



“Sunnyside,” as it appears in 2020.  
Photo courtesy of Jane Gibson.

# Sunnyside

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## MARIAN DE BERG

Marian de Berg, secretarial (Avondale University College, Cooranbong, NSW, Australia) retired in 2017 as administration assistant, Ellen G. White/SDA Research Centre, Avondale University College. A New Zealander by birth she has served the church in South New Zealand and Queensland conferences, South Pacific Division, and Avondale University College. In retirement she enjoys guiding at Sunnyside Historic House. She authored the book *Stories from Sunnyside* and wrote several articles for *Record*. She is married to Kevin with 2 adult daughters and 3 grandsons.

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“Sunnyside” was the home where Ellen White lived from 1895 to 1900 in Cooranbong, N.S.W., Australia.

## Beginnings

Ellen White and the small membership of the fledgling Seventh-day Adventist Church in Australia were eager to establish a school to train church workers. After they purchased the Avondale site at Cooranbong,<sup>1</sup> to show her faith in the project Ellen White was the first to purchase 40 acres of land on Avondale Road on July 7, 1895<sup>2</sup> Merely a bush track, the road served as the first entrance to the school. Finding no accommodation available in the area, she planned a small encampment on her land with tents for herself, her granddaughter Ella, and some other staff. During the month of August she directed the builders of her house and other workers to lay out her orchard and garden<sup>3</sup> With time of the essence, she had the foundations laid,<sup>4</sup> appointed an orchardist, and had trees planted so as not to delay for another year.<sup>5</sup>

## Moving In

Busy with duties elsewhere and two camp meetings in Melbourne and Tasmania, Ellen White did not arrive back in Sydney until December 20, 1895, to organize the move to Cooranbong. On Christmas Day, the cheapest time of the year for train fares, Ellen and her helpers traveled north to Cooranbong and her new home, which she named

“Sunnyside.” Although it was still not completed, she was happy to take up residence, commence writing again, and assist in the establishment of the school. She lamented the cost of housing, as much as double as in America, and the inferior timber that Australia had to offer.<sup>6</sup> With money so scarce Mrs. White’s original plans to keep the building as an office and then build a cottage did not come to fruition.<sup>7</sup> After she had a cheap, unplastered kitchen added to the original eight-room cottage,<sup>8</sup> it soon became apparent that the room needed to be plastered and sealed to keep out insects and rodents.<sup>9</sup> A small bathroom and storeroom were also constructed.<sup>10</sup>

## Entertaining

Early in 1896 Ellen had a family of 12 people living at Sunnyside.<sup>11</sup> Her parlor saw many visitors come and go—from the sick to many friends, ministers, and even the General Conference president.<sup>12</sup> One of Ellen White’s secretaries, Sarah Peck, stated that “Sister White was the very soul of hospitality, . . . Visitors were always welcome, and no one ever left her home hungry—not even a professional tramp, of which Australia had a large number in those days.”<sup>13</sup> At the time of the union conference meetings at Cooranbong in July 1899, Mrs. White freely invited her house guests to gather mandarins, oranges, and passion fruit from her orchard.<sup>14</sup> Ellen, herself, liked to keep a simple diet and adhered strictly to two meals a day.<sup>15</sup> Their outdoor oven baked the bread for the families of Ellen and son, Willie, and the Iram James’s family.<sup>16</sup>

## Writing

Ellen White’s book *Steps to Christ* came off the press soon after her arrival in Australia. Her attention then turned to finishing her life of Christ, *The Desire of Ages*, published in 1898.<sup>17</sup> She also completed two companion books, *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing* (1896) and *Christ’s Object Lessons* (1900). During the course of one year, with the help of Sarah Peck, Ellen White had all her correspondence and manuscript collection filed in a system still in use today.<sup>18</sup> She wrote volume 6 of *Testimonies for the Church* and commenced the book *Education* during the “Sunnyside” years.

## Moving On

Even though Ellen White had expected to spend the rest of her life in the house, she finally became convinced that God had other plans for her. By 1900 several crises began surfacing in America, one of which was the Kellogg situation,<sup>19</sup> and she felt impressed that she must return to America once again.<sup>20</sup> “Sunnyside” went on the market, and Susan Minchin, a widow whose eldest son, Henry, had accepted the Seventh-day Adventist faith in Christchurch, New Zealand, and had enrolled as a student at the Avondale School, snapped it up.<sup>21</sup> She brought her family to Australia and lived at Sunnyside until 1905 when she resold the property to move to Queensland with her son. It is interesting to note that although she moved to Australia to support her son in his new belief, she did not accept the Seventh-day Adventist message herself until 1927.<sup>22</sup>

“Sunnyside” passed into the hands of several owners after Susan Minchin. One other prominent owner of this property was Margaret Arthur and her daughter, Daisy. Margaret joined the Avondale staff in 1904 with responsibilities at various times as preceptress, matron, sewing mistress, store keeper, and later forewoman of the Sanitarium Health Food Company. Daisy taught business, history, and arithmetic for 11 years before transferring to the Sanitarium Press and factory as forewoman.<sup>23</sup> The mother and daughter provided accommodation for many students during their time at “Sunnyside” (1911-1952).

## Reacquisition of “Sunnyside”

The Seventh-day Adventist Church, aided by a generous donation from the Sanitarium Health Food Company, repurchased “Sunnyside” in 1958. William Zeunert, assistant treasurer of the South Pacific Division, was the driving force behind the acquisition and restoration of Ellen White’s Australian home. An official opening of the building took place on Sunday, November 20, 1960, when a crowd of at least 350 people gathered on the site.<sup>24</sup>

## Centennial Celebrations

On the lawns of “Sunnyside” Sabbath afternoon, November 18, 1995, a large crowd gathered for a special program celebrating the life of Ellen White on the anniversary of her taking up residence there in 1895.<sup>25</sup>

Not only was Ellen White writing on the life of Christ [*The Desire of Ages*], she was living out 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, . . . you came to Me” (verses 34-39).

Today more than 2,000 visitors from around the world visit “Sunnyside” each year.<sup>26</sup>

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  14. Ellen G. White to Edson and Emma White, July 30, 1899, Letter 240, 1899.?
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