



James "Pat" Arthur Bowen Blanch

Photo courtesy of Lester Devine.

Blanch, James Arthur Bowen (1908–1982)

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.

James "Pat" Arthur Bowen Blanch, who ministered to indigenous people in Australia at Mona Mona, in North New South Wales, and later at Kuranda, was born at Coffs Harbour in New South Wales (NSW), Australia, on November 12, 1908.¹ As he grew into adulthood, he developed a number of practical skills, listing on his biographical record that he was a shop assistant, miner, timber worker, saw miller, concrete worker, farmer, and dairy hand at different times.² During the depression of the early 1930s, searching for work, he moved north from Sydney traveling by horse and sulky. He passed through the small town of Cooranbong and there made his first contact with Seventh-day Adventists. He was a heavy drinker, chain smoker, and swearer working in the Sydney Markets with his sister Adelaide on a fruit and vegetable stall, where he received an invitation to attend an evangelistic crusade being conducted by George Burnside in Sydney. One night after attending the program, he was smoking his last cigarette in bed when he promised that he would give up the drinking, smoking, and gambling and swearing if God would take it from him. He woke up the next morning and never smoked, drank, or gambled again. His swearing also vanished.³ He then had Bible studies with Pastors Naden and Battye and was baptized in 1937 by Pastor Walter E. Battye.⁴

Wishing to attend Avondale College, Pat enrolled at the college in 1939, self-financing his education by cherry picking and working in the college dairy and delivering milk to the village by horse and cart right through until 1945.⁵ He graduated from the building construction course, but although he studied Bible subjects, it does not appear that he graduated from the ministerial course because of advice he was given with respect to his advancing age. He was 36 at the time.⁶

On April 5, 1945, Blanch married Gwendoline Wright,⁷ who had been born on September 22, 1921,⁸ in Timaru, New Zealand, and had completed her nursing training at Sydney Adventist Hospital.⁹ Pat and Gwen Blanch's first appointment was to Mona Mona Mission in North Queensland, where Pat worked in the sawmill and on the farm for six years.¹⁰ Apparently, that was not all he did. In a handwritten note on a biographical record, he notes that in 1947 he had 7 persons baptized; 1948, 8 persons; and 1949, "53 souls going forward into baptism."¹¹ During their time in Mona Mona, the Blanch's four children were born in Mareeba Hospital: David Dudley, Dawn Esther (Hasler/Boag), Adele (Martens/Goldberg/Cooper) and Robyn (McCullough).

In 1951 the family moved to Wahroonga and there gave 12 years of service with Pat working as the caretaker and courier at the Australasian Division Office. With the closure of the Mona Mona Mission in 1962, they returned to North Queensland at the beginning of 1963 to work closely with the indigenous people in the district around Kuranda where Mona Mona had been located. Pat Blanch was regarded as a person who was "in tune with their needs."¹² After 3 years at Kuranda, he was invited to transfer to the North New South Wales

Conference. There he continued his ministry with Aboriginal people, locating in the Armidale district for 2 years, Moree for 5 years, and Gunnedah/Coonabarabran for 18 months¹³ until his retirement due to failing health on June 30, 1974.¹⁴ Shortly before his retirement, Pat Blanch was ordained at Tamworth on September 18, 1973.¹⁵

At the age of 65 and having suffered a number of heart attacks, Pat retired with Gwen to Alstonville, near Lismore, NSW.¹⁶ They remained a short time in Alstonville before they sold their property and moved back to Kuranda so they could engage in voluntary ministry with the indigenous population of the area. They remained living there until just before Pat died on September 28, 1982.¹⁷ A funeral service was conducted in the Sydney Adventist Hospital Chapel by Pastors H. C. Barritt, R. A. Vince, and L. R. Thrift, and he was buried in the Avondale Adventist Cemetery, Cooranbong, New South Wales.¹⁸

When he heard of his death, Mr. P. Killoran, Director of Aboriginal and Island Advancement in Queensland, wrote: "The name of Pat Blanch will be remembered throughout North Queensland for the man he was, the work he did, his dedication, loyalty and devotion to Almighty God, and especially by the Aboriginal people of the Cairns Hinterland, particularly in the Kuranda area. He is one of the very few about whom it can honestly be said that he will not and cannot be replaced."¹⁹

When they learned that Pat Blanch's life had come to an end, two senior Aboriginal leaders in Townsville commented, "We loved Pastor Blanch. When we get to heaven we're going to live next to him."²⁰

Gwen married Lloyd Sawtell on October 26, 1986, and lived in Alstonville.²¹ She died on May 27, 1997.²²

SOURCES

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"Tribute to Pastor Pat Blanch by Mr. P. J. Killoran, Director, Department of Aboriginal and Island Advancement, Queensland." *Australasian Record*, November 20, 1982.

NOTES

1. James A. B. Blanch Service Records, South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives, Folder: "Blanch, James A. B.," Document: "Personal Service Record." A number of small items of fact were clarified in an interview between David Blanch and Barry Oliver, Cooranbong, NSW, Australia, on January 15, 2017.
2. James A. B. Blanch Biographical Records, South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives, Folder: "Blanch, James A. B.," Document: "Biographical Information Blank, Received 13 February 1946."
3. Blanch interview.
4. Lyndon R. Thrift, "Life Sketch of Pastor J. A. B. Blanch," *Australasian Record*, November 20, 1982, 13.
5. Blanch interview.
6. James A. B. Blanch Biographical Records, "Biographical Information Blank, Received 13 February 1946."
7. James A. B. Blanch Service Records, South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives, Folder: "Blanch, James A. B.," Document: "Personal Service Record."
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. James A. B. Blanch Biographical Records, South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives, Folder: "Blanch, James A. B.," Document: "Biographical Information Blank, March 8, 1950."

12. Glynn Litster, "The Aborigines," in *Seventh-day Adventists in the South Pacific 1885–1985*, ed. N. P. Clapham (Warburton, Victoria: Signs Publishing Company, n.d.), 193.
13. James A. B. Blanch Service Records, South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives, Folder: "Blanch, James A. B.," Document: "Conference Worker's Evangelistic Record."
14. James A. B. Blanch Sustentation Records, South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives, Folder: "Blanch, James A. B.," Document: "Pr J. A. B. Blanch North NSW Conf."
15. Thrift, "Life Sketch," 14.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. H. C. Barritt, "James Arthur Bowen Blanch obituary," *Australasian Record*, November 20, 1982, 14.
19. "Tribute to Pastor Pat Blanch by Mr. P. J. Killoran, Director, Department of Aboriginal and Island Advancement, Queensland," *Australasian Record*, November 20, 1982, 14.
20. Thrift, "Life Sketch."
21. F. Pearce, "Sawtell-Blanch," *Australasian Record*, November 29, 1986, 14.
22. Ian Johnson, Grant Burton, and Frank Pearce, "Gwendoline Bertha (Blanch) Sawtell obituary," *Australasian Record*, June 28, 1997, 14.

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