

Stockton, John Henry (1854–1896)

MILTON HOOK

Milton Hook, Ed.D. (Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, the United States). Hook retired in 1997 as a minister in the Greater Sydney Conference, Australia. An Australian by birth Hook has served the Church as a teacher at the elementary, academy and college levels, a missionary in Papua New Guinea, and as a local church pastor. In retirement he is a conjoint senior lecturer at Avondale College of Higher Education. He has authored *Flames Over Battle Creek*, *Avondale: Experiment on the Dora*, *Desmond Ford: Reformist Theologian, Gospel Revivalist* the *Seventh-day Adventist Heritage Series*, and many magazine articles. He is married to Noeleen and has two sons and three grandchildren.

John Stockton was the first person in Australia to become a Seventh-day Adventist after the arrival of Seventh-day Adventist missionaries from the United States in 1885.

British Heritage

John Henry Stockton was born in Manchester, Lancashire, England, on September 8, 1854, to Thomas and Harriet (Mort) Stockton. He was christened on the eighth day at Saint Mary, Saint Denys, and Saint George Anglican Church, now Manchester Cathedral. He began his childhood with an older sister, Alice, and a brother, Alfred.¹

To Australia

In December 1855, John's father emigrated to Melbourne, Victoria, on the *Red Jacket* in order to find a suitable place for the family to join him later.² He chose a farming property at Moliagul, west of Bendigo. Harriet was pregnant when he left England, and the babe, Ann Mort Stockton, died in infancy, 1856³ In January 1858 mother Harriet, together with children Alice, Alfred, and John sailed on the *British Lion* to rejoin Thomas.⁴ A third son, Samuel, was born at Moliagul in 1862.⁵



John Henry Stockton

Photo courtesy of Adventist Heritage Centre, Australia.

John became a coach builder, employed by John Lockhead. He married Lockhead's daughter, Ann Pollock Mindora, in the Presbyterian Church on Napoleon Street, East Collingwood, suburban Melbourne, February 25, 1876. Ann was the same age as John, twenty-one, born at sea on the way from England to Australia.⁶

A Change of Faith

Some Seventh-day Adventists in San Francisco adopted Australia as their mission field, mailing *Signs of the Times* to random names they found in the Melbourne Street Directory. One church member, E.A. Stockton, noticed the name of J.H. Stockton in the listing and began sending literature, even though he was simply a namesake rather than a relative. When the original party of Seventh-day Adventists arrived in Melbourne in 1885 Elder Mendel Israel called on John Stockton at Clifton Hill to invite him to their Sabbath School held in their rented home "Sumerlide" in suburban Richmond.⁷

On August 8, 1885, John and his two eldest children, "Minnie" and "Harry," walked several kilometers to attend the Sabbath School at Richmond. The following week Samuel also attended but did not continue. John's wife, Ann, joined the group in September.⁸ John and Ann attended a tent crusade at North Fitzroy near Stockton's home, after which they both were baptized. The Melbourne SDA Church was organized on January 10, 1886⁹ in which the Stocktons were charter members, the first in Australia. John was elected as deacon.

Apart from his deacon duties, Stockton took an active part in the Melbourne branch of the International Tract and Missionary Society (ITMS), his name appearing repeatedly as a member of various committees¹⁰ and giving reports of activities from time to time.¹¹ He and fellow church member, William Wainman, joined the ranks of the colporteurs. They sailed to Brisbane, Queensland, as pioneers to sell *Thoughts on Daniel and Revelation*, reporting back to an October 2, 1887 meeting of the ITMS that 375 copies were sold.¹² In August 1890 Stockton sailed alone to pioneer the work of the Church in Western Australia by selling health and other denominational books¹³ until he returned at the end of the year.¹⁴ At the Fifth Australian Conference Session, January 1893, he urged that missionaries be sent to Western Australia to capitalize on the seed that he had sown.¹⁵

In the meantime, in 1892, Stockton was elected as the West Australian representative on a committee to search out a site and plan for the establishment of a training school in Melbourne.¹⁶ One was found at Saint Kilda and the Australasian Bible School was started there in August 1892. Teenagers "Minnie" and "Harry" Stockton were among the early students.¹⁷ The Stocktons transferred their membership to the Prahran Church, nearer to the school.¹⁸

Demise

On Friday evening, July 17, 1896, John died suddenly of heart failure at his home in Preston, northeast Melbourne. He was buried in the Melbourne General Cemetery at Carlton North.¹⁹ The children of John and Ann

were Mindora or "Minnie," Henry or "Harry," Ernest, Ruth, Percy, Arthur, Roy, and Myrtle. Seven survived their father, their ages at the time of his death ranging from two to twenty years.²⁰ It was a premature and tragic passing of a highly principled man who courageously followed his convictions and did much to strengthen the Adventist cause during its infancy in Australia.

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