

# Cole, John Martin

## (1862–1937)

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### 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.

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John Martin Cole was an early missionary to the South Pacific, a conference president in Australia, New Zealand, and the West Indies, and a minister in the United States, mainly in the Northwest.

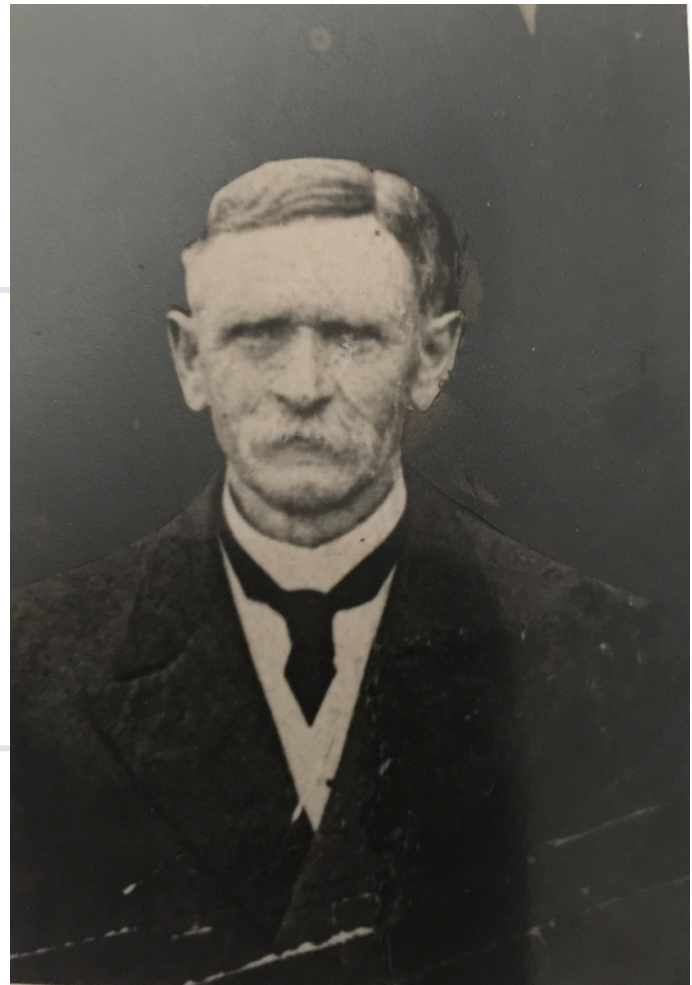
### Early Experience

John Martin Cole was born in Ballybay, Ireland, on April 3, 1862. In the Spring of 1873, he emigrated to America with his family and was naturalized in Albion, Nebraska, in 1879.<sup>1</sup>

Immediately prior to his naturalization John, together with his parents and sister, had accepted the Seventh-day Adventist faith. He began his ministry in Oregon when he was twenty years of age.<sup>2</sup> As a young man he had learned the carpentry trade and he became well known as a minister who built houses of worship.<sup>3</sup>

On November 30, 1890, John married Fanny Stanger Clark in Battle Creek, Michigan. Fanny was born in Worthington, Iowa, in 1868. Her family later moved to Nebraska where, like John's family, they accepted the Adventist faith.<sup>4</sup>

### Mission Work in the South Pacific Islands



John Martin Cole, c. 1935

Photo courtesy of Ross Goldstone.

The Coles' overseas mission service began in 1893 when they embarked for the South Pacific on the mission schooner "Pitcairn," sailing from San Francisco on January 17, arriving at Pitcairn Island a month later without incident. During the stopover John accompanied a few others to nearby Mangareva Island and sold Bibles to the few inhabitants whose Scriptures were earlier burned by a priest. Leaving Pitcairn Island, the vessel sailed on to Tahiti, Rurutu Island, Rarotonga, Nuie Island, Tonga, Fiji and Norfolk Island.<sup>5</sup> On September 9, 1893, John and Fanny disembarked at Norfolk Island to strengthen an interest that had developed among the relatives of the Pitcairners.<sup>6</sup>

On Norfolk Island Cole visited all the families and, with some assistance, reconstructed the stone chapel that had fallen into disrepair in one corner of the former convict jail.<sup>7</sup> On May 22, 1895, he formally organized the small group of believers into the Norfolk Island Church and they continued to meet in the chapel John had rebuilt. A few weeks later John and Fanny transferred to Fiji with their infant daughter Ruita who had been born on Norfolk Island.<sup>8</sup> The name Ruita was the islander equivalent of Ruth.

In Fiji Cole struggled to grow the mission. He initially established himself at Levuka on Ovalau Island but the site proved to be unsatisfactory because it was too remote from the principal centers of population. After twelve months at Levuka he hired a small boat to transport his family and goods to the capital, Suva. It was a slow and gruelling trip. They slept at night under tarpaulins while it rained heavily. The captain was such a poor navigator that several times the vessel became stuck on coastal mud banks and had to be poled off to safety while Cole manned the helm.<sup>9</sup> Soon after settling in Suva he reported with renewed optimism that his new home was almost completed and his family was in "usual health."<sup>10</sup>

On May 5, 1897, Fanny gave birth to a baby boy in Suva. They named him Tavita, the Fijian form of David!<sup>11</sup> Within weeks John and Fanny made the decision to return to America with their young children.

## Ministry at Home and Conference Leadership Overseas

Cole took his family back to familiar Oregon. He served as an ordained minister and executive committee member in the Western Oregon Conference until 1909 when he returned to the South Pacific.

Cole served as president of the South Australian Conference from 1909-1911, then New Zealand Conference, 1911-1915. Ten years were then spent as president of the New South Wales Conference with offices located in Sydney. His son, Tavita, was part of his team as a licensed minister during the final four years of Cole's term before the entire family returned to America in 1925.<sup>12</sup>

John and Fanny did not, however, return to anything like a permanent home. Almost every year after Cole returned to the United States he transferred to a different locality, going wherever a congregation needed his ministry. In 1926 he served in the Illinois Conference<sup>13</sup> and then the Western Washington Conference.<sup>14</sup>

Then, in 1928, it was overseas service again for two years, albeit closer to home as president of the Leeward Islands Conference, with head offices at St. John's, Antigua.<sup>15</sup> Returning once again to the American West, he ministered in Milwaukie, Oregon,<sup>16</sup> and Santa Rosa, California.<sup>17</sup> Then it was back to Washington state at Vancouver and Battle Ground.<sup>18</sup> Finally, he served at Ukiah and Richmond in California.<sup>19</sup>

On his birthday, April 3, 1937, Cole officially retired at the age of seventy-five.<sup>20</sup> However, he did not stop preaching. On May 22 he conducted the Sabbath service at the Meadow Glade church, north of Vancouver, and in the evening gave a stereopticon lecture. The following day he felt unwell and passed away that same evening.<sup>21</sup> Four months later, on September 27, 1937, Fanny passed away in the Portland Sanitarium, Oregon. Both John and Fanny were laid to rest in a cemetery near Vancouver.<sup>22</sup> At the time of their deaths Ruita was supervising nurse at the Paradise Valley Sanitarium and Tavita and his family were in ministry at Eugene, Oregon.<sup>23</sup>

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## NOTES

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2. J. E. Fulton, "John M. Cole," *ARH*, July 8, 1937, 22.
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6. M. G. Kellogg, "News from the 'Pitcairn,'" *Bible Echo*, November 15, 1893, 366.
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10. "Our Island Missions," *The Gleaner*, May 1897, 62.
11. "Tavita M. Cole," *North Pacific Union Gleaner*, July 4, 1983, 26.
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14. "Western Washington Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* for 1928, 67.
15. "Leeward Islands Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbooks* for 1929, 258, and 1930, 200.
16. "North Pacific Union Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* for 1931, 61-62, 400.
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21. Neff, "J. M. Cole."

22. E. L. Neff, "Fanny Stanger (Clark) Cole," *North Pacific Union Gleaner*, October 26, 1937, 7.

23. Neff, "J. M. Cole."

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