



Herbert & Vera White with Yvonne and Veronica, 1945.

Photo courtesy of Hedley John Eager.

White, Herbert (1909–1982) and Vera Hilda (Zeunert) White (1910–2001)

HEDLEY JOHN EAGER

Hedley John Eager, Ph.D. (Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan), retired in 1996 as Dean of the School of Graduate Studies, Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, Philippines. Born in Australia, Eager served in SDA educational roles in Australia, New Zealand, Pakistan, Philippines, and throughout South-East Asia; authored two devotional books, six educational books, and numerous articles for church publications. With wife, Yvonne, he has four daughters, nine grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

Herbert and Vera White both began serving the Seventh-day Adventist Church before their marriage, Herbert White as a colporteur and Vera Zeunert as a primary school teacher. For forty-two of the next forty-three years of service, Herbert White served the church in leadership responsibilities with Vera White providing daily support at home, and sometimes accompanying him to distant towns, islands, and countries. Herbert White's publishing, missionary, and conference leadership contributions included each level of church organization from mission and conference, to union, division and the General Conference. From the Church's headquarters he shared his knowledge and experience within every division of the worldwide Church.

Early Life (1909–1926)

Herbert White was born on October 23, 1909, in Brandon, North Queensland, Australia.¹ He was the sixth child of William Henry White, born in Bolton, Yorkshire, England, and Mary (Banister) White, born in Ivanhoe, Ayr, Queensland, Australia (1867-1936; 1879-1968).²

William White, at age twenty, arrived in Cooktown, Australia, on June 20, 1888, by the ship *Dorunda*,³ and settled in North Queensland, marrying Mary Banister on March 16, 1898.⁴ William White became a supervisor in a local sugar mill. Of their children, William,⁵ Henry, Violet Ann, Mabel Mary, Arthur, Herbert, Leslie, Frederick Charles, and Rose May,⁶ Arthur and Herbert became ordained ministers in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

When the Church of England introduced candles, William White, visited many churches searching for truth.⁷ He and his wife began keeping Sabbath after reading *Signs of the Times* before knowing who Adventists were.⁸ Around the beginning of 1924, they read the books *Bible Readings*⁹ and *Daniel and the Revelation*. In response to Peter Fahey's witness¹⁰ and attending C. A. Wrigley's tent meetings, the Whites were baptized by C. A. Wrigley and became charter members of the Ayr Seventh-day Adventist Church in Queensland.¹¹ On August 22, 1925, Herbert White was baptized in Ayr,¹² after attending a group baptismal class led by C. A. Wrigley, and he became a member of the Ayr church.¹³

Vera Hilda Zeunert was born on January 31, 1910, in Seppeltsfield, South Australia. She was the eldest child of Johann Heinrich August Zeunert, also born in Seppeltsfield, and Johanna Sophia Dorothea Lange, born in Nuriootpa, South Australia (1879-1950; 1886-1968).¹⁴ The family was of Lutheran background, but after Bible studies and much discussion the parents accepted the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and were baptized in 1915.¹⁵ Vera Zeunert's siblings were William Edwin, Norma Elsa, Edna Gertie, and twins Eric and Stanley. All the siblings served in the Adventist Church, except Stanley who died at eighteen months of age.¹⁶

Education, Career Beginnings, and Marriage (1926-1932)¹⁷

Herbert White, a mechanic by trade, began ministerial studies in 1927 at Avondale, (now Avondale College of Higher Education) in New South Wales, Australia, where he and Vera Zeunert began their lifelong friendship.

While studying he worked as a student colporteur for two years.¹⁸ White left college in 1929, before completing studies, to begin full-time colporteur ministry in Queensland, taking 33 orders in December 1929, his first month of selling the book *Our Day*.¹⁹

Vera Zeunert attended school in Seppeltsfield and Nuriootpa, South Australia. She began teacher training at Avondale in 1926 and graduated in 1930.²⁰ Vera Zeunert taught at the Adventist Primary School in Bickley, Western Australia, in 1931-1932.²¹

In 1931-1932, Herbert White joined the colporteur team in Western Australia.²² By April 1931, he received recognition for the “greatest amount of sales” in Australia and New Zealand. This placed him for the first time among “the ‘Banner’ colporteurs.”²³ His success of ninety-three percent delivery of books in Kalgoorlie and Boulder, Western Australia, was further rewarded with one family “attending church as a result of his work.”²⁴

Herbert White and Vera Hilda Zeunert were married on December 19, 1932, in Nuriootpa, South Australia, in wedding performed by P.G. Foster.²⁵ By the end of the month they were on board ship and bound for Christchurch, New Zealand, and the beginning of a lifetime of service together.

Early Service (1933–1954)²⁶

From 1933 to 1934, White served the South New Zealand Conference as field missionary secretary.²⁷ During the snowy Southland, New Zealand, winter, he successfully met the challenge of arranging book deliveries with colporteurs for snowbound clients in the region. He achieved this by phone and the help of the local store manager who advanced payment for his clients.²⁸

Throughout their life together, Vera White experienced the challenge of days and even weeks on her own while her husband was away. While in Invercargill, New Zealand, in November 1933, Herbert White received a telegram from her with the message, “You’re the father of twins.” He immediately travelled the 500 kilometers to his family in Christchurch.²⁹ Their twin daughters were Yvonne Lilian and Veronica Mae, born in Christchurch, New Zealand.³⁰

In September of 1934, White became field missionary secretary for the South New South Wales Conference, a position he held until 1937 when he moved to the New Guinea Mission where he led the New Guinea Training School at Put Put.^{31 32}

Herbert’s first mission field appointment began in October 1937. His family arrived some two to three months later, but met a real challenge. They were quarantined on their arrival in New Guinea in early 1938, “curtained in on the hospital verandah” for a month with one twin very sick with measles.³³ Then Vera White helped her husband and the Hiscox family prepare for the annual council of the New Guinea Mission,³⁴ scheduled for March 1, 1938, on their new Put Put campus.

Within four months White was appointed acting superintendent of the whole New Guinea Mission territory.³⁵ However, because of a health challenge that needed attention, he returned to Australia while his wife and the children remained at Matupi where Vera White assisted in the school.³⁶ The family returned to Australia late 1938 so White could regain his health.³⁷

Back in the South New South Wales and Victorian Conferences, White engaged in appeal and colporteur work.³⁸ For his work as a colporteur in Victoria, he received his second recognition among the "Banner Colporteurs for 'Most Sales'" in August 1939.³⁹ Between 1940 and 1942, he served as field missionary, home missions, and Sabbath School secretary for the South Australia Conference.⁴⁰ White was ordained to the gospel ministry on Sunday, March 22, 1942, in Adelaide.⁴¹ Soon after his ordination, he was called to the Australasian Union Conference headquarters in Wahroonga, New South Wales, where he served as field missionary secretary and assistant publishing secretary⁴² until 1944 when he became publishing department secretary.⁴³

While publishing department secretary of the Australasian Union Conference, White recognized that colporteurs were changing their focus from selling "literature . . . to rejoic[ing] over souls won, and not merely sales made."⁴⁴ Reports of this nature confirmed for White that the colporteurs were reaching the long recognized evangelistic purpose of the literature ministry.

At the close of World War II, White became superintendent of the Solomon Islands Mission territory in 1945.⁴⁵ He surveyed the whole region, travelling by mission vessel 3,500 miles (5,600 kilometers) and identified many challenges and strengths. White recognized immediate needs including very high priorities for the repair and maintenance of mission ships and buildings. The solid faith among the members after World War II was a strength, as were the considerable material gifts to the mission from the American forces.⁴⁶ White also recognized that "the influence of the Sabbath school lessons" was a particular contributor to the islanders' spiritual strength.⁴⁷ A village practice was to study together each day in village worship groups both prior to and during the war years.

As wife and mother, Vera White supported her husband, her twin daughters and their schooling, the training of house helpers, and care for missionary families and guests. She visited other mission districts on special occasions by mission boat with her husband and mission personnel. When mission vessel motors stopped while on the high seas, Herbert White applied his mechanical skills in emergency repairs.⁴⁸ On July 17, 1947, one hundred years after the first missionary martyr fell on St. Isabel, Solomon Islands, Herbert White, along with "Brother Newman...Pastor Jugha and Pastor Patovaki conducted the first baptism [of five candidates] on Isabel."⁴⁹

White was one of five delegates sent to the General Conference autumn council of 1948, to present the Australasian Union Conference's reorganization plan for its territory.⁵⁰ He was also a member of the Australasian Union Conference committee when the reorganization plan was accepted and became official. The new organization was named the Australasian Inter-Union Conference, comprising two union conferences and

two union missions. White was appointed president of the Coral Sea Union Mission (CSUM).⁵¹

At the inaugural CSUM meetings of February 6-12, 1949, as president, Herbert White, encouraged all the mission leaders to focus on committed guidance and training for all their local workers. In so doing he further encouraged dependence on God for His power to advance the gospel in their newly organized field of service.⁵²

Soon after this, Herbert White showed his "courage and progressiveness"⁵³ to learn the real challenges of this new territory. He led the "first party ever to travel by road from Lae on the coast to Mt. Hagen in the highlands"⁵⁴ by jeep. They travelled the only twenty miles of made road from Lae, then navigated their way through the tall kunai grass-covered Markham Valley by watching mountain top to mountain top. They crossed streams, swam a strong flowing river, and connected with another jeep to travel a newly opened track to Mt. Hagen in the highlands.⁵⁵

By his constant practice of keeping in touch, White knew his workers' strengths, accomplishments, needs, and future plans for meeting their mission goals. White especially noted the "valuable contributions" the missionary wives were making.⁵⁶

White was "the first author to prepare a book in Pigeon [sic] English, *Toktok Bolong Baibal*, for the South Seas."⁵⁷ He also prepared the same book in Simple English, *The Bible Talks*,⁵⁸ and was editor of *Better Life for Pacific People*, published by the Home Health Education Service, Lae, Territory of Papua New Guinea. This magazine included one page in Pidgin English for the New Guinea people.⁵⁹

Rapid growth in the CSUM, led Herbert White to begin the plan for reorganizing this mission territory in 1952-1953.⁶⁰ The Australasian Inter-Union Conference executive committee accepted the reorganization plan in March 1953, referring it to the next annual meeting for final approval.⁶¹ As a result, White was appointed president of the new smaller reorganized CSUM,⁶² and E. A. Boehm became the president of the newly organized Bismarck-Solomons Union Mission⁶³

Summarizing the blessings of God for the year 1953, Herbert White emphasized how, with reorganization, smaller mission units enabled closer, more effective supervision for national leadership. These opportunities resulted in "an encouraging consolidation of existing work,"⁶⁴ and "sensational advancement and development in new areas."⁶⁵ White and his team of national pastors were privileged to organize "the first major probe into this new area" of the Yapuri River of Papua New Guinea.⁶⁶

He could not help but be gratified by the report of over nine hundred baptisms for the year for the new CSUM. But White also reported, "the most inspiring sight that I have witnessed this year, or at any period in my service, was the response of our laity to the call to step right into the gospel program, without promise of wages or expectation of monetary reward."⁶⁷ Such responses within his field confirmed that "above all else, we are nearer the time when God is going to cut His work short in righteousness and bring a speedy finish to His gospel programme."⁶⁸

On November 25, 1954, at the second session of the Australasian Inter-Union Conference committee, White resigned from the position of president of the CSUM due to his health.⁶⁹ But in passing on the responsibility of leadership to J. B. Keith, he was happy to report of God's abundant grace for the indigenous peoples of the CSUM. Among many evidences of growth he reported, was the phenomenal growth of both Sabbath school membership and baptized church membership. The latter being a growth of 331 per cent in the quadrennial period 1950 to 1953 inclusive, and noted by the General Conference president at the General Conference Session as: "The highest gain reported by any union."⁷⁰

Later Service (1955-1975)⁷¹

Back in Australia, Herbert White served the West Australian Conference as president from 1955 to 1958⁷² and, in 1959, was also president of the Victorian Conference for a brief time.⁷³ White encouraged widespread "soul-winning endeavours" while president of both the West Australian and Victorian Conferences.⁷⁴ Strong church member participation and God's blessing of evangelism resulted in expanding congregations and increased building programs in a number of churches.⁷⁵

During their years in the West Australian, Vera White raised money for the church building fund by presenting a major southwest Pacific exhibition of artifacts and films in the Victoria Park Town Hall, Perth.⁷⁶ The exhibition was later repeated in the country city of Bunbury, Western Australia.⁷⁷

In 1960, Herbert White was called to the Australasian Division where he served as home mission and Sabbath School secretary through 1961.⁷⁸ His Sabbath School secretary duties were exchanged for those of publishing secretary in 1962⁷⁹ and in 1963 he began a three-year term solely as publishing secretary of the Australasian Division.⁸⁰ In his role as home missionary and Sabbath School secretary of the Australasian Division, Herbert White supported the "minister-member blueprint" for evangelism for the 1960 "Jubilee Year programme" that the Greater Sydney Conference workers presented to the church officers in Sydney, New South Wales.⁸¹ He also gave support for the Trans-Commonwealth Union Conference Laymen's Conference held in Melbourne, Victoria.⁸²

A major contribution by Herbert White to the publishing program in Australia and New Zealand was the restructuring of the Home Health Education Service (HHES) into a new business organization, the Home Health Education Service Central Credit office, separating it entirely from the local conferences' Book and Bible Houses.⁸³

While living in Wahroonga, New South Wales, in the 1960s Vera White was a "helpful and enthusiastic Dorcas leader,"⁸⁴ devoting her energies to help meet people's needs through her local Dorcas Welfare Society.

White's success as publishing secretary for the Australasian Division was noticed by leadership at the General Conference. In 1966, he was called to be associate secretary of the General Conference's publishing department. Consequently, the Whites moved to the United States.⁸⁵ During his approximately nine years at the General

Conference, every division of the Adventist Church benefited from his leadership training and counsel.⁸⁶ Among White's many duties was editor of *Digest*, through which he directly influenced the Church's worldwide publishing program. This magazine kept publishing leaders of the Church informed of progress and developments of the publishing work throughout the denomination.

White traveled extensively, for example, presenting at the pre-council group meetings and annual council of the South American Division, held in Uruguay in 1967,⁸⁷ and co-directing, with fellow General Conference publishing department personnel, at the North American Division Publishing Council in Dallas, Texas, September 17-21, 1968⁸⁸ He aided "in the stabilization of HHES credit systems in various divisions" of the worldwide SDA church,⁸⁹ instructed the publishing leaders of the Southern European Division at a council in Torre Pellice, hosted by Waldensians in 1969;⁹⁰ and participated in North Philippine Union Mission literature evangelist institute, with four hundred literature evangelists, February 22-27, 1971⁹¹ White also spoke at sales training events in New Jersey and Canada in 1973. The first for a group of Spanish literature evangelists.⁹² The latter presentation was the first seminar for literature evangelists in Canada in seventeen years.⁹³

On one of their European itineraries Herbert and Vera White travelled through Yugoslavia,⁹⁴ making White "the first publishing department leader from the General Conference . . . to visit a socialist country,"⁹⁵ and the first to receive the honor of a "reception given by the mayor in Kragujevac."⁹⁶

Fellow leaders and literature evangelists looked upon Herbert White as one who served the church "effectively and efficiently,"⁹⁷ demonstrating a "dedicated life,"⁹⁸ "noble character qualities and sound leadership."⁹⁹ He was admired for his courage and diligence in spite of his health.¹⁰⁰ One colleague stated, "We have appreciated the balance, the breadth of business judgment, the spiritual lift and vision, the strength, and the wisdom with words that you have brought to the publishing department."¹⁰¹ White's encouragement, inspiration, and enthusiasm impacted the lives of all he served.¹⁰²

Retirement Years (1976-2001)

Herbert White retired from service in the General Conference on September 1, 1975. For a few months immediately after his retirement, White worked with the Southern Union publishing department in Georgia.¹⁰³ In 1977, the Whites returned to Australia where they settled in Bonnells Bay, New South Wales. Herbert White's health challenge of many years allowed him and Vera just five years of retirement together in Australia. He died in the ambulance on the way to Royal Newcastle Hospital, Newcastle, New South Wales, on January 18, 1982.¹⁰⁴ Vera Hilda White lived a further nineteen years, sharing time with family. She passed away in Cooranbong, New South Wales, on September 1, 2001.¹⁰⁵

Contribution

Herbert White, who served 46 years with his wife Vera by his side, was a man whom God led from a mechanic to a leader of men and women in the publishing ministry of the church, from a salesman to an organizer of the Home Health Education Service Central Credit Office, expanding it to other Adventist world divisions, and from a missionary to a visionary leader, facilitating reorganizational changes in the CSUM that contributed to rapid growth. From an administrator to an author of numerous articles in the *Australasian Record* and other publications of the Adventist Church, White's many gifts as an editor, speaker, and leader of the Church, provided guidance, professional training, and morale-building spiritual encouragement in every world division of the Adventist Church. This he accomplished by prayerfully meeting daily challenges with God's power of ever-present love, grace, and care.

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43. Note: At the Annual Meeting of the Australasian Union Conference late 1943, Herbert White was appointed Superintendent of the Solomon Islands Mission. See "Recommendations from the Annual Meeting," *Australasian Record*, December 13, 1943, 8; "Pastor J. J. Poter...,"

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