

Wilkinson, Leonard Victor (1906–1997) and Enid Lucy (Hare) (1905–2006)

RAYMOND WILKINSON

Raymond Wilkinson, Ed.D. (Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, USA) was born to missionary parents and grew up in Fiji. He was educated at Longburn College, Massey University New Zealand, and Avondale College Australia. With wife Ruth, his Church service involved teaching and educational administration in the South Pacific Islands. He retired 1994 but since then has enjoyed volunteer service in the islands. Now married to Lola, Raymond has four adult children and eight grandchildren.

Leonard and Enid Wilkinson were missionaries to Fiji.

Early Years

Leonard Victor Wilkinson,¹ known as Len, was born December 19, 1906, in Gisborne, New Zealand.² He was the eldest child of Frederick Cater Wilkinson (1883-1974) and Gertrude Agnes Beaven (1877-1956). Two sisters, Julia and Dorothy Jean and a brother, Colin Beaven, were later added to the family.³ The family was nominally Methodist, but seldom attended church. Wilkinson suffered a severe attack of meningitis when he was about eighteen months of age and medical opinion was that he would never walk. However, his parents set aside time for prayer, and with the use of hot and cold fomentations, he recovered. Although his health continued to be poor, Wilkinson's parents believed God had healed him for a purpose.⁴

When Wilkinson was seven years old the family moved to Hastings, New Zealand, where his father was a public accountant and real estate agent, and his mother for some years ran a successful hat shop. When nearly 14 Wilkinson won first prizes as a violin player in both the open and under 21 categories of the Gisborne Eisteddfod music festival. Music was always an important part of his life⁵.



Len and Enid Wilkinson, c. 1970.

Photo courtesy of Raymond Wilkinson.

Conversion

In 1921, Roy Allan Anderson, a young Australian evangelist, conducted evangelistic meetings in Hastings. Wilkinson's parents left home one Sunday evening to walk to the Methodist Church, a rare event for them. As they passed the Adventist church a sudden rain shower caused them to shelter in the church foyer. They became interested in the Bible prophecy Roy Anderson was explaining, and stayed to listen. They spoke with Pastor Anderson at the end of the meeting, continued to attend the series, and had home Bible studies⁶ Frederick Wilkinson, an award-winning trumpet player, played the trumpet with Anderson and the two became close friends.

The Wilkinsons soon became convinced that the biblical Sabbath should be observed, but worried about the effect Sabbath-keeping might have on their business interests. They decided to go away for a weekend to try and decide what they would do, leaving Len Wilkinson, age 14, in charge at home. On Sabbath morning he directed the children to get ready and they attended Sabbath School and the church service at the Seventh-day Adventist church. When their parents returned home and learned what had happened, they decided that the family should become Seventh-day Adventists. Len Wilkinson and his parents, were baptized in April 1922⁷

Training

In 1924, Wilkinson left New Zealand to attend the Australasian Missionary College (now Avondale College), and in 1925 graduated from the biblical academic course, at that time the preparation for both ministry and teaching.⁸ He was president of the graduating class. While at the college, he played in the orchestra, as did Enid Lucy Hare (born July 17, 1905, in Stawell, Australia), youngest child of Robert Hare (1858-1953) and Henrietta Johnson (1864-1955).⁹ Enid Hare had also commenced her training in 1924, intending to become a school teacher. However, she did not graduate with Wilkinson at the end of 1925,¹⁰ as she had been asked to teach at the one-teacher church school at Quirindi, New South Wales, during that year.

Marriage

After graduation Wilkinson engaged in literature evangelism, working in New South Wales country towns during 1926.¹¹ At the end of that year, he was appointed to Western Australia, assisting Erwin E. Roenfeldt with an evangelistic program in Perth.¹² Enid Hare continued teaching, in Quirindi and Sydney (at Fairfield and Auburn), until the end of 1927. In February 1928, Enid Hare travelled to Western Australia where on April 5 she and Wilkinson were married in the Perth church.¹³ Subsequently, they were appointed to pastoral work caring for a small church group at Kellerberrin, east of Perth.¹⁴

Denominational Service

In 1929, the Wilkinsons returned to Perth, where their daughter, Valma June (1929-2008), was born on July 22, 1929.¹⁵ Shortly after moving back to Perth, they were appointed to Moora, north of Perth, and a few months later, again, reassigned, this time to be the principal of the church school at Gosnells, a suburb of Perth. After less than a year there, they were called to Fiji, where Len Wilkinson became principal of a boarding central school at Navuso in the Wainibuka Valley on Viti Levu, Fiji's largest island.¹⁶

The family travelled to Fiji in 1931, calling on the way at Len Wilkinson's parents' home in Hastings, New Zealand. While there, the strong Napier earthquake—which also damaged Hastings—of February 3, 1931, struck, delaying their onward travel.¹⁷ On arriving in Fiji, they travelled by launch and then on foot to their school at Navuso, arriving in the middle of February. No sooner had they arrived, however, than a severe cyclone brought flooding rains to the Wainibuka Valley and the river rose some 80 feet (25 meters).¹⁸ The flood lasted for more than two weeks, and when the mission president, E. B. Rudge, arrived by launch bringing needed supplies, Enid Wilkinson travelled back to Suva with him, and remained there until their son, Raymond Kenneth, was born.¹⁹

Len Wilkinson diligently learned Fijian with the assistance of a retired Fijian pastor who knew almost no English. He preached his first sermon in the Fijian language only six weeks after his arrival. He later became well known for his fluency in Fijian, and during the world war years was requested by the New Zealand government to carry out translation of news and letters from Fiji on a voluntary basis. However, while Fijian was used in the village and the school, as parents the Wilkinsons were strict about the use of English in their home. It was important that the children be equipped for their later return home.

The river was the transportation corridor for those living in the Wainibuka. In 1932, for example, Wilkinson, together with a number of other Church employees and some school students, floated down the river on a number of *bilibili*—large rafts of bamboo lashed together with a thatched house constructed on them for shelter from the elements—in order to attend the Fiji Mission meetings (*bose*) held on Nukulau Islands.

At the end of 1932, Wilkinson was appointed the first principal of a newly opened boarding school at Vatuvonu located on Fiji's second largest island, Vanua Levu.²⁰ The Navuso students and staff did not want to see the family leave. There was much weeping, for Wilkinson had proven to be a very popular teacher and principal.²¹ The Wilkinsons were at Vatuvonu for only two years, however. So well accepted was Len Wilkinson's leadership that he was appointed the principal of the Buresala training school, the oldest and most senior of the Church's training schools in Fiji. On his staff, as Bible Teacher, was Septimus Carr, who had opened the Buresala School in 1905 and who in 1908 was appointed as the first Seventh-day Adventist missionary to New Guinea. While at Buresala Enid engaged in the training of Fijian teachers as well as teaching her two older children. A third child, Beryl Maureen, was born in Suva.²²

On July 18, 1937, during meetings on Nukulau Island, Wilkinson was ordained to the gospel ministry.²³ Subsequently, at the beginning of 1938, he was appointed the district director of Viti Levu West. This district included much of the interior of Fiji's largest island. His work involved much trekking and travelling by horse,

living largely on native foods as he visited scattered villages.

In 1939, Wilkinson was appointed superintendent of the Fiji Mission and the family moved to the mission headquarters at Suvavou. Soon thereafter, Enid Wilkinson travelled to Australia where a son, Vernon Leonard, was born in Sydney.²⁴ Later that year, Len Wilkinson joined the family for furlough and was appointed as a Bible teacher at Avondale College. He engaged in Bible teaching until the end of 1940, but was asked to return to Fiji as superintendent in 1941.

World War II brought the threat of a Japanese invasion, or at least bombing, to Fiji. The Fiji government asked Wilkinson to organize air-raid shelters and first aid clinics for half of Suva. The head of the Methodist Mission in Fiji, a friend of Wilkinson, was asked to do the same for the other half of Suva. Each one organized six shelters. Then in January 1942, while Wilkinson was away visiting remote village churches, a New Zealand army officer delivered an official notice to Enid Wilkinson, commandeering their home to house 45 New Zealand soldiers. She was allowed 48 hours in which to pack and move her family. Enid Wilkinson realized that the New Zealand officer had arrived on the last bus trip for the day, and soon the traffic curfew would mean no vehicles could run. The officer faced many miles of walking in the night to return to his army camp. She explained the situation, and suggested he be a guest for the night. The following day, the family packed and moved into Len Wilkinson's small office, about 50 meters from their house. After Wilkinson returned home, they were able to move into the mission transit accommodation, where they remained until travelling to New Zealand in April 1942. While in New Zealand, Len Wilkinson had a goiter operation. The operation was only partially successful. Early in 1943, he was able to return to Fiji, but now had great difficulty in the tropical heat.²⁵ At the end of 1944, he was appointed principal of Longburn College in New Zealand.²⁶ He continued in that role for six years. However, in poor health, he resigned from denominational service and in 1951 went to live in Hastings, where he assisted his father, working in real estate and valuation.

Later Life

For the next 27 years, despite health difficulties, Len Wilkinson served as head elder of the Hastings church, at times also serving on the local conference and division executive committees. For the same 27 years Enid Wilkinson served the Hastings church as treasurer.

Throughout their lives Len and Enid Wilkinson gave willing service to God. In Fiji Len Wilkinson's fluency in the local language, his willingness to visit remote village groups, enter into village life, and discuss spiritual truths in language that was readily understood was long remembered. As a principal he was much loved by staff and students, and many later expressed appreciation for the influence he had on their lives.

In 1995, the couple moved to Bethesda Home and Hospital in Auckland, where Len Wilkinson died, aged 90, on August 10, 1997.²⁷ Following his death, Enid Wilkinson moved to a nursing home in Hamilton, New Zealand, to be closer to her two daughters. She died on May 25, 2006, a few weeks before she would have turned 101.²⁸

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NOTES

1. Much of the data in this biography is based on the personal knowledge of the author as a son of Len and Enid Wilkinson.
2. Leonard Victor Wilkinson Personal Service Records, South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives, folder: "Wilkinson, Leonard Victor," document: "Wilkinson, Leonard Victor."
3. Colin B. Wilkinson, "Wilkinson Family Tree," unpublished document compiled in 1995 by Leonard Wilkinson's younger brother, Colin Wilkinson, held in the personal collection of the author.
4. Leonard Victor Wilkinson and Enid Lucy Wilkinson, interviews with author between December 1987 and January 1988.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Leonard Victor Wilkinson Worker's Biographical Record, South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives, folder: "Wilkinson, Leonard Victor," document: "Biographical Information Blank."
8. Permanent academic record of Leonard Victor Wilkinson, Academic office, Avondale College of Higher Education, Australia.
9. Jill Johnson, *The Story of Joseph Hare of Kaeo and His Descendants* (Lower Hutt, New Zealand: Jill Johnson, 2009).
10. Permanent academic record of Enid Lucy Hare, Academic office, Avondale College of Higher Education, Australia.
11. W. G. Turner, "Council Proceedings," *Australasian Record*, September 14, 1925, 4.
12. "Distribution of Labour," *Australasian Record*, October 18, 1926, 34.
13. Leonard Victor Wilkinson and Enid Lucy Wilkinson, interviews with author between December 1987 and January 1988.
14. Ibid.
15. Leonard Victor Wilkinson Personal Service Records, South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives, folder: "Wilkinson, Leonard Victor," document: "Wilkinson, Leonard Victor."
16. Viola M. Rogers, "Outgoing Missionaries," *Australasian Record*, February 2, 1931, 8.
17. Enid L. Wilkinson, "A letter from the Earthquake Area." *Australasian Record*. March 9, 1931, 3.

18. Enid L. Wilkinson, "The Floods in Fiji," *Australasian Record*, March 9, 1931, 3; see also Simon McGee, Stephen W. Yeo, and Swastika Devi, "Flooding in the Fiji Islands Between 1840 and 2009.," accessed June 19, 2019, <https://www.riskfrontiers.com/pdf/Floods%20in%20Fiji%201840-2009%20-%20Risk%20Frontiers%20final.pdf>.
 19. Leonard Victor Wilkinson Personal Service Records, South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives, folder: "Wilkinson, Leonard Victor," document: "Wilkinson, Leonard Victor."
 20. Leonard V. Wilkinson, "New School at Buca Bay, Fiji," *Australasian Record*. September 4, 1933, 3- 4.
 21. Eva E. Edwards, "Wainibuka Intermediate School, Fiji," *Australasian Record*. February 13, 1933, 3.
 22. Leonard Victor Wilkinson Personal Service Records, South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives, folder: "Wilkinson, Leonard Victor," document: "Wilkinson, Leonard Victor."
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 25. A. M. Fraser, "Union Conference Annual Meeting," *Australasian Record*, December 11, 1944, 4.
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 27. Alvin Coltheart, "Leonard Victor Wilkinson obituary," *Record*, September 27, 1997, 14.
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