

Buckner, William George (c. 1828–1920) and Rosa (Reece) (1850–1901)

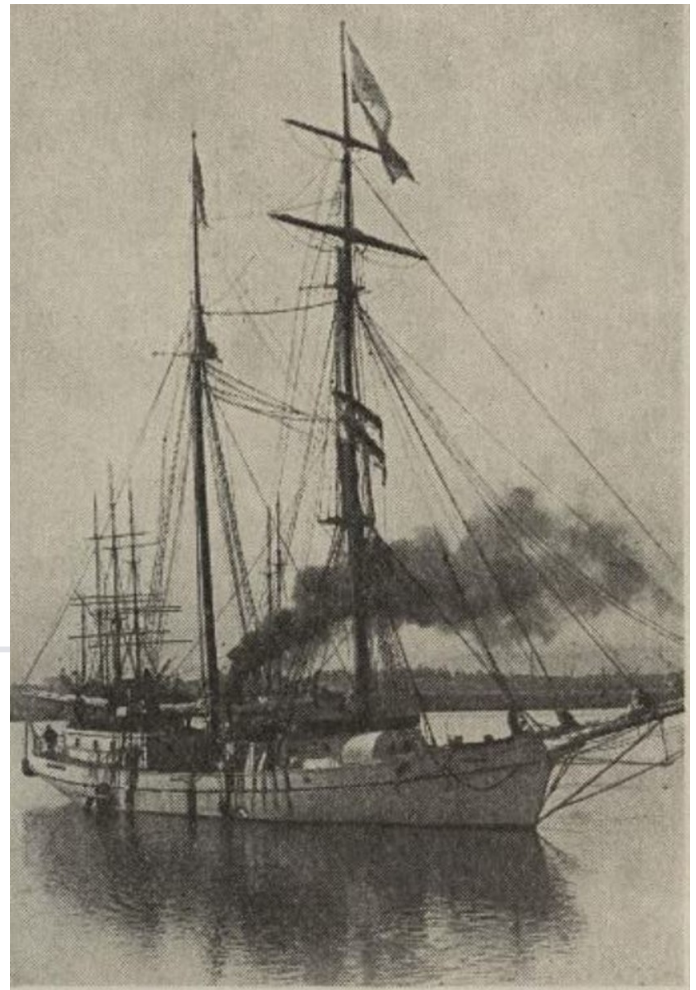
MILTON HOOK

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.

William and Rosa Buckner were missionaries in the South Pacific.

Early Life

William George Buckner was born in Tennessee about 1828 to Burrow and Matilda (Maddox) Buckner. His siblings were: Matilda (b. 1816), Berry (b. 1819), Parmelia (b. 1820), Catherine Sophora (b. 1822), Henry Dewitt (b. 1824), Moses (b. 1826), Nancy (b. 1830), James Small (b. 1832), Elizabeth (b. 1835), and Richard Aylett (b. 1840)!¹ Burrow Buckner was a farmer and self-supporting Baptist minister in the Tennessee backwoods working for the conversion of Cherokee Indians. In 1842, he moved his family to a farm at Turnback Creek, Missouri, and continued preaching on Sundays. The Buckner family was characterized as pioneers with large frames, high cheek bones, striking blue eyes, and straight black hair. A niece remembered the Reverend Burrow Buckner as a lovable and believable eccentric who put red pepper and butter in his coffee?²



Missionary ship *Pitcairn*

Photo courtesy of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Archives.

William was only 11 years old when his father decided on the move to Missouri. Educational opportunities were scarce except a little in the home and a practical experience on their self-sufficient farm.³ When William was about 18, he volunteered to join the 3^d Mounted Regiment of Missouri to fight in the Mexican War, an enterprise culminating in the annexation of Texas from the Mexicans. At that time, William had an uncle serving in Texas as a Baptist minister. William's regiment returned home in October 1848.⁴

After his military experience, William returned to farming in Missouri and married Sarah Frances Butts on January 22, 1850.⁵ He fathered a baby in 1851 to Frances Freeland (or Frieland). The child was named Henry Frieland Buckner⁶ and was raised in William's home. William and Sarah had three sons of their own: James Burrow (b. 1852), Andrew Brown (b. 1855), and William (b. 1859). It was about 1854 when William began farming in Bourbon County, Kansas.⁷ Sarah passed away in 1861, leaving William with four children under 10 years of age.⁸ A little later, he took his family to a farm in San Joaquin County, California,⁹ and then further south into Stanislaus County. He did not remarry immediately.¹⁰

Uniting with Seventh-day Adventists

William's Californian days as a farmer took a significant turn when, at the age of 42, William married twenty-year-old Rosa Reece (one record has her as Rosa Rollins) on May 29, 1870.¹¹ A decade or more later, they joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church.¹² The circumstances of their conversion are not clear, but it is certain that William continued to farm in California until he was 66 years old and eligible for a War Veterans Pension.¹³

In 1894, William and Rosa were selected to sail with a team of missionaries on the schooner "Pitcairn." Considering the six voyages made during the 1890s, William was the oldest individual to take the trip. He was chosen for his practical skills. The vessel departed Oakland, California, on June 17, 1894. Exactly one month later, they arrived at Pitcairn Island, having endured times of frustrating calm interspersed with pitching and tossing in stormy seas. William proved to be a poor sailor and arrived so weakened by seasickness that he had to be carried to arrive on shore and wheeled in a barrow to his residence.¹⁴

After William recovered, he applied himself to engineering a supply of clean mountain water for the Pitcairners because they had suffered a recent outbreak of typhoid fever that claimed some lives. He also erected a windmill that provided power for a mill to grind grain and turn a lathe for wood products¹⁵ and added buildings to the school that Hattie Andre was conducting. Having spent two years on Pitcairn in very productive self-supporting toil, William and Rosa chose to sail with the Pitcairn to Tahiti in July 1896 and board the mail steamer back to California. They had plans to engage in mission work among the Black-Americans.¹⁶ Indeed, for approximately three years, they labored in Montgomery, Alabama, and then returned to San Jose, California. Sadly, Rosa passed away in San Jose on November 1, 1901.¹⁷

Retirement

William spent his senior years in Los Angeles. The 1910 Census records him at suburban Long Beach and living with a new wife, Marie, an elderly woman from Denmark.¹⁸ His final years were marked by poor health necessitating periodic respite care in the National Homes for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers in suburban Sawtelle until he passed away on February 16, 1920, at the age of 92.¹⁹ He was laid to rest as an honored soldier in the Los Angeles National Cemetery. Three years later, Marie passed away and was interred alongside him.²⁰

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