



**William John Clouten at work in his boatshed.**

William John Clouten and his fishing boat, while living in Tacoma, Wyong.

Photo courtesy of Keith Clouten.

## Clouten, William John (1859–1935)

### KEITH CLOUTEN

Keith Clouten, M.L.S. (University of Southern California), retired in 2003 as Library Director of Andrews University. In retirement, Clouten has given volunteer library service to Adventist institutions in Ghana, Kenya, Lebanon, Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Thailand. He has authored several books and articles in professional journals. He is married to Ngairé with two adult daughters and five grandchildren.

William John Clouten and his family were some of the first converts to the Seventh-day Adventist faith in the Cooranbong area in the mid-1890s at the time a site was being sought to establish Avondale College.

### Beginnings

Evidence suggests that Clouten families originated in England, concentrated in the southern County of Kent.<sup>1</sup> Spelling variations, which were once common among surnames, included Clute, Clout, Cluten, and Clouten—all relating to the humdrum occupation of patching worn-out things. The 1611 King James Bible tells about some Gibeonites who came to Joshua with shoddy clothing: “They took old sacks upon their asses . . . and old shoes and *clouted* upon their feet” (Josh 9: 4, 5, emphasis added).

When George Clouten sailed from Plymouth to Sydney in 1847, he brought the Clouten name to Australia.<sup>2</sup> Soon after arrival, he settled at Belmont, New South Wales, and there established the first commercial fishery at Lake Macquarie.<sup>3</sup> His son, William, met and married Naomi Gill, a daughter of the colony’s pioneer Methodist missionary Silas Gill.<sup>4</sup> William served as a Methodist lay preacher during the later years of his life.<sup>5</sup> The first of William and Naomi’s 14 children, William John (“Bill”) Clouten, was born in 1859 at or near Maitland, New South Wales, Australia. He married 17-year-old Jane Cowell in 1883. Between 1884 and 1911, their marriage produced 12 children, 6 of them boys.<sup>6</sup> So, two prolific marriages assured a future abundance of Cloutens and a more substantial Methodist presence in eastern Australia.

Bill Clouten began a career of boatbuilding and fishing. About 1890, he moved with his young family to Dora Creek, a small village beside the new railway line connecting Sydney with the north. The train provided access to city markets for his fish. Before ice became available, local fishermen followed the practice of storing their catches in sawdust pits in front of their houses. They would then pack the fish with bracken fern between each layer, and someone would take them by spring cart to the train.<sup>7</sup>

## Life Changes

About this time, two developments brought change to Bill Clouten and his family. First, a drought resulted in the Australian colonies falling into a major economic depression in the 1890s. Many industries were devastated, affecting the market for lumber. Cooranbong was a farming and lumber-cutting community, and dozens of families in the area shared the fate of their countrymen, losing employment and income. Second, in May 1894, a small party of Seventh-day Adventists arrived in Dora Creek by train. The church leaders planned to build a school in the area but did not have a lot of money. To this end, they were following a lead on 1,500 acres of land that was for sale for a low price. The group rented a couple of boats and rowed up the creek about 5 kilometers (3 miles) to look at the land.<sup>8</sup>

With the encouragement and inspired guidance of Ellen White, the Adventists purchased the property and were soon clearing the forest and constructing buildings that would become Avondale College. Soon, young people in training were making home visits in the Dora Creek neighborhood and conducting meetings in homes and public rooms. The Cloutens attended those meetings and accepted the Seventh-day Adventist faith.

Ellen White purchased 40 acres on the Avondale estate.<sup>9</sup> Once settled in her new home, “Sunnyside,” she quickly became aware of the desperate needs of people in the surrounding communities. Extreme poverty and a total

lack of medical facilities took their toll on the population. However, Ellen White was accompanied throughout her nine years in Australia by a trained American nurse, Sara McEnterfer, whose services were quickly discovered and utilized. Reports of Sara's caring visits spread quickly by "bush telegraph."<sup>10</sup>

In the early morning of July 23, 1897, Ellen was busily writing when Sara interrupted her, saying that "Brother Coulten had just come running from Dora Creek, so out of breath he could scarcely speak, stating, 'There is at Dora Creek a man very sick with inflammation of the lungs, and he will and must die unless he has help.' " The sick man was a neighbor of the Cloutens. When Sarah arrived later that morning by buggy, Bill gave whatever assistance he could and continued to check on the patient throughout the day and evening. "The sick man said, 'You are a good fellow, Billy Coulten. You know what to do for a fellow. I feel better.' "<sup>11</sup>

Writing about Bill Coulston in her diary on February 25, 1899, Ellen White said,

The father of one family, now converted to the truth, was a fisherman, smoking and drinking. He has good natural abilities, but uncultivated. The fishing business is now very poor and uncertain, and few can sustain their families. This brother went out into the bush, after selling his boat, and commenced to clear land. He was a boat builder, and yet he could not support his family. He is at work and has raised vegetables enough to keep them. He has raised melons and other things. Things in the bread line he has to buy, also clothing, but they are doing as well as could be expected. He is trying to win souls to the truth.<sup>12</sup>

The place in "the bush" where Bill chose for his family was the scattered village of Martinsville, several miles upstream from Cooranbong. "He and his eldest children, eight, ten, and twelve years old, walk six miles to Sabbath School and meeting when the weather will permit." The family was poverty-stricken; the man who had purchased Bill's boat was unable to pay for it. In 1899, Bill Clouten came down with typhoid fever. Ellen White wrote,

Sara and Brother James have gone up to see what the situation is. If Brother Coulston can be moved, he must be brought within our reach, even if he has to be carried on a litter. We cannot let him lie there and die, to leave his wife and children to the mercy of whoever will have mercy on them.<sup>13</sup>

A few days later, Sister White reported that Bill had recovered. "He is weak, but is up and dressed, and is cheerful and happy in the Lord." She arranged to send the family some flour for cooking.<sup>14</sup>

## Later Years

In Martinsville, the Cloutens encountered resistance to their faith from Bill's family and community members. About 1905, Bill moved his family a few miles south to a fishing community at Tuggerah Lakes.<sup>15</sup> Life there was a struggle, and in the absence of other Adventists, their Advent hope wilted. Revival did not come until 1929, when Bill and Jane, with their two youngest children, moved their home to Toronto on Lake Macquarie.<sup>16</sup> There they



were contacted by a local Seventh-day Adventist, William Prees. They attended meetings conducted by students from Avondale College and became charter members of the Toronto Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1932.<sup>17</sup> Bill Clouten died from lung cancer at Toronto, New South Wales, in 1935.

## Legacy

Bill and Jane's youngest son, Herbert, described how he committed his life to Christ at the conclusion of an evangelistic series:

The final meeting came all too soon. The call was made to accept Christ and the Three Angels Message. That night I went fishing as usual. My heart was overflowing with peace and happiness. I stopped the motor out in the middle of the lake, knelt down and surrendered my life to Christ.<sup>18</sup>

Herbert Clouten married Pearl Hawkins soon after his father's death in 1935, and they moved to the Avondale College community to ensure a Christian education for their children. Their two sons have served their church on two continents—Keith as the library director at Avondale College, Australia; Burman University, Canada; and Andrews University, United States of America; and Neville as the first director of the School of Architecture at Andrews University.

The Clouten story demonstrates the patience and perseverance of a God who uses a variety of people and circumstances to achieve His ultimate purposes.

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## NOTES

1. *Cloutlines*, June 1996, Mittagong, N.S.W.: Clout Descendants Society, 1992.
2. Ibid.
3. "A New Species of Industry," *Sydney Morning Herald*, June 23, 1874.
4. Eric G. Clancy, *A Giant for Jesus: The Story of Silas Gill* (Waitara, N.S.W.: E. G. Clancy, 1972).
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6. Lorna Jobson, "Cloutens of Tacoma, 1905-1980" (unpublished document, n.d.), personal collection of Keith Clouten.
7. Pam Dewberry and Patricia Irwin, *On Flows the River* (Wyong, N.S.W.: Wyong Colour Copying, 2005).
8. Keith Clouten, "Finding God at Work in Our Family Roots," *Faculty Publications* 691 (Unpublished Paper, Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University, 2018), <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pubs/691>; "We are planning to buy a tract of land, and we can scarcely get enough money to go and see it." W. C. White to C. H. Jones, May 16, 1894, Ellen G. White Estate.
9. Ellen G. White to Sister Wessels, May 3, 1896, Letter 111, 1896, Ellen G. White Estate.
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13. Ellen G. White to Brother, March 20, 1899, Letter 48, 1899, Ellen G. White Estate.
14. Ibid.
15. Jobson, "Cloutens of Tacoma."
16. Herbert Clouten, *The Story of My Life: Reflections and Recollections* (Lacombe, Alberta: Herbert Clouten, 1993).
17. "Recollections of Mr. Herbert Clouten" (unpublished document, July 1975), personal collection of Keith Clouten.
18. Clouten, *Story of My Life*, 18.

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