



First Graduating Class - all Theology students, November 22, 1968. Front row left to right: Aaron Lopa, Rex Tindall (staff), Jim Manele, Alex Currie (staff), Allan Paul. Back row left to right: Ben Duna, John Dio, Piuki Tasa, Roawai Baiau, Peter Duna, Phillip Daboyan.

Photo courtesy of Robyn Tindall Muskita.

Sonoma Adventist College, Papua New Guinea

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Sonoma Adventist College is located inland from Kokopo on the Gazelle Peninsula, East New Britain Province, Papua New Guinea (PNG). It is a coeducational tertiary college offering various certificates, diplomas and degrees across a range of disciplines, including agriculture, building construction, commerce, primary education, and theology.¹

The Early Years of Sonoma

Sonoma Adventist College was established in 1968. Its founding followed from the report of a commission set up by the Australasian Division to study educational needs in the Coral Sea Union Mission and the Bismarck Solomons Union Mission. The report recommended that effective as from 1968, an interunion college for ministerial training and primary teacher training be established that would serve the needs of both unions.²

A. R. Mitchell, president of the Bismarck Solomons Union Mission, in his report to the union session in 1967 spoke of the need for the college:

For months now negotiations have been going on between the union and the division with a view to decentralizing the Jones Missionary College. It has been felt that the isolation of Kambubu makes the work of teacher and ministerial training almost impossible. When dealing with increasing numbers of students, both these vital aspects of our missionary training program require that teachers have ready access to a number of government schools for practice teaching. Likewise, the training of young ministers demands centers of population where experience in both personal and public evangelism is available to them. Kambubu is effectively isolated from both these essentials by reason of the vagaries of boat travel and/or flooded rivers.

A very desirable property of some 250 acres known as the 'Sonoma' plantation was selected above all others which had been inspected, as the site most ideally suited to our needs. An abundance of running water, an area of natural bush flanking the creek, and more than sufficient level land for semi-mechanized gardening influenced the brethren in their final unanimous decision to recommend its purchase. Before legal contracts could be signed, certain green lights, as it were, needed to flash their approval.

A portion of the whole, now registered with the lands department as agriculture lease, must needs be first converted into a mission lease, thus providing for the many college buildings and campus requirements. During the intervening weeks since the annual meetings, successful negotiations with the director of lands, Port Moresby, the district commissioner, Rabaul, also the director of education for the territory, have now been completed.

The division committee has not only approved the purchase, but on the initiative of the officers has voted that the 'Sonoma' property be the object of another volunteer youth building project during vacation 1967–1968.

We believe the challenge of such a project will meet with an enthusiastic response from our many missionary-minded young people in the homeland who are qualified tradesmen.

A school building, dormitories for both boys and girls, a dining room, and ablution blocks all need to be erected before the changeover can be effected in time for the 1968 college year.³

In fact, the buildings were not ready for the 1968 school year. But nevertheless, nine ministerial students came to Sonoma from Kambubu and Kabiufa at the beginning of 1968. As there were no classrooms or dormitories at the Sonoma site, an adjoining property, Winalin (also known as Vunalin) was leased for the 1968 school year. With other students that arrived, there were 21 students in 1968, and they were accommodated in a corrugated-iron shed formerly used by plantation workers. All students in that first year were males. They washed in a small creek and showered under a waterfall. They grew and prepared most of their own food.⁴

Sonoma Plantation provided sufficient land for food production, classrooms, dormitories, staff housing, married student accommodation, administration offices, and a library. The college was established with the philosophy that study and work together produce the most effective post-college workers. Students had the opportunity to earn their fees by working during the main vacation period in the college gardens and college building projects. This enabled the college to be largely self-sufficient particularly with regard to food during the college year. Because the college was not fully established as yet, the first graduation which came on November 22, 1968, was a graduation from Kambubu School and there were 15 graduates: 9 ministerial students and 6 building construction students.⁵

During 1968 the offerings of the youth societies from around the Australasian Division were dedicated to the Sonoma College building project.⁶ Then at the end of 1968 a fly-and-build team from Australia arrived and built the main classroom block.⁷ They were supported by many volunteers from churches in and around Rabaul and students from Jones Missionary College who cleared cocoa and coconut trees from part of the plantation land.⁸ The classroom block was complemented by the completion of a library, administration offices, assembly hall, and one block of dormitories during 1969. In 1970 additional dormitories, and staff housing was added. Then in 1971 a boarding primary demonstration school for up to 200 students was added.⁹

Sonoma Adventist College began with a mission to provide an Adventist tertiary education for students completing high school in PNG, the Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu by training people who may serve the Seventh-day Adventist Church, other private entities, and the government, or be self-employed in Pacific Island nations. Its major aim and vision from the beginning has been to create an environment conducive to graduating people who can become lifelong committed Christians to serve as disciples of Jesus Christ.¹⁰

The Ethos, Mission, Vision and Values of Sonoma College¹

The following statements are extracts from the Staff and Student Handbook for 2019.

Ethos Statement:

“Sonoma Adventist College is a registered Seventh-day Adventist tertiary institution in Papua New Guinea guided by principles outlined in the Bible as interpreted and adhered to by the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Papua New Guinea and worldwide. The college believes and operates by upholding all the fundamental beliefs and values of the SDA Church. Its aim is to serve the country and other neighbouring nations by providing an education of the highest quality within the context of the Adventist Christian belief and aspiration. It promotes Christian values through subject content embedded in its academic programs, work opportunity, social activity, and spiritual exercise experiences offer to all its students. The college works and cooperates in partnership with the Office of Higher Education to support and promote the vision and goals of the Papua New Guinea Government.”

Mission Statement:

“The mission of Sonoma Adventist College is to achieve effective educational outcomes in the area of primary teaching, ministerial, agriculture, building, business studies, and basic principles in acceptable work behaviour, to individuals who wish to study in an Adventist college environment. The college’s special commission is to prepare competent, productive, and contributing citizens who may serve the Seventh-day Adventist Church or other organizations, or be self-employed in Papua New Guinea and neighboring island nations.”

Vision Statement:

“Sonoma Adventist College seeks to continue and improve as a provider of Christ-centred tertiary education in Papua New Guinea, enriching its students and graduates to serve effectively in their professions as lifelong Adventist Christians giving God-honoring leadership in the home, church, place of work, community, and country.”

Values Statement:

“The mission of Sonoma Adventist College, a Christian tertiary institution affiliated with Pacific Adventist University, is derived from the following core values espoused through its motto: ‘To know, To love, To Serve.’”

Overview of Significant Developments²

Listed below by year are the significant developments in the history of the college subsequent to the events which brought about its establishment:

1970–1971 The primary teaching course was transferred from Kambubu to Sonoma.¹³ The college became a separate entity under its own board. The first graduation was conducted on the campus.

1972	A course was developed for training administrators throughout PNG and the Solomon Islands. It was taught in the semester break. John Cernik was its coordinator. Forty-nine students graduated at the end of the year. ¹⁴
1973	Upgrading courses for teachers began. A one-year domestic science course was introduced. It was also conducted in 1976.
1974	A Commerce Department was added to provide secretarial and clerical training.
1976	The Agriculture Department was transferred from Kabiufa and Mount Diamond High Schools to Sonoma under Ken Dever.
1978	A mechanics course was started, but soon phased out because of a lack of teaching staff support and resources. The course was under Dicks Tutuo, a mechanic from the Solomon Islands
1979	First year of a two-year secretarial course began.
1981	A building construction course was transferred from Kambubu to Sonoma under Robert Walker.
1991	Student enrollment reached 291. ¹⁵ The beginning of a three-year community teaching diploma training. This course was designed by Olga Ward of Sonoma Teacher Training Department and was adopted by the PNG government's Education Department for all teacher education. ¹⁶
1994	During the Rabaul volcanic eruption in 1994, the administration with the support of staff and students, accommodated several thousand victims of the eruption in the classrooms and makeshift tents on the campus. ¹⁷ Classes were conducted as normal except for four days during the peak of the eruption in September.
1995	Ministerial and teacher education graduates given some credits to continue into degree study at Pacific Adventist College.
1997	Teacher education students with good passes became eligible for the National Scholarship (HECAS) provided by the PNG Education Department.
1999	Beverly Kaleva became not only the first Papua New Guinean to be principal of Sonoma Adventist College but also the only woman principal to hold this post at the college.
2000	Samson Kuku returned from doctoral studies in the Philippines to become principal of the college.
2001	First reunion homecoming took place, organized and staged successfully by Kuresa Tagai. Grade 12 as the compulsory entry requirement into teacher education was introduced and implemented.
2003	Introduction of a trimester teacher education program to keep in line with the rest of teacher education colleges in PNG. A diploma course was introduced for past certificate graduates with satisfactory grade point averages. The first graduates from this program graduated in November 2003. Compulsory grade 12 entry requirement into business studies is introduced. The second reunion day was celebrated under the leadership of Jim Manele. The Sonoma Alumni Association was formed but had yet to be registered.
2004	The three-year diploma course for teacher education was phased out and replaced with the trimester teacher education program. A building technology course began with an annual enrollment instead of a new intake every second year. The prime minister, Grand Chief Sir Michael Somare, was the graduation guest speaker. For the first time, the college graduated over a hundred students and since then has maintained this number.

2005	Sonoma was officially recognised as a tertiary institution by the South Pacific Division. His Excellency the governor general of PNG worshipped on a Sabbath at Sonoma. The Sonoma logo and the college motto, "To know, To Love, To Serve," was introduced.
2006	A diploma course in agricultural science was introduced. A diploma course in building technology and architecture drawing replaces the certificate course in building construction. The Vunalin property is purchased in the name of the Papua New Guinea Adventist Association, jointly funded by the Papua New Guinea Union Mission and the South Pacific Division
2007	Final study program of the inservice diploma in primary school teaching. A total of 126 teachers graduated with a diploma in teaching in January of 2008. Sonoma Alumni Association was registered by Isaiah Senau, treasurer of the association.
2008	Celebration of the 100th year of Adventism in PNG and fortieth anniversary of Sonoma Adventist College.
2009	Signing of a memorandum of understanding with Pacific Adventist University (PAU), recognizing academic credit transfer from Sonoma to the university, beginning with the teaching course and followed by the ministerial studies and business studies courses. Beginning of a three-year course for certificate qualifications in elementary school teaching at Kabiufa Adventist Secondary School in Eastern Highlands province. A second group convened on campus at Sonoma Adventist College.
2010	Building technology and architectural drawing course and business studies course became two-year courses. An academic affiliation with Pacific Adventist University was signed in October. PAU for the first time participated at graduation as a partner in the affiliation agreement signed between the two institutions. PAU's representative was Tracie Mafile'o.
2011	The first enrollment of six students taking degree study in primary school education, an affiliated academic program with Pacific Adventist University. There was a successful application to the Incentive Fund Association, a subdivision of Aus-AID Australia, to fund five projects: an 84-bed female dormitory; a health clinic; nurse accommodation; maintenance on the current girls dormitories; and a health studies classroom. The total grant was 2.3 million PNG kina.
2012	The guest for graduation was Barry Oliver, president of the South Pacific Division and chancellor of PAU. First graduates (five students) of the Bachelor of Education (Primary).
2013	Lawrence Tanabose, general secretary of the South Pacific Division, was the guest speaker at the graduation. A creative phonic program, with a first intake of 200 students, was conducted at Sonoma. A second cohort of 200 students attends at Kabiufa Adventist Secondary School.
2014	The enrollment reaches 634 students. Sonoma Demonstration Primary School agrees for Sonoma male students to use an old girls dormitory to accommodate extra male students. The first married students duplex (SPD-sponsored). The administration of Sonoma Community Elementary School requests a site for an additional classroom. At the end of the year 234 students graduate. In its budget the national government allocated 2 million kina for Sonoma infrastructure development. PNGUM formally announced at the year-end session that a multipurpose building will be built at Sonoma College, funded by the South Pacific Division. Sonoma was formally recognized by the Ministry of Higher Education Research Science and Technology as an institution of higher and technical education in Papua New Guinea.
2015	Staff houses and classrooms for Sonoma Community Elementary School to be built depending on funds. The college board requested the administration to develop a college campus master plan and strategic plan. A proposal is made to build a boys dormitory, classrooms, staff houses, and extension to the existing dining hall.

2016	Enrollment of 803 students. The campus master plan and strategic plan were in development. Work on the multipurpose building is commenced. Student graduates numbered 244.
2017	Enrollment of 722 students. New bore for water was drilled, and it started supplying water to the campus. Work on the first phase of the multipurpose building was completed. Work was completed on the dean of men's house. There was an accreditation visit to the college by Adventist Accrediting Association team.
2018	Enrollment of 690 students. Extensions to the library were completed. Work on second phase of the multipurpose building completed, and college board approved phase 3 to be the last stage of the building. Graduated 271 students. Celebration of 50 years of operation. ¹⁸
2019	Enrollment of 619 students. Second crop of balsa wood harvested by PNG balsa from Vunalin land.

Principals of Sonoma Adventist College

K. J. Bullock (1968–1969); M. P. Cozens (1970–1971); Raymond Wilkinson (1972–1976); Richard Anderson (1977–1983); Walter Bidmead (1984–1986); Martin Ward (1987–1991); Ron Pieterse (1992–1993); Ray Hobson (1994–1995); Ian Littlewood (1996–1998); Beverly Kaleva (1999); Malachi Param (interim, 2000); Kuresa Tangi (interim, 2000); Samson Kuku (2000–2006); Malachi Param (2007); Samson Kuku (2008–2014); Isako Esekia (2015–).

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NOTES

1. Much of the information in this article is written from the personal knowledge of the author, who was the principal of Sonoma Adventist College between 1977 and 1983.
2. A. E. Jones, "Bismarck Solomons Union Mission Annual Meetings, Held December 1967," *Australasian Record*, February 26, 1968, 6.
3. A. R. Mitchell, "Session and Annual Meetings: Bismarck Solomons Union Mission," *Australasian Record*, March 27, 1967, 9, 10; see also A. R. Mitchell, "Explosion and Expansion," *Australasian Record*, November 6, 1967, 7, 16.
4. Alexander S. Currie, founding head of Sonoma Adventist College theological training course, interview with the author, Cooranbong, NSW, September 1, 2018.
5. A. S. Currie, "Sonoma's First Graduation," *Australasian Record*, January 20, 1969, 12; John R. Lee, "Kambubu Graduation 1968," *Australasian Record*, January 20, 1969, 12.
6. "Please go to the young people's meetings . . ." *Australasian Record*, January 22, 1968, 5.
7. David Weslake, "The Sonoma Project 1968-69," *Australasian Record*, May 26, 1969, 8; David Weslake, "The Sonoma Project—In a Nutshell," *Australasian Record*, May 26, 1969, 9.
8. A. S. Currie, "New Adventist College Established: Sonoma Prepares for Invasion," *Australasian Record*, November 4, 1968, 8.
9. David Weslake, "The Sonoma Project—In a Nutshell."
10. Personal knowledge of the author, who was the principal of the college between 1977 and 1983.
11. "Sonoma Staff and Student Handbook, 2019," available from Sonoma Adventist College, P.O. Box 360, Kokopo, 613, East New Britain Province, Papua New Guinea.

12. This overview is provided by the "Sonoma Staff and Student Handbook—2019," unless otherwise indicated.
 13. A. E. Jones, "Report from the Bismarck-Solomons Union Mission," *Australasian Record*, March 31, 1969, 10.
 14. D. C. Roy, "Sonoma Adventist College Graduation," *Australasian Record*, February 5, 1973, 2.
 15. "Sonoma Bulging," *Record*, April 13, 1991, 9.
 16. Olga Ward, interview with the author, May 1, 2019, Cooranbong, NSW. .
 17. "Division Committee Jottings," *Australasian Record*, January 21, 1984, 5.
 18. Malinda Kotoveke Philip, "Sonoma Celebrates 50 Years of Service," *Record*, January 26, 2019, 8.
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