

Robbins, Andrew Joseph (1910–1996) and Ollie Mae (Robertson) (1910–2006)



Andrew Joseph Robbins family.

Photo courtesy of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Archives.

WILMAREE M. TORNALEJO, AND REMWIL R.
TORNALEJO

Wilmaree M. Tornalejo has a B.A. in Medical Laboratory Science (BMLS) from the Adventist University of the Philippines in 2016. She obtained her Doctor of Medicine degree from the Adventist University of the Philippines, College of Medicine in 2020. She is currently doing her post-graduate internship (PGI) at the Adventist Medical Center Bacolod.

Remwil R. Tornalejo is an associate professor in the Historical-Theological department of the International Institute of Advanced Studies Seminary (AIAS). Tornalejo has a B.A. in theology from Mountain View College, Valencia, Philippines, and M.P.S., M.Div., and M.Th. degrees from AIAS. He had served as a pastor, Literature Ministry Seminary dean and instructor at the South Philippine Union Conference. He had served as chair of the theology department of the South Philippine Adventist College. Tornalejo completed his D.Theol. from Theological Union (ATESEA). He is married to Marilou Manatad. They have four children.

Andrew Joseph Robbins was a pastor, Bible teacher, a pioneer missionary to China and the Philippines, a professor, a hospital chaplain, evangelist, and church administrator.

Early Life

Andrew was born on November 19, 1910, Morgantown, West Virginia, U.S.A., to Strawn M. Robbins and Oakie U. Christner.¹ The elder Robbins was a builder and a contractor who did major construction jobs in Pennsylvania and West Virginia.²

Andrew had one sister named Jean and two brothers, Donald and Leon. Leon later became a minister and a missionary, too.³ Andrew's early years were spent in Morgantown, West Virginia, and Connellsville, Pennsylvania.⁴

Through the influence of his godly parents, Robbins was converted into the Adventist faith in 1925 and was baptized in the same year by Elder W. M. Robbins, president of West Pennsylvania Conference⁵ during a camp meeting in Greensburg, Pennsylvania.⁶

Education and Marriage

Robbins attended Morgantown High School from 1923 to 1927. From 1927 until 1931, he attended Washington Missionary College, where he earned his B.A. He graduated as the senior class and student association president. In 1941 until 1942, he attended the University of Chicago where he finished his M.A. degree in Oriental Languages and Literature. Robbins also attended the SDA Theological Seminary and earned Doctoral units.⁷

He learned Latin in high school, completed 3 years of a 5-year Chinese language course; he also studied Japanese, Greek for 4 years, Hebrew for 3 years, German for 1 year, and French for 1 year.

Andrew Joseph Robbins was married to Ollie Mae Robertson, on July 28, 1931, at Takoma Park, Maryland. Frank H. Robbins, uncle of Andrew, who was then president of the Columbia Union Conference, officiated the marriage.⁸ Andrew and Ollie were parents to children—David and Linda Robbins.

Ollie was born on August 12, 1910, in Memphis, Tennessee to parents R. William Robertson, from Scotland but a U.S. citizen, and Jennie M. Atchlay, an American—both residents of Memphis Tennessee.⁹ Ollie grew up in an Adventist home and attended Church School at Nashville and Memphis. She attended Southern Junior College from 1923 until 1926, completing grades 10-12. She was baptized in the Adventist Church in 1925 at the Nashville Memorial Church in Nashville under Elder Kime. She started denominational work in the Potomac Conference in 1927 as a secretary. From 1927 until 1931, Ollie attended Washington Missionary College where she finished her B.A.¹⁰ She finished a secretarial course from Nelson's Business College.¹¹ After her marriage to Andrew Robbins, she continued working as a secretary of the Conference until they were called to mission service in China. She went back to work as a secretary of the conference in 1942 after they returned from China a year earlier.

Ministry

Robbins began his ministerial work in 1931 at the old West Pennsylvania Conference where he served as an intern and an evangelist. Starting that year until 1935, he served as district pastor in Johnstown, Altoona, and Indiana; he worked as conference district leader in Western Pennsylvania. He was ordained in 1935 in Western Pennsylvania by elders W. A. Spicer and M. G. Conger.¹²

After his ordination, he was called to serve as publishing department and home missionary department secretary in the Manchurian Union, China, from 1936 until 1937. He became the principal in Manchurian Union

Training Institute in 1937 and served as president of North Manchuria Mission until 1941.¹³ Because of World War II, the Robbins' were advised by the Asiatic Division to leave China.¹⁴

In 1941, they left for their home country, the U.S., for a furlough and to do graduate studies. After completing his M.A., Robbins continued his studies for a doctoral degree. He needed only to complete a thesis before he was called to serve as a teacher in the Department of Religion at Washington Missionary College from 1942 until 1950.¹⁵ While teaching, he also pastored the Arlington, Virginia Church.¹⁶

In 1950, Robbins was called back to China but was hindered from sailing because of political difficulties in the Far East. In that same year, he was elected president of the West Pennsylvania Conference, where he started his ministerial service.¹⁷ He served in that capacity from 1950 until 1958.

During Robbins' leadership, the Conference purchased and developed a new 150-acre summer camp site at Laurel Lake, Pennsylvania. The conference evangelistic programs experienced a lot of success, and many members were added and new churches were planted in various places within the conference's territory.¹⁸

In August 1958, Robbins was elected to serve as president of North Philippine Union Mission in the Far Eastern Division.¹⁹ He replaced Elder W. J. Hackett, who was elected to serve as president of the Atlantic Union Conference.²⁰ Andrew J. Robbins was president of NPUM from 1959 to 1963.²¹

During his tenure as president of NPUM, he was instrumental in the establishment and promotion of many church institutions and programs for the nurture of church members as well as outreach evangelism.²² In his time as president, he had an emphasis on soul-winning and shared this passion to the church workers.²³ He established the Chaplaincy department of all the major health institutions in the Union territory. He improved the Manila Sanitarium and Hospital and expanded the medical work in the northern part of Luzon through the opening of the Cagayan Valley Sanitarium and Hospital on March 16, 1959. The inauguration of the hospital was attended by local and national dignitaries from the Philippine government.²⁴

Robbins also developed the educational institutions in the North Philippine Union Mission including the Mt. Isarog Academy (now Naga View Adventist College). He initiated the reorganization of some church schools into multi-grade schools with the authorization of the Bureau of Private Schools.²⁵

He encouraged the church leaders and members to conduct more Vacation Bible Schools and to distribute literature to the public as a form of evangelism. He "prepared flannel graph pictures and mimeographed lessons and stories printed to promote Sabbath School evangelism in NPUM." He was also instrumental in the advancement of the Radio and TV and Bible Correspondence School Programs.²⁶

In the early part of 1964, T. C. Murdoch, then president of Mountain View College for the past eight years, was called to be the president of the North Philippine Union Mission, replacing Elder Robbins who was called by South China Island Union Mission to serve as president of the Hong Kong-Macao Mission, where he stayed until

his retirement in 1979. After their retirement, the Robbins stayed for two more years in Hong Kong and did voluntary mission work, serving as hospital chaplain, pastor, and teacher until 1981.²⁷

Later Life

Upon their return to the United States, the Robbins' settled in Grand Terrace, California, during the rest of their retirement days. They attended the SDA Chinese Church in Loma Linda. Andrew John Robbins died in Loma Linda, California, on August 3, 1996.²⁸ Mrs. Ollie Mae Robbins died on March 20, 2006.²⁹

Legacy

Elder and Mrs. Andrew Joseph Robbins will be remembered through their committed mission service in North America and in various fields in the Far East during the pioneering years of the Adventist Church in that part of the world. Robbins was a pioneer Adventist missionary in China and the Philippines. He was instrumental in the growth of Adventist Church membership in China and the North Philippine Union Mission through his passion and commitment to evangelism. During his missionary service in China, he set up training schools to train church workers. When he served the Philippine Union Mission, he created various evangelism projects. He was also instrumental in establishing and developing medical and educational institution within the area of NPUM.

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