



The Tasmanian Conference office in Hobart, Tasmania.

Photo courtesy of Mark Falconer.

Tasmanian Conference, South Pacific Division

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The Tasmanian Conference is a constituent of the Australian Union Conference.¹ Its headquarters are located at 157 Main Road, Moonah, Tasmania.² Its unincorporated activities are governed by a constitution that is based on the model conference constitution of the South Pacific Division of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (SPD). Its real and intellectual property is held in trust by the Australasian Conference Association, Limited, an incorporated entity based at the headquarters office of the SPD in Wahroonga, New South Wales, Australia.

The conference executive committee has transferred most of its functions to two corporations to act as trustees for the conference:³ Seventh-day Adventist Church (Tasmanian Conference), Limited, which oversees the day-to-day operations of the conference itself and was incorporated on July 1, 2005, and Seventh-day Adventist Schools (Tasmania), Limited, which oversees the operation of the education entities within the conference and was incorporated on October 1, 2004.⁴

Current Territory and Statistics

The territory of the Tasmanian Conference is: "Tasmania and adjacent islands."⁵

The Tasmanian Conference in 2019 has ten churches and four companies. The churches are Launceston, Deloraine, Rosny, Glenorchy, Collinsvale, Ulverstone, Devonport, Wynyard, Burnie, and Margate. The church companies are New Norfolk, Smithton, Scottsdale, and King Island.⁶ Church membership at the end of 2017 was 1,196.⁷ The conference had 44 active employees. Its tithe receipts for 2016 totaled US\$992,638. Its tithe and offerings per capita were US\$1,268.11.⁸

The regular publication of the Tasmanian Conference is the *Tasda* newsletter, published in a print edition quarterly.

Schools:

Hilliard Christian School: Located at Cheviot Road, West Moonah, TAS, the school offers instruction in kindergarten to grade 10. It has an enrollment of 54, with seven teaching staff.⁹ The school commenced operation in 1901 with Miss Katie Judge as the first teacher.¹⁰

North West Christian School: Located at 18 Ling Street, Penguin, TAS, the school offers instruction in kindergarten to grade 10. It has an enrollment of 103, with eight teaching staff.¹¹ Established in 1975, the school was originally called the Pengana Seventh-day Adventist School. In 1996 the name was changed to the North West Christian School.¹²

Camps

Spring Beach Youth Camp: Located at 138 Happy Valley Road, Spring Beach, TAS, the camp offers a range of outdoor and indoor activities, especially for youth and children.¹³

Pine Springs Camp Ground: Located at 6133 Frankford Road, Wesley Vale, TAS, the campground is the site for the annual Tasmanian Conference camp meeting and convention.

Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA)

ADRA operates two op shops in the conference: one in the Northgate Shopping Centre at Glenorchy, and one at 1/25 King Edward Street, Ulverstone.¹⁴

The Origins of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Territory of the Tasmanian Conference

In 1887 two literature evangelists, Arnold and Newman, canvassed the Hobart area with *Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation*. A tailor in Hobart, George Foster, and his wife, Isabella, began to observe the Sabbath. John Higgins and his wife, along with their two daughters, Annie and Alice, began worshipping together in the Fosters' home in Queen Street, Sandy Bay.¹⁵ This small group requested that someone be sent from Melbourne. In response, M. C. Israel and W.L.H. Baker were sent to Hobart at the beginning of 1888.¹⁶

In an article written for the *Bible Echo and Signs of the Times*, Mendel Israel and William Baker gave a brief account of the first evangelistic series conducted by the SDA Church in Tasmania:

We commenced meetings in the tent at Sandy Bay Feb. 29 [1888], and continued them till April 21, when we stored the tent for the winter. The average attendance during the meeting was fifty. These attended nearly all through, and at least twenty-five of them are keeping the Sabbath, including five, Brn. Foster's and Higgin's families, that had accepted the truth through the efforts of Brn. Arnold and Wainman while canvassing here for *Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation*.¹⁷

A second series of meetings was commenced immediately afterward on Sunday, April 22, 1888, in the federal hall on Murray Street, Hobart.¹⁸ Many who had attended the first series in Sandy Bay attended the second series in the federal hall.¹⁹ Following the meetings, Israel and Baker reported that "as a result of the labor in Hobart, forty-seven have fully made up their minds to keep all the commandments and the faith of Jesus, and have their names on the covenant."²⁰ A baptism of 14 was held on Wednesday, June 27, and on Thursday, June 28, the Hobart SDA Church was organized.²¹ On the following Sabbath, "June 30, the church held its first quarterly meeting, and one sister was baptized. Membership twenty-four. Nearly all were present, and participated in the ordinances, all for the first time as Seventh-day Adventists. The ordination of the elder took place just previous to the celebration of the Lord's supper."²²

Even though the Tasmanian SDA Church was in its infancy, it appointed two of its number, George Foster and David Steed, to attend “a general meeting of Seventh-day Adventists of Australia and Tasmania, convened for the purpose of taking into consideration the advisability of organization.”²³ The meeting convened on August 30, 1888, in Melbourne, VIC. The Australian Conference was formed at that meeting. Tasmania, with just one organized church, was a part of the conference.²⁴

In November 1888 Mendel Israel returned to Hobart to conduct another series of evangelistic meetings. In a letter written on January 12, 1889, he reported on a baptism of eight persons and noted that since organization 46 persons had joined the church, although “one has apostatized and two have been transferred to Melbourne.”²⁵ The membership was 44.²⁶ Israel conducted a number of other series of meetings, with somewhat mixed success.²⁷

On February 20, 1889, two deacons, David Steed and William Lange, commenced meetings in the German, Danish, and English rural settlement of Bismarck, some 20 kilometers to the northwest of Hobart. After being turned out of the local Methodist church and then the local school, a local farmer, August Darko, opened his home for Steed and Large to conduct their meetings.²⁸

On Sunday June 2, 1889, there was a baptism of 16 persons from the Bismarck area. The baptism was held at the Queen Domain Ladies Baths in Hobart. Those baptized were Charles and Eliza Fehlberg, Hans and Marie Appeldorf, Peter Appeldorf and his wife, George and Annie Appeldorf, Karl Fehlberg and his wife, August Fehlberg and his wife, Otto Rabe and his wife, a Mr. Darko, and a Mr. Janson.²⁹

Other baptisms followed, and as a result, a church was organized at Bismarck (later Collinsvale) by Mendel Israel on July 20, 1889.³⁰ He reported that the newly organized church had 33 members: “twenty-six Germans, six Danes and one English.”³¹ Charles Fehlberg was chosen as elder; E. Brandstater and H. Appeldorff as deacons; A. Tottenhofer as treasurer; and Peter Appeldorff as clerk.³² A church was built on land donated by August Darko, and the first meeting was held in it on December 28, 1889.³³ The Bismarck church was renamed as Collinsvale during the time of World War I. The Collinsvale church has been used continually ever since and is the oldest SDA church building in Australia.

Between November 28 and December 9, 1895, the first camp meeting in Tasmania, with 32 family tents, was conducted on the recreation ground opposite the Newtown post office. The largest attendance at any meeting was 107, and Ellen G. White was in attendance.³⁴

The Beginnings of the Organized Seventh-day Adventist Church in Australia

At the annual session of the General Conference, held at Battle Creek in November 1884, the Committee on Resolutions reported that it had “resolved, that in our judgment, steps should be immediately taken to open a

mission in Australia." The resolution was adopted by the floor of the session.³⁵

The Committee on Fields of Labor then presented a partial report, in which its fourteenth recommendation read: "That Eld. S. N. Haskell go to California in time to attend the fall camp-meeting, and as soon after this as possible go to Australia to superintend the establishing of a mission there; and that Eld. J. O. Corliss, and other laborers who may be selected, go at the same time to labor in the mission."³⁶

There was considerable discussion on the recommendation, with some dissenters. After remarks by Elders Haskell, Butler, White, and Waggoner, it was referred back, without instructions, to the committee.³⁷ After reconsideration of its recommendation, the Committee on Fields of Labor brought back their report, with a twenty-fifth recommendation as follows: "That in view of the great importance of spreading the truth to earth's remotest bounds, and of opening a mission in Australia as soon as possible, S. N. Haskell go to Australia next May, taking with him a competent corps of laborers to establish a mission; and that he return in time to attend the next General Conference [session]."³⁸

In May 1885 S. N. Haskell, Henry Scott, W. Arnold, J. O. Corliss, and M. C. Israel (the last two named with their families) set sail for Australia. They reached Sydney on June 6, 1885, after a voyage of 29 days. They moved on to Melbourne and commenced work, thus establishing a foothold for the church in Victoria and Australia.³⁹

On the basis of the financial strength and the availability of local human resources, the Australian Conference was organized in September 1888. Attending the session were 22 lay delegates, representing the churches at Adelaide, Ballarat, Hobart, and Melbourne, and the company at Wychitella, and four ministers as delegates at large. A constitution as used by all conferences was adopted, with some alterations. The elected officers were: president, G. C. Tenney; secretary, Stephen McCullagh; treasurer, Echo Publishing House.⁴⁰

The Australasian Union Conference was organized during the time of the Australian camp meeting, January 15–25, 1894. It comprised District 7 of the General Conference districts, and included the conferences of Australia and New Zealand. The stated object of the union was "to unify and extend the work of the third angel's message, under the general direction of the General Conference, in the Australasian field."⁴¹ It was anticipated that as the work expanded, other conferences would be organized.⁴²

Arthur Daniells described the further steps taken to organize the conferences in Australia. He wrote:

At the beginning of 1894 it was felt that the Australian Conference had more territory than it could well manage, so the colonies of Queensland and West Australia were separated from the conference, and placed under the care of the union conference as mission fields. Near the close of 1895 another change was made. New South Wales was separated from the Australian Conference by the organization of the New South Wales Conference. At that time the name of the conference was changed from the Australian to the Central Australian Conference.

The Tasmanian Conference

On October 29, 1899, the Queensland Conference was organized,⁴⁴ and on November 25, 1899, the South Australian Conference was organized.⁴⁵ Then on January 1, 1900, Tasmania became a mission field under the care of the Australasian Union Conference.⁴⁶ E. Hilliard was asked to assume the leadership of the work of the church in Tasmania.⁴⁷ Arthur Daniells expressed the hope that within a very short time Tasmania could be organized as a conference.⁴⁸

Organization took place a little more than a year later at the first SDA camp meeting held in Tasmania. The camp meeting convened at Launceston, February 12–24, 1901. Under the chairmanship of E. W. Farnsworth, a constitution was adopted, officers elected, and an executive committee of five appointed. The elected president was E. Hilliard, the vice president was C. H. Parker, the secretary was T. Howse, and the treasurer, P. H. Pretzman.⁴⁹ The membership in Tasmania at that time was given as 155.⁵⁰ There were just “four churches, two or three companies of Sabbathkeepers, and several isolated members.”⁵¹ For the next four years the conference office was located at 131 St. Johns Street, Launceston.⁵²

At the Australasian Union Conference council held at Wahroonga, NSW, in September 1909, action was taken to recommend the amalgamation of the Victorian Conference and the Tasmanian Conference. The name of the amalgamated conference was the Victoria-Tasmania Conference.⁵³ The reason given for the amalgamation given was “that a considerable saving in office expenses could be made.”⁵⁴

Then in 1915 the combined conference was separated into the Victorian Conference and the Tasmanian Conference.⁵⁵ At a meeting in Hobart, March 11–14, 1915, called by the officers of the Victoria-Tasmania Conference, the Tasmanian Conference was organized.⁵⁶ Under the chairmanship of the president of the Victoria-Tasmania Conference, M. Lukens, a constitution was adopted, officers elected, and an executive committee of seven appointed.⁵⁷ The position of president was referred to the Australasian Union Conference. The union asked G. Hubbard to oversee the work of the church in Tasmania on a temporary basis, but deferred the appointment of a president until the annual meeting of the union in September 1915.⁵⁸ A. H. White was subsequently appointed.⁵⁹ Meanwhile, A. W. Chelberg had been appointed as secretary/treasurer at the Hobart meeting.⁶⁰ The conference office was located in the Franklin Chambers, Macquarie Street, Hobart.⁶¹

But then in 1922 the Victorian Conference and the Tasmanian Conference were once again amalgamated into the Victoria-Tasmania Conference.⁶² This arrangement lasted only four years, until the Australasian Union Conference session held in Sydney, September 14–28, 1926, when Victoria and Tasmania were separated once again.⁶³ Initially, Tasmania was cared for by the Australasian Union Conference.⁶⁴ Then at a conference session held February 17–28, 1927, a constitution was adopted, officers were elected, and an executive committee of seven appointed for the Tasmanian Conference.⁶⁵ The elected president was E. G. Whittaker, and the secretary/treasurer, F. J. Butler. No further amalgamation of the Victorian Conference and the Tasmanian Conference has taken place.

When the Tasmanian Conference was organized at the beginning of 1927, the conference office was located at 8 Forest Street, South Hobart. In 1929 offices were transferred to 5 Jordan Hill Road, Hobart. Subsequently the offices were relocated to McTavish Avenue, North Hobart; then to 2 Elizabeth Street, Hobart; Montpillier Retreat, Battery Point; and, at present, Main Road Moonah.⁶⁶

Until 1949 the Australasian Union Conference, which was also designated as the Australasian Division, operated as a collection of conferences and missions.⁶⁷ The Tasmanian Conference was one of the conferences in the Australasian Division. In 1949 four unions were organized within the territory of the division, which became known also as the Australasian Inter-Union Conference.⁶⁸ The conferences in Australia were divided between the Trans-Tasman Union and the Trans-Commonwealth Union. Tasmania was included in the territory of the Trans-Commonwealth Union.⁶⁹ The name of the Trans-Commonwealth Union was changed to the Trans-Australia Union in 1976.⁷⁰

In 2000 a major reorganization of the unions in the South Pacific Division occurred at the division session.⁷¹ The number of unions in the division was reduced from five to four. The Australian Union Conference comprising the nine conferences in Australia (including the Tasmanian Conference) was formed in this reorganization.⁷²

Mission and Strategic Plans of the Tasmanian Conference⁷³

The Vision Statement of the Tasmanian Conference in 2019: Transforming Tasmania with Jesus for Eternity.

The Official Commentary on this statement is:

The greatest need of the church and the world are Spirit-filled disciples. Filled with the Holy Spirit and armed with Christ's love, this will enable our communities in Tasmania to be transformed. Jesus gave the specific command to the church to "make disciples" (Matt. 28:19, 20). We are all called to be a part of the "Great Commission," and therefore, Jesus commands us to go out into local communities to make disciples. In order to mobilize our churches, there is a need for revival and transformation of our members, through the Holy Spirit, so as to recapture the passion and drive that characterized the Apostolic church and early Adventism. Part of the process for revival and transformation is to equip, train, and empower our members so that not only they transform those around them, but also . . . [they] release the pastors to be evangelists based on the NT model.

Strategic Objectives and Accomplishments

The conference, through a special constituency meeting, has adopted a ten-year strategic plan that has provided the conference and constituency much-needed direction. The strategic plan is a dynamic document that informs mission and has four key areas. First, spiritual revival and personal transformation. Second, to equip, train, and empower in order to mobilize disciples. Third, to transform Tasmanian communities. Fourth, financial stability. The accomplishments coming from these objectives are:

Pastors becoming trainers and equippers

The family camp has now rediscovered its roots and become evangelistic

Health expos being conducted for the community across the state

A citywide outreach in Hobart in 2019

Conference tithes has increased significantly and with the schools becoming self-sufficient the financial position of the conference has improved

Increase of 25 percent in baptisms

Investment of personal and resources to reach younger generations through social media

Home churches and church plants are at their embryonic stage.

Remaining Challenges for the Conference

One of the outcomes desired from equipping and training church leaders and members is that they will care pastorally for the church and release local pastors to plant new churches. Freeing up the pastors remains a significant challenge. Some other challenges are:

Revitalization of Sabbath School

Mobilizing the laity for mission

Schools becoming mission-focused

Retention of young people

The employment of more literature evangelists in the conference.

Presidents of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Tasmania

Tasmanian Mission (1900–1901)

E. Hilliard (1900–1901).

Tasmanian Conference (1901–1909)

E. Hilliard (1901–1904); J. Pallant (1905–1907); L. V. Finster (1907–1908); W.L.H. Baker (1908–1909).

Victoria-Tasmania Conference (1909–1915)

E. S. Butz (1909); C. H. Parker (1910–1911); E. H. Gates (1912–1913); M. Lukens (1914–1915)

Tasmanian Conference (1915–1922)

G. Hubbard (acting, 1915); A. H. White (1915–1918); H. E. Piper (1919–1921); H. C. White (1922).

Victoria-Tasmania Conference (1922–1926)

A. H. Piper (1923); F. A. Allum (1924–1926).

Tasmanian Conference (1927–)

E. G. Whittaker (1927–1929); S. L. Patching (1929–1930); F. G. Rampton (1931–1933); E. E. Roenfelt (1934–1935);

H. G. Moulds (1936–1937); W.M.R. Scragg (1938–1942); W. E. Batty (1943–1944); D. Sibley (1945); L. A. Butler

(1946–1947); H. W. Hollingsworth (1948–1954); C. D. Judd (1955–1958); W. E. Rudge (1959–1963); A. D. Pietz

(1964–1970); R. W. House (1971–1975); C. S. Adams (1976–1978); K. H. Mead (1978–1979); R. N. Lawson

(1980–1986); J. H. Gate (1987–1990); C. R. Wallace (1991–1998); A. R. Walshe (1998–2000); K. G. Amos

(2000–2007); W. B. Boehm (2008–2010); D. C. Slade (2010–2015); G. H. Webster (2015–)

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NOTES

1. Recognition is given to Mark Falconer, secretary of the Tasmanian Conference, and to Paul de Ville, retired, most recently principal of Carmel Adventist College, WA, for assisting with the compilation of much of the information in this article.
2. The conference website is <https://tas.adventist.org.au/>.
3. Tasmanian Conference Executive Committee minutes, Meeting 22, August 22, 2004, Action 2004: 474, Tasmanian Conference Archives, Moonah, TAS.

4. Mark Falconer, secretary of the Tasmanian Conference, email to author, May 3, 2019.
5. *Seventh-day Adventist Online Yearbook*, "Tasmanian Conference," p. 351, accessed March 17, 2019, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Yearbooks/YB2017.pdf>.
6. Mark Falconer, secretary of the Tasmanian Conference, email to author, March 18, 2019.
7. A current statistical overview of the conference at any time may be accessed at <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Statistics/Forms/AllItems.aspx?RootFolder=%2fStatistics%2fASR&FolderCTID=0x01200095DE8DF0FA49904B9D65211> ; *2018 Annual Statistical Report, 154th Report of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists for 2016 and 2017*, accessed January 20, 2019, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Statistics/ASR/ASR2018.pdf>.
8. Ibid.
9. "South Pacific Division Annual Statistical Report to the General Conference, 2017," held in the Office of the Education Director of the South Pacific Division, Wahroonga, NSW.
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11. "South Pacific Division Annual Statistical Report to the General Conference, 2017."
12. "North West Christian School: Our History," accessed March 17, 2019, <https://www.northwestchristianschool.com.au/page/our-history/>.
13. "Spring Beach Youth Camp," accessed March 17, 2019, <https://springbeachyouthcamp.com.au/>.
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15. "Hobart Church: Extract from Résumé in Church Clerk's Records, 1887," in Adrian M. Peterson, "Historical Survey of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Tasmania," unpublished document held in the South Pacific Heritage Centre, Avondale College, Box 142, Cooranbong, NSW: "Tasmanian Conference, General."
16. Ibid.
17. M. C. Israel and W.L.H. Baker, "Hobart, Tasmania," *Bible Echo and Signs of the Times*, June 1888, 92.
18. Ibid.
19. M. C. Israel and W.L.H. Baker, "Hobart, Tasmania," *Bible Echo and Signs of the Times*, August 1888, 124.

20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
23. "Australian Conference Proceedings," *Bible Echo and Signs of the Times*, October 1888, 156.
24. Ibid.
25. "The Work in Hobart," *Bible Echo and Signs of the Times*, February 1, 1889, 44.
26. Ibid.
27. M. C. Israel, "Hobart and Port Esperance," *Bible Echo and Signs of the Times*, February 15, 1889, 60.
28. David Steed, "Bismark Tasmania," *Bible Echo and Signs of the Times*, April 15, 1889, 124.
29. "Extract from the Bismark SDA Church Minutes, 1888," unpublished document held in the South Pacific Heritage Centre, Avondale College, Box 142, Cooranbong, NSW: "Tasmanian Conference, General."
30. Adrian M. Peterson, "Fasting, Prayer, and a Young Preacher," *Australasian Record*, October 12, 1964, 2.
31. M. C. Israel, "Hobart and Bismarck," *Bible Echo and Signs of the Times*, August 15, 1889, 252.
32. "We have received from the clerk . . .," *Bible Echo and Signs of the Times*, February 15, 1890, 64.
33. "The following letter was received . . .," *Bible Echo and Signs of the Times*, January 15, 1890, 32.
34. C. P. Michaels, "The Hobart Camp Meeting," *Bible Echo and Signs of the Times*, February 10, 1896, 45; Adrian M. Peterson, "Historical Survey of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Tasmania," unpublished document held in the South Pacific Heritage Centre, Avondale College, Box 142, Cooranbong, NSW: "Tasmanian Conference, General."
35. *Seventh-day Adventist Online Yearbook*, "General Conference Proceedings: Sixth Meeting," accessed March 15, 2019, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Yearbooks/YB1885.pdf>.
36. *Seventh-day Adventist Online Yearbook*, "General Conference Proceedings: Eighth Meeting," accessed March 15, 2019, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Yearbooks/YB1885.pdf>.
37. Ibid.

38. *Seventh-day Adventist Online Yearbook*, "General Conference Proceedings: Twelfth Meeting," accessed March 15, 2019, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Yearbooks/YB1885.pdf>.
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