

North New South Wales Conference, South Pacific Division

BARRY OLIVER

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The North New South Wales Conference office in Wallsend, NSW, Australia.

Photo courtesy of Maddy Voinea.

The North New South Wales Conference is a constituent of the Australian Union Conference in the South Pacific Division of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

Territory and Statistics

The North New South Wales (NSW) Conference headquarters is located at 112 Lake Road, Wallsend, New South Wales, 2287, Australia. 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 of the SPD in Wahroonga, New South Wales.¹

The Conference Executive Committee has transferred most of its functions to three corporations to act as trustees for the conference: Seventh-day Adventist Church (North New South Wales Conference) Limited, which oversees the day-to-day operations of the conference and was incorporated on April 1, 2003;² Seventh-day Adventist Schools (North New South Wales) Limited, which oversees the operation of the education entities within the conference and was registered on November 14, 2003;³ and Seventh-day Adventist Aged Care (North New South Wales) Limited, which oversees the operation of the aged care facilities within the conference and

was registered on April 1, 2003.⁴

The territory of the North NSW Conference is “that part of New South Wales north of the Hawkesbury and Capertee Rivers as far as the 150th meridian of East Longitude, thence east of the line running north to Cassilis, but excluding the town of Cassilis, to a point just west of the town of Coonabarabran, but east of the 149th meridian of East Longitude and then directly west to the South Australian border parallel with the Queensland border.”⁵

In the *2019 Annual Statistical Report of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists*, THE North NSW Conference was listed as having 66 churches and 14 companies. Church membership at the end of 2018 was 12,112, making it the second largest conference by membership in Australia.⁶ The conference had 1,256 active employees in 2016. Its tithe receipts for 2016 totaled US\$11,496,898. Its tithe and offerings per capita were US\$1,453.57.⁷

Schools of the North New South Wales Conference

The North NSW Conference operates the largest education system in the Australian Union Conference.

Avondale Schools. The first school at Avondale commenced operations at Cooranbong, New South Wales, on April 28, 1897, as the Avondale School for Christian Workers.⁸ The school had been opened on August 24, 1892, as the Australasian Bible School in North Fitzroy, Victoria, Australia,⁹ with 25 students.¹⁰ When the Australasian Union Conference formed in 1894, the oversight of the school was placed in the hands of the union.¹¹ In 1897 the union transferred the school from Victoria to the newly acquired Brettville estate in Cooranbong, NSW, and it was renamed the Avondale School for Christian Workers. Ellen White wrote extensively in support of the school.¹² In 1911 it became the Australasian Missionary College, and later, in 1954, Avondale College. An elementary school was established in 1897, and the Leaving Certificate was offered by the college from 1917 when the school gained state recognition as a secondary school. The elementary and secondary schools were transferred from the college campus to a location at 119 Avondale Road, Cooranbong, in 1980. In 2012, the Toronto Seventh-day Adventist School located at the corner of Wangi Road and Parkside Parade, Toronto, NSW, 2283, was added as a second campus of Avondale Schools.¹³ The Avondale Early Learning Centre was approved in June 2002 and established on the Cooranbong Avondale Schools campus.¹⁴

Blue Hills College. Lismore Adventist School was established in 1950 in the church hall in Brewster Street, Lismore.¹⁵ The school later transferred to its present location at 17 Blue Hills Avenue, Goonellabah, NSW, 2480, and was renamed Blue Hills College. It has elementary and secondary campuses.

Central Coast Adventist College. Established as the Erina school in 1969,¹⁶ the school began in a small building on Mann Street in Gosford, with one teacher and 18 students. In 1970 the campus was moved to the current site at Penrose Crescent, Erina, NSW, 2250. The 4.2-hectare (10.4-acre) property has been developed into a pre-

Kindergarten to Year 12 campus. In 2018, Central Coast Adventist School had more than 110 staff, and about 875 students were enrolled.¹⁷

Kempsey Adventist School. Originally located on Yaraval Street in Kempsey, NSW, Kempsey Adventist School was established in 1977.¹⁸ Approval for the school to relocate to 108 Crescent Head Road, Kempsey, was given in October 2001.¹⁹ The school has both elementary and secondary campuses.

Macksville Adventist School. Macksville Adventist School commenced operation with 17 students on January 31, 1967. By the end of the year, the enrollment had grown to 24. Classes were run in the Macksville church hall. The school was relocated to its present site with the official opening of the building in October 1984. The school is located at 11 Dudley Street, Macksville, NSW.²⁰

Macquarie College. The Hamilton church in Newcastle, NSW, established the first school in the conference in the rear of the church building on Lindsay Street, Hamilton, sometime between mid-1900 and the start of 1901.²¹ The school closed after about three years, and then reopened about 1913 and closed again sometime after 1918.

In early February 1933, the school reopened in the rear of the Hamilton Church, beginning with 19 students, growing to 24 within weeks.²² The potential of the school prompted a report at the conference session “that more church schools should be established in this Conference.”²³

A new facility was built by the end of 1938. The two-teacher school boasted a mere 20 students, 11 of which were primary pupils, with several non-Adventists included.²⁴

The school gradually increased in enrollment and staff. In 1991, the school was once again relocated²⁵ to 182-222 Lake Road, Wallsend, NSW, 2287, and renamed Macquarie College. The campus includes an early learning center, elementary school, and secondary school. The Macquarie College Early Learning Centre commenced operation in 1994.²⁶

Manning Adventist School. The Manning Adventist School commenced operations in 1977.²⁷ It is located at the corner of Urray Road and The Bucketts Way, Tinonee, NSW, 2430, Australia.

Port Macquarie Adventist School. Established by a 1991 action of the North New South Wales Executive Committee,²⁸ the Port Macquarie Adventist School is located at 500 Ocean Drive, Port Macquarie, NSW, 2444, Australia. It is an elementary school.

Toronto Adventist School. Opened on February 12, 1982, with 14 pupils, the Toronto Adventist School was located in the Toronto Church complex at the corner of Galbraith Street and Barry Street, Toronto.²⁹ The school transferred to a campus at the corner of Wangi Road and Parkside Parade, Toronto, NSW, 2283, Australia, opening on April 5, 1983.³⁰ In 2012, the school became a second elementary school campus of Avondale Schools.³¹

Tweed Valley Adventist College. When opened as a primary school in Riverview Street, Murwillumbah, in 1958, Murwillumbah Seventh-day Adventist School had 20 students. By 1964 the college had 35 students enrolled and offered a secondary curriculum. In 1974, the college was moved to its present site on Hall Drive in Murwillumbah. By 1998 Tweed Valley Adventist College had been named one of the top nine “Outstanding Small Schools” in New South Wales and was providing a curriculum from Kindergarten to Year 12.³²

Nursing Home and Retirement Facilities

Alstonville Lifestyle Community. The Alstonville Lifestyle Community facility was established in 1984.³³ It has a 51-bed hostel accommodating the needs of residents in low care, high care, and secure dementia care.³⁴ It also has 84 self-care villas.³⁵ It is located at 77 Pearces Creek Road, Alstonville, NSW, 2477, Australia.

Avondale Lifestyle Community. Located at 552-578 Freemans Drive, Cooranbong, NSW, 2265, Avondale Lifestyle Community was established by action of the North New South Wales Executive Committee in 1955.³⁶ Its entities include the Avondale House Aged Care Facility (formerly Charles Harrison Nursing Home); the Alton Lodge Aged Care Facility; Alton Villas, situated on the western side of Freemans Drive and comprising 104 two- and three-bedroom villas, communal village gardens, and croquet and golf courses; and Kressville Villas on the east side of Freemans Drive, which is the location of the Adventist Senior Living corporate office. Kressville Villas offers 128 one-, two-, and three-bedroom villas, a village maintenance shed, and the village café.³⁷

Jewells Lifestyle Community. Located at 7 Niaba Road, Jewells, NSW, 2280, the Jewells Lifestyle Community was purchased in 2012.³⁸ It has 97 villas, a community hall, a croquet course, and a community garden.³⁹

Wyee Point Lifestyle Community. The Wyee Point Lifestyle Community is located at 100 Government Road, Wyee Point, NSW, 2259. The land was purchased in 2012.⁴⁰ It has 26 independent living units with further development planned.⁴¹

Camps

Stuarts Point Convention Centre. The Stuarts Point Convention Centre is located at 250 Grassy Head Road, Stuarts Point, NSW, 2441. Approval for the purchase of the land for this campground was given at a special session of the conference on August 6, 1989.⁴² The first annual convention of the North NSW Conference was held at this site in 1992.⁴³ Annual conventions have been conducted since that date. In 2009 a second annual convention for seniors was added, known as the North New South Wales Grey Nomads Convention.⁴⁴ Land for the first campground of the North NSW Conference was purchased at Eraring, on Lake Macquarie, NSW, in 1947.⁴⁵ Annual conventions were conducted there until 1981. That land was sold in 1989.⁴⁶ In 1950, land for a campground at Goonellabah was purchased,⁴⁷ and in 1969,⁴⁸ it was sold in order to provide funds toward the purchase of land for a campground at Byron Bay, which had been authorized for purchase in July 1968.⁴⁹ The

land at Byron Bay was sold in 1989 in order to assist with the purchase of the Stuarts Point land.⁵⁰

Yarrahapinni Adventist Youth Centre. Yarrahapinni Adventist Youth Centre is located at 366 Grassy Head Road, Grassy Head, NSW, 2441. There are two different accommodation types. For large school and education groups, there is dormitory accommodation for up to 100 people. There are also eight cabins that offer an additional 80 beds.⁵¹ The land was purchased in 1978.⁵² Previous to the establishment of Yarrahapinni, the conference owned and operated a youth camp at Sawtell, NSW, which had been purchased in 1960⁵³ and was later sold.

Adventist Book Center

The conference owns and operates an Adventist Book Center and outlet for Sanitarium Health Foods, *Better Books and Foods*, at 588 Freemans Drive, Cooranbong, NSW, 2265.

Origins of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North New South Wales, Australia

The first official move by the Church into the territory of the North NSW Conference occurred with the purchase of the Brettville estate in order to establish the Avondale School for Christian Workers.⁵⁴ Search parties had extended north of Sydney, and finally, a piece of land known as the Brettville Estate was located at Cooranbong. It comprised approximately six hundred hectares (about 1,500 acres) and was advertised at \$7,500. It had been passed in at auction when the highest bid was only \$4,000.⁵⁵ Elder William White, vice-president of the Australian Conference, learned that the owner was willing to sell by private treaty at the bargain price of \$4,500.⁵⁶

There was some ambivalence initially about purchasing the property among church leaders and members.⁵⁷ The dilemma was placed before the members at a camp meeting in Sydney in November 1894, where it was freely discussed and a favorable recommendation put forward.⁵⁸ Church officials then voted to go ahead with the enterprise.⁵⁹

The first church in the North NSW territory was the Avondale Village Church. Soon after the purchase of the Brettville Estate, the first building to be constructed was the sawmill to provide the lumber required for the construction of the school. The people who moved onto the estate for the construction started meeting in a small parlor initially, then the floor of the sawmill, then the loft of the sawmill.⁶⁰ Ellen White had an earnest desire to build a chapel to house the growing church.⁶¹ The church building, with seating capacity for approximately 450, was completed by the end of the academic year in 1897 and was first worshipped in on October 16, 1897.⁶²

William Carswell pioneered the Bible work of the Church in Newcastle, a large city northeast of the Avondale School. Consequently, an action was taken in July 1898 by the New South Wales Conference as follows:

Whereas, the Lord has blessed the labours of Brother and Sister Carswell in Newcastle, and there is in that important city an interest among the people to hear the truth,—

Resolved. That we establish a permanent mission in that city in the near future, embracing the various phases of the work.⁶³

By September 15, 1898, it was reported in the *Union Conference Record*,

A new city mission has just been opened in Newcastle, by the N. S. Wales Conference. H. C. Lacey and wife, of the Avondale School, are in charge, being assisted by Sisters Hetty Newcombe and Mary Schowe, of the Sydney Mission. W. R. Carswell and wife, who have pioneered the work in Newcastle with the *Bible Echo* and the sale of publications, will still continue in that line of work. Openings have already presented themselves for public services, and Sunday evening meetings will begin in the near future.⁶⁴

Carswell lived long enough to be invited to the 50th anniversary of the first Seventh-day Adventist Church in Newcastle: the Hamilton Church.⁶⁵

The first camp meeting in the conference was held at Hamilton, Newcastle, commencing on the evening of December 22, 1898⁶⁶ and continuing for 10 days.⁶⁷ The *Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners' Advocate* reported,

The following ministers of the denomination are already in attendance:—Messrs. A. G. Daniells, G. B. Starr, W. C. White, W. A. Colcord, G. C. Tenney, H. C. Lacey, G. W. Morse, J. Pallant. Mrs. E. G. White, a prominent speaker and writer is also present.⁶⁸

Significant Events in the History of the North New South Wales Conference

1951—George Burnside City Mission in Newcastle⁶⁹

1960—Move into new offices at 21 Gordon Avenue, Hamilton⁷⁰

1962—George Burnside City Mission in Newcastle⁷¹

1970—Formation of the Avondale College Church⁷²

1979—Fordyce Detamore evangelistic series in Cooranbong (all-time record baptisms)⁷³

1984—Development of Alstonville Retirement Village⁷⁴

1988—Relocation of conference headquarters from Hamilton to Wallsend⁷⁵

1991—Relocation of Newcastle School from Hamilton to Wallsend⁷⁶

1992—Kenneth Cox evangelistic series in Newcastle⁷⁷

1993—CD Brooks evangelistic series in Moree⁷⁸

2011—Opening of Currawah Adventist Aboriginal College near Brewarrina⁷⁹

Formative Events That Led to the Organization of the Conference

Near the close of 1895, New South Wales was separated from the Australian Conference by the organization of the New South Wales Conference.⁸¹ Northern New South Wales was a part of the New South Wales Conference until a meeting of the 24th Session of the New South Wales Conference held at Parramatta Park on October 16, 1919, established the North Eastern New South Wales Conference. At that session, it was recommended,

This conference be divided: the dividing line to be the Hawkesbury River and Capertee Rivers as far west as the 150' of east longitude, thence north to Casilis, and thence in a north-westerly direction to Queensland, to a point where the 147' longitude and the 29' latitude meet. That this division be known as the North Eastern NSW Conference.⁸²

The first president of the North Eastern New South Wales Conference was Pastor J. M. Cole, and the first secretary-treasurer was J. Todd.⁸³ On October 6, 1920, the Australasian Union president, Pastor Meyers, stated that “the Union Conference has completed the plans for the organization of this new conference, and it is now in place to nominate the standing committee from the delegates of the North Eastern Conference.”⁸⁴ The first Executive Committee was appointed on October 15, 1920.⁸⁵ On October 25, 1920, a request was made for the newly formed conference to reside in a room of the Hamilton Church, paying the church £20 a month in rent. At the same meeting, a resolution was passed to build a new conference head office in Hamilton.⁸⁶ A meeting on January 16, 1921, at Avondale determined the wages of key employees, the hours that the conference office would be open, and a rudimentary car allowance policy.⁸⁷

Almost immediately the conference began to be designated as the North New South Wales Conference.⁸⁸ In the 1921 yearbook, it was named the North New South Wales Conference, and it has been so named ever since.⁸⁹ The current description of the territory of the conference was first used in the 1976 yearbook.⁹⁰

Mission and Strategic Plans of the North New South Wales Conference

The mission statement of the North New South Wales Conference is “We invest in others.”⁹¹

The conference has experienced some major successes:⁹²

Establishing the largest Seventh-day Adventist School system in Australia with ten schools, two early learning centers, 3,600 students, and over 500 employees.

Establishing a large Seventh-day Adventist Aged Care company with four sites, 800 residents, and 305 employees.

Establishing the ARISE Discipleship Training School in 2013 that has now graduated almost 350 students who are active in their local churches, working as Bible workers, or training to be pastors.

Maintaining a commitment to annual camp meetings every year since 1920. These key nurturing and empowering events for the conference are booked out every year.

Maintaining a commitment to youth ministry through summer camps, Pathfinders, STORM,⁹³ and youth rallies that maintained positive connections for youth with the Seventh-day Adventist Church and mentored them into leadership roles in the church.

Maintaining financial strength since inception with the highest tithe base of the nine Australian conferences and the highest annual turnover for the three incorporated entities.

Some challenges remain for the conference:⁹⁴

Training and equipping the leaders of the future in the local churches.

Improving the relationships of church members and making churches the loving and nurturing places God designed them to be.

Dealing with the administrative complexity that is a feature of the modern corporate environment in which the church operates.

Maintaining faith in the local church members in the face of secularism and materialism.

Presidents

J. M. Cole (1920–1922); A. H. Piper (1923); J. M. Cole (1924–1925); H. E. Piper (1926); H. A. Hill (1926–1928); P. G. Foster (1929); E. H. Guilliard (1930–1931); A. H. White (1932–1934); W. J. Westerman (1935); J. W. Kent (1936–1942); W. J. Westerman (1943–1945); D. Sibley (1946–1955); H. W. Hollingsworth (1956–1959); W. J. Richards (1960–1965); L. S. Rose (1966–1971); R. V. Moe (1972–1975); A. H. Tolhurst (1975–1980); A. D. C. Currie (1980–1985); R. V. Moe (1985–1996); P. Colquhoun (1996–2002); J. A. Lang (2002–2011); J. S. Lawman (2011–2017); Tom L. Evans (2017–)

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NOTES

1. Pastor Paul Geelan, secretary of the North New South Wales Conference, compiled much of the information contained in this article.
2. Paul Geelan, e-mail message to author, May 14, 2018.
3. Geelan, e-mail message.
4. Geelan, e-mail message.
5. "North New South Wales Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press, 2016), 337.
6. Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research, *2019 Annual Statistical Report: Advance Release of Membership Statistic by Division for 2018* (Silver Spring, Md.: Seventh-day Adventist Church, 2019), 11. A current statistical overview of the conference at any time may be accessed in the

Annual Statistical Reports folder of the ASTR Statistics page, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Statistics/Forms/AllFolders.aspx>.

7. Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research, *2018 Annual Statistical Report: 154th Report of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists for 2016 and 2017* (Silver Spring, Md.: Seventh-day Adventist Church, 2018), 64, 41.
8. C. B. Hughes, "Avondale School for Christian Workers," *Union Conference Record*, January/February 1898, 7.
9. "The School," *Bible Echo*, September 15, 1892, 288.
10. Ibid.
11. "Australian Seventh-day Adventist Conference Proceedings," *Bible Echo*, February 5, 1894, 38.
12. See for example, Ellen G. White, "School Matters," Manuscript 98, 1897, September 13, 1897, Ellen G. White Estate.
13. Minutes of the Seventh-day Adventist Schools (North New South Wales) Limited Board, October 26, 2009, Action 2009.700, North New South Wales Conference Archives, Wallsend, NSW, Australia.
14. Minutes of the North New South Wales Conference Executive Committee, June 24, 2002, Action 102.127, North New South Wales Conference Archives.
15. Minutes of the North New South Wales Conference Executive Committee, February 1, 1950, North New South Wales Conference Archives.
16. Minutes of the North New South Wales Conference Executive Committee, February 29, 1968, North New South Wales Conference Archives.
17. "History," Central Coast Adventist School, accessed May 19, 2018, <http://www.ccas.nsw.edu.au/discover/our-history>.
18. Paul Geelan, e-mail message to author, July 26, 2018.
19. Minutes of the North New South Wales Conference Executive Committee, October 29, 2001, Action 101.689, North New South Wales Conference Archives.
20. "History," Macksville Adventist School, accessed July 27, 2018, <http://www.macksville.adventist.edu.au/our-school/history/>; Minutes of the North New South Wales Conference Executive Committee, September 20, 1966, North New South Wales Conference Archives.
21. A. T. Jessop, Minutes of the Australasian Union Conference Session, July 1901, Cooranbong, South Pacific Division Heritage Centre, Avondale College of Higher Education, Cooranbong, New South Wales, Australia.
22. Minutes of the North New South Wales Conference Executive Committee, February 8, 1933, February 26, 1933, October 27, 1933, Gilson, W. J. Files, South Pacific Division Heritage Centre, Avondale College of Higher Education, Cooranbong, NSW, Australia, Box 40.

23. Minutes of the North New South Wales Conference Session, October 27, 1933, Gilson, W. J., File, South Pacific Division Heritage Centre.
24. Minutes of the New South Wales Conference Executive, September 20, 1937 to April 5, 1939; Conference Session Minutes, December 8, 1938, Gilson, W. J. Files, South Pacific Division Heritage Centre.
25. Bruce R. Youlden and Glynn Litster, "Hamilton Adventist School and Macquarie College," in *Light on the Northern Coalfields: A Short History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Greater Newcastle Area 1898–1998*, ed. W. Glynn Litster and Malcolm J. Bull (Newcastle, NSW: Newcastle Centenary Committee of the North New South Wales Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, 1998), 65.
26. Minutes of the North New South Wales Conference Executive Committee, June 28, 1993, North New South Wales Conference Archives.
27. "History," Manning Adventist School, accessed June 20, 2019, <https://www.manning.adventist.edu.au/about/history/>; Phyllis Lee, "Back to Mullumbimby Celebrations," *Australasian Record*, October 17, 1977, 8.
28. Minutes of the North New South Wales Executive Committee, August 26, 1991, 115, North New South Wales Archives.
29. Kevin Harges, e-mail message to author with information supplied by Joy Humphris, August 4, 2018.
30. Ibid.
31. Minutes of the Seventh-day Adventist Schools (North New South Wales) Limited Board, October 26, 2009, Action 2009.700, North New South Wales Conference Archives.
32. "History," Tweed Valley Adventist College, accessed July 27, 2018, <http://www.tvac.nsw.edu.au/about/history/>.
33. Geelan, e-mail message, May 14, 2018.
34. "Alstonville Residential Aged Care," Adventist Senior Living NNSW, accessed May 20, 2018, <http://www.adventistseniorliving.com.au/resicare/alstonville-residential-aged-care/>.
35. "Alstonville Lifestyle Community," Adventist Senior Living NNSW, accessed May 20, 2018, <http://www.adventistseniorliving.com.au/selfcare/alstonville-lifestyle-community/>.
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