



Scraggs family photo. Seated are Pastor Walter Scragg and Mrs. Dorothy Scragg. Behind them are his children, from left to right: Dr. Roy Scragg, Mrs. Iris Adderton and Pastor Walter Scragg, Jr.

Photo from the Record, August 18, 1980.

Scragg, Walter Matthew Rhodes

(1890–1985)

SHIRLEY TARBURTON

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Walter Matthew Rhodes Scragg was an Australian Seventh-day Adventist evangelist and administrator who worked in Australia and New Zealand. He was a conference president for twenty-two years.

Early Years

Walter Matthew Rhodes Scragg was born on June 5, 1890, at Glen Osmond, South Australia.¹ He was the tenth of eleven children born to John Scragg (1845-1929) and his wife, Ann Ramsbottom (1851-1939), who had immigrated from Lancashire, England to South Australia in 1873 on the *Asterope*.² His ten siblings were John William (1870-1872), Phoebe Ann (Oliver, 1872- 1958), Joseph Thomas (1874-1884), Elizabeth (1875-1875), Elizabeth Hannah (Ween, 1877- 1963), Arthur James (1879-1967), John (1881-1953), Celina Victoria (Thomas then Pearce, 1884-1968), Robert Ramsbottom (1886-1958), and Edith Mary (Sparrow, 1892-1969).³

When Scragg was just an infant, his family moved to Scott Creek in the Adelaide Hills, about twenty-four kilometers by road south-east of Adelaide.⁴ Here he grew up on his father's "block" where vegetables and fruit were grown. He most likely attended the local Scott Creek school where his father was on the school committee.⁵ After he left school, Scragg worked in his father's market garden,⁶ then upon reaching adulthood, obtained land of his own, setting up his own market garden and orchard.⁷ He even won a prize at a nearby agricultural show for some "export quality apples" that he exhibited in 1912.⁸

Conversion

Before Scragg was born, his mother, Ann, had attended some meetings in Parkside (Adelaide) in 1888-1889.⁹ They were held in a tent by American evangelist, Will D. Curtis, a Seventh-day Adventist.¹⁰ When the family moved to Scott Creek, they became friends with the family of an early Seventh-day Adventist convert (and later, pastor), Joseph E. Steed. Steed's wife, Julia, is credited with saving toddler Walter Scragg's life by carrying the mortally ill child seven miles to the railway and thence to the Adelaide hospital, when his mother was unable to do so.¹¹ Ann Scragg would take her small children to have Sabbath school with the Steeds or they would go to her home. It was not long before Ann Scragg was baptized.¹² Then the Steeds moved away, and although there were other Adventists in the area, with no leadership their zeal waned.¹³

The Scragg family was closely involved in the local church community, filling lead roles in the Scott Creek Methodist church¹⁴ and also belonging to the temperance society, the Rechabites.¹⁵ However, Walter Scragg felt little interest in spiritual things until about 1912, when he was converted, joined the Methodist church, and became a Sunday School teacher.¹⁶

In 1913, Alfred Sperring was asked by the South Australian Conference to visit the group of Adventists at Scott Creek, study the Sabbath School lesson with them and generally encourage their spiritual growth. Ann Scragg went to the first cottage meeting and persuaded Walter Scragg to accompany her to the second.¹⁷ Scragg drove

Brother Sperring to the station afterwards and after a lengthy spiritual discussion, promised to attend the upcoming camp meeting. As a result, Scragg kept his first Sabbath on December 6.¹⁸ He was baptized in 1914.¹⁹ His father also took Bible studies and was baptized.²⁰

Education and Internship

The year after his baptism Scragg decided to train as a gospel worker. He studied at the Australasian Missionary College (AMC) at Avondale from 1915 to 1918, taking the missionary course.²¹ He completed his studies in October and then worked as a literature evangelist in Mildura, on the border between New South Wales and Victoria.²² He fostered the spiritual interest of so many people that a minister was sent to conduct an evangelistic series there.²³ In June 1919, Scragg was appointed to assist Pastor H. Letts run a tent mission in the town.²⁴ The local churches opposed them vehemently²⁵ nevertheless, a church of twenty members was organized.²⁶

While in Mildura, Scragg had a remarkable experience that strengthened his confidence in the Lord's leading. One evening while riding his bicycle to a Bible study that he was to conduct nine miles away, a series of scenes ran through his mind and indelibly impressed themselves on his memory. He saw himself being unexpectedly asked to defend the seventh-day Sabbath to a Church of Christ minister who would arrive while Scragg was there. He was shown what texts the minister would raise and how to answer them. All took place as he was forewarned, and because of the preparation he was given he confidently gave the answers shown to him. Consequently, the two families at the study accepted baptism and joined the church.²⁷

Marriage and Family

On April 19, 1920, six and a half weeks before his thirtieth birthday, Scragg married Daisy Quodrill in the Auburn (Sydney) Seventh-day Adventist church.²⁸ Daisy Irene Quodrill was from Hobart, Tasmania, and they had met while attending college at Avondale.²⁹ She was born on January 17, 1892,³⁰ the second of four children born to Frederick John Quodrill (1865-1947), a police constable,³¹ and his Danish wife, Wilhelmina Marie Nielsen (1859-1945).³² Daisy Quodrill's sister and two brothers were Frederick John (1888-1967), Walter Lambert (1893-1925), and Stella Elevera (Wiggins, 1897-1922).³³ Wilhelmina Quodrill became an Adventist in 1890 after attending meetings held by Pastors M. C. Israel and W. L. H. Baker near Hobart.³⁴ Consequently, Daisy Quodrill and her siblings were raised in the church although their father never joined them.³⁵

When Daisy Quodrill was twenty-one she started selling Adventist books³⁶ in Melbourne to earn money to go to college.³⁷ She did this until the end of 1914³⁸ so probably commenced studying at Avondale in 1915, the same year that Walter Scragg did. She was described as a hard worker who was a successful sales-person, and who worked for the sanitarium after leaving Avondale.³⁹

Three children were born to Walter and Daisy Scragg–Ruhamah Grace Iris (Adderton, 1922-2014),⁴⁰ Roy Frederick Rhodes (1924-), who became a doctor,⁴¹ and Walter Robert Lambert (1925-2010), who became a pastor.⁴²

Career

Following their marriage, Walter Scragg was appointed to the South New South Wales Conference as a Bible worker.⁴³ They were sent to Temora where they ran a tent mission.⁴⁴ Towards the end of 1920, the South New Zealand Conference asked Scragg to become their Field Missionary Secretary to supervise and promote the literature ministry in their conference⁴⁵ as well as to look after the Sabbath School and Young People's Departments.⁴⁶

The Scraggs sailed for South New Zealand on December 2⁴⁷ and settled in Christchurch where they lived for the next two years.⁴⁸ In 1922 Walter received the added responsibility of Home Missions Secretary,⁴⁹ in charge of the raising of funds for mission projects. Daisy contributed where she could, going door-to-door during the Appeal for Missions, collecting donations from the public.⁵⁰

In May 1923, they were asked to transfer to Feilding in the North Island of New Zealand⁵¹ where Scragg worked with Howard Rampton running a tent mission.⁵² Later in the year, he was ordained to the gospel ministry by Pastor H. Blunden at a meeting held at the SDA College at Longburn.⁵³ In about April 1924, a church was organized in Fielding⁵⁴ and plans were made for a church building.⁵⁵

At the Australasian Union Conference Annual Council held in August 1925, Scragg was chosen to be the president of the North New Zealand Conference.⁵⁶ The Scragg family, which now included two children and one due within a few weeks, moved to Auckland and Walter Scragg immediately began travelling around the conference, getting to know his workers.⁵⁷ During his term of service in North New Zealand, the conference experienced steady growth despite the financial depression of the time.⁵⁸

A Break in Service

In March 1929, Scragg's father died, leaving his seventy-nine-year-old mother alone on their market garden. As soon as was practicable,⁵⁹ Scragg resigned from his position and took his family back to Scott Creek to settle his mother's affairs and help her to deal with her changed circumstances.⁶⁰

To support his family, Scragg returned to selling Adventist books.⁶¹ He took the opportunity to study the Bible more deeply for himself and was able to pursue his interest in writing doctrinal articles.⁶² He was welcomed by his home community and received a standing invitation to preach in the local Methodist circuit, which led to him regularly taking the Sunday evening services in seven Methodist churches.⁶³ He also cared for the local Adventist congregations, strengthening them.⁶⁴ When it came time for the Scraggs to leave, the Methodists and the

Seventh-day Adventists combined to express their appreciation for his ministry. Scragg took the opportunity to preach to them on the "International Signs of the Times."⁶⁵

Back to Evangelism

Early in 1931, Scragg accepted an invitation to return to church employment in Cowra, South New South Wales. He and his family arrived there at the end of April and he began the task of nurturing those interested as the result of an evangelistic series that had just been completed by Pastor J. W. Kent.⁶⁶ This commenced a very busy four years of evangelistic and pastoral effort. The family moved to Carcoar in October 1931 and Scragg worked also in the surrounding towns of Lyndhurst, Manduramah,⁶⁷ and Blayney where he held meetings simultaneously, resulting in many Bible studies for him and his team.⁶⁸ He supported the congregations at Bathurst,⁶⁹ Young,⁷⁰ and Lithgow,⁷¹ worked in Mudgee⁷² and organized a new church in Narrandera.⁷³

After a few months, he conducted baptisms in several of these centers and some years later it was reported that the total reached 179 people baptized.⁷⁴ During his time in this part of the state, he travelled widely and spread his godly influence over hundreds of square kilometers of territory. He and his family moved five times in three years in order to be close to where Scragg was working.⁷⁵

Daisy Scragg loved door-to-door work and despite having three young children, always took part in the Annual Appeal for Missions collection. When reporting the 1934 campaign progress, Walter Scragg stated, "This year, Mrs. Scragg, working from house to house, collected nearly £10 in five days. A few months ago she nearly passed away down the valley of the shadows. How good God is to us that now after so short a space, she is able to work so energetically for the Master."⁷⁶ Nothing else was said about her crisis of health.

In September 1934, Scragg was asked to move to West Australia, to fill the "need for a strong evangelist" in Perth.⁷⁷ He decided to drive the family across the continent in their automobile, making the epic trek of 2,600 miles (4,185 kilometers) in November.⁷⁸

There were five people on Scragg's Perth evangelistic team apart from himself and they commenced public meetings in three location in the new year. This kept them all very busy with visitation and Bible studies as well as the actual meetings.⁷⁹ Over eighty people were baptized there by the end of 1935.⁸⁰ Each succeeding year, evangelistic meetings were held in different parts of the city, eliciting ever-increasing audiences and a continued stream of baptisms⁸¹ which totaled 170 over three and a half years.⁸² Daisy Scragg also participated, selling Adventist books from door-to-door.⁸³

President Again

The family's next move came in 1938 when Scragg became the president of the Tasmanian Conference.⁸⁴ They arrived in June and worked there for three and a half years.⁸⁵ This was Daisy Scragg's home state and both her

parents were still alive, so it was a particularly happy time for her. In an auspicious start to his presidency, Walter Scragg had the pleasure of organizing the first church in the northeast of Tasmania. The Bridport-Scottsdale church was the fruitage of the work of evangelist George Burnside.⁸⁶ Scragg initiated and presented a weekly Voice of Prophecy program on the radio⁸⁷ (which was heard as far away as the Solomon Islands!⁸⁸) as well as held public evangelistic meetings near Hobart.⁸⁹ He also pastored a church, as there were few on the conference staff.⁹⁰

At the 1941 Union Conference Session, Scragg was appointed to the presidency of the South Australian Conference.⁹¹ The family made the move early in December⁹² and took up residence in Prospect, Adelaide.⁹³ The Second World War forced many missionaries to return home to Australia. South Australia benefited from their services through a strong program of evangelistic meetings, making excellent use of the extra ministers.⁹⁴

Convinced of the value of radio evangelism, Scragg commenced a program similar to that which he presented so successfully in Tasmania and was soon reaping the benefit from many different areas.⁹⁵ He knew how important it was to encourage and strengthen his conference workers and, by communicating with them and visiting when possible, built a cohesive, focused workforce.⁹⁶ In 1943, one hundred were added to the church—ninety-seven new converts and the return of three former members.⁹⁷

Due to his radio broadcasts, Scragg became widely known as a Seventh-day Adventist personality throughout the secular community and other Christian groups to the extent that he was recognized in public by his voice.⁹⁸ In 1946, he was elected honorary president of the Protestant Federation of South Australia, highlighting the respect with which he was held.⁹⁹ He was pleased to be able to secure the services of J. W. Kent to run evangelistic meetings in South Australia in 1947-1948, that saw attendances of between 800 and 1000 people per meeting.¹⁰⁰ Ever enthusiastic about evangelism,¹⁰¹ Scragg, himself, ran meetings for the public in the Adelaide City church during the same period.¹⁰² Somehow, he also found time to play in the Advent United Band which was founded in 1944.¹⁰³ Although tall and of imposing presence, he did not hold himself aloof, but made a point of mingling with people as much as he could.¹⁰⁴

At a special session held at Avondale in December 1948, the Adventist Church within the Australian-South Pacific region underwent a complete re-organization, resulting in the formation of the Australasian Inter-Union Conference which comprised two union conferences and two union mission fields. As part of this, the South New South Wales Conference was also reorganized, with the city of Sydney and its environs forming a new conference.¹⁰⁵ The South New South Wales Conference, thus, lost more than half its membership and all of its institutions except one small school¹⁰⁶ (the Bathurst school¹⁰⁷), and had to establish a new headquarters at Wagga Wagga, which only had a small church. Scragg was appointed president.¹⁰⁸ He lost no time, setting off to visit every church group in the new conference to encourage and build up the constituency. Whereas there had been six churches when he had left the area many years previously, now there were twenty-three. It was a great pleasure for him to be able to revisit so many scenes of his earnest labor seventeen years before and to find

people he had studied with, still faithful.¹⁰⁹

Over the next eight years it was Scragg's task to transform Wagga Wagga into a center of Adventist influence as befitted a conference headquarters, and to build up the conference itself. He had great cooperation from the ministers and literature evangelists in his conference and the next few years saw continual growth.¹¹⁰ A property was purchased for the conference headquarters,¹¹¹ and construction commenced on ministers' houses, an office building, enlarged church and a school in Wagga.¹¹² (These were completed in 1954.¹¹³) Almost two years later he was able to report 143 baptisms and received a request for more schools.¹¹⁴

At the Conference Session held early in 1955, it was reported that from when the reorganization took place, the church membership had grown 42%, Sabbath school membership had risen by 85% and the number of children enrolled in the church schools had risen by 900%. Seven new church buildings and three new schools had been built as well as two church halls. Several new churches had been organized including a church in the national capital, Canberra.¹¹⁵ Scragg continued to put as much of the budget as possible into evangelism, and a number of successful evangelistic series were run each year in various different towns.¹¹⁶ A personal high point for Scragg during these years was his attendance at the June 1954 General Conference Session in San Francisco in the United States.¹¹⁷

Retirement

In June 1955, Scragg turned sixty-five. He was still energetic and did not address his passing of the usual retirement age until the following year. He had commenced his denominational service at an older age than many ministerial interns and it was decided that he would retire on January 14, 1957,¹¹⁸ with thirty-six years of service.¹¹⁹ As he did not feel ready to stop working, he was appointed to pastor three churches in the Young area of South New South Wales.¹²⁰ He and his wife had endeared themselves to the South New South Wales Conference constituency and were given an emotional farewell from the presidency.¹²¹

They moved to Young, where for the first time in their lives they owned their own home.¹²² As well as pastoring the Young, Harden, Grenfell, and Cowra churches,¹²³ Scragg returned to his early love of selling Adventist literature, which he said gave him great enjoyment and health.¹²⁴ By mid-1959, he had baptized eighteen people¹²⁵ as well as taking time to garden and write.¹²⁶

In 1959, Daisy Scragg's health deteriorated to the extent that Walter Scragg had to arrange nursing care for her. This was provided at home.¹²⁷ At the end of September 1960, Daisy Scragg died at the age of 68 and was buried in Young.¹²⁸ Apart from the wonderful support she had been to her husband's ministry, she was well known for her many years of door-to-door work, including literature evangelism and collecting for missions.¹²⁹

On March 21, 1961,¹³⁰ Scragg married Dorothy Walker Mercer neé Dun (1913-2011).¹³¹ In April they drove north through Queensland, speaking at camp-meetings, then flew to New Guinea to visit Walter Scragg's elder son, Dr.

Roy Scragg, who was employed in the Public Health Service of the Territory of New Guinea.¹³² They travelled widely visiting many mission stations, and came away inspired by all they experienced.¹³³

Walter Scragg energetically took on various assignments for the conference¹³⁴ and other church leaders¹³⁵ and continued to pastor the churches around Young, as well as writing a number of articles for church publications.¹³⁶ He and his wife travelled to other states, renewing acquaintance with colleagues and friends from former years,¹³⁷ going as far as Perth, Western Australia, in 1969.¹³⁸ During these years, he also wrote some books¹³⁹ and tracts¹⁴⁰ which were published as evangelistic aids.

Early in 1980, the Scraggs left Young and moved into a retirement unit in the outskirts of Adelaide, S. A.¹⁴¹ Here in Adelaide he enjoyed having the association of his eldest son, Dr Roy Scragg and his family who were also living there.¹⁴² In June 1980, Walter was the guest of honour at a function to celebrate his ninetieth birthday with nearly a hundred friends and family members and enjoyed having all his children with him.¹⁴³

Death

Five years later, on June 17, 1985, Scragg died in an Adelaide nursing home, aged ninety-five.¹⁴⁴ There are many aspects to the legacy that he left behind, not the least being the hundreds of people that he was instrumental in bringing to the Lord. The radio ministry in the South Pacific Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, which he initiated, stands as a testimony to his vision,¹⁴⁵ and the South New South Wales Conference is a "monument to his tenacity and intensive visitation."¹⁴⁶

After Scragg's death, Dorothy Scragg returned to New South Wales, taking up residence at the Adventist Retirement Village at Kings Langley in western Sydney. Here, she died on January 11, 2011, aged ninety-eight.¹⁴⁷

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