

Higgins, Annie Shreusbury (1875–1968)

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.

Annie Shreusbury Higgins was one of the original twenty members, and the secretary, of the first Missionary Volunteer (MV) Society in Australasia.

Early Life

Annie Shreusbury Higgins was born in Nottingham, England on May 26, 1875 to parents John (1850-1926) and Harriett Maria (1851-1940) Higgins. The family migrated to Australia in 1879 and settled in Melbourne. In 1887 they moved to Tasmania, and it was here that the family accepted the seventh-day Sabbath by reading the book *Daniel and the Revelation* by Uriah Smith. As far as is known they were the first to accept the Seventh-day Adventist faith in Tasmania.¹ A sister, Alice Margaret Higgins (1898-1976), was born in Melbourne in 1898.²

Life and Service

Higgins was one of the original twenty members, and the secretary, of the first Missionary Volunteer (MV) Society in Australasia organised by Pastor A. G. Daniells in Adelaide in 1893.³ In January, 1894 she enrolled at the St. Kilda Road Bible School⁴ and in 1895 was appointed as stenographic and general office secretary at the North Fitzroy Tract Society for the next three years.⁵ One of her fond memories was working on the first issue of *The Australasian Union Gleaner*, the predecessor of the *Australasian Record*. Typewritten on wax sheets it was put through a mimeograph and pinned together.⁶ In 1898 she moved to a newly established branch of the Queensland Tract Society and was placed in charge.⁷ While here she started working for the isolated members and their children in the conference and also encouraged them to help support the Parker family and the missionary program in the New Hebrides.⁸

In 1899 she was appointed to the West Australian Tract Society. Here she was instrumental in organising 5-13 year-old-children into a missionary society. She wrote that making garments and cooking food for the needy not only gave the youngsters skills but created a missionary spirit to help others less fortunate. Higgins also reported that nearly all the children had missionary flower or vegetable gardens, or missionary hens.⁹

An appointment to the Australasian Bible School at Avondale commenced in June, 1900. Higgins took charge of the business office and taught classes in the business department duplicating the work of an accountant in the Tract Societies.¹⁰ A Tract Society Convention in mid-1901, held each morning at the Avondale Church during the Union Conference Session,¹¹ attracted her interest before once again joining the New South Wales Tract Society in 1902.¹² Again, one of her projects in this state was to educate children in working for foreign missions. Lessons were prepared about the geography, customs and the beginnings and continuation of the gospel work in several island territories. Even the parents became deeply involved in the project.¹³

In 1907 Higgins added the portfolio of Sabbath School Secretary in the Queensland Conference to that of the Tract Society Secretary.¹⁴ Health issues surfaced in the heat of the Brisbane summer but work was continued in the cooler



Annie Higgins
Photo courtesy of Adventist Heritage Centre, Australia.

climate of Toowoomba on the Darling Downs tablelands.¹⁵ In 1908 she continued the Tract Society work in the Victorian-Tasmanian Conference taking on the task of Young People's Secretary, as well.¹⁶ For the next twenty-five years she laboured for the youth of the church in New South Wales, Tasmania and Victoria.¹⁷

Higgins long desired to serve her Lord in island missionary work, but each time she applied for such a post her doctors refused to pass her for life in semi-tropical climates.¹⁸ In retirement Higgins would comment, "I have never had the opportunity of visiting a mission field, but always enjoyed helping in various ways to raise funds for their support."¹⁹

As a small, frail, eighty-three year old, Higgins carried the torch on the last leg of its journey to the opening of the Australasian Division Youth Congress in Victoria in December 1956.²⁰ Accompanied by eight young Master Guides she presented the torch to the then Division Youth leader, R.A. Vince in front of 1,800 assembled youth. This special occasion celebrated the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Missionary Volunteer organisation. She had been a youth leader herself for twenty-six years.²¹

Contribution

As the MV secretary in Victoria, Higgins originated the doctrinal text plan in the early MV Societies in 1909. This feature studied a new Bible doctrine each quarter with a specific memory text for each week.²² Each Junior Missionary Volunteer (JMV) sat an examination at the end of the quarter as a prerequisite to moving up to the next JMV class. She could report that over 600 papers crossed her desk each quarter for marking.²³ This program was believed to be unique to the Australasian Division. She also implemented the Sabbath School Investment Plan in the Australasian Division.²⁴ As well as writing several articles for the *Australasian Record* Higgins wrote many letters to the isolated families in each conference where she worked and published several of the letters she received in reply.²⁵

Many young people had fond memories of her visits to their homes or churches. She would instruct the young in how to make dainty creations which would later be sold for missions. Even in retirement her hands kept busy knitting garments for islanders, visiting, and reading to the visually impaired.²⁶ Higgins died on Sabbath morning, June 8, 1968 at ninety-three years of age.²⁷

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