

# Australian Sentinel and Herald of Liberty, Australasian Union Conference

## 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.

The *Australian Sentinel and Herald of Liberty* was a short-lived journal published between 1894 and 1898. It was based on the journal *American Sentinel* and dealt with religious liberty issues.

## The Context

At the Australian Union Conference (AUC) session in Middle Brighton, suburban Melbourne, January 1894, Arthur G. Daniells urged the delegates to read the latest issues of *American Sentinel*, published by Pacific Press. The periodical advocated the separation of church and state affairs.<sup>1</sup> The topic was especially relevant in Australia because of the public discussions taking place

about the formulation of a federal constitution for the planned amalgamation of the colonies under one Commonwealth of Australia. The degree of popularity of this topic is indicated by the fact that four thousand extra copies were ordered of the April 2, 1894, issue of *The Bible Echo* that featured articles about religious liberty.<sup>2</sup>

## A New Periodical

Sensing the mood of the era, church officials quickly responded with the announcement that an Australian version of *American Sentinel* would be issued from the Echo Publishing Company in Melbourne. It was planned as a 32-page quarterly titled *Australian Sentinel and Herald of Liberty*.<sup>3</sup> Records are sketchy, but it is certain that Daniells himself was the editor in 1897<sup>4</sup> and most likely had served in that capacity from the beginning. Willard Colcord, as field secretary of the Religious Liberty Department for the AUC, acted as associate editor.<sup>5</sup> The annual subscription rate for four issues was advertised as 18 pence. The first number was mailed in late April 1894.<sup>6</sup> Colcord soon used the pages to enter into a debate with the *Christian Pioneer* over the ethics of Sunday laws.<sup>7</sup>

The periodical proved to be timely. During the following months in 1894 the Firth brothers, Seventh-day Adventists in Sydney, were prosecuted for working on a Sunday. And Robert Shannon, another Seventh-day Adventist in Sydney, was summoned to court for working on Sunday and given the choice of serving time in the stocks or paying a fine. He chose the fine. If he had chosen the stocks, the legal system would have been embarrassed, there being no stocks available. The Melbourne newspapers seized on the reports and delighted in making fun of the cases at the expense of the Sydney legal system and its reference to antiquated stocks as a form of punishment.<sup>8</sup> However, Seventh-day Adventists did not take the matters so lightly, reading into these developments sinister signs of the last days.

The only copies of the quarterly to survive in archives are the four issues of 1897. By that time the title was adapted to *The Southern Sentinel and Herald of Liberty*. It had been reduced to an eight-page (16 sides) periodical with an



The Southern Sentinel and Herald of Liberty title page 1897.  
Photo courtesy of Adventist Heritage Centre, Australia.

annual subscription rate of sixpence. Its motto at the masthead was “Keep the State and Church Forever Separate.” The articles warned against trade union influences in the prosecution of Sunday laws, religious bias that may infiltrate public schools, and any law that required public officials to be religious. The periodical argued that all aspects of the civic and legal systems should be secular.<sup>9</sup>

## Diminishing Relevance

By 1898 it was clear that the Australian Constitution would guarantee religious liberty. In a series of federal conventions and referendums conducted among the Australian population, one clause of the proposed constitution, Section 116, specifically stated that the federal government would not be allowed to enact laws restricting religious freedom.<sup>10</sup> By interpretation it meant that the federal government would be allowed to legislate to ensure religious freedoms. These provisions would not automatically apply to state laws, but would be upheld in the highest court of the commonwealth.

With imminent certainty of religious freedom in Australia the continuance of *The Southern Sentinel and Herald of Liberty* was like beating a solo drum after the main band had marched by. Nevertheless, the decision was made to issue it more frequently. From January 1898 a new issue was published every month, and it was more vigorously advertised, urging readers to subscribe for an annual rate of one shilling.<sup>11</sup> These developments were short-lived. The September 1898 issue appears to be the last of the periodicals.<sup>12</sup> Colcord was under assignment at the time to do part-time editorial work for Ellen White and engage in evangelistic crusades.<sup>13</sup> Elder Robert Hare was appointed as his replacement to be editor of *The Bible Echo* in addition to *The Southern Sentinel and Herald of Liberty*, but the latter was discontinued.<sup>14</sup> Any promotion of the religious liberty theme was later published in the columns of other church periodicals.

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## NOTES

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3. Union Conference Committee, “A New Journal,” *The Bible Echo*, April 9, 1894, 112.?
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  12. "The September number of the *Southern Sentinel* . . . ," *The Bible Echo*, September 19, 1898, 304.?
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