



Ludwig and Elizabeth Lemke

Photo courtesy of Mel Lemke.

## Lemke, Ludwig Daniel August (1871–1944) and Elizabeth Florence (Stimson) (1878–1966)

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LESTER LEMKE, AND MEL LEMKE

Lester Lemke, M.B.A. (University of New England, NSW, Australia). Retired as executive director of Catholic Secondary Principals Australia in 2014. Born in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea to the missionaries Ernest and Delys Lemke. Worked in education for 44 years in a range of mainstream and cross-cultural contexts as a teacher, faculty head, deputy principal, principal, regional secondary inspector, assistant secretary for education (PNG) and executive director of the Australian Catholic Principals' Association based in Canberra, ACT, Australia.

Mel Lemke, D.Min. (Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California, the United States), currently serves as Ministerial Association director for Education in the South Queensland Conference, Australia. Born in Papua New Guinea of missionary parents, Lemke has served the church as a pastor, conference and union youth director, division Adventist Volunteer Services director, college lecturer, seminary department director, and school chaplain for over a decade. Lemke is an author and international speaker, and has four adult children.

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Ludwig Daniel August Lemke was a pioneer of the Seventh-day Adventist church in Australia. Through his work as a colporteur, publishing leader, evangelist, college principal, and conference resident, he helped to establish and grow the fledgling group of believers that formed the basis of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Australia. Well educated, intelligent, articulate, and deeply committed to his God, his faith, and his family, he was a man of vision, courage, and talent who gave all in the service of his God and his church.<sup>1</sup>

## Early Life in Germany and Sailing the Seven Seas

Ludwig Daniel August Lemke, affectionately known as Lou or Louis, was born in Badenstadt, Hanover, Germany, on September 10, 1871.<sup>2</sup> One of five children (he had three brothers and a sister), Lemke attended both primary and secondary school in Badenstadt and, as a relatively young man, graduated from the University of Hanover with a degree in education. While still a student at the University of Hanover, Lemke developed a reputation as an inspirational student leader, a persuasive public speaker, and an outspoken critic of the stance taken by the conservative German statesman Otto Eduard Leopold, Prince of Bismarck. Ultimately, and perhaps inevitably, Lemke's outspoken critique of the government resulted in his arrest and detention for what was seen as his subversive activities. His older brother, William, then head of Customs and Immigration, advised Lemke that he either needed to remain silent about his views or leave.<sup>3</sup>

Having completed his university studies, Lemke also found himself eligible for military service. In an effort to avoid being drafted into the army and to follow his brother's advice, he joined the German merchant marine. The stories he shared from those adventurous days were as inspiring as they were numerous. Among the many ports he visited during his time in the merchant marine were three visits to Australia, and it was in 1894 during his third visit, while the clipper was taking on a load of wheat at Port Germein, that he decided to make a new life for himself in South Australia. Years later, when he travelled to Europe and the United States as a delegate to the General Conference session, he sought and received an honorable discharge from the German merchant marine.<sup>4</sup>

## Settling in South Australia

After absconding from his ship, Lemke found work near Port Pirie with a well-educated but poor farmer by the name of Mr. Plenty. Although the farmer could not afford to pay wages, Lemke agreed to work for food and lodging alone while he learned to speak English. He worked on the farm for two years. It was during this time that he attended a public meeting where he heard a Salvation Army captain testify to the saving power of God. He went back to his room, knelt in prayer, and surrendered his heart to the Lord.<sup>5</sup>

## Joining the Gold Rush

When Lemke left Mr. Plenty's farm, he moved further inland where he found work in an orchard, then later, in a quarry mining limestone to be used as flux in the copper smelters at Port Pirie. Still later, he worked in the smelters at Port Pirie. When work became scarce, he travelled with a friend to the gold fields in Western Australia. They journeyed to Kalgoorlie by train, then by Cobb and Company coach to the gold rush at Malcolm where they worked for a time without making the hoped-for fortune. Ultimately, both Lemke and his friend returned to South Australia.<sup>6</sup>

## Marriage and Family

In 1896, Louis Lemke met Elizabeth Florence Stimson. She had been born on February 3, 1878, in the town of Wirrabara, South Australia.<sup>7</sup> Her father, an English migrant, was the local police constable. Her mother was of Scottish descent. The family were members of the Salvation Army, and Lemke joined their fellowship. Louis Lemke and Elizabeth Stimson were married on October 23, 1897.<sup>8</sup> Eleven children were born to them:<sup>9</sup> Agnes Dorothy Sophia (December 20, 1899-March 6, 1931) married Henry Cronk; Edward Wilhelm James (October 29, 1901-1969) married Beatrice Watson; Ludwig Frederick (January 20, 1904-December 15, 1923); Elizabeth Florence (August 10, 1905-April 25, 1975) married Rueben Brandstater and later Harry Bywaters; Gertrude Annie (January 10, 1908-March 26, 1990) married Les Reynolds; Harold Roy (April 18, 1910-May 22, 1978) married Jean Watson; Ralph Cyril (August 18, 1913-October 24, 2011) married Elsie Beecham; Herman Richard (February 8, 1915-1918); Norman Allen (March 30, 1917-January 24, 2007) married Fay White; Gordon Leslie (January 15, 1921-October 6, 2005) married Noreen; Ernest Charles (August 1, 1922-August 22, 2008) married Delys Marion Blair.

## Early Ministry Life

In 1905, Louis and Elizabeth Lemke attended an evangelistic campaign run by W. W. Woodford and as a result joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church.<sup>10</sup> In late 1906, Lemke started selling Adventist literature from door to door driving a buggy and two ponies in the Barossa Valley.<sup>11</sup> The Barossa Valley was first settled in the 1840s by German migrants escaping religious and political persecution at home in Germany. Because Lemke was of German origin and spoke the German language, he understood and related well to the people in the area who

welcomed him into their homes. The Lutheran ministers appreciated him and his books, and he was highly recommended to various congregations. This was the first Adventist contact in the Barossa area. Lemke realized there was an urgent need for a German-speaking evangelist in the Barossa and he was instrumental in bringing Daniel Nathan Wall from the United States to the region in 1914.<sup>12</sup> Erhardt Roenfeldt, along with his wife Antonie and their family, became Adventists as a result of Lemke's work and Wall's ministry.<sup>13</sup> Wall travelled up and down the Barossa on his pushbike, offering and giving Bible lessons in German. As a result, the believers formed a German Seventh-day Adventist church in Greenock in 1915.<sup>14</sup> Lemke had done much work to open the way for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Barossa Valley.

Lemke enjoyed ongoing success as a literature evangelist. As a result, the Australasian Union Conference (now the South Pacific Division) invited him to become secretary of the publishing department and field mission. He held these positions from 1908 to 1917, and again, concurrent with his Avondale position, in 1920.<sup>15</sup> In 1912, he travelled as a delegate to the General Conference session to represent the Australasian Union Conference's publishing interests and to help with strengthening the Church's work in Britain and Europe.<sup>16</sup> During this time, the church in Germany was experiencing particular difficulties. The General Conference asked if the Australasian Union Conference would release Lemke to return to Germany to assist in resolving the difficulties. He went back to Germany for a year to help support, develop, and extend the Adventist publishing work. While in Germany, he sought and received an honorable discharge from the German merchant marine, enabling him to become an Australian citizen. He was ordained on June 18, 1915.<sup>17</sup>

For a short time in 1916/1917, Lemke served as president of the South Australian Conference. He was reappointed at the March 1917 session of the conference. However, just five months later, in August 1917, he was appointed principal and business manager of Australasian Missionary College (now Avondale University College) in Cooranbong, New South Wales.<sup>18</sup> In late 1920, he was appointed president of the New South Wales Conference.<sup>19</sup> When the conference divided into North New South Wales and South New South Wales, he became president of the South New South Wales Conference.<sup>20</sup> Then in 1923 he was appointed president of the South Australia Conference.

## A Short Interlude

As a result of his heavy administrative and evangelical responsibilities, Lemke's health failed in 1928 and it became necessary for him to withdraw from his responsibilities at the time of the conference session in March 1928.<sup>21</sup> At this time, he purchased a vineyard at Berri on the Murray River in South Australia where he became an early pioneer in drying fruit. He constructed the first large-scale dehydrator in Australia.<sup>22</sup>

## Final Years of Ministry

At the thirteenth session of the Australasian Union Conference held in Melbourne in September 1930, Lemke was invited to be the president of the West Australia Conference.<sup>23</sup> The family travelled by ship from Adelaide to Fremantle. They were accommodated at the West Australia Missionary College (now Carmel Adventist College) in guest rooms until they were able to find a house in Perth. Lemke remained in this position until the end of 1935 when his health began to fail again and he retired from fulltime service. At the time of the Australasian Union Conference Council, the union president, W. G. Turner, announced that Lemke would not be continuing and added, "After the many years of tireless activity rendered the cause of God throughout Australasia, Brother Lemke's presence in administrative leadership will be greatly missed."<sup>24</sup>

In retirement, Lemke purchased a 750-acre dairy farm at Jindong, near Busselton in the southwest of Western Australia. However, he continued to be involved in the work of the Church. For example, In September 1936 he attended the fourteenth session of the Australasian Union Conference as a delegate-at-large and presented a devotional message.<sup>25</sup> In 1938, he was assigned the Bunbury and Busselton churches.<sup>26</sup> This arrangement lasted until 1941 when he was assigned to pastoral work in Perth.<sup>27</sup> This coincided with the sale of the farm in 1941, when Louis and Elizabeth Lemke moved back to Perth for a short time before finally settling in Capel. He presented the graduation address at the West Australian Missionary College in 1937 and 1943.<sup>28</sup> He was a member of the West Australian Conference executive committee until the time of his death.<sup>29</sup>

At the annual meeting of the Australasian Union Conference in October 1942, it was reported that he had to have an operation in the Sydney Sanitarium.<sup>30</sup> While he was reported as "longing" to resume his pastoral duties, his health was not robust.<sup>31</sup> He died on July 29, 1944, at age 73.<sup>32</sup> He was buried at Perth's Karrakatta Cemetery in Subiaco, near Kings Park on the Swan River.<sup>33</sup>

Following her husband's death, Elizabeth Lemke lived with their daughter, Gertrude. When her oldest daughter, Agnes, died, she raised her granddaughters, Mavis and Phyllis, as her own in her older years.<sup>34</sup> Elizabeth Lemke died at the age of 84 on December 1, 1966.<sup>35</sup> She was buried with her husband at Karrakatta Cemetery in Perth.<sup>36</sup>

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## NOTES

1. Much of this article is written from the personal knowledge of the authors as grandsons of Ludwig and Elizabeth Lemke. The memoirs of Ernest Lemke, son of Ludwig Lemke and father of the authors, which are held in the personal collection of the authors, were used extensively. Where facts are cited without reference, they are either from the personal knowledge of the authors, or from the memoirs.
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3. "L. D. A. Lemke History Snippets," unpublished private memoirs held in the personal collection of Mel Lemke.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ludwig Daniel August Lemke Biographical Records, South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives, folder: "Lemke, Ludwig Daniel August, document: "Lemke, Ludwig Daniel August."
8. Ibid.
9. Ernest Charles Lemke Biographical Records, South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives, folder: "Lemke, Ernest Charles," document: "List of Names of Lemke Family;" Ernest Lemke, "Life History-The Lemkes," unpublished private memoirs held in the personal collection of the authors.
10. J. W. Kent, "Ludwig Daniel August Lemke obituary," *Australasian Record*, September 4, 1944, 7; Ludwig Daniel August Lemke Biographical Records, South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives, folder: "Lemke, Ludwig Daniel August, document: "Lemke, Ludwig Daniel August."
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15. Ludwig Daniel August Lemke Biographical Records, South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives, folder: "Lemke, Ludwig Daniel August, document: "Lemke, Ludwig Daniel August."
16. "Brother Lemke returned from the General Conference via Europe...," *Australasian Record*, October 13, 1913, 8.
17. Ludwig Daniel August Lemke Biographical Records, South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives, folder: "Lemke, Ludwig Daniel August, document: "Lemke, Ludwig Daniel August."
18. "The 1917 Council," *Australasian Record*, September 24, 1917, 5; "College and Intermediate School Faculties," *Australasian Record*, September 24, 1917, 8; Ludwig Daniel August Lemke Biographical Records, South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives, folder: "Lemke, Ludwig Daniel August, document: "Lemke, Ludwig Daniel August."
19. "Pastor Lemke has been asked...," *Australasian Record*, March 9, 1920, 8.
20. "Corrections," *Australasian Record*, May 3, 1920, 7.
21. South Australia: Twenty-eighth Annual session," *Australasian Record*, June 18, 1928, 6.
22. L. D. A. Lemke, "Baptismal Service at Berri, South Australia," *Australasian Record*, September 3, 1928, 7; Personal knowledge of the authors as grandsons of L. D. A. Lemke.
23. "Distribution of Labour," *Australasian Record*, September 29, 1930, 24.
24. W. G. Turner, "Union Conference President's Report," *Australasian Record*, September 16, 1935, 1.
25. "Delegates at Large," *Australasian Record*, September 28, 1936, 28, 31.
26. "West Australian Conference Session," *Australasian Record*, May 9, 1938, 5.
27. W. R. Litster, "West Australia Conference Session," *Australasian Record*, May 5, 1941, 3.



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34. Personal knowledge of the authors.
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36. Ibid.

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