



"Lindo," Summer Hill Sanitarium, 1900. It operated at the time of the Australasian Medical Missionary and Benevolent Association.

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Australasian Medical Missionary and Benevolent Association

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Australasian Medical Missionary and Benevolent Association (1897-1900) aimed to promote the principles of healthful living of the denomination and the establishment of the church's medical and charitable enterprises.

Formation

When Dr. Edgar Caro returned to Australasia from the United States in October 1897 after completing his medical studies,¹ he carried “a letter of advice” from the International Medical Missionary and Benevolent Association addressed to the Australasian Union Conference (AUC) officials. Caro virtually walked off the boat and into the AUC Session in Sydney, October 25 through 31 and, as a member of the Committee on Resolutions, steered the acceptance of the letter together with various decisions relating to medical evangelism. Foremost was the appointment of the Medical Missionary Organizing Committee.²

The Medical Missionary Organizing Committee established the Australasian Medical Missionary and Benevolent Association (AMM and B Association). Caro spent some time among the church constituency advocating medical evangelism, culminating in meetings held in the North Fitzroy Seventh-day Adventist Church on April 17 and 18, 1898, when the AMM and B Association was officially formed. Caro made the point that the AUC had already invested money in the medical cause by sponsoring a few Australasians, including himself, to train in America. Using the International Medical Missionary and Benevolent Association as his model, Elder William White read the proposed articles of association to the assembly. It was to be, he explained, a vehicle for the dissemination of principles for healthful living and the establishment of hospitals, sanitariums, orphanages, homes for the aged and destitute, training schools for nurses, the publication of health periodicals, and the sale of health foods and health appliances.³

The articles of association were adopted by vote, and an executive committee was elected as follows: Elder Arthur Daniells, president; Elder Asa Robinson, vice-president; Dr. Edgar Caro, secretary; Edith Graham, treasurer; Anna Ingels, corresponding secretary. Committees of management were also appointed for the embryonic Sydney Health Home and the Melbourne Foods Agency that imported American health products.⁴

Growth

Daniells provided strong leadership in promoting the AMM and B Association. The largest constituency, the Melbourne churches, responded by forming a Victorian branch with a committee of nine to organize a raft of charity enterprises, including an old people's home and the Helping Hand Mission with associated wood yard and laundry.⁵ The nucleus of this move was formed at a meeting on June 12, 1898, in the Oddfellows Hall, Melbourne. At the close of the meeting, nearly 50 church members paid a membership fee of one pound.⁶

A New South Wales branch of the AMM and B Association was formed at the July 1898 annual meeting of the New South Wales Conference. Its immediate responsibility was the oversight of the Sydney Health Home.⁷

The first annual meeting of the AMM and B Association was held in Melbourne on August 9, 1898, with Daniells as chairman and Caro as secretary.⁸ Alfred Semmens, manager of the Sydney Health Home, presented a progress report that included the fact that 32 student nurses had begun their course of study at the Avondale School for Christian Workers. Daniells spoke of medical work opened in Western Australia and a bakery in Melbourne. Caro reported about their single New Zealand charity venture, Bethany Home in Napier.⁹

Twelve months later, during July 1899, the second annual meeting took place at Cooranbong, New South Wales, at the time of the Fourth AUC Session. Two meetings were held to conduct AMM and B Association business, July 20 and 23. The most important resolution adopted was one to raise £8,000 to build a 100-bed hospital in Sydney. The handsome sum of £1,000 was raised at the session. What appeared to be innocuous, but nevertheless held some gravity, was a resolution to incorporate the AMM and B Association under the Companies Act of New South Wales. The constituency also determined to establish a dress reform bureau and Christian Help Bands throughout the Australasian field.¹⁰ Ellen White was present and spoke of her satisfaction that a health retreat was under construction on the Avondale campus.¹¹ The report from George Morse, manager of the Summer Hill Sanitarium where Caro functioned, contained ominous signs that all was not well. He spoke of their rented buildings at Summer Hill as “entirely inadequate . . . , thus rendering its operation extremely difficult and often embarrassing to a serious degree.”¹²

An Abrupt End

All of the little enterprises operated by the AMM and B Association were funded by donations or loans from the constituency. This vital fact identified Caro’s model as fundamentally flawed when compared to Kellogg’s model. Kellogg used significant profits from the large Battle Creek Sanitarium to support his charitable Chicago Mission. Caro had no such backing. The AUC was committed to establishing a major sanitarium, but they could not expect the small constituency to fund it and at the same time support multiple enterprises whose finances were tenuous. The fact that the AMM and B Association was semiautonomous gave further cause for concern. If it became insolvent or the management became estranged from the church, then the church would suffer a significant loss. These elements were initially discussed outside the boardroom for some months, and finally, the executive board met at Cooranbong on February 25, 1900, to address the dilemma. They voted unanimously to call a meeting of the AMM and B Association members for the purpose of disbanding the association and transferring all its enterprises and governance to the AUC. They also recommended that the Summer Hill Sanitarium adopt the Cooranbong health food business, both enterprises with parlous financial situations.¹³ This move exacerbated Caro’s problems. At the time both institutions were in poor financial condition.

To fulfill legal obligations, the planned meeting of association members was advertised on February 28 and March 1 in the *Sydney Daily Telegraph*. Most members lived in Victoria, so the gathering itself was held during a camp meeting at Geelong on March 18, 1900. Daniells presided. Morse acted as secretary in the absence of

Caro. The proposed transfer was adopted without incident, electing Caro as the superintendent of the AUC Medical Department. Significantly, a Reference Committee was elected to monitor Caro and his department.¹⁴

A separate meeting was held at Summer Hill on April 1, 1900, to formalize the transfer of the health foods business to the Summer Hill Sanitarium. Robinson chaired the meeting, and once again, Morse acted as secretary. It was voted that the business should be known as the Sanitarium Health Food Company, its manager should reside at Cooranbong, and its office should be in Gower Street at the Summer Hill Sanitarium, with all profits flowing to medical missionary work in Australasia.¹⁵ Apparently, Caro was not at the meetings when the AMM and B Association was dismantled. He later resigned, and all the enterprises formerly under the control of AMM and B Association, except the health food business, closed down.

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3. A. T. Robinson, "Australasian Medical Missionary and Benevolent Association," *Bible Echo*, May 2, 1898, 139.
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