



The Albion church, Queensland, as it looked at the time of its opening on February 13, 1929. Three hundred people were present. The conference president, Pastor A. C. Chesson, performed the ceremony.

From *Australasian Record*, June 28, 1976.

**Chesson, Alfred Charles (1890–1978),  
and Lillian (Adair) (c. 1891–1942)**

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## 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.

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Alfred and Lillian Chesson were initially called to the mission field to work among Indian people in Fiji, and Alfred went on to be the Missionary Volunteer Secretary and Assistant Secretary of the Home Mission Department before becoming an Evangelist and then President of the Queensland Conference in Australia from 1924 to 1928.

Alfred Charles Chesson was born in Melbourne, Australia, on July 5, 1890.<sup>1</sup> He became a Seventh-day Adventist in 1911.<sup>2</sup> A builder by trade, he worked as a literature evangelist from the end of 1911 through 1912 before attending the Australasian Missionary College at Cooranbong, New South Wales, Australia.<sup>3</sup> He graduated from the missionary course in 1913.<sup>4</sup> His first year was spent working in Broken Hill, New South Wales, with Harold Lukens, conducting a tent evangelistic series.<sup>5</sup>

Chesson married Lillian Adair, the daughter of John Robert and Betsy Harriet (Elvery) Adair,<sup>6</sup> from Queensland, on December 16, 1914. The ceremony was conducted by Pastor J. E. Fulton in the Wahroonga Church, New South Wales.<sup>7</sup> Lillian had just graduated as a nurse from the Sydney Sanitarium in 1914.<sup>8</sup> They were under appointment to transfer to Fiji, working with people of Indian descent in the country.<sup>9</sup>

In Fiji they were assigned to work closely with Ellen Meyers at the Somabula Mission for the Indians population. They endeavored to learn the language and use their skills to win the hearts of the people.<sup>10</sup> Lillian Chesson, with her nursing skills, was particularly appreciated by the Fiji Indians.<sup>11</sup>

On August 12, 1915, the young couple left Fiji for Auckland, New Zealand, having been appointed to work in India;<sup>12</sup> however, they did not take up their appointment in India. Records indicate that by October 1915, Chesson was working with the Gisborne Church in the North New Zealand Conference and that at the conference session held in February 1916, he was given a ministerial license by the conference and assigned to the Gisborne district.<sup>13</sup>

At the Australasian Union Conference Council held August 29–September 12, 1916, Chesson was appointed to the South New Zealand Conference.<sup>14</sup> Shortly after their arrival in South New Zealand, “bitter opposition” to the evangelistic efforts being conducted was reported. Tents were pulled down at Gore and Maitāwhiri.<sup>15</sup> At Chesson’s series, it was reported that “the tent was pulled down, the pole carried away and hidden in long grass, the rostrum demolished, and the ropes tangled up.” With the help of neighbors, “by evening all was in readiness to commence the meeting on time.”<sup>16</sup>

On February 1, 1919, at the South New Zealand Conference Session held at Saint Albans, Christchurch, Alfred Chesson was ordained to the gospel ministry.<sup>17</sup> He had recently been appointed as the Missionary Volunteer Secretary and Assistant Secretary of the Home Mission Department of the Australasian Union Conference (AUC) with headquarters in Wahroonga, Sydney, Australia. Thus, the family left New Zealand and arrived in Sydney in late February, ready for a new challenge.<sup>18</sup>

While at the AUC, Chesson introduced a new Bible doctrines course for young people called "Standard of Attainment."<sup>19</sup> However, he did not remain long in his position at the AUC. Early in 1920, he was appointed to the Mildura district in the Victorian Conference.<sup>20</sup> On the occasion of the opening night of his evangelistic series in Mildura, Victoria, Australia, in September 1920, he was adjusting one of the lamps, and it burst into flame, throwing burning benzene in his face. He was taken to the hospital and subsequently had to spend some weeks convalescing.<sup>21</sup> By November, it was reported that he was on the road to recovery.<sup>22</sup>

By March 1921, he had recovered sufficiently to be conducting an evangelistic series in Melbourne, Australia, which saw at least 19 persons begin to "keep the Sabbath."<sup>23</sup> Reporting on the program, Chesson stressed the importance of the work of laypeople in the church. He concluded his report: "May God bless the efforts of our lay brethren for in that lies the hope of the church."<sup>24</sup> He followed up with an evangelistic series in Moonee Ponds, a suburb of Melbourne, in the summer of 1921–1922.<sup>25</sup> Following the Victorian camp meeting at the beginning of 1922, he was assigned to the Balwyn area, and it was reported by June 1922 that a Sabbath School with 17 members had commenced meeting in Balwyn.<sup>26</sup> It was also reported that as a result of the meetings, a church building was constructed at Mont Albert and that Pastor Chesson personally assisted with the construction work.<sup>27</sup>

At the end of 1922, the Chesson family was once again on the move. This time, Chesson had been appointed to work in North Queensland, Australia.<sup>28</sup> During 1923 he conducted a six-week evangelistic series in Bowen.<sup>29</sup> He then commenced a series in Townsville, which resulted in the establishment of a company of 14 persons.<sup>30</sup> Shortly after completing the first series, he commenced another in different location in Townsville, which was still being conducted in the second half of 1924.<sup>31</sup> In June 1924, Chesson dedicated the first Australian SDA church building constructed north of the Tropic of Capricorn. It was located at Finch Hatton, west of Mackay.<sup>32</sup> Then at the union session held in September 1924, he was appointed as the President of the Queensland Conference with headquarters in Brisbane.<sup>33</sup> He remained as president until September 1928, when because of poor health, he asked to be relieved of that responsibility. At the AUC Session in September 1928, his request was accepted, and he was transferred back to the North Queensland Mission as superintendent.<sup>34</sup> He led the mission until ill health again intervened toward the end of 1932. While in Sydney attending the AUC Council in September 1932, he consulted with a number of medical specialists. After returning to north Queensland, he became ill again and received medical counsel "to find without delay a complete change of employment whereby nervous and physical strain will be largely eliminated."<sup>35</sup> Pastor Chesson requested that the AUC accept his resignation so that he "might be free to follow some calling on the land."<sup>36</sup> The AUC committee accepted his

resignation “with regret,” and “the sincere hope that a change of employment and environment will quickly and wholly restore him to normal health and strength.”<sup>37</sup>

Lillian Chesson died and was buried in the Rookwood Cemetery in Sydney on July 1, 1942. Her obituary published in the *Australasian Record*<sup>38</sup> mentions “her husband, and sons Ralph and Ray.”<sup>39</sup> But there is no further reference in any official record of the Seventh-day Adventist Church to Alfred Chesson as a pastor in the Seventh-day Adventist Church except those references that refer to his ministry up to the beginning of 1933. There is a handwritten note on a brief biographical note in the archives of the South Pacific Division. It reads, “Apostate.”<sup>40</sup> In a book published in 2018, Alfred Chesson is referred to as a co-pastor of an independent Holiness Church in Sydney with his son Ralph.<sup>41</sup> Later, the book refers to him as one of the early Nazarene pastors in Australia.<sup>42</sup>

According to a death notice in the *Sydney Morning Herald* newspaper of October 24, 1978, Alfred Charles Chesson died on October 21, 1978, at the age of 88 years.<sup>43</sup>

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