Christchurch Sanitarium, New Zealand

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.

Christchurch Sanitarium was a medical facility for hydrotherapy treatments in Christchurch, New Zealand, from 1900 to 1921.

Preliminary Enterprise

Gustav Adolf Brandstater and Florence Rachel Grattidge were two young people among the early converts to the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Tasmania. They traveled to the Battle Creek Sanitarium in 1892 to train as nurses, married during their studies, and returned to Australia in 1897. Early in 1898 they were appointed to Christchurch, New Zealand, where they assisted in establishing a facility for hydrotherapy treatments.

The Brandstaters began their work in a small cottage at Linwood, an inner suburb on the eastern side of Christchurch. Patronage grew to such an extent that a larger house was rented at 71 Hereford Street, Linwood. The enterprise was known as the Christchurch Health Home. It was functioning on a profitable basis when, early in 1900, a search began for a suitable site on which to establish a sanitarium.

Christchurch Medical and Surgical Sanitarium

A Seventh-day Adventist farmer, Sidney Amyes, led the search that eventually found a property of several hectares opposite the suburban Papanui railway station. Its convenience was enhanced by the fact that it included a large two-story wooden home of 20 rooms. It was purchased for 1,800 pounds; a significant portion of which was donated as a result of a special appeal to New Zealand church members. They also rallied to give soft furnishings, linen, cutlery and cookware.

Staffing plans had been initiated at the Fourth Australasian Union Conference Session held at Cooranbong, NSW, in July 1899. Dr Friedrich Braucht, of the Samoan Sanitarium, was a delegate at the session. He was persuaded that other medics should replace him in Samoa in order for him to pioneer the Christchurch Sanitarium. He sailed to New Zealand, secured his medical registration papers, returned to Samoa to arrange business matters, and then sailed back to New Zealand. In the meantime, large bathrooms were added to the existing building and everything was readied for the official opening on July 1, 1900.

At the time the manufacture and sale of health foods was regarded as preventive medicine and closely linked to the medical enterprises. In the same year an oven and other pieces of machinery were installed on site that proved to be the beginning of an enduring factory. Initially, the production of health foods and the medical work were governed by a single board, with Amyes as the business manager keeping separate accounts. However, separate boards were introduced in 1901.

The Brandstaters closed their hydrotherapy rooms in Linwood and opened another venture in the heart of the city at Cathedral Square. Its purpose was to act as a feeder for the Papanui establishment. It was short-lived and the Brandstaters soon joined the staff of the Sanitarium.
Mixed Success

A major problem surfaced with the difficulty of finding a medical doctor who was willing to stay long-term and build up a good reputation. Braucht was restless and decided he should return to his sanitarium in Samoa after only 12 months at Christchurch. Amyes, in his first report as business manager, mentioned that Dr Martin Keller had replaced Braucht in mid-1901. He also said 319 patients were treated in the first 12-month period, three of them who had become Sabbath keepers. Some poor people had been treated free of charge. An orchard, vegetable garden, and poultry run were well established and nine nurses had begun a training course.

Keller stayed for only a few months. Australasian Union Conference officials appointed him to the Adelaide Sanitarium instead. Dr George Gibson had arrived in Sydney in November 1901 in route to an appointment in the Philippines, but was persuaded to change plans in favor of the Christchurch Sanitarium. His tenure was spread over five years with a long break in 1904 that included time at the Sydney Sanitarium to learn hospital management. Finances were breaking even at the time.

Any advantages gained by Gibson’s study stint in Sydney were lost at the end of 1906 when he accepted a New Zealand government appointment as medical officer on the Chatham Islands, east of Christchurch. Dr John Reekie replaced him as the fourth doctor in six years.

The General Conference President, Ole Olsen, arrived to inspect the enterprise at the same time as Reekie was beginning his work. Reekie shared with Olsen his grumbles about the institution. Olsen later wrote a dismal report, saying the building was not suitable for a sanitarium and it was too close to the evils of the city. There were complaints about the noise of train traffic, the low altitude of the suburb, and the cold climate that resulted in high heating costs for the enterprise. A decision was made to sell the property, open treatment rooms in the city, and transfer the sanitarium work to a rural site at Cambridge in the North Island.

Hydrotherapy Treatments Only

Reekie did not linger. In a few months he had entered private practice south of Auckland at Pukekohe. The radical plans to sell and relocate the institution were shelved and the Brandstaters, together with a reduced team of other nurses, continued to offer hydrotherapy treatments. The words “medical” and “surgical” were dropped from the title of the enterprise and a steady patronage prevailed. The 1910 report noted 90 patients were treated, a modest profit of 52 pounds realized, and several converts admitted to the church. By 1917 the patronage was dwindling and a very small profit was achieved. In 1921 the Australasian Union Conference voted not to proceed with refurbishments to comply with Department of Health standards. Instead, the decision was made to close the institution on September 30, 1921. At that time there were only four patients receiving care. The fact that the Christchurch Sanitarium survived for two decades was testament to the professionalism of Brandstater and his team.

SOURCES

Amyes, Sidney H. “The Medical and Surgical Sanitarium, Christchurch, New Zealand,” Union Conference Record, July 26, 1901.


Braucht, Friedrich E. “The Christchurch Sanitarium.” Union Conference Record, November 1, 1900.


“Dr F E Braucht is spending some time in Samoa...” Union Conference Record, July 1, 1901.

“Dr G H Gibson arrived at Sydney November 15...” Union Conference Record, December 1, 1901.

“Dr J S Reekie has left the Papanui...” Union Conference Record, May 20, 1907.


Gibson, George H. “The Christchurch Sanitarium.” Union Conference Record, October 1, 1906.

“Gifts Sent to Christchurch Sanitarium.” Union Conference Record, December 1, 1900.

Graham, Edith M. “Our Medical Work.” Union Conference Record, July 1, 1900.

Irwin, George A. “The New Zealand Camp-Meeting.” Union Conference Record, March 1, 1904.


Olsen, Ole A. “A Visit to New Zealand.” Union Conference Record, February 11, 1907.

“Proceedings of the Union Conference Committee.” *Union Conference Record*, September 1, 1901.

“Resolutions Adopted by the Union Conference.” *Union Conference Record*, July 31, 1899.


Sherwin, Thomas A. “Medical Department.” *Australasian Record*, October 8, 1917.

Smith, William J. “Medical Work in New Zealand.” *Union Conference Record*, March 1, 1901.


“The Christchurch Medical and Surgical Sanitarium….” *Union Conference Record*, November 1, 1900.


“Union Conference Proceedings.” *Union Conference Record*, July 26, 1901.

“We are pleased to hear that Dr F Braucht…” *Union Conference Record*, November 1, 1899.

NOTES

1. Andrew G Stewart, “Gustav Adolf Brandstater, *Australasian Record and Advent World Survey*, June 8, 1959, 13. Note: To avoid the stigma of Germanic names during the First World War some of Gustav’s relatives Anglicised their surname to Branster. Gustav retained his surname but preferred to be called Uncle Arthur. For that reason, most people referred to him as Arthur Brandstater.


5. Ibid.


7. “Gifts Sent to Christchurch Sanitarium,” *Union Conference Record*, December 1, 1900, 14.

8. “Resolutions Adopted by the Union Conference,” *Union Conference Record*, July 31, 1899, 14-16.

9. “We are pleased to hear that Dr F Braucht…” *Union Conference Record*, November 1, 1899, 15.


13. “Dr F E Braucht is spending some time in Samoa…” *Union Conference Record*, July 1, 1901, 15.


15. “Proceedings of the Union Conference Committee,” *Union Conference Record*, September 1, 1901, 16.

16. “Dr G H Gibson arrived at Sydney November 15…” *Union Conference Record*, December 1, 1901, 15.


20. “Dr J S Reekie has left the Papanui…” *Union Conference Record*, May 20, 1907, 7.


22.

encyclopedia.adventist.org is an official website of the Seventh-day Adventist World Church
© 2020 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists 12501 Old Columbia Pike Silver Spring, MD 20904 USA 301-680-6000