



Oroua Missionary School, c. 1915

Photo courtesy of Adventist Heritage Centre, Australia.

Longburn Adventist College, New Zealand

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Longburn Adventist College has been the senior Seventh-day Adventist educational institution in New Zealand since it was opened in 1913. It has undergone a number of name changes and often been restructured during

its existence.

Spartan Start

When the Pukekura Training School at Cambridge was sold in March 1912 steps were taken to buy a more central position for a Seventh-day Adventist training institution in New Zealand. A suitable property was found at Longburn near Palmerston North and tripartite negotiations began for its purchase. The 241 acres at Longburn, previously owned by the Slack Brothers and a Mr Gaskell,¹ but then in the hands of Jesse Hill, were exchanged for three properties: two were owned by the New Zealand Conference, they being a small allotment in Wellington and the unsold portion of the Pukekura estate. The third property was a small farm at Wanganui owned by church member George Wright, who would, in turn, be given a portion of the Longburn estate. Hill had taken out two mortgages on the property. He added some cash to equalise the deal that was concluded by October 1912.²

The plans were for a coeducational institution offering the last two years approximating elementary school level, known as the Preparatory Course, and the first two years of secondary school as part of the Academic Course. Joseph and Nettie Mills were appointed to lead out, transferring from Pukekura.³ The enterprise was named the Oroua Missionary School, Oroua being Maori for "twice entered," a reference to it being the second attempt after Pukekura to provide Christian education for the New Zealand church youth.⁴

A start was made on the school building in November 1912. A barn was also erected, together with a rough annexe for farm labourers that was dubbed "Petrol Palace" because its walls were fashioned from metal petrol cans, cut open and flattened out. An artesian bore was sunk to provide a reliable water supply. The Mills transferred from Pukekura in December and tented on the estate.⁵ Cabbages, cauliflowers, beans, peas, carrots, turnips, lettuces, potatoes and tomatoes were planted in the rich soil and ten hives of bees were established during the first few months.⁶

The design of the main building was similar to its older sister, the Darling Range School in Western Australia. The central section was two-storied to provide classrooms, kitchen, dining room, chapel and business office. A single storey wing on each side served as dormitories for the faculty and boarding students. The exterior was finished in a neo-Tudor style and the interior consisted of oiled rimu panelling. Mills and his wife were glad to move out of their primitive tent and into the dormitory prior to its dedication on April 30, 1913.⁷ Only a couple of days after occupation the building was shaken by a severe earthquake,⁸ causing a crack to appear in the cement foundation that was never repaired.⁹

Some Success amid Trials

From the start the school farm was an outstanding success. The young men developed a regular clientèle in Palmerston North for excess vegetables. The proceeds contributed to repayment instalments on the building loan of 3,500 pounds. In the first year there were twenty-one boarders and four day students. The following year found twenty-five boarders and six day students in attendance.¹⁰ At the first graduation service, December 21, 1913, Vernon Nilsson and Ruita Cole, daughter of the New Zealand Conference president, received their Preparatory Certificates. Following the service three students were baptised in the nearby Manawatu River!¹¹

After the favourable start a short period of instability occurred that had more to do with an ideological struggle within the denomination than any war on the other side of the world. A divide developed in the denomination between educators who favoured an emphasis on agriculture as opposed to those who wanted to upgrade the academics. The source of the storm was at Australian headquarters and the Australasian Missionary College where the principal was dismissed in September 1914 for allegedly diminishing agricultural work.¹² Mills was rushed from his post in New Zealand prior to final examinations and graduation exercises in order to fill the gap in Australia.¹³ It forced some temporary measures at Oroua Missionary School. Leonard Paap took over as acting principal when Mills left¹⁴ and continued for most of 1915. Harold Piper stepped in for the last months of the year. Mills was returned for the 1916 school year.¹⁵ This instability was not ideal. Enrolment numbers for 1916 slumped to a nadir of seventeen. However, the return of Mills brought fresh confidence and the tally rose to forty in 1917¹⁶ and continued to improve.

The 1916 Military Services Act caused considerable anxiety for the school family: male students and faculty aged twenty to forty-five were included in a monthly ballot to join the forces. In 1917 the principal's name together with all the eligible young men's names were drawn, but only one was selected to serve on a state farm, producing food for the troops.¹⁷ Of equal concern were the annual shortfalls in school finances. During the early years the loan taken to build the school became a burden, repayments barely covering the required interest as the capital gradually rose to 4,000 pounds by 1918.¹⁸ In 1919 the Australasian Union Conference (AUC) paid out the loan in two instalments.¹⁹

New Zealand Missionary School

It was evident the AUC recognised the value of the school in terms of youth baptised and the graduates who entered denominational employment. With an increasing number of missionaries needed for the Pacific Islands a specialised missionary course was introduced and the graduation class of 1921 included three who later served in the island mission field.²⁰ The following year the name of the institution was changed to "New Zealand Missionary School," reflecting its new found focus.²¹

The number of youth who enrolled each year kept climbing, far outstripping the original capacity of twenty-five boarders. The early 1920s averaged enrolments of fifty and double-decker bunks had to be installed. A principal's cottage was built in 1922, his transfer from dormitory quarters freeing up some space.²² In 1923 work

began on second storeys to both dormitory wings. These were completed in time for the 1924 school opening.²³ A separate sound-proofed music building was erected in 1926, removing the noise distraction from the main study area.²⁴ E. Lennard Minchin was the music teacher.²⁵ In the same year two double storey wings were added to the main building, raising the capacity to accommodate one hundred boarders.²⁶

In order to provide more farm land from which to feed the boarders Wright generously donated a portion of his adjoining property.²⁷ Cash crops such as gooseberries found a ready market, injecting finances into the treasury.²⁸ Other school industries included the packaging of dates, wickerwork²⁹ and the production of lamp shades.³⁰ The 1925 bank balance showed a six hundred pounds profit for the year.³¹ This healthy fiscal situation made possible the installation of electric lighting in 1924, replacing dangerous candles and kerosene lamps.³² Positive results continued throughout the 1920s, a quadrennial report, 1926-1929, stating that the average enrolment had been seventy-four. The same report noted that twenty-six graduates had advanced to further education, thirteen had entered the Sydney Sanitarium to train as nurses, eight were employed in church office work and some engaged in canvassing books. No longer did the graduate classes feature those completing only preparatory studies.³³

New Zealand Missionary College

In an effort to upgrade the institution to college level in 1931, Edward Rosendahl, principal, introduced a music course leading to a performance diploma from Trinity College, London. Several students passed the examination at the end of the year, his own daughter receiving honours.³⁴ Rosendahl wished to lift the academic standards further but the momentum was lost with his successor, and the AUC Education Director admitted in his 1936 report that the Business Course remained the only true tertiary level course on offer.³⁵ This was despite the fact that the institution, since mid-1931, was referred to as a college: the "New Zealand Missionary College."³⁶ Not until the early 1940s did anyone graduate from the first year of the teaching or ministerial studies at college level.³⁷

The Second World War years remained buoyant with an average enrolment of one hundred students. Their studies were unaffected because those required to do army training were permitted to join ambulance units during the vacation months. The Sanitarium Health Food Company granted scholarships for some students, making it easier to maintain attendance totals.³⁸ Graduation candidates matched the figures, reaching an all-time high of thirty-three in 1944.³⁹ Once again, the purpose of the institution was illustrated when the 1942 class presented to the college a plaque on which were inscribed the names of forty ex-students who were serving or had served as foreign missionaries.⁴⁰

Steel and Concrete

In the post-War years building materials were scarce but some effort was made to improve the campus facilities at a minimal cost. First to be constructed was a very basic social hall in 1947. One of the earliest functions held in it was a community sale of goods to raise funds to feed the hungry in Europe.⁴¹ It became the venue for indoor games and some graduation services.⁴² Then, in 1955, teachers and students began work on a new block of classrooms, library and administration offices to replace the ageing wooden structure. It was officially opened on April 6, 1958,⁴³ but as rooms had been completed earlier, in 1957, they were occupied immediately.⁴⁴ An extension was added in 1959 to serve as a science laboratory. In 1980 a second storey provided extra classrooms.⁴⁵

Contractors, teachers and students combined to install a swimming pool that was officially opened on October 22, 1961. It was always considered to serve the dual purpose of an emergency reservoir in the event of fire.⁴⁶ In the same year plans were laid to construct a large church building for regular Sabbath worship and the end-of-year graduation services. Church grants provided most of the building funds and students raised considerable amounts for the furnishings. They also worked hard laying storm-water drains and pathways. On April 25, 1964, the first Sabbath service was held and the following day a large crowd gathered for the dedication service.⁴⁷

A Tragic Loss

When Alfred Kranz completed a decade as principal, 1955-1964, Robert Syme was appointed to replace him. Syme and his family were only at the college for a few months when they visited the thermal springs at Rotorua during the term-end holidays. Their puppy fell into a boiling lake and Syme attempted a rescue but the edge broke away and he became submerged in the scalding water. He passed away in the local hospital two days later.⁴⁸ Walter Scragg, Jr., stepped in to carry the leadership and remained another year.

Longburn College

Without losing sight of the missionary perspective that the institution had fostered from the beginning its name was changed in late 1966 to Longburn College.⁴⁹ Scragg, in his 1966 report, acknowledged the change and proceeded to give a bright account of the agricultural enterprises and campus improvements. These included the building of new dormitories to be ready for occupancy in 1967. His one disappointment was the fact that the tertiary program in ministerial training had not been lifted beyond the first year of studies.⁵⁰

Scragg's wish for a lift in the academic level was fulfilled in 1970 when Harold "Bill" Irvine initiated a three year teaching diploma course affiliated with the New Zealand Education Department. The first graduates formed part of the 1972 graduation class. This program flourished until it was terminated in 1991, further students being encouraged to train at Avondale College in Australia.⁵¹

Most of the capital improvements during the 1970s and 1980s were accomplished by volunteer tradesmen. Ex-students began a fund in 1971 to finance a new social hall/gymnasium. For two years Roy Giles volunteered his time to supervise its construction and the official opening took place on June 11, 1978. He also directed the building of a new Manual Arts Centre on the site of the old wickerwork factory. It was ready for use in 1977.⁵² Then, from 1979 through 1981, Philip Williams volunteered his time to supervise the construction of a modern complex incorporating a kitchen, cafeteria, and student lounge.⁵³

Longburn Adventist College

The name "Longburn College" was modified to "Longburn Adventist College" in 1981 to clearly distinguish its denominational ownership. The decade witnessed a growing number of Asian students accepted into the dormitories, their names first appearing among the 1989 graduates.⁵⁴ Funds were set aside from their fees and ear-marked for an International Student Centre on campus consisting of six classrooms, a computer suite, resource room and staff offices. It was opened in 2002. At the time there were fifty international students attending from the Pacific Islands, Germany, Korea, China and Japan. Some came from Saniku Gakuin [Adventist] Academy in Japan for intensive English language tuition.⁵⁵

Today, Longburn Adventist College continues to provide quality Christian education for New Zealand and international young people at the academy or high school level. The enrolment in 2017 was 239, including both day and boarding students.⁵⁶

List of Principals

Joseph Mills (December 1912–October 1914), Leonard Paap (November 1914–October 1915), Harold Piper (October–December 1915), Joseph Mills (1916–June 1920), Edward Rosendahl (July 1920–1921), Henry Kirk (1922–1923), Erwin Cossentine (1924–1927), Edward Rosendahl (1928–1934), George Greenaway (1935–1938), Cyril Palmer (1939–1944), Leonard Wilkinson (1945–1950), Gordon McDowell (1951–1954), Alfred Kranz (1955–1964), Robert Syme (January–May 1965), Walter Scragg (May 1965–1966), Ronald Vince (1967–1968), Ernest Krause (1969–1972), Lyle Davis (1973–1979), Desmond Cooke (1980–1985), John Hammond (1986–1989), Paul Devine (1990–1992), Phillip Hann (1993–1997), Peter Kilgour (1998–2003), Brian Mercer (2004–2006), Bruce Sharp (2007–2015), Brendan Van Oostveen (2016–)

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