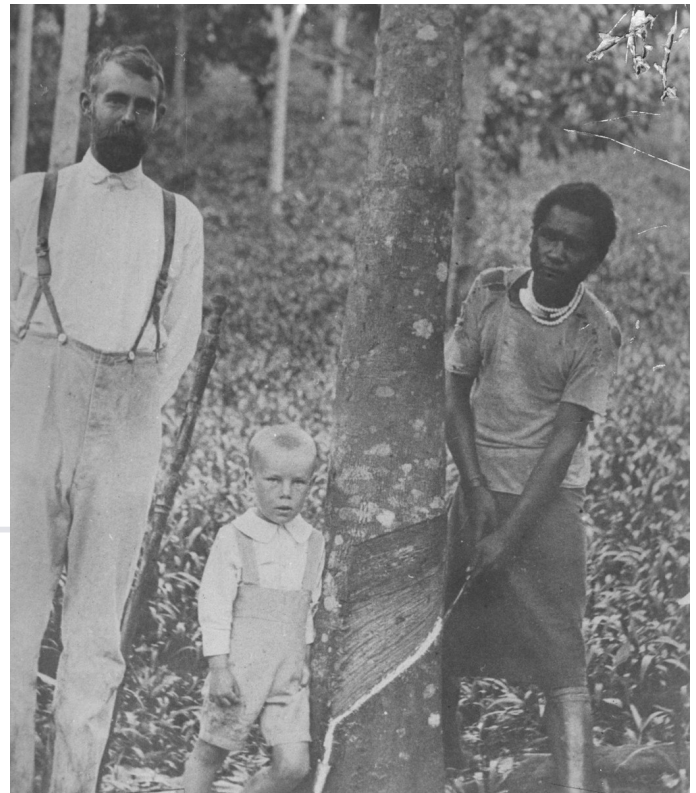


Lawson, Arthur Norman (1880–1965) and Enid (Gordon)

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.



Arthur Lawson and son Newton with an unknown plantation worker, Bisiatabu, Papua, c. 1915.

Photo courtesy of South Pacific Division Heritage Centre.

Arthur Lawson was an early missionary to Papua New Guinea and later worked among Australia's indigenous people.

Arthur Norman Lawson was born on July 16, 1880, in Wilmington, South Australia.¹ He became a Seventh-day Adventist in Broken Hill, New South Wales (N.S.W.), Australia, in 1903 due to the influence of Pastor J. Steed.² In 1904 Lawson did some literature evangelism work in Broken Hill, N.S.W., selling *Daniel and Revelation*.³ He enrolled at the Australasian Missionary College in 1905, where he graduated from the normal (teacher training) course in 1910.⁴ Upon graduation, he was appointed to work in Papua at Bisiatabu⁵ to fill the vacancy created by the departure of Gordon Smith and his wife.⁶ Lawson then spent some months in nursing training at the Sydney Sanitarium and Hospital in Sydney, N.S.W., in order to prepare himself for mission service before going on pre-embarkation leave on July 31, 1911, with his family in Broken Hill.⁷ He sailed for Papua on September 30, 1911.⁸

Nearly a year later, Lawson described the events of his first year in mission service to the church membership back in Australia. He was grateful for the modest amount of nursing training he had earlier received at the "San" because it had enabled him to help the local people, particularly with several cases of snakebite.⁹ He also reported that the mission station at Bisiatabu was ideally placed for the "starting of the work in this dark island."¹⁰

Toward the end of 1912, Enid Gordon traveled from Tasmania to Papua and arrived at the Bisiatabu mission station, where she and Arthur were married on December 10, 1912. They had one son, Newton Ralph, born in Papua in 1913.¹¹ They continued their service in Papua, taking over the leadership of the mission when Septimus and Edith Carr returned to Australia in 1915.¹² They continued on in Bisiatabu until their return to Australia in early 1921.¹³

Back in Australia, Lawson worked for a time for Australia's indigenous people at the Mona Mona Mission in Queensland.¹⁴ Then he moved to Cooranbong (N.S.W.), living there for the rest of his life and working for the Sanitarium Health Food Company until his retirement.¹⁵

Old and frail in the early 1960s, Lawson did not sleep well and often wandered around the Avondale College campus during the night. In those days, students worked in the Sanitarium Health Food factory on the campus, and as they got off their shift at two o'clock in the morning, they would often see this old man walking the campus in the middle of the night with his kerosene hurricane lamp bobbing among the trees. Some commented on these sightings with disrespect, even ridicule. But the college preceptor (dean of men) at the time, Desmond B. Hills, was astute, and he invited old Pastor Lawson to take evening worship for the young men in the dormitory.¹⁶ With a weak, quavering voice, Lawson described what it was like to be a pioneer missionary—how he had preached the gospel, every day of every month for years, at Bisiatabu in Papua New Guinea before the first baptism, and how that first convert had died six weeks later of blackwater fever. He told how he continued his preaching and teaching, full time, for several more years before he saw the second baptism. Those present in the chapel that night were humbled by the story of commitment and resilience. The man with the lamp was an honored presence on campus from then on, and those present that night carried the memory of the occasion with them down through the years.¹⁷

Arthur Norman Lawson died on June 29, 1965, at the Kurri Hospital, New South Wales, in his 85th year.¹⁸ He was buried in the Avondale Adventist Cemetery, Cooranbong, New South Wales.¹⁹

The seed that Lawson and his contemporary pioneer missionaries to Papua New Guinea sowed, and which did not seem to be fruitful at the time, has now fully blossomed, as today there are more church members in Papua New Guinea than in any other country in the South Pacific Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

SOURCES

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NOTES

1. W. N. Lock, "Arthur Norman Lawson obituary," *Australasian Record and Advent World Survey*, August 2, 1965, 15.
2. Ibid.
3. "Monthly Summary of Australasian Canvassing Work," *Australasian Record*, November 1, 1904, 4.
4. Lock, "Arthur Norman Lawson obituary," 15.
5. "Brother Arthur Lawson . . . ," *Union Conference Record*, November 28, 1910, 8.
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7. "Brother Arthur Lawson . . . ," *Australasian Record*, August 14, 1911, 8.
8. "Brother A. Lawson left . . . ," *Australasian Record*, October 23, 1911, 8.
9. A. N. Lawson, "Experiences in New Guinea," *Australasian Record*, September 23, 1912, 3.
10. Ibid.
11. Arthur Norman Lawson Biographical Records, South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives, Folder: "Lawson, Arthur Norman,"
Document: "Lawson, Arthur Norman."
12. "S. W. Carr to connect" *Australasian Record*, July 5, 1915, 4.
13. Lock, "Arthur Norman Lawson obituary," 15.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.

16. Desmond B. Hills, interview by author, September 10, 2019, Cooranbong, New South Wales, Australia.

17. Personal knowledge of Lester Divine, who was present in the chapel on that occasion.

18. Lock, "Arthur Norman Lawson obituary," 15.

19. Ibid.

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