



Buresala Training School, Fiji

From *Journal of Pacific Adventist History*.

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Raymond Wilkinson, Ed.D. (Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, USA) was born to missionary parents and grew up in Fiji. He was educated at Longburn College, Massey University New Zealand, and Avondale College Australia. With wife Ruth, his Church service involved teaching and educational administration in the South Pacific Islands. He retired 1994 but since then has enjoyed volunteer service in the islands. Now married to Lola, Raymond has four adult children and eight grandchildren.

Buresala Training School was the first educational institution designed to train workers that the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) church operated in Fiji (and, in fact, the South Pacific Islands region). From its opening in February 1905 until the transfer of its programs, in 1940, to what became Fulton College, it prepared a steady stream of ministers, teachers, workers' spouses, and dedicated church laypeople. In that way, it supported the advancement of the church in Fiji and also in areas of Polynesia and Melanesia, including New Guinea.

Early Plans

John I. Tay and his wife, Hannah, Americans, were the first Seventh-day Adventist missionaries to Fiji. They arrived by the first voyage of the SDA missionary ship *Pitcairn* in 1891. Sadly, Tay died on January 8, 1892, after only five months in Fiji.¹ In 1894 Americans John Cole and his wife arrived, and they were joined in May 1896 by the American John Fulton and his family.² John Cole returned to America in 1897 because of ill health, and Fulton was then joined, in 1898, by the American Calvin Parker and his wife.³

Fulton and Parker began visiting Suvavou (New Suva), a village across the harbor from Suva, and one of their first converts was Pauliasi Bunoa, who had been a teacher, an ordained minister, and a missionary to Papua New Guinea for the Wesleyan church. Through helping Fulton with translating a tract about the Sabbath, Pauliasi chose to become a Sabbath keeper and, after study with Fulton, was baptized. In 1900 he began preaching his new faith and in 1906 was ordained as a minister of the SDA Church.⁴

Early in his ministry, Pauliasi told Fulton and Parker how useful the time he had spent in the Wesleyan training school had been for him, and he urged them to establish a training school as soon as possible.⁵ From that time Fulton, who saw how effective indigenous workers could be, consistently urged the SDA Church to find suitable land and a teacher and establish a training center. In 1903, while Fulton was at the Australasian Missionary College, he met the Australian Septimus Carr, who was soon to graduate, and learned he was interested in going to Fiji to train young people as workers for God. Fulton was also given £250 to help establish a school.⁶

Search for a Suitable Site

In October 1904, Septimus Carr, newly graduated from Avondale and appointed to establish a training center for Fiji, arrived in Suva, and a few days later went with Fulton to search for a suitable school site. They were not successful on Viti Levu, Fiji's main island, but heard of some land on the nearby island of Ovalau, which those who knew the place thought suitable, if the owner, Mr. Morris, would sell. They then returned to Suvavou, for on February 1, 1905, Septimus Carr and Edith Guiliard (who had been living with the Fultons and helping with translating and printing) were married, with John Fulton officiating.⁷

Just two days later, Pastors E. H. Gates (visiting Fiji from the union office in Australia), John Fulton, Septimus Carr, and three Fijian crew sailed in the mission yacht *Adi Suva* to see Mr. Morris. They explained their desire to establish a school to train Fijians for leadership and had heard that he had 300 acres he might be willing to sell. He took them to see the land, which he said was called Buresala (*bure*, a Fijian house, especially of worship, and *sala*, a path or track). The land was fertile and seemed to meet all their requirements. At first Mr. Morris said he did not wish to sell or lease the land, but a little later he sent word that he would lease the property. When the men went to see Mr. Morris, he made out a lease agreement for 90 years. Then he considered carefully and said he would prefer to sell than have such a long lease period and agreed to sell for US\$1,250 (£250 equivalent), which was the amount Fulton had been given to buy land.⁸

As soon as possible, the agreement was drawn up and the money paid. Before the men headed back to Suva, they arranged with some Fijian workers from Bureta, a nearby village, to build four thatched houses, each 12 by 18 feet, at Buresala.⁹

Word was quickly sent to those planning to be students, the Carrs packed their goods and school supplies, and with Fulton as captain, the *Adi Suva* took them and available students to Buresala. The third house there was almost completed when they arrived, and before the end of February 1905, school was started with the 10 available students. Soon 4 more students arrived. At the time of their mid-year break, the students were told they were not to bring any others who wanted to be students because there was not sufficient space or food supply. However, one boy returned with a younger cousin who had insisted on traveling with him. They pleaded for him to stay, and finally he was accepted, and the first year ended with 15 students.¹⁰

The Fultons decided to move their house and the printing press from Suvavou to Buresala, and in a short time that was accomplished. The house sections were loaded onto a banana barge, which the *Adi Suva* towed to Buresala. While the Fultons' home was being erected, they lived in small thatched huts the students had built for them.¹¹ An advantage in having the press at Buresala was that Edith Carr, who during her time with the Fultons at Suvavou had become proficient in using the press and translating from English to Fijian, was very willing to continue to help. Buresala served as a printing center for many years, helping in the expansion of the work of soul saving in Fiji.¹²

In October 1906, Septimus Carr, reporting on the progress being made at Buresala, said he had word from Tonga that Timothy, the first Tongan Sabbath keeper in that island group, would be traveling to Fiji by the next boat, ready to attend Buresala in 1907.¹³ That same month, C. H. Parker, reporting on the work in Fiji, told how well the program at Buresala was progressing and said there were then 16 students. He also commented on positive features of the Buresala land and the faithful work Edith Carr was doing with the press. The students at the school were building additional houses, he reported, in readiness for married students the following year.¹⁴

When S. W. Carr mentioned student numbers in November 1907, he reported 26 students. In addition to the young men, there were six married couples (which included Timothy and his wife from Tonga), and two young ladies.¹⁵

In June 1908, when the SDA Church's annual Fijian Council was held at Suvavou, representatives from both Samoa and Tonga missions met with them and were included in the Plans and Recommendations and Distribution of Labour committees. One of the unanimous recommendations made by the council was that the Fiji, Tonga, and Samoa missions be united in the Central Polynesian Mission, with a subsequent recommendation that Buresala School be open to receiving students from all three island groups.¹⁶ The Fiji Council also recommended (unanimously adopted) that a boys' dormitory with an iron roof be built at Buresala to meet the increasing enrollment of the school. Before the end of the meetings, £30 had been received in cash

and pledges to help build the dormitory.¹⁷

Accepting Students from Further Afield

The September 7, 1908, *Record* (special edition) carried reports from the Biennial Council of the Australasian Union Conference confirming the establishment of the Central Polynesian Mission, authorizing Buresala to accept students from Tonga and Samoa and to help with printing work for Tonga and Samoa. When C. H. Parker gave the Fiji report, he declared that Buresala was “flourishing” and that student numbers had risen to 32, even though 3 students had recently been appointed to other fields.¹⁸ The three included Peni Tavodi, who had gone with Septimus Carr to pioneer SDA mission work in New Guinea. A. G. Stewart and his wife had arrived to take the Carrs’ place at Buresala, and Stewart was also to serve as secretary of the mission.

Early in 1909 Miss Annie Williams arrived at Buresala to care for the education of girls, and by December nine girls were attending, housed in a six-room cottage built for them and Miss Williams, who provided special aspects of their education. In a report that Annie Williams wrote for the *Record*, she asked readers to send used clothing for the young ladies.¹⁹

Work on building a boys’ dormitory had commenced in mid-1909 but had lapsed due to other priorities. Near the end of the school year, the young men volunteered a month’s free labor to help speed the work, and two days before the opening of the new school year, the building was opened and dedicated. A. G. Stewart led in the service, followed by a feast (*mangiti*) of celebration.²⁰

Soon after that, in late March, Fiji was struck by a severe hurricane.²¹ J. E. Fulton, writing about the damage at Buresala, stated that the school launch had been badly damaged, all native thatched buildings had been blown down and would have to be rebuilt, and many of the gardens had been destroyed. However, he said that Buresala had survived better than other settlements on the island, good progress in restoration was being made, and the spirit at the school, with about forty trainees, was positive. At a later council, the national workers voted to each give a sheet of roofing iron for the roof of the reconstructed school building.²² Gradually, more substantial buildings were provided.

The training program at Buresala continued to provide workers for the island missions. In 1918 in his report on work in the Australasian Union’s mission fields, C. H. Watson, Australasian Union president, said some Buresala students were being sent to areas outside of their missions, both further east and to the west in Melanesia. Training programs, he said, needed to be expanded.²³ Later, in his report on the Central Polynesian Mission, C. H. Parker stated that some were questioning whether Buresala was a suitable setting to meet the expanding need for trained workers. He mentioned the amount of sickness there, the increasing difficulty of growing sufficient food for expanding needs, and the difficulty of growing rice there, which would be necessary if Indian students from Fiji would be attending. He also stated that the workload for H. R. Martin, the principal, was too great, and there was need for another teacher.²⁴ Other teachers were appointed, and additional help came

when S. W. Carr (founding principal of Buresala) returned to Fiji in 1919. Carr continued to serve in Fiji until the end of 1938, much of that time spent at Buresala, teaching, translating, and printing.²⁵

In 1921 a pig-proof fence was erected around Buresala's garden area where considerable food loss had been occurring due to the activity of wild pigs. S. W. Carr, who was then in charge at Buresala, said the change was immediate, and school and student crops were doing well.²⁶ About the same time, a new school, named Navuso, was being established beside the Wainibuka River to serve as a feeder school for Buresala.²⁷ Soon after that, Buresala's program for girls was transferred to Navuso, and lady teachers were trained there until 1940, when all SDA teacher-training programs were amalgamated at Fulton College.

In 1927 Buresala was able to use two new classrooms that had been added to their school building by H. Sprengel. Later that year, when the students were told a Sabbath School offering would provide material for a new boys' dormitory, 50 students volunteered to help and even to provide their own food. In six weeks that vacation, the building, of Oregon pine on a concrete floor, was ready for use.²⁸ When Gordon Branster returned at the school in 1927, he brought brass band instruments donated by people in Australia and America. The students were very enthusiastic, and before long the band was visiting other places, entertaining the people and increasing attendance at meetings held.²⁹

A school for Indian students had opened at Samabula, near Suva, in 1927, and H. Sprengel offered, in his vacation time, to help build their dormitory and classrooms because they planned to begin a training program in 1928. Buresala did not at that time cater to Indian students.³⁰ Samabula continued its training program until 1940, when their training section moved to Fulton College.

In 1930 the Buresala students decided to raise money to improve the water supply at the school. By working at a variety of tasks, they raised most of the money needed to purchase the needed materials. Then, under the leadership of Fred Lang, who was a teacher and industrial instructor, pipe was laid to a nearby spring to bring water to various parts of the campus, providing a convenient and improved water supply.³¹

A few weeks later, November 23, 1930, became a day of tragedy for Buresala. That morning a warning was received that a hurricane was coming and prompt action should be taken. Of immediate concern was the *Cina* ("light"), the school launch. Fred Lang, with seven of the students as helpers, took the *Cina*, towing several smaller workboats, to find safe anchorage in the nearby Viru River. When they had almost reached the river mouth, fierce hurricane winds blew them out to sea, and sadly neither the boat nor the men were ever seen again. There was also considerable destruction at the school, and all native-style housing had to be rebuilt.³²

Following Fred Lang's death, Harold Sprengel, who had been teaching at the Australasian Missionary College in Australia, was asked to return to Buresala, in Lang's place, where, in addition to his teaching work, he directed the school band.³³

Changes

In the 1930s Buresala continued to be an important training center, but important changes had been taking place in Fiji and in the educational work of the church. The center of government for Fiji, its major port of entry, and the center for interisland shipping had moved from Levuka, near Buresala, to Suva, on the main island. Almost the only boats calling at Buresala were SDA mission boats. Transport in Fiji now involved roads, trucks, and buses as well as ships. Buresala was isolated from the major centers of population and of Adventist membership. The training of Adventist workers (particularly teachers) had been spread to involve three other schools: Navuso on the Wainibuka River, with access only by the river; Samabula, on the outskirts of Suva and certain to be engulfed by Suva's expansion; and Vatuvonu, also isolated on the island of Vanua Levu. Buresala did not have a primary school adequate for the practical instruction of teacher trainees. Government requirements for the registration of teachers were rising, and the church was having difficulty providing adequate staffing for four training centers.³⁴ The obvious solution was centralization. In 1939 the decision was made to try to find suitable land on Viti Levu, with road access, and to move buildings from Samabula, Navuso, and Buresala to the new site. The Australasian Union Conference agreed the plan be put into operation and took formal action in their Executive Committee Meeting on April 2, 1940, including staff changes and financing. Buresala ceased to operate at the end of 1939, and Arthur Dyason, then Buresala principal, was given the task of organizing the moving of buildings and setting up the new center, which became Fulton College. Thirty Buresala students volunteered a year of service to help prepare the new site and move the buildings.

Principals of Buresala from 1905 to 1939, with Official Name Changes of the Institution³⁵

1905–1907	S. W. Carr In 1907 Buresala was listed as Fiji Training School.
1908–1910	A. Stewart
1911–1912	G. E. Marriott
1913–1915	H. C. White
1916–1920	H. R. Martin In 1918 Buresala was listed as Central Polynesian Training School, in the Asiatic Division Conference. In 1920 Buresala was listed as Central Polynesian School in the Australasian Union Conference.
1921	S. W. Carr In 1922 Buresala was listed as Buresala Training School in the Australasian Union Conference.

1922–1924	C. S. Palmer
1925–1929	G. Branster
1930–1931	S. W. Carr
1932	C. S. Palmer
1933–1934	H. R. Steed
1935–1937	L. V. Wilkinson
1938	R. W. Lane
	A. P. Dyason
1939–1940	In 1940 A. P. Dyason supervised the transfer of buildings and staff to the Fulton College site.

Summary

Many workers were trained for God's service during the 35 years of Buresala's educational ministry, not only for Fiji but also for Polynesia to the east and Melanesia to the west.

Many effective lay workers were prepared for leadership roles in their churches. The training role did not cease in 1939.

The training role was merely transferred, along with buildings, staff, and educational resources, to the new site, which became Fulton College on the main island of Viti Levu.

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