



Hedwig, child Selma, and Elder Otto Reinke

From Review & Herald, June 15, 1922.

Reinke, Otto Eduard (1875–1921)

MICHAEL W. CAMPBELL

Michael W. Campbell, Ph.D., is North American Division Archives, Statistics, and Research director. Previously, he was professor of church history and systematic theology at Southwestern Adventist University. An ordained minister, he pastored in Colorado and Kansas. He is assistant editor of *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia* (Review and Herald, 2013) and currently is co-editor of the forthcoming *Oxford Handbook of Seventh-day Adventism*. He also taught at the Adventist International Institute for Advanced Studies (2013-18) and recently wrote the *Pocket Dictionary for Understanding Adventism* (Pacific Press, 2020).

Otto E. Reinke gave leadership to Adventist mission work in the United States, Switzerland, Germany, and Russia. During World War I and the Russian Revolution of 1917, he persisted in leading the church forward in the face of severe hardship, violent upheaval, and repression, until exhaustion and illness led to his death at age 46.

Born of Lutheran parents on January 11, 1875, in Tachauerfelde, Germany, Otto was baptized as a teenager by the Free Baptists. He accepted the Adventist message in Berlin, Germany, through the evangelistic work of Gerhard Perk in 1894. He attended the Adventist school in Hamburg and sold publications in Danzig and Berlin!

In 1895 Otto and his friend, John Lipke, came to the United States and enrolled in the nursing course at Battle Creek Sanitarium. Otto married a fellow nursing graduate and German immigrant, Bina Frederike Moeller [Miller] (1865-1908), on September 30, 1897. The two engaged in city mission work in Chicago and Milwaukee, and managed the Helping Hand Mission in San Francisco for two years. In 1900 Reinke was ordained and entered evangelistic work in Wisconsin. In 1901 the Reinkes began working among German-speaking immigrants in Brooklyn, New York. Otto conducted evangelistic efforts and wrote articles for the *Christlicher Hausfreund*.² Tragically, Bina contracted a debilitating disease in 1906 that resulted in her death on December 15, 1908.³

On June 27, 1909, Otto wedded Hedwig Neetmann (1875-1948) and that same day sailed for Europe to take up his new responsibility as president of the German-Swiss Conference. The couple's only child, Selma (1911-1985), was born March 12, 1911, in Zurich, Switzerland. In 1912, Reinke became the first president of the South German Union Conference.

He returned to the United States for the 1913 General Conference session, then returned overseas to take charge of the East Russian Union Conference. The next year, with the beginning of World War I, Reinke assumed leadership of the Siberian Union Mission, succeeding Gerhard Perk, who was forced to leave the country. As war conditions deteriorated, the Reinke family tried to leave Russia in 1917 but failed.

The conditions of famine, spread of disease, economic instability, violent revolution and lack of communication, resulted in the death of many believers, who were effectively cut off from the outside world.⁴ The Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 led to the Soviet Union and communist governance. By May 1919, due to the government cutting off the paper supply, the denomination's Russian publishing house had closed.⁵

During the war Reinke translated and copied by typewriter a limited quantity of Sabbath School lessons, but the lack of paper eventually made even that impossible. Moreover, the Soviet government confiscated all copies of the Bible and then controlled its circulation.⁶ Furthermore, all denominational workers were forced "to accept a position somewhere in an institution of the government" including Reinke, who worked as a bookkeeper in a flour mill.⁷ Undeterred, he continued to organize the work of the church, laying bold plans for its expansion, and even held a meeting for workers in Moscow, September 25-30, 1920.⁸ His persistence resulted in a 24-day imprisonment that year with fellow church worker, Daniel Isaac.⁹ The year before his death Reinke had another opportunity to leave the country, but "he felt it his duty to stay, even though it should cost him his life to do so," wrote L. H. Christian.¹⁰

Exhausted and suffering from typhoid, Otto E. Reinke died on February 28, 1921, in Saratov, Russia—the location of the Adventist church headquarters at that time.¹¹ He is buried in the cemetery at Husenback, a German colony east of Saratov.¹² Steen Rasmussen, another missionary to Europe, wrote that learning about his death "was a severe shock to all of us. Our brother and fellow laborer had stood faithfully at his post during all the years of trouble and perplexity such as we never shall fully realize."¹³

After Otto's death, Hedwig and Selma managed to escape to Latvia on February 12, 1922. They stayed in Europe for the next eighteen months visiting family, then returned to the United States on August 24, 1924. Hedwig taught school until her retirement. She passed away on August 25, 1948 and is buried in the Adventist cemetery in Burke County, North Carolina.¹⁴

SOURCES

Andreasen, M. L. "Bina Frederike Reinke obituary." *ARH*, January 7, 1909.

Christian, L. H. "From Europe." *ARH*, July 7, 1921.

Conradi, L. R. "A Thrilling Experience as a Prisoner of War in Siberia." *ARH*, June 30, 1921.

Kneeland, B. F. "[H]edwig Neetman Reinke obituary." *Southern Tidings*, October 27, 1948.

Löbsack, H. J. "Through Revolution and Famine in Russia." *ARH*, June 15, 1922.

Reinke, O. E. Letter to General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, July 20, 1920. In "Report of the Autumn Council of the General Conference Committee." *ARH*, November 25, 1920.

Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia. 2nd rev. edition. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1996. S.v. "Reinke, Otto Eduard."

Shaw, J. L. "Elder Otto E. Reinke Dead." *ARH*, June 23, 1921.

NOTES

1. J. L. Shaw, "Elder Otto E. Reinke Dead," *ARH*, June 23, 1921, 24; *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, 2nd rev. edition (1996), s.v. "Reinke, Otto Eduard."
2. S.N. Haskell, "The Work in Greater New York," *ARH*, January 21, 1902, 44; M. Stein, "The German Company in Jersey City," *Atlantic Union Gleaner*, March 12, 1902, 104.
3. M.L. Andreasen, "Bina Frederike Reinke obituary," *ARH*, January 7, 1909, 31.
4. See A. G. Daniells, "A Good Word from European Russia," *ARH*, January 22, 1920, 22, and "Good news comes from Elder O. E. Reinke . . .," *ARH*, October 28, 1920, 16.
5. L.R. Conradi, "A Thrilling Experience as a Prisoner of War in Siberia," *ARH*, June 30, 1921, 18-19.
6. L.H. Christian, "Conditions in Europe," *Australasian Record*, February 21, 1921, 2.

7. O. E. Reinke letter to General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, July 20, 1920, in "Report of the Autumn Council of the General Conference Committee," *ARH*, November 25, 1920, 6-7.
 8. L. R. Conradi, "A Thrilling Experience as a Prisoner of War in Siberia," *ARH*, June 30, 1921, pg. 18-19.
 9. L. H. Christian, "Europe's Call to America," *Lake Union Herald*, Nov. 17, 1920, 3-4.
 10. L. H. Christian, "From Europe," *ARH*, July 7, 1921, 8.
 11. "A cable was received this week from Elder L.R. Conradi . . .," *ARH*, May 12, 1921, 24.
 12. Shaw, "Elder Otto E. Reinke Dead."
 13. Steen Rasmussen, "Attending Meetings in Former Russian Territory," *ARH*, August 11, 1921, 13.
 14. "Hedwig M.N. Reinke," *Find A Grave*, Memorial ID No. 8607067, accessed March 30, 2021, https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/8607067/hedwig-anna_marie-reinke.
-

encyclopedia.adventist.org is an official website of the [Seventh-day Adventist World Church](#)

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