



West Australian Missionary College (later Carmel Adventist College), c. 1930.

Photo courtesy of Milton Hook.

# Carmel Adventist College, Australia

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Carmel Adventist College is a coeducational boarding school near Perth, Australia. Carmel Adventist College began as the Darling Range School early in 1907.

## Beginnings

In 1906 one could take the steam train from Perth, Western Australia, and travel up the zigzag line to a ridge in the Darling Range that led to Canning Mills where jarrah trees were sawn into lumber. Along the ridge the train would stop briefly at places such as Gooseberry Hill, Heidelberg, Green's Landing, and Pickering Brook. In the surrounding valleys early settlers were establishing orchards.<sup>1</sup> A small group of settlers at Heidelberg (renamed Bickley) and Green's Landing (renamed Carmel) were new converts to Seventh-day Adventism. They became aware that their church leaders in Western Australia wished to establish a school for the training of denominational workers and missionaries. One of those settlers, Charles Ashcroft, was part-way through building his home on his new orchard at Green's Landing and was impressed that he should offer his property as the site for the training school.<sup>2</sup> He offered to donate his land, orchard, and home, estimated to be worth one thousand pounds, providing that church authorities pay a two hundred pound bank loan against his name and one hundred pounds to get him started on a new orchard.<sup>3</sup>

Church leaders visited the orchard in November 1906 and were satisfied with its soil quality, water supply, and access. The deal with Ashcroft was made and Harry and Prudence Martin, a young married couple fresh from the Avondale School for Christian Workers, were employed to prepare the property as a co-educational boarding school in order to begin classes in 1907. From the earliest planning stages, it was named the Darling Range School.<sup>4</sup>

Harry Martin was given one pound to buy a digging fork, an axe, and a grindstone to begin work. Firewood was cut and sold to buy groceries and vegetable crops were planted between the rows of fruit trees. He dismantled an old stable and built a shack for himself and his wife. He then completed Ashcroft's home to house boarding students and added a small chapel and temporary classrooms.<sup>5</sup> Beginning on January 13, 1907 Martin conducted evening classes with only two students present. Another arrived the following day and others came and went at irregular intervals throughout the year. Lilian Clarke, a recent teaching graduate of the Avondale School for Christian Workers, arrived on January 15 to assist him.<sup>6</sup> Regular day classes with tuition did not begin until June 5 in Bible, English language, history, physiology, mathematics, and music in addition to elementary drills in reading and penmanship.<sup>7</sup> Most students came with only basic schooling. The academic level was pitched at what was called preparatory studies, that is preparatory to a college course. Students could pay all or part of their tuition fees by working in school industries such as wood cutting, vegetable and fruit growing, and a fledgling breakfast food factory producing granola roasted and ground in the school kitchen.<sup>8</sup>

Work began in February 1907 on what became the main school building overlooking the orchard in the valley. On February 28 Martin started a shallow excavation over which the kitchen would be built,<sup>9</sup> followed by an adjoining dining room and a chapel and classrooms upstairs. He also erected a two-story wing of dormitory rooms on the south side.<sup>10</sup> By July 1907 Clarke reported there were seven boarding students, four from the local area, all using the new dining room as an improvised classroom and the kitchen doubling as a dining room.<sup>11</sup>

In April 1909 Martin and a number of students were stricken with typhoid fever. Government health authorities inspected the school sanitation and insisted on some improvements.<sup>12</sup> Tragically, seventeen-year-old Emma Giblett succumbed to the disease on May 4 and was buried in the forest to the side of the orchard. The episode was a sobering experience for the entire church constituency.<sup>13</sup>

## Stabilization

Illness and the pressure of work slowed Martin's usual industriousness. A replacement principal for 1910 in the person of Roger Brown, an American teacher at the Avondale School, enabled Martin to concentrate on construction work.<sup>14</sup> Brown served two years until his wife, Elizabeth, suffered poor health that forced them back to their homeland.<sup>15</sup> In his remarks at the close of the 1910 school year Brown spoke highly of Martin's building progress and mentioned that four students had gone to assist in tent missions and five had begun canvassing books.<sup>16</sup> At the close of the 1911 school year he proudly announced that enrollment had reached fifty and four students from the school had qualified to begin the nursing course in 1912 at the Sydney Sanitarium.<sup>17</sup> Brown was the only American to serve as principal of the institution.

William Smith transferred from New Zealand to replace Brown.<sup>18</sup> His tenure witnessed the first acknowledgement of graduates during year-end services. The 1912 class graduated five from preparatory studies.<sup>19</sup> Three of those progressed to graduate from the Intermediate Course in 1913, together with another eight from preparatory studies.<sup>20</sup> The four years of preparatory studies were equivalent to grades four to seven. The overlapping Intermediate Course matched grades six to nine and therefore could be classed as academy level.<sup>21</sup> Enrollments fluctuated. Smith reported that the first eight years saw totals of fourteen (1907), twenty-one (1908), thirty-six (1909), forty-seven (1910), fifty (1911), thirty-two (1912), fifty-one (1913), and forty (1914). By 1914 a large cistern was installed to gather rainwater from the main building and a dam was constructed in the middle of the orchard to store a supply from a spring that never ran dry. Smith also had a wish list—he wanted the main building painted. He believed the kerosene lamps were dangerous and gave inadequate light for reading. He hoped that one day the students would have proper desks in the chapel and classrooms instead of common chairs to sit on.<sup>22</sup>

Smith took up chaplaincy work in 1917 and was replaced by Albert Piper<sup>23</sup> for a three-year tenure, followed by Joseph Mills, in 1920 and 1921.<sup>24</sup> By this time the institution offered some advanced courses in limited fields in addition to the elementary ones. The upper levels were a two-year business course, the first two years of a teaching course, and preparatory studies for a nursing course.<sup>25</sup> A few students were attracted to a rudimentary ministerial course and a missionary course.<sup>26</sup> Enrollments between 1919 and 1922 averaged forty-five. In 1920 all debts were finally erased and the following year a profit of four hundred pounds was realized. The orchard, vegetable garden, and two hundred poultry contributed to the finances.<sup>27</sup>

Edward Rosendahl was principal from 1922 through 1927.<sup>28</sup> During this era Martin returned to resume work on the main building. He demolished Ashcroft's original structure and used the timbers to construct a matching two-story wing on the north side of the main building. Other additions were made so that both wings were given attic rooms and wide balconies at the front. The interior was finished with ceilings of stamped metal sheeting and high dados and staircases of jarrah hardwood. By the end of 1925 Martin had it completed.<sup>29</sup> Late in 1925 it was voted to re-name the enterprise the West Australian Missionary School.<sup>30</sup>

## West Australian Missionary School

Church authorities had invested 4,350 pounds to complete the main building and looked for bright prospects for the future.<sup>31</sup> It was not to be. In 1926 enrollment slumped to only forty students and the annual accounts showed a loss of one thousand pounds. Enrollment for 1928 was only twenty-four and it seemed the institution would close.<sup>32</sup> Four were granted preparatory certificates and three were given proficiency certificates.<sup>33</sup> In the same year Albert Speck replaced Rosendahl as principal. Fortune favored Speck with an enrollment of fifty for 1929,<sup>34</sup> which strengthened into 1930 with an enrollment of fifty-seven,<sup>35</sup> sufficient to save the enterprise. The opening of the Sanitarium Health Food (SHF) Company factory on site in March 1933 guaranteed more students a ready income for their fees and cemented the financial viability of the school.<sup>36</sup>

## West Australian Missionary College

In 1932 the institution was upgraded to college level and its name amended to West Australian Missionary College.<sup>37</sup> An upgraded business course and a more comprehensive ministerial course was offered in addition to the preparatory studies. At the end of the year Hector Kingston became the first to graduate from these ministerial studies while John Abbott was the first graduate from the improved business course. Other senior courses were represented in graduation classes of the 1930s. The first graduates of a bible workers course appeared in 1935 followed by graduates from an intermediate normal (teaching) course in 1936.<sup>38</sup> In 1933 the first candidates sat for the government advisory board examinations with "satisfactory" results.<sup>39</sup> Entrants were submitted each subsequent year, these examinations becoming known as the Junior and Leaving Certificates.<sup>40</sup>

The graduation weekends adopted a familiar routine, beginning with a vespers service on Friday evening and Sabbath services in the nearby Bickley Church where the students and faculty regularly met.<sup>41</sup> On Sabbath afternoon there was always a baptism service held at the college dam in the center of the orchard and a musical program on Saturday evening in the college chapel.<sup>42</sup> On graduation Sunday approximately two hundred visitors would gather on the lawn in front of the main building for refreshments, followed by the graduation service in the chapel.<sup>43</sup> The first time a graduation class president was mentioned was in connection with the 1934 service.

Physical improvements included the introduction of electric lighting in 1931.<sup>45</sup> In 1934 a customized woodwork building was erected behind the main building and woodwork was incorporated into the curriculum. In the same year the front lawn was terraced. Work began on a major addition to the front of the college, adding a principal's office and business office downstairs and a library and two classrooms upstairs,<sup>46</sup> which was completed in 1935. The exterior was finished in a neo-Tudor style that characterized the building until its demolition decades later. A swimming pool was also installed in 1935 which doubled thereafter as an alternative baptismal site.<sup>47</sup>

The routines of the college year were maintained throughout the Second World War years but enrollment and graduation totals were severely affected. Ministerial, teaching, and business students continued to complete their courses. However, the graduation classes showed a decreasing number, beginning with fourteen (1939), eleven (1940), four (1941), eleven (1942), five (1943), three (1944) and only one in 1945. One contributing factor to the downward trend was the military enlistment of over thirty young men who were students and potential graduates during the war years. Unfortunately, two of those men, Bevil Glover and Ronald Dorrington, were killed in action when in the service of the Royal Australian Air Force.<sup>48</sup> Very few returned soldiers took up studies, most of them focused on immediate employment to support themselves and their young families. For this reason, there was an average of only ten annual graduates in the 1950s.<sup>49</sup>

## The Halcyon Era

Toward the end of 1950 college principal Cyril Palmer requested another appointment and Raimund Reye was transferred from evangelistic work in New Zealand to replace him.<sup>50</sup> The year 1951 heralded a period of fifteen years of steady growth under Reye's leadership. In most years the enrollment was close to one hundred, peaking in 1964 at 132.<sup>51</sup> Attendance at graduation services could no longer be accommodated in the chapel, numbering up to seven hundred at times, so a marquee was erected on site each year.<sup>52</sup> Even the student numbers became too large to attend nearby Bickley Church on Sabbath mornings, as was the custom, so the College Church (later Carmel Church) was formed on September 12, 1953, meeting in the chapel.<sup>53</sup>

Housing a large number of students in a two-story wooden building always presented a fire risk, especially with the kitchen ovens incorporated into the structure. As early as 1956 plans were made to provide single-story brick dormitories. The first building, for the young men, was completed and opened at the start of the 1959 college year. It was fittingly named Charles Ashcroft Hall.<sup>54</sup> A matching second building for the young women was completed in 1961 and named Kathleen Giblett Hall after an early teacher and sister of Emma Giblett. A new swimming pool was installed directly behind this dormitory to double as an emergency water source in case of fire.<sup>55</sup>

In 1956 an agricultural science course was introduced and linked to a state government examination. The two-year course of ten units only included two units of agricultural science<sup>56</sup> but it was argued that the inclusion of

bookkeeping and building construction units were beneficial for would-be farmers. Practical experience was given in dairying, poultry, and beekeeping.<sup>57</sup> Given the denominational preference for rural living this innovation was a logical one but it attracted few students. The youth were conflicted with the pressure to train as ministers, nurses, teachers, and church accountants. The course was unique among SDA colleges in Australasia but few young men were attracted to it, two of the best students achieving honors in the 1966 state examinations.<sup>58</sup>

Reye, affectionately known as “Dad,” was farewelled at the 1965 graduation weekend. He had witnessed the largest graduation class the previous year, once again a high percentage of them progressing to further education elsewhere or entering directly into denominational employment.<sup>59</sup>

## Carmel College

The departure of Reye approximated the decline in enrollment and graduation class numbers, one factor being the opening of a competitive college in Victoria. For example, the 1968 class consisted of only twenty-two young people, a little over half of the 1964 total.<sup>60</sup>

The year 1969 marked the beginning of a change of name for the institution, removing the reference of intent to train missionaries and using the nomenclature of what had become common usage: Carmel College. It was no coincidence that the change occurred when college principals began to accept government educational grants. Among the earliest government financial assistance was money for a new science building;<sup>61</sup> government authorities apparently impressed with several recent awards won by Carmel students who entered the Science Talent Quest sponsored by the West Australian Science Teacher’s Association.<sup>62</sup> Government money would not have been forthcoming to train missionaries but it was readily available to tutor budding scientists.

The institution rapidly morphed into a secondary school or academy even though it retained the title “College.” Following Reye’s departure, tenure for principals became short term. Long-held customs surrounding graduation weekends provided some sense of continuity. The year 1974 saw the first *Encounter* publication, an annual souvenir of mug shots and school events. Special awards for music, leadership, sports, deportment, and most improved student were also introduced. A major building program was simultaneously undertaken to replace the old wooden building, providing a large two-story brick structure for classrooms and administration offices.<sup>63</sup>

Despite the significant capital investment in new buildings, there were ominous signs of trouble ahead. From 1964 through 1974 agricultural endeavors sustained losses every year.<sup>64</sup> The irony was that the institution was training agriculturists to manage profitable farms but could not make a profit on its own farm. The dairy was an early casualty, followed by the poultry enterprise, and eventually the fruit crops were picked and marketed by Carmel Church members to help pay for a new church building opposite the SHF factory. Annual enrollment numbers also began to drop with totals rarely reaching one hundred. Upper level students were transported



each day by bus from the Perth suburbs to swell the totals, a costly and time-consuming exercise. In 1981 the enrollment fell to seventy-six,<sup>65</sup> necessitating a rescue mission to save the college.

## Carmel Adventist College

In September 1981 the West Australian Conference (WAC) executive committee voted to accept management of Carmel College on an experimental basis for twelve months, relieving the Trans-Australian Union Conference who had carried the responsibility for decades.<sup>66</sup> In October 1982 the WAC took the final step and assumed ownership of Carmel College.<sup>67</sup> From the beginning of the 1983 college year the institution would be known as Carmel Adventist College. A relatively small number of students were boarders. For example, in 1995 there were twelve young women and eight young men in the respective dormitories. A fleet of vans was used in the Perth metropolitan area to carry most students to and from classes. The ratio of non-SDA students rose from an initial 15% to a later 25% marker, but these percentages were abandoned in 1997 in favor of a flexible one, varying each year and throwing open the enrollment to anyone who desired a Christian education. Improved enrollment totals reflected this policy change, the 1994 total being 193 and the 2003 total reaching 349. Samples of the graduation (Year 12) totals provide a modest increase: Twenty-six (1983), thirty-seven (1996), and thirty-six (2007). Government grants made possible some ongoing improvements to the campus. Major works included a large gymnasium completed in 1994 that also served as a venue for graduation services. An arts building was added in 2004, the same year that the college received government accreditation.<sup>68</sup>

In May 2003 the horrific news reached Australia that former student Lance Gersbach had been brutally murdered while on mission service in the Solomon Islands. His death was the most recent of five former students who died in tragic circumstances during overseas mission service. The earlier four were Frederick Lang (1930), Delys Lemke (1953), John Rowden (1975), and Lens Larwood (1979). The institution had always fostered a missionary spirit and hundreds of former students journeyed overseas to fill mission roles as nurses, ministers, teachers, and accountants, a few paying the supreme sacrifice.<sup>69</sup>

A master plan for campus development was proposed in 2006 that included the possibility of nearby Bickley Primary School transferring to the Carmel site, there being ample space with the closure of the orchard.<sup>70</sup> This eventuality was remote because of the costs involved but from 2013 the two institutions have been nominally linked under the titles Carmel Adventist College - Secondary<sup>71</sup> and Carmel Adventist College - Primary.<sup>72</sup> In 2018 a council of thirteen was established by the WAC to oversee routine operations of the two institutions. The secondary division particularly faces vigorous competition for enrollments because of a proliferation of private secondary schools. Average enrollment at both the secondary and primary levels in recent years has approximated 180 each.<sup>73</sup> The secondary level is registered to accept international students and provides opportunities in extra-curricular activities such as choir, various sports, and volunteer community work under the club name Bush Rangers.<sup>74</sup> Both educational institutions are financially viable, well appointed, and continue

to provide quality Christian education as they have done for over a century.

## List of Principals

1907-1909	Harry Martin
1910-1911	Roger Brown
1912-1916	William Smith
1917-1919	Albert Piper
1920-1921	Joseph Mills
1922-1927	Edward Rosendahl
1928-1932	Albert Smith
1933-1935	Cyril Palmer
1936-1939	Thomas Lawson
1940-1946	Alfred Kranz
1947	Alfred Martin
1948-1950	Cyril Palmer
1951-1958	Raimund Reye
1959	Alfred Martin
1960-1965	Raimund Reye
1966-1970	Wallace Hammond
1971-1975	Graeme Litster
1976-1980	Robert Bower
1981-1982	John Nicholls
1983-1984	Graeme Shields
1985-1987	Dennis Reye
1988-1989	Russell Skipworth
1990-1993	David McClintock
1994-2003	Brian Mercer
2004-2005	Jan Barnett
2006-2011	Gavin Williams
2011-2013	Paul de Ville



2014 (January-June)	Davina Peters
2014 (July-December)	Ron Hiscox (acting principal)
2015-	Nicholas Thomson

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