



Julia and Joseph Steed

Photo courtesy of Michael Steed.

Steed, Joseph Everson (1859–1938) and Julia Mary (Stephens) (1860–1947)

MICHAEL VERNON STEED

Michael Vernon Steed, M.Hlth. Sc. (PHC), (University of Western Sydney, Hawkesbury, New South Wales, Australia), retired in 2018 as Nurse/Counsellor from Hunter New England Addictions and Mental Health, New South Wales, Australia. As a South Australian by birth, Mr Steed has been employed in government and private health sectors around Australia. He also served the church as a nurse, Adventist College teacher and administrator at the Sydney Adventist Hospital, Avondale College Faculty of Nursing and Health, and Mamarapha Adventist Aboriginal College.

Joseph Steed was a pioneer evangelist in South Australia and Samoa. Steed and his wife, Julia, effectively utilized newspapers and literature in sharing the teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Early Years in Norwood

Joseph Everson Steed was born in Norwood, Adelaide, in 1859.¹ He was the son of Frederick Richard Steed (1828–1901) and Maria Everson (1833–1882), both emigrants to South Australia. Joseph Steed married Julia Mary Stephens (1860–1947) in 1880.² Their children were Joseph Thomas Frederick Steed (1881–1950), Edward Horace Stephens Steed (1883–1932), Arthur Norman Steed (1886–1887), Ethel Julia May Steed (1888–1955), Alma Chlorine Steed (1890–1974), Dora Amelia Steed (1893–1984), and Harry Roy Steed (1897–1941).³ His business with his father, called “Steed & Son: House Decorators & Painters,” was located on the Parade, Norwood.⁴

First Evangelistic Series in South Australia

In 1886 pioneer John Corliss held an evangelistic series in a tent in Stepney, SA.⁵ Joseph had been persuaded to attend the tent meetings and was impressed by Corliss and his message. Because of the tensions caused by family work commitments, Joseph was not baptized until 1888.⁶ Then in August 1888, after being baptized by George C. Tenney, Joseph was a delegate to the first Australian Seventh-day Adventist conference session in Melbourne.⁷ Julia had been baptized by M. C. Israel in 1887.

Early Literature Evangelist and Church Elder

As one of the first literature evangelists in Australia, Joseph canvassed the mining town of Broken Hill in 1889–1890, with notable converts A. W. Semmens and R. H. Constandt later making useful contributions.⁸ Ordained an elder in Adelaide in 1891/1892 by William Curtis, Joseph carried the responsibilities of an elder without a resident minister for a period of time. He discontinued full-time canvassing. A. G. Daniells came from Melbourne to train church officers in biblical and pastoral care. Joseph considered Daniells his mentor during those years.⁹ The Steeds moved to Scott’s Creek in the Adelaide Hills, SA, in 1893 for a short time, then Joseph canvassed in the Kadina district in 1894, with positive results.¹⁰ He then conducted meetings in Echunga and a successful evangelistic series in Tea Tree Gulley in 1897/1898, resulting in a number of baptisms.¹¹

In 1898 Joseph was appointed as the South Australian state agent for the new Sanitarium Health Food products produced in Melbourne. His wife, Julia (1860-1947)¹², had her own fruit and vegetable shop on the Parade, Norwood, where these products were sold in Adelaide for the very first time.¹³ In the same year the Adelaide church embarked upon setting up in West Terrace, Adelaide, a Helping Hand Rescue Home for Destitute Women.¹⁴ Joseph as secretary on the committee overseeing the running of this institution was appointed to conduct spiritual meetings twice a week for the residents.

Resuming canvassing in 1899, Steed traveled extensively by train and bicycle. With those who showed interest in the teachings of the Church he would keep in touch by letter or visitation.¹⁵ In 1900 he plied the Murray River and Lake Alexandrina in a boat with a foot paddle. He named the boat the *Herald*.¹⁶ In 1901 and 1902, Steed canvassed the northern towns of Laura and Willowie, among others. He drew large crowds to his “Lantern Lectures” on Christ. Then in 1903/1904 Steed assisted and trained other canvassers, especially promoting *The*

Desire of Ages in the city of Broken Hill, NSW.

From 1905 to 1907 Joseph Steed worked with T. H. Craddock, G. Hubbard, and R. Hare in a number of evangelistic series conducted in provincial towns in South Australia, including Petersburg, Jamestown, Burra, Naracoorte, Hamley Bridge, and Balaklava.¹⁷ Even though there was much prejudice, and heating in the venues left much to be desired, a number of people were baptized as a result.

Appointed to the German Samoa Mission

In 1907 the Australasian Union Conference Council reopened the Samoan field, with Joseph Steed as its first appointed evangelist. The Steed family that included children Dora and Harry first set out for Buresala, Fiji, to become acquainted with methods used in island work.¹⁸

Calvin H. Parker, superintendent of the Fijian mission field, was appointed to accompany the Steeds, and all arrived in Apia, Samoa, in late December 1907.¹⁹ Parker and Steed held meetings among the few European Adventists living in Apia, Samoa. Parker organized the first Seventh-day Adventist church in Samoa in 1908 with a membership of five with Joseph Steed in charge of this small company.²⁰ Simple health treatments and hydrotherapy kept Julia and Dora busy at the Sanitarium Hospital.²¹

In August 1908 the Steeds attended the Fijian Council meeting with other island delegates to hear John Fulton, from the Australasian Union Conference, announce the forming of a Central Polynesian Mission.²² Head administrator would be Calvin Parker, with Joseph Steed and William Palmer as his assistants.²³ The headquarters would be at Buresala, Ovalau, Fiji, with Fiji, Samoa, and Tonga making up this new administrative body.²⁴

The Steeds remained located in Samoa. However, Steed struggled with Polynesian culture and customs.²⁵ In 1909 Sybil Read, a Bible worker, who had previous experience in Samoa, arrived to assist him.²⁶ Around this time Malama Vaiola Kerisome, a part Samoan and Niuean islander, was accepted into the Steed family and became known as Vai Steed.²⁷ She proved to be a valuable worker in Samoa and later at Avondale College, assisting in the translation of Samoan and Niue literature for the islands. She would later go back as a teacher missionary to her people in Niue.²⁸

A disturbing change in events occurred when a Savaii island chief, Lauaki Mamoe, and his warriors decided to challenge the German administration. This led to German warships being dispatched to Samoa and the potential uprising was averted.²⁹ On board the *Leipzig* was a petty officer, Gustav Backhaus, who with other sailors attended Steed's meetings at the sanitarium. Backhaus and four other sailors responded positively to the subjects presented. He desired to go back to Germany and finish his time in the navy and then join Steed in Samoa. Steed advised him to attend the Adventist school in Germany and then return to Samoa.³⁰

Backhaus was baptized in Germany and decided to go to South Australia. He had developed a romantic acquaintance with Steed's daughter, Dora, while in Samoa, and the two were married in Adelaide.³¹ Gustav Backhaus joined Daniel Wall in the Barossa Valley mission that resulted in forming a new German-speaking church at Nuriootpa.³²

Toward the end of 1909 Steed became sick with bronchial asthma and was ordered by the doctor to leave Samoa. In November he spent a few days at the Sydney Sanitarium before going on to engage in mission work in South Australia.³³ His wife, children, and Via Kerisome, who was to attend the Avondale School for Christian Workers, followed later in December 1909.³⁴

Evangelism in South Australia and Victoria

On arrival in South Australia Steed engaged in pastoral work and evangelism. He worked with A. H. Rogers conducting a tent effort at Beverley during the first few months of 1910. Following, another tent was erected at Kilkenny, and a series of meetings conducted.³⁵ During this time he continued to be involved in translation for the work in Samoa.³⁶ In January 1911 the Steed family were transferred to Victoria. He conducted successful evangelistic series in Brunswick, the mining town of Costerfield, and St. Kilda.³⁷ At the Victorian-Tasmanian Conference camp in St. Kilda in 1912, Joseph Steed was ordained to the ministry.³⁸ In 1913 the Steeds relocated to the Murray-Goulburn Valley. He pitched tents and conducted evangelistic series in Nathalia, Kerang, and Swan Hill in 1914.³⁹ In each place Steed found that the newspapers provided honest and detailed accounts of his topics.⁴⁰ Town clergy challenged Steed, but his tactful reasoning impressed many people, and eight people were baptized.

Return to Samoa

The Steeds returned to Samoa in 1914.⁴¹ A church was built and dedicated at Lalovaea by John Cole in November 1915, and the first baptisms were conducted in the Visigano River.⁴² A further baptism by Steed occurred with a high chief two months later. His name was changed from Mana, meaning "power," to Faimalo, meaning "making a kingdom," after his conversion.⁴³ In 1916 the Central Polynesia Mission, comprising Fiji, Samoa, and Niue, became the Central Polynesian Conference. Joseph Steed was appointed as vice president, and a new school building with a new teacher were approved.⁴⁴

By 1918 church membership in Samoa was thirty, with twenty of the members being Samoans.⁴⁵ During that year Steed baptized Mrs. Margaretta Reye and her sons.⁴⁶ Husband Ernst Reye, who had been influenced by German higher criticism and modernism, found Steed's discussion of archaeology persuasive, and was eventually won over by the missionaries' consistent lives.⁴⁷

Ministry in Fiji

With missionary work expanding rapidly in Fiji, and a need for more workers, by early June 1920 the Steeds were transferred to work among the European population in Suva.⁴⁸ In Fiji Steed found a place to conduct evangelistic meetings in a cinema. He encountered a group calling themselves “rationalists,” who claimed that the Bible was not inspired, and directed questions to Steed of an evolutionary and geological nature. Their letters appeared in the local paper, giving Steed an opportunity to discuss many points of belief.⁴⁹

Steed also engaged in circulating literature, visiting people and doing ship mission work among the trading vessels visiting Suva Harbor.⁵⁰ He also found time to assist with the building of the new mission school at Navuso with Gordon Branster.⁵¹

Meanwhile, back in Samoa, some replacement missionaries, including William Litster, a teacher at Vailoa, returned to Australia in early 1921, because of poor health.⁵² With many challenges for the work in Samoa, the Steeds returned in mid-1921, noticing changes with some new faces, others missing altogether.⁵³

There was much work to occupy Steed. He found he could not deal with everything alone, so he made an appeal for a suitable tradesman who could fill that role in the work of the church in Samoa. The response was disappointing.⁵⁴ Steed had his hands full with Bible studies, but, together with church members, conducted a successful Appeal for Missions campaign. He met with, and had the respect of significant leading Samoan officials such as heads of government, the chief judge, the commissioner of police, and the American and Chinese consuls.⁵⁵

On October 15 Steed was thrilled after much effort with the baptism of five individuals and with others showing interest.⁵⁶ However, after years of service the Steeds with mixed emotions left Samoa, arriving in Australia on December 10, 1921, with Thomas and Edith Howse taking up the work in Samoa once again.⁵⁷

Ministry Back in Australia

In 1922 the Steeds located in Tumut, NSW, again pitching a tent and conducting an evangelistic series. The meetings attracted detailed coverage in the local newspapers. Prejudice by local clergy kept many people from attending, but meetings in two small villages at Lacmalac and Brungle had good attendances⁵⁸

In 1923, appointed to the North New Zealand Conference, Steed was the pastor of Ponsonby church. There he engaged in pastoral and evangelistic work around Auckland. Steed’s personal approach was appreciated by many, particularly young people. He was able to converse with a large cross section of the community and records indicate that he conducted a number of weddings and funerals.⁵⁹ In 1925 Steed visited and encouraged members in Wellington and Petone. He attended the camp meeting at Dannevirke in 1926, where he participated in a number of baptisms.

In 1926 the Steeds were transferred to Adelaide for pastoral and evangelistic work. He conducted an evangelistic series the city of Adelaide. Using his prophetic charts, he delivered lectures in the Advent Hall. Ruby

Stratford, a Bible worker and preacher, brought a number of people to the lectures. Then in 1928 the Steeds spent a few months in Broken Hill again conducting a series of meetings for the public.⁶⁰

The Steeds were next appointed to the New South Wales town of Maitland. Steed ministered to prisoners in the East Maitland jail, and raised money for the hospital. A camp meeting was conducted on the Singleton showgrounds in 1929, with Steed as a speaker. Thirteen people were baptized. During this time with the industrial unrest because of the lockout and the depression, Steed visited the mining families of Pelaw Main and Kurri Kurri. A number of people attended his public meetings. Three were baptized, and others had Bible studies.⁶¹

A conference camp meeting was held at Pelaw Main in October 1930. Many miners and their families attended regularly.⁶² Robert Hare attributed the attendance to Joseph Steed's tireless work in the district. At the end of the camp and session Steed was asked to continue his much-appreciated pastoral labor in Kurri Kurri. Nineteen newly baptized people had been welcomed into Church fellowship as members.⁶³

The Final Years

By September 1931 the Steeds had retired and were residing in Dee Why, NSW.⁶⁴ Still active, in early 1932 Joseph organized a Sabbath School which met in a Hall at Balgowlah.⁶⁵ But by 1933 the Sabbath School had reorganized and was meeting in the United Friendly Societies Hall, Manly.

Joseph Everson Steed died in 1938,⁶⁶ and Julia Mary Steed died on June 12, 1947, at The Entrance, NSW.⁶⁷ A. G. Stewart wrote about Julia: "In her passing one of the early links with the pioneer days of the advent message in Australia has been broken."⁶⁸ Both Joseph and Julia Steed are buried at Avondale Adventist Cemetery, Cooranbong.⁶⁹

Legacy

The Steeds were pioneers in the Australasian Union Conference in evangelism, personal pastoral ministry. They effectively utilized newspapers and literature in sharing the teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Joseph wrote many articles for Church and secular papers. Popular themes included Christ as man, sin offering, and mediator. Three generations of Steeds followed him in ministry for the Church: Harry Steed, Ernest Steed, Robert Steed,⁷⁰ and Lincoln Steed.⁷¹

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