

# Cormack, Alexander William (1887–1968)

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## 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.

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Alexander William Cormack was born on October 12, 1887, in Willoughby, suburban Sydney, New South Wales. His parents were Alexander and Frances (McMahon) Cormack who had four children: Mary Augusta (b.1877), Alexander William (b.1887), Frances Elizabeth (b.1890) and Benjamin (b.1892).<sup>1</sup>

In 1906 the Cormack family attended a tent crusade conducted by Elders George Starr and Frederick Paap. All members of the family were persuaded by the messages.<sup>2</sup> Alexander Cormack, Snr., passed away in late 1907 aged seventy-two. He was twenty years older than Frances. His burial service was held in the Presbyterian section of Rookwood Cemetery, Sydney.<sup>3</sup> His death had precluded his baptism but Frances and the children went ahead and joined the Seventh-day Adventist church. Frances struggled to raise her children but the older ones were able to contribute some income. Alexander, for example, held an office job with the New South Wales Railways Department.<sup>4</sup>

## A Long Church Career

Saturday working hours caused Alexander to resign from his secular work and transfer to the Sydney depot of the Sanitarium Health Food Company. In 1910 he was appointed to be the secretary of the New South Wales



Alexander William Cormack

Photo from *Far Eastern Division Outlook*, March 1937, page 1.

Conference.<sup>5</sup> He held this position until 1914. In the same year he married Evelyn Castilian Irwin in Sydney.<sup>6</sup> They transferred to the Western Australian Conference under appointment following their marriage.<sup>7</sup> Alexander initially served in the ministerial team until October 1916 when he was elected president of the conference at the annual Western Australian camp meeting. He was ordained at the same gathering.<sup>8</sup> He continued for a further two years in Western Australia before transferring to the presidency of the North New Zealand Conference in 1919.<sup>9</sup> Three years were spent in New Zealand before arriving at the Victoria-Tasmanian camp meeting as president-elect in January 1923. His term in Victoria proved to be only a few months prior to his appointment to India.

It was in November 1923 that a request came from the General Conference for Alexander to fill the vacancy of president of the Southern Asia Division with central offices in Poona, India. The Cormack family sailed from Sydney on December 5, 1923, aboard the S.S. "Mongolia."<sup>10</sup> At the time there were fifty Seventh-day Adventist churches with a total of sixteen hundred members in the countries that were then called India, Burma and Ceylon.<sup>11</sup> During his presidency at Poona the number of mission centres proliferated, increasing to twenty-eight under five different governing entities.<sup>12</sup> It was said of his term, 1923 through 1933, "he helped to lay a strong foundation for the work."<sup>13</sup>

In 1934 Alexander was appointed to be one of two associate secretaries at General Conference headquarters to work with Elder Milton Kern.<sup>14</sup> For two decades, 1934 through 1954, the scope of his interest and care was world-wide. By 1954 the number of associate secretaries had risen to seven, then under the direction of Elder Denton Rebok.<sup>15</sup> One associate who knew Alexander well wrote in his eulogy, "He was a good man; so kind and understanding. He could write such kind letters and was always so gracious and thoughtful."<sup>16</sup>

## Retirement

In retirement Alexander and Evelyn eventually moved to Michigan. Their four daughters had married, the eldest, Estelle, pre-deceasing them in 1965. In 1968, while visiting another daughter in Long Beach, California, Alexander passed away peacefully on February 9.<sup>17</sup> Evelyn passed away at Loma Linda on September 5, 1969.<sup>18</sup>

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## NOTES

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3. "Deaths: Alexander Cormack," *Sydney Morning Herald*, December 3, 1907, 6, 12.
4. Roy Allan Anderson, "Australian Leader Awaits Reveille," *Australasian Record and Advent World Survey*, April 1, 1968, 2.
5. Ibid.
6. District of Chatswood, Certificate of Marriage no. 15270 (1914), Government of New South Wales Department of Births, Deaths and Marriages, Sydney, New South Wales.
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8. J[ohn] H. Woods, "Western Australian Camp Meeting," *Australasian Record*, November 27, 1916, 5-6.
9. A[lexander] W. Cormack, "North New Zealand Conference and Camp Meeting," *Australasian Record*, March 31, 1919, 2-4.

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11. "Southern Asia Divisional Section of the General Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1924), 155.
12. "Southern Asia Division," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1933), 190-197.
13. Roy Allan Anderson, "Australian Leader Awaits Reveille," *Australasian Record and Advent World Survey*, April 1, 1968, 2. At the February to March 1929 biennial council of the Southern Asia Division operating policies were voted for all unions, the publishing house and for Vincent Hill School. Extensive policies were also formulated for the Sabbath School, Ministerial, Educational, Medical and Home Missionary and Young People's Departments and several financial policies were also reformulated ("Minutes of the Biennial Council of the Southern Asia Division," *Eastern Tidings* Double Number, May 1, 1929, 4-17).
14. "General Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1935), 9.
15. "General Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1954), 14.
16. Roy Allan Anderson, "Australian Leader Awaits Reveille," *Australasian Record and Advent World Survey*, March 1, 1968, 2.
17. Ibid.
18. "Word has been received..." *Australasian Record and Advent World Survey*, December 15, 1969, 16.

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