

Wensell, Niels

(1902–2000)

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Daniel Oscar Plenc, Th.D. (River Plate Adventist University, Entre Ríos, Argentina), currently works as a theology professor and director of the White Research Center at the River Plate Adventist University. He worked as a district pastor for twelve years. He is married to Lissie Ziegler and has three children.

Niels Wensell was a pastor, professor, and administrator in the South American Division.¹

Niels Jorge Carlos Wensell Paulentz was born on July 31, 1902, in Valdivia, Chile. He was the second son of Egil Christian Bull Wensell Benjaminsen (1863–1906) and Luise Paulentz (1873–1966).² The Wensells were European immigrants whose ancestors had fled Bohemia because of their religious convictions and had first taken refuge in Holland and finally in Norway. Luise also came from a Protestant family who had escaped from France and had settled in Germany. Luise was born there, and when she was

12 years old, her family immigrated to southern Chile. Niels spent his early childhood in Puerto Corral, Chile, over the Pacific Ocean. His siblings were Eleonora Florentine (1899–1977) and Paul Egil (1905–2010).³

Niels's father, Egil Wensell, died in a shipwreck in 1906, after which Luise returned to Valdivia, Chile, with her children in 1908. They were Protestant Christians who went to church on Sundays. Luise married again and moved to Punta Arenas, a port city in the extreme south of Chile over the Strait of Magellan. At the time, Punta Arenas was the southernmost city in the world. In this locality in mid-1918, Pastor Frank H. Westphal (1858–1944) and the missionary Arturo G. Nelson held evangelistic meetings, which Luise and her children attended. In one of the meetings, Luise was the only one present; however, Westphal sang, prayed, and preached as if the room were full.



Wensell brothers: Niels Wensell (on right) and Paul Wensell (on left).

From Department of Archives and Special Collections, University Libraries, Loma Linda

University, <https://cdm.llu.edu/digital/collection/WEHTASA/id/356/rec/7>.

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The first one in the family to be baptized was Luise (October 12, 1918), and before long, her sons, Niels and Paul, were baptized by the missionary Arturo G. Nelson on December 5, 1918. The ceremony was held in Punta Arenas, Chile, in the cold waters of the Strait of Magellan. Before returning to the north of the country, Pastor Westphal organized a small church and ordained Nelson as its elder.

Luise suffered because of her husband's opposition. Niels and Paul lost their jobs because of the Sabbath observance, so their stepfather threw them all out of the house. Then Nelson convinced Niels and Paul to be missionaries. At 16, Niels began selling publications in Magellan Mission, in Argentine Patagonia.⁴

Niels Wensell studied in the School of Nursing of River Plate Sanitarium (1921–1923), Entre Ríos, Argentina, and worked in the laboratory in the same institution. Meanwhile, he continued his studies at the River Plate Academy in Entre Ríos until he graduated from the ministerial course in 1925. He married Lidia Arn on February 27, 1924. She was a nurse who graduated from the River Plate Sanitarium in 1922. Lidia Arn Gauchat was born on June 16, 1896, in Esperanza, Santa Fe, Argentina, and died in Libertador San Martín, Entre Ríos, on March 29, 1995, at age 98. Her parents were Alberto Arn and Ema Gauchat. She was baptized in San Cristóbal, Santa Fe, Argentina. Niels and Lidia Wensell were the parents of the pastors Egil Haakon Wensell and Roald Niels Wensell, and they adopted Mabel Modesta in 1939.⁵

In 1926 and 1927, Niels returned to Magellan Mission in Argentine Patagonia to sell publications. His first destination for missionary work was Mauri Mission (also called Rosario) in Bolivia's high plateau, at an altitude above 4,000 meters (13,000 feet), where they worked from 1927 to 1929 among the Aymara indigenous people. Returning to Argentina from the Bolivian Mission, Niels Wensell worked from 1929 to 1936 in the Alto Parana Mission/North Mission (Northeast Argentina and the Paraguay Republic). He was ordained on May 11, 1935, in Charata, Chaco, Argentina. He was pastor in Posadas for three years, then in Monte Caseros, Corrientes, for one year and in San Miguel de Tucumán, Tucumán, for three years. He served as president of the North Mission, with administrative headquarters in Corrientes, for eight years (1937–1945). During his term, middle school education began in Misiones, Argentina, and medical work began in Asunción, Paraguay.

For a while, Wensell was the president of Uruguay Mission (1945–1947).⁶ He was then a Bible teacher at the River Plate College for six years (1948–1953). At the time, he was awarded a scholarship to study at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C., United States. Then he returned to Santiago and to administrative positions: he was president of Central North Chile Conference for seven years (1954–1960). Before retiring from active duty, he was president in Cuyo Mission (1961–1962), which covered the Argentine provinces of Catamarca, La Rioja, San Juan, Mendoza, and San Luis.

After 40 years of service, he retired on February 1, 1963, at age 60, and moved with his wife to Libertador San Martín, Entre Ríos, where he helped at River Plate College and in the local church. His children also had a long service in pastoral, administrative, and educational activities. His son Egil Haakon Wensell (1927–2017) was a history professor, a doctor of education, and an Adventist pastor; he was the rector of Buenos Aires Academy,

principal of North Argentine Academy and of River Plate College in Entre Ríos. His son Roald Niels Wensell (1929–2015) was a pastor who worked mainly in the treasury field.⁷

Niels Wensell died on June 22, 2000, at the age of 98 in Libertador San Martín, Entre Ríos, Argentina.

Pastor Wensell provide a wide range of service for the Adventist work in South America, leaving a legacy of inspiration due to his humble and hard work to fulfill the mission of the church.

SOURCES

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NOTES

1. See his autobiographical work: Niels Wensell, *Semblanza de un misionero adventista* [Semblance of an Adventist missionary] (Santa Fe: Imprenta Acosta Hermanos, 1995); Daniel Oscar Plenc, *25 Historias de misioneros* [25 histories of missionaries] (Buenos Aires: South American Publishing House Association, 2013), 65–71; Carlos Ramos, “Descansan en el Señor” [They rest in the Lord], *La Revista Adventista* [Adventist review], April 2001, 22. Information corroborated with file 1612 of the former Austral Union Conference, Argentine Union archives.

2. Egil Kristian Bull Wensell was born on October 1, 1863, in Lofoten, Norway, and died in a shipwreck in the Pacific Ocean in 1906. Luise was born on June 4, 1873, in Tegel, Brandenburg, Germany, and died in Libertador San Martín, Entre Ríos, Argentina, in 1966.
3. Two other sons of Egil Wensell and Luise Paulentz suffered infant death: Carl Henrik Bull Wensell (1900) and Franz Henrik Wensell (1901–1902). Paul Egil Jacob Wensell (1905–2010) was born in Valdivia, Chile. On July 11, 1932, he married Mignón Albina Block. They had five children: Gunnar, Lilia, Karen, Erna, and Waldemar. He served as the director of the Publication department at Chile Conference and Buenos Aires Conference. He worked in the Chullunquiani school near Juliaca, Peru, and was a pastor in Argentina and the director of the Publication department in East Brazil Union Mission. He died in Libertador San Martín, Entre Ríos, Argentina, at the age of 104. See “Falleció Paul Wensell, la persona más longeva de la provincia” [Paul Wensell, the oldest person in the province, passed away], *La Voz* [The voice], January 6, 2010, <https://www.lavoz901.com/noticias/falleci-paul-wensell-la-persona-ms-longeva-de-la-provincia.htm>; Paul E. Wensell, “Aquellos tiempos . . .” [Those times . . .], *La Revista Adventista* [Adventist review], March 2004, 28–29.
4. The Magellan Mission included the Chilean territory of Magellan, the island of Tierra del Fuego, the Argentine territories of Santa Cruz and Chubut, and the Falkland Islands, and was based in Punta Arenas, Chile. A. G. Nelson was the first superintendent of the Magellan Mission.
5. The personnel file of Pastor Niels Wensell in the Argentine Union archives records the marriage on February 20, 1924. The same information appears on the web page “Pastor Roald Wensell,” Vik Haakull Family History, last modified March 2, 2009, <http://www.haakull.com/TNG/getperson.php?personID=I61026&tree=cvh>.
6. Oscar N. Wasiuk, *Reseña histórica de la Iglesia Adventista del 7° Día en el Uruguay* [Historical review of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Uruguay] (Buenos Aires: South America Spanish Publishing House, 1996), 26.
7. Roald Niels Wensell was born on October 23, 1929, in Posadas, Misiones, Argentina, was the second son of Niels Wensell Arn and Lidia Arn. He graduated from River Plate College in 1950 and married Nilde Elina Mangold (1951), with whom he had three children: Silvia Ester, René Oscar, and Ruth Elena. He worked at River Plate Sanitarium, Entre Ríos, Argentina (1951–1952), in Buenos Aires Publishing House, Buenos Aires, Argentina (1953–1954), as ATM in Austral Union Conference (1955–1961), as treasurer in North Argentine Mission (1962–1965), as treasurer in Austral Union Conference (1966–1980), and as director of health, auditor, and account reviewer in South American Division (1980–1990). He died on July 2, 2015, in Libertador San Martín, Entre Ríos, Argentina. See “Falleció el Pr. Roald Niels Wensell Arn” [Roald Niels Wensell Arn passed away], *La Agenda* [The agenda], July 9–15, 2015, 4.

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