

Our Little Friend (Australasian Division)

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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.

Our Little Friend was a special periodical for children in Australasia published between 1933 and 1977. It was preceded by *Our Young Friends*, published for about 18-months beginning in 1891, and *Children's Friend*, published from approximately 1901 to 1903.

Our Young Friends

Late in 1891, the Echo Publishing Company began advertising an illustrated four-page weekly titled *Our Young Friends*. It was designed primarily as an aid for the children's Sabbath School lessons. The annual subscription was three shillings.¹ It received very little publicity and within eighteen months the decision was made to end its publication. Parents were advised to subscribe to the American *Our Little Friend*.² No copies of the Australian edition are extant.

Children's Friend

At the Fourth Biennial Session of the Australasian Union Conference (AUC) in July 1901 at Cooranbong, New South Wales, it was determined that a second attempt be made to publish a periodical for the children's



Our Little Friend title page 1934.

Photo courtesy of Adventist Heritage Centre, Australia.

Sabbath School under the title *Children's Friend* or *The Children's Friend*.³ The annual subscription of three shillings remained the same. The union conference president, George Irwin, promoted it only once in the church paper.⁴ Twelve months later, in the manager's address to the shareholders of the publishing house, some dismay was expressed that the periodical had a small constituency and was a drain on their finances. He did not report the full extent of the loss made by issuing *The Children's Friend*, but simply said it was "heavy."⁵ The manager's 1903 report admitted a dereliction of duty by failing to register the periodical as a newspaper.⁶ By that time, the paper had been discontinued. No copies are extant.

Our Little Friend

After a lapse of thirty years, the potential readership of a children's periodical was much larger. Therefore, at the 1932 Annual Council of the AUC it was voted provisionally that if a circulation of 2,500 copies could be assured, publication of *The Children's Friend* would resume. It would be issued fortnightly with an annual subscription of five shillings and six pence or three pence each. The aim was to provide material for the kindergarten Sabbath School lessons and church school readings. A second proviso was added, requesting a guarantee that the periodical would be given newspaper status, thus assuring less expensive postage rates.⁷

Despite the fact that a circulation of 2,500 copies could not be guaranteed, the printing of the first numbers went ahead at the beginning of 1933.⁸ Surprisingly, it appeared with the title *Our Little Friend*, identical to its American counterpart. First reports spoke of financial losses, but with a determination to continue until the enterprise became solvent, plans were made to extend its circulation to children outside the Church.⁹ Charles Snow and Archie Fraser acted as associate editors for the first few issues¹⁰ followed by Alexander King in mid-1933. It was a sixteen-page monthly.¹¹ In April 1934, Archie Fraser returned to the editorial chair,¹² remaining until January 1936 when he transferred to evangelism in the Victorian Conference. Marion Hay was elected the new editor.¹³ During her tenure, the output was essentially the same, but it was issued as an eight-page fortnightly. She and Norma Norris became long-standing editors, known affectionately to their young readers as "Big Sister" because of their friendly editorial letters and encouragement for readers to correspond with them. Excerpts from those responses were published regularly.¹⁴ Hay served from 1936 through October 1945¹⁵ and again from January 1949 through 1967.¹⁶ Norris was editor from October 1945 through January 1949¹⁷ and again, from 1968 through 1977.¹⁸

Our Little Friend's circulation improved considerably over the years. For example, in 1943 it was reported to be 5,751.¹⁹ In 1966, it rose to 12,230.²⁰ The paper's content was expanded to include short stories, a birthday corner, a pen-friend column,²¹ and regular articles by "Uncle Jack," alias Jack Skelton, who loved to write about his own hobbies such as bird-watching and stamp collecting.²² In line with the rising cost of living, its annual subscription rose to \$3.25 before the periodical ceased with the retirement of Norris in 1977.²³

An almost complete run of the issues of *Our Little Friend* is held by the South Pacific Division Heritage Centre, Avondale College of Higher Education, Cooranbong, New South Wales.

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NOTES

1. Advertisement, "*The Bible Echo and Signs of the Times*," November 1, 1891, 335.
2. "It has been decided to stop the publication...," *The Bible Echo*, April 1, 1893, 112.
3. "Union Conference Proceedings," *Union Conference Record*, July 31, 1901, 93-96.
4. Geo[rge] A. Irwin, "*The Children's Friend*," *Union Conference Record*, December 1, 1901, 16.

5. W[ilbur] D. Salisbury, "Annual Address to the Stockholders of the Echo Publishing Company, Limited," *The Bible Echo Supplement*, September 29, 1902, 1-4.
6. W[ilbur] D. Salisbury, "Report of the Echo Publishing Company, Limited," *Union Conference Record*, September 22, 1903, 5.
7. [William G. Turner], "Plans and Recommendations," *Australasian Record*, September 19, 1932, 4-5.
8. *Our Little Friend*, January 6, 1933, [1], Shelf Periodicals, South Pacific Division Heritage Centre, Avondale College of Higher Education, Cooranbong, New South Wales.
9. W[illiam] G. Turner, "President's Report," *Australasian Record*, September 18, 1933, 1-3.
10. E.g., *Our Little Friend*, February 17, 1933, 2, Shelf Periodicals, South Pacific Division Heritage Centre, Avondale College of Higher Education, Cooranbong, New South Wales.
11. *Our Little Friend*, March 31, 1933, 2, Shelf Periodicals, South Pacific Division Heritage Centre, Avondale College of Higher Education, Cooranbong, New South Wales.
12. *Our Little Friend*, April 13, 1934, 2, Shelf Periodicals, South Pacific Division Heritage Centre, Avondale College of Higher Education, Cooranbong, New South Wales.
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 22. E.g., Jack Skelton, "Stamp News," *Our Little Friend*, August 19, 1949, 5, South Pacific Division Heritage Centre, Avondale College of Higher Education, Cooranbong, New South Wales.
 23. "Periodicals," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1977), 468.
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