

Booklet

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**BEYOND THE ZIG-ZAG  
PIONEERING CARMEL COLLEGE IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

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By Milton Hook



**Seventh-day Adventist Heritage Series**



# **BEYOND THE ZIG-ZAG**

Pioneering Carmel College in Western Australia

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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.



**T**he Darling Range behind Perth was still a pioneer's paradise in the 1890's. Timber-getters had taken most of the largest jarrah trees which were prized for their enduring qualities and resistance to marine borers, but sawmillers and sleeper-cutters would still operate there for decades.

The vital artery which fed the scattered bush settlements and sawmills was a little railway affectionately called "The Zig-Zag Line". It ran from Perth via Midland Junction up the escarpment to Kalamunda and on to Canning Mills - a forty-eight kilometre trip. Its prime purpose was to transport lumber from the private sawmills in the forest. The occasional passenger had to chance his luck atop the timber in open wagons and arrived covered in soot. When the government took over the line in 1903 passenger facilities improved markedly and a regular timetable was established with two trains each way on week days only. In winter months, on a rare trip to the city, settlers' wives would set out from home before sunrise to catch the 6.35 a.m. train, taking with them a hurricane lamp, a junior or more, and an alarm clock to watch as they walked. At the trackside there was no shelter from the elements, just a bare platform or landing high enough for loading and unloading goods.

The three-hour crawl to Perth steamed through forests broken by tumbling outcrops of grey granite and red gravel ridges festooned with wildflowers in the spring. The locomotive sometimes spat

sparks into the dry undergrowth. Settlers became adept at putting out bushfires with nothing more than green branches and wet potato sacks. The return journey to the hills meant negotiating the zig-zag again. If the load was too heavy "Puffin' Billy" would pull half the train up the hill then scamper down the zigs and zags to get the other half. Some who lived near the first stop beyond the ridge, Gooseberry Hill, were known to get out and walk up to the top. It was much quicker that way.

Into this region came George Palmateer and Charles Ashcroft in the 1890's. As young men they had sailed from Victoria, worked for the Lands and Surveys Department and then bought their own choice tracts of bush in the Bickley Valley for \$2.50 per hectare. Palmateer's 120 hectares included a spring of water half-way up a valley which he used to succour his new orchard. He married Lucy Wallis, daughter of a nearby orchardist, built a magnificent ten-roomed villa with his own home-made bricks, named it "Heidelberg", and then harnessed the stream with a dam and water-wheel to generate his own electricity.

Settlers had to be self-sufficient. They made their own boots from kangaroo hide, insulated their homes by spreading sawdust in the ceiling, grew their own vegetables and kept their own cows and chickens. They experimented with the soils, trying to discover what crop would grow best. When the disease *Armillaria* invaded their fruit trees they found it harbouring in old red-gum roots left in the ground so these had to be eradicated by uprooting and burning. When their orchards matured, boxes of fruit were often taken two at a time by horseback to the rail landing. Then someone would accompany the fruit on the train to Perth to make sure it was not left in Midland Junction to spoil.

Ashcroft, at the same time as Palmateer, purchased a property in the Bickley Valley. His portion was lower in the gully where Piesses Brook flowed all year round. In 1902 he bought a second section in a neighbouring valley east of Green's Landing. Levi Green had pioneered the spot in 1894.



At Green's Landing Ashcroft cleared a few hectares of bush, planted fruit trees, and utilized the water from a spring halfway up the valley. He also began to build a six or seven-roomed house for himself and his wife Ada, daughter of Richard Urch - an early orcharding settler at Kalamunda. Ashcroft later sold his Piesses Brook property to Richard Loaring.

In 1904 George Hawkins entered the community and dramatically changed the course of history for Ashcroft, Palmateer, and others. Hawkins was a Seventh-day Adventist canvasser who sold his books to them and sparked an interest in Adventism. Walter Brittain studied the Scriptures with the group and the Western Australian Conference President, Lewis Finster, baptized nine in Piesses Brook on Sabbath, October 21, 1905. The next day the Heidelberg church was officially organized. They built their own little wooden church, painted white, in the Bickley Valley the following year.

At that time the Western Australian Conference, like the New Zealand Conference, was toying with the idea of starting their own boarding school. Parents and young people didn't like being isolated from home to study at the Avondale School in New South Wales. They wanted something closer. While in prayer Ashcroft was impressed to offer his partly developed property at Green's Landing for these purposes. In November 1906 some church officials visited the site and concluded it would be an ideal place. Its forty hectares or so, wire fencing, about two hectares of fruit trees and the partly finished cottage were estimated to be valued at \$2000. The five hundred fruit trees included oranges, mandarins, lemons, plums, apples, pears, peaches, figs, and loquats. Ashcroft agreed to accept \$200 for the entire estate providing the Western Australian Conference assumed liability for the transfer fee and a \$400 loan he had taken out with the Agricultural Bank. In effect, the church accepted a gift of almost \$1400 from Ashcroft who then rented another nearby orchard. This arrangement enabled the enterprise to start with its best foot forward.

Harry Martin, who had just completed the Missionary Course at the Avondale School, returned to the West with his wife, Prudence, to begin evangelism. However, Martin's prior experience in building and farming prompted Finster to change the plans and appoint him to superintend the development of the new school. Finster is reported to have handed Martin two dollars saying, "Go and buy an axe and a grindstone and I will persuade some students to come and help you." From that point onwards the enterprise was meant to be self-supporting.

To begin with, Martin operated the venture as an industrial school. Palmateer and Ashcroft served on the School Board, advising and steering the venture in its infant years. A shed on the property was dismantled and the iron sheeting used to fashion a temporary hut. In this oven-like shanty Martin and his wife endured the summer, using it as their home as well as a dining room for the worker-students who slept in the unfinished house Ashcroft had left behind.

On December 3 the first student arrived to take up the axe. Believe it or not, his name was Lou Chopping. Logs were sawn and split for sale as firewood. Martin planted a quick cash crop of turnips between the rows of fruit trees. Within six weeks all were washing and bagging these for rail to the Perth markets. Potatoes, cabbages, and cauliflowers were also planted. The orange crop from Ashcroft's young trees would only yield eight cases of fruit that first season. Three years later the harvest was nine hundred cases.

Martin began a little teaching on January 13, 1907. These classes were held after a day's work. He began with only two students but before the end of the week Hubert Smith, Don Nicholson, and Edith Clarke had arrived also. The fitting of doors and windows, and the plastering, was started on Ashcroft's partly finished home, At the same time work began on a new complex higher up the valley - one which would eventually constitute the permanent classrooms, boarding house, chapel, kitchen and dining room.

By June 1907 Ashcroft's partly finished home was sufficiently completed to have an informal opening ceremony with about twelve students on hand. The kitchen doubled as a dining room and the parlour was used as a chapel, classroom, and study area. It was named the Darling Range School. At that stage Lillian Clarke assumed much of the teaching load. She had graduated from the Teachers Course at Avondale the previous year. A few more students arrived, including Steve Mitchell, and Frank and Winnie Patterson. Two of the students were non-Seventh-day Adventists.

The school continued basically as an industrial one. Most of the students came in from country farms where cash was scarce. Work on the school farm and building therefore gave them the opportunity to build up credit which was used for tuition and board. They were paid four cents to eight cents per hour "according to their ability to earn". A forty-eight hour week was normal, therefore a student could earn between \$1.90 and \$3.80 per week. Tithe would be subtracted, as well as \$1.85 for board. In other words, those on a low hourly rate would need to supplement their tuition from cash reserves but the older or stronger students could manage without other assistance. In the first year of operation teachers had difficulty procuring adequate textbooks. Nevertheless, subjects offered were Bible, English, History, Physiology, Mathematics, Reading, Penmanship, and Music. Administration's stated aim was "to prepare [the student] quickly for the great harvest field". Therefore, it was primarily a missionary training institution from the start. However, in the initial years students tended to come and go for various lengths of time rather than staying for a full academic year. Ten young men and four young women registered for sundry periods in 1907. The following year only seven young men, together with fourteen young women, enrolled for periods ranging from a few weeks to the full year.

Church members in the West gave cash donations for the school. Some donated saddlery, poultry, and livestock. A few spent time

helping on the building programme. Palmateer donated bricks for an oven and Albert Shapcott gave a small grinding mill. These items enabled the students to begin cooking and marketing granola. Soon after, gluten and cereal coffee were manufactured also. This additional industry was the start of the health food factory on campus.

Harold and Nellie Blunden, both graduates of the Avondale Teachers Course, arrived in 1908 for a two-year term. Nellie was the daughter of Arthur Mountain, Secretary/Treasurer in the Western Australian Conference. Harold began teaching immediately but Nellie did not start until Lillian Clarke transferred at the end of the year. Martin concentrated on the orchard, vegetable garden, and the growing building higher up the valley. First, the south wing was completed in 1908 and gave better accommodation for the young men. They had to walk down the hill for meals and classes. Their accommodation was at a premium and the last boy to arrive that year, George Wise on June 30, had to sleep under the building.

For one year (1909) Ada Freeman connected with the school as preceptress. Twenty young women and sixteen young men enrolled at that time, some as late as the end of May. To ease the overcrowding, Martin, with the help of student labour, tried to accelerate the building of a two-storied annex to the boys' dormitory. This portion was planned as the centre of the developing complex and would provide the permanent chapel, classrooms, kitchen and dining room.

Disaster struck in April 1909. Martin and about six students came down with typhoid fever. One was a new student, Emma Giblett, the seventeen-year-old daughter of Jessie and Eliza Giblett who lived near Balbarrup in the south-west of the State. For several days Emma valiantly fought against confinement to bed, struggling to keep up her work and study schedule, but finally she relented on Friday, April 30. Freeman did all she could to nurse the ailing ones but there was no improvement in Emma. On

Sunday desperate distress calls were sent out to Perth and Balbarup. A district nurse was found that same day. A doctor arrived from Perth on the first available train, Monday. Another nurse, Mary Mountain, reached the school later on Monday. Emma's mother didn't receive news until Monday morning and caught the first available train from the south. Tuesday noon Emma was anointed. On Tuesday evening Blunden, and a local Adventist familiar with the bush, met Eliza Giblett at Kelmscott Railway Station and brought her cross-country to the school as quickly as possible. It was near midnight when they arrived. But they were too late. Emma had succumbed at 7.30p.m.

Adventist ministers at the time were not permitted to conduct services at Guildford Cemetery. Other cemeteries were too distant, so government authorities allowed a burial on the school property. Amid the gum trees on the opposite side of the valley a little plot was chosen. It being the only burial permitted there, Emma rests alone today.

Not wishing to arouse fears among the constituency, Albert Piper, President of the Western Australian Conference, wrote a circular letter saying, "Fever germs were brought up from the city when the students returned from a camp meeting [in Subiaco, March 18-28]." But the government health inspector visited the school and, despite claims to the contrary, declared the sanitation facilities unsafe. He ordered a number of major improvements. These were made as rapidly as possible and no more outbreaks of the disease occurred.

In late 1909 American missionary-teachers Roger and Elizabeth Brown transferred from the Avondale staff to replace the Blundens. Apart from teaching he served as principal, business manager, and preceptor. She acted as both preceptress and matron. Emma Giblett's sister, Kathleen, who had graduated from the Avondale School as a teacher in 1909, joined the staff also. She taught for ten years at the school, eventually leaving to care for her aged parents. Twenty-four young women and twenty

young men registered as students in 1910. The promise of increasing enrolments made it imperative to push ahead with building development. By the end of the year the two-storey section of the new building was advanced enough to allow closing exercises to be held in the unlined chapel upstairs.

During the summer vacation the double-storey portion was virtually completed. Two classrooms were located at the rear of the chapel. The kitchen was situated on ground level near the stairs, together with the dining room overlooking the orchard in the valley. This brought about a dormitory swap when classes resumed in 1911. The young ladies thereafter used the south wing, making it convenient for them to access the kitchen and classrooms. The young men transferred down the valley to the original cottage, playing the gentlemanly part again by walking to meals and classes.

The previous year (1910) was a bumper year for fruit and vegetable profits. All told, the school reported a gain of \$1400. Nevertheless, a rush was not made to complete the new complex by adding a north wing as a dormitory for the young men. That came much later, when Martin returned in the mid-1920's. Instead, improvements came in the form of a ceiling for the drafty chapel, a back verandah, two water tanks and tank stand, another building at the rear to serve both as a laundry and new bakehouse for the health food industry, and a large underground cistern in which to store water for the long dry summers. A flight of stairs was also erected on the north side leading to the chapel and classrooms. This circumvented the problem of the young men having to walk through the girls' dormitory to get upstairs. It also acted as a fire escape - a vital consideration because all lighting was by kerosene lamps. This method of lighting was described as "dangerous and antiquated" as well as being inadequate for study purposes. The exterior of the building remained unpainted for some years. Proper desks were also slow in coming. In the meantime they improvised by attaching book-rests to the chapel chairs.

Martin transferred to tent-mission evangelism in 1911 and was replaced as farm manager and builder late that year by Ellis Behrens. Behrens was a 1910 graduate from the Avondale Teachers Course who came as both farm superintendent and teacher. Arthur Mountain transferred from his position as Secretary/Treasurer of the Western Australian Conference to do some teaching, together with his wife, Mary, who taught physiology. Neither had any teaching credentials or experience but they adapted well. Arthur also tried his hand at building. They remained until early 1914. Behrens stayed only until the end of 1912 when Ashcroft himself returned as farm manager and preceptor.

Brown had to return to America before the school year of 1912 began. Hurriedly, William James Smith was called from the Pukekura Training School in New Zealand to fill the gap. He and his family did not arrive until mid-April and the enrolment for that year slumped to thirty-two. Fifty students had attended the previous year and this figure was recovered again in 1913. Smith, being a New Zealander, was never really in love with the friendly Western Australian flies and was known to sing their praises tongue-in-cheek. However, he settled in and gave strong leadership to the institution. Joining their teaching ranks in 1913 was an accomplished young lady in the person of Lilla Davies. She had graduated from the Business Course, Missionary Course, and Music Course at Avondale. In addition she had received an associate diploma in piano from the London College of Music.

The dormitory schedule left little time for leisure. All students were expected to work at least fifteen hours each week in some school industry as part-payment of their fees. Shopping trips on the train to Perth, even dental visits, were discouraged. Instead, these matters were to be cared for before the school term began. Students were expected to arrive at the beginning of the year equipped with adequate clothing, bed linen, towels, serviettes, soap, boot polish, a drinking glass, combs, curtains, galoshes and

everything else needed for relative comfort in semi-isolation. No jewellery was to be worn. Novel-reading was forbidden. Separate paths for Sabbath strolling were arranged for the opposite sexes. Parents were specifically told, "Do not send the incorrigible, the immoral, the mentally unbalanced, or those with disagreeable and dangerous maladies."

The school was established with the definite purpose of training youth to fill positions in the various arms of the church corporate. Missionary nurses, school teachers, Bible workers, business and secretarial personnel, as well as staff for the health food enterprise were all in demand. Classes offered were therefore structured from the elementary stages to steer youth into these vocations. For example, during the First World War years the two-year Preparatory Course, for those fourteen years and over, comprised Bible History, English, English History, Arithmetic, Geography, Penmanship, Physiology and First Aid, and Drawing. In effect, the course served as the first two years of modern-day high school. This was sufficient to gain entrance into the Nursing Course at the Sydney Sanitarium or courses offered at the Avondale School.

After obtaining the preparatory diploma a student could then enter the two-year Business course. This involved subjects such as Typewriting, Shorthand, and Bookkeeping, in addition to more Arithmetic, English, and Bible studies. Furthermore, if students wished to remain in the West rather than attend the Avondale School for three or four years then they could complete one or two years of the Intermediate Course in part-fulfilment of the Teachers and Missionary Courses offered at Avondale. This course included Elementary Science, Ancient History, and advanced studies in Bible, English, and Mathematics. Lessons in piano, organ, and violin, were additional options no matter what course the student was pursuing.

Did the institution achieve its missionary aim? In the first five years of operation (1907-1911) ninety individuals enrolled for



various lengths of time. Many, of course, found themselves unsuited for study. Some, however, pursued their course and entered full-time employment with the denomination.

Of the fourteen students who attended in 1907, only Don Nicholson graduated from the Avondale School. In 1910 he married Lillian Clarke, whose classes he had no doubt attended earlier at the Darling Range School. At Avondale, he completed the Missionary Course in 1912 and they later sailed for the Solomon Islands.

George Wise, who gave up his bed under the building and eventually slept indoors, went on to graduate from the Sydney Sanitarium in 1914. So did his sister, Ada. They were followed by Hilda Markey (1917), Albert Ward (1918), Leonard Hunt (1921), and Harry Gibson (1924). Ruth Giblett later married fellow student, Ludwig or "Lou" Borgas, and together they served among the Australian aborigines for many years. Edith Clarke graduated from the Avondale Teachers Course in 1911 and served in both missionfield and homeland schools. Albert Powell went as a missionary to Tonga. Harold Baird, of the well-known Perth business family, spent his life as a colporteur missionary in Burma and India.

As a fourteen-year-old, George Chapman started at the Darling Range School in 1910 and graduated from the Business Course at Avondale in 1916. He proceeded with a distinguished career in the health food industry, both in Australasia and at Loma Linda, California. Ethel Todd was later appointed Sabbath School and Youth Secretary for the South Australian Conference. Both Clara and Amy Smith, students in those early years, stayed on to teach at their alma mater without a certificate from Avondale. One or two others served in lesser capacities.

Therefore, almost 20 per cent of the students who attended in the first five years augmented the growing number of church workers. The institution continued in this capacity, training youth to go

directly into the denominational work-force or proceed to the Avondale School for advanced studies.

In 1915 the locals at Green's Landing considered a new name for their community. Kelvin and Saxon were put forward as suggestions. These were rejected for various reasons by the Post and Telegraphs Department and, instead, the name Carmel was proposed and accepted.

Carmel, in the Hebrew language, means "garden" or "orchard" an apt tag for the district. The school orchard continued to flourish and over the years has provided work for needy students, revenue for the institution, and a source of fresh and canned fruit for their table. The high quality of fruit sent to the Perth wholesale markets earned a reputation among retailers. Auctioneers would notice the school's name on the crate and shout, "Every plum picked and packed with a prayer!" In 1968 the school incorporated the name Carmel into its title, having changed it from the Darling Range School to the Western Australian Missionary School forty-two years earlier.

*Major sources for this booklet are the "Australasian Record", the Minutes of the Darling Range School Board and other documents stored at Carmel College, the 1979 book "Cala Munda" co-authored by John Slee and Bill Shaw, and the author's personal collection of pioneer data.*



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