

Roennfeldt, Clarence Edwin (1902–1991)

RAY ROENNFELDT

Ray Roennfeldt, Ph.D. (Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, U.S.A.) is presently Vice-Chancellor of Avondale University College in New South Wales, Australia. An Australian by birth, Roennfeldt has worked for the Church for almost 50 years as a nurse, pastor, missionary, educator, and administrator. He is the author or editor of several books as well as journal articles and book chapters. He is married to Carmel, a religious studies teacher, and they have two adult children and one grandchild.

Clarence (Clarrie) Roennfeldt spent the majority of his life as a very active lay preacher and church worker in the West Australian Conference. However, as a young adult he was involved in mission service in Burma and then in colporteur ministry in South Australia.

Early Life

Clarence Edwin Roennfeldt was born on April 8, 1902, into a farming family at Greenock, SA. His parents were Erhardt Franz Wilhelm Rönfeldt and Antonie Florentine (Jaensch). Clarence was the third child and a younger brother of Erwin E. Roenfelt.¹ He and his school-age siblings attended the local German school until the outbreak of World War I, when it became compulsory for all schooling to be conducted in English.

The family were very active in their local Lutheran church, and it was the expectation that Erwin (at least) would attend Lutheran seminary in Germany. However, around 1915 Clarence's immediate family became Seventh-day Adventists through the ministry of Daniel Wall; something that would change the course of his life. The family encountered very considerable opposition from relatives and erstwhile friends. At age 13 Clarence was one of the founding members of the Barossa Valley church at Nuriootpa in South Australia.²

Education and Mission Service

The early 1920s saw Clarence, following in the footsteps of his brother Erwin, at the Australasian Missionary College (now Avondale University College) undertaking ministry studies. However, he did not complete the course, for during a chapel service by W. W. Fletcher (the then president of the Southern Asia Division) a number of students became convicted that the "time was short" and that they should leave their studies and go into mission service. Clarence was one of them, and leaving his fiancé behind, by November 14, 1922, he had arrived in Rangoon (now Yangon), Burma (now Myanmar) to take up English colporteur work. Life was not easy selling Adventist English-language books to mainly Karen-speaking people, but for the next few years he engaged in this work, traveling mainly by bullock cart to the towns and villages of Burma.³

The Middle Years

On his return to Australia, Clarence spent quite a number of years in colporteur work in South Australia, traveling far and wide across the state, usually by bicycle, selling *The Great Controversy* and other Adventist literature.⁴ During this period he also assisted with a number of evangelistic tent missions⁵ before moving to Western Australia, where his brother, Erwin, was in church administration.



Clarence and Faith Roennfeldt on their wedding day in 1942.
Photo courtesy of Ray Roennfeldt.

Arriving in Western Australia, Clarence engaged in sales work for various businesses, all the while preaching regularly and taking Bible studies with some of the contacts he made. At that stage World War II caught up with him, and he was drafted into the Australian Army medical corps. Again, on weekends off he spent time in the local churches close to where he was stationed. At this point in his life (age forty) he met and married Faith Logue in 1942, and after the war he engaged in farming in the Harvey area. For a brief interlude in the 1950s he was employed as a pastor in the wheat belt town of Narrogin before returning to the farm in the Harvey region.

In 1958 Clarence and Faith moved with their family to the Margaret River area in the southwest of Western Australia. Clarence soon found that there were just a few Adventists in the area that met occasionally in a local hall. He very quickly became the leader of the church company, which began meeting each week in the local Congregationalist church. Because most of the members were dairy farmers, Sabbath School did not begin until 11:00 a.m., and often the church service did not conclude until about 2:00 p.m. Clarence was tireless in following up Bible study interests and former Adventists, and a number of new families swelled the membership of the church company to the point that it was organized as a church. In addition he, along with the whole family, traveled to many of the other churches and companies across the southwest, where Clarence filled preaching appointments. He was a popular and well-prepared speaker, although his family often referred to his long sermons as the “everlasting gospel.” During this time he was, for many years, a member of the executive committee of the West Australian Conference.

Retirement

Well into his 70s Clarence retired from farming, but not from preaching, continuing an active preaching ministry into his 80s. He and Faith retired to the town of Busselton, where he spent his final years in his theological library, in gardening, and in visiting neighbors and friends, before passing to his rest early in 1991 at the age of 88.

Clarence Roennfeldt always had a heart for mission and service, something that is well illustrated by the fact that he shared that vision with his friends and family. Clarence and Faith had five children—Lynette, Ray, Peter, Philip, and Julia—four of them having worked in mission service in Papua New Guinea for a total of more than 20 years; two of them are pastors; three of them trained as nurses; and two of them have doctorates in theology or ministry⁶

SOURCES

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NOTES

1. Roger Teusner, *Family History of Christian Heinrich Rönnfeldt: 1799-1971* ([Adelaide, South Australia]: Lutheran Press, 1971), 44.?
2. D. N. Wall, “Work for Germans in South Australia,” *Australasian Record*, March 8, 1915, 4; “South Australian Conference,” *Australasian Record*, April 24, 1916, 2; Monica D. Nash, “Barossa’s Bounty,” *Adventist Record*, May 2, 2015, 8–10; Frank E. Wall and Ava G. Wall, *Uncertain Journey: Adventist Workers With a Mennonite Heritage* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1974), 154–156.?
3. For his own description of his life in Burma, see Clarence E. Roennfeldt, “Greetings From Burma,” *The Missionary Leader*, February 1924, 1, 2; and for some of his Burma stories, see Goldie Down, “When the Leopard Came to Call,” *Guide*, November 21, 1979, 6–10.?
4. His *Great Controversy* “prospectus” (in the possession of Ray Roennfeldt), which constitutes a partial version of the book along with a number of foldout covers to illustrate the various available bindings. In the back of the book are listed the names and addresses of people who had purchased the book, along with the binding that they had chosen and the expected delivery date. Many of the addresses are from the Riverland area of South Australia.?
5. Clarence’s photo album (in the possession of Ray Roennfeldt) has photos of himself outside a tent advertising evangelistic meetings by Louis F. Were and him.?
6. Note that some of the details of Clarence Roennfeldt’s life are not documented except via family memories.?

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