



Headquarters Office Building of the North Queensland Mission between 1928 and 1958, 61 Sturt Street, Townsville, Queensland, Australia. Standing in front is Pastor Ted Oliver who had worked as a literature evangelist in the mission just after World War II to earn fees for attendance at the Australasian Missionary College at Avondale. Photo taken 1997.

Photo courtesy of Barry Oliver.

North Queensland Conference

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Barry Oliver, Ph.D., retired in 2015 as president of the South Pacific Division of Seventh-day Adventists, Sydney, Australia. An Australian by birth Oliver has served the Church as a pastor, evangelist, college teacher, and administrator. In retirement, he is a conjoint associate professor at Avondale College of Higher Education. He has authored over 106 significant publications and 192 magazine articles. He is married to Julie with three adult sons and three grandchildren.

The North Queensland Mission existed at various times under several different names and configurations of territory between 1895 and 1955. Between 1955 and 1984, it was designated the North Queensland Conference until, with a redistribution of territory, it became the Northern Australia Conference.¹

The headquarters of the North Queensland Conference were located at 45-49 Leopold Street, Aitkenvale, Queensland, Australia. The territory of the conference at the time of its dissolution was "that portion of Queensland north of a straight line parallel with the 22nd degree of South Latitude commencing at the coast at a point immediately south of St. Lawrence, and running due west between Winton and Muttaborra, and north of Boulia to a point on the border of the Northern Territory."²

In 1983, the North Queensland Conference had twenty churches. Church membership at the end of 1982 was 1,797. The conference had thirty-four active employees. Its tithe receipts for 1982 totaled US\$685,223. Its tithe and offerings per capita were US\$419.62.³

Institutions of the North Queensland Conference

Mona Mona Mission

The Mona Mona Mission was located on the Atherton Tableland to the west of Cairns. The Mona Mona School opened in 1914 with seven pupils and by May 31 the enrollment had increased to eighteen.⁴ The first Aboriginal baptism by Seventh-day Adventists took place at Mona Mona Mission on July 21, 1916. It was conducted by H. E. Piper. A young married woman and four dormitory girls were baptized.⁵ Following the baptism on July 22, the Mona Mona Mission church was organized. Piper officiated, explaining the purpose, function, and support of the church. The twelve charter members consisted of seven staff and five young women recently baptized.⁶

Mona Mona Mission operated until it was closed in 1962. The last financial statements on record and held in the archives of the Northern Australian Conference are dated 1962.⁷

Schools

The conference operated three schools during the time of its existence.

Cairns Adventist School operated out of rooms in the Cairns church located in Upward Street, Cairns, beginning 1950 during the existence of the North Queensland Conference. It currently operates as Cairns Adventist College in Gordonvale, Queensland.⁸

Mackay and District Seventh-day Adventist School was established in 1951 and operated on the same site as the Mackay Central Church, Milton Street, during the existence of the North Queensland Conference. When established, it was the first Protestant school in the district. The school now operates as Carlisle Adventist Christian College.⁹

Riverside Adventist Christian School was established in 1968 and continues to operate on the Northern Australia Conference grounds originally known as Halliday Park, in Leopold Street, Aitkenvale.¹⁰

The History of Organization in the Territory of the North Queensland Conference

The Queensland Mission was organized on January 24, 1895.¹¹ In 1896, the Australian Union Conference appointed G. B. Starr, superintendent; Alfred Hughes, secretary; and Nellie Starr, treasurer.¹² The fledgling organization retained mission status until October 20, 1899, when at a meeting held at Toowoomba, Queensland, under the chairmanship of Australian Union Conference president, A. G. Daniells, the attendees adopted a constitution and the mission became a conference.¹³ There were four churches in the conference—Rockhampton, North Brisbane, South Brisbane, and Toowoomba—with a total of 311 members including those designated as “scattered believers.”¹⁴ The officers of the conference were G. C. Tenney, president; Thomas Whittle, vice president; H. C. Lacey, secretary; and F. W. Paap, tract society business agent. The position of treasurer was apparently left open.¹⁵

At the union conference council held August 4-10, 1904, it was voted that Townsville would be the location for the headquarters of the Adventist Church in north Queensland. The action stated: “That Townsville be made the centre of the North Australia Mission field, and that a tract and book depository be established there.”¹⁶ On October 17, 1904, the North Queensland Mission was separated from the Queensland Conference.¹⁷ The boundary line was the Tropic of Capricorn.¹⁸ The headquarters were located on Eyre Street, North Ward, Townsville.¹⁹ Gustav Wantzlick was invited to come from New Zealand to take charge of the mission.²⁰ The Queensland Conference released its state tract society secretary, Emma L. B. Hill, to take charge of tract society work in North Queensland.²¹

As a mission organization, North Queensland came under the direct supervision of the Australian Union Conference. The division between north and south was not long-lasting, however. The conference and the mission were reunited on the recommendation of the Australian Union Conference and voted “with hearty approval” at the Queensland camp meeting and conference held at Toowoomba during September 17-27, 1907.²² T. H. Craddock, who had been working in North Queensland, was elected as president of the combined conference.²³

At the Australian Union Conference session held at Avondale, October 2-16, 1918, it was decided to again separate north and south Queensland. Because the Church had commenced its work in Papua in 1908, it was also decided this territory would be combined with north Queensland to form the North Queensland-Papua Mission.²⁴

Albert H. White from Tasmania was chosen as to be superintendent of the mission and the headquarters were in Charters Towers.²⁵ In April 1920, Frederick L. Sharp relieved Albert H. White due to his wife’s ill health and the mission headquarters were transferred to Mackay.²⁶

By the time of the Australian Union Conference session in September 1922, The union secretary, W. G. Turner, reported that “owing to the difficulty in operating Papua from Queensland, the organization known as the North Queensland-Papua Mission has been dissolved, the two fields now working as separate missions under the direction of the Australasian Union Conference.”²⁷

Due to the growth of the work in North Queensland and the financial constraints of the union, the following year the North Queensland Mission and the Queensland Conference were again reunited. Members above the Tropic of Capricorn were placed on the membership roll of the Conference Church.²⁸

In 1928, the Queensland Conference and the North Queensland Mission were once again separated. Alfred C. Chesson was invited to take the superintendency of the North Queensland Mission.²⁹ The mission headquarters were located in Sturt Street, Townsville. Later, the headquarters were moved to Armstrong Street, Hermit Park.³⁰ Chesson was succeeded by Roy Thrift, Charles Bird, Gordon F. Branster, W. N. Lock, and H. J. Halliday in 1948.

In 1955, the North Queensland Mission was organized into the North Queensland Conference with W. J. Richards, president, and I. R. Stratford, secretary.³¹ In 1963, land was purchased in Aitkenvale where the headquarters for the church were established. The Townsville Adventist School and the conference campground were also established on the property.³²

At the fifteenth triennial session of the North Queensland Conference held from April 12 to 15, 1984, a vote was taken to amend the conference constitution and change of boundaries to include the whole of the Northern Territory as well as northern Queensland. The name of the conference was changed to the Northern Australian Conference.

List of Superintendents/Presidents

North Australia Mission Field (1904-1907): Gustav Wantzlick (1904-1905); Thomas H. Craddock (1906-1907).

North Queensland Papua Mission (1918-1922): Albert H. White (1918-1919); F. L. Sharp (1920-1922).

North Queensland Mission (1928-1955): Alfred C. Chesson (1928-1931); Roy A. Thrift (1932-1935); Charles E. Bird (1936-1939); Gordon F. Branster (1939-1940); William N. Lock (1941-1947); H. J. Halliday (1948-1952); John B. Keith (1953-1954); W. J. Richards (1955).

North Queensland Conference (1955-1984): W. J. Richards (1955-1959); A. R. Mitchell (1960-1963); W. A. Townend, (1964-1969); Robert. H. Abbott (1970-1971); Edwin Totenhofer, (1972-1976); E. Howes (1977-1978); Harold G. Harker (1979-1981); Reginald King (1982-1984).

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NOTES

1. Much of the data in this article was submitted by Margaret Watkins of the Northern Australian Conference.
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3. *1983 Annual Statistical Report of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists for 1982*, accessed February 17, 2020 <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Statistics/ASR/ASR1983.pdf>.
4. Phillip B. Rudge, "Monamona Mission," *Australasian Record*, June 22, 1914. 4.
5. H. E. Piper, "A Visit to Mona Mona Mission," *Australasian Record*, September 4, 1916, 3.
6. Ibid.

7. Northern Australian Conference archives, Aitkenvale, Queensland, Australia.
8. "Cairns Adventist College," accessed July 30, 2018, <https://www.cas.qld.edu.au/>.
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11. Australasian Union Conference Minutes, January 24, 1895.
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16. "The Union Conference Council," *Union Conference Record*, August 15, 1904, 3.
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19. Darren Slade, President, Northern Australian Conference, email to author, July 27, 2018.
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21. Ibid.
22. O.A. Olsen, "The Queensland Camp-Meeting and Conference," *Union Conference Record*, October 28, 1907, 8.
23. "Queensland Conference," *Union Conference Record*, November 11, 2007, 6-7.
24. "Plans and Recommendations," *Australasian Record*, November 11, 1918, 32.

25. "En route from Tasmania...," *Australasian Record*, January 6, 1919, 8; A. H. White, "North Queensland-Papua Mission," *Australasian Record*, March 31, 1919, 6-7.
26. "Pastor F. L. Sharp...," *Australasian Record*, April 5, 1920, 8.
27. W. G. Turner, "Union Conference Proceedings: Secretary's Report," *Australasian Record*, October 2, 1922, 9.
28. "Union Conference Proceedings: Plans and Recommendations," *Australasian Record*, October 16, 1922, 57; *Seventh-day Adventist Online Yearbook*, "Queensland Conference," accessed July 30, 2018, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Yearbooks/YB1924.pdf>; *Queensland Conference Executive Committee Minutes, May 19, 1923, and October 27, 1923*.
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31. *Seventh-day Adventist Online Yearbook*, "North Queensland Conference," accessed July 30, 2018, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Yearbooks/YB1957.pdf>.
32. Darren Slade, president, Northern Australian Conference, email to author, July 27, 2018.

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