

Booklet

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**A TEMPORARY TRAINING SCHOOL
THE AUSTRALASIAN BIBLE SCHOOL IN MELBOURNE**

By Milton Hook



Seventh-day Adventist Heritage Series

A TEMPORARY TRAINING SCHOOL

The Australasian Bible School in Melbourne

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Produced by the South Pacific Division Department of Education
148 Fox Valley Road, Wahroonga, NSW 2076
SDA Heritage Series: Entry into the Australian Colonies
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr Milton Hook is the author of "Flames Over Battle Creek", a brief history of the early days at the Review and Herald Publishing Association as seen through the eyes of George Amadon, printer's foreman at the institution. Dr Hook's doctoral dissertation researched the pioneering years of the Avondale School, 1894 to 1900, and he has published some of these findings.

He spent three years as a mission director in Papua New Guinea. His teaching years include primary, secondary and college level experience, especially in Bible subjects, in Australia, New Zealand and America. He is an ordained minister, married and the father of two sons.

He would welcome any information which may enhance the content of this series.

A trickle of Adventist youth from Australasia found themselves in America before 1892. Some had gone to train as nurses and others for Biblical studies. Travelling costs, however, made the trip impossible for the battlers. Plans were therefore laid to open a Bible school to start meeting this need. The natural choice for a venue was Melbourne because it contained the largest number of Adventists at that time.

In July 1892 two adjoining sections of a large tenement building were rented in St Kilda Road, Melbourne, near the Alfred Hospital. The school's portion of the three-storied building comprised twenty-three rooms, some large enough for classrooms, as well as a communal dining-room and a chapel. Cable trams ran past the front doors. Across the road were the pleasant surroundings of Albert Park. The Royal Botanic Gardens were within walking distance. Considering its urban nature it was hard to imagine a more suitable site.

Pastor Joseph Rousseau and his wife, Emma, transferred from the Kansas Conference School to pioneer the Australasian Bible School. He served as principal and his wife taught some of the regular subjects. Pastor George Starr, former principal of the Central Bible School in Chicago, specialized in the Bible subjects. His wife, Nellie, acted as matron. Pastor William Baker assisted Emma Rousseau while doing some Biblical subjects himself. These five made up the full complement of American staff.

The school opened on August 24, 1892, with nineteen resident students and seven day students. Three more were added before the first term closed on December 14. Seven of the scholars were American missionaries themselves, simply enriching their Bible study. The roll-book reveals an even balance between the sexes. Half the number were book salesmen or trainees. No-one under fifteen years of age was admitted, although this limit was lowered in later terms. Those who used tobacco, alcohol, profane language, or were "vicious or immoral" were forbidden entrance. "The school," it was expressly stated, was "not a reformatory".

The rising bell rang at 5:30 a.m., hopefully not arousing the neighbours in the rest of the tenement block. Classes were conducted from 8 a.m. to dinner at 1:30 p.m. Those doing the English Course studied Geography, Book-keeping and the five R's- Reading, 'Riting, 'Rithmetic, Rhetoric and Religion. Starr's Biblical Course augmented the English Course with Bible Doctrines, Church History, and Evangelistic Methods such as book-selling, letter-writing and Bible reading. By today's standards it was a lay-training school having no links with the public education system.

Day students were charged \$3 per month for their tuition. Resident students paid \$10 per month and were expected to spend one hour each day helping in the kitchen, laundry, or house-cleaning departments. Tending the small front garden was the only outdoor work available. Three meals were served each day but it was noted that the evening meal was poorly patronized. Appetites may have been larger if more manual labour was possible. The matron used very little meat in the menu.

The school remained closed during the first half of 1893. This allowed the colporteurs to earn sufficient to sustain their families during the forthcoming second term of study. This term began on June 6, 1893, with a slightly different faculty. The Rousseaus and Starrs remained, but Baker transferred to ministerial work. Eliza Burnham, of the editorial department in the Echo Publishing Company, added to her duties by teaching English. Pastor Israel's

daughter, May, taught typewriting and phonography (shorthand). Her sister, Jessie, also did some part time teaching. Three non-Americans joined the staff- John Bell, Jr., was the mathematics instructor, John Reekie served as steward, and Carrie Gribble did a little part-time teaching as well.

Enrolments for 1893 virtually doubled, making it necessary to enlarge the dining-room, buy extra desks and furnish an additional portion of the tenement building. Accommodation had become so crowded that eleven young men were living in a cottage on Punt Road. However, when an adjoining portion of the school was rented they were able to move in with the rest of the boarders. Administrators were able to negotiate a reduced rate of \$40 per month for the combined three sections of the building. This meant they were then renting three-quarters of the entire apartments available.

Course structure also showed some development in the second term. The English Course was divided into four grades, each with a Bible subject included. The Biblical Course which they offered was made up of two preparatory years and three subsequent years. However, only one Bible subject was required each year. Other wide-ranging subjects listed throughout the course included Book-keeping, Algebra, Physics, Physiology, History, Astronomy, Geometry, Botany, Literature, Greek, and Civil Government. It was, quite obviously, a very broad-based curriculum.

When the school had first opened the prospectus had made it clear it was a temporary arrangement. Ellen White also wrote in late 1892:

We should find a more suitable location. As yet the providence of God has not opened the way for us to move from the city to a more favourable place. We are waiting, and watching, and working.

Throughout 1893 the search for a rural site continued. But rental arrangements had been made for the school to continue until September 1894, so Willie White wrote in mid-1893:

We wish to encourage families desiring the benefits of the school, to locate near it, with the assurance that another move will not soon be necessary. We have found that our present location is in the centre of a most promising field for evangelistic work, which has been commenced by teachers and students, and which ought not to be interrupted by a removal of the school.

When the second term ended on November 26, 1893, a dozen students began summer school activities, breaking for holidays over the Christmas/New Year period and petering out in late March and early April 1894. Low numbers made it difficult to operate classes productively.

The third and final term was conducted from April 4 to September 21, 1894. Enrolments dropped from the peak of 1893. Few, if any, responded to Willie White's plea to settle near the school. It was common knowledge the school was to be relocated. That fact became increasingly evident throughout the school term as the purchase of Brettville Estate at Cooranbong, New South Wales, was negotiated. Nevertheless, approximately fifty-seven enrolled as advanced or intermediate students in 1894, most attending for the full period.

In retrospect it is apparent that the irregular school terms and the uncertainty about continuity made it hard for any student to follow their course through to completion. At best, the individual students could improve their education, perhaps in preparation for more structured study later.

Some students later became church office workers. A few, such as Arthur Currow, trained in hydrotherapy. Many colporteurs used the advantage to enrich their education. Three men - Joseph Collins,

Charles Paap and Archie Rogers, were later ordained as ministers. At least five students served as missionaries overseas. They were Charles Anderson, "Tena" Judge, Fairley Masters, as well as Harold Cammell and Harry Camp who both served briefly in South Africa.

Among the Australasian students Fairley Masters was perhaps the more enduring church worker to attend the school. When he was a teenager he had trained as a blacksmith. Then he and his parents became Seventh-day Adventists in New Zealand and Pastor Arthur Daniells persuaded them to become colporteurs. The Masters family followed Daniells to Sydney and there did some pioneering with door-to-door bookselling. The following year (1892) Fairley went to Melbourne and was one of the few who attended all three terms of the Australasian Bible School.

On September 8, 1894, just two weeks before the school closed, Fairley and his parents paid their own fares to India where they planned to colporteur. Thus they became the first Seventh-day Adventists to leave Australasia with the express purpose of being missionaries. It was really like going home for them. Fairley was born in India when his father, Captain George Masters, was serving with the 19th Hussars Regiment.

For George and Margaret Masters their canvassing episode in India was short-lived. Margaret became ill in Calcutta and they returned hastily to Australia. Fairley, however, continued on. He first established himself in Madras. Then he purchased a tent and bicycle to travel further a field. He met a group of Saturday Sabbath-keepers in southern India who claimed to be descendants of converts made by the Apostle Thomas. Later he canvassed Cawnpore and Lucknow in the north. Fairley also sold a book to Ellen Meyers whose family became Adventists. She later served as a missionary to the Fijian Indians. Travelling into the then dangerous Peshawar District as far as the Kyber Pass into Afghanistan, Fairley sold books to the European soldiers, including his uncle who became an Adventist too. After two years in India he returned to canvass in Australia for another fifty years or more.

Masters was unquestionably one of the stars to emerge from the Australasian Bible School. But there were many others who became church workers, including "Harry" Stockton, Annie Higgins, and the tall, stooped sheep farmer from New Zealand, William Carswell. But church leaders suspected much more talent lay dormant in the students who attended. Some students even slipped through their fingers and faded from the church scene. Blame was laid on a few negative aspects of the school i.e., the allurements of sports and other distractions of the city in such close proximity, as well as listlessness arising from a lack of manual labour to balance mental exercise. These disadvantages impelled leaders to seek a rural spot for their permanent school. The Avondale School was their answer to redress the shortcomings of the Australasian Bible School.

Major sources for this booklet are the "Bible Echo and Signs of the Times", the "Australasian Record", the Register of Students at the Australasian Bible School, and the author's own doctoral dissertation entitled "The Avondale School and Adventist Educational Goals, 1894-1900" and personal collection of pioneer data.

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