

## BRITISH UNION CONFERENCE MINISTERIAL INSTITUTE



Workers present at the Ministerial Institute May 9-17, 1938

*Reading Left to Right:* FRONT ROW.—J. Harker, Miss K. E. Felton, Miss G. Jones, Miss M. Mason, Miss V. Warren, Miss M. John, Miss D. Taylor, Miss F. Barr-Hamilton, Miss M. Keough, Miss R. Chappell, Miss L. Fletcher, Miss I. Himsworth, Miss E. D. Brown, Miss J. Mitchell, Miss B. Buck, Miss A. M. Beazley, Miss E. Stendall, Miss M. M. Campbell, D. J. Clarke.  
SECOND ROW.—Dr. B. Williamson, E. E. Craven, F. W. Goodall, W. L. Emmerson, A. Warren, J. Rigby, A. Carey, O. M. Dorland, W. E. Read, W. A. Spicer, H. W. Lowe, W. T. Bartlett, R. S. Joyce, Dr. J. E. Cairncross, G. D. King, S. G. Hyde, W. H. Meredith, E. R. Colson, J. I. Robison.  
THIRD ROW.—S. Joyce, C. A. Reeves, Mrs. D. Case, Miss E. Guntrip, Miss J. Archibald, Miss A. McRorie, Miss J. Hyde, Miss N. Ritson, Miss O. C. Davies, Miss W. Buckle, Miss E. Adair, Miss M. Clements, Miss M. Kirby, Miss E. Cleary, Miss K. Mahon, Miss E. B. Finch, Miss A. Mallory, Miss M. Hamblin, Miss H. Ford, Mrs. I. H. Williams, Miss J. Handysides, Miss A. F. Clarke, J. B. West, H. F. De Ath, A. S. Rodd, D. Handysides.  
FOURTH ROW.—B. A. Walton, T. H. Cooper, E. Ashton, R. Vince, L. D. Vince, J. G. Bevan, N. H. Knight, W. J. Young, F. A. Spearing, J. H. Parkin, F. C. Bailey, D. M. Swaine, F. Edwards, A. H. Thompson, W. R. A. Madgwick, S. G. Joyce, W. Maudsley, H. K. Munson, R. T. Bolton, F. W. Coppock, R. H. Smith, J. Mustard, E. Butters, J. H. Bayliss, J. C. Craven.  
FIFTH ROW.—H. W. Armstrong, F. J. Wilmshurst, G. W. Bailey, A. G. Tapping, H. Humphries, H. W. McCrow, H. D. Clarke, J. J. Gillatt, C. R. Bonney, P. Cumings, D. Morrison, G. A. Keough, H. T. Johnson, C. Smith, E. F. Kinman, W. J. Runtting, J. E. Bell, D. Conroy, J. A. McMillan, O. H. Rosier, A. K. Armstrong, R. A. Freeth, C. T. Bannister, H. Benwell, W. G. Baldry, F. S. Jackson, L. A. Watson, G. R. Bell, L. G. Hardinge, W. G. Nicholson, E. R. Warland, A. W. Cook, W. J. Cannon, J. C. French, B. E. Sparrow, J. R. Lewis, B. Belton, E. Zins, J. H. Craven, K. Elias.

British Union Conference Ministerial Institute, 1938.

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# Colson, Ellis R. (1897–1967)

## NATHALIE JOHANSSON

Nathalie Johansson, B.A. (English and History), M.A. (English) (University of Southern Denmark), currently (2019) serves as the management assistant to the Treasury Department the Trans-European Division of the Seventh-day Adventists in St. Albans, England. Johansson plans to complete a Ph.D. in Adventist History in the near future.

Ellis R. Colson served the church as a teacher, business manager, and school principal at the mission school in Sweden, treasurer for the Northern European Division, business manager of Atlantic Union College, secretary-treasurer of the Minnesota Conference, and pastor in the Minnesota Conference.

## Early Life and Career

Colson was born in Lyons, Nebraska, U.S.A., on July 21, 1921,<sup>1</sup> and after completing elementary school attended college at Broadview.<sup>2</sup> He completed two years of postgraduate studies, beginning his studies at the University

of Chicago and finishing at Uppsala University in Sweden.<sup>3</sup> After graduating, Colson decided to stay in Sweden to work as a teacher at Nyhyttan, the Swedish Mission School. From 1929 he was to serve as principal<sup>4</sup> and later as business manager.<sup>5</sup> While in Sweden he met his future wife, Esther,<sup>6</sup> and in 1929 they were married.<sup>7</sup> They were to have three sons: LeRoy H., Ingemar L., and Lennart T.<sup>8</sup>

## The Northern European Division and West Africa

At the Northern European Division Winter Council held at Poznan, Poland, December 9-14, 1934, Colson was elected as treasurer.<sup>9</sup> In 1935 Colson moved to England to work as the treasurer of the Northern European Division, with headquarters in London.<sup>10</sup>

While he was working for the Northern European Division, he visited the mission fields in East and West Africa, as well as traveling to several European countries.<sup>11</sup> In May 1935 the Northern European Division voted to issue Colson with his ministerial license.<sup>12</sup>

In an article from the treasurer by Colson in *The Advent Survey* in 1935 he said, "We are not seeking and laboring for ephemeral, tinselled knickknacks, but for imperishable treasures. The money we solicit means little in itself. It will perish, but the pearls of great price in the kingdom of heaven, which is now in our hearts, will remain and become more and more established."<sup>13</sup>

On November 28, 1938, the Northern European Division voted for Colson to visit the West African mission fields to audit the accounts of the missions and attend the African Missionary Council in Nigeria that was to take place in March 1939.<sup>14</sup>

Colson reported on his visit in *The Advent Survey* and was amazed at the work that was being done: "I was impressed throughout our mission fields by the good work that is being done by our lay members. This was especially true over in Kenya, where in one church ten new Sabbath School groups, with 440 new members, were added in one year, all by the efforts of our faithful lay members. In another place one convert who had not yet been baptized, and who had known our truth only three months, had raised up three different groups of adherents and also built a chapel sufficiently large to accommodate the 200 adherents who came together for worship two or three times a week. This man was getting no remuneration for his services whatsoever. In fact, all this had been done before our mission leaders were aware of his existence. Here we have a wonderful field to explore and develop. If all our believers were so zealous and enthusiastic, burdened with a love for lost humanity, what a movement they would start!"<sup>15</sup> Colson visited four camp meetings in Kenya.<sup>16</sup> He wrote the following in the Southwestern Union Record about his experience: "We had one gathering in the Kisii hills, where 5,000 were present, and two gatherings among the Luo people, where 7,000 were present; these places being within forty miles of each other. Another meeting was held across the Kavirondo Bay, where 450 were present.... Some 300 grass huts were put up, which accommodated nearly three thousand people.... At the other camps,

however, material was scarce, and the believers came from shorter distances, which made it less necessary to put up so many, but there were some 200 anyhow.... I found the Africans are a singing people as their brethren and sisters are in other parts of the world...generally speaking, there were no meetings at night, but the natives would start singing about dusk as they prepared their evening meal and would keep it up until bedtime. I am sure that they would have sung all night if permission had been granted.... Nearly six hundred were baptized at the camps."<sup>17</sup> In another account reported in the Mission Quarterly, Colson wrote the following: "About fifty miles east of Lake Victoria in the Kisii hills of Kenya live a very interesting and responsive people. Here we have a strong, growing work. The tribe is not large, only about one hundred thousand, but at our last camp meeting there were nearly five thousand present. Our work there began just a few years ago, but already we have many strong sector schools and several large churches.... I was thrilled as I listened to the glowing reports given by the native evangelists. One who has charge of two churches reported that in one of them, with a baptized membership of 172, every member had joined. Scores of villages have been visited. Men, women, and even children have left their gardens and gone out seeking for and preaching to those hungry for the message. As a result, 300 adults, besides 142 children, have been added to the Sabbath School and baptismal classes. Ten new Sabbath Schools and primary training centers have been added to one church!"<sup>18</sup> There is no doubt that these visits made a deep impression on Colson.

## Returning to the United States

When the Second World War broke out in Europe in 1939, things started to change for division staff. Following the Winter Council, held November 22-27, 1939, Colson, with W.E Read, left for meetings in the West Nordic Union (Norway and Denmark).<sup>19</sup> During this visit travel within Europe and to the United Kingdom became difficult. Colson made his way to Switzerland and had to find a way to get to America (being an American citizen). William Bartlett was to report in *The Advent Survey*: "Brother Colson experienced great difficulty in making his way out of Switzerland through France and Spain to Lisbon where he took the boat to America."<sup>20</sup> Colson wrote about his experience, and excerpts of his letter were published in *The Advent Survey*. Bartlett summarized his journey and quoted from the letter: "Brother Colson took train to Lyons. About forty kilometers from that place the train could not go any farther. However, he found a bus which landed him there.... The only way to get out of Lyons was by bicycle.... While he was mounting the bicycle, he learned that the Germans were already in possession of the bridges. He followed other cyclists. Some of the roads were stopped, and they had to retrace their steps but finally found a clear road going south.... Speaking French as I do, it was not long before the village people discovered that they had a foreigner among them. A stout fellow demanded my papers. A crowd of sixty people gathered. They took my bags and searched them and then put the bicycle and all in a shed and locked the door. I caught a few words about parachute, prison, espionage, German, but these were enough to let me know I was in a tight place.... Then a Belgian soldier belonging to the Foreign Legion arrested me.... I was loaded with my luggage and bicycle into a lorry and driven about ten kilometers away to the police station. Here they

understood German, and the misunderstanding was soon cleared up.... At last, after an anxious time, I was told I was free.... This man for one hundred Swiss francs offered to take me with him to Marseilles and told me that without him I could not get through the military lines. After traveling about one hundred seventy-five kilometers, we had to stop as the authorities were only allowing military to go farther. I was told I must go back to St. Etienne where I would find an American Consul.... At this place Brother Colson had to stay ten days until the Armistice was signed. It rained incessantly. He slept on straw in a large theater and did not take his clothes off for five days. Potato soup was served twice a day, and they subsisted on this. Brother Colson lost several kilos in weight on this journey.... Finally he was able to make his way to the Spanish frontier only to find that it had just been closed. After a week of waiting, food became scarce at this place, and he had to live on fruit and tomatoes. After eight days of anxious waiting, the English and Germans were allowed through the frontier, but all the rest were stopped and probably sent back into France.<sup>21</sup> Colson did however make it into Spain and from there to Lisbon where he was able to sail to America.

On June 30, 1940, the Northern European Division decided the following: "In view of the fact that E. R. Colson has not been able to return to England and the uncertainty of him being able to rejoin his family here in Edgware during the war, and in harmony with Mrs. Colson's own request, it was voted that Mrs. Colson and the boys be authorized to sail to New York."<sup>22</sup> On July 4, 1940, Colson's wife and three children sailed to New York by steamship.<sup>23</sup>

Since the family were now in the United States and, with the difficulties of them returning to England, it was decided that Colson should stay in the United States and not return to England. His work at the Northern European Division therefore came to an end.<sup>24</sup>

## Atlantic Union College

On October 23, 1940, the General Conference Executive Committee autumn council invited Colson to connect with the Atlantic Union Conference with the prospect of becoming the business manager of the Atlantic Union College.<sup>25</sup> Colson began his new job as the business manager of the Atlantic Union College; however, he and his wife were unhappy with the living conditions, and Colson did not feel like continuing his work at the Atlantic Union College. "Colson and his wife were unhappy with their living conditions at South Lancaster. They have searched for a room for several days and could find nothing of which they were satisfied. Also, after investigating living costs, they found that it would not be possible for them to live in that place on their current salary. Brother Colson very freely said that he would not be satisfied to continue in the work at the college to which he had been appointed. He had expressed his feelings to Professor Jones and to others."<sup>26</sup>

Colson wrote a letter to E. D. Dick and E. D. Nelson on October 23, 1940, stating that he had no great desire to be a business manager and was looking for another appointment. "I have been connected with a school over in

Europe for about fifteen years and on the whole, I enjoyed school work, although I must confess, I enjoyed teaching more than being business manager. I really do not feel any great desire to be business manager of a college over here, although I would not feel free to turn down the call, in case it came through. I must also confess that I have enjoyed the work in the Northern European Division office more than any other work that I have had to date. I feel that I have been of greater service to the cause in that position than in any other.... My desire is not to remain in America. At least that is our intention for now, for we really feel that we would enjoy foreign mission work more than being in the homeland. On account of this, I have really felt that I would appreciate more some work along the conference treasury work or auditing work during the years that I spend in America. I believe this would increase my usefulness in foreign mission work more than if I would connect with a college.<sup>27</sup> On October 29, 1940, Colson got the following reply from E. D. Dick: "Since the future is so uncertain, particularly as regards the work of the Northern European Division, we feel that it would no doubt be best for you to enter into some line of service such as has been offered to you by Atlantic Union College, leaving it to the future to determine what later course you may pursue. I feel certain that you will be glad to serve in any way that you can while we are in this time of waiting.... You will be able to do a good work in connection with Atlantic Union College."<sup>28</sup> So Colson worked and waited.

## The Minnesota Conference and Final Years

Colson was elected as the secretary-treasurer of the Minnesota Conference at the Minnesota Conference camp meeting on June 15-25, 1944.<sup>29</sup> On December 24, 1946, Colson wrote the following in The Northern Union Outlook: "Many, upon accepting this message, have had the property they owned and that was free of indebtedness, appraised at a proper value, and tithed it. Others, in selling property, tithed the proceeds. Still others have tithed the value of stocks, bonds, etc. We believe there are those among us who have not done this as yet, but who should do it. If this were done and all of our people would pay an honest tithe on all their increase, what rich blessings from heaven would flow into the hearts and homes of our people everywhere."<sup>30</sup>

Colson continued to serve as secretary-treasurer of the Minnesota Conference to the Conference Session in 1951. He then continued to serve in the conference as a church pastor in the Glenwood district.<sup>31</sup> Colson's last appointment was as pastor of the Red Wing and Dodge Center churches.<sup>32</sup> Colson retired in 1962.<sup>33</sup> A few years after his retirement at the age of 69, on April 7, 1967, he was involved in a car accident near Hastings, Minnesota, and sadly passed away.<sup>34</sup>

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NOTES

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2. M. V. Campbell "Introducing two Conference Treasurers," *Northern Union Outlook*, December 12, 1944, 1.
3. Ibid.
4. "Swedish Missionary School," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1930), 308.
5. "Swedish Missionary School," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1933), 243.
6. Postal telegraph, June 17, 1940, to Dick General Conference from Robison.
7. M. V. Campbell "Introducing two Conference Treasurers," *Northern Union Outlook*, December 12, 1944, 1.
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9. E. D. Dick "The Winter Council," *The Advent Survey*, February 1, 1935, 8.
10. M. V. Campbell "Introducing two Conference Treasurers," *Northern Union Outlook*, December 12, 1944, 1; "Death of E. R. Colson," *ARH*, May 4, 1967, 48.
11. M. V. Campbell "Introducing two Conference Treasurers," *Northern Union Outlook*, December 12, 1944, 1; "Death of E. R. Colson," *ARH*, May 4, 1967, 48.
12. Northern European Division minutes, May 15, 1935, 31 (Trans-European Division Archives).
13. E. R. Colson "Opportunities in Harvest Ingathering," *The Advent Survey*, October 1, 1935, 2.
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15. E. R. Colson, "West African Mission Fields," *The Advent Survey*, September 1, 1939, 2-4.
16. E. R. Colson "Camp Meetings in Kenya," *Southwestern Union Record*, January 4, 1939, 1-2.
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23. Letter to J. I. Robison from H.S., June 30, 1940.
24. "Death of E. R. Colson," *ARH*, May 4, 1967, 48.
25. General Conference Committee Minutes, October 23, 1940, letter, GC records 45483.
26. T.J.M. to W. G. Turner, E. D. Dick, E. W. Nelson, H. T. Elliot, November 14, 1940, letter, GC records 45483.
27. Colson letter to E. D. Dick, E. D. Nelson, GC, October 23, 1940, GC records 45483.
28. Letter by E. D. Dick to Colson October 29, 1940, GC records 45483.
29. M. V. Campbell "Introducing two Conference Treasurers," *Northern Union Outlook*, December 12, 1944, 1; "Death of E. R. Colson," *ARH*, May 4, 1967, 48; C.V. Anderson "Welcome to E.R. Colson and Family," *Northern Union Outlook*, May 16, 1944, 5.
30. Ellis R. Colson "Faithful Stewards," *Northern Union Outlook*, December 24, 1946, 2.
31. H. E. Swenson, "Dorcas Federation Meets in Fergus Falls," *Northern Union Outlook*, May 4, 1954, 5.
32. Mrs. Fred Carlson, "Change of Pastors," *Northern Union Outlook*, November 10, 1959, 4.
33. Death of E. R. Colson," *ARH*, May 4, 1967, 48.
34. F. Allen Sackett, "Ellis R. Colson (Obituary)," *Northern Union Outlook*, September 22, 1967, 13; "Death of E. R. Colson," *ARH*, May 4, 1967, 48.

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