



Eric Martin Meleen family, February 1925, Auburn, New York.

Photo courtesy of E. Middleton. Source: *Find a Grave*, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/48128239/eric-martin-meleen>

Meleen, Eric Mortin (1887–1980)

CHERYL CHRISTO HOWSON

Cheryl Christo Howson earned a graduate diploma in computer aided interior designing at the Dr. Bhanuben Nanavati College of Architecture for Women in Pune, India. She co-founded an interior design company in Sri Lanka and worked as a copywriter. She contributed to the morning devotional published by Women's Ministries at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, the *Shepherdess International Journal* magazine, and the *Adventist Review*. She has written several plays. Currently (2020), she lives in Hosur, India while preparing for a piano exam.

Eric Mortin Meleen served the Seventh-day Adventist Church as an educator, administrator, and in the publishing department with his wife, Wilhelmina, a teacher and Bible worker, in the Southern Asia Division.

Early Life, Education and Marriage

Eric Mortin Meleen was born in Pennsylvania on April 8, 1887, the eldest of eleven children, nine girls and two boys. His Swedish father, Charles Alfred Meleen and mother, Lena D brought up their children in Jamestown, New York. ¹

He studied at South Lancaster Academy, Massachusetts.² After academy, he entered the Broadview Swedish Seminary in Chicago, Illinois, where he trained as an evangelist. It was here on May 25, 1911, that Eric Meleen married Wilhelmina Ringdahl, who had also trained for mission service, as a teacher³ She had previously attended South Lancaster Academy.⁴

Later, E.M. Meleen attended Washington Missionary College (Washington Adventist University) and Cornell University where he obtained a master's degree in education.⁵

The couple had four daughters, Helen (Lowry), Alice (Capps), Gertrude (Ayala), and Margaret (Lee)⁶

Three years after his wife Wilhelmina, known affectionately as Minnie, passed away, he married Evalyn Carman in August 1963. Evalyn had a son Eldon Carman from a previous marriage.⁷

Early Career as an Educator

In the early years of their marriage, the young couple helped Eric's father, Elder C. Meleen in his efforts among the Swedish people in Worcester, Massachusetts. Eric assisted as tent-master and Minnie as Bible worker⁸

Then in September 1917, Eric and Minnie accepted the call for service in India.⁹ Upon their arrival, E.M. Meleen was appointed principal of the South India Training School in November 1917. The sixth form students were organized into a graduating class for the first time.¹⁰

The South India Union Mission was organized in 1919, with E. M. Meleen as secretary of the Educational Department, a post he held until 1923. He was also secretary of the Young People's Department in 1919, and the Missionary Volunteer Department from 1920-23. In 1923 he also served as assistant superintendent.¹¹

Meanwhile, Eric was still in charge of the school which had split into two: the South India Boy's Training School of which he was principal and the South India Girl's school, with Mrs. G. G. Lowry and later Ms. Appleton in charge.

¹² To fill a growing need, Pastor Meleen secured a site at Krishanrajapuram and attended to putting up buildings in which to house the boy's school which moved there in 1921.¹³ He remained principal assisted by his wife, Minnie. The girl's school stayed at Bangalore under Mrs. J. Crammond.¹⁴

Eric and Minnie took care of the school until he was appointed educational secretary of the Southern Asia Division, Poona, in early 1924.¹⁵ He also served as secretary of the Sabbath School from 1925 to 1931 and missionary volunteer from 1925-1928.¹⁶ Mrs. Meleen taught general form subjects at Vincent Hill in 1927.¹⁷

On June 30, 1931 the Meleens and their three youngest daughters sailed from Bombay on furlough.¹⁸ When they returned in 1932, Pastor Meleen served again as educational secretary of the Division until 1936.¹⁹

Ministry as an Administrator

The Meleens moved to Bangalore where he served as president of the South India Union from 1932 until 1938.²⁰ He also served in various missions as needed, as director of the Telugu Mission around 1933-4,²¹ acting superintendent of the Malayalam Mission around 1935-6,²² and superintendent of the Kanarese Mission field around 1937.²³

During this time, the new English church on Cunningham Rd. in Bangalore was completed and dedicated on January 26, 1935.²⁴

The Meleens went on furlough in 1938 for two years, first staying at Union Springs, N.Y., before moving to South Lancaster, Massachusetts in September 1939 where their daughters studied and where Elder Meleen served as Bible teacher at the academy. On October 23, 1940, the Meleens boarded a ship back to India, leaving their girls behind.²⁵

Upon their return, Elder Meleen was superintendent of the Northwest India Union.²⁶ However, in February 1941 Elder Meleen was sent to the Burma Union as superintendent.²⁷ He served there until forced to evacuate in February 1942 during World War II. During the war years, many missionary families left Burma until only four men were left at the Rangoon station: Meleen, Hare, Christensen, and Baldwin.²⁸ Amidst various adventures, dangers, and miracles, they too finally arrived safely in India where they rejoined their families.²⁹

Upon the untimely death of Pastor G.G. Lowry, the General Conference appointed Pastor E.M. Meleen as acting president of the Southern Asia Division in June 1942.³⁰ It was an extremely difficult time to take over due to the large number of missionaries who had departed, leaving many vacancies in the field.³¹ The newly appointed president, Pastor A.L. Ham, was unable to travel to India, so Pastor Meleen continued as acting president until the Hams arrived on September 29, 1943.³²

Elder Meleen then served as superintendent of the South India Union and chairman of the Kottarakara School in Prakasapuram in late 1943.³³ After four years of laboring alone he finally rejoined his family in South Lancaster in October 1944.³⁴ Unfortunately, Elder Meleen had heart related health problems and in October 1945 was advised to delay returning to India.³⁵

Ministry as an Author, Editor, and Evangelist

The Meleens finally arrived back in India before the Division Session in January 1947, at which time Pastor Meleen became editor of the *Oriental Watchman* and *Eastern Tidings*, and also acting superintendent of the Western India Union.³⁶ One by one he added periodicals in local languages, serving as their editor: Tamil

Nalvazhi in 1947, Marga Darsi in 1949, and in 1951 Kerala Deepam and Swasthya aur Jiwan. By 1950 he was secretary of the Oriental Watchman Publishing House.³⁷

In 1950, Elder Meleen and N.O. Dahlsten organized the first Seventh-day Adventist Church with ten members at Pukpui in the South Lushai Hills (Mizoram).³⁸ In July 1951, Elder Meleen was sent to Bangalore where he served as the Acting Superintendent of the South India Union during the absence of Pastor Mattison.³⁹ Mrs. Meleen assisted in evangelistic campaigns, visiting people and giving Bible studies in Bangalore and Shillong. As a result, thirteen souls were baptized in Shillong.⁴⁰

On April 24, 1952, a host of friends gathered at Salisbury Park to honor and bid farewell to Pastor and Mrs. E.M. Meleen who were retiring and returning to the United States after thirty-four years of service.

Later Life

After leaving India in 1952, the Meleens settled in South Lancaster, Massachusetts, and then in Coalmont, Tennessee.⁴¹ Elder Meleen briefly returned to India once more in 1957 until August 1958, when he permanently retired.⁴² He returned to Coalmont where Mrs. Meleen passed away on September 21, 1960.⁴³

Elder Meleen outlived his second wife by three months: Evalyn Carman passed away on June 22, 1980 and he went peacefully to his rest on September 19, 1980 at the age of 93.⁴⁴

Contribution and Legacy

Pastor and Mrs. Meleen gave thirty-five years of their lives to faithful, self-sacrificing mission service in India and Burma; Elder Meleen stayed at his post when others evacuated back to America. In spite of his health problems, they always returned.

E. M. Meleen was responsible for organizing the educational department in the Southern Asia Division.⁴⁵ He served as high school principal, college president, union and division education secretary. He was also superintendent of the South India Union more than once and served briefly as superintendent of the Northwest Union and Burma Union. Finally, he authored several books and numerous magazine articles and was editor-in-chief and secretary of the Oriental Watchman Publishing House.⁴⁶

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