

Butler, Lancelot Lewis (1918–2004) and Hilda Gwenneth (Peacock) (1922–2018)



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.

Lancelot Lewis Butler

Photo courtesy of Adventist Heritage Centre, Australia.

Pastor Lance Butler was an Australian, an astute financial manager who spent his working life in the service of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He was treasurer of the Australasian Division for twelve years and then treasurer of the global General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists between 1980 and 1985.

Early Life

Lance Butler was born to Pastor Allan Butler and Hazel (Hoskins) Butler in Adelaide, South Australia, on November 17, 1918.¹ Lance was the third of four children: Beryl (Lantzke), Mervyn, Lance, and Fern (Parr).² The extended Butler family had become Seventh-day Adventists (SDA) as the result of an incident in the life of Lewis Butler, the grandfather of Lance. Lewis Butler was the first patient admitted to the Sydney Sanitarium, known as "the San," now Sydney Adventist Hospital, even though it had not officially opened its doors. He was severely ill

with rheumatic fever. On recovery, he studied the teachings of the SDA Church, became a member, and “fathered several generations of Adventist ministers and church administrators.”³

Lance Butler attended Longburn College in New Zealand in 1933 and Avondale College in Australia in 1937, graduating from the Business Course.⁴ Later he was to obtain several post-graduate qualifications: Fellow of the Society of Accountants, Associate of the Australasian Institute of Secretaries and he also became a member of the Australasian Association of Cost Accountants.⁵

Early Years of Service and Marriage

Butler began his denominational service working for almost five years with the Sanitarium Health Food Company (SHF). Before attending the Australasian Missionary College in 1937, he was a Store Boy in Brisbane, Queensland in 1935-1936. After graduation he was initially appointed to the Hobart branch of the SHF.⁶ However, the records show that rather than going to Tasmania, he worked as a retail storeman in Melbourne, Victoria from January 1938 until July 1939.⁷ Then from July 1939 until November 1940, he was a clerk for wholesale operations in Melbourne.⁸ His position as clerk quickly revealed an aptitude for dealing with finances.

In November 1940 Butler transferred from the SHF to conference operations and worked as a clerk in the Australasian Union Conference office until he was conscripted into the Australian armed services for the remainder of World War II, October 1941- May 1946.⁹ His service was primarily in New Guinea with ANGAU.¹⁰

Butler returned to denominational service in 1946 as a senior clerk at the headquarters of the Australasian Union Conference in Wahroonga, Sydney, New South Wales.¹¹ Just before recommencing work, he and Hilda (Peg) Gwenneth Peacock were married by the groom’s father, Pastor L. Allan Butler, in the Wahroonga Church on May 8, 1946.¹² Peg, born on July 23, 1922, was the daughter of George and Irene Peacock of Wahroonga.¹³ Her parents had become Seventh-day Adventists in Melbourne, Victoria after attending an evangelistic campaign conducted by Pastor J. W. Kent in 1918.¹⁴ She had two older sisters. Enid Irene graduated from the business course at the Australasian Missionary College at the end of 1930 and was assigned to work in New Zealand.¹⁵ Enid married Bert Adrian in 1931.¹⁶ He was killed in a motor vehicle accident in Fiji.¹⁷ She then married Alfred Walter Martin.¹⁸ Peg’s second sister was Joy Elizabeth. She was born on September 11, 1918 in Sydney and married Lionel Turner who taught at Avondale College for many years.¹⁹

Three sons were born into the Butler home: Robert Lance, Donald Lewis, and Rodney John.²⁰

Post War Service

At the beginning of 1949 Butler became the accountant for what was now the Australasian Inter-Union Conference. At the annual meeting of the Australasian Union Conference, a reorganisation had taken place which took into account the unique nature of the Australasian Union Conference.²¹ Unlike other unions in other

parts of the world, the Australasian Union had four union territories operating within it: two union conferences and two union missions. In effect, the Australasian Union Conference was operating somewhat like a division but whereas, according to the General Conference Constitution, divisions did not have their own constituencies but derived their authority from the General Conference, the Australasian Union Conference did have its own constituency from which it derived its authority. This was a remnant of it being the first union conference to be organised globally. It retained its union conference status when divisions were organised in all other areas in the world. An attempt was made to alleviate the anomaly somewhat by creating in effect a “super-union” which was called the Australasian Inter-Union Conference. While this did allow for unions to operate within a “super-union,” it did not solve the problems of derived authority and power of the constituency in the Australasian territory.²²

In his role as an accountant, Butler carried the lion’s share of the responsibility for “the multitudinous details involved in the accounts of such a complex operation, especially in the initial steps of setting up the new organization.”²³ After some three years at the Inter-Union Conference headquarters the Butler family transferred in March 1952 to Papua New Guinea where Lance was the Secretary Treasurer of the Coral Sea Union Mission based in Lae, Papua New Guinea.²⁴

In March 1959, the Butlers decided that they needed to return to Australia in order to care for the education of their children. Initially Butler was appointed as the Accountant for the Trans-Commonwealth Union Conference with headquarters in Melbourne, Victoria.²⁵ The appointment was later upgraded to Assistant Secretary Treasurer for the Union.²⁶ He remained in this role until January 1963 when he was invited to become the Secretary/Treasurer of the Trans-Tasman Union Conference, this time based in Sydney.²⁷

Australasian Division Treasurer

Then, in December 1968, he became the Treasurer of the Australasian Division (now South Pacific Division), the senior financial role in the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the South Pacific region.²⁸ At the end of his first year as Division Treasurer, Butler was ordained to the gospel ministry on December 27, 1969.²⁹

While Division Treasurer, Butler did much of the planning for the establishment of Pacific Adventist University near Port Moresby in Papua New Guinea. An option on a property was taken out by Division Executive Committee action on June 20, 1978.³⁰ The land was acquired in June 1978 and Butler was appointed as the chairman of the Island Tertiary Institution Planning and Development Committee at the Division.³¹ Another visionary project, initiated by him in March 1972, was the establishment of Christian Services for the Blind, an organisation with similar purposes to Christian Record Braille Foundation of the United States.³² Initiated in 1972, the name “Christian Service for the Blind” was adopted in May 1973 and the service was fully localised within the Australasian Division³³ and was expanded in 1986 to Christian Services for the Blind and Hearing Impaired.³⁴

Butler was also a major player in the rebuilding of Sydney Adventist Hospital. As Division Treasurer and a member of the board of management of the hospital, Butler was intimately involved in the project from conception to completion. In his address at the official opening of the new tower block on June 10, 1971, the Division President and chairman of the hospital board, Robert R. Frame, paid tribute to Lance Butler saying, "Pastor L. L. Butler, the present treasurer of the Australasian Division of Seventh-day Adventists . . . has watched this building rise from its foundations, and we are grateful indeed for his sanctified wisdom. He, under the blessing of God, has steered us through to this present moment."³⁵

The Avondale Flying School was also established during Butler's tenure as Division Treasurer. Recognising the need to train pilots for the Adventist Aviation program, particularly in the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea, he provided the stimulus needed to ensure the viability of the pilot-training program.³⁶ In his 1978 address for the dedication of the Cessna 152, two-seater trainer, named the "John I. Tay," Butler paid tribute to The Quiet Hour and its founders, Pastor and Mrs. J. L. Tucker who had raised the funds and donated the plane to the Flying School.³⁷ It was the fourth plane donated by The Quiet Hour to the aviation program in the South Pacific.

In 1969 Butler was approached by a group of SDA university students asking if there was any possibility that the Church could consider creating a facility for the youth and the community that was environmentally appropriate for a professing Christian.³⁸ Butler discussed the issue with the Division Youth Director, Pastor C. V. Christian, and, following extensive discussions with interested parties, a 49.76-hectare site with panoramic views of the mountains and Lake Jindabyne, situated a few kilometres south-west of the township of Jindabyne was procured for the establishment of the Adventist Alpine Village.³⁹ Butler was appointed as the chairman of an oversight committee in 1986 after he had returned from Washington subsequent to his retirement.⁴⁰

Another initiative which came about through Butler's receptiveness to ideas coming from the constituency was the formation of the Avondale College Foundation. Set up in 1978 to provide financial and human resource support for Avondale College, Butler saw it as an excellent means of both providing much-needed resources for Avondale and of utilising the skills and expertise of professional lay people who wanted to use their experience and expertise for the benefit of the Church.⁴¹

Butler's tenure saw the establishment of Seventh-day Adventist World Services (SAWS) in the Australasian Division. Initially Butler apparently knew little of the purpose for a new entity to care for the welfare work of the Church. However, acting somewhat in good faith, the Division Executive Committee voted early in 1978 to rent a warehouse in which emergency supplies could be stored, and Allan Forbes was appointed as SAWS Director for the Division. What began tentatively became ADRA in 1983 and has been a huge blessing to the Church and the world.⁴²

Butler had a unique ability to communicate with church members. In an article written in 1978 in which he described the workings of the financial system of the Church, he combined his penchant for clarity with a strong

sense of spirituality, commitment, and appreciation. Concluding this particular article he said, "The strength of our cause rests in the dedication of our church membership, manifested in generous and sustained support for God's work. We would like to express to you the thanks and appreciation voted by special action of the Division Executive Committee at its annual meeting each November for these tithes and offerings. May the blessings promised to those who faithfully support this work be yours in rich measure and may we all soon share in the reward of sacrificial giving and devotion to the spreading of the gospel, the finished task and the return of our Saviour."⁴³

Over the years Butler demonstrated an interest in music, brass instruments, and bands in particular. He played the euphonium in the Melbourne Brass Band with his sons while he was Assistant Secretary-Treasurer of the Trans Commonwealth Union Conference.⁴⁴ Then for a time, while he was the Secretary-Treasurer of the Trans-Tasman Union Conference, he conducted the Sydney Junior Brass band. Many individuals were said to have "graduated" from this band to the senior Sydney Band.⁴⁵ In 1963, a Band Association was formed within Australia. Ron Vince was elected as the president and Lance Butler was the secretary.⁴⁶ The organization soon expanded to become the Australasian Adventist Bands Association and included representation from brass bands in other areas of the Division such as Fulton College in Fiji and the Sanitarium Health food factory at Cooranbong.⁴⁷ Butler also enjoyed following and playing cricket and tennis.⁴⁸

During their 17 years in Sydney, Peg Butler worked at the Sydney Adventist Hospital. First she worked in the treatment rooms and then as the first female chaplain at the hospital.⁴⁹

General Conference Treasurer

In 1980 Butler was elected as the Treasurer for the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church with headquarters in Takoma Park, Maryland, which was just outside Washington D. C.⁵⁰ There he was heavily involved in the planning, financing, and building of the new headquarters for the World Church located at Silver Spring, Maryland, as well as in the sale of the old facilities.⁵¹

Although he had retired four years earlier and was living in Australia at the time of the official opening of the new General Conference building, Pastor and Mrs. Butler were invited to the ceremony where he was welcomed and presented with a plaque to acknowledge and honour him for the role he had played in bringing the project to fruition.⁵²

Harris Pine Mills was a significant business operated by and for the Church during the 1980s. It was gifted to the Church by Mr. and Mrs. C. H. Harris in 1951 and not only provided a significant income stream for the Church, but it also employed thousands of students at the Church's schools and colleges. In his report to the 1985 General Conference session, Butler summarised, "In 1984 Harris Pine Mills employed 2,282 students and paid \$3,344,640 in wages. For the past five years the student payroll was \$15,300,662. Since 1951, when Harris Pine Mills was donated to the Church, the student payroll has amounted to \$48,199,172. Payments to the General

Conference the past five years total \$1,374,600; to other church entities, \$1,878,902. Payments to the General Conference since 1951 total \$6,871,824; to other church entities, \$4,955,941. The management and employees of Harris Pine Mills are proud to be a part of the worldwide work of the Church.⁵³

As General Conference Treasurer, Butler displayed exceptional competence in financial planning for a broad range of denominational entities including educational institutions. He demonstrated this competence particularly in his financial planning for the University of Eastern Africa in Harare in 1984. "His plan called for the division to raise \$200,000 each year for four years, to be matched by \$400,000 from the General Conference each of the four years."⁵⁴ It was hoped that this would enable the university to resume its building program with the modern buildings as proposed in its master plan.

Another example of the astute financial management displayed by Butler was in the Donald Davenport affair. Though a number of church entities suffered losses when Davenport declared bankruptcy, Butler had made sure that no General Conference funds were involved.

Butler managed a very difficult period for the Church with integrity, fairness, and good stewardship.⁵⁵ His concluding words to the global Church as treasurer of the General Conference were, "This is the Lord's work. He is directing it and controls the affairs of men and nations. As His people respond He will open the way. We live in an exciting time in the history of the Church."⁵⁶

Summary of Denominational Service⁵⁷

Jan 1935 - Dec 1936	Store Boy	SHF	Brisbane
Feb 1938 - Jul 1939	Storeman	SHF Retail	Melbourne
Jul 1939 - Nov 1940	Clerk	SHF Wholesale	Melbourne
Nov 1940 - Oct 1941	Clerk	Australasian Union Conf.	Sydney
Oct 1941 - May 1946	Australian Armed Services		
May 1946 - Dec 1948	Senior Clerk	Australasian Union Conf.	Sydney
Jan 1949 - Mar 1952	Accountant	Australasian Inter Union Conf.	Sydney
Mar 1952 - Mar 1959	Sec/Treasurer	Coral Sea Union Mission	Papua New Guinea
Mar 1959 - Jan 1963	Assis. Sec/ Treasurer	Trans-Commonwealth Union Conf.	Melbourne
Feb 1963 - Nov 1968	Sec/Treasurer	Trans-Tasman Union Conf.	Sydney
Dec 1968 - Jun 1980	Treasurer	Australasian Division	Sydney

Jul 1980 - Jun 1985	Treasurer	General Conference	Takoma Park Maryland
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Retirement

Butler served one term as General Conference Treasurer. He did not make himself available for re-election at the 1985 General Conference session. At 67 and 63 years old respectively, he and his wife Peg chose to retire at that time and returned to their native Australia.⁵⁸ They lived in Browns Road Wahroonga for 17 years.⁵⁹ One of the factors that contributed to his decision to retire was the fact that, while on furlough in Australia in 1983, Butler had undergone double bypass heart surgery at Sydney Adventist Hospital.⁶⁰

During his retirement in Australia, Butler worked for a number of years in the planning for and the establishment of the Adventist Alpine Village at Jindabyne in New South Wales.⁶¹ Although retired, he was present for the official opening and dedication of the village on May 7, 1989.⁶² Then, in 1990, he was present to officially open the outdoor chapel that had been constructed at the facility.⁶³ In 1992 he, along with Loren Tinworth, Esmond Stockton, and Les Chandler, received a Certificate of Appreciation for the voluntary work they had each done toward the establishment of the Village.⁶⁴

A very astute financial manager, Lance Butler served with distinction in a lifetime of service to the Seventh-day Adventist Church, rising to the most senior financial management position in the global Church – General Conference Treasurer. Yet he was not just a financier. He was a pastor. Whether he was telling stories to children about taking the gospel to the jungles of Papua New Guinea⁶⁵ or participating in a funeral service and comforting the bereaved loved ones, Lance Butler had the heart of a pastor.

Lancelot Lewis Butler died on August 10, 2004.⁶⁶ Peg Butler died on February 25, 2018.⁶⁷ They are buried together in the Avondale Adventist Cemetery, Cooranbong, New South Wales, Australia.

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