



Group of Workers in the Echo Publishing Office, in Australia, About 1901

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Group of workers in the Echo Publishing Office, Australia, c. 1901.

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

# Echo Publishing Company, Limited

## 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.

Echo Publishing Company, situated near Melbourne, Australia, operated from 1889 to 1922.

## Humble Beginnings

When the small group of Seventh-day Adventist missionaries arrived in Melbourne in 1885 they rented a home in suburban Richmond. The printer in the group, Henry Scott, set type in his bedroom and carried the forms in a hand cart to a nearby print shop to have advertising material prepared for distribution prior to a number of tent crusades.<sup>1</sup>

Toward the end of 1885 the missionaries hired a building on the corner of Rae and Scotchmer Streets, North Fitzroy, to establish their headquarters, a two-story brick building formerly used as a retail store. At the rear was an iron building that had served as a stable and coach house. In these back quarters they installed a job press and gas engine to begin printing their own literature. Some of the missionaries lived upstairs in the front portion, while the ground level was used as their editorial office and an area open to the public for the sale of books and periodicals. Their major publication in these premises, *Bible Echo and Signs of the Times*, was first issued in January 1886. The building frontage carried the title *Bible Echo Publishing House* and words testifying that they were a branch of the International Tract and Missionary Society (American).<sup>2</sup>

In September 1886 Eliza Burnham, an experienced editor, arrived from America<sup>3</sup> for a decade of service, setting her stamp on the publishing enterprise so proficiently that the building became known as Burnham House. Soon after her arrival Walter Miller and John Woods, early converts, sold their printing business and joined with Scott to cope with the expanding volume of work. Their business contacts and entrepreneurial flair gave rise to a paper titled *Advertiser*, which generated revenue to print denominational literature.<sup>4</sup>

## Self-sufficient

By 1888 Seventh-day Adventist membership had grown so much that it warranted the establishment of church departments, including the publishing enterprise. In September a meeting was called to discuss the formation of a stock-issuing company. Nearly eight hundred pounds were immediately subscribed, and the decision was made to erect their own premises.<sup>5</sup> The shares were sold for one pound each and entitled owners to vote at annual meetings. Buyers understood that these were not dividend-bearing shares but were, in effect, donations to establish the printing business on a sound foundation.<sup>6</sup> Later, deposits on fixed terms or open accounts were accepted and interest paid half-yearly.<sup>7</sup>

A plot of land was purchased in 1888 at 14-16 Best Street, North Fitzroy. By the end of the year church member David Sheppard had completed a timber and iron print-shop at the rear of the allotment. At the same time work was well advanced on the brick building at the front of the plot. This was designed by Thomas Searell to eventually be a three-story structure. Church member John Hellier built the first two stories with a facade to later accommodate a third story.<sup>8</sup>

Legal requirements stipulated that the publishing work and land ownership be incorporated under the laws of Victoria. Therefore, in March/April 1889, the Echo Publishing Company, Limited, was officially constituted.

George Tenney was chosen as president of the company, Scott as vice-president, Miller as secretary, and Nathaniel Faulkhead as treasurer.<sup>9</sup> Miller called the first bi-annual meeting of shareholders to Federal Hall, the upstairs section of the front building, on July 13, 1889.<sup>10</sup> At this time the buildings were fully functional and on July 28 Federal Hall was dedicated as the chapel for the Melbourne church.<sup>11</sup> This convenience existed until 1892 when the third story was added to the main building and Federal Hall was converted to a small chapel and extra space for the publishing work.<sup>12</sup> The Melbourne church transferred to their own premises (see North Fitzroy church).

## Arrival of Wilbur Salisbury

In 1893 Wilbur Salisbury came to the Echo Publishing Company with printing experience in America and Britain.<sup>13</sup> He had placed the London Publishing House in good operational order and repeated the success in Australia despite recession in the commercial world at the time.

Under Salisbury's management a three-story brick building replaced the single-story timber and iron print shop at the rear during the period 1897/1898, almost doubling the floor space of the company. All phases of the printing process were well equipped, the type composing, stereotyping, printing, folding, and binding, all functioning under adequate conditions. The high quality of craftsmanship attracted the patronage of Lord Vasse, Governor of Victoria. An office was opened at 343 Flinders Lane to make it easier for city businessmen to lodge printing orders. On Monday evenings classes were held in Bible, grammar, philosophy, and drawing for the improvement of employees' education. On Thursday evenings the Echo Technical Club held meetings similar to the Mechanic's Institutes in secular circles. In these respects Salisbury demonstrated that he was a benevolent industrial reformer. He also purchased the block of land next door for further expansion if needed.<sup>14</sup>

When the building extensions were under way Salisbury arranged for another Cottrell Press to be sent from America, making five in operation in addition to three Platen presses. He organized the transfer of a backing machine, blocking press, self-clamping cutting machine, and a dynamo from Basle Publishing House, Switzerland, when that institution was turned into a sanatorium. He also purchased a local electrotype plant and had it installed. By 1899 eighty-three people were employed in the plant. Popular titles printed by the company included *A Friend in the Kitchen*, *The Coming King*, and *The Alarm of War and True Temperance*. A printing of *Steps to Christ* in the Rarotongan language was a major accomplishment.<sup>15</sup> Salisbury foresaw the time when the company would train individuals to establish and operate print shops in the wider mission fields.<sup>16</sup>

Profit in 1896 was reported at £275. The following year it rose to £576.<sup>17</sup>

Salisbury had the satisfaction of seeing one young man in his employ, Harold Cammell, transfer to Kenilworth Mission School in South Africa to supervise their print shop in 1901. However, Cammell contracted tuberculosis and returned to Melbourne where he passed away in 1903.<sup>18</sup>

After Salisbury's return from the 1901 General Conference Session he negotiated with the South African Union Conference (SAUC) for permission to establish a book depository and team of book sellers in the Natal-Transvaal region. His request was granted with the proviso that when SAUC had sufficient resources to enter that field themselves then Echo Publishing Company would act as wholesalers only. On April 25, 1902, Harry Camp and Cecil Pretzman sailed to Natal to pioneer the depository and start canvassing. Difficulties were experienced with the transport of orders in Natal.<sup>19</sup> The venture was short-lived because SAUC was quick to take control of the region. Pretzman became ill and Camp moved on to England.

Production met with a major crisis in 1903 when the Victorian postal authorities insisted that *The Bible Echo* content be fifty percent news in order to meet requirements for minimum postage rates. Salisbury knew that subscribers to the periodical would not favor a move to top rates and would withdraw their support. At the same time he did not see the point of publishing news that was readily available in the secular press, so the title was changed to *Australasian Signs of the Times* and its content adapted so that most of the news items focused on world catastrophes and rumors of war in fulfillment of Bible prophecies.<sup>20</sup>

An ideological shift was also taking place within Adventism at the time, a view to decentralize capital investments and move into rural locations away from cities.<sup>21</sup> The view filtered down from Battle Creek headquarters to the Australasian Union Conference, prompting a vote in September 1903 to explore the possibility of rebuilding the publishing enterprise somewhere outside of Melbourne.<sup>22</sup> This move was taken despite the hardship of developing an entire community around a new publishing house, so it would need to be a venue that offered educational, medical, fire brigade, power, water, transport, and road facilities.

Suitable property was found at Warburton in the Yarra Valley district to the east of Melbourne. It was purchased from George Thompson and the first buildings were erected by September 1905. Private homes were constructed near the plant and most key staff transferred in February/March 1906. The city office in Flinders Lane remained in use for only a few more months.<sup>23</sup>

The new establishment at Warburton, under the name Signs Publishing Company (SPC), had the responsibility of closing the business of its parent, the Echo Publishing Company, which proved to be a legal nightmare for two reasons. One was the difficulty in finding a buyer for the building and property in North Fitzroy. The more complex reason was the transfer of shares to SPC. Despite the fact that shareholders from the start considered them to be donations and no dividends were paid, the Register General of Victoria insisted that they all be transferred to the owners. The government had experienced no precedent for a business that had issued receipts to shareholders on the understanding that their investment was, in reality, a gift. The chief problem was that more than two thousand shares belonged to individuals who were deceased, had moved overseas, or could not be traced. Eventually, by 1919, the North Fitzroy property was sold. By sheer perseverance some shareholders continued to be located and encouraged to transfer their shares, but many others remained unresolved. Apparently, lawyers advised that the company be liquidated. There is no record of a court case or

SPC paying the government the equivalent of the outstanding shares. The Register General simply notified SPC that Echo Publishing Company would be struck off the business register three months after May 31, 1922.<sup>24</sup>

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