



Walter E. Battye
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Battye, Walter Edwin (1891–1972)

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Shirley Tarburton, M.Litt. (Distinction) (University of New England, Armidale, New South Wales, Australia) retired in 2008 after 40 years teaching church-school (mainly high school but including eight years at university). An Australian, she has taught in four mission fields, Australia, and New Zealand. She has authored five books and co-authored one on church history, biography and family history, as well as several magazine articles. She is married to Dr. Michael Tarburton with two adult children and four grandchildren.

Walter Edwin Battye was an Australian Seventh-day Adventist minister who served the Adventist Church for forty-two years, seventeen of which he was a conference president.

Background

Battye was born in Mount Gambier, South Australia, on September 21, 1891.¹ He was the eldest child of William Battye (1864-1941)² and his wife Ellen Charity née Tucker (1868-1946).³ Battye had three brothers, Arthur Holmes

(1893-1997),⁴ Allan Finla (1895-1982)⁵ and Leonard William (1911-1992).⁶

After Battye finished his schooling, he trained as a fitter and turner.⁷ During his teens, he was interested in the Bible truth presented at an Adventist tent meeting in Mount Gambier.⁸ This was most likely the series of evangelistic meetings run by Robert Hare in 1907.⁹ Battye thought about what he heard, and through diligent Bible study accepted what was taught.¹⁰ He joined the Adventist Church in 1911.¹¹

Working for the Church

In November of 1912, Battye was invited to take the position of tent master¹² in Port Pirie where H. A. Lukens was holding evangelistic meetings.¹³ This involved looking after the tent that was being used for the meetings, adjusting the ropes and walls, and acting as security guard by sleeping there at night. He also assisted with other aspects of the program.¹⁴ At the end of May 1913, Battye left Port Pirie to go canvassing (selling denominational books) to earn money to attend the Australasian Missionary College at Avondale.¹⁵

Further Education

In 1914, Battye enrolled at Avondale College studying a selection of subjects suited to his needs.¹⁶ He found many opportunities to develop and use his gift of singing in the college's musical programs.¹⁷ During the year-end break from classes, he worked as a tent master with an evangelistic program in Victoria¹⁸ then returned to Avondale for a second year to complete his course.¹⁹ He finished in October 1915²⁰ and was assigned evangelistic work in Victoria.²¹

Career

Battye was given a missionary license²² in 1916. At first, he served on J. H. Woods's (one of the first Australian-born Adventist ministers) evangelistic team in Melbourne.²³ The following year he was given ministerial licence, he again worked with Pastor Woods in a series of evangelistic meetings in the suburb of East Brunswick (in Melbourne).²⁴ This resulted in twenty-nine people being baptized during three separate baptisms, in one of which Battye took part for the first time.²⁵ Battye later worked with J. W. Kent's mission team in an evangelistic effort run in central Melbourne.²⁶

In 1918, Battye assisted Pastor Waldorf, another experienced evangelist, with whom he conducted an evangelistic campaign in the rural city of Bendigo.²⁷ Mid-year he travelled eastwards to Shepparton to assist one of his former Avondale teachers, A. J. Dyason, in the week of prayer there, braving floodwaters to visit isolated church members.²⁸ In November, Battye was appointed to work in Tasmania for 1919.²⁹

Marriage and Family

Before proceeding to Tasmania, Battye visited Adelaide in his home state, where, on December 26, 1918, he was married to Stella Davey.³⁰ Stella Mitylene Davey was born March 17, 1893, in Adelaide³¹ and was the eighth of nine children of Charles Davey (1850-1919)³² and his wife, Mary Hannah Marina née Knuckey (1855-1924).³³

In 1886, Charles and Mary Davey had become two of the first Seventh-day Adventists in Adelaide when they responded to evangelistic outreach by John O. Corliss. When he returned to Melbourne, Corliss left Charles Davey as elder-in-charge of the fledgling group. Davey faithfully served as an elder for most of the rest of his life.³⁴ All of Stella Davey's brothers and sisters were brought up as Seventh-day Adventists and were faithful church members. Her siblings were Edgar Charles (1879-1951), a physician;³⁵ Ada Hannah Marina (1881-1944), who served as a missionary in South Africa with her husband, Albert Henry White;³⁶ Elsie Sophia (1883-1926), a church-school teacher who married pioneer Western Australian Adventist Thomas A. Hollingsworth;³⁷ Bertha Lillian (Bowhey, 1885-1957), who worked at the Sydney Sanitarium and later in life married Walter Battye's younger brother, Allan;³⁸ Myrtle Lulu (Sperring, 1887-1952);³⁹ Tessie Johanna Ruby (Croker, 1889-1956);⁴⁰ Alfred William George (1891-1974);⁴¹ and Chrystabel Edna (1897-1948), who married Walter Battye's youngest brother, Arthur;⁴² a life-time employee (and manager) of the Sanitarium Health Food Company.⁴³

Stella Davey enriched Walter Battye's ministry with her musical talent.⁴⁴ Two children were born to them. Ian Raymond (1929-1994) who trained as a nurse⁴⁵ and worked for the Sanitarium Health Food Company,⁴⁶ and Laoma Dawn (1939-1978) who worked for the Voice of Prophecy until poor health prevented her.⁴⁷

Continued Evangelistic Ministry

The Battyes spent four years ministering in Tasmania. Walter Battye initially worked with H. E. Piper on his evangelistic team in Hobart,⁴⁸ then by himself in Hobart and Glenorchy.⁴⁹ In 1922, he sold Adventist literature.⁵⁰

From November 1922⁵¹ to 1926, the Battyes were once again in Victoria. At first, Battye worked in literature evangelism, then in 1923 he joined a mission team led by E. B. Rudge and H. C. Harker.⁵² In 1924, he again worked with J. H. Woods's mission team in an evangelistic effort that commenced in Alphington, Melbourne,⁵³ and soon afterwards relocated to Westgarth with Battye in charge.⁵⁴ Five or six attendees were studying for baptism when Battye was appointed to follow up with interests from H. Harker's work in Hamilton, Victoria.⁵⁵ He was very

encouraged to be able to report a baptism of eighteen and continuing Bible studies with a number of others towards the end of the year.⁵⁶ Battye continued working in Hamilton during 1925.⁵⁷ In 1926, he again partnered with Harker, this time in Warracknabeal.⁵⁸ These meetings began with a high attendance, but after strenuous opposition was initiated only six new believers had the courage to join the church.⁵⁹

Ordination

In October 1926, Battye was called to evangelism in North New Zealand.⁶⁰ With his wife, he sailed from Sydney on December 2.⁶¹ During the annual North New Zealand Conference Session held in Lower Hutt (near Wellington) at the end of the year, Battye was ordained to the gospel ministry on January 1, 1927.⁶²

Ministry in New Zealand

Battye's first appointment in New Zealand was Gisborne where he spent two years presenting evangelistic meetings and giving Bible studies.⁶³ During the 1928 camp-meeting, Battye, who became appreciated for his singing, was in charge of the music. He received commendation for the high standard of the musical items presented and for the beauty that the music brought to the worship throughout the encampment.⁶⁴ At the next camp meeting when the field placements were made, Battye was appointed to minister in Rotoura with the assistance of Ormond K. Anderson.⁶⁵

Towards the end of 1929, the Battyes were transferred to Auckland (where their son, Ian was born)⁶⁶ While ministering in the Auckland area,⁶⁷ Battye also strengthened the Kaeo church further north.⁶⁸ In January 1930, they commenced four years⁶⁹ of ministry and evangelistic work in the south of the island, in Wellington.⁷⁰ The meetings he took in various locations in the city drew large crowds.⁷¹

Early in 1934, Battye and his team, which now included songster L. C. Naden and Bible worker Jessie Johnstone, were transferred to Hamilton.⁷² After eighteen months, and a baptism of fifty-five, Battye's team was relocated to Auckland.⁷³ Bible studies were also continued with the Hamilton attendees. By the end of 1935, seventy-three had been baptized from that mission⁷⁴ and in mid-1936 another thirteen had joined them.⁷⁵ In Auckland, Battye and Johnstone were joined by T. A. Anderson. Five to six hundred people were continuing to attend each week.⁷⁶ By August 1936, the first baptism of nineteen people had been conducted and Battye was preparing a second group for the next baptism.⁷⁷

Battye was a delegate to the Australasian Union Conference session, which was held in Melbourne in September⁷⁸ He and Laurence Naden (who had been transferred to Timaru⁷⁹) sang a duet for the opening meeting of the session⁸⁰ — just one of the reunions Battye enjoyed during the meetings. During this session, he was reassigned to the South New South Wales Conference, thus, terminating his service in New Zealand.⁸¹

South New South Wales

Battye became pastor of the Woollahra church in Sydney.⁸² This was a large congregation with a beautiful, newly dedicated church, the largest in the conference.⁸³ It was not long before Battye took advantage of this capacious venue to run public evangelistic meetings with the able assistance of R. Brandstater and Bible worker Miss E. Moran.⁸⁴ A "goodly number" were baptized from these meetings before they commenced a new series at Randwick in early 1938.⁸⁵ A baptism followed on September 24, 1938.⁸⁶

In 1939, Battye's evangelistic outreach moved to the air waves as he took on responsibility for the Advent Radio Church, organizing programming and making on-air presentations.⁸⁷ With the onset of World War II, radio broadcasting took the Adventist message to places that missionaries were forced to leave.⁸⁸ Just six weeks after Australia joined the war, Stella Battye gave birth to Laoma. In 1940, Battye conducted evangelistic meetings in Hornsby⁸⁹ and then in Haberfield.⁹⁰ In addition, he found time to write a series of articles for the church paper about the ministry of the Holy Spirit.⁹¹

At the Australasian Union Conference session in September 1941, Battye was appointed president of the Tasmanian Conference.⁹² Immediately, the South New South Wales executive committee asked him to conduct an evangelistic series at Concord before he had to leave.⁹³ This he did prior to his departure in mid-December.⁹⁴

Administration

After spending twenty-nine years in evangelism, Battye was to spend the rest of his service for the church in administration. In Tasmania from 1942 to 1944, he did all he could to support and build the Church in that conference. With his background in evangelism, he gave it a strong emphasis.⁹⁵ For example, in March 1942 the services of N. C. Burns were employed in Launceston to run the biggest evangelistic campaign the city had seen.⁹⁶ The interest was so great, the evangelistic team and local members could barely handle the bible studies.⁹⁷ Burns was able to repeat the harvest in Hobart the following year.⁹⁸ Battye also arranged for George Burnside to run an evangelistic series in Wynyard in 1942-1943, which led to several baptismal services as well.⁹⁹ As the war bit deeper, blackouts were enforced, making it very difficult to run evening meetings, so in April 1944, Battye held a conference-wide ministerial convention to brainstorm other methods of soul-winning.¹⁰⁰ Using these strategies, the Church grew under his stewardship.

The Battyes left Tasmania at the end of 1944 when the North New Zealand Conference requested that he return as president.¹⁰¹ He had only been away for eight years, so there were many who knew him and had confidence in his leadership.¹⁰²

Battye was based in Auckland as the president of the North New Zealand Conference from January 1945 to December 1948.¹⁰³ During these four years, he continued the emphasis on evangelism that he had shown in Tasmania.¹⁰⁴ He had a talent for recognizing evangelistic potential in young ministerial workers and nurtured such men as John Coltheart, Geoff Ratcliffe, Alvin Cook, and others who developed into strong evangelists.¹⁰⁵ His other strong interest was evangelism amongst the Maori New Zealanders.¹⁰⁶ He organized Adventist churches in three towns with a high proportion of Maoris in the population. In October 1945, he organized the Rotorua Seventh-day Adventist church,¹⁰⁷ and in October 1946 he conducted a baptism and dedicated a church in Kaitaia.¹⁰⁸ In March 1948, the first Adventist church specifically for Maori members was dedicated in Te Kao.¹⁰⁹ A Maori Adventist church was also organized in North Auckland and ten Maoris were baptized in Herekino.¹¹⁰

In 1946, he was a delegate to the General Conference session in the U.S.A.¹¹¹ and was away for about three months.¹¹² The session, held in Washington, was an inspirational time and Walter was able to make a contribution as a member of the male octet which presented the special item at the opening meeting.¹¹³

After much deliberation, in 1948, a reorganization of church governance in Australasia and the South Pacific took place.¹¹⁴ The new elements of the organization that was ratified at the General Conference autumn council, October 18-28, included provision for the Australasian Union Conference to be renamed the Inter-Union Conference, and its territory to be split into two Union Conferences and two Union Missions.¹¹⁵ A special session was held at Avondale, December 1-12, 1948, to effect this change and to appoint the personnel to the various positions that had been created.¹¹⁶ At this session, Pastor Walter E. Battye was named as the inaugural president of the Trans-Tasman Union Conference,¹¹⁷ which included both New Zealand Conferences, the (new) Greater Sydney Conference, the North New South Wales Conference, Queensland Conference, and the North Queensland Mission.¹¹⁸

After attending the summer camp meetings for both of the New Zealand conferences as the Trans-Tasman Union Conference representative, Battye and his family moved to Sydney in February,¹¹⁹ taking up residence in Wahroonga¹²⁰ where the Trans-Tasman Union Conference offices were initially housed in the division office building.¹²¹ Battye's time was almost fully taken up with attending camp meetings,¹²² conference sessions,¹²³ speaking appointments,¹²⁴ and hosting visiting personnel.¹²⁵ He was indefatigable, happy to make his time available for counsel, or to be of service in any way he could.¹²⁶ The successful operation of the Trans-Tasman Union Conference stood as a testimony to his organizational abilities.

Retirement

At the end of 1958, after ten years as president of the Trans-Tasman Union Conference, Battye retired.¹²⁷ He and his wife remained in their home in Wahroonga¹²⁸ where they supported the local church. In 1964, Battye was asked to become associate editor of the *Australasian Record*. His assistance grew to be full-time and lasted for three years, rather than the few months initially anticipated.¹²⁹ He introduced the editorial feature into the paper¹³⁰ that persists more than fifty-five years later. From time to time, devotional articles also came from his pen.

Death

Late in April 1972, Battye was admitted to the Sydney Sanitarium and Hospital in Wahroonga, where he died on May 1, 1972. On May 3, he was buried at the Avondale Seventh-day Adventist Cemetery in Cooranbong after a service in the Wahroonga Seventh-day Adventist church that was attended by scores of fellow workers, friends, and family.¹³¹

Stella Battye also died in Wahroonga, seven years later, on July 24, 1979, and was buried beside her husband at Avondale.¹³² She had been pre-deceased by their daughter nine months previously.¹³³ Both Walter and Stella Battye were people of strong faith, loyal to the cause of God and completely dedicated to His service.¹³⁴

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