Riffel, William B. (1898–1999)

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William B. Riffel family.

Photo courtesy of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Archives.

William B. Riffel served the church as a teacher, missionary, mission director, and church administrator.

Early Life

William B. Riffel was born on June 19, 1898, in New Heaven, Montana.[1] He was the second child of Elder Jacob Riffel and Mary Myer. Elder Riffel was a pastor in the Kansas Conference.[2] The Riffels had five sons and three daughters. One of the sons died at the age of 12 years due to a car accident.[3] The four other sons are namely: Jacob E. Riffel, who was born in Berrien Springs, Michigan; William B. Riffel, Portland, Oregon; Julius Riffel, College Place, Washington; and Elmer Riffel, Toppenish, Washington. The three daughters are namely: Mrs. Esther Reiber, Lewiston, Idaho; Lydia Riffel, Los Angeles, California, and Mrs. Selma Swinney, Los Angeles.[4] William and Jacob would later serve as pioneer missionaries in the Far Eastern Division of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.[5]

Both Jacob and Mary were from Russia. Mary when she was only three, together with her parents left Europe and settled in Kansas.[6] They became naturalized American citizens before the District Court of the 25th Judicial District at Sedwick, Kansas on September 19, 1906.[7]

William spent his early years in Carrier, Oaklahoma; Lehigh, Kansas; and College Place, Washington. Raised in an Adventist home, and through the influence of godly parents, he was baptized at the age of fifteen in 1913 by Elder Haffner at the Walla Walla Camp meeting.[8]

Education and Marriage

William began his basic education in Carrier, Oaklahoma Church School where he stayed for three years. He transferred to Lehigh Public School in Lehigh, Kansas for a year and then moved to College Place, Washington Church School for the next four years. He then spent the next eight years at Walla Walla College where he completed his bachelor's degree in 1923.[9] He was able to finance and make his way through school by gardening.[10]

William Riffel married Esther M. Rippey on June 10, 1924, at Spokane, Washington.[11] Esther was born on May 9, 1901,[12] in Kanopolis, Kansas, and raised in an Adventist home of parents, Elder and Mrs. J. A. Rippey of Sherwood, Oregon. The Riffels had three children; Retta Leora, Gordon William, and Dorothy Ann.[13]

Ministry

William B. Riffel completed an A. B. course from Walla Walla College[14] and from 1921 until 1922 served as principal of an intermediate school at Wilcox, Washington.[15] He served as a church school teacher and preceptor of Sutherland Academy at Sutherland, Oregon in 1922 until 1924. From June 1924 until December of that same year, he served as a ministerial worker of the Montana Conference.[16] On August 7, 1924, the General Conference Committee voted to "request the North Pacific Union and the Montana Conference to release W. B. Riffel to connect with the Far Eastern Division for evangelistic work in the Philippines."[17] The Riffels sailed off to the Philippines from "San Francisco on January 15 on the S. S. 'Taiyo Maru,' for Manila,"[18] and arrived at the Manila port on February 17, 1925.[19] Upon arrival he first served as a teacher in the Philippine Academy and then was appointed to head the Southern Luzon Mission in 1926.[20] In February of 1927, Riffel was ordained as a pastor, during the biennial session of the Philippine Union Mission.[21] As the director of the mission, he got the privilege to visit and listen to inspiring testimonies within his region.[22] Within the first six months of his service, they were able to baptize 28 members and under him, the Bicol Mission membership had doubled despite strong opposition.[23]

In 1932 Riffel was elected as the director and treasurer for the East Visayan Mission, in Cebu, Philippines. Under his directorship from 1933 to 1934, the East Visayan Mission baptized 430 and 508 souls respectively, which was a growth of 938 members during this period. The church made significant progress in the field, and the membership of the mission rose to 148 members that were divided into 150 churches and companies.[24] He also mentioned that the mission had around twenty-five to thirty workers. However, much of the credits exclusively go to the lay members as they were a mighty factor in soul winning efforts.[25] W. B. Riffel, during his second furlough from July 15, 1936 to August 24, 1937, attended the autumn council of 1936, which was held in Fort Worth, Texas with W. P. Bradley as representatives of the Far Eastern Division.[26] In 1937 W. B. Riffel was called to serve as the director of the Mindanao Mission (which was under the East Visayan Mission).[27] Through his enthusiastic leadership, he rallied workers and church members to preach the three angels' message to every

part of the island of Mindanao.[28]

From 1942 to 1945 because of World War II, the foreign missionaries in the Philippines were held at an internment camp, including William and Esther Riffel. At first the Riffels and their three children were taken to a camp in Davao, in the southern part of Mindanao, and the mission work was headed by Pastor Apolonio Somoso. For some time the whereabouts of the Riffels were unknown, but later on, the mission workers found out that they were transferred to Los Banos, a camp in southern Luzon along with other missionaries, and finally released on February 23, 1945.[29] After the crisis Riffel returned to the United States to continue his studies in the Adventist Theological Seminary.[30] On May 2, 1945, the Riffels and their three children with other missionaries arrived in the United States from the Philippines.[31] The Women's Auxiliary of Southern California expressed their welcome to the returning interned missionaries by providing them some books and clothings. Elder Riffel shared his gratitude to them on behalf of the missionaries.[32] On October 25, 1945, the G. C. voted their permanent return "in harmony with his request."[33]

The following year Riffel, through the call of the North Pacific Union, joined the Upper Columbia Conference.[34] He served as the district pastor of the Walla Walla Church up to 1951.[35] He had worked as pastor of the Spokane Valley Church since 1951 and then started a new church building that was later dedicated by H. L. Rudy, General Conference vice-president on May 5, 1956.[36]

The Riffels had their share of struggles in the ministry. On August 20, 1955 the residence of Elder and Mrs. Riffel at Goldendale, Washington was damaged by water and fire; clothing, their belongings, and his personal library was completely destroyed.[37] Nonetheless, Elder W. B. Riffel continued to serve as a pastor and serve in Yakima, Washington from 1958 to 1959; and in 1960 he was invited to become the superintendent of the new district composed of Cashmere and Leavenworth.[38] He retired from active denominational service in 1962 from the Upper Columbia Conference.[39]

Later Life

He worked under the Upper Columbia Conference until retirement and remained active in the ministry with the Bourbon church in Missouri [40] and continued to perform his ministerial functions through his life of baptism.[41] Up until 1996 he was still a part of the honorary ordained ministers of the Mid-America Union Conference.[42] William B. Riffel passed away on March 19, 1999, at the age of 100 years.[43]

Contribution

William B. Riffel served in the Far Eastern Division for 20 years. He pioneered the mission work in the Southern Luzon and Mindanao Mission. He also contributed to the progress of the mission work in the East Visayan Mission.[44] Although all his family members suffered and were taken prisoners in the Philippines during World

War II, their dedication and sacrifices paid off through the progress of the Adventist work in these particular fields.

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