

Howse, Eric William (1914–2004) and Annie Mae (Bradley) (1911–2010)



Eric William Howse

Photo courtesy of the South Pacific Division Archives, Wairoa, NSW, Australia.

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.

Eric Howse spent 28 of his 49 years of service for the church in health food work. He initially worked in the South Pacific and then at the General Conference as the worldwide director of health food operations. Mae, as well as being wife and mother, utilized her accounting skills from time to time, most notably as secretary to W. L. Pascoe in the General Conference Treasury.

Eric Howse's parents, Amelia Mabel de Jersey and William Ralph Howse, from Tasmania, were graduates of the Australasian Missionary College (later Avondale University College). Mabel graduated from the teaching course in 1911 and Will graduated from the missionary course in 1912.¹ They married at Glenorchy, Tasmania, on January 8, 1913, and then sailed immediately for mission service in Tahiti in French Polynesia.² Their son, Eric, was born the next year on May 21, 1914,³ and named after Eric Hare, the well-known missionary to Burma and a close friend and former college roommate of Eric's father.⁴ In time three siblings were born: Ron, also born in Tahiti; sister Moira, while the family was in mission service in the Cook Islands; and in 1925, Eileen, while the

family was back in Australia and living in Warburton, near Melbourne, VIC.⁵

From the age of seven until 19, Eric lived at Warburton, where his father was employed as a printer for the Signs Publishing Company. When his formal education ended in 1928, his part-time work, splitting wood and washing dishes for Warburton Sanitarium, became full-time employment in the Signs Publishing Company bindery, gluing newly printed cereal packets for the Sanitarium Health Food Company (SHF). The 14-year-old junior employee could not have imagined he was to become the leader of the world food work of the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church, based in Washington, D.C.⁶

The young Eric Howse, who had not thought beyond his present employment, was soon asked if he would consider studying accountancy, as there was a vacancy in the Signs Publishing Company office. He was willing and was promptly sent to Melbourne to train on the “Comptometer.” His Warburton work was varied in that he regularly helped other departments, and he quickly learned how the publishing program of the church operated. Studying accountancy in his spare time, he was moved into the Accounts Department and was responsible for wage analysis and costings. He enjoyed his work in Warburton and was surprised when, after five years, he was asked to be the assistant accountant at the Australasian Union Conference office in Wahroonga, on the outskirts of Sydney.⁷ Not only was Howse busy with his accountancy work in Wahroonga and his evening accountancy studies—he was also responsible for meeting arriving missionaries in the only car the union office had. He also delivered departing missionaries to their ships as they left for mission service.⁸

Very happy in his work, Howse was surprised when his supervisor, T. W. Hammond, noticed that he had never attended the Australasian Missionary College (AMC), which he had no intention of doing, as he was close to qualifying as an accountant. But Eric Howse went to Avondale and, being self-supporting, had to work his way through his study program, taking a partial (Category C) academic load while there.⁹

Back working full-time for the church as an accountant again, Eric met Mae Bradley, who was also an accountant. She was working at the SHF café in Sydney, and he was working at the Sydney wholesale branch of the SHF.¹⁰ It was the end of 1936. One of twins, Annie Mae Bradley (known as Mae),¹¹ was born on May 9, 1911, in East Freemantle, WA. She was a frail baby and not expected to live, but in time both she and her sister Eva survived, did well, and soon joined the four older children in the family.¹²

While her father, Benjamin, a builder, never joined the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church, her mother was much involved in her local community and SDA congregation. At the age of 14 Mae began her bookkeeping, shorthand, and typing studies, as well as dressmaking. She did very well academically. She later enrolled at Avondale College, turning 16 while there. She thoroughly enjoyed her time at Avondale and then found life rather lonely in her first job in the Tasmanian Conference office, living in a small attic room. During her lunch hours she waited on tables in the local Sanitarium Health Food Company (SHF) café. However, she was very happy when she was invited to return home to Western Australia and work in the Hay Street office in Perth.¹³

In October 1937 Eric was transferred to Western Australia.¹⁴ Their affection for each other continued to develop via long distance, and they were married at Wahroonga SDA Church on October 18, 1938.¹⁵ In time Eric and Mae were to have two sons: Murray, who later studied medicine and became a physician; and Kevin, who later trained for the SDA ministry, served as a pastor in several countries, and then, with his doctorate, became a ministerial training lecturer at Newbold College and also, later, at Avondale College.¹⁶

During World War II Howse volunteered for military service with the Royal Australian Air Force. After training and several subsequent postings he spent most of the war years in Darwin, Northern Australia, serving in the air force as a medic, leaving Mae and their six-month-old son, Murray, back in Sydney for the duration of the war.¹⁷ After the war their second son, Kevin, was born, Eric having returned to denominational service as the accountant for the Australasian Union. Within three years the family was appointed to mission service, where, based in Fiji, Eric was the secretary-treasurer (1949–1956) of the Central Pacific Union Mission.¹⁸

On return from mission service Howse was appointed as the accountant for the Lewisham SHF factory in Sydney, a role he found interesting, as he was much involved with the introduction of a new accounting system.¹⁹ But he was also quite unwell with amoebic dysentery, for which there was no then known cure, so, desperate for help, he took leave from his work and traveled to Canada, seeking a solution in Vancouver with Dr. Athol Piper, who had completed some research into dysentery, and the problem was ultimately fully resolved. While there, he spent some time in several IBM offices investigating for the SHF the new computer-based accounting and costing systems IBM had developed. Once he was well on the way to completing his six months of treatment and recovery from his health problem, Eric for a time managed a dry-cleaning business in Vancouver in order to support his family back in Australia. Once fully recovered, Eric returned to Australia and his position at Lewisham.²⁰

From 1960 Howse managed the Carmel SHF factory and Perth wholesale operations in Western Australia. From 1964 through 1966 he managed the Lewisham factory in Sydney and was then very surprised to learn that he had been elected treasurer of the Australasian Division, a position he held for the two years, 1967–1968.²¹ Then, while on the way from Los Angeles to Washington to attend the General Conference session, he found himself on the same flight as Robert Pierson, the president of the General Conference. During that flight Pierson told Eric that the world church needed to add a new department to oversee all the health food operations of the church and wondered if Eric would be willing to establish and then lead it. Thus Eric Howse left his position as division treasurer, with Lance Butler succeeding him, and moved to Washington, D.C.²²

Howse headed up the health food work of the world church at the General Conference for 11 years. Many of the health food factories around the world were not doing well when compared with the SHF operation in Australasia, and Eric, having previously managed health food factory operations there, combined with his financial expertise, was the right man at the right time to lead the world health food industry program. Unfortunately, Eric's new role was a demanding one that kept him away from Mae and home for six months in

the year. With both sons having left home and married, Mae obtained a position in the General Conference headquarters using her accounting skills as secretary to W. L. Pascoe; so much so that when she eventually retired, the church had to hire several people to handle the workload she had coped with on her own for many years.²³

Eric and May Howse officially retired on July 1, 1980.²⁴ Eric had given 49 years of service for the church, 28 of them in the health food work of the church.²⁵ Mae herself had given 22 years of service to the church as an accountant.²⁶

Eric and Mae Howse endured many sad times. It was tragic to lose both sons in their prime of life, with both dying of brain tumors when only in their forties. Eric Howse died at the Wyong, NSW, hospital on December 12, 2004, after 49 years of denominational service, 28 of them with the health food work of the church.²⁷ Mae Howse died on September 24, 2010, at the age of 99.²⁸

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NOTES

1.

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9. Ibid.

10. Eric William Howse Service Records.

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