

Booklet

13

LITTLE SCHOOLS FOR LITTLE PEOPLE
EARLY ADVENTIST PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN AUSTRALIA

By Milton Hook



Seventh-day Adventist Heritage Series

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Australasia

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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.

The Seventh-day Adventist mission thrust may be likened to Neptune's trident. It had three prongs. The printing and distribution of religious literature was designed to pierce the conscience and feed the soul. The establishment of sanitariums and health-food enterprises were created to strike against intemperance and promote healthy bodies. And the operation of schools was undertaken to educate minds. These leading objectives were increasingly sharpened to stimulate the growth of well-balanced characters.

With respect to elementary education Adventists have always been apprehensive about government schools, preferring to give their children church-based instruction. These sentiments have their roots in the early days of the Advent movement when the children of new converts became the butt of playground jokes. Wishing to shield their young ones from this prejudice, as well as the later teaching of evolution and rising secularism, they created their own home schools and church schools. These were considered to have the added benefit of providing a positive outlook on all facets of Seventh-day Adventism.

The first inkling that Seventh-day Adventists in Australasia might establish their own elementary school system came in 1889. It was announced in "The Bible Echo and Signs of the Times" that Enos and Florence Morrison were arriving from America via New Zealand to assist the mission Down Under. They had just completed an extensive tour of American camp meetings, he training colporteurs and she conducting the children's' meetings at each camp. They

spent four months training colporteurs in New Zealand and then sailed for Melbourne. Enos came to Australia specifically to train more colporteurs. Florence, the news item stated, was appointed to help set up a school. They spent nearly eighteen months in Australia before continuing on to South Africa for similar work. However, no elementary school was started in Australia during her stay. Instead, she worked as Secretary of the Australian Sabbath School Association. She also helped to form children's' clubs called Rivulet Missionary Societies.

When the Australasian Bible School operated in Melbourne from 1892 to 1894 no provision was made for the primary grades. It was, essentially, a laymen's training school for mature students who could leave home and board at the institution. Elementary schools were not created until sufficient numbers in any community warranted them. Time demonstrated that the more enduring schools for the youngsters naturally grew up in centres where there were pockets of Seventh-day Adventists.

As a community of Seventh-day Adventists grew in isolated Cooranbong, New South Wales, the need for an elementary school soon became apparent. Metcalfe and Maria Hare were among the earliest church members to transfer to the area. That was in 1895. At that time their two lads, Milton and Robert (not to be confused with his uncle, Pastor Robert Hare), were aged eleven and five respectively. However, the parents were reticent to send their children to the local public school. This characteristic point of view eventually attracted the attention of government education officers and pressure was brought to bear on the Hares to send Milton to the local elementary school. By 1897 Ellen White's grand-daughter, Mabel, and young Robert Hare were eligible to begin school and pressure continued to mount. It was inevitable that friction with government officers would increase as more Adventists with children moved into the area. With such a crisis looming it is understandable that Ellen White in urgent tones addressed the issue at the official opening ceremony of the Avondale School on April 28, 1897.

The School Board had earlier entertained the idea of providing elementary education on campus, but decided to postpone these arrangements and plan for intermediate and advanced levels only. Ellen White, however, insisted on a school for the younger ones too. Mr Gambrill, a non-Adventist who lived down-stream at Dora Creek village, listened sympathetically to her address. When she concluded he strode to the front of the congregation and made an impromptu speech critical of the local government school where his children attended. He promised to transfer his children if an elementary school was started on campus. In this manner a small core of students were gathered from both the Adventist and non-Adventist sectors.

Lillian Lacey, the American wife of teacher Herbert Lacey, had less than two days to organise the elementary school on campus. On Friday, April 30, Robert Hare and Mabel White, both aged about seven, enrolled at the school. Classes began in a partitioned-off section of the dining-room. It was, indeed, a little school for little people. The following Monday Iram James, Ellen White's gardener, enrolled three of his children - Stanley, Winnie and Effie. All were under ten years of age.

Two days later Ellen White wrote to her son, Willie, saying, "The first seven to ten years of a child's life is the time when lasting impressions for good or evil are made." To emphasise the stand which she had taken she continued in her letter urging that if there were six or more elementary-aged youngsters needing Adventist education then a little school should be established. At Avondale they had, of course, started with less than six, knowing that the numbers would escalate as families flocked there. Indeed, when the school-year concluded on October 28 the school boasted seventeen pupils.

Gambrill made good his promise by sending his two boys, Edwin and Arthur, to the school. They rowed each day via Dora Creek to attend lessons. Later in the year little Ivy McNaughton and Gladys Bell joined them. Sam and George Parcels walked across "The Dry

Log" from Cooranbong village each day. Edwin and Margaret Worsnop's little girls, Jesse and Alice, began in midyear, together with Esther Deane. In September James Rodd brought his family to Cooranbong from Sydney where he had worked as a coach-builder and painter. Young Cecil, Leslie, and Roy Rodd were all enrolled for the final month of the school year.

Lacey had continued to teach her small group of nine pupils until Cassius and Ella Hughes arrived from America at the end of May. Ella then took over the teaching of the little tots while her husband worked as school principal and farm manager. She lamented the fact that the children had to sit on backless benches. She also longed for a blackboard securely attached to a wall rather than living in fear of her board crashing from its rickety easel onto her toes. This was, of course, a common peril in the early schools.

Hughes had two young ladies to assist her in the elementary school, not because the enrolment numbers or the students themselves were unmanageable but rather as teacher trainees. They were "Maggie" Hawkins from Tasmania, and Evelyn Gooding from South Australia. Both received their board and tuition free at the senior school in exchange for their assistance in the little school. The scheme was, in effect, the beginnings of the teacher-training programme at the Avondale School and after this initial piloting it was established as a regular course in 1898. Hawkins remained as a student but later specialised in health-food cafe management. Gooding, on the other hand, taught in the homeland and Rarotonga.

At the end of the 1897 school year the pioneering teachers reviewed their work with satisfaction. Church administrators were happy to lay plans for extending the system. At the Stanmore camp meeting, the day after the Avondale elementary school closed, the Australasian Union Conference Session voted the following,

Resolved- This Conference, through its executive committee appoint a committee of nine women, to be known as the Committee on Primary Education, whose

duty it shall be to labour for the establishment and maintenance of primary schools and classes of varied character and form as the way may open.

There is no record that this committee of women was ever elected. Instead, the Avondale School staff appeared to have sole charge of the training programme and continued to prepare teachers who would later staff the scattered elementary schools. Initiatives in church school education were first generated by the local conference officers or parent groups rather than from any Union Conference committee.

In April 1898 Sarah Peck arrived on the Avondale campus primarily to assist in editorial work for Ellen White. Peck was an American educator who had just come from pioneering mission schools in South Africa. Her advice and experience were valued by the Avondale teachers. Another American teacher, Rae Ellis, joined the Avondale staff in mid-1898. Adopting ideas from her teachers in America, she insisted on the extreme practice of using only the Bible as her textbook for all subjects. Ellen White was aghast and wrote to her son, Edson, saying,

Young inexperienced girls are not the ones to manage in our church schools The way Miss Ellis came here and went to work feeling fully competent to instruct from the Bible as the only book to be used, confused but did not enlighten. She stated the great work she had done in America in establishing church schools in a large number of places where she had been appointed. That young lady has everything to learn.

For the latter half of 1899 Ellis assisted Hughes in the Avondale elementary school because the enrolment had risen to thirty-five, thirteen more than in 1898. However, by then her extreme views had softened. Early in the same year (1899) Peck was busy gathering and editing excerpts from Ellen White's writings on the church school theme. A compilation of these was presented and discussed

at the 1899 Australasian Union Conference Session held at the Avondale School in July. There it was voted to strengthen the teacher-training department and unite with the local conferences to encourage and select trainees throughout Australasia. The church school theme was vigorously agitated at this session and the direct result was a rash of little elementary schools in the next few years.

The only major factor which hindered the establishment of elementary schools was the constant shortage of teachers. Among the colonial converts there were a few government-trained and experienced educators such as Emma Faulkhead, "Katie" Judge, and William James Smith, whose services were enlisted. Dire necessity forced church administrators to co-opt others who had a reasonable education. Nurse Louisa Tuxen was in this category. In 1900 Tuxen pioneered a little school in a room adjoining the South Brisbane church. It began with eighteen pupils and continued for about five years.

Annie Walker came to Avondale with some education, briefly assisted Hughes, and then pioneered the short-lived school at nearby Wallsend. There, in her first year (1900) locals paid her \$2 each week to teach. The evangelistic programme at Wallsend had attracted quite a number of children so it was decided to start a day school. They had no desks so an amateur carpenter built a table. Walker had to put wood-chips under the legs to stop it rocking. Later she needed another table and decided to make it herself. She found two kerosene boxes, turned them on their ends, and nailed a plank between them. These crude tables were matched with some wobbly seats salvaged from camp meetings. Walker nailed them to the floor for stability.

The school opened with only one pupil- a little non-Seventh-day Adventist girl who cried because there was no one else in the school. Walker borrowed a neighbour's girl to give some company but she cried too when her mother left her at the school each morning. Walker desperately searched around and persuaded two more pupils to come. Two others were borrowed as nonpaying sit-

ins and she started with five in the house the mission team was renting. The house, Walker said, had a local reputation for being haunted. When the team left, Walker found the house to be too big so she moved into a disused miner's slab hut, removed the inner wall between the two rooms, and lived and taught in this derelict cottage. The parents of two of the little boys were so impressed with the teaching and Bible lessons that they became Seventh-day Adventists and, in turn, introduced five more to the church.

When Evelyn Gooding completed her training at Avondale in 1900 she was appointed to pioneer a school in the Petersham (later called Stanmore) church, Sydney, in 1901. It was customary for the parents to pay the school fees which constituted the teacher's entire income. Other church members and the local conference did not add to this amount. During vacation teachers often sold books door-to-door to eke out a living or they assisted as a Bible-worker in a summer tent-mission. Men who had to support a family therefore found it impossible to survive in the career. It was left almost entirely to single women. In Gooding's case her weekly income was \$1.50 per week. However, some parents were slow in paying. "She finds it rather difficult to get her money", wrote Cassius Hughes to Willie White in a personal letter dated April 8, 1901. Gooding was obliged to pay sixty cents in rent to her landlady each week. After tithe and offerings were subtracted she was left with about sixty cents for food and clothing. Everyday for lunch she could only afford a date or two and a split-pea sandwich without butter. In the winter she shivered day and night for lack of clothes and adequate blankets. Her lot improved only when she transferred to Rarotonga the following year.

On April 23, 1900, the first church school in Victoria was started by the North Fitzroy members. Rae Ellis had married fellow American Orwin ("Orrie") Morse at Avondale in late 1899. He transferred to work at the Echo Publishing Company in Melbourne and she taught thirty-nine youngsters when the school opened. The following year Emma Faulkhead took over. By 1902 the enrolment had soared to ninety but dipped to fifty in 1904 and petered out when the Echo Publishing Company was removed to Warburton the next year. The

school was reactivated later. During the heyday of its first span of operations (1900 -1906) Faulkhead had the assistance at various times of three young women - "Prissie" Prismall, "Lizzie" White, and "Millie" Hubbard. All had grown up in Melbourne and were tutored in elementary school-teaching at the senior Avondale School.

Tasmania opened its first church school at Hobart in 1901. "Katie" Judge taught for about twelve months and then left in preparation for sailing to South Africa to wed Cecil Pretzman. Edith Hill, a non-graduate but one who had studied for two years at Avondale, came to fill the gap in May 1902. A second Tasmanian school opened in Launceston in 1904 with American-born Ella Boyd as the initial teacher of twelve pupils. She had graduated from Avondale in 1902 and taught in the Brisbane school for one year before going to Launceston.

New Zealand struggled in their attempts to maintain a church school with any lasting qualities. William James Smith's first attempt in Christchurch fizzled because the small number of pupils, dropping to less than ten, was not enough to pay his wages. In late 1903 he tried again in Napier with mixed success for a short while. It was reactivated in mid-1906 by Edith Ward, a 1903 Avondale graduate. Church schools at Ponsonby in Auckland, and one in Wellington, were short-lived. In 1905 Ward tried generating a church school in New Plymouth with six students, but it too faded. Real success was not achieved until the elementary school was begun in conjunction with the Pukekura Training School. This was accomplished, of course, because of the larger concentration of Seventh-day Adventist families settled in the area. Failure in other centres was no reflection on the teachers.

Church schools with a short life-span were a recurring feature of the early days. The Hamilton school, New South Wales, which opened in 1908 experienced an intermittent existence. Western Australia's first, Osborne Park, flickered for six years then died in 1910. The school at Bathurst, New South Wales, appears to have lasted little more than the school term of 1906. Among the first in South

Australia, Kangarilla school, survived with seven or eight pupils for about six years (1907-1912). Mount Gambier, with less than ten pupils, had a similar experience, beginning in 1909 and fading about 1913.

As Gooding had discovered when she began at Petersham, the fees attracted from small classes were barely sufficient to live on. Parents either could not or would not pay higher fees. Only when the enrolment went beyond approximately twenty pupils did a school appear to be self-sustaining. Many schools did not survive infancy. Those schools which did continue on were generally found in the larger Adventist centres such as Cooranbong, Wahroonga, Warburton, and Heidelberg in Western Australia. (The Germanic name "Heidelberg" was changed during the First World War to "Bickley").

Schools were usually conducted in very simple dwellings. The short-lived New Plymouth School was held in a lean-to at the rear of their tiny church. Ruth Cozens, the pioneer teacher at the Murgon school in Queensland, laboured under similar privations. Osborne Park pupils met in the small church itself, using drop-down desk-tops attached to the backs of the pews. Upper Preston school in Western Australia first met in a room of George Chapman's home where Eva Clarke taught nine students. Church members at Heidelberg built a single-roomed weatherboard hut, less than four-by-six metres for their purposes. There, Violet Branford taught eight pupils, after completing her training course at Avondale in 1907 and returning home to live with her parents near the school.

Another feature of the early schools was their dedication to foreign mission projects. Part of the philosophy was to balance mental and physical exercise. For the latter the children often developed flower and vegetable gardens in preference to doing gymnastics. The produce was then sold to support overseas missions. When at Kangarilla in 1908, Gooding took the students on expeditions into the hills to gather wattle-gum for sale. Proceeds were sent to support Pastor Pauliasi Bunoa, a Fijian missionary. Rita Ford, a

teacher at Eugowra, New South Wales, organised her pupils in 1908 to raise money for Joseph Mills, missionary in Singapore. Mills was well-known among the Eugowra folk because he had pioneered their school in 1904. To raise money for him the students sold pin-cushions and bonnets door-to-door, harvested turnips, and trapped rabbits for sale to a local fur dealer.

Standards of conduct in the schools were always held high. For instance, the use of slang by teachers and students alike was frowned on. Apparently their definition of slang was broad by today's terms. In 1912 the teacher at Murgon, Eva Edwards, wrote against the use of expressions such as "hold your tongue", "clear out", and "the nippers". Even "little monkey" was forbidden because, as she explained, dubbing someone as an unclean animal was terribly degrading. These opinions, of course, echoed the ideals of the times in which she lived. Whether the youngsters measured up to these standards is a dubious matter. While local church members were responsible for the operation of schools the perpetual problem of fees and teachers' wages remained in the system. Schools mushroomed then died as a direct result of this weakness. Generally, it was single women only who attempted to live on the meagre income. If they were fortunate enough to be able to stay with their parents while they taught, as in Brandford's case, the drain on their finances was less severe.

Mills was an exception to the all-women norm. He was not a trained teacher but for two years (1904 and 1905) he managed with ten pupils at Eugowra simply because of the outstanding support received from the local people. But Henry Minchin, a 1904 Avondale graduate, only lasted one year at Petersham (Stanmore) where Gooding earlier had difficulties obtaining her income.

Male teaching graduates invariably moved immediately into other avenues of church work even though most were single at the time. Septimus Carr (1904), Mark Carey (1905), Kenelm Hungerford (1905), Harold Piper (1908), and Tom Roberts (1909) all entered overseas mission-fields where they did some teaching but were also

expected to be versatile in other forms of evangelism. Their wages were guaranteed by the Australasian Union Conference who appointed them. James Gregory (1905) was used in editorial work. Harold Blunden (1906), Leslie Smart (1907), and James Pascoe (1908) spent their first post-graduate years in colporteur work where a better income was usually forthcoming.

Some form of uniformity in fees and wages was introduced as a result of action taken at the 1909 Australasian Union Conference Session. It was recommended that the local conferences assume responsibility for the operation of the elementary schools located within their own regions, receive all tuition fees, and pay teachers from a common educational fund. Refinements of this scheme called for each church member to donate one cent each week to the conference educational fund. This was designed to supplement tuition fees. A standard scale of fees was also instituted. Parents with only one child at school were charged ten cents per week. Those with two children, fifteen cents. For three children it was twenty cents. Any additional children from the same family were charged five cents each.

Did the new system work efficiently? A report for the first six months of 1911, dealing with the four schools in New South Wales, reveals there was some shortfall on occasions. The schools in this report were Ashfield, Wahroonga, Eugowra and Corndale. (The Avondale elementary school, being an integral part of the teacher-training program, was funded separately). The report showed that \$208 was received into the conference educational fund and \$268 was paid out in salaries to the four single female teachers. However, constant promotion by conference leaders generally lifted support for Christian education and attracted sufficient funds to maintain this uniform system, as well as provide for further expansion. One additional benefit which arose from the centralisation of school administration was the genesis of elementary school teachers' institutes. The first of these was conducted on the Avondale campus, December 18-28, 1911. It was held only for the New South Wales and Queensland teachers in addition to three people who

were studying on campus at the time - "Harry" Streeter, Grace Cherry, and "Daisy" Arthur. Edwards came from the Murgon school in Queensland. The former Eva Clarke, Mrs Tom Escreet, represented the Avondale elementary school itself. The other four New South Wales schools were represented by Edith Clarke (Wahroonga), Martha Robinson (Ashfield), Rita Ford (Eugowra), and Myra Ford (Corndale). Avondale School educators, Charles Schowe and Rhae Allbon, were the chief speakers.

Post-graduate training for elementary teachers blossomed briefly in the following years with the introduction of the Advanced Normal Course at the Avondale School. Grace Cherry and Una Hosking graduated from it in 1913. Only one other, Beatrice Aitken in 1915, was granted this certificate before the course was dropped.

At great expense the Seventh-day Adventist elementary school system has continued to offer an alternative to secular education. Parents are grateful for the reinforcement given in the schools concerning beliefs and ethics which they themselves cherish. Many a student looks back with fond memories of the dedicated teachers and life-long friendships made in the classrooms. The primitive facilities of the pioneering days have been superseded by adequate amenities but the same spirit of devotion to train little people persists among the elementary school teachers today.

Major sources for this booklet are the "Bible Echo and Signs of the Times", the "Australasian Record", the "Australasian Union Conference Minutes", private letter collections stored at Avondale College, and the author's personal collection of pioneer data.

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- 1 **Debut** - Adventism Down Under before 1885
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