

Robinson, Loretta Viola (Farnsworth) (1857–1933)

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Loretta Farnsworth is credited with being the first Seventh-day Adventist Bible worker. She served as a pioneer city mission worker, evangelist, pioneer missionary to South Africa and Australia, chaplain, and religion teacher.

Early Life

Loretta was the twelfth of the twenty-two children of William Farnsworth (1807-1888). Loretta was the oldest child of his second wife, Cynthia J. Stowell (1829-1917).¹ When Loretta was ten, she attended an 1867 revival meeting conducted by James (1821-1881) and Ellen White (1827-1915) and J. N. Andrews (1829-1883), in Washington, New Hampshire. She along with her two brothers (E. W. and O. O. Farnsworth) and ten other people were baptized in a hole cut into the ice in nearby Millen Pond.²

Loretta married Asa Theron Robinson (1850-1949) on September 28, 1876, in Washington, New Hampshire. Asa was a new convert to Adventism and spent his weekends at Loretta's parents' home. Her father, William, was especially close to and protective of his daughter, Loretta. Even though Loretta had two older sisters, they were significantly older than she and had left home when she was still little. One of her sisters, Josephine, died before Loretta turned three years old. Of her two younger children, one had died at thirteen years old in 1873, and the



Loretta (Farnsworth) Robinson

Credit: EllenWhite.org. Shared by Michael W. Campbell.

other was almost thirteen years younger. Loretta was the only daughter old enough to help in the management of the large household with so many young children. After the couple fell in love, William made Asa promise to buy the adjoining farm to take care of them in their old age.³

Work for the Seventh-day Adventist Church

Loretta and Asa spent their first three years of married life farming near them. While there, their two sons, Erban (1877-1944) and Dores (1879-1957), were both born. They then moved to Westerly, Rhode Island, where Asa was employed as a mechanic and carpenter by C. B. Cottrell and Sons, a Seventh Day Baptist firm that made printing presses. While there, Asa became ill, and at one point the family did not have any food to eat. Loretta prayed that the Lord would provide for them. Soon afterward Loretta was invited by their landlady to do some sewing, which helped them make ends meet. She saw this as a turning point in her life that challenged her to step out in faith.⁴

Loretta and Asa were invited by the New England Conference to engage in pioneer city mission work. They labored in Worcester, New Bedford, and Boston, Massachusetts, and Brooklyn, New York. While in Worcester, in 1884, S. N. Haskell (1833-1922) sent them two Bible readings he prepared with about 150 questions each and suggested they prepare similar Bible readings. Loretta prepared Bible readings on the new earth. She was the first woman known to have engaged in Bible work. In 1884 to 1885, Loretta was cook and matron of the students' home in South Lancaster Academy.

From 1891 to 1897 Loretta and Asa went as pioneer Adventist missionaries to South Africa facing "many hardships and perplexities." In 1893, they had a daughter, Gladys (1892-1993). In 1897, they moved to Australia where they continued ministry, primarily around Melbourne.⁵ They spent two years at the newly formed Avondale School where Loretta served as one of the Bible teachers. They were both engaged in evangelistic work. She was regarded as "an excellent preacher" across New South Wales, New Zealand, and Queensland. Due to Loretta's declining health, they returned to attend the 1903 General Conference session in Oakland, California.

Loretta and Asa afterward spent a winter in a tent in Boulder, Colorado with their ten-year-old daughter and took rigorous treatments. The following year her husband took the presidency of the Nebraska Conference. She took care of her family including her aged mother. Asa described her health as "precarious at times," but her time stateside allowed her to slowly regain her health.⁶ She gave a presentation on the "Education of Bible Workers and the Needs of the Cities" at the 1910 Educational Convention held in Berrien Springs, Michigan.⁷

After three years in Colorado and seven years in Nebraska, Loretta and Asa spent an additional nine years as a Bible teacher and missionary worker at the New England Sanitarium. She was known for her "tact and sympathy and winsomeness" that made her so effective in ministry.

Final Years and Legacy

In 1929, Loretta retired from active service after which she moved back to Colorado to be under the care of her brother, Dr. M. A. Farnsworth. She once again recovered and by 1930 had relocated in Angwin, California.⁸ They lived there for three years before she passed to her rest on August 13, 1933. She is buried in their family plot in Saint Helena Cemetery in Saint Helena, California.⁹

In 1941, Loretta was featured as one of the “pioneer women” of the denomination for her evangelistic work and Bible teaching.¹⁰ She was remembered as “a woman of principle” for whom “it was as natural” for her to teach the Bible “as to live” as “one of the denomination’s ablest Bible instructors.”¹¹

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NOTES

1. For genealogical records, see: https://www.ancestry.com/invite-ui/accept?token=8Ko9gOsIBiDymRLIQlupe5WZOE4tZyozUr9czbh_6aE=, accessed February 25, 2024, ancestry.com.
2. See Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches of Ellen G. White: Being a Narrative of Her Experience to 1881, as Written by Herself; with a Sketch of Her Subsequent Labors and of Her Last Sickness* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1915), 181.

3. Clifton L. Taylor, "As the Days of a Tree," *ARH*, July 12, 1956, 16-17, 26.
4. L[ouise] C. K[leuser], "IV. Origin of the Bible Work: Bible Readings by Land and Sea," *Ministry*, January 1949, 16, 17.
5. See announcement of their arrival on the steamship, *Aberdeen*, in *The Bible Echo*, October 18, 1897, 336.
6. A. T. & Loretta V. Robinson, "The South African Missionary," *The South African Missionary*, April 15, 1912, 1-2.
7. "Educational Convention," *ARH*, July 7, 1910, 19.
8. See note in *ARH*, April 3, 1930, 32.
9. <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/48253177/loretta-viola-robinson>, accessed February 16, 2024, ancestry.com.
10. Stella Parker Peterson, "Know Your Church History," *ARH*, October 16, 1941, 14, 22.
11. K[leuser], "IV. Origin of the Bible Work," 16, 17.

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