

Hefren, Archibald Lawrence (1904–1986)

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.



Archibald Hefren

Photo courtesy of Lester Devine.

Archibald Lawrence ('Arch') Hefren was a teacher, preacher, administrator, and missionary from Australia.

Archibald Lawrence Hefren was born into a Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) family in Balmain, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia on March 23, 1904.¹ Because his father did not approve of church schools, Hefren received his early education in the government school system and attended the prestigious Fort Street Boys High School. In his last year there was 'dux' or 'valedictorian,' the top scholar of the year. Because of his ability he was given a scholarship to attend either Sydney University or Teachers College. Choosing teaching, he completed the course with distinction and taught for four years in a city school and then four years in the country and glad to have a job when so many were unemployed during the depression.²

On January 1, 1933, Hefren married Burnie Violet Chester in the Sydney suburb of Stanmore.³ Burnie had been born in Crookwell, New South Wales on June 24, 1909.⁴ To this union were born three children, Peter Roderick, Enid Coralie, and Glynn Gordon.⁵ Unfortunately, Peter and Enid both died in young adulthood. Despite these tragedies, it was a happy marriage and fifty years later Hefren declared it "even better at the end than at the beginning."⁶

In January 1935, Hefren joined the teaching ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist school system⁷ as a result of the influence of W. J. Gilson.⁸ He spent the next four years as the headmaster of the Warburton School in Victoria before transferring to the same role at the school in Perth, in Western Australia (1939 - 1941).⁹ While

there he learned French¹⁰ and also completed a master's degree in History with the University of Western Australia.¹¹ It should be noted that in those years some Australian Seventh-day Adventists tended to be cautious, even suspicious, about higher education, and particularly so when it was obtained at a secular institution. So, graduate level university degrees were rare among Seventh-day Adventists at that time and Hefren would have been one of the best educated church employees. The reality that he did this study in his spare time while carrying a very heavy workload is an indication of both his independence of thought and his determined tenacity.

By 1942 Hefren was the headmaster of the SDA High School then located at Burwood, in Sydney, remaining there until the end of 1949.¹² In 1950 he was appointed to evangelism in South Australia.¹³ His first evangelistic campaign was in Renmark, South Australia where he was assisted by Rex Cobbin and Alex McGowan.¹⁴ Seven baptisms were the result.¹⁵ In 1953, veteran missionary A. G. Stewart officiated at Hefren's ordination.¹⁶ Even though his biographical record has a handwritten addendum indicating his preference for evangelism, and that he regarded his present educational work to be only "temporary," he remained in educational work for the rest of his career, mostly at Avondale College from 1955 until 1974.¹⁷ There was a three-year departure from Avondale in the early 1960s as headmaster for the second time at the Adventist High School in Sydney, this time at its new Strathfield campus.¹⁸

Hefren was a powerful and somewhat unconventional preacher. On one occasion, he was invited to take the Vespers service in the Avondale College chapel on two successive Friday evenings and the students looked forward to that. The first Friday evening he spoke with powerful authority and had the attention of all present as he wound up the volume to what all present thought would be the climax of his presentation. Then, very deliberately, in mid-sentence, he suddenly stopped and then very quietly said in a conversational voice, "I'll tell you the rest next week," and promptly sat down! The students went back to their dormitory rooms, fascinated, intrigued, and somewhat perplexed as they were "left hanging."¹⁹ But they were all back in the chapel the next Friday night for the conclusion of Pastor Archibald Hefren's powerful argument!

Archibald Hefren's name is mentioned numerous times in the church newspaper, *Australasian Record*, mostly associated with various events but some stand out. One account has him retiring (again!) and packing as he and his wife were off to Solusi College in Zimbabwe where he taught for some years as a volunteer.²⁰

On their return to Australia, Archibald Hefren pastored three churches in the area around Avondale (Hillview, The Entrance and Cessnock) and was assistant pastor at a fourth (Brightwaters).²¹ Including his time as a volunteer, Pastor Hefren gave 42 and a half years of denominational service.²²

One notable article he wrote was titled, "Divorce Is Too Expensive," and as one would expect from Archibald Hefren, the approach was unique, non-traditional, and powerfully argued.²³ Another very well written submission was "The Glory of Mercy."²⁴ One of his last speaking appointments was for the opening of the new 1,600 seat auditorium and classroom complex at the secondary school where had twice served as headmaster,

Sydney Adventist College, at Strathfield in Sydney.²⁵

Hefren lived a truly remarkable and effective life. Among the first of a small group of secondary teachers in the early days of the Adventist high school system, Hefren, along with his colleagues, taught a remarkable range of subjects; the workload must have been enormous. His friend and colleague, Noel Clapham wrote,

Arch Hefren was a valued colleague and minister of the Word. He scorned shallow thinking and insincerity in discussion. He loved his work for the Lord, and was not a little frustrated during the last few months when physical disability thwarted active service ...with the help of Bernie (sic), the home on the lake was a mecca for young people: there was always food for thought and food from the kitchen. Discussion was always lively and meaningful. What a marvellous pair the Hefrens made: Arch restless and thrusting: Bernie calm and wise!⁶

Archibald and Burnie Hefren celebrated their fiftieth wedding anniversary on January 4, 1983, together with their family and many friends.²⁷ Archibald Hefren died on March 18, 1986 at West Lakes private Hospital, Rathmines, New South Wales.²⁸ Mrs. Burnie Hefren, after living alone for some years, died on August 15, 1992 at the Toronto, New South Wales Private Hospital.²⁹

SOURCES

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Hefren, A. L. "The Glory of Mercy." *Australasian Record*, March 26, 1979.

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"On Sunday May 20 . . ." *Australasian Record*, June 18, 1951.

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Stewart, A. G. "The South Australian 1953 Camp Meeting." *Australasian Record*, April 20, 1953.

"The biggest assembly hall in the division . . ." *Australasian Record*, October 27, 1984.

NOTES

1. Archibald Lawrence Hefren Biographical Records; South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives; Folder: "Hefren, Archibald Lawrence; Document: "Biographical Information Blank."
2. N. P. Clapham, "Life Sketch for Pr. Arch Hefren," *South Pacific Record*, May 17, 1986, 14.
3. Archibald Lawrence Hefren Biographical Records; South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives; Folder: "Hefren, Archibald Lawrence; Document: "Hefren, Archibald Lawrence Biographical Record."
4. Archibald Lawrence Hefren Biographical Records; South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives; Folder: "Hefren, Archibald Lawrence; Document: "Biographical Information Blank."
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6. N. P. Clapham, "Life Sketch for Pr. Arch Hefren," *South Pacific Record*, May 17, 1986, 14.
7. Archibald Lawrence Hefren Biographical Records; South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives; Folder: "Hefren, Archibald Lawrence; Document: "Biographical Information Blank."
8. N. P. Clapham, "Life Sketch for Pr. Arch Hefren," *South Pacific Record*, May 17, 1986, 14.
9. Archibald Lawrence Hefren Service Records; South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives; Folder: "Hefren, Archibald Lawrence; Document: "Hefren, Archibald Lawrence Service Record."
10. N. P. Clapham, "Life Sketch for Pr. Arch Hefren," *South Pacific Record*, May 17, 1986, 14.
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13. Ibid.
14. "On Sunday May 20 . . .," *Australasian Record*, June 18, 1951, 8.
15. N. P. Clapham, Life Sketch for Pr. Arch Hefren, *South Pacific Record*, May 17, 1986, 14.

16. "On Sabbath afternoon," *Australasian Record*, March 9, 1953, 8; A. G. Stewart, "The South Australian 1953 Camp Meeting," *Australasian Record*, April 20, 1953, 5.
17. Archibald Lawrence Hefren Biographical Records; South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives; Folder: "Hefren, Archibald Lawrence; Document: "Biographical Information Blank."
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19. Personal knowledge of the author as a friend and colleague of Pastor Hefren.
20. "Pastor A. L. Hefren is about to retire again . . .," *Australasian Record*, June 17, 1974, 16.
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27. R. H. Parr, "Fifty Fruitful Years," *Australasian Record*, March 5, 1983, 13.
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29. Ross Goldstone, Les Coombe and Bruce Charles, "Burnie Violet Hefren Obituary," *Record*, November 14, 1992, 13.

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