

"I have been blessed in reading this fascinating and carefully researched account of Ellen White's time in Australia."

—*Dr Allan Lindsay, church historian, Keepers of the Flame and Tell the World*

STORIES FROM SUNNYSIDE

ELLEN WHITE IN AUSTRALIA
1891-1900



MARIAN DE BERG

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FOREWORD

Ellen White's connection with Australia commenced with a vision she received on April 1, 1874. She referred to it as an "impressive dream in which the messenger said, 'You are entertaining too limited ideas of the work for this time. . . . You must take broader views. The message will go in power to all parts of the world, to Oregon, to Europe, to Australia, to the islands of the sea.'" Fifteen years later, at the age of 64, she arrived in Sydney in December, 1891. Politically orchestrated circumstances brought her to this distant land. Reflecting on the purpose of her journey, she said, "This morning my mind is anxious and troubled in regard to my duty, can it be the will of God that I go to Australia? This involves a great deal for me. I have not special light to leave America for this far-off country. Nevertheless, if I knew it was the voice of God, I would go."¹ The depth of her personal experience with God and confidence in His leading prevailed. She wrote, "I am presenting the case before the Lord, and I believe He will guide me."²

In 1894, providential guidance brought her to Cooranbong, a little village with a timber-cutting industry, a Catholic church, a school, a police station and a courthouse, where during the 1880s the population reached about 700 residents. In the context of the "impressive dream," Cooranbong was a speck in the vast ocean of human life. Following the Seventh-day Adventists' acquisition of the 1500 acres (600 hectares) to set up the education system, Ellen White built her home—named "Sunnyside"—where she resided from 1896 to 1900.

About five years ago, I noticed a lack of stories relating to Ellen White's experiences of these years written from an Australian perspective. I envisioned stories and images from this past that transmitted the emotions of the life lived in all its fullness—stories that shaped a legacy. With this in mind, I asked my administrative assistant Marian de Berg to commence the research and collection of data from letters, manuscripts and other resources. Marian's 29-year experience and love for details equipped her with an in-depth knowledge of the subject. For the past 12 years, she has offered excellent support and assistance to my work as director of the Ellen

G White Research Centre. During this time, I have also observed her flair as a writer, so I challenged her to write a book. From my office desk, I often watched her unreserved passion and commitment to the task, and it is my pleasure to see the final product.

This book does not provide an explanatory framework of Ellen White's prophetic role, nor a theological charter for argumentative debates. It recalls the narratives in the life of a person engrossed in the depth of God's love. It recalls the memories, the colours and the sounds highlighting qualities such as personal uniqueness, giftedness and value. Perhaps it's in the places where the rubber meets the road that one finds the authenticity of the prophetic voice—a voice that does not only speak but acts the part of God's extended hands in the community.

The depth and simplicity of these stories touch my heart. The selected stories link with human experience, the story of our heritage. They recall the images of a person who translated God's love into practical Christian experience. Perhaps here one finds the heart of the impressive dream. I suggest it's not just another book, but a set of life-inspiring narratives challenging us to take a decisive step not only to read the story but to make those images ours.

I express my appreciation for Marian's hard work and commitment to this thorough research project and it is my privilege to recommend this book as a crowning achievement of her 29 years of ministry.

Dr John Skrzypaszek
Director
Ellen G White Research Centre
Avondale College of Higher Education

1. Manuscript 44, 1891.
2. Letter 57, 1891.

INTRODUCTION

As an administrative assistant working at the Ellen G White/Seventh-day Adventist Research Centre at Avondale College of Higher Education for the past two decades, I have been privileged to read Ellen White's correspondence and manuscripts. A large portion of her writings, particularly those on the life of Jesus, were written while she lived in Australia. I have been encouraged and moved by her life's journey while she lived in Cooranbong where Avondale College is situated. Her correspondence during this time reveals Ellen White as a caring Christian woman giving her all to the work of the gospel.

She had a broad vision for the Adventist Church's work in Australia and was instrumental in helping to establish Avondale College—the Avondale School for Christian Workers, as it was originally known. The purchase of the bush land for Avondale School at Cooranbong in New South Wales came when Seventh-day Adventist membership in Australia had not yet reached 1000.

For the past six years, I have also been actively involved in various ways with her home—"Sunnyside"—near Avondale College. I conduct group tours ranging from very young Grade 1 school students to retirees. I train volunteers and organise a roster each month. Visitors come from all around the world to see the home Ellen White built and lived in for six years in the 1890s.

This book is not a scholarly work, but it draws significantly on letters and other materials she wrote while in Australia. To this extent, the stories draw on primary source materials, which will be of interest to scholars of Adventist history in particular, and religious history in general.

Ellen White was born in Gorham, Maine, on November 26, 1827, and died peacefully at her "Elmshaven" home in California, on July 16, 1915, at 87 years of age. During her lifetime, she ministered to many people in homes, churches and camp-meetings around the world. She lived in Basel, Switzerland, for two years in the mid-1880s and in November, 1891, she set sail for Australia, intending to spend a similar amount of time assisting the newly developing church in the South Pacific. However, her stay—in

Australia and New Zealand—lasted for nine years, from 1891 to 1900.

The stories in this book come from this period, with particular emphasis on her everyday activities at Sunnyside from 1895 to August, 1900, and her travels to various camp-meetings and speaking appointments. From the time she arrived in Australia, she travelled extensively along the east coast of Australia, from Rockhampton in Queensland to Hobart in Tasmania. She also ventured as far west as Adelaide in South Australia and spent 10 months in the North Island of New Zealand.

The British colonisation of Australia commenced in January, 1788, when a penal colony was established at Sydney Cove. The First Fleet of 11 ships left the shores of Great Britain on May 13, 1787, and arrived at Sydney Cove in mid-January, 1788. Free settlers arrived as early as January, 1793. By the 1890s, Australia was a group of six British colonies: Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania, South Australia and Western Australia. It was not until January 1, 1901, that these states became an independent nation under Federation to become the “Commonwealth of Australia.” Queen Victoria, the reigning British monarch, was Australia’s Head of State. By 1900, Australia’s population had almost reached four million.

Transportation around the country was rough. Roads needed attention after rain and carriage wheels created deep ruts. Boats reeked of cigar smoke, and train engines spat out smoke and cinders onto people and clothing through the open carriage windows.

Seventh-day Adventism reached Australia in 1885, only six years before Ellen White arrived. There was a six-day working week, with Sunday considered sacred and a financial depression had hit hard with banks foreclosing many properties. Most working converts to Adventism lost their jobs for refusing to work on Sabbaths. Many of these had large families to support and wanted to erect churches so they could worship on the seventh day. Young men and husbands were also being sent from Australia to South Africa to fight in the Boer War.

Times have changed dramatically over the past 100 years, from the horse and buggy era of Ellen’s time in Australia, to motorised vehicles, airplanes and ships. Come back in time with me and re-live Ellen White’s life “down under” and the blessings that she brought to this fledgling group of

believers.

Truly we can say her life here in Australia, was an living example of Matthew 25: “I was hungry . . . I was thirsty . . . I was a stranger . . . I was naked . . . I was sick . . .

“Jesus replied: ‘You gave me something to eat . . . you gave me drink . . . you invited me in . . . you clothed me . . . you visited me.’”

CHAPTER ONE

ARRIVAL IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC

The Seventh-day Adventist church's first missionaries to Australia landed in Sydney on June 6, 1885. The group consisted of three preachers, Pastors S N Haskell, J O Corliss and M C Israel, with wives Julia Corliss and Lizzie Israel, who each had two children. They were accompanied by a printer, Henry Scott, and a door-to-door religious salesman, William Arnold.

Settling in Melbourne, the group commenced evangelistic work and established a magazine, *The Bible Echo and Signs of the Times*, at their rented printing establishment, *The Bible Echo*. These first six years, before the arrival of Ellen White, saw books sold and meetings held in all Australian states in both the cities and country towns—and in New Zealand.

At the General Conference Session at Battle Creek, Michigan, in March, 1891, Pastor Haskell made a stirring appeal for workers to go to Australia to establish a school, and requested that Ellen White and her son, W C (“Willie”) White, spend time there also. Action was taken by the Mission Board to request that the Whites move to this new field of labour and to leave in the autumn of that year.

But Ellen saw no light in going to the South Pacific and was concerned that her writing would be hampered while meeting the needs of this new venture. She found God silent on the issue, but after praying for a decision, she accepted the call. She knew that if God did not want her to go, He would close the door.

The door remained open and, on November 12, 1891, she and her party set sail from San Francisco for Sydney, Australia, on the *Alameda*. She celebrated her 64th birthday on the journey—although, at the time, she believed it to be her 63rd.¹

A week after leaving San Francisco, the *Alameda* docked at Honolulu,

Hawaii. Here Ellen and her companions visited the home of Lawrence and Matilda Kerr where they found a “table piled with native oranges, bananas, various fruits, cake and an abundance of Jersey milk.”² In this home, Matilda Kerr requested that Ellen bless her children:

Pali Lookout in the Hawaiian Islands.

Photo: Carol Sayers



She brought in her little children that I might lay my hands on their heads and bless them. I bowed in prayer with her and her little group, and prayed for them all, the little ones kneeling and my hands upon their heads, while the tears were streaming from the eyes of the mother and children. She embraced me again and again, and told me how much she loved me, and how she had longed to see me, and to have the honour of receiving me into her house.³

Then, heading toward the Pali Lookout, they ascended a hill six miles (10 kilometres) away and enjoyed a picnic lunch surrounded by great mountain peaks and verdant valleys below. With the ship due to leave around midnight, a hastily called meeting was arranged in the YMCA hall where Ellen was surprised by the number of people assembled. After such a beautiful day, “I was glad I consented to speak to them, venturing the whole matter on the promise of the Lord, ‘Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.’ I felt that Jesus was indeed with me that night by His Holy Spirit.”⁴ Before departure, the Kerrs presented her with an upholstered rocking chair that added comfort for the remainder of the trip and her stay in Australia.



One of the two rocking chairs owned by Ellen White while at “Sunnyside”.

Photo: Marian de Berg

From Honolulu, Pastor and Mrs G B Starr joined the party on their voyage to Australia. One week’s journey from Honolulu, they reached the Samoan Islands. Ellen did not venture to shore, but Willie, the Starrs, May Walling, Fannie Bolton and Emily Campbell did.

This was a very pretty island. The boat could not connect with the land, for they have no harbour here, but a pilot came on board, and guided the boat to a safe anchorage. Then a novel sight greeted our eyes, for boats and canoes filled with natives crowded to the ship. The natives with few exceptions were naked and elaborately tattooed, wearing only a cloth about the loins. Their canoes and boats were filled with native fruits and wares . . . some of which we never have seen in America, or even heard of.⁵

About noon on December 3, the Alameda tied up to the Auckland wharf in New Zealand. Here they enjoyed meeting several members from the Auckland church and were then taken to the home of Edward Hare, “Kaeo Villa”, a large residence that he and his wife Elizabeth ran as a boarding house. Then they enjoyed a tour of the city. Ellen was invited to speak in the Adventist “meeting house” that evening. This was the first Seventh-day Adventist church south of the equator and she spoke to an “eager congregation, on the love of Jesus.”⁶

We found Auckland a splendid harbour. Brother Hare and others, both men and women, met us at the landing, and putting us into a couple of hacks, hurried us off to the home of Brother Hare. Here we found a pleasant home, and a nice lunch prepared for us. On the extended table were several dishes of large

strawberries, oranges and bananas, boiled eggs, and beautiful bread, and we were not slow in eating this delicious repast. . . . After lunch, we were driven in a hired carriage, many miles through the city and surrounding country. We had a very enjoyable ride, looking upon grand scenery, filled with farms, beautiful flowers and grand trees. Around every cottage the yards are filled with blooming flowers and shrubs, while the hedges are perfect and flourishing.⁷

The Alameda left early the next morning for Australia. During the voyage, Ellen was seldom idle. Even before she arrived on Australian soil, she had penned a letter to her son, Edson, and his wife, Emma, wishing that they could join her in the Lord's work in this field: "O Edson could you come to Australia with a sanctified heart, and feed these poor, hungry, starving sheep, living on the islands of the sea, what good you might do for Jesus."⁸

During the voyage, she wrote 150 pages of manuscript material and letters, and appeared disappointed she had not accomplished more. Her goal had been 300 pages. Ellen had been disappointed that her personal assistant, Sara McEnterfer, had taken ill and could not make the voyage to Australia with her. However, she found Emily Campbell to be "a kind, attentive companion. . . . No-one could have served me better."⁹

At 7 am on Tuesday, December 8, 1891, Ellen, her son Willie, Pastor and Mrs Starr, Marian Davis, May Walling, Fannie Bolton and Emily Campbell entered Sydney Harbour on the Alameda. They were greeted by Pastor and Mrs A G Daniells and a number of the Sydney church members and were driven to the Daniells' home at 118 Darlington Road, Darlington. Here she said, "The Lord knows that we did not come across the great ocean to see the country, or for our amusement. Jesus will give me strength for all that He requires of me to do."¹⁰

On December 11 and 12, 1891, Ellen spoke to Sydney church members in a hall in Newtown. On Sunday, December 13, she and her party made a boat trip up the Parramatta River and spoke to those assembled at Parramatta.

After a brief stay, they moved on to live in Melbourne, which had become the hub of Adventist activity in Australia. For The Bible Echo she

wrote: “The missionary work in Australia and New Zealand is yet in its infancy; but the same work must be accomplished in Australia, New Zealand, in Africa, India, China, and the islands of the sea, as has been accomplished in the home field.”¹¹

Despite a small Adventist membership, a school was commenced at St Kilda, an inner Melbourne suburb, to train Christian workers. Two buildings were rented and the Australasian Bible School opened its doors on August 24, 1892.

Unfortunately, ill health and subsequent inability to write caused Ellen to leave Melbourne and, when an invitation was extended for her to visit New Zealand, she was happy to go. In March, 1893, she and Willie attended the first camp-meeting in the South Pacific, held in Napier. They had planned to only be in New Zealand for four months to attend a Conference Session and visit the churches in the North Island, but Ellen and her party did not leave until after the close of the second camp-meeting at Wellington that ran for three weeks in November and December.

While in Wellington, on the morning of June 21, Ellen awoke “full of terror” from a scene that had been presented to her concerning her son Edson. As a result of Ellen’s dream Edson turned his life around and began to work for the education of the black people of the Mississippi delta region of America.

Ellen White’s group arrived back in Australia and docked in Sydney on December 22, 1893. They hastened to Melbourne to attend the first Australian camp-meeting—held in Brighton, Victoria.

The Melbourne climate had not been kind to Ellen and she had no desire to resettle there. On March 27, 1894, she established her household in Sydney and planned to look for land for a school—a school in the country where the students could work using both brawn and brains. Rural properties in Victoria, and land north and south of Sydney were inspected. A decision was made to buy the Brettville Estate at Cooranbong. A persuading factor was the price of only \$US4500 for almost 1500 acres (600 hectares).

Ellen rented a home, “Norfolk Villa,” in the Sydney suburb of Granville. While living in Granville, it was inevitable that Ellen would run what she

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