

Ulrich/Smith, Laura Louisa (Lee) (1873–1950)

W. GLYNN LITSTER

W. Glynn Litster, Ph.D. (The University of Newcastle, Newcastle, New South Wales, Australia), retired in 1994. Litster was born in Melbourne, Australia, and served as an educator and missionary in the South Pacific Division of Seventh-day Adventists. His roles included teacher, principal, school supervisor, and education director. Late in his career he researched the history of Sanitarium. During retirement he produced Pacific Islands hymnbooks in 7 languages. He is married to Elva, has two adult children, 6 grandchildren, and 3 great grandchildren.

Laura Louisa Lee Ulrich Smith was a nurse, educator, and promoter of the Adventist health message and lifestyle.

The Early Years

Laura Louisa Lee was born in Sandy Bay, Hobart, Tasmania, on April 25, 1873.¹ In her younger years she had no knowledge of Seventh-day Adventist teachings, but through contact with a friend, she spent time in the home of Ellen White at Sunnyside, near Avondale, where she learned vegetarian cooking. She later became the cook in the home of Willie White for a short time. In 1899, Laura Lee enrolled in the nursing course at Summer Hill Sanitarium in the inner western suburbs of Sydney. That year a camp meeting was held at Maitland on the Hunter River west of

Newcastle. Lee was asked to attend to show interested campers the new health foods that were being produced by Edward Halsey at Cooranbong and were being served in the meals for the campers. Lee also promoted the new health foods to persons interested in dietetics and to prospective purchasers.

When the camp closed at the end of December, Miss Lee remained in Maitland and opened the first health food retail shop in Australia on January 11, 1900. While Lee did all she could to promote the sale of these new vegetarian foods, the people of Maitland did not realize the value of this new vegetarian diet. After three months, the shop closed and Lee returned to the Summer Hill Sanitarium to complete her nursing training.

At the end of the course, Lee joined Mrs. M. H. Tuxford, who had come from America to be the first Church-employed cooking demonstrator in Australia. Together they operated a health food café at 283 Pitt Street, Sydney, which had been opened under the umbrella of the Sanitarium Health Food Company in March 1902. Lee, then a young nurse, was eager to learn from Mrs. Tuxford. The menu offered to the patrons in the café and a small retail shop included Protose pies and Caramel Cereal Coffee.²

The Sydney Café and Treatment Rooms

During her years at the Summerhill Sanitarium, Lee had met Carl August Ulrich (known as August), a fellow nursing student. Soon after the completion of their course at the sanitarium, Lee married Ulrich. Their only son, Carl Frederick Lee, was born October 19, 1903.³ Together the couple were employed at the newly-opened Sydney café. While the café, under the direction of Mrs. Tuxford and Laura Ulrich, served hot vegetarian midday meals to the Sydney clients, treatment rooms were set up in the back of the building so that August Ulrich could provide massage and water treatments. Unfortunately, this arrangement only continued for a short time as August Ulrich became ill, and the couple had to return to Bismarck [Collinsvale], Tasmania.⁴ Shortly after their return to Tasmania, August Ulrich was killed in a tree-felling accident.⁵

In 1907, the young widow opened a Sanitarium café in Liverpool Street, Hobart, and later another in Launceston. About 1910, Laura Ulrich was asked by George Fisher, the manager of Sanitarium's Sydney café, to move back to



Larua Lee Ulrich
Photo courtesy of the Sanitarium Health Food Company Archives.

Sydney to become the Matron of the café. Fisher soon realized the value of having Ulrich visit the various cafes in other states to provide guidance to the staff, developing new but simple recipes, preparing printed material on healthful living, and giving lectures and demonstrations to the public.

Ulrich took on these journeys her small son, Carl. While giving public lectures about meals and recipes, vegetarian foods, healthful living, and the need for regular exercise she would prepare a place on the platform for her child to sleep while she talked. This attention to the care of her young son was not lost on those who attended. It was said of Ulrich that she “combined discipline with understanding and sympathy. Her staff were always dressed according to health reform standards, and she fully represented them. In her association with the young people in her care, Mrs. Ulrich abundantly fulfilled the inspired specifications: “The young women should be under the care of a wise judicious matron, a woman who is thoroughly converted, who will certainly guard the workers, especially the younger ones.”⁶ Further Ellen White said that “the girls and the young women in our restaurants need a shepherd...to be sheltered by home influences,”⁷ and that is exactly what Ulrich demonstrated in her leadership of the staff in all of the cafes and restaurants.

From 1919 to 1921, Ulrich was preceptress and matron at Avondale College, Cooranbong.⁸ As a successful cook, she knew how to make food preparation an art. Her skill in preparing recipes was presented in her well-known book, *Good Food and How to Prepare It*.⁹

Her Later Years

On July 11, 1935, Ulrich married Francis Edward Smith.¹⁰ For the next ten years she and her second husband brought encouragement and cheer to the church members and community of Launceston. Her last years were spent in a private hospital in Launceston where on August 2, 1950, she died.¹¹

The Sanitarium Health and Wellbeing Company’s “Laura Lee Award”

In 2003, the Sanitarium Health & Wellbeing Company created the Laura Lee Award, an annual employee award given to an employee who best epitomizes in their life and service the values of the Company so ably demonstrated by Laura Lee Ulrich. The process for electing the awardee is described as follows:

The Laura Lee Award recipient is selected from one of the “Living Our Values” recipients nominated by each of the Sanitarium sites or business units. There are eight recipients in total—each of whom is nominated by their peers and selected by the manager of their site or business unit for embodying one or more of Sanitarium’s five core values: Care, Courage, Humility, Integrity and Passion. The Senior Leadership Group then meets to assess which of the eight “Living Our Values” recipients stands out most for embodying our values. This person becomes the Laura Lee Award recipient. The individual is then announced at the annual Laura Lee Luncheon in September each year.¹²

SOURCES

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NOTES

1. Laura Louisa Lee Ulrich Biographical Information, South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives, folder: “Ulrich, Laura Louisa,” document: “Ulrich, Laura Louisa Lee.”?
2. “She Opened Health Food Cafes in Most States,” *Australasian Record*, November 7, 1955, 2-3.?
3. “Laura Louisa Lee Ulrich Biographical Information.”?
4. Maurice Ulrich, interview with author, Cooranbong, New South Wales, Australia, October 11, 2016.?
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6. Ellen G White, *The Health Food Ministry* (Washington DC: Ellen G. White Publications, 1970), 119.?
7. *Ibid.*?
8. Maurice Ulrich, interview.?
9. Laura Louisa Ulrich, *Good Food and How to Prepare It* (Warburton, Victoria: Signs Publishing Company, 1925).?
10. H. C. Harker, "Smith-Ulrich," *Australasian Record*, August 5, 1935, 7.?
11. "Brevities," *Australasian Record*, August 21, 1950, 8; H. W. Hollingsworth, "Ulrich-Smith," *Australasian Record*, September 4, 1950, 7.?
12. Darren Hagen, email message to author, October 17, 2016.?

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