Booklet

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AN EXPERIMENT AT COORANBONG

PIONEERING AVONDALE COLLEGE

By Milton Hook

Seventh-day Adventist Heritage Series

AN EXPERIMENT AT COORANBONG

Pioneering Avondale College

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A Heritage Series: Debut - Adventism Down Under before 1885
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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.

Cooranbong in the 1890's was a sleepy hollow. The timber-cutters had faded away, leaving stark stumps among the eucalyptus trees. These were a mute memory of more prosperous days when men cut sleepers for the new Sydney-to-Newcastle railway. The few lingering settlers had lost their mainspring. Time had stopped in their rustic shanties and they did little to improve their farms. Thomas Healey had closed his hotel. Even the Sisters of St. Joseph, who sought solitude, had deserted their convent for a more populous place.

Despite its ghost-town appearance there was something utopian about the district, an enchanting bucolic character that bred nostalgia. When Metcalfe and Maria Hare arrived from New Zealand with their two little boys in 1895 and pitched a tent on the Avondale property they fell in love with the place. On frosty mornings they could see kangaroos on the flat, grazing and puffing white whiffs of vapour from their noses. Koalas slept in the forks of the gum trees amid the wild orchids hanging from the branches. Timid bellbirds, wrens, honeyeaters, and other birds shared the bush with them. At night they listened to the rhythmic croaking of a frog choir in the swamp. Possums would sometimes make a nocturnal scamper through their tent fossicking for food scraps. All were welcome except the occasional snake.

Church administrators had decided in January 1895 to call the estate "Avondale" probably because the area was broken with

little creeks and rivulets reminiscent of England and New Zealand. In times of drought the lower portions would remain the greenest in the district, being in a basin at the foot of the blue-green Wattagan hills.

In May 1894 Willie White and Ainslee Reekie had acted for the church and agreed to buy a 607 hectare property from the trustees of the estate of the late William Brett. They had paid a deposit of $50, another $550 on June 30, and a final payment of $1200 on February 13, 1895. An additional forty hectares or more bordering Dora and Sandy Creeks were purchased from others at the same time. On this latter portion, at the confluence of the creeks, later dubbed "The Point", there was a neglected orange-grove. Further upstream, near what became known as "The Swing Bridge", an old lady lived in a shack. Most of the property, however, was untouched except for the removal of some better timber by the sleeper-cutters in the 1880's.

Brett's property had been offered at auction about January 1894 but no offers reached the $2000 reserve price. In the course of preparation for the auction the boundary lines were probably checked by surveyors, leaving small furrows or lockspits as well as score-markings on trees. Churchmen bent on finding an alternative site for the Australasian Bible School[1] in Melbourne had explored properties near Euroa and Benalla in Victoria, as well as Dapto, Picton, and Ourimbah in New South Wales. Two other estates near Cooranbong were also explored, and later some at Penrith.

When the search parties examined Brett's property they ranged all over it, sampling the soil at random and noting its qualities. A government agricultural advisor later visited one rainy day and gave a dismal forecast of its farming potential but recommended the addition of lime to make the soil productive.

[1] Fore details regarding the unsuitability of this School see the booklet, “A Temporary Training School”.

Despite a few sceptics the decision was made in May 1894 to establish the permanent training school at Cooranbong. It was to be an experiment in educational methods. The advantages of the site were its low price, isolation from the city attractions, availability of water and timber, a reasonable amount of arable land, access by boat and buggy to the railway line, and its serene setting amidst nature. In a prayer circle during a visit to Cooranbong Stephen McCullagh had also received healing from a throat malady. This was accepted by some at the time as evidence of God's stamp of approval on the choice.

By July 1894 Willie White had organised a Sydney surveyor to mark out roads on the estate and sub-divide some sections for resale. Trenches or surveyors' lockspits nearly two metres long and twenty-two centimetres deep would probably be found all over the property indicating where the roads were to be formed. White's plan was to sell small lots of the land to church members.

Joseph and Emma Rousseau transferred from the Melbourne school to Cooranbong, renting Healey's disused hotel as accommodation for themselves and those who came to pioneer the venture. Among these were William Carswell and his wife, Janet. She acted as matron. Robert Lamplough, Arthur Currow, Percy Mills, William McKnight, Arthur Wainman, and "Zep" Tadich all went north from the Melbourne school to Cooranbong to help clear the land, plough, and build. Others who had not attended the school in Melbourne joined them, such as Harry Richardson, Alex MacKenzie, James Macintosh, Harry Ross-Lewin, and Alex Stewart, Jr. Late comers were accommodated in tents alongside the hotel. Altogether, there were approximately twenty industrial students in their teens and twenties who toiled by day in exchange for a little tuition from the Rousseaus in the evening.

One crusty battler, Edwin Worsnop, who had a reputation for rashness, sold everything he owned in Melbourne and moved

his family to Sydney with the intention of going to Norfolk Island as a self-supporting missionary. He was deterred from these plans and thought he might help with the school project instead.

On the eve of setting out to walk the 120 kilometres or more to Cooranbong he was persuaded to take the train instead. He, too, moved his family to Cooranbong and did considerable pioneering on the estate. In anticipation of the school opening, Tom Sherwin, Sr., Alfred Hughes, and David Lacey formed the vanguard of men who also settled with their families in the neighbourhood.

At first Hare and his family were the only people to live on the estate. The other folk were housed in Healey's Hotel and each day they would walk to and from work on the Avondale property. They eventually found a short-cut through the bush over the trunk of a tree fallen across Dora Creek. This became known as "The Dry Log". Their first priority was to clear about four hectares on a knoll at the southern end adjacent to Dora Creek. A swamp on the east side of the knoll was cleared of tea-tree scrub and drained with a network of deep ditches. Then they tried to plough it before planting vegetables and fruit trees. They waited for rain but no rain came. The drought had not broken by July 1895 so Hare decided to plough single furrows only and plant a thousand fruit trees in them. These trees he would water by hand and later plough between the rows. He borrowed a plough but it broke in the rock-hard ground on the first attempt. In desperation he went to Sydney and bought a large strong plough and set to work. It was an unusually dry year. Some who visited Cooranbong in August, the end of the winter season, spoke of bushfires and a shroud of smoke which hung in the hills. Nevertheless, 90 percent of the young fruit trees survived that season. An experimental plot of pumpkins, melons, and potatoes yielded a reasonable harvest. The drought did not break until February 1896.

Another priority was the construction of a sawmill. When Hare was buying the plough in Sydney he also found a used milling plant for sale. He dismantled it and brought it to Avondale, then set it up in a large barn-like structure he had built near the bank of Dora Creek. The equipment included a steel saw-bench with circular saws, a larger saw for breaking down the logs, and a planer. These were run by a 15 horse-power steam engine.

Hare discovered the saws were hardly a match for the iron-hard logs, but by mid-1896 he had processed about fifty of them and stockpiled some timber. The first supplies were used for a ceiling and stairs in the sawmill, creating a loft under the iron roof. Suitable clay for brick-making was also found on the estate and by mid-1896 forty thousand bricks were stockpiled. The initial plan was to construct brick-veneer classrooms and dormitories but later drastic economy measures were launched.

William Prescott, the General Conference Education Secretary, visited for nine months in the Australasian colonies during 1895/96. Much of that time he spent observing and assessing the educational needs of the church, making recommendations and organising plans for the new school. He felt the title "Avondale College" was far too pretentious for the level of tuition that was being offered in the evening classes at Healey's Hotel. Indeed, he believed the name would not reflect the level available once the permanent school was operating fully. Therefore, the name was changed to the "Avondale School for Christian Workers". Prescott also outlined a philosophy and curriculum as guidelines for the new school and its teachers.

Soon after Prescott left in May 1896, the Rousseaus returned to America also. Emma's health was jaded and Joseph himself had battled with influenza and boils as he tried to teach and act as preceptor. Their departure was a sad blow because the church members had come to value their work and were confident their teaching would be a strong component in the new school.

The Rousseaus were replaced by newly-weds Herbert Lacey and his American wife, Lillian. From July 20 to October 1, 1896, they conducted afternoon and evening classes in the loft above the sawmill for a score or more of local students. But with the approaching summer this classroom under the iron roof became unbearably hot by day. In the evening it became the haven of hordes of mosquitos, gnats, moths, beetles and all manner of creatures buzzing and whirring around the kerosine lamps. Very little academic work was accomplished in 1896. Building supplies were stockpiled and the fruit and vegetables were tended.

Progress languished largely because of a long and expensive court case brought about when the trustees of the estate refused to hand over the title-deed of the property. Full payment was made by February 1895 but the trustees quibbled about a further payment of $6 interest and the alleged breaching of some legal technicality by Willie White. In August 1895 the court ruled in favour of White, awarding $2000 and demanding the title-deeds be handed over. However, the trustees appealed and won the retrial in February 1896. White's lawyers waived their costs but he still had to pay $800 for the trustees' costs. Discouragement hit a low ebb in the White household. These proceedings were very nearly the undoing of the whole Avondale enterprise and there was talk of abandoning it. Ironically, the same lawyers who fought White in court later told him of a way that the title-deed could be transferred legally. White hired them and by late 1897 he gained the title-deed.

Putting on a brave face all the time that the trustees refused to give up the title-deed, White pushed ahead with the subdivision of a portion of the estate and sold sections to church members such as Hare, Rousseau, Lamplough, Carswell, Worsnop, and about fifteen others. The Whites themselves bought over sixteen hectares of the estate and built a large home on it

called "Sunnyside". At the time not one of these pioneers possessed a title-deed. The considerable cash investment and more than two years of hard work on the property was still poised on a knife-edge even when the first of the school buildings were being erected.

A loan of $2000 was obtained from the Wessels family in South Africa and then plans were perfected for the first permanent school building. Fred Lamplough won the contract, agreeing to build it for $364, most of the basic material being used from the stockpiles on hand. As a deterrent to termites the builders used bricks for the foundations and chimneys, the remainder being of timber with an iron roof.

Late afternoon, October 1,1896, Ellen White was called to the work-site to set down the first foundation brick. The quiet affair was attended only by the few who happened to be in the vicinity, Hare, Lacey, and Ellen White each made a brief speech, then she closed with a dedication prayer.

The building itself was a two-storied structure with small dormitory rooms to house a maximum of thirty-six young ladies. The teachers' quarters were in the downstairs front rooms. They called it Bethel, a Hebrew name meaning "House of God".

On the north side of Bethel a second two-storied building, with a basement at the back, was begun in February 1897. The cool basement was used for food storage, especially the large quantities of fruit preserved later from the orchard. The ground floor served as the dining-room and kitchen but at first some of the dining area was partitioned off for a primary school class, and a corner of the kitchen doubled as living quarters for the cook. The upstairs level was used as a dormitory for the young men and a section also acted as a temporary chapel. No longer did church meetings have to be held in the sawmill loft which had been used for this purpose since vacating Healey's Hotel.

Early in April the carpenters realised they wouldn't have the building ready for the advertised school-opening date. In a desperate bid they called for volunteers from the local Adventist community. Men, women, and children responded. Some painted window-frames before they were put in place. Newlywed Hetty Haskell and nurse Sarah McEnterfer nailed down the dining-room floor boards while Iram James cramped the lengths into position. The soft hands of the ladies were tortured with blisters. These they punctured, rubbed petroleum jelly into them and went on hammering. Other women acted as brickies' labourers, forming a human chain to ferry bricks to the masons building the basement floor. A large underground cistern for rainwater storage was also built at the rear between the two buildings. Despite the fact that the second building was unlined the school opened on schedule, April 28, 1897.

McEnterfer solicited the Cooranbong community for donations which enabled the school to buy and mount a bell on a simple wooden tower between the two buildings. This was the means of waking everyone at 5.45 every morning in time for worship followed by breakfast at 7 o'clock. Classes were scheduled throughout the morning and lunch was served at 1.30 p.m. The afternoons were spent in manual work, Sunday afternoons especially being times when the entire school family joined together for landscaping and flower-gardening. This helped to generate the close communal spirit which became a distinctive feature of early Avondale.

The appointed principal of the new school didn't arrive from America for its opening so Herbert Lacey stepped in as acting-principal, teaching physiology and music as well. His wife started the primary school. Tom Skinner worked as the chef. Pastor Stephen Haskell conducted a Bible Institute for the first month, and his wife, Hetty, began her duties as matron.

Cassius and Ella Hughes arrived in Sydney from America on May 24, 1897. They had pioneered Keene Industrial School in Texas and were ideally suited for the Avondale situation. Neither seemed to be robust but appearances were deceptive for they toiled constantly as a team in teaching and outdoor work. Not only was Cassius a competent principal but the success of the farm was largely due to his expertise. From the time of their arrival Ella's letters to her parents in America painted vivid pictures of the conditions:

> *"July 1, 1897. At Morriset one of the boys met us with a spring wagon and one horse. We enjoyed our ride through the woods very much. Cassius gathered flowers for me by the roadside and the men lunched from our box. At last after a four mile [over six kilometres] ride we came in sight of the buildings just as the dinner bell was ringing. We were happily surprised to find two nice buildings ready for us on the school grounds ....*
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> *...we had to get to work at once. The family numbered about thirty when we arrived and there were about twenty day students .... We have two small rooms on the first floor next to the front door.... We unpacked the cake of maple sugar last night.... I melted it and treated the American people who are here. They seemed to enjoy it very much. I also gave them samples of the nut foods we had with us. It was the first they had seen."*

During 1897 a capacity group of forty boarding students enrolled. In addition, twenty-five seniors and seventeen primary pupils attended as day students fro m the Cooranbong community. Boarders were charged $32 for the six-month term and worked eighteen hours each week in the school home or farm to complete their obligations.

Three meals were served each day, the menu being entirely vegetarian. Some who were unaccustomed to this diet later resorted to stocking sweets and tinned fish in their rooms. This led the faculty to ban any food in the dormitories. Another taboo strictly enforced was any fraternizing between the opposite sexes. "Attachment, courting and writing on slips of paper", wrote Ellen White, were to be dismissed from their mind. Games were also forbidden. On Sunday, July 4, 1897, the American teachers celebrated their Independence Day with some ball games. Ellen White frowned on this activity and again reprimanded the teachers when, three years later, tennis and cricket were played on a school anniversary.

The letters which Ella Hughes wrote home to her parents continued to reflect her fascination with the rustic Australian scene:

> *"July 18. I work out of doors almost every afternoon and that makes me strong to do all the teaching I have to do .... Since I wrote before they have finished a nice brick oven for us. It will hold near fifty loaves of bread at one baking .... People never say two weeks here but a 'fortnight'. All the pitchers are 'jugs'; the boys are all 'lads'. They call each other 'chaps'. The crackers are all 'biscuits'. The school seats are 'forms', the teacher a 'master'. They have a peculiar accent to their words which is very pleasing to me .... The blackboards are all painted boards stood on easels. The forms have no backs ....*
>
> *The boys cut a large tree down two weeks ago that stood in the back yard and when it went down two opossums ran out of its top. They were so stunned by the fall that the boys caught them. They skinned them and dried the skins and gave me the skins. I'd use them for a rug but fear the rats would eat them up. They come into this unfinished house sometimes.*

Cassius cut a path through the bush the other day and I helped him. As we were coming home we saw two kangaroos ....

There are fine places all about where one can take walks. I think ff an ideal place. It has got one draw back to me and that is the fleas ....

Cassius and the boys have had fun catching a [koala]bear. Cassius ran ff up a tree and one of the boys went up the tree and sawed the limb off and let it down ....

July29. The post office is about a mile and a quarter from here and I have walked over and back several times .... We go in a path through the thick woods and cross the river on a big log ....

We let the bear go out of pity. They kept him several days to look at. This afternoon one of the students caught a black bat in the chapel".

In the first year all staff except Herbert Lacey and Tom Skinner were American. That influence predominated well into the twentieth century. After Hughes arrived Lacey added Arithmetic and Geography to his teaching load. Hughes himself specialised in History and concentrated on the farm industries so vital for financial stability. He introduced bee-keeping after noticing the prevalence of wild bees in the native blossoms. His apiary subsequently yielded enormous quantities of honey. Lillian Lacey continued with the primary school until the end of the school term, then Ella Hughes took over with the assistance of two trainees, Evelyn Gooding and"Maggie" Hawkins. Throughout the first school year Ella had specialised in teaching senior English, assisting Haskell with one Bible class, and some cooking instruction, as her letters tell:

"August 11. I have one of the nicest Bible classes. It is a treat to hear it recite. We are studying Daniel. They learned the seventh chapter all by heart....

All home students are very much interested in learning how to cook. Sister Haskell teaches the girls everyday. This afternoon they have learned how to make nutose .... I have a cooking class of boys the evening after the Sabbath. They made better beaten biscuits than any of the girls so the girls are trying hard to do as well....

September 11. They are to start the sawmill tomorrow to saw the timbers for the new boys' dormitory. They will bum the bricks soon for the pillars to put under the building".

The boys' dormitory referred to was built during the summer vacation of 1897/98. Hare drew up plans and superintended its construction, the total cost being approximately $1,600. Once again bricks were used only for the foundation piles, the remainder being timber with an iron roof. However, unlike the other buildings, attic rooms were incorporated for extra accommodation. A bathroom block was added at the rear. No fire-places or other heating facilities were included because the young men were expected to withstand the winter better than the young ladies. When the young men arrived in March 1898to begin another year of school work their stark dormitory still needed painting and furnishing. Carpet remnants from the Melbourne school were used on the stairways. The luxury of linoleum in the hallways was added soon after. Hughes and his wife took rooms in this building for the duration of the year and acted the part of a preceptor in addition to their other duties.

In that same summer of 1897/98 the interior walls and lining of the second building were completed and a separate laundry was built. One thousand large cans of peaches, plums, pears,

and quinces were preserved, as well as jams and jellies. Grape-juice was bottled for storage in the kitchen basement too. This canning became an annual summer-time ritual.

Miss Nannie Whittenburg arrived from Texas in 1898 to be matron and cooking instructor. Skinner had transferred to Western Australia, so Minnie Hawkins took over as cook. These were the only staff changes for the year, except for the addition of an American book-keeper and music-teacher, Orwin Morse, in August. Herbert Lacey, with Sunday instruction in hydrotherapy from Dr. Edgar Caro, offered the first year of the nurses training course. Lillian Lacey pioneered a commercial department for the teaching of secretarial skills. For this reason Ella Hughes assumed charge of the primary school and continued to train teachers as she had begun in the summer. She lamented they still had only "miserable benches" without back-rests for the children and had to teach in places designed as bedrooms.

With the extra dormitory accommodation enrolment rose to over one hundred in 1898. Mid-way through the year it was reported the school was $6000 in debt. For that reason building progress came to a halt despite an executive decision to press ahead with larger classroom and chapel facilities.

Not until the summer of 1898/99 did work begin seriously on College Hall, later dubbed "The Chapel". It was situated between Bethel and the boys dormitory. Plans were drawn by Henry Thomson, a Canadian converted to Adventism in Sydney. He had settled his family in a bark hut and two tents on 7 hectares of the Avondale estate near Alton Road. His plans for College Hall bore a marked resemblance to the main building at South Lancaster Academy in Massachussetts. Stephen Haskell, Ella Hughes, and other American missionaries in Australia at the time had taught or studied at the Academy and some, no doubt, contributed architectural ideas with this building as a model.

Once again, the foundations were brick and the main structure was of wood with an iron roof. The wood was so hard that every nail-hole had to be bored with a gimlet to prevent the nails bending like spaghetti. The lower floor of six chambers was used for tuition, with the primary school in the two front rooms. Two interior flights of stairs led to the second-floor chapel, the principal's office, and a room for the small library. Hare, Thomson, and Lamplough had led the building team, completing the job at a total cost of $1600. The school bell was transferred from its stand near Bethel and installed in a small spire atop the chapel. For decades its droll toll would peel across the campus, waking all before sunrise, marking off the class periods during the day, and calling worshippers to vespers.

College Hall was officially opened on April 13, 1899. This relieved accommodation pressure on the second building especially, which could then be used for the original purpose i.e., a kitchen and dining room, as well as additional rooms upstairs for the young ladies. Enrolment peaked at 150 in 1899 but dropped to 110 in 1902 before making a climb to two hundred by 1905. By then extra accommodation was desperately needed.

The following year (1906) a two storey addition with a French roof providing attic rooms, was built to connect Bethel with the second building. This attractive structure was called Preston, after Rachel Oakes Preston, a Seventh-day Baptist who introduced Millerite Adventists to the Saturday Sabbath in the 1840's. Additions were made to the boys' dormitory during the First World War years.

At the opening ceremony for College Hall Willie White repeated the purpose of the Avondale School. It was, he said, to train youth to be "missionaries of the solid practical stamp." That is, to equip young men and women to be versatile, to garden,

cook, nurse, teach, sell, and build--all in a spirit of Christian humility. In the early years little importance was placed on the granting of diplomas and graduation ceremonies. Instead, the priority was to obtain some education as rapidly as possible and then join the mission work-force, Only "Cards of Standing" were issued at year-end.

In 1902 the first graduation ceremony was held, fittingly, on the eve of departure for Cassius and Ella Hughes. Among the graduates was Minnie Hawkins, trained as a teacher by Ella Hughes. Minnie later married an American, Clarence Crisler. The other teaching graduate was Ella Boyd, daughter of American missionary, Maud (Sisley) Boyd. Ella taught in Tonga, married New Zealander Leonard Paap, and together they returned to the Tongan mission field. Joseph Mills, a Queenslander, graduated from the Business Course. So also did Prissie Hare and Ernest Ward, both New Zealanders who eventually returned to their homeland to work in church employment.

During the first decade of graduations (1902-1911) one hundred people successfully completed senior studies in the Business, Biblical, Missionary, and Teachers Courses. The greater proportion, fifty-six, were young women. Eight were the children of American missionaries. Almost one-third stayed to complete two courses, but since the First World War this practise has become the exception. Four of the first one hundred graduates even completed three courses, one being Metcalfe Hare's youngest son, Robert, who later became a medical doctor in America. Another triple graduate was Rena Rogers, who, after graduating from the Business, Teachers, and Biblical Courses, completed nursing at the Sydney Sanitarium. Then, with all of her accumulated wisdom, she married George Wise.

In order to reach the Avondale School perhaps no youth has ever demonstrated more pluck and flare than two McMahon

boys in 1914. They, with their parents, were new converts. The large family of twelve children had little money to spare on train fares so the boys built a rowing boat and emulated the explorers George Bass and Matthew Flinders. An account of their intrepid voyage appeared in the "Sydney Daily Telegraph" of July 10, 1914:

> *Two young Seventh-day Adventists, fired with religious fervour, have just completed an adventurous voyage from Cunninghame, Gippsland, Victoria, to Sydney.*
>
> *The feat is a unique one, and all the more remarkable from the fact that it was undertaken in the face of the gales raging off the coast for the past week or so. The young men are Robert McMahon (26) and Henry McMahon (20). Clear-eyed and lithe-limbed, they look capable of surmounting any physical difficulty. They rowed from the Victorian town on the morning of June 25 in a seventeen-foot boat of their own building, which they had named the "Advent".*
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> *"We had many things to contend with," related the elder brother. "We were in gales, with the seas running high, but we placed our trust in the One above, and we came safely through. Only on one occasion did we ship any water, and that was when we were caught in a bombora. The worst weather we met with was in the vicinity of Moruya River. We had trouble there when we attempted to cross the bar. We did cross three lines of breakers, but found shallows ahead, so had to pull out to sea again. However, we pulled over to the pilot station, and received proper directions. We had plenty of food with us, and the people along the coast were most*

kind. They would hardly credit that we had come such a distance in an open rowing boat.

"Do it again? Rather!" and the eyes of the young man glistened. "We would have gone right up to Brisbane if we had not been pressed for time. No, I can't say that we were ever in a precarious position. We ate well, slept well, and rowed well, and we never felt better in our fives. Of course, a small lugsail we carried was some assistance to us at times, but the principal means of propulsion were the sweeps. We hugged the coast most of the time. Only occasionally were we any distance from the land, and that was when we crossed a bay. Once, when we were about nine miles out, a Japanese tramp steamer, evidently mistaking us for castaways, came four miles out of her course to assist us. But we were quite right. Our destination is the Seventh-day Adventist College at Lake Macquarie. We had intended to row there, but we sold our boat yesterday, so we will proceed by train to-morrow instead.

Henry McMahon became a medical doctor. Robert returned to a life of farming in the Gippsland. Their brother, Ben, later served briefly as principal of the institution.

The Avondale campus has consistently been a colourful and vibrant place. It has drawn youth from all over the world and, in turn, generated an army of church workers who have served in many fields as missionaries. Even those who simply studied in its cloisters without graduating profited in many ways. The close bonds of collegiality always remain a lifetime memory.

The major source forth is booklet is the author's own doctoral dissertation. This includes the "Gleaner", the "Bible Echo and Signs of the Times", the "Australasian Record", the Register of Students at the Avondale School, the Minutes of the Avondale School Board, and private letter collections stored at Avondale College.

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