



The South New South Wales Conference office, Turner, ACT, Australia.

Photo courtesy of Calvin Drinkall.

South New South Wales Conference, South Pacific Division

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The South New South Wales Conference is a constituent of the Australian Union Conference.¹ Its headquarters are located at 3 McKay Gardens, Turner, Australian Capital Territory (ACT), Australia. Its unincorporated activities are governed by a constitution 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 office of the SPD in Wahroonga, New South Wales.²

The conference executive committee has transferred most of its functions to two corporations to act as Trustees for the Conference:³ the Seventh-day Adventist Church (South NSW Conference) Limited, which oversees the day-to-day operations of the conference itself and was incorporated on August 26, 2004;⁴ Seventh-day Adventist Schools (South NSW Conference) Limited, which oversees the operation of the education entities within the conference and was incorporated on August 26, 2004.⁵

Current Territory and Statistics

The territory of the South New South Wales Conference includes “the Australian Capital Territory; and a portion of the state of New South Wales. The northern boundary begins with a straight line from the entrance of Lake Illawarra to Yerranderie, excluding the town of Yerranderie, thence due north to the Capertee River following the river west to the 150th meridian of east longitude, thence north to Cassilis, including the town of Cassilis, and then running northwest from Cassilis to a point just west of the town of Coonabarabran (but not including Coonabarabran), and east of the 149th meridian of east longitude, direct west to the South Australian border (parallel with the Queensland border). The southern boundary is the state border dividing New South Wales from Victoria, including the Victorian Municipality of Wodonga adjacent to the city of Albury, but excluding the populated area adjacent to Mildura on the northern side of the Murray River, extending from the township of Gol Gol through the district of Sunraysia, to and including the town of Wentworth.”⁶

In the *2018 Annual Statistical Report of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists*, the South New South Wales Conference was listed as having thirty-one churches and eight companies. Church membership at the end of 2017 was 2,859.⁷ The conference had ninety-three active employees. Its tithe receipts for 2016 totaled US\$2,410,166. Its tithe and offerings per capita were US\$1,226.11, the lowest of the conferences in the Australian Union Conference.⁸

The regular publication of the South New South Wales Conference is *Imprint Magazine* published in a print edition monthly.⁹

At the ninth meeting of the South NSW executive committee held at Young on September 25, 1949, it was voted, “that we make investigations concerning the possibility of opening up institutions in this field, as sanitariums and central schools, and that we discuss the possibility of such propositions with the Union Conference officers.”

Schools

Since the South New South Wales Conference was reorganized into its current territory in 1949, SDA education has been important, with ten schools opening between the years 1950 until 1981. No new schools have opened since 1981, although those that remain have changed their names. Schools that have been opened in chronological order and operated for various lengths of time since 1949 are as follows:

Albury Adventist School, opened in January 1950.¹¹ It now operates as Border Christian College.

Wagga Wagga Adventist School, opened in January 1954.¹² The school closed at the end of the 2007 School year.¹³

Bega Adventist School, opened January 1955.¹⁴ The school closed at the end of the 1979 school year.¹⁵

Bathurst Adventist School, opened in January 1956.¹⁶ The school closed at the end of the 1962 school year.¹⁷

Lithgow Adventist School, opened in January 1961.¹⁸ It closed in the late 1960s.¹⁹

Woden Valley Adventist School, opened in January 1970.²⁰ It now operates as Canberra Christian School.

Goulburn Adventist School, opened in January 1976.²¹ It closed at the end of 1997.²²

Narromine Adventist School, re-opened in September 1976.²³ A small school had operated for some time many years before at Mumble Peg, on the outskirts of Narromine. It now operates as Narromine Christian School.

Parkes Adventist School was approved for opening in January 1977.²⁴ However, it did not open at that time and has not operated at any time.²⁵

Bowral Adventist School, opened in January 1981.²⁶ The school closed at the end of the 2001 school year.²⁷

Those schools which continued to operate in 2019 are as follows:

Border Christian College. Formerly known as Albury Adventist School, it is a Kindergarten-Grade 12 School located at 429 Elizabeth Mitchell Drive, Thurgoona, NSW, Australia. It has an enrollment of 144 and a teaching staff of ten.²⁸

Canberra Christian School. Formerly known as Woden Valley Adventist School, it is a Kindergarten-Grade 6 primary school located at 64A Ainsworth Street, Mawson, ACT, Australia. It has an enrollment of 102 and a teaching staff of five.²⁹

Narromine Christian School. Formerly known as Narromine Adventist School, it is a Kindergarten – Grade 6 primary school located at 147-153 Terangion Street, Narromine, NSW, Australia. It has an enrollment of 103 and a teaching staff of five.³⁰

Camps

Adventist Alpine Village is located at Tinworth Drive, Jindabyne, NSW, Australia.³¹ The South New South Wales Executive Committee agreed to the purchase of the facility from the SPD on February 19, 2012.³² The action to transfer ownership on July 1, 2012 was approved on June 17, 2012.³³ The previous conference campground at Goulburn was recorded in February 2011.³⁴

Origins of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Territory of the South New South Wales Conference

One of the earliest recorded activities of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the territory of the current South New South Wales Conference was the work of two colporteurs: Phillip Reekie and F. W. Caldwell in the Eugowra district in 1898.³⁵ Eugowra is 341 kilometres west of Sydney. Reekie and Caldwell sold *The Great Controversy* to Thomas Kent³⁶ who shared the book with his neighbors. Subsequently, five of the families—the Chatmans, Gersbachs, Grays, Packhams, and Thompsons—became Seventh-day Adventists. Mr. Kent was baptized on July 30, 1898 and started worship services in his home.³⁷

The group was organized by Pastor S. M. Cobb, the New South Wales Conference president based in Sydney, into a church with twenty-one members on November 15, 1903.³⁸ The Eugowra Church with twenty-three members, along with the Wahroonga Church with forty-one members, was welcomed into the New South Wales Conference at the conference session held on April 1-10, 1904.³⁹

Meanwhile, the members at Eugowra commenced building a small church of eighteen feet by thirty-five feet on one of the member's properties. They hoped to have it opened by March 1904,⁴⁰ but it was not dedicated until Sunday, June 19, 1904.⁴¹ It was the first Seventh-day Adventist Church to be dedicated west of the Blue Mountains in New South Wales.⁴²

Eugowra church members opened a school on May 9, 1904.⁴³ Ten children were in attendance,⁴⁴ the first school opened in the territory of the current South New South Wales Conference. Joseph Mills was the first teacher.⁴⁵ Jean Stephen, who later married Pastor A. G. Stewart, the veteran missionary to the South Pacific, was the second teacher.⁴⁶ Rita Ford subsequently taught at the school for seven years, beginning January 1906.⁴⁷

The Eugowra Church closed in 1927 as members moved away,⁴⁸ but its legacy remains. In January 1999, Pastor Reg Brown reported that "some 80 descendants [of the original Eugowra church members] or their spouses have worked for the church as doctors, evangelists, missionaries, nurses, pastors, secretaries, and teachers. Twelve became ordained ministers, five in one family. James Kent, the youngest of Thomas Kent's twelve children, became an evangelist and is credited with baptizing 2500 and planting fourteen churches."⁴⁹

While the Eugowra Church may well have been the first organized church in the territory of the current conference, other groups were being nurtured, churches organized, and buildings dedicated. Just four days after the Eugowra Church building was dedicated, a church of twelve members was organized at Orange by Pastor J. M. Cobb on June 23, 1904. Then on Monday, June 26, Pastor Cobb baptized seven people and organized a church of ten members at Blayney.⁵⁰ Cobb also reported on that same visit that after tent meetings in Bathurst, the people were ready to start the construction of a church building.⁵¹

However, it was further south where the first church was organized in the territory of the current South New South Wales Conference. The Goulburn Church was accepted into the New South Wales Conference at the conference session held in association with the Burwood camp meeting, October 9-19, 1902.⁵² Literature evangelists had been working in the city since 1898. Among them were a couple by the name of Hay, in 1898;⁵³ H. E. Hughes in 1900,⁵⁴ and G. Ryder in 1901.⁵⁵ Mr. and Mrs. McGowan had also been working there for some time as volunteers.⁵⁶

At the beginning of 1949 when the current South New South Wales Conference was formed, there were twenty-two churches that had been organized and were still functioning in its territory. Listed with their membership they were:⁵⁷ Albury (60); Bathurst (39); Bowral (23); Bega (25); Broken Hill (50); Conference Roll (281); Cowra (25); Dubbo (26); Goulburn (29); Grenfell (13); Harden (20); Lithgow (38); Mandurama (12); Mudgee (21); Mumble Peg [Narromine] (19); Narrandera (4); Oberon (23); Parkes (29); Temora (25); Tumut (29); Wagga Wagga (26); Young (14).

At the session of the South New South Wales Conference held in September 2017, the conference secretary listed the conference churches, together with their membership as: Albury (338); Bathurst (34); Bega (72); Bowral (132); Broken Hill (42); Canberra National (329); Cootamundra (12); Cowra (11); Dubbo Aboriginal (13); Dubbo (112); Goulburn (103); Griffith (165); Lithgow (46); Mandurama (12); Moruya (49); Mudgee (30); Narrandera (16); Narromine (142); Nowra (82); Oberon (25); Orange (86); Parkes (46); South Canberra (202); Southern Illawarra (69); Temora (16); The Rock (2); Tumbarumba (21); Tumut (50); Wagga Wagga (163); Wodonga English (55); Wodonga Slavic (26); and Young (53).⁵⁸ The companies were listed as Cobargo Company (48); Milton-Ulladulla Company (30); Queanbeyan Company (18); Wallaga Lake Company (17); and Yass Company (6).⁵⁹ The conference roll was listed with a membership of 102.⁶⁰ The total membership was 2776. By the end of September 2018, the total membership of the conference had risen to 2901.⁶¹

Significant Events in the Organization of the South New South Wales Conference

In May 1885, S. N. Haskell, J. O. Corliss, and M. C. Israel (the two last named with their families), Henry Scott, and W. Arnold set sail for Australia.⁶² After reaching Sydney on June 6, 1885 after a voyage of twenty-nine days,⁶³ they moved on to Melbourne and commenced work, thus establishing a foothold for the church in Australia.⁶⁴

Within three years, an Australian conference was organized in Melbourne in September 1888. The elected officers included G. C. Tenney, president; Stephen McCullagh, secretary; Echo Publishing House, treasurer.⁶⁵

The Australasian Union Conference was organized during the Australian Conference camp-meeting, January 15-25, 1894. It comprised District 7 of the General Conference districts and included the conferences of Australia and New Zealand. It was anticipated that as the work expanded other local conferences would be organized and added to the union.⁶⁶ The stated object of the union was “to unify and extend the work of the third angel's message, under the general direction of the General Conference, in the Australasian field.”⁶⁷ The Australasian Union Conference was the first union conference organized as such in the global Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Arthur Daniells described the further steps taken to organize the local conferences in Australia. He wrote: “At the beginning of 1894 it was felt that the Australian Conference had more territory than it could well manage, so the colonies of Queensland and West Australia were separated from the Conference and placed under the care of the Union Conference as mission fields. Near the close of 1895 another change was made. New South Wales was separated from the Australian Conference by the organization of the New South Wales Conference.”⁶⁸

Nearly twenty-six years later, the New South Wales Conference was divided at a meeting of the Twenty-Fourth Session of the New South Wales Conference held at Parramatta Park on October 16, 1919. At that session it was recommended that “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.”⁶⁹ In a very short time the North Eastern NSW Conference began to be designated as simply the “North New South Wales Conference” and was so named at the New South Wales Conference session in 1920 when further action was taken to separate the two conferences.⁷⁰ In the *Yearbook* of 1921 it was named the “North New South Wales Conference and has been so named ever since.”⁷¹ The rest of what had formerly been the New South Wales Conference was designated as the South New South Wales Conference.⁷²

At the beginning of 1949 the South New South Wales Conference was further divided into the Greater Sydney Conference with headquarters in Sydney, and a South New South Wales Conference with headquarters in Wagga Wagga.⁷³ The division had been approved on September 23, 1948 by action of the session of the South New South Wales Conference held at Blacktown between September 21 and October 3, 1948.⁷⁴

The first president of the reformed South New South Wales Conference was W. M. R. Scragg and the secretary/treasurer was F. J. Butler.⁷⁵ The first location of the conference office was 46 Coleman Street, Wagga Wagga, New South Wales, which was the home of Mr. and Mrs. Gordon, who made available rooms for the conference work to be conducted. On August 21, 1951 the South NSW Conference moved to new premises at 75 Coleman Street, Wagga Wagga.⁷⁶

At that time the Australian Capital Territory, a territory under the jurisdiction of the Commonwealth of Australia, was not part of the South New South Wales Conference, although it was located within its territory. The matter was discussed by the conference executive committee in March 1954.⁷⁷ A company of twenty to twenty-five people were meeting each Sabbath in Canberra, the national capital.⁷⁸ In September of that year the conference executive committee took action to ask the Trans-Commonwealth Union Conference to include the Australian Capital Territory within the territory of the South New South Wales Conference.⁷⁹ This request was granted and Canberra SDA Church was organized March 26, 1955 with nineteen members. Then at the first meeting of the Fifty-Seventh Session of the South New South Wales Conference, held at Young on April 6, 1955, Canberra Seventh-day Adventist Church was voted into the sisterhood of churches in the conference.⁸⁰

The inclusion of the Australian Capital Territory in the territory of the conference proved significant as in 1965, the South NSW Conference office moved from Wagga Wagga to a new headquarters office building in Canberra.

⁸¹ The conference currently continues to operate at 3 McKay Gardens Turner, ACT, 2612.⁸²

Some Significant Evangelistic Events in the South New South Wales Conference

In 1949, an evangelistic program was conducted at Lithgow by Pastor Harvey and Len G. Doble. Eleven people were baptized as a result. ⁸³ The same year Pastor W.M.R. Scragg (conference president) conducted an evangelistic series of meetings in Broken Hill over nine days, with a number of interests created.⁸⁴

In 1951, Pastor S.M. Uttley, who later became the second president of the conference, conducted the first SDA evangelistic program in Canberra.⁸⁵

In 1952, Pastor Austin Cooke conducted an extended evangelistic series in Wagga Wagga, giving about 160 presentations. Pastor Cooke also ran other series in Bathurst (1954), Dubbo (1955), Orange (1957), Canberra (1958), and Goulburn (1959).⁸⁶

From 1960 to 1962, Pastor. C.R. Stanley, A.H. Tolhurst, and A.A Godfrey conducted evangelistic series in Albury, Wagga Wagga, and Bathurst.⁸⁷

In 1966, Pastor C.A. Townend conducted an evangelistic series in Canberra.⁸⁸ Pastor John Carter conducted an evangelistic crusade in Canberra in the first half of 1967, in which sixty good interests were reported.⁸⁹

In 1969, several significant evangelist campaigns were conducted. Pastor Russell Kranz conducted an Avondale Field School of Evangelism in Canberra with graduating theology students.⁹⁰ Pastor W.H. Otto conducted an evangelistic series in Goulburn and G.E. Youlden conducted an evangelistic series in Temora.⁹¹ Pastor W. H. Otto and Peter Roennfeldt conducted series in Parkes, Forbes, and Peak Hill.⁹² Pastor Otto preached in Dubbo, Narromine, Gilgandra, Tottenham, and Nyngan.⁹³

In 1973, Pastor Otto conducted an extended series of evangelistic meetings in Canberra.⁹⁴

In 1977, Pastor John Carter conducted an evangelistic series in Albury, assisted by Pastor Ted Oliver and Pastor Laurence Byrne with some eighty people baptized.⁹⁵

In 1981, Pastor Graeme Bradford conducted an evangelistic series in Canberra.⁹⁶

In 1982, Pastor Graeme Bradford conducted an evangelistic series in Goulburn.⁹⁷

In 1984, the executive committee voted: "That each church in the conference be encouraged to participate in some form of public outreach evangelism in 1984."⁹⁸

In 1994, Doctor Barry Oliver and Pastor Graeme Bradford conducted an Avondale Field School of Evangelism for M.A. students in Canberra.⁹⁹

In 2002, evangelistic series were conducted in Wagga Wagga¹⁰⁰ and Canberra.¹⁰¹

Mission and Strategic Plans of the South New South Wales Conference

The following is the mission statement of the South New South Wales Conference in 2019: "To be and grow flourishing followers of Jesus."¹⁰² According to conference leaders, the South New South Wales Conference is fulfilling its mission by "empowering church members and our pastoral team to be everything God intended them to be."¹⁰³

Several significant achievements for the conference are as follows:

In 1951 the South NSW Conference achieved the highest tithing receipts per capita of any conference in the union.¹⁰⁴

In 1958 the South NSW Conference reached its goal of 100 baptisms a year for the first time, with 105 persons baptized that year, raising the total conference membership to 1235.¹⁰⁵

In 1963/1964 the television program "It is Written" and a "Mission Reaping Campaign" were reported as helping to push baptismal numbers to 200 for the period.¹⁰⁶

By the end of 1966 the South NSW Conference had almost doubled its membership from 831 in 1949 to 1642 in December 1966.¹⁰⁷

Baptisms for 1972 reached an all-time high of 156, raising the membership to over 2000 for the first time.¹⁰⁸

Some remaining challenges for the conference include:¹⁰⁹

Distance. The South NSW Conference covers an area of 660,000 square kilometers, with small towns dotted throughout the conference.

Population. Many young people leave towns and cities in the conference, looking for work or to study in major capital cities.

Churches. Most congregations in the conference are small, with the exception of Canberra, Wagga Wagga, and Albury.

New South Wales Conference (1895-1919) List of Presidents:

W. C. White (1895-1896); W. H. L. Baker (1896-1898); S. N. Haskell (1898-1899); G. B. Starr (1899-1900); W. A. Colcord (1900-1901); C. A. Snyder (1901-1902 [eighteen months]); W. Woodford (1902 [six months]); S. M. Cobb (1903-1905); J. E. Fulton (1905-1907); J. Pallant (1907 [nine months]); J. H. Woods (1908-1911); A. H. Piper (1911-1913); E. H. Gates (1913-1916); J. M. Cole (1916-1919); W. H. Pascoe (1920-until the organization of the South New South Wales Conference).

South New South Wales Conference (1919-1948) List of Presidents:

L. D. A. Lemke (1921-1922); J. M. Cole (1923); A. H. Piper (1924-1926); G. G. Stewart (1926-1928); C. H. Parker (1928-1930); W. J. Westerman (1930 [five months]); R. E. Hare (1930-1936); H. E. Piper (1936-1940 [May]); A. V. Piper (1940 [June]-1941 [September]); W. E. Battye (1941 acting); G. G. Stewart (1942); R. A. Thrift (1942-1943); G. Branster (1944-1948)

South New South Wales Conference (1949-Current) list of presidents:

W. M. R. Scragg (1949-1956);¹¹⁰ S. M. Uttley (1956-1959);¹¹¹ E. A. Reye (1959-1965);¹¹² C. D. Judd (1965-1967);¹¹³ H. B. Christian (1967-1971);¹¹⁴ H. C. Barritt (1971-1975);¹¹⁵ K. J. Bullock (1975-1977);¹¹⁶ R. W. Howes (1977-1980); K. J. Bullock (1980-1986);¹¹⁷ R. N. Lawson (1986-2002);¹¹⁸ G. Webster (2002-2005);¹¹⁹ R. G. Manners (2005-2011);¹²⁰ M .E. T Faber (2011-2018);¹²¹ Cristian Copaceanu (2019-).¹²²

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NOTES

1. Recognition is given to Calvin Drinkall, Secretary of the South New South Wales Conference, and to Doris Faber for assisting with the compilation of much of the information in this article.
2. The conference website is <https://snsw.adventist.org.au/>.
3. Special Session of the South New South Wales Conference Minutes, Action 2004.47 accepting Action 2004.1404 of the South New South Wales Executive Committee, held at Canberra, April 10, 2004 South New South Wales Conference Archives, Canberra, ACT, Australia.
4. Calvin Drinkall, Secretary, South New South Wales Conference, email to author, December 20, 2018.
5. Ibid.
6. *Seventh-day Adventist Online Yearbook*, "Greater Sydney Conference," accessed January 25, 2019
<http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Yearbooks/YB2017.pdf>
7. A current statistical overview of the conference at any time may be accessed at
<http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Statistics/Forms/AllItems.aspx?RootFolder=%2fStatistics%2fASR&FolderCTID=0x01200095DE8DF0FA49904B9D65211>
; *2018 Annual Statistical Report 154th Report of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists for 2016 and 2017*, accessed January 20, 2019,
<http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Statistics/ASR/ASR2018.pdf>
8. Ibid.
9. The magazine can be accessed digitally at <https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/view/62197360/imprint-december-2018>.

10. South New South Wales Executive Committee Minutes, Ninth Meeting, held at Young, September 25, 1949, South New South Wales Conference Archives, Canberra, ACT, Australia.
11. South New South Wales Executive Committee Minutes, Tenth Meeting, held at Wagga, October 30, 1949, South New South Wales Conference Archives, Canberra, ACT, Australia.
12. South New South Wales Executive Committee Minutes, Sixteenth Meeting, held at Young, December 20, 1953, South New South Wales Conference Archives, Canberra, ACT, Australia.
13. Seventh-day Adventist Schools (South NSW Conference) Limited Board of Directors Minutes, October 29, 2007, South New South Wales Conference Archives, Canberra, ACT, Australia.
14. South New South Wales Executive Committee Minutes, Eighth Meeting, held at Harden, September 19, 1954, South New South Wales Conference Archives, Canberra, ACT, Australia.
15. South New South Wales Executive Committee Minutes, Sixth Meeting, Action 79/146, held at Canberra, October 11, 1979, South New South Wales Conference Archives, Canberra, ACT, Australia.
16. Fifty Seventh Session of the South New South Wales Conference Minutes, held at Harden, July 3, 1955, South New South Wales Conference Archives, Canberra, ACT, Australia; The Educational Secretaries report made at the tenth meeting of the 59th Session at Young on March 27, 1957 stated that: "we had one school with one teacher and eleven pupils in 1949, the year 1956 closed with four schools staffed by eight teachers caring for 133 pupils"
17. South New South Wales Executive Committee Minutes, Thirteenth Meeting, Action 62/2304, held at Young, September 23, 1962, South New South Wales Conference Archives, Canberra, ACT, Australia.
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19. The last reference to the school in the *Yearbook* occurs in 1965/1966. However there is a reference to the school in the *Australasian Record* of January, 1969. See *Seventh-day Adventist Online Yearbook*, "Institutions of the Australasian Division," page 102, accessed March 23, 2019, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Yearbooks/YB1894.pdf>; "While we are in South New South Wales . . .," *Australasian Record*, January 13, 1969, 16.
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