

Minchin, Gerald Martin Hopetoun (1901–1969)

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.

Gerald Martin Hopetoun Minchin, an Adventist educator, was born at Cottesloe, near Perth in Western Australia on January 14, 1901.¹ His parents, who became Seventh-day Adventists around 1906, were John (Jack) and Martha Ellen (Nellie) Hitchcock Minchin.² They were some of the first converts in the state of Western Australia.³ When their father died in 1918 and their mother approximately 18 months later,⁴ Gerald Minchin and his younger brother, Lennard, were cared for by their two sisters, Florence Marguerite (Laird)⁵ and Ruby Constance (Britten).⁶ They had two older brothers, Victor and Harold.⁷ Both Gerald and Lennard Minchin attended the Darling Range School (now Carmel Adventist College).⁸ As the two youngest children in the family the two brothers were particularly close.

Minchin completed the ministerial course at the Darling Range school in 1920.⁹ He attended the Australasian Missionary School where he studied teaching and business.¹⁰ Subsequently he traveled to the United States where he graduated from Union College in Nebraska and the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C.¹¹

Minchin began his denominational work as a teacher in Perth, Western Australia,¹² and later, Hawaii where he taught from 1924-1926.¹³ After moving to the mainland of the United States, he taught in Kansas and Missouri for nine years,¹⁴ during which he married Leona (Belle) Rhoads on August 22, 1928.¹⁵ When the young couple



Gerald Minchin

Photo courtesy of Lester Devine.

accepted a call to overseas service they, with their daughter, Dorothy (Comm), moved to Singapore. In Southeast Asia, Minchin was Secretary of Education and later elected President of the Malaya Union Seminary. It was during these years of mission service the Minchin's second daughter, Eileen (Eckert), was born.¹⁶

World War II and Minchin's declining health, due largely to overwork, made it necessary for him to return to Australia in 1941. He taught at Avondale College in 1942¹⁷ followed by an appointment to New Zealand Missionary College (Longburn College) in New Zealand. After the war, Minchin spent twenty years teaching Bible and serving as chair of the Bible departments at Canadian Union College, Newbold College, Atlantic Union College, and Columbia Union College. He retired in 1965, but taught an additional year at Andrews University.¹⁸

Minchin and his wife, Belle, were on a round-the-world trip and had reached Singapore when he needed to have surgery for gall-bladder complications. Almost three weeks into his recovery he had a heart attack and within a few hours passed to his rest in the Youngberg Memorial Hospital¹⁹ on May 11, 1969. He was buried at the Choa Chu Kang Christian Cemetery in Singapore.²⁰

Roy Branson was to later write, "Pastor Minchin's classes were memorable because as a Theology Professor he didn't just tolerate questioning of the Adventist tradition. He welcomed it. In fact, if others didn't oblige, he'd raise probing points himself. He could be completely relaxed when theology majors pushed him on such issues as the relationship between the investigative judgment and Christ's death and resurrection as a guarantee of humanity's salvation. He never pretended, however, that there were easy answers."²¹

James Londis wrote of Gerald Minchin,

As a teacher, Minchin was a theologian-poet. Not many Adventist preachers of his time would have made a great effort to go to hear T. S. Elliot read his poetry at Harvard University the way he did. He believed the best theologians were poets and the best poets were possessed of a religious spirit. In our Christian Doctrines class, for instance, Minchin was as likely to quote Wordsworth or Shelley as he was Augustine... Among the AUC alumni I have met over the years, many remember Elder Minchin with an uncommon warmth and fondness. As they have matured, his wisdom seems to glow all the more brightly. Some will even tell you that they have remained Seventh-day Adventists because of him. I suspect that in the resurrection Gerald Minchin will find great joy in discovering that his marriage of theology and poetry helped many of his students maintain their faith through times of skepticism and despair.²²

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NOTES

1. "Family Notices," *Western Mail*, January 19, 1901, 35; D. A. Roth, "Pastor Gerald Minchin Succumbs after Surgery," *Australasian Record*, June 16, 1969, 1; Western Australia Birth Registry, Registration no. 1901/230, Perth, Western Australia; Gerald Hopetoun Minchin Biographical Records, South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives, Folder: "Minchin, Gerald Hopetoun," Document: "Minchin, Gerald Hopetoun."
2. Dorothy Minchin-Comm, "A Desire Completed, The Story of the Minchin Brothers, Two Sons of Western Australia" (Lake Elsinor, CA: Dorothy Minchin-Comm, 1991), 4.
3. Gerald Hopetoun Minchin Biographical Records, South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives, Folder: "Minchin, Gerald Hopetoun," Document: "Biographical Information Blank."
4. R. E. G. Blair, "Margaret (sic) Ellen Minchin obituary," *Australasian Record*, October 27, 1919, 7.
5. A. E. Speck, "Florence Marguerite Laird obituary," *Australasian Record*, January 20, 1930, 7.
6. C. S. Palmer, Ruby Constance Britten obituary," *Australasian Record*, August 12, 1957, 7.
7. Dorothy Minchin-Comm, 4.

8. Ibid., 30.
9. Gerald Hopetoun Minchin Biographical Records, South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives, Folder: "Minchin, Gerald Hopetoun," Document: "Minchin, Gerald Hopetoun."
10. Ibid.
11. D. A. Roth, "Pastor Gerald Minchin Succumbs after Surgery," *Australasian Record*, June 16, 1969, 1.
12. "Distribution of Labour," *Australasian Record*, October 16, 1922, 63.
13. Dorothy Minchin-Comm, 39-45.
14. Roth, 1.
15. Dorothy Minchin-Comm, 49.
16. Roth, 1.
17. Mary Stellmaker, "Philippine Missionaries Visit Avondale," *Australasian Record*, October 28, 1974, 2.
18. Roth, 1.
19. Youngberg Memorial Hospital was named for Gerald Minchin's brother-in-law, Gustavus Benson Youngberg, the husband of Belle Minchin's sister, Norma Youngberg. (R. H. Powrie, "Visitors from Singapore," *Australasian Record and Advent World Survey*, June 6, 1953, 8; Norma Youngberg, the Ellen G. White Estate, and the General Conference Department of Education, *Spirit of Prophecy Emphasis Stories*, vol. I, January 1979, p. 44, accessed May 5, 2019, https://adventistdigitallibrary.org/adl-366824/spirit-prophecy-emphasis-stories-vol-i?solr_nav%5Bid%5D=39e29898763568a3966d&solr_nav%5Bpage%5D=0&solr_nav%5Boffset%5D=0; "Rhoads," *Atlantic Union Gleaner*, February 6, 1968, p. 18, accessed May 5, 20019, https://adventistdigitallibrary.org/adl-335738/atlantic-union-gleaner-february-6-1968?solr_nav%5Bid%5D=39e29898763568a3966d&solr_nav%5Bpage%5D=0&solr_nav%5Boffset%5D=4).
20. Ibid.
21. Dorothy Minchin-Comm, 28.
22. Ibid. 29.

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