

Kilroy, Wilfred

(1908–1970)

LESTER DEVINE

Originally trained as a secondary history teacher, a career long Adventist educator, Lester Devine, Ed.D., has taught at elementary, secondary and higher education levels and spent more than three decades in elected educational leadership positions in two divisions of the world Church, NAD (1969-1982) and SPD (1982-2005). He completed his forty years of denominational service with a term as director of the Ellen G. White/Adventist Research Centre at Avondale University College in Australia where his life-long hobby of learning and presenting on Adventist heritage issues became his vocation.

Wilfred Kilroy was a career length employee at Sanitarium Health Food Company (SHF) with headquarters in Australia. He gave 48 years of service.¹

Kilroy was born in Christchurch, New Zealand on May 6, 1908.² He was educated in his home town and began his working life at the Christchurch SHF

factory in 1922 as a stock-boy, before transferring to the retail arm of the company at the Christchurch store in 1926. By 1927 he was back at the Christchurch factory where he worked as a dispatch clerk until 1932.³

Kilroy married Thelma Dulcie Bates on October 31, 1929.⁴ Their home was a source of great hospitality and its cheerful witness blessed many.

From 1932 until 1938 Kilroy was a food process worker, then a foreman at the Auckland SHF factory in New Zealand.⁵ Then in 1938 he was made Manager of the factory at only 30 years of age. Kilroy then became the General Manager for the New Zealand SHF operation in 1941, a role he filled for the next three years of World War II. In 1944 he transferred to the Head Office of the company in Wahroonga, New South Wales, Australia and for the next 14 years he was the Australasian Production Manager. In 1958 he was promoted to the position of Assistant General Manager of the Company. In 1962 he was promoted to the senior position in the Company, that of General Manager.⁶



Wilfred Kilroy

Photo courtesy of the Sanitarium Health Food Company Archives.

As General Manager, Kilroy knew the value of trained technicians and qualified quality control officers. Avondale College agreed to offer two courses to train young people, each of them of two years duration. Most graduates were employed at the Company factories around Australia and New Zealand. In January 1968, a 10-day course for managers was conducted at Avondale College. Its purpose was to familiarize managers with the content and function of these new courses. Some managers saw the benefit of these courses and were happy to employ graduating technicians in their factories; others not so much. Following the death of Wilfred Kilroy, the significance and importance of those courses declined and their cancellation was only a matter of time.⁷

Historically, development of new SHF products was unstructured at best but by the late 1960s laboratory workers could research a new product and submit it to the New Products and Standards Committee established by Wilfred Kilroy. With 17 members, including marketing executives, accountants and laboratory staff, there was no one on this committee representing current marketing research. Thus, while a step in the right direction the committee was doomed to ineffectiveness and was replaced in 1987 by a marketing committee with only seven members.⁸

Needing to stay in the vanguard of food companies, some aggressive planning was necessary. As one part of that strategy Stan Grubb proposed to Wilfred Kilroy the H. C. Tempest Memorial Scholarship to train engineering students and some notable recipients who later worked for the company were Dr. Ivan Scale, Neville Chester, Graham Fraser, and Ian Robson.⁹

By this time the international Church was developing an appreciation of the commercial success of the SHF and Granose Foods in the United Kingdom appealed to the SHF for assistance in rescuing a business on its way to failure. After some investigation Wilfred Kilroy believed that more than anything else Granose Foods needed a strong marketing manager so he responded to the call for help by seconding Allan Evans to Granose Foods; and in time sales improved.¹⁰

During his time as General Manager of the company, he reported on a major fire that occurred at the Christchurch factory on the afternoon of October 11, 1966. The Christchurch factory held a special place in the life of Wilfred Kilroy as it was the site of his initial employment with the SHF.¹¹ It was to be some years before the factory returned to full production.

At the age of 62, Wilfred Kilroy died while still General Manager of the SHF.¹² He had been ill for only a few weeks. Forty-eight years had been spent working for the Company. He had only recently been re-appointed to his position at the General Conference of the World Church. He had been a member of the Australasian Division's Executive Committee for 26 years, a record few could claim.¹³ During Kilroy's time as General Manager, the SHF was essentially a department of the Church at the Australasian Union Conference (now South Pacific Division) headquarters at Wahroonga, Sydney. That reality is reflected in the minutes of the time where the name of Wilfred Kilroy is frequently noted along with actions dealing with SHF business.¹⁴

Wilfred Kilroy was survived by his wife, Thelma, sister Phyllis and two brothers, Walter and Les.¹⁵ He was buried in the Avondale Seventh-day Adventist Cemetery at Cooranbong, New South Wales, Australia.¹⁶ Thelma Kilroy died on January 20, 1977, one day short of her seventieth birthday, and was buried beside her husband.¹⁷

SOURCES

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NOTES

1. R. R. Frame, "Life Sketch of Wilfred Lawrence Kilroy," *Australasian Record*, February 8, 1971, 11.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. "Australasian Division Appointments from the General Conference," *Australasian Record*, August 13, 1962, 8.
7. Robert Parr and Glynn Litster, *What Hath God Wrought, The Sanitarium Health Food Company Story* (Warburton, Victoria, Signs Publishing Company, n. d.), 203.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.

11. W. L. Kilroy, "Health Food Factory Fire," *Australasian Record*, November 21, 1966, 1.
 12. R. R. Frame, "Wilfred Kilroy obituary," *Australasian Record*, February 1, 1971, 19.
 13. Frame, "Life Sketch," 11.
 14. Examples of W. Kilroy items in the AUC minutes, February 2, 1942, February 19, 1942, July 27, 1942, August 27, 1942, June 4, 1943, November 2, 1943, May 22, 1944, September 26, 1944, January 19, 1946, June 4, 1946, October 21, 1946.
 15. R. R. Frame, "Wilfred Kilroy obituary," 19.
 16. Ibid.
 17. R. A. Vince, "Thelma Kilroy obituary," *Australasian Record*, February 28, 1977, 14.
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