



R. C. Wangerin and Theodora S. Wangerin

Photo courtesy of Kuk Heon Lee.

## Wangerin, Rufus Conrad (1883–1917) and Theodora (Scharffenberg) (1888–1978)

---

### KUK HEON LEE

Kuk Heon Lee graduated from Sahmyook University (B.A.), Newbold College (M.A.), and Sahmyook University (Ph.D.). From 1990 to 2009, he served as a pastor at Korean Union Conference. In 2010, he joined Sahmyook University as a lecturer and professor at the Theology Department. His research and teaching interests are in Church History. He wrote several books and published several papers on the subject. Currently, he is also the Dean of Planning at Sahmyook University.

---

Rufus C. Wangerin ( , Wang, A-Shi) and Theodora S. Wangerin ( , Wang, Dae-A) were a missionary couple who led the missionary work of the Korean Adventist Church in the early days. R. C. Wangerin served as a missionary in

the South mission field for seven years before returning to the United States due to pulmonary tuberculosis. His wife, Theodora Wangerin, came back to Korea after her husband's death and devoted herself to Korean missionary work for almost forty years. She served as the secretary of Sabbath School, the secretary of the Young People's Missionary Volunteer Department, the editor-in-chief of the Korean Publishing House, and the director of Bible Correspondence School, Korea.

## Background

R. C. Wangerin was born on November 11, 1883, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.<sup>1</sup> In his seventeenth year, he united with the Seventh-day Adventist Church. After entering the Adventist Church under the influence of his mother who accepted the faith of Adventism, he studied theology at Battle Creek College. At that time he earned tuition while working as a Call Boy at Battle Creek Hospital. After graduating from college, he worked as a colporteur and the gospel ministry at the Missionary Department of Wisconsin. He was recommended as a Korean missionary in 1909 while serving as a licentiate gospel worker.<sup>2</sup> He volunteered as a Korean missionary and married Theodora, who worked with him in the same church in May 1909, four months before leaving the United States.

Theodora S. Wangerin was born on December 17, 1888, in St. Louis, Missouri.<sup>3</sup> She grew up in the Adventist Church from the age of 12 following the beliefs of her parents who accepted the faith of Adventism in 1900. Her elder sister, Mimi Scharffenberg, was the first female missionary to enter Korea in 1907. Theodora was getting a lot of news about Korea due to her sister's influence. While serving as a female Bible worker at the Wisconsin Conference, she married R. C. Wangerin for Korean missionary work.<sup>4</sup>

## Ministry in Korea

R. C. Wangerin and Theodora S. Wangerin left the United States in September 1909 and arrived in Seoul, where the headquarters of the Korean Mission is located, on October 8.<sup>5</sup> The leaders of the Korean Mission held the Worker's Institute in Seoul in February 1910, where the leaders made a resolution to divide Korea into four missionary areas (Central, West, South, and East Sea Coast). In particular, in this resolution, R. C. Wangerin was in charge of the South mission field and should have moved to Kyungsan, which was its headquarters.<sup>6</sup> However, he could not secure funds to establish a missionary headquarters in the mission field, so he stayed in Seoul for about a year and moved to Kyungsan with evangelist Kim Kyu-hyuk in 1911.<sup>7</sup>

In the summer of 1911, the Korean Mission received funding from the General Conference (GC) and purchased about one acre of land under Mt. Seongam in Kyungsan-eup, Kyungsangbuk-do.<sup>8</sup> After purchasing the land, R. C. Wangerin and his wife came down to Kyungsan on August 29 with several Korean workers.<sup>9</sup> They set up their first tent on the land and began missionary work. R. C. Wangerin led an evangelical meeting there with Korean workers to gather church members. In addition, they began building houses for missionary headquarters and a

private house and completed them on November 19, 1911. In February 1912 a Korean style house was built to be used as a chapel and a guest house for Korean workers.<sup>10</sup> After constructing the buildings, they organized a first Sabbath School in the South Mission Field with 30 members of the Sabbath School, including 10 church members who were baptized.<sup>11</sup>

R. C. Wangerin held the second evangelical meeting in Kyungsan for five weeks around March 1912. At this series of evangelism, 18 people accepted Adventism and began to observe the seventh-day Sabbath.<sup>12</sup> He sent Korean workers to Kyungsang-do such as Daegu, Dongnae, and Busan for missionary work in the South Mission Field. In 1914 Korean workers were sent to Kanggyeong and Jincheon for missionary work in Chungcheong-do, and Keun-Eok Lee and Seok-Young Kim were sent to Kim Jae and Naju for missionary work in Jeolla-do.<sup>13</sup> Due to his active missionary policy, missionary work of the Korean Adventist Church began even in difficult environments in the South Mission Field.

In May 1915 the first General Meeting of the Asiatic Division of the GC was held in Shanghai, China, under the guidance of Arthur Daniels, the president of the GC. At this General Meeting, R. C. Wangerin and H. A. Oberg were ordained as pastors.<sup>14</sup> As an ordained pastor, he carried out missionary work in the South Mission Field of Korea with special passion. However, when he was diagnosed with pulmonary tuberculosis in the fall of 1914, his health began to deteriorate. At that time Korea had a high risk of getting sick because of its poor hygiene environment. In 1916 his health condition worsened, and to make matters worse, the youngest daughter of the three children born in Korea died of illness and was buried in Kyungsan.<sup>15</sup>

In July 1916, a month after the death of his youngest daughter, R. C. Wangerin returned to the United States with his family to treat tuberculosis. He and his family came to Colorado Springs, Colorado, one of the places where James White recuperated, and lived there to recuperate his strength. However, his illness did not show any improvement, and he died a year later on the morning of June 1, 1917.<sup>16</sup> At the young age of 33, he fell asleep in the arms of the Lord, leaving his wife and two children behind.

## Ministry of Theodora Wangerin

In December 1917, six months after her husband's death, Theodora S. Wangerin took her two children back to Korea and succeeded her husband's missionary work.<sup>17</sup> One of the reasons she came back to Korea was that her older sister, Mimi Scharffenberg, had deteriorated in health. Mimi Scharffenberg returned to the United States in January 1919 and was hospitalized in the Adventist Sanitarium in Washington D.C., but failed to overcome her illness and fell asleep in Jesus on December 19, 1919.<sup>18</sup> Theodora S. Wangerin, who lost her husband and her sister, worked harder on missionary work in Korea, mourning their deaths.

Theodora Wangerin was appointed secretary of the Sabbath School Department at the first General Meeting of the Chosen Union Mission held in May 1919.<sup>19</sup> The department was originally in charge of his older sister, Mimi Scharffenberg, but because she returned to the United States to treat her disease, her younger sister Theodora

Wangerin took over the role. When Pastor Howard Lee, an educational missionary, temporarily returned to the United States in 1921 due to health problems, too, she also served as secretary of the Young People's Missionary Volunteer Department where he was in charge.<sup>20</sup>

It was until 1924 that she concurrently served as secretary of the Sabbath School Department and the YPMV Department. At the fourth General Meeting of the Chosen Union Mission held in May 1925, as Pastor Howard Lee returned from the United States, the position of secretary of the YPMV Department was entrusted to him again, and Theodora Wangerin only served as secretary of the Sabbath School Department.<sup>21</sup> She served in the position for 21 years until Young-Seop Oh was appointed as the new secretary of the Sabbath School Department at the eleventh General Meeting of the Chosen Union Mission held in March 1939.<sup>22</sup>

In February 1933 the eighth General Meeting of the Chosen Union Mission was held, and the Home Commission Department was newly established. Theodora Wangerin served as secretary of the Sabbath School Department and also served as secretary of the newly organized Home Commission Department.<sup>23</sup> As the head of this department, she published a booklet titled "Home Lesson" to enlighten the family life as a desirable Adventist home.<sup>24</sup> In addition, she continued to publish articles related to the "Christian Home" in *Shi-jo* (*Korean Signs of Times*) and *Kyo-hoi-chi-nam* (*Church Compass*).<sup>25</sup> Like the Sabbath School Department, she took charge of the Home Commission Department until 1939.

Theodora Wangerin succeeded her sister's ministry and served as editor of the Korean Publishing House. She was appointed as the editor when her predecessor, Pastor E. J. Urquhart, returned home in 1923 for the sabbatical year and served until 1927. E. J. Urquhart returned to Korea in 1928 and served as the editor again, and in February 1932, he took office as the director of the West Chosen Conference. As a result, the position of the editor was again entrusted to Theodora Wangerin. She served as editor until 1939.<sup>26</sup>

As an editor Theodora Wangerin made great efforts to develop the church's official magazines, *Shi-jo* and *Kyo-hoi-chi-nam*. She also wrote and posted a lot of articles related to "Home Ministry." In particular, she focused on translating to publish Ellen White's books. She translated *Acts of Jesus Christ* (1932), *Councils on the Sabbath School Work* (1933), *Great Controversy I* (1934), *Great Controversy II* (1936), and *Steps to Christ* (1936).<sup>27</sup>

In 1940 Japan prepared for the Pacific War against the United States. Accordingly, the General Conference ordered the missionaries working in Korea to withdraw to their home country, and the missionaries withdrew to the United States from November 1940. According to this situation, Theodora Wangerin left Korea and returned to the United States on December 10, 1940.<sup>28</sup> After 1945 when the war ended, missionaries began to return to Korea, and Theodora Wangerin also returned on June 26, 1947, continuing to serve as the editor of the Korean Publishing House.<sup>29</sup> As soon as she returned, she solved legal issues and began re-issuing *Shi-jo* on October 20, 1947.<sup>30</sup> In addition, in 1948, books such as *Steps to Christ* and the *Light of Prophecy* were published, and in 1949, the *Crisis of the Last Days* was published.<sup>31</sup>

After returning to Korea, the most remarkable thing she did was organizing the Voice of Prophecy Free Bible Correspondence School. She translated textbooks from English into Korean to start the Bible Correspondence School in Korea. In January 1948 the Bible Correspondence School was organized, and this project was promoted in earnest.<sup>32</sup> With the dedicated activities of her and the school's staff, more than fifteen hundred people enrolled in the course in a year, and 380 people completed the course on March 19, 1949.<sup>33</sup> This work was a great success in the mission of the Korean Adventist Church. The ministry of this Bible Correspondence School became the last missionary work she conducted in Korea.

## Later Life

On June 25, 1950 the Korean War broke out suddenly. Theodora Wangerin, along with other missionaries, evacuated to Japan by plane at 2 p.m. on June 27.<sup>34</sup> She waited for the day to return to Korea while doing missionary work in Japan. During her stay in Japan, Theodora Wangerin called the editorial staffs of the Korean Publishing House to Yokohama, Japan, where she continued to publish the textbooks of the Sabbath School lessons and for the Bible Correspondence School and *Shi-jo*.<sup>35</sup> While she devoted herself to the publishing ministry and the Bible Correspondence School ministry during this time, she returned to the United States in mid-June 1952 when she was old enough to retire.<sup>36</sup>

She came to Korea with her husband in 1909 and began missionary work. In June 1952, 42 years later, she retired from missionary work and returned to the United States. She served in the ministry for the longest time among missionaries active in Korea, and her stay in Korea reached 36 years. After returning home from missionary work in Korea, she spent her later years in California and died on March 19, 1978 at the age of 89 in Reading, California.<sup>37</sup>

---

### SOURCES

Butterfield, C. L. "A New Mission Station in South." *ARH*, October 5, 1911.

Butterfield, C. L. "Harvest Time in Korea." *ARH*, December 9, 1909.

Butterfield, C. L. "Korea." *ARH*, November 25, 1909.

Butterfield, C. L. "The Death of Sister Scharffenberg." *Asiatic Division Outlook*, March 1-15, 1920.

Butterfield, C. L. "Training in New Recruits." *ARH*, April 21, 1910.

*Church Compass*. June 1919; June 1921; July 1925; September 1925; March 1933; September 1933; July 1937; June 1939; February 1941; October 1947; May 1949; February 1950; December 1951; July 1952.

Daniells, A. G. "The Asiatic Division Conference." *ARH*, August 26, 1915.

Kim, Jae Shin. "A Study on the Work of Korean Christian Culture." a thesis of Kyunghee University, 1968.

Lee, Frederich. "Fifteen Minutes to Pack." *ARH*, September 7, 1950.

Lee, Yung Lin. *A Comprehensive Study in the History of the Adventist Church in Korea*. Seoul: Sun Myung Cultural Press, 1968.

"Missionary Sailings." *ARH*, November 29, 1917.

Oh, Man Kyu. *History of One Hundred Years of Korean SDA, 1904~1945*. Seoul: Korean Publishing House, 2010.

*Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*. Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1909.

Wangerin, R. C. "From New Mission Station in South." *ARH*, March 14, 1912.

Wangerin, R. C. "Seoul, Korea." *ARH*, December 29, 1910.

Wangerin, R. C. "Special Effort in Kyungsan." *ARH*, May 16, 1912.

"Wangerin, Rufisu Conrad," obituary. *ARH*, July 19, 1917.

Wangerin, Theodora. "Literature Work in Korea." *ARH*, April 8, 1948.

---

## NOTES

1. "Wangerin, Rufus Conrad," obituary, *ARH*, July 19, 1917, 23.
2. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association., 1909), 53.
3. Because she was Mimi Scharffenberg's younger sister, her birthplace can be seen as the same as Mimi's birthplace. C. L. Butterfield, "The Death of Sister Scharffenberg," *Asiatic Division Outlook*, March 1-15, 1920, 11.
4. C. L. Butterfield, "Korea," *ARH*, November 25, 1909, 11.
5. C. L. Butterfield, "Harvest Time in Korea," *ARH*, December 9, 1909, 11.
6. C. L. Butterfield, "Training in New Recruits," *ARH*, April 21, 1910, 13.
7. R. C. Wangerin, "Seoul, Korea," *ARH*, December 29, 1910, 15.
8. Butterfield, "Korea," 11.
9. C. L. Butterfield, "A New Mission Station in South," *ARH*, October 5, 1911, 24.
10. R. C. Wangerin, "From New Mission Station in South," *ARH*, March 14, 1912, 13.

11. *Church Compass*, September 1925, 1.
12. R. C. Wangerin, "Special Effort in Kyungsan," *ARH*, May 16, 1912, 14.
13. Man Kyu Oh, *History of One Hundred Years of Korean SDA, 1904-1945* (Seoul: Korean Publishing House, 2010), 175, 176.
14. A. G. Daniells, "The Asiatic Division Conference," *ARH*, August 26, 1915, 5. Man Kyu Oh, 151.
15. Man Kyu Oh, 176.
16. "Wangerin, Rufus Conrad," obituary.
17. "Missionary Sailings," *ARH*, November 29, 1917, 24.
18. C. L. Butterfield, "The Death of Sister Scharffenberg," *Asiatic Division Outlook*, March 1-15, 1920, 11.
19. *Church Compass*, June 1919, 5, 6.
20. *Church Compass*, June 1921, 15.
21. *Church Compass*, July 1925, 28, 29.
22. *Church Compass*, June 1939, 26, 27.
23. *Church Compass*, March 1933, 45, 46.
24. *Church Compass*, September 1933, 18.
25. *Church Compass*, July 1937, 11.
26. Man Kyu Oh, 349.
27. Jae Shin Kim, "A Study on the Work of Korean Christian Culture," a thesis of Kyunghee University, 1968, 167-175.
28. *Church Compass*, February 1941, 16.
29. Yung Lin Lee,
30. *Church Compass*, October 1947, 16. Theodora Wangerin, "Literature Work in Korea," *ARH*, April 8, 1948, 24.
31. *Church Compass*, February 1950, 19, 20.

32. Wangerin, "Literature Work in Korea," 24.
33. *Church Compass*, May 1949, 16.
34. Frederich Lee, "Fifteen Minutes to Pack," *ARH*, September 7, 1950, 4.
35. *Church Compass*, December 1951, 95.
36. *Church Compass*, July 1952, 54.
37. *ARH*, April 13, 1978, see [here](#).

---

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