

Caldwell, Robert Archibald (1879–1966) and Mary (Schowe) (c. 1879–1954)



LESTER DEVINE

Originally trained as a secondary history teacher, a career long Adventist educator, Lester Devine, Ed.D., has taught at elementary, secondary and higher education levels and spent more than three decades in elected educational leadership positions in two divisions of the world Church, NAD (1969-1982) and SPD (1982-2005). He completed his forty years of denominational service with a term as director of the Ellen G. White/Adventist Research Centre at Avondale University College in Australia where his life-long hobby of learning and presenting on Adventist heritage issues became his vocation.

Australian Robert Caldwell was a self-supporting literature evangelist who worked in Singapore, the Malay Peninsula, Thailand, and was the first Seventh-day Adventist missionary in the Philippines. He also worked in Hong Kong, China, and Australia eventually becoming a Bible worker and, for a short time, principal of Avondale College.

Born in 1879, Robert Caldwell and his Presbyterian mother, Jane (Nichols) Caldwell became Seventh-day Adventists in 1888 and became members of North Fitzroy Church in Melbourne, Australia.¹ Because of issues with the Sabbath, his father did not join the Church.² Caldwell attended the Australasian Missionary College, graduating in 1900, the year Ellen White left Australia. Robert later remembered that as he left Avondale, “almost the last words of Brother Palmer to me . . . were to the effect that I would meet with success in the backblocks.”³ He commenced literature evangelism in Victoria in 1901, by February that year working in Newstead and Avoca.⁴ Initially, he had very few resources. He remembered that at the beginning of his career, he had to borrow a half-crown from the state agent in order to be able to purchase food.⁵ He did well, however,

Robert and Mary Caldwell, October 29, 1907.

Photo courtesy of Adventist Heritage Centre, South Pacific Division.

and he was soon able to purchase a bicycle. He enthused: "This investment saved much in travelling expenses."⁶ In 1902 he transferred to Western Australia and continued in literature evangelism.⁷ In 1903 he was elected at the conference session as the canvassing agent for the Western Australia Conference.⁸ During that year, articles written by him began to appear in the *Union Conference Record*.⁹ Over the ensuing years, his articles and exploits would appear regularly in the pages of the union paper. In 1904 he was invited to enter mission service as a literature evangelist in Singapore,¹⁰ and he accompanied Pastor G. F. Jones to there. Initially he worked in Singapore, the Malay Peninsula, and Bangkok, selling *The Desire of Ages*.¹¹ He entered Manila with *Home Hand Book*, *The Coming King*, and *Patriarchs and Prophets* in Spanish.¹²

Robert Caldwell was the first Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) missionary to the Philippines.¹³ As a literature evangelist, he was self-supporting. He wrote: "The opportunity afforded in this work of being self-supporting . . . is certainly sufficient inducement—were there no other—for one to cheerfully and devotedly serve the Lord in this branch of the work for all time, and after eleven years thus engaged, this is my testimony and consecration in the eleventh and last hour of opportunity."¹⁴

Caldwell was joined in Manila in 1906 by Pastor J. L. McElhany (who later served as General Conference president) and in December 1908 by L. V. Finster.¹⁵ Meanwhile, Caldwell spent considerable time working in other countries in Asia during an extended period. For example, he was in Siam (modern Thailand) for a period during 1905.¹⁶ He also sold SDA literature in Hong Kong. While there, he met and welcomed on May 6, 1906, the first Seventh-day Adventist ministerial missionaries from Australia to work in China, Arthur and Evaline Allum.¹⁷ The following year found him in China traveling up the Yangtze River to cities including Chinkiang, Nanking, and Kukiang.¹⁸ Just before traveling to Australia for his marriage, he reached Beijing for a short time.¹⁹

Caldwell married Mary Schowe in the Stanmore church in Sydney, New South Wales, on Tuesday, October 29, 1907.²⁰ The service was conducted by Pastor Starr, who was assisted by Pastor Jesse Pallant. Mary was a sister of Charles Schowe, a highly respected teacher at the Australasian Missionary College for many years.²¹ Together, Robert and Mary traveled to the Philippines, embarking just a few weeks after their wedding.²² They remained there until 1913,²³ when they returned to Australia and stayed for almost two years, during which time their daughter, Roberta Frances, was born. She later became a Seventh-day Adventist School teacher and married Jack Bridge of Quirindi, New South Wales.²⁴

Caldwell supported the family during this time by canvassing in Victoria and New South Wales.²⁵ Then in 1915, he was invited to assist Pastor Smart in an evangelistic campaign in Dungog, New South Wales.²⁶ It is not recorded whether he received remuneration from the conference during this time. Given his philosophy of self-supporting service, he probably did not receive any wages but continued to canvass SDA literature from home to home.

The family returned to the Philippines in 1916.²⁷ They remained there until they finally finished their period of mission service in 1919.²⁸ During this time, Caldwell would often leave home for long periods of time, traveling

throughout the countries of Eastern Asia, visiting the people and engaging in literature evangelism, all the time as a self-supporting missionary.

On returning to Australia, Caldwell was appointed as the principal at Avondale College in early 1920.²⁹ While there, he assisted as a Bible teacher.³⁰ However, he remained in that role for only a short period, and before the end of 1921, he was invited to transfer to Tasmania as a Bible worker.³¹ In 1922 a son was born, David, who later became a Seventh-day Adventist School principal and musician.³²

Caldwell's sustentation record indicates that he worked for the Seventh-day Adventist Church for 26 years, with most of those years being in literature evangelism.³³ However, the records elsewhere seem to indicate that he worked for a longer period.³⁴ Eventually, poor health took its toll. Mary died in the Quirindi Hospital, New South Wales, on May 17, 1954.³⁵ Thirteen years earlier, she had suffered a severe stroke and was bedridden. Her husband had been her principal caregiver during those years.³⁶ Even so, as time and energy permitted, he did a lot of visitation in his community and had a list of people to whom he regularly mailed Adventist literature.

Caldwell lived long enough to know that there were nearly 100,000 church members in the Philippine archipelago; spectacular growth in just one lifetime from the seed that he had planted 60 years earlier.³⁷

Robert Caldwell died in the Royal Newcastle Hospital on December 11, 1966. He was 85 years of age.³⁸ The funeral service was conducted by Pastors A. J. Campbell and R. H. Abbott. He was buried in the Avondale Adventist Cemetery, Cooranbong, New South Wales, Australia.³⁹

SOURCES

Allum, F. A. "En Route to Honan, China." *Union Conference Record*, July 23, 1906.

Arrogante, F. M. "Growth of the Message in the Philippines." ARH, November 3, 1966.

"At 3.30 p.m. on Tuesday afternoon October 29 . . ." *Australasian Record*, November 11, 1907.

"Brother R. A. Caldwell . . ." *Australasian Record*, July 19, 1915.

"Brother R. A. Caldwell . . ." *Australasian Record*, April 5, 1920.

"Brother R. A. Caldwell . . ." *Australasian Record*, October 3, 1921.

Caldwell, David. "Robert Archibald Caldwell," MP3 recording housed in the Adventist Heritage Centre, Avondale College of Higher Education, Cooranbong, New South Wales, Australia.

Caldwell, R. A. "A Colporteur's Reminiscence." *Australasian Record*, October 2, 1911.

———. "A Colporteur's Reminiscence (Concluded)," *Australasian Record*, October 23, 1911.

———. "A Country Journey: To China's Capital." *Union Conference Record*, November 11, 1907.

———. "A Sabbath-keeper in Siam," *Union Conference Record*, September 15, 1905.

———. "Back in the Philippines." *Australasian Record*, May 15, 1916.

———. "Experiences on the Yangtse, China. No. 1." *Union Conference Record*, August 26, 1907.

———. "Experiences on the Yangtse, China. No. 2." *Union Conference Record*, September 2, 1907.

———. "Experiences on the Yangtse, China. No. 3." *Union Conference Record*, September 9, 1907.

———. "Sow Beside All Waters." *Union Conference Record*, November 15, 1903.

———. "Within Peking's Walls." *Union Conference Record*, November 18, 1907.

Campbell, A. J. "Robert Archibald Caldwell obituary." *Australasian Record and Advent World Survey*, January 30, 1967.

"Fifty years ago . . ." *Australasian Record and Advent World Survey*, May 3, 1954.

Hadfield, B. E. "Bridge-Caldwell." *Australasian Record*, November 6, 1939.

Jones, G. F. "The Circulation of Our Books in Singapore." *Union Conference Record*, October 21, 1907.

"Monthly Summary of Australasian Canvassing Work." *Union Conference Record*, September 1, 1902.

"Monthly Summary of Australasian Canvassing Work," *Union Conference Record*, December 1, 1901, 10.

"Monthly Summary of Australasian Canvassing Work," *Union Conference Record*, August 3, 1908.

"Our Canvassers." *Union Conference Record*, April 1, 1901.

Pallant, J. "West Australian Conference." *Union Conference Record*, November 1, 1903.

"Publishing and Canvassing." *Australasian Record*, November 12, 1928.

Robert Archibald Caldwell Sustentation Information. South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives.
Folder: "Caldwell, Robert Archibald." Document: "Caldwell, Robert Archibald Weekly Rates."

"Sister Caldwell in writing . . ." *Union Conference Record*, August 31, 1908.

Sterling, George L. "Mary Caldwell obituary." *Australasian Record and Advent World Survey*, June 7, 1954.

Stewart, A. G. "Charles Henry Schowe obituary." *Australasian Record*, June 23, 1952.

"The Colporteur." *Australasian Record*, December 8, 1913.

"The Colporteur." *Australasian Record*, March 2, 1914.

"The Colporteur." *Australasian Record*, November 2, 1914.

NOTES

1. R. A. Caldwell, "A Colporteur's Reminiscences," *Australasian Record*, October 2, 1911, 7.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. "Our Canvassers," *Union Conference Record*, April 1, 1901, 8; "Monthly Summary of Australasian Canvassing Work," *Union Conference Record*, December 1, 1901, 10.
5. Caldwell, "A Colporteur's Reminiscences."
6. Ibid.
7. "Monthly Summary of Australasian Canvassing Work," *Union Conference Record*, September 1, 1902, 7.
8. J. Pallant, "West Australian Conference," *Union Conference Record*, November 1, 1903, 4.
9. R. A. Caldwell, "Sow Beside All Waters," *Union Conference Record*, November 15, 1903, 6.
10. Caldwell, "A Colporteur's Reminiscences."
11. G. F. Jones, "The Circulation of Our Books in Singapore," *Union Conference Record*, October 21, 1907, 6.
12. R. A. Caldwell, "A Colporteur's Reminiscences (Concluded)," *Australasian Record*, October 23, 1911, 5-6; "Sister Caldwell in writing . . .," *Union Conference Record*, August 31, 1908, 7; A. J. Campbell, "Robert Archibald Caldwell Obituary," *Australasian Record and Advent World Survey*, January 30, 1967, 15.
13. "Fifty years ago . . .," *Australasian Record and Advent World Survey*, May 3, 1954, 16; F. M. Arrogante, "Growth of the Message in the Philippines," *ARH*, November 3, 1966, 55.
14. Caldwell, "A Colporteur's Reminiscences (Concluded)," 6.
15. Arrogante, "Growth of the Message," 55.
16. R. A. Caldwell, "A Sabbath-keeper in Siam," *Union Conference Record*, September 15, 1905, 6.
17. F. A. Allum, "En Route to Honan, China," *Union Conference Record*, July 23, 1906, 3-5.
18. R. A. Caldwell, "Experiences on the Yangtse, China. No. 1," *Union Conference Record*, August 26, 1907, 3; R. A. Caldwell, "Experiences on the Yangtse, China. No. 2," *Union Conference Record*, September 2, 1907, 2; R. A. Caldwell, "Experiences on the Yangtse, China. No. 3," *Union Conference Record*

, September 9, 1907, 2-3.

19. R. A. Caldwell, "Within Peking's Walls," *Union Conference Record*, November 18, 1907, 3; R. A. Caldwell, "A Country Journey: To China's Capital," *Union Conference Record*, November 11, 1907, 2.
20. "At 3.30 p.m. on Tuesday afternoon October 29 . . .," *Union Conference Record*, November 11, 1907, 8.
21. A. G. Stewart, "Charles Henry Schowe obituary," *Australasian Record*, June 23, 1952, 7.
22. "At 3.30 p.m. . . ."
23. "The Colporteur," *Australasian Record*, December 8, 1913, 6.
24. B. E. Hadfield, "Bridge-Caldwell," *Australasian Record*, November 6, 1939, 7.
25. "The Colporteur," *Australasian Record*, March 2, 1914, 6; "The Colporteur," *Australasian Record*, November 2, 1914, 6; David Caldwell, "Robert Archibald Caldwell," MP3 recording housed in the Adventist Heritage Centre, Avondale College of Higher Education, Cooranbong, New South Wales, Australia.
26. "Brother R. A. Caldwell . . .," *Australasian Record*, July 19, 1915, 8.
27. R. A. Caldwell, "Back in the Philippines," *Australasian Record*, May 15, 1916, 2.
28. A perusal of the "Monthly Summary of Australasian Canvassing Work" in the *Union Conference Record Australasian Record* between 1908 and 1915 indicates that the family was mostly in Manila; see, for example, "Monthly Summary of Australasian Canvassing Work," *Union Conference Record*, August 3, 1908.
29. "Brother R. A. Caldwell . . .," *Australasian Record*, April 5, 1920, 8.
30. "Brother R. A. Caldwell . . .," *Australasian Record*, October 3, 1921, 8.
31. Ibid.
32. David Caldwell, "Robert Archibald Caldwell."
33. Robert Archibald Caldwell Sustentation Information, South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives, Folder: "Caldwell, Robert Archibald," Document: "Caldwell, Robert Archibald Weekly Rates."
34. "Publishing and Canvassing," *Australasian Record*, November 12, 1928, 4.
35. George L. Sterling, "Mary Caldwell obituary," *Australasian Record and Advent World Survey*, June 7, 1954, 7.

36. Ibid.

37. Arrogante, "Growth of the Message."

38. A. J. Campbell, "Robert Archibald Caldwell obituary," *Australasian Record and Advent World Survey*, January 30, 1967, 15.

39. Ibid.

encyclopedia.adventist.org is an official website of the [Seventh-day Adventist World Church](#)

© 2020 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists 12501 Old Columbia Pike Silver Spring , MD 20904 USA 301-680-6000