

Mitchell, Thomas Alfred (1897–1965)

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.

Thomas Alfred Mitchell was a Publishing Department secretary and Home Missions secretary for Australasian Union Conference, and Signs Publishing Co. manager.

Early Life and Education

Thomas Alfred Mitchell was born in the rural town of Rutherglen, Victoria, on July 4, 1897 to Alfred George and Margaret (Sheridan) Mitchell.¹ His siblings were Belle (b.1887), Mary Margaret (b.1889), William George (b.1892), Albert Isaac (b.1903), John Arthur Enoch (b.1905) and Dorothy Irene (b.1908).² When he was eighteen years old he was converted to Seventh-day Adventism and baptized by Elder Harry Mitchell in nearby Albury.³ He was working as the foreman of a carpentry team but left that occupation to study at the Australasian Missionary College and the Sydney Sanitarium.⁴

Ministry

In June 1921 Thomas began to canvass *Heralds of the Morning* in the North New South Wales Conference, rapidly becoming a leading salesman with consistently good results.⁵ In 1922 he sold *Christ's Object Lessons* with equally high sales figures.⁶ The following year, 1923, he briefly tested the sale of *Ministry of Healing* and found



T. A. Mitchell

Photo courtesy of Adventist Heritage Center, Avondale, Australia.

success again.⁷ During his canvassing days he met Ina Victoria Dorse. They were married in the Cessnock church in 1923.⁸

With his canvassing results Thomas demonstrated a gift worth employing in a leadership role to tutor and supervise other colporteurs. He was therefore elected to be the Field Missionary secretary for the North New South Wales Conference in November 1924, the territory being quite familiar to him.⁹ At the August 1927 Australasian Union Conference Session Thomas was chosen to transfer to the Queensland Conference, adopting the same portfolio.¹⁰ A further assignment was given to him in 1930 when he transferred to the same role in the South New South Wales Conference.¹¹

After a decade of experience in departmental work Thomas was elected to be the Field Missionary Secretary for the entire Australasian Union Conference (AUC), now South Pacific Division. He carried this responsibility for five years, 1935 through 1939,¹² and then held the Home Missions portfolio at the same level until 1944.¹³ In this role he was ordained to the gospel ministry on the Sabbath of October 12, 1940, in the Wahroonga church.¹⁴ Throughout 1945 and 1946 he served as Publishing Secretary for the AUC,¹⁵ a role that prepared him to be manager of the Signs Publishing Company in 1947.¹⁶

Final Years

After twenty-five years in administration Thomas began to experience health difficulties so he accepted lighter responsibilities in pastoral ministry in the Queensland Conference, first at Brisbane Central Church and later at Maryborough.¹⁷ In 1951 his health deteriorated further with the first of two heart attacks, prompting early retirement the following year.¹⁸ He and Ina continued to enjoy the company of the Maryborough Seventh-day Adventist community. Thomas passed away in Maryborough on February 20, 1965. At the time their eldest child, Cyril, was a missionary in the Sepik River region of Papua New Guinea, and their three married daughters, Lorna, Meryl and Margaret, were living in Australia.¹⁹ Thomas was laid to rest in the Maryborough cemetery.²⁰ Ina initially stayed with her daughter, Lorna, in Maryborough. Sadly, Lorna died in 1993. Ina was placed in a care facility by her surviving children, Cyril and Margaret in Hervey Bay, Queensland. It was there that Ina passed away in 2002. She was laid to rest with Thomas.²¹

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