

Booklet

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**PUKEKURA AND OROUA  
PIONEERING LONGBURN COLLEGE IN NEW ZEALAND**

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By Milton Hook



**Seventh-day Adventist Heritage Series**



# **PUKEKURA AND OROUA**

Pioneering Longburn College in New Zealand

Milton Hook



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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.



“I love the place” was the name of the place, or, in the Maori language, “Pukekura”. It was the location first chosen for the training school in New Zealand, situated a few miles south-west of Cambridge in the North Island.

At the Wellington camp meeting of January 1906 church members had voted to begin a school where their children could train to intermediate level without having to go overseas to America or Australia. They had pledged \$1400 towards the venture and elected a search party of nine men - Arthur Brandstater, Edward Halsey, George Wright, Edward Hare, and the Conference Executive Committee consisting of Pastors Stephen Cobb and Frank Lyndon, Dr George Gibson, William James Smith, and Sidney Amyes. Walter Irwin, Principal of the Avondale School, had even tripped across the Tasman Sea to help in the search. But they were unable to come to any agreement regarding a suitable place.

Later, in November 1906, at the Masterton camp meeting, a new search party was elected consisting of only three men -Cobb, the President of the Conference, together with Amyes representing the South Island and Joseph Hare representing the North Island. They were instructed by the delegates to buy a property not exceeding \$4000. What they found at Cambridge was sixty-eight hectares costing almost \$70 per hectare. The hilly farmland had been cleared of large timber and there was an old house on the estate. Peter Read, the owner, was working it as a dairy farm. There were good springs of water available and the soil seemed

promising. With high expectations they purchased the property in the summer of 1906/1907 and began to lay plans to erect a boarding school.

American teacher and carpenter, Frank Chaney, came from the Avondale School to superintend the construction of the main building. Cobb himself rolled up his sleeves and assisted too, together with a dozen young Kiwis who came as industrial students to earn credit for future schooling. A large barn as well as a teacher's cottage was also erected in 1907.

The "Castle on the Hill", as it became known, was a wooden two-storey building with a Mansard or French roof giving attic accommodation. Thus, it effectively provided three storeys of boarding rooms in the same design as Preston Hall at Avondale. Chaney patterned the main central section similar to Avondale's College Hall or "The Chapel". That is, the main entrance led into a hallway with the principal's room on one side and a business office on the other. Two flights of stairs located on either side of the hallway lead up to the chapel and classrooms. Two extra classrooms were found in the spacious attic. Attractive bay windows were incorporated into the principal's and business offices. A balcony was added to the upstairs section similar to Avondale's Bethel Hall. The dining room was placed at the back, together with a basement which housed the kitchen, dug partly into the side of the hill. Two dormitories, each with eighteen rooms, were planned as wings on the main building. The rooms would accommodate two students each, giving a maximum capacity of seventy-two. This number, plus day students, could be fitted comfortably into the ninety-six-seat chapel. However, only the west wing was constructed initially.

In the summer of 1907/1908 the be whiskered and kindly old John Higgins came to help speed up the building program so that regular classes could begin with the 1908 school year. To advertise the school the annual camp meeting was held at Cambridge in early January, giving members an opportunity to



see the progress and to fulfil cash pledges. It also inspired potential students to enrol.

Despite the fact that some portions of the building interior were not finished, the dedication ceremony took place on Monday afternoon, February 3, 1908. Locals flocked in, driving their motor cars, buggies, traps, carts, and drays. They crammed into the chapel and spilled down the staircases, some even having to stand in the lobby downstairs straining to hear the speechifying - and there was much of that from Pastor Ole Olsen, President of the Australasian Union Conference, as well as Hare, Chancy, the local Mayor, and prominent businessmen of Cambridge. The building itself had cost approximately \$3600 and a further \$1600 was spent on farm implements, additional fencing, a dairy herd, poultry, bee hives, and over five hundred fruit trees.

Chaney stayed on as principal, farm manager, and building supervisor until the end of 1910. Higgins remained just for the 1908 school year and was succeeded by Wesley Hare. Their wives assisted too, Bertha Chancy teaching physiology and language classes whilst wiry little Harriet Higgins acted as matron or cook. William James Smith came as Bible teacher and preceptor, at the same time trying to carry the responsibility as Vice-president of the Conference. His wife taught sewing. American Nellie Sisely came in from her mission school on Tonga to teach the primary pupils for just one year before returning to Nukualofa. Mabel Piper, even though she had not yet graduated from Avondale, assisted by teaching music and drawing. Prissie Hare, a graduate of the Business Course (1902) and Missionary Course (1904) at Avondale, returned to her homeland and cared for the office and any business subjects.

Throughout the first year approximately fifty students enrolled for various lengths of study time. This was its capacity until a further wing could be added. Part way through the year nineteen were baptized in a nearby stream by Smith. Florence Harker, one of the

senior pupils, epitomized the purpose of the institution in these words,

*On the slopes of Pukekura  
Stands a school three storeys high;  
Its surroundings are most healthful,  
And pleasing to the eye ....*

*... Now this school is opened  
With many noble youth,  
Who have pledged their strength and loyalty  
To extend Jehovah's truth.  
They know that on their shoulders  
This mighty work will rest,  
And each one's aim and object is  
To do his very best.*

*O God above, O God of love,  
Bless Pukekura School;  
Bless every teacher, every youth;  
May loving kindness rule.  
May faithful, watchful diligence  
Prepare them for the field,  
That each may fight for truth and right,  
Bearing the sword and shield*

The developing Adventist community unnerved one local clergyman who began to preach against the Saturday Sabbath. His sermons were noted in the local newspaper and Smith wrote a defence which the editor published. Salvos were fired back and forth in the same columns as the public became increasingly polarized on the issue.

Some of the more militant folk prodded the local constable to storm Pukekura on Sunday, September 20, 1908, and catch some at work. Smith was charged with hoeing on a Sunday. John Sterling was found discing a paddock and young Edgar James

was caught driving a team of horses back to the barn. All three were summoned to appear in the Cambridge Court for violating the Sunday laws "within sight of a public place". They were each fined fifty cents plus costs.

Another court case involving Pukekura was running at the same time. One of the locals had apparently met Cobb and Chaney when they first arrived and had advised them about building supplies, thinking to attract some commission from those businessmen he recommended. But Chaney bought more cheaply elsewhere and the local became quite peeved about it. He charged them an architect's fee. Chaney refused to pay so the local sued. The judge treated it all with a giggle, deciding Chaney owed the local a token three cents and both should pay their own court costs. Both these court cases indicated deep antagonism smouldering in the district. Nevertheless, Chaney and Smith soldiered on.

In anticipation of increased enrolment the summer vacation of 1908/09 was spent by Chaney and student helpers making a start on the east wing. Another reason for this project was that it would provide another stairway to the young mens' quarters in the attic rooms and a further escape in case of fire. Accommodation overflowed in 1909 and a bathroom, classroom and reception room were all transformed into bedrooms. Fifty-three boarding students and twenty-seven day students enrolled. This included fifteen youngsters in the affiliated primary school. The large number of non-boarders reflected the fact that many Adventist families had come to settle in the neighbourhood. It proved to be the highest enrolment Pukekura ever received.

When Piper went to Avondale in 1909 to complete her study for the teaching certificate Edith Caro came to Pukekura especially to teach music. She later doubled as preceptress. Joseph and "Nettle" Mills transferred from the Eastern Training School in Singapore to help cope with the increased intake of students. Joseph also acted as preceptor. It was a particularly busy year.

Six hectares of wheat, four hectares of maize, and about thirty-five tonnes of potatoes were harvested. The young ladies canned over two thousand large cans of fruit and jam from the orchard and garden. Three large water tanks were installed. A blacksmith's shop and a carpenter's shop were established. A large barn-like building was also erected as a health food factory industry for the students but this project never really came to fruition.

Chaney jubilantly reported a profit of over \$200 for the first quarter of 1909, but as the year wore on signs of financial difficulties appeared. Only fifteen of the students were paying full fees. The remainder were working in the school industries to pay off 50 per cent or more of their costs. This meant the industries had to make an immediate and handsome profit. That did not materialize. Largely to blame was a twenty-eight hectare wheat crop which failed. Chaney, Smith, and Mills were not experienced farmers. Furthermore, a profitable year-round industry for the young ladies could not be generated.

The dairying business was sold, leaving only a few cows for the school's own use. This helped to recoup losses and school management insisted thereafter that more students be full-paying ones. A natural result of this was a decline in enrolments. The east wing was enclosed and flooring laid during the summer vacation of 1909/10 but remained unlined and lacking the finishing touches. However, some spartans toughed out the winter in these conditions.

Sixty-six pupils, including those in the primary school, attended in 1910. This was still sufficient to warrant the same level of teaching staff, except some of the responsibilities were shuffled. Chaney remained principal and his wife took over in the business office. Mills acted as preceptor and his wife served as matron. The Bible teaching was continued by Smith. The imposing figure of Piper returned to teach about twenty pupils. Amyes gave his sorely-needed experience and advised about the farming

activities. Much of the work, however, was left to Harold Letts, one of the students. At the end of 1910 the school was still \$800 in debt.

In 1911 enrolments slid further to fifty-seven. A cut in staffing was imperative. Chaney transferred to Papua in view of the fact that most of the building had been completed. Smith assumed the principal's mantle and the Millses shared most of the teaching assisted by Maude Smart. Caro doubled as matron and preceptress.

The academic high-water mark of Pukekura was reached at the end of the 1911 school year. At that time eighteen certificates were presented to those who had completed the Preparatory Course. Some of these folk had attended the school from the start. A few had even begun on their intermediate studies.

What became of the early students? In many cases they furthered their education. Others returned to their homes and farms. One senior student, Harold White, married Piper the primary school-teacher and graduated from the Biblical Academic Course at Avondale in 1912. They began their united church work as missionary-teachers in Fiji. Annie Newbold later married fellow class-mate William Wilton, who served in the Sanitarium Health Food Company. Roslyn White and Herbert Morrison graduated from the Sydney Sanitarium in 1914. Cyril Palmer, Edgar James, Agnes Moore, and Norman Faulkner all progressed onto the Avondale School and graduated from various courses.

An exceptionally long vacation of five months was taken in the summer of 1911/12. It was designed, ostensibly, to allow young people to earn enough cash so that more could enrol as full paying students. But this strategy was undermined by the rumour that Pukekura was about to close. Just as the 1912 school year was opening on March 20 the official church paper admitted a search was on for a more suitable site. In actual fact, the Australasian Union Conference had voted back in September

1911 to sell Pukekura but this was kept confidential. With such uncertainty in the minds of church members the enrolment, of course, plummeted. Only sixteen boarding students and five day students registered. It was the nadir of the New Zealand school. The Smiths, fortuitously, found they were needed to manage the Darling Range School in Western Australia. Caro transferred to the Avondale School. Mabel (Piper) White transferred from the primary school and was replaced by Lucy Beavis. Only Mills and his wife, together with Smart and Beavis, were left to preside over the spectre.

The important factors in the choice of a new site were closer proximity to the South Island youth, good soil, and better access to buyers of their farm produce. The key figure in the discussions was Amyes. As a member of the Conference Executive Committee he had repeatedly promoted the cause of the South Islanders. His farming abilities and business acumen were respected. Furthermore, his brief personal experience at Pukekura as farm adviser added to the weight of his arguments.

In March 1912 the larger portion of Pukekura was sold to William Nickle. There was a gentlemen's agreement with the new owner that they continue to use the building until the school year was completed. Some local church members were annoyed by the developments. They had deliberately settled on neighbouring farms in order to give their children an Adventist education. The blow was softened somewhat with the promise that the primary school would continue at Cambridge for their benefit.

Later in the year a suitable spot was chosen further south at Longburn. George Wright, a farmer at Wanganui and father of a Pukekura student, joined in a deal with the conference administration. Wright's three hectare Wanganui farm was parceled with the remaining twenty-eight hectares at Pukekura and a home-cum-office in Wellington. This package was exchanged with Jesse Hill who handed over his ninety-seven hectares at Longburn and a lump sum of \$1576. This area was

then divided up with an initial twelve hectares chosen for the new school and the remainder retained by Wright. In later years the twelve hectares was quadrupled and some kilometres away at Himatangi an additional fifty-eight hectares was purchased for grazing.

The Longburn property had a flat aspect and plenty of rich alluvial soil that could be easily worked by the students. Its close proximity to the new railway line and hence easy access to Wellington markets was another feature in its favour. And, of course, it was more centrally located for the entire New Zealand membership.

Wright agreed to oversee the farm. In November the building contractor, Frank Chaney's older brother, Albert, began in earnest with a rather optimistic view to open the new school in March 1913.

The basic plan was similar to the Pukekura building - a double-storied central section with chapel and classrooms upstairs and kitchen and dining room facilities at the back on ground level. Dormitory space was reduced to two single-storied wings to cater for a maximum of twenty-four boarding students. There were no attic rooms. It was given a handsome Tudor-style exterior and finished with oiled rimu panelling inside and a red-tiled roof. As soon as a section was enclosed most of the furnishings were transferred from Pukekura.

The school year had closed at Pukekura and only a few folk remained to help shift the last of their equipment. They awoke to the smell of kerosene and a fierce crackling of fire early on the Monday morning of December 23, 1912. Apparently the fire had started in the far corner of the uncompleted east wing. The timbers quickly became an inferno and all attempts to save the building were futile. They escaped with their lives and the documents of sale. Mystery still surrounds its cause. Some allege Nickle set the fire himself, hoping to claim insurance. However,

apparently he could not satisfy the insurance company and Nickle didn't get a nickel. "I love the place" had been a bitter experience that had intensified to gall for Nickle. The pile of ash disintegrated with time. Nickle eventually built up a profitable dairy farm on the property.

Everyone had lived in tents at Longburn during the summer of 1912/13 while building was in progress. An artesian bore was sunk, providing enough pressure to hose clear over the top of the new structure. It would provide all their water needs and serve in case of fire. Hedges were planted to protect against the windy Roaring Forties. Vegetable gardens of cabbages, cauliflowers, peas, beans, carrots, lettuce, turnips, potatoes, and tomatoes were established immediately in readiness for the school year. Later, the young men built up a thriving business with a number of vegetable rounds in nearby Palmerston North.

The building itself was completed in only five months at a cost of \$6564, including the gas-lighting plant. Two weeks were spent in organizing everything. The young men moved into the east wing and the young ladies into the west wing. On Wednesday afternoon, April 30, a dedication and opening service was held in the presence of local church members, teachers and students. The name which was chosen for the missionary school was "Oroua", a Maori word meaning "twice entered", because it was the second attempt to establish a viable training institution in New Zealand.

In its first year, 1913, Oroua attracted twenty-one boarding students and four day students. This was a slight improvement on the all-time low at Pukekura the previous year. More significantly, the enrollees at Oroua were all senior students. No primary school was affiliated with the institution. Mills and his wife continued to teach, assisted by Smart once again. Mills reported that two received their Preparatory Course certificates at the end of the year - a South Islander, Vernon Nilsson, and an American lass, Ruita Cole, the daughter of the New Zealand Conference



President, Pastor John Cole. Mills also spoke of having planted a small orchard and six hundred gooseberry plants. He noted, too, that the school had paid its first instalment on the \$7000 loan with the Australasian Union Conference, leaving it with a profit of \$20 for the year.

Enrolments had gradually risen to the forties by the end of 1919 when Mills transferred to the Darling Range School in Western Australia. Boarding capacity was exceeded year after year so it became necessary to add a second storey to both dormitory wings in the early 1920's, increasing its capacity to fifty-two. At the same time the institution's name was changed to the New Zealand Missionary School. In 1927 further extensions gave accommodation for thirty-six more students. A music studio, set apart from the main building, was erected at the same time.

The dairy, poultry farm, orchard, and vegetable gardens continued to be profitable industries on campus, providing work opportunities for the students. A wicker-basket factory was added in the late 1920's for the young women to gain employment. Some of the young men worked in the campus furniture shop. After the Second World War the Sanitarium Health Food Company also established a factory opposite the school which increased possibilities for students to earn their own fees.

The Oroua Training School was first registered as a secondary school in 1917. It continued to provide the Adventist youth of New Zealand with this level of education, especially a boarding opportunity for those from the isolated farms. In addition, over the years other courses were offered, such as secretarial, elementary school teaching, music, carpentry, and agriculture. These have enhanced the skills and job opportunities for many. Scores have advanced their studies overseas, graduating with nursing, secondary education, and theology degrees.

While Longburn's westerlies are quite bracing in comparison to the warmer climes of Cambridge, the soil was found to be more

productive and easily worked. Generally speaking, the change from Pukekura to Oroua proved to be a sensible one. The financial problems at Pukekura were not intensified at Oroua, largely because the size of the institution was kept small and allowed to grow gradually.

*Major sources for this booklet are the "Australasian Record" and the author's personal collection of pioneer data.*



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