Norfolk Island

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Norfolk Island is a subtropical island in the South Pacific.

Territory and People
Norfolk Island is located 1,610 kilometers (1,066 miles) east-northeast of Sydney, Australia; 1,456 kilometers (905 miles) east-southeast of Brisbane, Australia, and 1,063 kilometers (661 miles) north-northwest of Auckland, New Zealand, at latitude 29.03° south and longitude 167.95° east. Set on 3,455 hectares (8,537 acres), Norfolk Island is a volcanic outcrop 8 kilometers (5 miles) long and 5 kilometers (3 miles) wide. Two smaller uninhabited islands, Nepean and Phillip, lie to the south at a distance of 1 kilometer (0.6 mile) and 6 kilometers (4 miles), respectively.

The historical area of Kingston is the site of the first Polynesian arrivals and two convict settlements and is where the descendants of the Bounty mutineers from Pitcairn Island arrived in 1856. The Georgian buildings and ruins that make up the convict site are listed as World Heritage sites.

**The Pitcairn Visits and the Arrival of the Seventh-day Adventist Church**

On its first voyage to the South Pacific Ocean, 1890–1892, the missionary sailing ship Pitcairn anchored at Pitcairn Island during December 1890. Three Pitcairn Islanders were taken on board with the view that they would later introduce the American crew to their relatives on Norfolk Island. They were Heywood Christian and his siblings James Russell McCoy and Mary Ann McCoy. After calling at other island groups, they arrived at Norfolk Island on September 30, 1891, receiving a warm welcome. While the Pitcairn sailed on to Auckland for repairs, Albert and Hattie Read disembarked and remained with the McCoys for a few weeks at Norfolk Island in order to generate some interest. Several islanders began to observe the Sabbath prior to the Reads rejoining the Pitcairn on its return voyage.

The second voyage of the Pitcairn brought the missionaries John and Fanny Cole to Norfolk Island on September 9, 1893. They engaged in house-to-house visitation, seeking to strengthen previous efforts.

**Occasional Leadership**

In October 1894, Cole chose to visit the Ashfield camp meeting in Sydney, where he consulted with church leaders and gained permission to enlist the help of some self-supporting missionaries. He selected two couples, Americans Stephen and Melvina “Vina” Belden and Melbournians Charles and Edith Anderson. The group of five sailed to Norfolk Island in December 1894. Their initial project focused on restoring a derelict chapel located in the ruins of the old convict prison. A builder-missionary, Charles Baron, came from Lord Howe Island to assist them for four months. This served as the first church building on the island. Prior to Cole’s departure in mid-1895, he baptized a small number of islanders and, together with the missionaries, formed the Norfolk Island Church on Wednesday, May 22, 1895.

By 1899 Anderson had transferred back to Australia, leaving the aged Beldens in sole charge. Vina Belden reported that 20 regular Sabbath keepers were worshiping in the little chapel in the face of persistent opposition from most Sunday keepers. Edward Gates, director of Pacific Island missions, readily admitted in 1903 that Norfolk Island was a neglected corner of his territory. In 1904 George Starr led a small party of missionaries to the island for three months as a revival and nurturing exercise. Again, in 1906, he returned for six weeks and held public meetings. Two baptismal services were conducted for 13 candidates, 4 of them being rebaptisms. He found general opposition had dissipated. This situation was arguably the result of the Beldens’ consistent witness. Stephen especially assisted the islanders with clock repairs, carpentry, and basic dentistry.

At the time of Starr’s 1906 visit, Stephen Belden was suffering from an incurable facial cancer, or melanoma. He passed away on November 4, 1906, after months of agony. The local Anglican archdeacon kindly conducted the burial service.

**Strengthening the Mission**

At the Sixth Biennial Australasian Union Conference (AUC) Session in September 1906, Julius Christian attended as the first Norfolk Islander to represent his small group. At the meeting, South Australian lay-preacher Harry Mitchell and his wife, Esther, were appointed to be resident missionaries. They arrived in December 1906. At the same time, the first young person from the island to attend the Avondale School for Christian Workers, Mildred McCoy, prepared to leave for Australia.

Mitchell remained four years but had to return to Australia on account of Esther’s poor health. Their successors, Arthur and Jessie Ferris, arrived in January 1911. When Ferris was called away temporarily to Lord Howe Island in 1912, it was fortuitous that Calvin and Myrtle Parker and Septimus and Clara Carr were delayed at Norfolk Island for six months en route to the New Hebrides. They used the time giving hydrotherapy treatments and conducting revival meetings and a baptism.

Ferris reported that 17 new members were baptized during the quadrennium 1910–1914, but their overall numbers were depleted by emigration. Their Sabbath School attendance averaged 40. Services in the old prison chapel, rebuilt two decades earlier, were proving to be inconvenient in wet weather, the traveling on muddy roads being unpleasant and the leaking roof causing major indoor flooding. In 1917 Sidney Nobbs donated a church plot on the central tableland, and Ferris organized a team to help him fell and saw six huge Norfolk pine trees gifted by Emily Quintal. These were broken down in the local sawmill in readiness for the builders while Jesse Ferris painted a series...
of island views for the tourist trade in order to raise funds for the new church. It was dedicated free of debt on Friday evening, May 2, 1919.

Inertia

In October 1919 Richard and Miriam Adams sailed to Norfolk Island in readiness for the transferal of Ferris in 1920. Both Richard and Miriam were trained nurses, appointed on the understanding that they would be self-supporting. Their medical ministry was valued, but church growth remained stagnant, with membership recorded at 16 in 1922. The mission was given only passing mention in the AUC Quadrennial Sessions. Adams returned to Australia in 1928, and the members were left with local elder leadership, namely George Wise. During the early 1930s, Norfolk Island came to be recognized as part of the parish of Ferris, who would make an annual visit from Lord Howe Island.

Transition

Throughout the latter half of the 1930s, William and Louisa Smith served as resident missionaries but still, there was scant mention of Norfolk Island in the AUC reports. Thomas and Edith Howse arrived on Christmas Day 1941 to replace the Smiths. Thomas provided a nursing ministry to the community remaining throughout the Second World War years. Increasingly, the island was considered to be less of a South Pacific mission field and more of an attachment to the Australian homeland. No longer did it feature in island mission reports. Several ministers were appointed in succession to nurture the members. Charles Boulting served from 1946 through 1950, followed by George Weslake (1951–1955), William Coates (1956–1957), and Harold Meyers (1958–1959). In 1959 the membership numbered 32. The church was then incorporated into the Greater Sydney Conference and remains part of the sisterhood of churches in that conference. In 2018, the Norfolk Island Seventh-day Adventist Church had 39 members.

Sources

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*NOTES*


2. Ibid.


5. E. H. Gates, “From the ‘Pitcairn,’” *Bible Echo and Signs of the Times*, December 1, 1891, 368.


13. “Those who are acquainted with the needs . . . .”, *Union Conference Record*, October 1, 1899, 15.


20. “Sister Mildred McCoy of Norfolk Island . . . .”, *Union Conference Record*, January 7, 1907.


25. 


42. Adrian Raethel, secretary of the Greater Sydney Conference, e-mail message to author, August 15, 2018.