shot up to more than 300, MH was adjudged the best boarding school in India in 1960-61.

When Mr. Stewart's right-hand man, Mr. Graeme Murray, took over the reign in 1964 after Mr. Stewart retired MH was on an uphill swing. Mr. Murray built on the solid foundation laid down by his predecessor. One notable addition to MH's growing stature was the establishment of the Teachers' Training College (TTC) in its campus. TTC graduates not only played a significant role in improving the standard of education in Christian schools in Darjeeling, they have also done remarkably well while serving various schools in the rest of India as teachers and heads.

Due to unstable political situation in the region, Rev. John Johnston who took over after Mr. Murray in 1979 had a tough time in running MH. However, the soft-spoken preacher and Biology and Bible teacher kept the school going and MH sailed through smoothly. Much was expected from Mr. Jeff Gardner when he became the Principal in 1990 but due to many reasons, including internal 'staff politics', his tenure did not last long. This was most unfortunate as Mr. Gardner had worked under both Mr. Murray and Mr. Johnston as Senior Master for a long time and he was best suited for the job as Principal. Unfortunately, he left MH in 1994 just before the school celebrated its 100<sup>th</sup> year.

Those who took charge after Mr. Gardner, namely Mr. Gilbert Samuel, Mr. Pradip K. Das and Mr. George Fernandes, tried to keep MH flag flying but they faced many difficulties. It was the Hermonites from Sikkim, Siliguri and Darjeeling who persuaded the Managing Committee to appoint Mr. Fernandes as Principal mainly to stabilize the situation and to keep the school going. This worked well for sometime. But the downward slide that gradually started after Mr. Johnston and Mr. Gardner's departure was unstoppable and after Mr. Fernandes left in 2011 MH was heading towards a bleak and uncertain future.

Despite the enormous goodwill and sympathy and concern shown by the Hermonites to improve the situation the school authorities failed to respond positively. Mt. Hermon School is owned by the Methodist Church in India which runs the school with the help of the Managing Committee. For several years after the abrupt departure of its Principal, Mr. Terrance Wharton, the school was run without a Principal. Even now we don't have a Principal. In 2018 we came to know that there were only 51 boarders (18 boys and 33 girls) and a 100 odd dayscholars.

The global Hermonites' concern for MH and the need to do something concrete is well-documented in the latter part of this book. Their love and concern for their alma mater is a profound reflection of the spirit that has not only founded the school but has kept the school going in the past 100 plus years through troubled times. I'm particularly proud and grateful to Roslyn (Rongong) Namgyal, Dipak Mirchandhani, Shiva Saria and Lucinda (Cindy) Gibbs for leading and managing the 'MH Revival' Campaign globally in 2012 and thereafter. A big 'Thank You' to all Hermonites for taking a deep interest in MH affairs and supporting my candidature as Principal. We have done our job sincerely and with good intentions. Leave the rest to God. "God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform."

This book is a Tribute not only to our great Founders, Principals, Teachers, Students and Others, it is also a Tribute to all Hermonites of all ages who have lived, died and hoped so that MH lives on to reach greater heights. Bijay Palriwala, a Hermonite of the Stewart era from UK who started the 'MH Revival' movement in 2011 died in November 2019. This book is a Tribute to Hermonites such as Bijay. I wrote this in Facebook when Bijay passed away: "Bijay's efforts and hopes will not die in vain. May he rest in peace." Bijay's advice to us was: "Only combined, sustained effort can hope to improve the situation so I am hoping that others will join in the effort!" Hail Mt. Hermon!

Since the formation of Hermonites International (Hi!) in 2005, we have been very successful in forming/reviving alumni chapters all over the world, particularly in India, Nepal and Bhutan. Thanks to the MH spirit and communication technology, Hermonites are now closely united as never before. Here I would like to make a special mention of some of the active Hermonites who, over the years, have helped to connect Hermonites and cement their bonding. Some of them include the following: Krishna Goenka, Thinley Gyari, Mahesh Singh, Anita (Adhikari) Sahwney, Karan Anand (Delhi), Tshering Dorji, Thinley (Delma) Dem, Karma Khokor, Daw Penjo, Sonam Lhendup (Taki), Rinji Om (Bhutan), Pratap Rai, Anup Chachan, Sarthak Pradhan, Sunirmal Chakrabarti, Nima Thondup (Darjeeling), Charan Chabria, Sujit Singh, Prabir Manna, Hashib Mondol, Yasmin (Mukand) Chung, Shakti Shaw (Kolkata), Annie Gardner, Santosh Rijal, Ashok Pokharel, Ram Bhattarai, Pramod Shrestha 'Goofy', Jugesh Shrestha (Nepal), Ravi Agarwal, Moon Moon Singh, Sushil Mittal, Jagdish Saria, Narendra Sarogi, Jagjit Singh and Shiv Saria (Siliguri), Namgyal Wangdi, Prakash Mundra, Uttam Pradhan, Karma Bhutia, Suresh Sarda, Punam Agarwal, OT Bhutia, Thentok Lachungpa, Udai Sharma, Surendra Pal Singh Lamba (Sikkim), James Sinclair, Pradip Verma, Lucinda Gibbs, Dipak Mirchandhani, Bill Moore, Patricia Russell, Mary Ann Mackie, Ronen Ghose (UK), Ranjit Dasgupta and Pradip Singhania (Bangalore), Ashish Bhengra (Chennai), Walsa Mathai, Sherab Namgyal, Barry Ison, Johnstons, Glasbys (Australia), Dhruba Rai, Adrienne (Murray) Thompson (New Zealand), Puii, Rothang Rema, Robin Sengupta, Fui Chung Lee, Margaret Mapley, Sikdar Nirmal (US & Canada), Tony Sardjono, Barid Manna (Indonesia), Suresh Chatlani (Africa), Apok Jamir, Len Gangte, Bobby Roy, Thangi Rema, Jimmy Lowangcha, Zeena Singh, Ajit Singh, Ayinla Ao (Northeast), Frank Freese (Pune), Varongthip Lultanond (Thip), Navin (Khuria) Wongsejullarat, Aphichoti Chavengsaksongkram (Oak), Joy Nalinee Mishra, Nampung, Pornipha, Mantana (Thailand).

## ***Hail Mount Hermon! A Tribute***

I may have forgotten to give due credit to photographs and other materials used in this book to all concerned persons. Please pardon me for this. But I do want to acknowledge my deep sense of gratitude to James Sinclair and late Hazel Craig of the UK alumnus for materials, including photographs, used in this book. Special thanks to Bangkok's Joy Nalinee Mishra for initially starting the ball rolling in her website on MH. It was an inspiration and a great help to us all.

The 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary year will witness further bonding of Hermonites. We can only hope and pray that the alumni's wish and desire to start a new and fresh relationship with its alma mater will see the light of day in the days and months to come.

At this point of time we hope and pray that the Methodist Church leaders in India take a serious look in what is going on in MH. They must look within and introspect to find out what is really going on in this great institution, why it is sliding downhill and take timely and effective steps to restore MH to its former glory.

Carl Jung said, "Your vision will become clear when you look into your heart. Who looks outside, dreams. Who looks inside, awakens." The Bible is very clear as to what we should do when we are faced with a problem: "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." (Proverbs 3:5-6)

Amen!

Jigme N. Kazi  
(MH: 1963-1979)

Gangtok (Sikkim), March 2020

# 1

## Mount Hermon: Rising Up From The Ashes

*“Inch by inch  
Step by step  
One day at a time  
We Shall Overcome.”*

Jigme N. Kazi

### KNOWLES

**Founder: Emma L. Knowles (1840-1924, Principal: 1895-1917)**



When Miss Emma L. Knowles, an educational missionary under the Women’s Foreign Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church of the United States, founded Mount Hermon School on March 11, 1895, the school was called Arcadia Girls School and was located below Chowrasta facing Lebong in Darjeeling.

Miss Knowles had already spent many years in India as Principal of schools for European girls at Nainital (Uttarakhand) and Calcutta before coming to Darjeeling.

Emma Knowles played a major role in establishing the Wellesley Girls High School in Naini Tal and having worked at the Calcutta Girls School she realised the need for a similar school to be set up in Darjeeling’s favourable climate.

She began ‘Arcadia’ with only 13 students. Deeply religious and a committed Christian, Miss Knowles was convinced that it was God’s will to establish a school for girls in Darjeeling. Within three years of the founding of the school a terrible landslide in 1899 completely damaged the school building, killing ten of its students in the tragic incident.

Undaunted by the terrible disaster and faith in the Almighty, Miss Knowles purchased a piece of land near the railway station in Darjeeling town just above the Hill Cart Road and continued with the work. By 1902, the school had at least four dwelling houses and a three-storey building. The enrolment of the school rose to 50 and the school was renamed Queen’s Hill School (QHS).

## **STAHL**

### **Carolyn Josephine Stahl (Principal: 1918-1929)**

From the beginning of the century till 1929, it was Miss Carolyn J. Stahl, who really served the school, first as an assistant to Miss Knowles, and then as the Principal from 1918 to 1929.

Queen's Hill School was nearly closed down in 1914 due to shortage of funds but because of the concern and dedication of both Miss Knowles and Miss Stahl the school survived. Miss Stahl, also from America and a member of Women's Foreign Missionary Society, believed that "any great task can be accomplished by the exercise of boundless faith, much intercessory prayer and ceaseless work."

By 1918, the enrolment rose to 163 and the school authorities felt the need to find a suitable site for expansion of the school. Queen's Hill School was primarily for the children of missionaries and other Europeans as most white people were called. The students were taught a British curriculum.



## **FISHER**

### **Frederick Bohn Fisher (1882-1938)**



Though he did not become Principal of the school, Bishop Frederick Bohn Fisher is regarded as one of the four Founders of Mt. Hermon School. Born in Pennsylvania in the US in 1882, Bishop Fisher was elected to the Episcopacy and came to India as a missionary and became the Bishop of Calcutta and served in the Thoburn Methodist Church in Calcutta.

As a prominent Methodist Church leader, Rev. Fisher took a live interest on Queen's Hill School. The present location of the school was purchased from Leborg Tea Company, Grand Hotel (Calcutta) and Mount Everest Hotel (Darjeeling) in 1920. Bishop Fisher played a vital role in the purchase of the new estate.

The inauguration of the new school building, which has been described as "one of the finest buildings in the Orient," was performed by Lord Lytton, then the Governor General of Bengal, in May 26, 1926. Initially, the school had around 100 acres.

In 1929-30, Rev. E.S. Johnson of the Thoburn Methodist Church (Calcutta) became Principal of the two schools located in the new campus – Queen's Hill School for Girls and Bishop Fisher School for Boys – and in the same year (1930) and for the third time the school was renamed Mount Hermon School and became a co-educational institution.

In their honour Mt. Hermon still continues the tradition of awarding best girl and boy students every year during its annual Speech Day: Miss Stahl Cup for Best Girl Student and Bishop Fisher Cup for Best Boy Student.

Bishop Fisher knew Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore on intimate terms. “He seemed to me to be one of the few Christians who walked in the fear of the Lord, and, therefore, feared no man,” was Gandhi’s comment on Bishop Fisher, who died of a heart attack in 1938.

Among the former principals of Mt. Hermon after Miss Stahl, Mrs. Lila Engberg (Principal – 1931-1935) needs a special mention mainly because it was she who helped and inspired MH to move forward after the devastating January 15, 1934 earthquake that caused severe damage to the main school building.

Mrs. Engberg not only managed to mobilize huge amount of funds to rebuild the school building but also made sure that repair and reconstruction works were done on time to enable the school to begin its next academic session in March 1935 without much difficulty.

## **DEWEY**

### **Halsey E. Dewey (Principal: 1938-1952)**

Mt. Hermon endured another major crisis in the early 1940s. The effect of the Second World War hit the school badly as most of its students were from abroad. The school was nearly closed down in 1943. Not only were the funds low the enrolment also dropped to only 120. The uncertainty of the future of the mission in India also had an adverse effect on the school.

But it was Rev. Halsey E. Dewey, who became the Principal in 1938, who was chiefly responsible for keeping the school going during one of its darkest periods. Rev. Dewey, who is one of the four Founders of the school, had heavy responsibilities for mission work in Bengal and as staff were hard to get, he found it increasingly difficult to keep the school going and was nearly closed down in 1952. Between 1938, when Rev. Dewey became the Principal, through to the 1940s and 1952, when Rev. Dewey left, MH had two other Principals: Rev. M.A. Clare (1942) and Mrs. R. Forsgren (1947).



## **STEWART**

### **David Garth Stewart (Principal: 1954-1964)**



Mt. Hermon really and truly emerged as a great educational institution in the sub-continent when Rev. David G. Stewart of the New Zealand Chinese Inland Mission (now renamed Overseas Missionary Fellowship) took over the school as its Principal in 1954.

From only about 100 students in early 1950s, the school grew to well over three hundred students by the time Rev. Stewart left at the end of 1963. The school grew not only in strength but in standards and character. In 1961-62, Mt. Hermon was adjudged the best boarding school in India.

## **Hail Mount Hermon! A Tribute**

By mid-1950s MH had a mix of children of different nationalities - American, Australian, New Zealanders, British, Europeans, Indians, Anglo-Indians, Tibetans, Sikkimese, Burmese, Bhutanese, Nepalese, Chinese and even students from Thailand who used to fly all the way out to India for the school term.

It was in 1960 that the school was divided into four Houses named after its Founders and Heads: Knowles (green), Stahl (red), Fisher (yellow) and Dewey (blue).

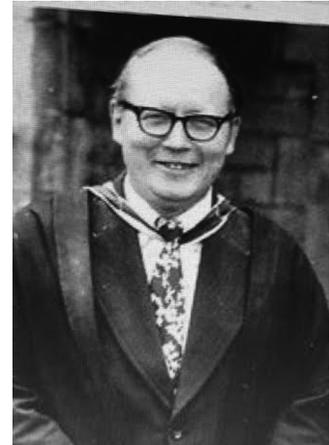
### **MURRAY**

#### **Graeme Armstrong Murray (Principal: 1964-1978)**

Mr. Graeme A. Murray of New Zealand was already the Acting Principal during Rev. Stewart's last year in MH. He naturally took over the school as Principal in 1964 after Rev. Stewart's departure. Mr. Murray finally left MH after 24 years of service to the school in 1978.

Mr. Murray built on the solid foundation laid down by Rev. Stewart and Mt. Hermon blossomed and went from strength to strength during his tenure as Principal. Under Mr. Murray's leadership Mt. Hermon maintained its high standard in all spheres – academic, sports & games, music, plays & dramas etc.

Mr. Murray was blessed by a group of dedicated and competent members of the staff: Mrs. Joy Rongong, Mr. and Mrs. Mathai, Miss C. Hawke, Mr. and Mrs. W. Jones, Mr. and Mrs. Johnston, Mr. and Mrs. Jeff Gardner, Mrs. Alexandra, Miss P. Russell, Miss Bilcliffe, Mr. and Mrs. Lunnon, Mr. and Mrs. Ismail, Mr. and Mrs. West to name a few.



### **JOHNSTON**

#### **John Arcus Johnston (Principal: 1979-1989)**



Rev. John Arcus Johnston, whose association with MH goes back to 1959, became the next Principal in 1979 after Mr. Murray left at the end of 1978. Rev. Johnston from Australia was a quiet, soft-spoken gentleman. During his tenure as Principal Darjeeling went through an uncertain political period when the main demand of the local Gorkha (Nepali) population was for creation of a separate state of 'Gorkhaland.'

Because of the new political environment most schools in Darjeeling, including MH, faced many difficulties during this period. However, Rev. Johnston somehow managed to stay the course and MH was able to pull through the turbulent period.

## **Uncertain future**

Jeff Gardner, an ex-teacher of MH, who later became Rector of St. Paul's School, Darjeeling, took over the school in 1992 after Rev. Johnston left in 1989.

The school's future after Rev. Johnston's departure was uncertain. It may be recalled that most senior teachers of the school left MH in 1978 and this created a huge gap in the teaching faculty.

Mr. Gardner was already the Senior Master when Mr. Murray was the Principal. His taking over the school as Principal in 1992 gave much hope and confidence to all Hermonites and well-wishers of the school that the school was in good hands.

The manner in which the school was run after Mr. Johnston and Mr. Gardner left (1993-94!) prompted Hermonites in the region to urge the Managing Committee, which runs the school on behalf of the Methodist Church in India, to make Mr. George Fernandes, who was on the staff from 1977 during Mr. Murray's tenure, the Principal to ensure stability of the school. Mr. Fernandes and his wife Saroj (Pradhan) Fernandes (a Hermonite), who took charge of MH in 2000-01 have made much contribution to keep the school going and to stabilize the situation when it seemed MH was being troubled on all fronts.

## **'MH Revival' Campaign**

In order to revitalize all aspects of the school's life Hermonites from all over the world from the beginning of 2012 have been unitedly urging the Managing Committee to appoint a competent Hermonite as Principal to set things in order so that the school regains its past glory and continues to give valuable service to society.

Despite overwhelming concern shown by global Hermonites throughout 2012 on the school's future survival and success the school authorities, Managing Committee Members and the Methodist Church in India did not respond to the Hermonites' call for 'MH Revival'.

The main building of the school has been badly damaged after the September 18, 2011 earthquake, staff cottages which were burnt down or in disrepair have not been rebuilt or maintained, school campus has been encroached and worse is the rapid fall in the enrolment...the present strength of boarders is said to be just over 200. There is also the justifiable apprehension that MH may be closed down in the near future or die a natural death if its problems are not properly addressed at the earliest.

**(Jigme N. Kazi was a student in MHS (1963-1972), did his teacher's training (TTC) at Mt. Hermon (1974-75) and taught at MH (1976-1979). He was the Founder-President of Hermonite International (Hi!) and is now Chairman Emeritus of Hermonites International. He has written three books on Sikkim and is a journalist based in Gangtok, Sikkim, India. This piece (minus the first quote) was prepared for Hermonite Altamas Kabir, Chief Justice of India, who was the Chief Guest for MH's Speech Day, 2012.)**

# 2

## By Faith They Built Mt. Hermon School



**FOUNDERS:** (L to R) Knowles, Stahl, Fisher and Dewey.

Mount Hermon School is a co-educational school in the town of Darjeeling, in the Indian state of West Bengal. It is located in North Point, Singmari. It follows the American education style, rather than the British style in vogue in the other schools of the area. It has ICSE (for grade 10) and ISC (for grade 12) board.



**The main school building of Queen's Hill School was opened in 1926.**

Mt. Hermon is a renowned school in Darjeeling hills where facilities for both boys and girls from class KG to 12, day scholars and boarders are available including the facility of all three streams in classes 11 & 12, viz. Science, Commerce & Humanities.

### **History**

The school was established in 1895 under the auspices of the Methodist Episcopal Church of America. Its founder and first Principal was Miss Emma Knowles, a missionary sent out to India with the Women's Foreign Missionary Society in 1881. Emma Knowles played a key role in establishing the Wellesley Girls High School in Nainital (Uttarakhand) and having worked at the Calcutta Girls' High School she embarked on a similar school to be set up in Darjeeling's cool climate. Her plan gained the approval of the Church authorities in the United States as well as in India, but no financial aid was forthcoming from either quarter. It was only by borrowing and by paying rent out of her missionary salary that she was able to open her school in 1895 in a rented house called Arcadia, in a long low building right in the heart of the town, with just 13 pupils on the rolls. The school was also called Arcadia at that time and was considered as a branch of the Calcutta Girls' High School.



## **Hail Mount Hermon! A Tribute**

By 1899 there were 37 boarders when Miss C.J. Stahl was the officiating Principal for Miss Knowles. On a late September evening, following a deluge from continuous rains, “the ledge in front of the school became a river of water.” The children were evacuated to a home higher up. Some little ones had already fallen asleep in their new refuge when a great boulder hit the corner of the room destroying the two walls. The two children just moved to a place of safety were killed, all others went unhurt.

On the same night in a cottage not far from Arcadia, 6 children of Mr. and Mrs. Lee were living in the care of their older sister and trusted servants. They attended Arcadia as day scholars. The next morning revealed that there was not a vestige of the cottage or anything it held. Mrs. Ada Lee turned to God and wrote of her journey in pain in her book, *The Darjeeling Disaster*. It chronicles her struggles and her faith in converting her disaster to triumph. Out of this heart-wrenching engagement with God the Lee Memorial Mission was born to care for famine-stricken orphans, by providing for them food, education and a decent place to stay. Thus in Wellington Square, Calcutta, the Lee Memorial Building came into being in 1908, “In Answer to Prayer – Psalm 27:1”.



In the disaster of 1899 ten students had died. Following the disaster Arcadia was closed and opened again on 1 March 1900 in two rented houses named Queen’s Hill and The Repose, which were later purchased with a third house, Woodville, on ground leased from the Maharaja of Burdwan. These premises were above the railway station, and the school



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officially became Queen's Hill School for Girls. A new wing was added in 1902 with financial aid from the Women's Foreign Missionary Society and building grants from the Government of India.

Emma Knowles worked tirelessly for her school until 1915, and retired from active missionary service a few years later. Her greatest hope was to see her school established in a permanent building 'before her call should come'. She died in 1924 aged 84, but she got her wish when Miss Carolyn Josephine Stahl, who became Principal in 1918, was able to write and tell her of the purchase of the Mount Hermon Estate in 1920. A slump in the tea industry led to the sale of the large estate belonging to the Lebong Tea Company, an ill wind which blew some good for the Methodist missionaries looking for a site for the school. The site was bought for a bargain price of Rs. 50,000/- by Bishop Frederick Fisher of the Thoburn Memorial Methodist Church in Calcutta. Fred Fisher was the moving spirit behind the purchase of the site and the building of the new school.



Later he was instrumental in the purchase of Fernhill in 1927, which was to become the senior boys' living accommodation - again at a bargain price, a mere Rs. 35,000/-. Cottages sprang up on the new estate and the school itself was officially opened in 1926, still called Queen's Hill School. As early as 1899 only small boys were taken into the school and by 1903 there were 20 boys. In 1930 the school was renamed Mount Hermon School, incorporating the original Queen's Hill School for Girls and Bishop Fisher's School for Boys, eventually becoming the fully integrated co-educational boarding school.



**Fernhill 1932**

The story goes that the school received its name during a prayer meeting of some of the missionaries, Bishop Fisher and Miss Stahl seated around Miss Stahl's fireplace. When they rose from their knees after praying, the name 'Mount Hermon' came to them of the snow-capped mountain 9,232 ft high in the northernmost part of present-day Israel.



Since the school was founded in 1895, for nearly 60 years it was run by the Methodist Episcopal Church of America through its Calcutta Christian Schools Society (CCSS), the Management comprising members of other non-conformist churches and missionary societies under the chairmanship of the Calcutta Methodist Bishop. In the early 1950s a new 'united' committee added with co-operating missions from the Australian, New Zealand and British Baptist societies, as well as British Methodists, the Presbyterian Church of Wales and the Church of Scotland. The religious ethos of the school remained evangelical, but the largely American influence became diminished for a short period with the appointment in

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1954 of the Reverend D.G. Stewart, an Australian Baptist, as principal. David Stewart was Principal for ten years (1954-1964) and was then succeeded by Graeme Murray, a New Zealand Baptist, who held the post for 15 years. In 1979, Reverend John Johnston, an Australian Baptist and the school's Senior Master, became Principal, retiring in 1989 after 30 years' service on the school staff.



As the Methodist Episcopal Church decentralized it became the Methodist Church in Southern Asia, which included the territories of India, Burma, Malaysia and the Philippine Islands. In 1981 the Methodist Church in Southern Asia further decentralized and gave autonomy to the Church in India, which then became the Methodist Church in India. All its properties were transferred to the Methodist Church in India Trust Association (MCITA). Over all these years the governance of the school continued under the CCSS, and under the chairmanship of the Bishop of the Bengal Regional Conference and through the administrative jurisdiction of the Calcutta District.

Recently, on 4 May 2014, at the 31<sup>st</sup> Annual Session of the Bengal Regional Conference, the Presiding Bishop, Bishop Dr. Phillip Silas Masih, placed the Mt. Hermon School under the administrative jurisdiction of the North Bengal-Sikkim District providing it greater flexibility.

## **The school**

The District Superintendent for this region is Rev. Noel Prabhuraj, Rev. Prabhuraj, Secretary and Chaplain of the school, is also the Vice-Chairman for the School. The present Principal, Mr. Terrence Wharton, was appointed in April 2013. Mr. Wharton took over from Mr. George William Fernandez who retired end of 2012. Mr. Norton Emmanuel took over from Mr. Wharton in April 2015 as the school's Administrator.

The student body is divided into four houses – Knowles, Stahl, Fisher and Dewey, which are named after previous principals/founders of the school.

The school has three departments – the Infant Department (KG to standard 2), the Junior School (standard 3 to standard 6), and the Senior School (standard 7 to standard 12).

The subjects taught in the school are English, Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, History, Geography, Civics, Computers, Commerce, Accountancy, Political Science, Physical Education, Business Studies, Economics etc.

In standard 11 and 12 the stream is divided into Science, Commerce and Humanities.

Several languages are taught during the vernacular language classes - Hindi, Bengali, Nepali, Tibetan, Mizo (Lushai), Dzongkha and Thai.

## **Discipline**

The discipline of the school is looked after by the Prefects of the school, who are usually chosen from a group of standard 12 students. House captains are elected from students of standard 9 to 12 by the Senior School students by way of vote among themselves to arrange for extra co-curricular activities. Every class has a Class Captain. Junior School students are looked after by their teachers in classrooms, matrons in the hostel and guarded by the Junior School Monitors selected from a group of standard 6 students when they play outside.

## **Co-curricular**

Co-curricular activities include football, cricket, swimming, basketball, volleyball, throwball, badminton and table tennis.

## **Facilities**

The school has a swimming pool, a playground named the Downfield, and a Top Flat for the Junior School. There is a playground for the infant department students with swings, merry-go-rounds, slides, sea saws, and monkey ladders.

## **Music**

Singing classes from KG to Standard 8 are taken twice a week. Piano, violin, guitar lessons are individually given. The school has a grand piano in its chapel hall, seven upright pianos in the music room and several other upright pianos in the small lounge, big lounge, and cottages. Every year several students sit for the Trinity College of Music, London grade examinations ranging from Initial to Grade 8. The School has three choirs - Infant Choir, Junior Choir and Senior Choir.

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### **Activities**

- Every Saturday morning a class presents a Chapel Play based on a theological topic. Every Saturday evening a class presents a class play.
- The school major production over the years have included My Fair Lady, The King and I, Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat, The Pied Piper of Hamelin, The Sound of Music, Fiddler on the Roof, She Stoops to Conquer, H.M.S. Pinafore, Scrooge, Salad Days and many more.
- Inter-house competition is organized among the students for quiz, debate, elocution, extempore, music competition, basketball, football, swimming, and cricket.
- For the Morning Chapel Service, every day at 7:40 A.M., the school assembles at the School's Chapel Hall where they sing a hymn accompanied by the music teacher on the grand piano, a reading is done from the scripture and a short prayer is made by the Chaplain. Thereafter, the Principal of the school makes announcements for the day.
- The students take part in various activities and play against various schools in Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Kurseong and Siliguri etc.

### **Notable alumni:**

- Altamas Kabir - Justice Altamas Kabir, Chief Justice of India and Judge, Supreme Court of India.
- Emil Wolfgang Menzel, Jr. - primatologist and Professor of Psychology.
- Tom Stoppard - English playwright, attended the school from 1943 to 1946.

(Mt. Hermon School website, 2015.)

# 3

## The Darjeeling Disaster Of 1899

On September 24<sup>th</sup> 1899, Darjeeling was devastated by a deluge of landslides in pouring rain, which wiped out many habitations. One such incident took place in a church school with little children as boarders, which was washed away killing almost all the children. This book, *The Darjeeling Disaster*, is about the aftermath for a family who lost their children to this disaster. This is the tale about a heroic mother, Ada Lee, with a small child who made the trip from Calcutta the next day of the landslides, when Darjeeling was totally cut off and there were no roads. This book was published in 1912.

David Hiram Lee spent his student days in Ohio and came to India in 1875, working alongside William Taylor. Ada Hildegard Jones was born in West Virginia. At the age of fourteen an aunt took her to Ohio, where she went to Scio college. After a bout of typhoid fever she is said to have had a vision where God asked her to “live for India”. A few weeks later a letter arrived from a certain Mrs. Doremous of the Union Missionary Society, “stating that Dr. Thoburn, in passing through on his return to India, had handed to her Miss Jones’s name as a candidate for missionary work in India.”

She arrived a year later as part of the Woman’s Union Mission. A fairly sensationalist article in *The Milwaukee Journal* says, “[s]he was the first woman sent by other women to save women.” The same article describes her as “a spunky type” and suggests that she was following “the man of her choice half-way round the world to marry him.” The details are up for verification, but the two got married in Madras in 1881, after Ada apparently was rejected in Calcutta by “neglected sufferers” and inhabitants of harems, whose souls she was trying to save. When Hiram’s health started to decline, they went back to Ohio, returning to India a few years later. It was during this phase that the tragic incident took place. On 24 September 1899, six of their children, Vida, Wilbur David, Ada Eunice, Esther Dennett, Lois Gertrude, and Herbert Wilson, who were studying at Queen’s Hill School in Darjeeling, were swept away to death in one single landslide. The school had its premises in a building known as Arcadia where one Miss Emma Knowles served as the first principal. It was then supposedly regarded as a branch of the Calcutta Girls’ High School (this is not surprising considering the American missionary connections). The school is known today as Mount Hermon School.

Wilbur was the only one who lived to tell his parents of their last moments, but he too died within a few days of the disaster. Along with the six, claimed by the landslide was also Jessudar, a Bengali girl who had become part of the family. Jessudar, Ada Lee tells us, was born of Hindu parents.

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She lost her father early in life after which the family lived in great poverty. Throughout the narrative, the missionary tone strikes one as deeply problematic, but this is only to be expected I suppose. “A wicked man” tried to buy the little girl from her mother for eight rupees (translated in the account to 2 dollars 25 cents), but her mother resisted. Soon after the family converted to Christianity through some “native Christians of the village”.

One day Jessudar was carried away by the wicked man, but she was rescued and deposited with the Lee family for safety. There is a highly dramatic story of how she decided once and for all to turn to God’s service, discarding symbolically the Hindu bangle that she wore. The Lee family also used run a Sunday school, where Vida taught. A couple of photographs fascinated me from Ada Lee’s book. The book by Ada Lee is a disturbing read, as it contains many of the letters exchanged with the children and an account by Wilbur of the fateful event.

Following the disaster, money flowed in and enabled the founding of the Lee Mission. Dr. and Mrs. Walter Griffiths took charge of the school from the late 1930s. (The rhetoric as reported by *The Milwaukee Journal* seems to have remained as problematic as ever even post-independence.) The Lee school in Darjeeling was reported by Gordon Sinclair (special correspondent for *The Milwaukee Journal*) as one of the best in the Himalayas. At the same time, around 1949, there were 400 students and a teacher’s training programme for 30 and an orphan home in the Mission in Calcutta. It is also supposed to have provided accommodation for missionaries travelling in India.

Ada survived David Hiram and died in India in 1948. She is buried at the Lower Circular Road Cemetery. For now, I am quite grateful that they allow their premises to be used for diverse activities without interference.

**(Blog: Calcutta Confusion)**

## **Tragic beginning**

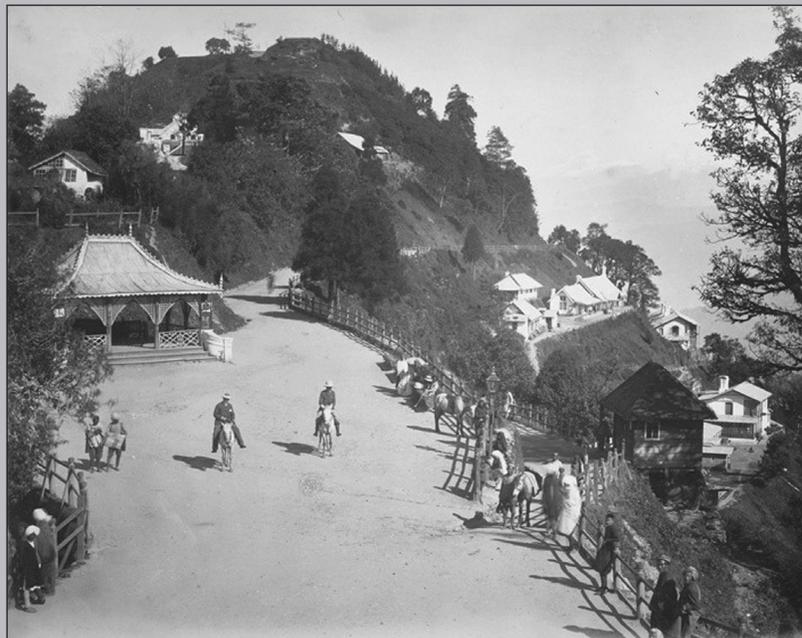
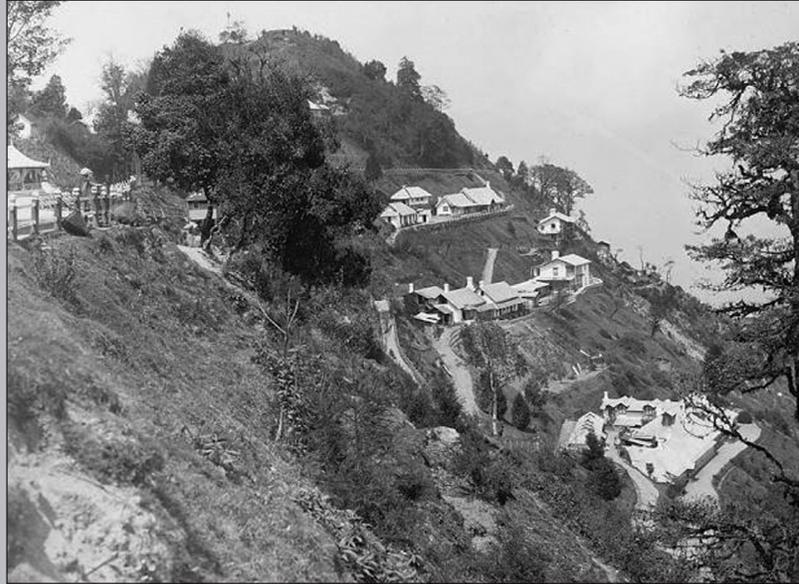
**Jigme N. Kazi**

**Arcadia Girls’ School, Queen’s Hill School,  
Mt. Hermon School**

When Mt. Hermon School was first founded by an American missionary, Miss Emma Knowles, in Darjeeling in 1895 it was known as Arcadia Girls’ School. Three years after its founding a devastating landslide in 1899 not only killed many of its students but destroyed the school building.



Arcadia Girls' School was supposed to have been located on the Lebong side of Darjeeling's Chowrasta (see photos). The old photo of the area of 1880 shows a similar cottage (zoomed) on this side of the hill. Take a look at this cottage and the one taken by our Founder-Principal, Miss C.J. Stahl after the tragic incident.



In 1978 I edited the school's annual 'Hermonite' magazine and Hermonite Ved Agarwal ('71 batch) and I traced the school history of this era with articles and photographs on Queen's Hill School, located above the main road near the railway station. However, we could not locate the exact spot of the old school – Arcadia Girls' School.

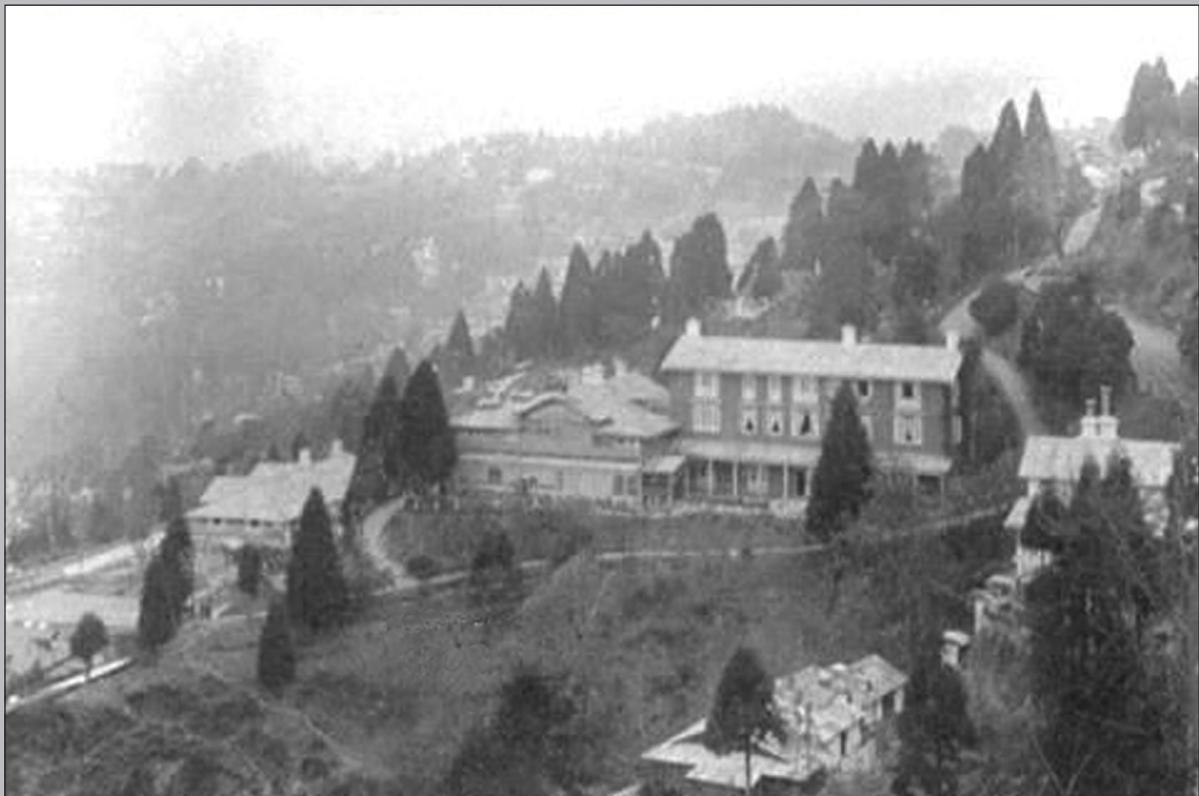
## Hail Mount Hermon! A Tribute



The building at Darjeeling, India, in which the children were killed in the landslide 1898.  
Phobe & Ruth Wallace, Eric Anderson  
Noted by Carolyn Stahl

In the 1920s the school (QHS) was expanding and needed more space and the present school area was purchased and the school was renamed Mt. Hermon School in 1929.

Folks, we must all try to locate the exact spot of "Arcadia".



This is our school, not just one building but five, strung along the hill side down to the railway. Only three are showing. It is five minutes walk to the railway station. Has almost no playground. The tall building was built in 1902. The others were then old, forty years or more. It housed the school 1900 - 1925 (Carolyn Stahl)

(Jigme N. Kazi, Facebook. Photo of QHS from Hermonite 1978, annual school magazine.)

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