

Martin, Harry Rowland (1874–1937) and Prudence Evangeline (Hill) (1883–1974)



Prudence and Harry Martin

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Harry Rowland Martin was an evangelist, educator, and church administrator. Harry Martin's construction projects provided numerous facilities for the Seventh-day Adventist church in Fiji, Solomon Islands, and Australia.

Early Experience

Harry Rowland Martin was born in Victoria, Australia, on December 5, 1874.¹ When the banks failed and work was hard to find during the depression of the 1890s, he decided to try his luck on the West Australian goldfields. He did not find gold, but he did find employment, making wheelbarrows for the miners, providing ice for household food stores, and using his carpentry skills at the mine heads. He made enough money to start his own home and wheat farm at Meenaar, located just north of York, Western Australia.²

The Seventh-day Adventist Church

Fairley Masters, a Seventh-day Adventist colporteur, came selling his books through the York district and Lewis Finster delivered them. Finster arranged Bible studies in the nearby home of the Hill family. There were eight attendees in total, including Rowland and a local blacksmith, Thomas Escreet. In 1903, they were baptized and a Sabbath School was formed in the Hill home. Martin married Prudence Evangeline Hill (born in 1883³) and they spent their honeymoon travelling to the Avondale School for Christian Workers (now Avondale College) at Cooranbong, NSW.⁴

Further Education

Martin had always been a manual laborer. To turn to books was quite a significant change. For three years, 1904-1906, he applied himself to the missionary course. During his graduation service on October 7, 1906, he was one among eleven others chosen to read a short essay they had written. His was titled "Qualifications of the Missionary." He cited famous missionaries, such as William Carey and John Paton, to illustrate his theme that missionaries must be practical people.⁵ During his term at the school, he helped to build Preston Hall, a ladies' dormitory dedicated on September 24, 1906, just two weeks prior to his graduation.⁶ In the same month, Prudence also gave birth to their first child, Jesse Edward, on September 1. Two daughters later joined the family, Edith in 1908 and Grace in 1909. The Martins remained in Cooranbong for a few months after Jesse Edward's birth in order for mother and child to gather strength before sailing back to Western Australia.⁷

Church Employment

Harry Martin was appointed to join a tent crusade at Bunbury, Western Australia,⁸ but his arrival coincided with plans by conference officials to transform an orchard into a training school. With his farming experience and carpentry skills he was deemed the ideal man to pioneer the institution at Green's Landing (later renamed Carmel) in the hills near Perth. The conference had accepted the property from Charles Ashcroft who had planted the orchard and almost completed a home on it.⁹

The conference president handed Martin a pound note to buy an axe and grindstone to get things started. The Martins with baby Jesse moved into a tin shed with earthen floor while a few prospective students arrived to help. Martin quickly completed Ashcroft's home to provide living quarters and a classroom for the students. Prudence Martin acted as cook and matron. With her husband, she shared a joint salary of thirty shillings each week. Income for Martin to build a permanent training school began with the sale of fruit and vegetables and firewood. Church members rallied to donate poultry, a horse and cow, and a block of land. Everyone toiled by day. In the evenings Martin conducted classes. He made a tidy profit during the first year, 1907, and each following year.¹⁰ In 1909, at the West Australian Conference camp meeting, several hundred pounds were given

for Martin to begin construction of the main building further up the slope at the head of the orchard!¹¹ Only a few weeks after the camp meeting there was an outbreak of typhoid fever on the property due to poor sanitary conditions. Martin himself contracted it but recovered. One young lady, Emma Giblett, died!¹²

By the close of 1910, Martin had the main building functional. It was known as the Darling Range School!¹³ He had begun as builder, principal, and teacher at the school in addition to being education secretary of the Conference.¹⁴ As the project strengthened others took the leadership. Martin was a workaholic and his health failed, forcing him to recover briefly back at his parent's property in Victoria. He returned to the district and built a solid mansion named "Heidelberg" for local orchardist, George Palmateer, who had assisted Martin as a member of the school board.¹⁵

First Fiji Assignment

In late 1914, Martin was appointed principal of Buresala Training School on Ovalau Island, Fiji. The family of five sailed from Sydney on February 18, 1915.¹⁶ Buresala was an established mission station, but in some disrepair. Martin built a new dormitory for the young men, improved the mission director's home, and replaced a leaking roof on the young ladies' dormitory.¹⁷ Around 1918, the mission printing press was transferred from Suva to Buresala, so that Martin could oversee the production of hymnbooks, lesson pamphlets and tracts in Central Polynesian languages.¹⁸

In 1920, Martin moved from Ovalau to pioneer Adventist mission work on Vanua Levu, establishing himself at Savusavu Bay.¹⁹ His travels as district director in this region also took him to the islands of Taviuni and Qamea. Before long he was provided with his own cutter, the *Na Talai* (The Messenger), rather than sail on the smelly cockroach-ridden copra boats belonging to the plantation owners.²⁰ Martin's building skills were used again when he helped to construct a boys' school at Navesau along the Wainibuka River on the island of Viti Levu in 1922.²¹

Solomon Islands Interlude

In 1923, the Martin family returned to Australia for their second furlough. The children, now aged thirteen to sixteen, needed access to advanced education. For that reason, Martin left his family in Bickley, Western Australia, while he briefly returned to the Pacific Islands²² to construct a training school, printing office, and other buildings at Marovo Lagoon in the Solomon Islands. He completed the work in eight months and returned to Western Australia in early 1924.²³

Familiar Territory

In view of the fact that Martin returned to the vicinity of the Darling Range School (then named the West Australian Missionary School), church officials seized the opportunity to have him complete the main building that he had begun almost twenty years earlier. Following his original plan, he added a wing for the young men and built wide verandas across both levels of the front of the building which overlooked the orchard. This provided some shade for the hot summer months and protection from the winter rains. As usual, his workmanship was superb. Near the end of 1925, the task was completed.²⁴

Second Fiji Assignment

Towards the end of 1925, Martin was asked to return to the Fiji Mission.²⁵ He brought his family to New South Wales and left his two eldest children at the Australasian Missionary College where they continued their education.²⁶ Prior to sailing for Fiji, Martin was ordained on January 29, 1926, in the Wahroonga Seventh-day Adventist Church, Sydney.²⁷

As Fiji superintendent, Martin was kept busy visiting the various stations and Fijian teachers in his district, much of the time using the *Na Talai* to cross the waters. He played a major role in building the Samabula School for Indian students near Suva.²⁸ Then, in 1927 the efforts for Indians and Fijians were united under one leader and Martin was reassigned to be the director of the West District on Viti Levu.²⁹ His first task was to build his own home at Nadarivatu.³⁰ In 1928, he constructed a training school at Nadrau.³¹ Increasingly, Martin was hampered with rheumatoid arthritis and in 1930 he returned to Sydney for treatment.³² On his return to Fiji, he bravely battled on, giving instructions to his Fijian assistants from his bedside. Three times Martin was carried in a chair to the north coast at Koro Vou in order to supervise the building of a mission school.³³ In October 1932, he reluctantly surrendered his post and sailed back to Western Australia, all the time confined to a wheel chair.³⁴

Retirement

Five years into retirement, now severely crippled, Martin made the trip to the Sydney Sanitarium and Hospital to have his knees straightened so that his legs could at least take his weight. The two operations were a success; however, he died suddenly of a post-operative embolism on November 22, 1937.³⁵ Prudence Martin died on March 23, 1974.³⁶ In addition to the Martins' evangelistic work, Harry Martin's prolific construction projects provided numerous facilities dedicated to training more missionaries.

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