

# Wilcox, Roger Anderson (1911–2002)

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## THE BRAZILIAN WHITE CENTER – UNASP

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Roger A. Wilcox

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Roger Anderson Wilcox was a pastor and church administrator. He was president of the Middle East Division (1959-1965) and the South American Division (1966-1975).

## Early Years

Roger Anderson Wilcox was born in 1911 in Marshfield, Oregon, United States.<sup>1</sup> There are few historical records about his early life. However, it is known that during his childhood he lived in the states of Oregon, California, New Mexico, and Virginia. Around 1927 he was baptized. The following year he started high school at Shenandoah Valley Academy, located in New Market, Virginia,<sup>2</sup> finishing his studies there in 1931.<sup>3</sup> He then attended the Theological Seminary in Takoma Park, Maryland.<sup>4</sup> He graduated with a degree in theology in 1936.<sup>5</sup>

## Life and Ministry

After his graduation in May<sup>6</sup> he accepted the invitation of the New Jersey Conference to work in evangelism for the next two and a half years.<sup>7</sup> He also married Violeta Wilcox that year.<sup>8</sup> From this union were born Carl Wilcox and Robert Wilcox.<sup>9</sup> Violeta and Roger made significant contributions to the denomination. She worked for a period at the Review and Herald Publishing Association,<sup>10</sup> served as a secretary and accountant in Lebanon and Brazil, and also worked in the accounting office of the South American Division.<sup>11</sup>

At the end of intense evangelistic work in New Jersey, Roger was ordained to pastoral ministry in May 1938.<sup>12</sup> The Wilcox family moved to Brazil on June 26, 1938,<sup>13</sup> landing in the city of Belém, state of Pará. They planned to contribute to the missionary effort that had already begun with the activities of Pastors Leo Halliwell and B. W. Steinweg.<sup>14</sup>

Roger worked in the North Brazil Union as director of the former North Coast Mission,<sup>15</sup> of which he was later the first president.<sup>16</sup> He was in this position from 1938 to 1946, leading the churches that were already established in the territories now belonging to the North Coast and Maranhão Conferences.<sup>17</sup>

In 1947 he accepted the call to work in the middle-eastern region of Brazil, serving the East Brazil Union Conference as president of the Rio-Minas Gerais Mission, which included congregations in the states of Rio de Janeiro and Minas Gerais.<sup>18</sup> The following year he was appointed president of the East Brazil Union Conference and stayed in this position until 1958.<sup>19</sup>

On August 8, 1959, Roger and his family arrived in the port city of Beirut, Lebanon, on board the ship S. S. Alida Gorthan. He had responded to God's call to serve as president of the Middle East Division,<sup>20</sup> a position which he held until 1965.<sup>21</sup> Simultaneously, he headed the East Mediterranean Union (1959-1961).<sup>22</sup> In July 1966, he left the Middle East and returned to South America, where he served as president of the South American Division until June 1975.<sup>23</sup>

While president of the South American Division, he became known as a leader of long-term plans, standing out for the famous 10-year plan, quadrennial plans, and the various slogans he launched. One of his important initiatives occurred in 1971, a year internally called the "Year of the Laity." During this period a four-year plan of lay activities was launched which was intended to engage 5,000 lay evangelists to win people to Christ.<sup>24</sup>

In addition to these initiatives, he was concerned with the doctrinal understanding of the members. Three important documents were voted and adopted, during his administration: one on Sabbath observance, one on dress and adornment, and the third on the philosophy of Adventist music.<sup>25</sup>

During Roger's presidency in the South American Division, he took the initiative of transferring the headquarters from Montevideo, capital of Uruguay to Brasília, capital of Brazil.<sup>26</sup> The change was motivated by political-economic problems that affected Uruguay and, consequently, impacted the progress of the work at the division office. By that time the number of members in Brazil had become larger than that of all of the other countries in the division. On January 15, 1974, the cornerstone for the new headquarters was put in place. The opening of the new headquarters took place on June 22, 1976,<sup>27</sup> about a year after Roger retired as president of the division.

## Later Years

Roger served the South American Division until June 1975 when he retired after 39 years of dedicated service.<sup>28</sup> Even after his retirement, his experience enabled him to provide valuable assistance in several areas of the Church. He served as secretary of North American Missions Committee (1975 to 1979) and of the General Conference Israelite Heritage Institute (1975 to 1979).<sup>29 30</sup>

Due to increased age and the intensity of work throughout his ministry, he began to have some health issues<sup>31</sup> and had to slow down his work pace in 1979,<sup>32</sup> although he still contributed to the church during the following years. He is remembered for some of his pioneer initiatives, among them the partnership he forged between Middle East College and Loma Linda University.<sup>33</sup> This achievement was highly beneficial to that institution and to the Lebanese society. The results were recognized in the sociocultural context as relevant contributions to the Lebanese society. On September 11, 1966, he received from Dr. Toufic Sabbagh, acting director of the Republic of Lebanon Ministry of Education, the highest award from the Education Department for the services rendered to that country's education while heading Middle East College. Roger died in 2002 at the age of 91.<sup>34</sup>

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## NOTES

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