



"Lindo," Summer Hill Sanitarium, 1900.  
Photo courtesy of Adventist HealthCare Limited.

## Medical and Surgical Sanitarium, Summer Hill, New South Wales

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The initial Seventh-day Adventist missionaries to Australasia used literature and tent crusades to win converts but it was less than a decade before they experimented with Dr. John Harvey Kellogg's model of evangelism, one that promoted a healthy lifestyle, simple hydrotherapy, and massage treatments.

### The "Health Home"

When Alfred and Emma Semmens returned to Australia in 1894 after their nurses' training under Kellogg in the Battle

Creek Sanitarium, they found medical missionary work to be an untested form of evangelism. Alfred Semmens was given opportunities to promote the idea among Melbourne and Sydney Adventist members.<sup>1</sup> Before long he persuaded church officials of the New South Wales Conference to establish a bathhouse. This move resulted in the hiring of a cottage named “Beechwood” in Hugh Street, Ashfield, suburban Sydney. Semmens, together with his wife and other assistants, conducted hydrotherapy treatments beginning in April 1896. He sought to attract clients with nervous and digestive disorders. He advertised his methods as using electric light baths, vapor baths, sitz baths, salt glows, hot packs, wet sheet packs, better diet, massage, and manual Swedish movements. The institution proved to be the progenitor of something larger.<sup>2</sup>

## “Meaford”

The “Health Home” enterprise met with enough success to warrant a move to a larger rental property in the adjacent suburb of Summer Hill. With Semmens remaining as superintendent, business was transferred in January 1897 to a home called “Meaford” on Gower Street.<sup>3</sup> This institution, in 1898, was functioning under the auspices of the Australasian Union Conference (AUC), specifically the Medical Missionary Organizing Committee.<sup>4</sup>

In October 1897, Dr. Edgar Caro arrived in Australia after completing his medical studies in America.<sup>5</sup> He spoke at a number of Adventist camp meetings, proving to be a strong advocate of healthful living and medical missionary evangelism.<sup>6</sup> He also gained a recommendation from Kellogg’s International Medical Missionary and Benevolent Association for a similar group to be established in Australasia. Subsequently, the Australasian Medical Missionary and Benevolent Association (AMM&BA) was formed and legally constituted.<sup>7</sup> In effect it was semi-autonomous with goodwill ties to the Adventist Church.

After promoting medical missionary work in Victoria and New Zealand, Caro settled into work as superintendent at “Meaford” in about July 1898.<sup>8</sup> He notified readers of the denominational periodicals that the enterprise would, henceforth, be known as the “Medical and Surgical Sanitarium” instead of the “Health Home.”<sup>9</sup> Semmens and his wife continued with their hydrotherapy and massage treatments until March 1899 when they were appointed to begin a sanitarium in Adelaide.<sup>10</sup> George Shannan served as nurse and pathologist. George Morse acted as house manager. In August 1898, Louis Currow became the first nurse trainee, a number of whom would follow him. Late in 1898, Dr. Silas Rand worked as house physician for a few months before transferring to Newcastle to establish a branch sanitarium. When Semmens, who had also acted as treasurer, departed for Adelaide, Morse was given the role of treasurer in addition to his other duties.<sup>11</sup>

## “Lindo” and “Moyne Hall”

The Medical and Surgical Sanitarium’s clientele increased significantly. In 1899, it became necessary to lease a double-story home named “Lindo” opposite “Meaford.” In 1900, a similar home down the street was also leased. It was named “Moyne Hall.”<sup>12</sup> While the consulting, treatment, and operating rooms remained in “Meaford,” Lindo” served as the ward for male patients and “Moyne Hall” as the ward for females.<sup>13</sup> No drugs were administered to patients.

During the financial year 1898-1899 paying patients numbered 285. Additional individuals received free treatments, but those numbers were not fully recorded. Caro performed 127 surgical operations with inadequate facilities.<sup>14</sup> At this time the AMM&BA supervised thirteen medical, hydropathic, and welfare enterprises scattered throughout the major cities of Australia and New Zealand. In 1899, Caro refined the nurses’ training program to a span of three years. These nurses would service Summer Hill Sanitarium and other enterprises.

## Reorganization

The AMM&BA, based on Kellogg’s model, proved to be troubling for church officials. With Kellogg becoming increasingly independent of the Church, Australian officials foresaw the possibility that Caro may follow a similar path and wrest control of the AMM&BA enterprises, including the Cooranbong food factory and outlets, away from the Church. A pivotal meeting of the AMM&BA took place in Geelong, Victoria, in Caro’s absence. It was held under the chairmanship of Elder Daniells in March 1900. At that meeting the AMM&BA was voted out of existence and replaced with a medical department of the AUC, an entity titled the Medical Missionary Council.<sup>15</sup> Caro was made superintendent of the department; however, he was no longer semi-autonomous.<sup>16</sup> Caro was weakened but not defeated, but it was a two-edged sword. From then onwards any financial liabilities of the Summer Hill Sanitarium or any other health enterprise were ultimately the responsibility of the AUC.

Soon after the Geelong meeting, the owners of “Meaford” refused to renew the lease, deciding to sell the property. From mid-1900, Caro had to conduct the Sanitarium under extreme difficulties. Surgery cases became rare, fees were increased to compensate these losses, and the clientele dwindled. During the crisis the nurses were obliged to carry buckets of hot and cold water up and down the stairs when giving treatments.<sup>17</sup> The AUC made no effort to rent another building. They were focused on the establishment of a major sanitarium at Wahroonga. Caro took a few months of vacation in early 1901, only to return to a very important meeting of the AUC.

## Demise

At the 1901 AUC session, Caro gave his report of the Summer Hill Sanitarium. Frederick Sharp, the current manager, also presented his summary for the financial year 1900-1901. On the morning of July 16, George Irwin, the president of the AUC, called John Blunden to the chair at the start of the meeting. Blunden set the standard high in his pre-ambles when he stated that medical supervisors should be loyal to God's commandments and people who have overcome their defects of character. Sharp submitted his report showing significant debt and over two thousand pounds owing to the Wahroonga Sanitarium account. Sharp was a latecomer to the accounts and had worked hard to correct past errors. In the meeting it was claimed that allocations given by the General Conference, intended for the Wahroonga Sanitarium, had not been adequately earmarked and were used to shore up the Summer Hill Sanitarium. Sharp had done some auditing and adjusted what he calculated was to be diverted back to the Wahroonga Sanitarium. Blunden explained to the meeting that his examination of the accounts had demonstrated to his satisfaction that other debts identified by Sharp were an accumulation of bad debts and should be written off rather than used to balance the books. Sharp had, indeed, written them off but this action and his adjustment in favor of the Wahroonga Sanitarium put the financial statement into a substantial deficit. The situation was exacerbated by a substantial loss in the health food business. Caro made a spirited defense of his work and Sharp claimed the enterprise was currently on a sound financial basis. Nevertheless, church officials had cause to be concerned that the perilous financial situation might bring down all the medical enterprises and the associated health food industry!<sup>18</sup>

At the same 1901 AUC session, a number of executive committees were elected and Caro found himself left with the dilemma of the Summer Hill Sanitarium. Dr. Daniel Kress, a newcomer from America, was elected to the boards of the Wahroonga Sanitarium, the Sanitarium Health Food Company, the Avondale Health Retreat, and the Book Committee.<sup>19</sup> It was clear he was the new medical favorite. Four months later, Caro resigned and returned to New Zealand. Within weeks the Summer Hill Sanitarium was closed, staff placed elsewhere, and clients recommended to the Avondale Health Retreat.<sup>20</sup>

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