

# Lowry, Roscoe Sydney (1918–2019)

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## CHERYL CHRISTO HOWSON

Cheryl Christo Howson earned a graduate diploma in computer aided interior designing at the Dr. Bhanuben Nanavati College of Architecture for Women in Pune, India. She co-founded an interior design company in Sri Lanka and worked as a copywriter. She contributed to the morning devotional published by Women's Ministries at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, the *Shepherdess International Journal* magazine, and the *Adventist Review*. She has written several plays. Currently (2020), she lives in Hosur, India while preparing for a piano exam.

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Roscoe Sydney Lowry contributed to the Seventh-day Adventist Church as an educator and as the longest serving president of the Southern Asia Division; while his wife, Jessie Louise, supported his ministry as a teacher, office staff, and musician.

## Early Life

Roscoe was born to a family of Seventh-day Adventist ministers: his grandfather had been a pioneer minister in the southern United States; and his parents, Gentry Lowry (1884-1942) and Bertha Burrow (1886-1975), began their life as missionaries in December 1909.<sup>1</sup> Eight years after his parents' arrival in India, Roscoe was born in Bangalore on January 4, 1918. He spent his childhood there and began schooling at the Bishop Cotton School in 1924. After only a year, he was sent to Vincent Hill School in Mussoorie, India, from which he graduated in 1935.<sup>2</sup>

## Education and Marriage

As a young man, Roscoe first attended Southern Missionary College in Tennessee and then transferred to Pacific Union College in California, where he graduated with a B.A. in religious history and speech in 1940.<sup>3</sup>



Roscoe S. Lowry, c. 1960s

Photo courtesy of Gordon Christo.

On May 30, 1938, Roscoe married Jessie Louise Carter,<sup>4</sup> the only daughter of Pastor Jesse B. (May 7, 1891-1985) and Fannie Lois Callicott Carter (November 2, 1897-September 16, 1980), who had faithfully served as missionaries until Mrs. Carter's health no longer permitted it. After Mr. and Mrs. Carter were married in 1917, Jesse entered the gospel ministry which led to his ordination in 1920. Following his ordination, the family arrived in India where they ministered in Bombay (Mumbai), Kalyan, and Lasalgaon, for 15 years until 1935.<sup>5</sup> Jessie Louise was born January 29, 1920. She studied at the church school in Poona (Pune), India, under Sister E. M. Meleen, and later at Vincent Hill School, Mussoorie.<sup>6</sup>

Roscoe and Louise had their first child, Donna Lobeth, on January 14, 1940, before the couple moved to India as missionaries. Their second daughter, Louise Lyvern, was born on August 16, 1942, while they were at Lasalgaon. Carter Jesse William was born in Pune on January 4, 1946, while they were at Poona.<sup>7</sup> In 1977 the Lowrys adopted an Indian girl, Priya Priti.

With plans for further study, Pastor Roscoe Lowry sailed to the United States on February 24, 1947, to join the rest of his family who were on extended furlough. Roscoe completed his Masters' degree in administrative psychology from the University of Denver.<sup>8</sup>

In 1954 the family again moved to the United States for three and a half years while Roscoe engaged in doctoral study at the University of Southern California. In 1958 he received a Doctor of Education degree in philosophy and psychology.<sup>9</sup> His studies concluded with a dissertation investigating the educational implications of the philosophy of India's vice-president and renowned philosopher, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan.<sup>10</sup>

## Career and Ministry

Roscoe and Louise Lowry began their service to the church at the St. Helena Sanitarium in California, where Roscoe worked first in the cafeteria as cook and cashier, then as clerk and receptionist, and lastly as cashier-accountant in the business office.<sup>11</sup>

Since both Roscoe and Louise were children of missionaries to India, the missionary call was strong in their blood. On July 8, 1941, the couple, with their barely one-year-old baby, boarded a boat bound for India.<sup>12</sup> Having grown up in India, they were already familiar with Hindi and passed the proficiency exams in a year. Roscoe spoke Hindi, Urdu, Marathi, and some Tamil. Lasalgaon School, Maharashtra, was their first appointment, where Roscoe served as the principal beginning in 1942.<sup>13</sup>

The sudden passing away of Roscoe's father brought great sorrow to the family and to the entire division where he was greatly loved. Elder Gentry G. Lowry had been elected division president at the 1941 General Conference Session, but passed away on May 4, 1942.<sup>14</sup>

Changes were taking place in education in the Southern Asia Division. While Roscoe Lowry was principal of the Lasalgaon High School, it was affiliated with and moved to Spicer Missionary College (now Spicer Adventist

University) in 1944. Meanwhile, Louise Lowry worked as the college registrar<sup>15</sup> and assisted with the music.<sup>16</sup> Due to a lack of sufficient personnel, Roscoe also served as Education and Youth secretary for the Western India Union.<sup>17</sup> To fill the need more completely, the Lowrys were called away from Spicer for full-time work in the Western India Union in May 1945, and Neville Matthews became headmaster of the high school.<sup>18</sup> In 1946 Roscoe assumed leadership of the South and Central Maharashtra Missions, while continuing to care for the Education and Youth departments of the Western India Union.<sup>19</sup>

Following in his grandfather's and father's footsteps, Roscoe S. Lowry was ordained to the gospel ministry in the presence of his mother, wife, and children on April 20, 1946. Also in attendance to witness the solemn occasion were the members of the Poona English and Marathi churches. C. A. Schutt spoke and E. D. Thomas offered the ordination prayer.<sup>20</sup>

Ever ready to return to India, the Lowrys returned in 1949 after Pastor Lowry completed his M.A. degree in the United States. They were stationed at Lowry Memorial High School, which his father had established in 1915 as the South India Training School. After serving there as principal for a year, the Lowrys then moved to Salisbury Park when he was elected Education secretary for the Southern Asia Division from 1950 until 1954.<sup>21</sup> During this time, when the Adventist educational system was going through a series of crises of identity and accreditation, Dr. Lowry worked, counseled, and guided the schools to preserve their divine mandate and scholarly pursuit.<sup>22</sup>

After acquiring his doctorate in the United States, Dr. and Mrs. Roscoe Lowry arrived back in Southern Asia on November 4, 1958, where Roscoe resumed his duties as Educational secretary for the division<sup>23</sup> and Louise was secretary to Pastor O. O. Mattison, the division president.<sup>24</sup> At the end of that term in 1962, Roscoe accepted a faculty position in the School of Education at La Sierra College, California. The Lowrys took what they thought was a permanent return to the United States.<sup>25</sup>

However, the Southern Asia Division still had need of them. Just two months later at the 1962 General Conference Session in San Francisco, Roscoe was unexpectedly elected president of the Southern Asia Division. They accepted the call, and Dr. Lowry returned in India on October 17, 1962, to assume his duties; but due to health reasons, Mrs. Lowry returned later to India.<sup>26</sup>

At the division year-end meetings in 1962, in addition to the presidency, Pastor Lowry became one of the associate editors of the *Southern Asia Tidings*. Mrs. Lowry was appointed the Home Commission leader for the division.<sup>27</sup>

Although only 44 years old and with limited ministerial experience and no experience as a division or even a union officer, Dr. Roscoe S. Lowry turned out to be the most durable president of the Southern Asia Division. Once elected, his administrative ability was never questioned. He was re-elected president in 1966, 1970, and again in 1975.<sup>28</sup> During those 18 years, the membership grew from 25,877 in 1962, to 101,657 in 1980. The number of churches grew from 361 when he became president to 792 at the end of his last term. Baptisms in

1962 totaled 2,084, and in 1979 totaled 11,889.<sup>29</sup>

## Later Life

After serving four terms as division president, Dr. Lowry made it quite clear, at the 1980 General Conference Session, that he believed it was time for a national to take over the mantle of leadership. But Dr. and Mrs. Lowry were not ready to leave India yet, since Roscoe was 62 and had several years of service remaining. So, first, he filled a vacancy in the Oriental Watchman Publishing House as editor for six months, then at the end of the year he accepted an appointment as field secretary for the division. He served in that capacity as a senior statesman for the church in Southern Asia until his retirement.<sup>30</sup> During this time Louise Lowry was associated with a foster-baby care program that placed babies waiting for adoption in homes on the campus of Salisbury Park. Upon the departure of Eleanor Hetke, Mrs. Lowry took over as coordinator of the program from 1985 to 1987. In 1987 the Lowrys returned to the United States to live in Chehalis, Washington<sup>31</sup> where he passed away on March 2, 2019.

## Contribution and Legacy

Among other things, Dr. Lowry will be remembered for raising the remuneration level for national workers, terminating such provisions that benefitted only expatriates and Anglo-Indians, and the incorporation of the church as SERVSDA (Services Association of Seventh-day Adventists), a Pvt. Ltd. Company. Most of all, the Lowrys will be remembered for the friendship they developed with the local people and their readiness to help.<sup>32</sup>

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