



Premises rented at St Kilda Road Melbourne for the first Training School in Australia. Lemuel J Rousseau was the principal of the school. It was the forerunner of Avondale College.

Photo courtesy of *Australasian Record*, November 2, 1925.

Rousseau, Lemuel Joseph (1857–1898)

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Joseph Rousseau was instrumental in establishing the first Bible school in Australasia at St. Kilda, Melbourne, in 1892. He then assisted in the location of suitable ground for the establishment of the Australasian Missionary College at Cooranbong, where he and his wife were among the first Seventh-day Adventist residents. He returned to America and died prematurely at the age of 41.

Early Years

Lemuel Joseph Rousseau was born to Eliza and Frederick Rousseau on October 15, 1857, in Iowa.¹ He preferred to be called Joseph. When he was just a lad, his family moved south to Eldorado, Kansas. He was raised in a Seventh-day Adventist home.² An early mention of his family in church periodicals was an acknowledgment, in the *Review and Herald*, of part of a payment of a \$20 pledge to Battle Creek College by his mother in 1876.³ A few years later Joseph himself attended the same college.

During his studies in Battle Creek he met and married a fellow student named Emma Louise (Eshelman) Saxton about 1886. She was born in Sterling, Illinois, on May 31, 1858.⁴ Emma had previously married Nelson John Saxton on December 27, 1876, and were struck from the membership of their Baptist church when they began to observe Saturday as the Sabbath in the fall of 1880. A year later John tragically died from pneumonia.⁵ Emma then did some colporteur work for a year before attending Battle Creek College to train as a teacher.⁶

Service in Kansas

Joseph and Emma were first appointed to Joseph's familiar territory of Kansas, he as an itinerant evangelist and she as a church schoolteacher. In time they enjoyed a more settled life with Joseph engaged in conference administration.

It was reported that Rousseau was given his license to preach in 1884.⁷ His first recorded evangelistic crusade was in the little town of Bennington, Ottawa County, in July 1885.⁸ There followed campaigns in Traer⁹ and Osborne (1886),¹⁰ Clifford,¹¹ Wichita,¹² Hutchinson (1887),¹³ and Leavenworth (1889).¹⁴ During these years he took an active part in the Kansas Sabbath School Association¹⁵ and held office in the Kansas Health and Temperance Society.¹⁶

In May 1888 Rousseau was ordained at the close of the Kansas camp meeting in Emporia.¹⁷ Later that year he was a delegate at the October 1888 General Conference session in Minneapolis. The Australian Conference was admitted to the General Conference at that same session.¹⁸ Little did Rousseau realize that four years later he himself would serve in Australia. Rousseau served as secretary of the Kansas Conference throughout 1888 and 1889¹⁹ and at the same time as principal of the Ottawa Preparatory School. Emma was his assistant at this school, a first for Kansas.²⁰ At the 1889 Kansas camp meeting, held at Ottawa, Joseph and Emma gave up their furnished tent to Ellen White so that she could be more comfortably accommodated.²¹

Return to Battle Creek

In 1890 the Rousseaus returned to Battle Creek College for further studies.²² In October he joined Ellen White in a series of weekend revival meetings at nearby Otsego.²³ The following year, 1891, he was given the pulpit on

one occasion in the Dime Tabernacle at headquarters, preaching from the word "Prepare to meet thy God" (Amos 4:12).²⁴ Joseph and Emma remained in Battle Creek until the northern summer of 1892.

Service in Australia

The Rousseaus received an appointment from the General Conference to establish the first Seventh-day Adventist missionary training school in Australia. They enjoyed a smooth passage across the Pacific Ocean from California to Melbourne, Victoria, arriving in July 1892.²⁵

The school premises in St. Kilda, suburban Melbourne, were already hired and furnished as classrooms and boarding apartments. The two-story building was located opposite parkland, providing a relatively healthy environment, but from the start it was always considered to be a temporary arrangement, as a rural setting was preferred. The school facility was named the Australasian Bible School and opened for its first term of 16 weeks on August 24, 1892. Rousseau acted as principal and teacher of history and the natural sciences. Three other teachers were named, among them was Emma, who assisted with the English language classes.²⁶ The 1893 terms ran from June to August and September to November.²⁷ This was followed by a southern summer term²⁸ and a final term beginning in April 1894.²⁹ During breaks Rousseau promoted the school in Hobart³⁰ and Adelaide,³¹ preached and baptised in the Melbourne suburbs,³² and spoke about education principles at the Middle Brighton camp meeting³³ and Melbourne Sabbath School Convention.³⁴

In 1894 Rousseau became increasingly involved with the search for a permanent rural site for the training school. Early in the year he was elected to the search party and was aware of a preference for a property at Cooranbong, NSW.³⁵ He also knew that a government assessor had given a poor estimate of the soil quality. When the winter school term finished in Melbourne, he joined a search party at Cooranbong in August. He sampled the soil himself and agreed with the government assessor. Uniting with fellow searcher, Arthur Daniells, and the Board of Foreign Missions in America, he advised they search further. The constituency rejected the advice, voting to buy the property. Despite the odds against him, Rousseau continued a private search for a better property. He found one at Penrith in western Sydney. In December he persuaded William White and his mother to inspect it. They agreed the soil was superior, but the price was beyond their meager funds. Rousseau's hopes were dashed in the pit of poverty.³⁶

Joseph and Emma were among the first Seventh-day Adventists to settle at Cooranbong in order to supervise the preparation of the estate for the new training school. A disused hotel was rented near the property. They transferred to the premises early in 1895. It, together with a few tents scattered in the yard, served as a temporary home, classroom, and dormitory for a team of men who attended two classes by Joseph and Emma each day and cleared the land in exchange for their instruction and lodging. On one occasion he turned away a man who offered to work.³⁷ Ellen White heard of it and wrote him a letter of reproof, admitting that the man had a rough exterior but was a Christian at heart and should not have been dismissed so coldly.³⁸

These were spartan days, and Emma was suffering ill health. He began to sense that a school in the backwoods with a heavy emphasis on manual labor was not his calling. He was more of a classical pedagogue. Nevertheless, Rousseau's peers elected him late in 1895 to what they called the "Avondale College Board." When the General Conference Education secretary, William Prescott, arrived in Australia about the same time, he and Rousseau agreed that the word "school" better suited the academic level offered at the institution. It therefore came to be known as "The Avondale School for Christian Workers."³⁹ Prescott conducted a series of lectures at the hotel on Christian education principles, March 26 through April 23, 1896. Rousseau himself was qualified to assist him, but because of health problems, took no leading part. Following the meetings the Rousseaus requested a one-year leave of absence to return to Battle Creek Sanitarium in order to receive treatment. They sailed from Sydney on July 6, 1896.⁴⁰

Sudden Tragedy

While recuperating in Battle Creek Rousseau decided to improve his missionary prospects by taking studies in the Medical Missionary College. Two years into his studies he suffered a lung hemorrhage on August 29, 1898, and quickly died.⁴¹ He was 41. For the second time in her life Emma had lost her husband prematurely. For a few years she worked as matron in the New England Sanitarium at Melrose, Massachusetts. In 1919 she moved to Los Angeles and made her home with her sister, Dr. Lillian Magan, withdrawing within herself and becoming a recluse.⁴² She died peacefully January 24, 1937.⁴³

Retrospect

A decade of service from both Joseph and Emma Rousseau was characterized by energy and loyalty. They were recognized as individuals with academic and organizational abilities in various departments of the church, including Sabbath School, temperance, home missions, evangelism, and church school education. Delicate health robbed them of a prolonged contribution.

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