

Ashcroft, Charles Ernest (1872–1963)

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.

Charles Ashcroft was a pastor, church administrator, and one of the pioneers of the denomination's senior educational institution in Western Australia.

Early Life

Charles Ashcroft was born in Benalla, Victoria, Australia, on January 1, 1872.¹ When he was eighteen, he left home to seek his fortune in Western Australia. This move would shape his identity.²

In 1891, on board ship to Albany, Western Australia, he met George Palmateer, who had similar plans.

They purchased packhorses and made their way to Perth, where they found employment with the Lands and Survey Department. Their work took them further north to Geraldton, surveying the new rail line to Mullewa and another from Northam to Southern Cross. They resigned from government employment to try their hand on the Coolgardie goldfields. After a few months and no success, they returned to Perth in 1893 and invested their savings in purchasing untouched bushland in the Bickley Valley. Both men pioneered the area, carving out orchards on either side of Piesses Brook and each marrying a local lass.³ Ashcroft married Adelaide "Ada" Urch.⁴



Charles Ernest Ashcroft

Photo courtesy of Milton Hook. From the collection of Allen Gough, Cooranbong, NSW.

In 1902 Ashcroft sold his property and moved to the neighboring valley at Green's Landing to plant another orchard. The locality name was changed to Carmel in 1915. He was constructing his home on the property when George Hawkins visited the area in 1904, selling *Signs of the Times* subscriptions, *The Coming King*, and *Christ's Object Lessons*. An interest in Bible studies ensued. These were conducted by Walter Brittain in Ashcroft's home. The following year, on October 21, 1905, Ashcroft and Palmateer, together with their wives and others, were baptized in Piesses Brook by Elder Lewis Finster.⁵

Commitment to the Seventh-day Adventist Church

Twelve months after his baptism Ashcroft learned that officials of the West Australian Conference were searching for a site where they could establish a missionary training school. After discussions with the conference leadership in which he offered his land, Ashcroft agreed to accept a cash payment for the equity in his orchard providing the conference take over his bank loan.⁶ This transaction led to a stronger involvement with the Church. During the formative years of the missionary school, then known as the Darling Range School, Ashcroft was one of five trustees and served on the school board.⁷ He was also elected to the West Australian Conference executive committee⁸ and as an elder of the new Heidelberg Church in the Bickley Valley.⁹

By 1908 Ashcroft was fully engaged in church work. In the West Australian Conference, he held the portfolios of Sabbath School, Young Peoples, Home Missions, and Religious Liberty.¹⁰ He was one of six West Australian delegates to the Australasian Union Conference Session at Cooranbong, New South Wales, in September 1908.¹¹

Relinquishing his role at the conference office in 1910, he assisted with a tent mission at Albany,¹² and he and his wife were instrumental in raising a company of converts at nearby King River.¹³ The following year he was appointed to pioneer the Northam district,¹⁴ at the same time retaining his role as a trustee of the Darling Range School. His link with the school was strengthened in 1913 when he was appointed preceptor in addition to being the manager of the orchard that he had originally planted.¹⁵ During this two-year period, he was again elected as a member of the West Australian Conference executive committee.¹⁶

Further Service

Leaving Western Australia, Ashcroft served at the Ballarat church, Victoria, in 1915¹⁷ and then moved on to New South Wales to similar pastoral duties in Sydney for three years.¹⁸ In 1919 he and his wife and only child, Ernest, sailed for South New Zealand to begin a four-year term including ministry in the Nelson area.¹⁹

Returning home to Victoria, Australia, he took a break from church employment until the beginning of 1928 when he was invited to care for the Wangaratta church.²⁰ The family remained there for eighteen months, and then in mid 1929 he was appointed to his home district of Bendigo.²¹ He remained in this pastoral role for ten years, retiring from full-time denominational service in 1940 at the age of 68.²²

Later Life

Approximately 10 years after retirement, Ashcroft and his wife returned to Western Australia, where they had been pioneering orchardists at Bickley Valley and Green's Landing. They purchased a rocky block of land opposite the Bickley Church (formerly Heidelberg Church), built a small cottage, despite his age, and blasted holes in the rocks in order to plant stone fruit among the stones. His little orchard struggled for lack of water.²³ He took an active part in the Bickley Church, preaching regularly.²⁴ Throughout his ministry he had declined ordination, believing the mantle of the Spirit was sufficient. Nevertheless, in 1956 he was granted an honorary ministerial license that was renewed annually until his death.²⁵ He died peacefully in the local hospital on June 4, 1963.²⁶

Contribution

Church officials and the West Australian Missionary College community (formerly Darling Range School and now Carmel College) continued to associate the Ashcroft name with the pioneering years of the denomination's senior educational institution in Western Australia. For that reason, at the beginning of the 1959 school year, a new dormitory for young men boarding at college was opened and named Ashcroft Hall.²⁷

Charles Ashcroft is remembered as a man of ascetic habits and stern demeanor with a loyal work ethic. Having become a Seventh-day Adventist in his early thirties, his commitment did not diminish. He never attended a Bible college but relied solely on the manner by which he had first been persuaded, that is, a proof text method supported by quotations from Ellen White's writings.²⁸

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