

Harrison, Charles William (1889–1986)

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.

Dr. Charles Harrison was superintendent of the Sydney Sanitarium and Hospital for three decades and a professor of anatomy at the College of Medical Evangelists (later Loma Linda University School of Medicine).

Formative Years

Charles William Harrison was born at rural Grass Creek, Indiana, on December 17, 1889, to Thomas and Susan (Brunk) Harrison. His eight siblings were Thomas (b. 1875), Jane (b. 1877), Elizabeth (b. 1878), Albert (died in infancy, 1880), Nellie (b. 1884), Daisy (b. 1886) and Frank (b. 1893).¹ He was raised in a Seventh-day Adventist home and baptized in 1902 by S.G. Huntington at Grass Creek. As a teenager he became what he described as “a rough carpenter,” that is, untrained.²

In 1907 Charles moved to California. He entered the College of Medical Evangelists at Loma Linda in 1910 and was granted an M.D. in 1915.³ In the same year he married Evelyn Hannah Stone at Loma Linda. A graduate of the School of Nursing at Loma Linda in 1912, Evelyn also took a business program at Pasadena Business College, 1912-1913.⁴



Evelyn Hannah and Charles William Harrison

Photo courtesy of General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Archives.

Sydney Hospital and Sanitarium Years

In the first years of his career, 1915 through 1921, Dr. Harrison served as a professor of anatomy at his alma mater. There followed a brief term of eighteen months as resident surgeon and assistant superintendent at White Memorial Hospital in Los Angeles.⁵

A request was made for Harrison to transfer to Australia but first he required British certification to work there in the medical field. On November 27, 1924, he and Evelyn, together with their two children, Anna May (b. 1918) and Charles William, Jr., (b. 1920), sailed from New York on the S.S. "America" for London.⁶ Dr. Harrison pursued further studies at St. Bartholomew's Hospital and School, earning credentials as a Member of the Royal College of Surgeons and Licentiate of the Royal College of Physicians in 1925. He did a further ten weeks advanced study in Edinburgh to gain his Fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons membership.⁷

In 1926 Dr. Harrison and his family sailed to Australia and began a lengthy association with the Sydney Sanitarium and Hospital, where he served as medical superintendent. In the same year Charles and Evelyn were blessed with another son, Harold Newton. The institution was on the outer suburban rim of the city. In order to cater for an inner city clientele and attract patrons to the sanitarium, medical offices were opened in Macquarie and George Streets where Charles earned a reputation as "the praying doctor."⁸

Early in 1935 the family returned to America for a six-month furlough.⁹ In the United States, and later in England, Harrison did some post-graduate studies in tropical diseases so that when he returned to Australia he would be more conversant with treatments for Pacific islanders.¹⁰

Prior to 1926 most of the patients at the Sydney Sanitarium came for the hydrotherapy treatments. When Dr. Harrison arrived his reputation as a surgeon became well known and the institution gradually developed into a respected hospital.¹¹ Harrison also had the foresight to register the hospital with government accreditation authorities as a training school for nurses, enabling graduates to find widespread recognition and employment.¹²

The influence of Charles and Evelyn Harrison in both the medical work and association with the church members was profound. Charles was often seen leading a Sabbath School class in the local Wahroonga church. Evelyn enthusiastically adopted the role of spokesperson for the Home Commission (predecessor to Family Ministries), promoting the importance of the Christian home and sharing literature with hospital patients who showed an interest in the topic.¹³

Charles Harrison gave the best of his years, 1926 through 1956, to leadership at the Sydney Sanitarium and Hospital. When the Harrisons' departure from Australia drew near, farewell gatherings were held by different groups of medical peers and friends. One function was attended by 170 nurses who had graduated during his time at the institution. Management gifted Charles and Evelyn with a kangaroo-skin rug and a set of books by Ion Idriess, a famous Australian author.¹⁴

Senior Years

After returning to the United States, Harrison joined the medical staff of Patton State Hospital in San Bernardino County, California, for three years, before returning to his former role as professor in the Department of Anatomy at the College of Medical Evangelists, Loma Linda, California.¹⁵ With development and reorganization of this institution, Dr. Harrison's ongoing contribution was as a lecturer in the Department of Anatomy, Loma Linda University Graduate School. He was 89 years of age when he relinquished his teaching role in 1978.¹⁶

The esteem for Harrison was enduring among Australian church members. When a large nursing home was opened on August 16, 1964, in the Seventh-day Adventist community of Cooranbong, it was named the Charles Harrison Memorial Home.¹⁷ Dr. Harrison visited the facility almost a decade later.¹⁸

Evelyn Harrison passed away in Loma Linda on October 23, 1970, at age 78 and was laid to rest in the nearby Montecito Memorial Park.¹⁹

Charles Harrison was invited back to the Sydney Sanitarium and Hospital to take part in the ceremony marking the commencement of the hospital's major rebuilding program. On November 14, 1971, Dr. Harrison was given the honor of unveiling the commemorative plaque at the entrance doors of what would become a multi-storied complex to replace the old original building in which he worked for three decades.²⁰

Immediately after the unveiling ceremony Harrison departed for Auckland, New Zealand, where he wed a 1931 nursing graduate, Lena Sarah Phillips.²¹ They returned to California and made their home at Loma Linda where Dr. Harrison continued lecturing in anatomy. He passed away on January 27, 1986, at age 97.²² Lena passed away at 90 on December 20, 1994.²³

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NOTES

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