

Michaels, Charles Philip (1854–1936)

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.

Pastor Charles Michaels commenced his working life with the Seventh-day Adventist Church as one of the first literature evangelists in Australia. He held a number of pastoral, departmental and administrative roles in his forty-nine years of service.

Charles Philip Michaels was born on January 12, 1854, to James and Theresa (Newell) Michaels in Swansea, Wales. He was christened on February 8, 1854, in St. Mary's Anglican Church in the center of Swansea.¹ He migrated to Australia, settling in Trentham, Victoria, where he operated a retail business. Mendel Israel opened a tent mission in Trentham on March 16, 1887, less than twelve months after the first group of Seventh-day Adventist missionaries arrived in Australia.² After hearing Israel preach about the Saturday Sabbath Charles began to observe it, closing the doors of his shop on Saturdays and selling the business soon after.³

Church Career

Salesmanship was a natural talent possessed by Charles. After the sale of his business in Trentham he learned the art of door-to-door selling of denominational books, becoming one of the earliest Australian canvassers. He made such a success of it that he was selected to be the General Agent for Australia, training and supervising many others in the skill.⁴



Charles Michaels

Photo courtesy of South Pacific Division Heritage Centre.

Charles married Lillian Downer⁵ who was born in Bendigo, Victoria, in 1855.⁶ It was there that she accepted the SDA faith in 1890.⁷ After Charles married he was allowed to sell the large book titled *Ladies Guide* which contained explicit female anatomical details. In 1896 he sold scores of them in the South Gippsland district of Victoria, earning a handsome income.⁸

Gradually, Charles accepted church roles additional to his canvassing. In 1897, when debate was topical about the wording of the Australian Constitution prior to Federation, he helped to organize the collection of thousands of signatures to a petition to parliamentarians that advocated religious freedom and the separation of Church and State.⁹ In 1898 he led a small group attempting to establish a Melbourne retirement home for the elderly.¹⁰ He also managed the Central Australian Tract Society¹¹ and was a member of the Central Australian Conference (CAC) executive committee.¹² In the same year he assisted the conference president in a tent crusade in Bendigo.¹³ He was a CAC delegate at the 1899 Australasian Union Conference (AUC) Session at Cooranbong, New South Wales.¹⁴ In the same year he spent some months canvassing in Launceston, Tasmania,¹⁵ returning to the mainland to help establish a church in Geelong, assisting in the services and giving health talks and Bible readings and selling books in the local area.¹⁶

In late 1901 a major drive was undertaken to pay off accumulated debt attached to the Avondale School for Christian Workers. It was coupled with a push to sell thousands of copies of *Christ's Object Lessons*, a portion of the proceeds being used to liquidate the debt. Charles was put in charge of training scores of church members in Australasia to sell the book. In order to accomplish his task he visited almost every church in New Zealand, Victoria, Tasmania, New South Wales and South Australia. At the 1903 AUC Session he presented a report, outlining the success of the campaign with many young people responding and selling from door-to-door.¹⁷ The total sales of the book cleared the £10,000 debt.¹⁸

After the debt was paid off Charles returned to canvassing, achieving excellent results with *Great Controversy*. He concentrated on Melbourne suburbs so that he would not have to be absent for lengthy periods from his growing family.¹⁹ He and Lillian had three sons and three daughters to nurture.²⁰ Once again, Charles accepted additional roles together with his canvassing. He was a board member of the Melbourne Helping Hand Mission for the poor²¹ and Religious Liberty secretary for the Victorian Conference during 1908 and 1909.²² He was ordained to the gospel ministry in 1909.²³

Charles gained wider experience when he was appointed to serve in the West Australian Conference, 1910 through 1912.²⁴ He then transferred to the South Australian Conference until 1923 where he accepted the role of vice-president for most of his term.²⁵ He returned to the Victorian Conference in 1924.²⁶ Back in familiar territory he served as pastor of the Ballarat church, 1924 through 1928, and Geelong church, 1929 through 1936.²⁷

Lillian suffered with heart trouble for years and finally succumbed on March 29, 1931.²⁸ Charles never retired. He was well-known as "an indefatigable worker in the cause of God." At the age of eighty-two he was still caring

for the Geelong church. On the evening of April 28, 1936, he was walking from his home in Geelong to post a letter when he suddenly collapsed and died. Both Lillian and Charles are buried in the Melbourne General Cemetery.²⁹

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