



Executive Committee, taken at the Conference

Front Row, kneeling (from left): E. Rosendahl, T. W. Hammond, A. H. Piper, G. T. Chapman, H. E. Piper, W. J. Westermøn, G. E. Adair, R. H. Adair.
Second Row: R. E. Hare, A. W. Anderson, W. G. Turner, C. H. Watson, A. G. Stewart, Dr. C. W. Harrison, G. G. Stewart, F. G. Rampton.
Third Row: F. A. Allam, C. H. Parker, E. H. Guilliard, E. B. Rudge, G. S. Fisher, S. Watson, W. N. Lock, H. K. Martin, E. G. Whittaker,
 W. O. Johanson, H. A. Hill.
Back Row: A. G. Minchin, G. Peacock, S. L. Patching, J. J. Potter, N. H. Faulkner, C. M. Snow, P. G. Foster.

The Executive Committee of the Australasian Union Conference/Australasian Division, 1930.

Photo courtesy of the *Record*, September 29, 1930.

Australasian Union Conference During the Depression

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.

Australasian Division income during the depression was remarkable in the face of widespread adversity. Any progress made by the church during the worst years was in sharp contrast to numerous bankruptcies and business failures in the secular world.

The Great Depression is generally considered to be a worldwide financial and social calamity triggered by the collapse of the New York Stock Exchange in 1929. Stock values began falling in September, crashing dramatically on October 29. International trade plummeted, causing widespread unemployment and plunging government tax revenues. In Australia, mining and agricultural production and exports suffered badly. Not until 1932 did the prices of wool and meat exports begin to make a slow recovery.

In view of the dire financial circumstances, church finances would inevitably be reduced. At the Australasian Union Conference (AUC) headquarters, William Hammond and Reginald Adair were the two individuals charged with the overall management of finances.¹ The 1930 Quadrennial Session Report of the AUC and the 1936 Sexennial Session Report both portray the fact that the pace of church affairs slowed, but church finances were remarkably buoyant.

The 1930 Quadrennial Session Report

The treasurer's report showed that tithe receipts had increased from £9,438 (1926) to £12,241 (1929). The Appeal for Missions, which represented monies largely from the public, also exhibited an increase, with £14,635 collected in 1926 and £16,037 collected in 1929. Most other offerings displayed similar rises, including the Sabbath School offerings and those from the Young People's Society meetings. At the end of 1929, the AUC held £15,000 in reserve, enough to meet operating expenses for three months. Profits earned from the health foods business and channeled through the legal body, the Australasian Conference Association, Limited (ACA), were lauded as vital sources for financial liquidity.

However, the rapidly growing Pacific Island mission fields and the denominational education system were the two areas highlighted as the greatest consumers of AUC funds. Only very careful budgeting and tightened expenditure had maintained stability. The admission was made that during 1928 and 1929 they were unable to increase the number of employees, both European and Pacific Island nationals. It could be argued from some elements in this report that the treasurers saw financial troubles on the horizon prior to the October 1929 stock market crash, but they freely admitted they could not forecast the duration of the depression²

Twelve months later, at the 1931 AUC Annual Council, officers were rueing the longevity of the depression that hung over the land "like a pall." They spoke of "many pressing problems to solve" but did not elaborate in their report.³ They were possibly referring to lower income and the continued inability to significantly add to their workforce in the face of increasing demands for funds.

The 1936 Sexennial Session Report

The 1936 session was the next major gathering of officers after the 1930 session. It provided some historical perspective of the church both before and during the depression years, followed by evidence of some recovery.

The following table provides annual totals of tithes and offerings for 1926 through 1935:

1926	£51,134
1927	£56,950
1928	£57,562
1929	£60,934
1930	£56,998
1931	£51,637
1932	£50,727
1933	£50,613
1934	£53,222
1935	£57,892

The above table indicates there was no immediate deep plunge in revenue following the stock market crash but, instead, a slowing decline for four years and a gradual recovery beginning in 1934. By 1936, the church officers were confident that the worst years were in the past.⁴

The treasurers gave three main reasons for the relatively good annual incomes. One was the fact that they had a balance of nearly £20,000 at the end of 1929, in addition to the £15,000 in reserve. Another reason was increasingly generous appropriations from the health foods business. And a third reason was that the public continued to give to the Appeal for Missions, on average an annual total of £13,000 during the worst years of the depression. The treasurers noted the largesse of one church member who had donated a sheep station, an enterprise that earned up to £1,000 each year. The report also told of a significant legacy that enabled the AUC, during the recovery years, to introduce the Trainee Plan for the employment of young workers at minimal wage rates. Twenty-seven youth were placed in this program between 1932 and 1935.⁵

Membership numbers, if anything, increased as a result of the depression. In the home field the totals were 8,370 (1925), 9,516 (1929), and 12,088 (1933). Significantly, the rate of growth increased sharply after 1929, the average annual increase between 1929 and 1933 being 514 compared to only 286 for the period 1925–1929. Mission field membership continued its upward climb with 1,430 (1925), 1,949 (1929), 3,098 (1933) and 3,744 (1935).⁶

Despite the worst of the depression, the six years 1930 through 1935 witnessed the acquisition of six new motor launches and three dispensaries in the mission fields. In the same area, the recovery years brought an increase in the workforce from 226 to 372. And in the homeland, conference workers increased by 74. Eighteen new churches were built, and membership increased by nearly 38 percent.⁷

New Headquarters Building

Right at the time that the depression began to take effect in Australia, at the 1930 AUC Quadrennial Session, the astonishing decision was made to invest in a new office building.⁸ The AUC headquarters had been transferred from Melbourne to Sydney in 1899. The office was in a home called “Elsnath” in suburban Strathfield.⁹ In 1910 they transferred to a weatherboard cottage called “Mizpah” on Fox Valley Road, Wahroonga, and over the years it was expanded with the addition of extra office rooms.¹⁰

As soon as the 1930 decision was made, the construction of the new brick premises began alongside “Mizpah.” Most of the building costs came from the health food business via the ACA, not from tithes and offerings.¹¹ The structure itself was masterly executed with good quality bricks and fitted inside with hardwood timbers.

The new building was officially opened and dedicated on Tuesday afternoon, September 1, 1931. Elder Albert Anderson gave the dedication sermon. It was apparent that he sought to allay any accusations of extravagance in times of extreme poverty for he went to great lengths to explain the cramped and “insufferable disadvantages” of “Mizpah,” the imperative of efficiency being more important than economy, the opulence of the Jerusalem Temple, the importance of employee’s health, and the utilitarian nature of the building. By the time the officers met at the 1936 AUC Sexennial Session, two wings were added to the offices, one at each end of the building.¹²

Summary

If the Great Depression had not occurred, advances by the church would obviously have quickened considerably. Generally speaking, church income during the depression was remarkable in the face of widespread adversity. Any progress made by the church during the worst years was in sharp contrast to numerous bankruptcies and business failures in the secular world.

SOURCES

Anderson, A. W. “Dedicatory Address of the New Administration Building of the Australasian Union Conference.” *Australasian Record*, September 14, 1931.

Hammond, T. W. “Union Conference Treasurer’s Report.” *Australasian Record*, September 29, 1930.

Hammond, T. W., and R. H. Adair. “Treasurer’s Report.” *Australasian Record*, September 21, 1936.

Piper, A. H. "The 1931 Council." *Australasian Record*, September 21, 1931.

———. "The Secretary's Report." *Australasian Record*, September 14, 1936.

Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook. Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1909, 1932.

"Union Conference Proceedings." *Australasian Record*, October 6, 1930.

NOTES

1. E.g., "Australasian Union Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook 1932* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1932), 101.
2. T. W. Hammond, "Union Conference Treasurer's Report," *Australasian Record*, September 29, 1930, 8–14.
3. A. H. Piper, "The 1931 Council," *Australasian Record*, September 21, 1931, 8.
4. T. W. Hammond and R. H. Adair, "Treasurer's Report," *Australasian Record*, September 21, 1936, 3–6.
5. Ibid.
6. A. H. Piper, "The Secretary's Report," *Australasian Record*, September 14, 1936, 6–10.
7. T. W. Hammond and R. H. Adair, "Treasurer's Report," *Australasian Record*, September 21, 1936, 3–6.
8. "Union Conference Proceedings," *Australasian Record*, October 6, 1930, 12–13.
9. E.g., "Australasian Union Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook 1909* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1909), 92.
10. A. W. Anderson, "Dedicatory Address of the New Administration Building of the Australasian Union Conference," *Australasian Record*, September 14, 1931, 1–3.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.

encyclopedia.adventist.org is an official website of the [Seventh-day Adventist World Church](#)

© 2020 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists 12501 Old Columbia Pike Silver Spring , MD 20904 USA 301-680-6000