

Fisher, George Septimus Julius (1872–1947)

W. GLYNN LITSTER

W. Glynn Litster, Ph.D. (The University of Newcastle, Newcastle, New South Wales, Australia), retired in 1994. Litster was born in Melbourne, Australia, and served as an educator and missionary in the South Pacific Division of Seventh-day Adventists. His roles included teacher, principal, school supervisor, and education director. Late in his career he researched the history of Sanitarium. During retirement he produced Pacific Islands hymnbooks in 7 languages. He is married to Elva, has two adult children, 6 grandchildren, and 3 great grandchildren.

George Fisher's forty-six years of service include managing health food cafes, Avondale Industries and the Sydney Sanitarium in Australia.

Early Years

George Septimus Julius Fisher was born in 1872, in London, England.¹ He attended school for only six years before moving to Australia. In early January 1894 he came to the Seventh-day Adventist camp meeting at Middle Brighton, a southern suburb of Melbourne where he heard Ellen White speak on the future development of institutions in Australia.² In 1896 he became a Seventh-day Adventist and was employed as a clerk at the Echo Publishing Company in North Fitzroy, a suburb of Melbourne. In 1904 he was transferred to Sydney to manage the vegetarian café in place of James Hindson. It was in this role that his management skills began to develop, greatly benefitting the Church.³

In 1898 George Fisher married Lily Oliver who had, for a time, been a literature evangelist. Lily who was born in 1875 and had become an Adventist in Prahran, a suburb of Melbourne. Tragically, she died on January 10, 1909 while he was returning from a business trip to New Zealand. He arrived home to hear the news on the morning of the funeral. She was in her thirty-fifth year and is buried at the Gore Hill Cemetery, Sydney.⁴ He was left to care for four small daughters aged two to ten: Violet Olive, born 1899 in Melbourne; Hazel Miriam, born 1901 in Melbourne; Ruth Antionette, born 1904 in Sydney; and Laurel Lily, born 1906 in Sydney.⁵ A year later, on January 21, 1910, George married Mary Isabel Christie who had been working at the Sydney café.⁶ They spent twenty-two very happy years of marriage and had three children together: Elizabeth Elsie, born 1913 in Sydney; John Lawrence, born 1915 in Sydney; and Harold, born 1917 in Sydney.⁷ Mary died on November 22, 1931 at age forty-four as a result of a kerosene explosion while she was trying to light the kitchen fire.⁸ George was the manager of the Avondale industries at the time.

Management Skills in Various Church Departments

When George Fisher arrived in Sydney in 1904, he became the manager of the Pure Foods Café, located at 45 Hunter Street. The immediate need faced by Fisher was to make the business profitable. The Church was in no position to carry any sustained losses. With a dedicated staff and strong leadership the business was turning a profit within a short time.⁹

Between 1906 and 1916, primarily with Fisher's encouragement, health food cafes were established in Australia's other major cities: Melbourne, 1906; Hobart, 1907; Adelaide, 1908; Brisbane 1911; and Perth, 1916. In 1908, a client of the Sydney café introduced Fisher to a number of products that had recently arrived from England. Fisher was invited to visit the client's warehouse perchance he might find something that could be of use in the café menu. Fisher called at the warehouse but did not see anything of interest. Just as he was about to leave, he saw something



George Fisher, long-serving manager, considered to be "the father of the Sanitarium Health Food Company".

Photo courtesy of Sanitarium Health and Well Being.

wrapped in brown paper and string. On examining the label, he saw that it was named "Marmite." It was explained that this product could be used to make gravies and fondues and other savories. He heeded the advice of the agent and took it back to the kitchen staff who immediately put it to use. They also discovered that it could be spread as a delicacy on bread. Fisher quickly made arrangements through the agent with the manufacturers in Burton-on-Trent, England to import Marmite exclusively for sale by SDA health food wholesalers.

From 1912 to 1920 while residing in Sydney, Fisher was responsible for the general oversight of all branches of the health food work in New Zealand, as well as Australia. Not only were cafes established in the large cities, but they were used to promote the sale of healthy foods. Tables were set up in the corner of cafes where clients could obtain the products they had eaten. This quickly led to the opening of retail shops that stocked a wider range of healthy vegetarian foods. Fisher was also responsible for the wholesale distribution of goods manufactured at the Cooranbong factory. He employed traveling salesmen and provided them with vehicles to visit grocers, take their orders, and have the goods delivered.

Avondale Industries and the Sydney Sanitarium Years

In 1920, Fisher was placed in charge of Avondale Industries, a conglomerate of departments taking in Avondale Press, the food manufacturing business, the maintenance and can-making departments, and a large sawmill, which milled logs brought in from the Watagan Mountains by bullock teams. He ensured that there were managers in each department. His principal interest was food manufacturing. Products manufactured included "Granose" flake biscuits, "Granola," and "Quick Bru," a non-caffeinated drink powder. The products were transported by barge along Dora Creek to the rail station, approximately four miles (6.5 kilometers) distant. Avondale College students were employed in the factory. This had the effect of both providing needed labor and assisting students with their school fees. As sales accelerated, especially the wheat-flake biscuit sales, Fisher found it necessary to enlarge the factory. In order to obtain the latest machinery and develop new markets he traveled to England, America, and the Far East.¹⁰

In 1933 Fisher was appointed manager of the Sydney Sanitarium, where both female and male nurses trained for service in the South Pacific or other parts of the world, a position he held for nine years. He retired in 1942 after forty-six years of service.

Fisher's Legacy

Australasian Union Conference President, W. G. Turner wrote of Fisher: "His name will ever be linked with our Health Food interests, which so largely under his personal counsel have grown to their dimensions... He believed in and accepted the counsels of the Spirit of prophecy."¹¹ He was a foundation member of the Australasian Conference Association Ltd., the incorporated entity which holds in trust the property owned by the Church in Australia. He also served as an executive committee member of the Australasian Union Conference until his death.¹² He passed away on December 30, 1947¹³ and was buried in the Northern Suburbs Cemetery, Sydney.

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