



Ernest Steed

Photo courtesy of Adventist Heritage Centre, Australia.

## Steed, Ernest Horace Joseph (1925–2006) and Roda Joan (Shaw) (1925–2014)

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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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Ernest Steed, an Australian pastor, was distinguished by his commitment to principles of good health, and particularly to the temperance activities of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. For some years he was the temperance director of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

## Early Years

Ernest Horace Joseph Steed was born in Bendigo, Victoria, on March 18, 1925<sup>1</sup> to Edward Horace Stephens and Violet May (Gadsden) Steed. The given name Joseph honored his grandfather, Joseph Everson Steed, a minister and a pioneer missionary to Samoa. Ernest Steed's father did not enjoy good health and passed away in 1932, leaving to mourn his wife and four children.<sup>2</sup> Family records indicate Steed received his basic education at Epsom, suburban Bendigo, and later at Warburton and Horsham in Victoria.<sup>3</sup>

At the age of eighteen, Steed attended the Australasian Missionary College during 1943 but left after the first term of 1944. He struggled academically, seeming to show an interest only in Bible subjects.<sup>4</sup> He reminisced later of his efforts to earn his tuition fees by working in the poultry sheds, cultivating the vegetable gardens, and making granola in the Sanitarium Health Food factory on campus.<sup>5</sup>

## Denominational Service

Steed was exempt from military service while studying at Australian Missionary College. There is a gap in the records following that period, but there is every likelihood that he sold Seventh-day Adventist literature for some time because he first appears in 1948 as a ministerial probationer and assistant publishing secretary in the West Australian Conference,<sup>6</sup> a departmental position requiring experience and success in literature evangelism.

During his time in Western Australia, Steed met Roda Joan Shaw. They were married in the Perth Seventh-day Adventist church by the conference president on Tuesday evening, May 18, 1948.<sup>7</sup> Roda Shaw was born in New Zealand of Scottish heritage on July 27, 1925. Her father died when she was an infant and she and her sister were raised by their mother and grandmother. They moved to Australia where Roda Shaw received her schooling and trained as a seamstress.<sup>8</sup>

Ernest Steed continued in the publishing department work for another two years and then was asked to transfer to the Sabbath School and Home Missions departments.<sup>9</sup> Press relations was added to his responsibilities in

1952. This proved to be the springboard for his subsequent career.<sup>10</sup>

In 1952, the Steed family moved to Sydney where Ernest Steed was under appointment as press relations secretary for the Greater Sydney Conference, a role he held until 1959. At the same time, he was also Young People's secretary from 1954 through 1956, and temperance secretary from 1954 through 1959.<sup>11</sup> During the 1950s, Steed became the quintessential advocate for the Adventist church in New South Wales and beyond, enlisting the media, famous athletes, politicians, and clerics. The Sydney camp meetings received wide coverage on radio and in the press.<sup>12</sup> He utilized church youth programs to engage in a public Bible reading poll to advertise the Voice of Prophecy study guides.<sup>13</sup> When the Melbourne Youth Congress took place in 1956, he was elected to be the chairman of its public relations committee, working outside his conference territory.<sup>14</sup> He organized the distribution of large road signs that gave directions to Adventist churches.<sup>15</sup> In 1958, he held a Public Relations Congress, inviting a broad spectrum of speakers including radio and press personalities in addition to Anglican, Salvation Army, and Church of Christ clergy.<sup>16</sup> When Elder Scharffenberg visited Sydney from America in 1958 as executive director of the International Commission for the Prevention of Alcoholism (ICPA), an Australian chapter was established with Steed readily accepting the role as executive secretary.<sup>17</sup>

In 1960, Steed was appointed to the Australasian Division headquarters to work in press relations and temperance.<sup>18</sup> On Sabbath, July 2, 1960, he was ordained to the gospel ministry by Elders Lawrence Naden, Eric Johanson, Walter Battye, and Andrew Stewart. The service was held in the headquarters church at Wahroonga.<sup>19</sup>

In his new role, Steed travelled throughout Australia, New Zealand, and the South Pacific Islands, promoting the cause of temperance wherever he went. He started at his base in Sydney by hosting Australia's first Institute of Scientific Studies for the Prevention of Alcoholism. He held it at Sydney University, January 18 through 29, 1960, providing American lecturers and local speakers from the Salvation Army, the Women's Christian Temperance Union, and the Police Traffic Branch.<sup>20</sup>

In the name of community evangelism and public relations Steed inaugurated the Dial-a-Prayer service from his Wahroonga headquarters, using the Voice of Prophecy technology and its speaker, Walter Scragg. It started on July 12, 1961, but the lines became overloaded and immediate adjustments were made to enable a fresh beginning on August 24. In the first twenty days, 37,000 calls were received from the public.<sup>21</sup>

Part of Steed's role was to continue issuing the *Alert* for the cause of temperance, a periodical modelled on the American equivalent, *Listen*. He also initiated a similar magazine titled *The Winner*, which he adapted for young people.<sup>22</sup> He toured throughout Australia, promoting temperance among public leaders, screening films in schools, addressing service clubs such as Apex, Lions, and Rotary, and encouraging university students to survey classmates about drunk driving in order to raise awareness of dangerous habits.<sup>23</sup> He toured Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands,<sup>24</sup> Fiji, Samoa, and the Cook Islands, organizing street marches to advertise his temperance rallies.<sup>25</sup>

One significant program that Steed introduced into Australasia from America was the Five-Day Plan to Stop Smoking. Elder Jenkins of Wollongong, New South Wales, was the first to conduct the 5-Day Plan under the auspices of the Australasian Division temperance department, opening on April 5, 1963. Soon after, Steed himself conducted a 5-Day Plan seminar at Warburton Sanitarium<sup>26</sup> and later toured Australia to train teams of church members as presenters.<sup>27</sup>

In the northern hemisphere summer of 1966, Ernest Steed moved to the General Conference headquarters to join four associate secretaries in the temperance department.<sup>28</sup> As he did in Australia, Steed began his work at home base, the United States, ranging to the west coast where he conducted sixteen workshops for temperance secretaries at which he introduced a new manual for their use.<sup>29</sup> The following year he travelled throughout Europe with Elder Sharffenberg, meeting dignitaries involved in the temperance cause. He introduced the 5-Day Plan in Yugoslavia and at the meeting of the ICPA, when Scharffenberg submitted his resignation as executive secretary, Steed was elected to replace him.<sup>30</sup>

Ernest Steed was appointed head of the General Conference temperance department in 1969.<sup>31</sup> He came to the office at a time when American government officials were moving against the tobacco industry, recognizing its health dangers. The Cigarette Label Act (1965) had forced the tobacco industry to place a warning on their packaging. Steed capitalized on this move to promote the 5-Day Plan, conducting the first North American 5-Day Plan Congress. It was held in Chicago, April 13 through 17, 1969.<sup>32</sup> His first major report of the temperance department was given at the 1970 General Conference Session in Atlantic City, New Jersey. One highlight estimated ten million people had quit smoking during the quadrennium as a result of participation in the 5-Day Plan. He spoke of seminars for the prevention of alcoholism having been conducted in Italy, New Zealand, and South Africa. The temperance message, he said, was breaking down prejudice against the Adventist church in countries like Iran and Turkey and among Muslims in Africa.<sup>33</sup>

Encouraged by success on all fronts, Steed planned for a major international ICPA congress in Kabul, Afghanistan. It was held August 27 through September 1, 1972, in the ballroom of Hotel Inter-Continental. Delegates numbering 120 from thirty different countries attended. During the course of proceedings, Dr. Abdul Zahir, prime minister of Afghanistan, a Muslim and teetotaler, readily accepted the vice-presidency of ICPA.<sup>34</sup>

Ernest Steed was executive secretary of the American Temperance Society and the International Temperance Association from 1974 through 1982, while temperance secretary for the General Conference.<sup>35</sup> When the temperance and health departments merged in 1982, Steed served until 1987 as one of four special assistants to Neal Wilson, General Conference president.<sup>36</sup> He did not relinquish his position as director of ICPA, continuing to organize a periodic congress. His fifth congress was held in Rio de Janeiro, August 26 through 30, 1984, when 300 delegates attended from thirty-three different countries.<sup>37</sup>

## Retirement

Ernest and Roda Steed retired to Orange City, Florida. They worked to help establish a new church community in suburban DeBary.<sup>38</sup> In 1998, they celebrated their fiftieth wedding anniversary with their three children, Lincoln, Leonie and Martin, and the extended family.<sup>39</sup> At the 2003, Annual Council of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Steed was among thirteen to be awarded a Health Ministries Medal of Distinction for a working lifetime of services to better health worldwide.<sup>40</sup>

In 2006, Ernest Steed developed a medical condition requiring surgery. He was admitted to Florida Hospital Medical Center (now Advent Health Orlando) but did not survive the operation on July 25, 2006. He was laid to rest in the Deltona Memorial Gardens, Orange City, Florida.<sup>41</sup> In 2013, Roda Steed's health deteriorated rapidly with Alzheimer's disease, cancer, and a mild stroke. She died on November 16, 2014, and was also interred in Deltona Memorial Gardens.<sup>42</sup>

Books by Ernest H. J. Steed

*The Creeping Madness*. Washington, D.C.: Narcotics Education, Inc., 1968. 160 pages. Co-author Francis Soper. Reprinted from *Listen* magazine articles. Against the use of social drugs.

*Impaled: The Story of Brian Dunn*. Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1970. 72 pages. Account of missionary nurse Dunn's murder in the Solomon Islands.

*The Answer to Alcoholism*. [Washington, D.C.]: Narcotics Education, Inc., 1971. 96 pages.

*The Great Alternative*. Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1976. 58 pages. The element of self-control when overcoming the use of social drugs.

*Two Be One*. Plainfield, NJ: Logos International, 1978. 160 pages. Personal views about religious pluralism and the critical method of biblical exegesis.

*Winds of Change*. Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2012 reprint. 54 pages. Global strategies for temperance crusades.

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