

Hare, Robert and Henrietta (Johnson) (1858–1953)

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Ross Goldstone, M.A. (Avondale College, Cooranbong, New South Wales, Australia) retired in 1998 as Senior Pastor, Avondale Memorial Church, Cooranbong, NSW, Australia. New Zealand born, Goldstone has served the Church as a pastor, Conference Youth Director, teacher, and Sessional Lecturer at Avondale College. He has authored nine books relating to Adventist history, including *The Angel Said Australia*. He is also co-author of four other books on Adventist history in Australasia. In retirement Ross Goldstone continues to research and write Adventist Church history.

Robert Hare was an evangelist, writer, poet, and editor. Hare and his wife, Henrietta, made a significant contribution to the work of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Australia and New Zealand.

Family Background Robert Hare was born in Lurgan, Armagh, Ireland on December 21, 1858 and died in Wahroonga, NSW, Australia, on the 23 August, 1953.¹

His parents, Joseph and Margaret (Maggie) Hare were Methodists and migrated to New Zealand with their nine children aboard the "*Lancashire Witch*," arriving in Auckland on June 3, 1865.² Wishing to be of Christian witness to the Maoris, the family settled in Kaeo, approximately 130 miles north of Auckland where they became involved in road building, the timber industry and house and boat building.³ In the evenings Joseph Hare, an experienced school teacher, home-schooled his children, since there was no school at that time in Kaeo.⁴

Early Years: 1866–1888



Robert Hare

Photo courtesy of Adventist Heritage Centre, Australia.

In 1866 Robert's mother, Maggie, died in childbirth.⁵ It was a devastating loss to the whole family and particularly to young Robert - a loss that weighed on his mind throughout his life. On June 17, 1868, Robert's father, Joseph, married Hannah Skinner, a widow with seven children living in Kaeo.⁶ More children were born to this union so Robert ended up with twenty-two siblings. Joseph and Hannah shared an interest in the welfare of the local Maoris, he in their spiritual lives and Hannah, a nurse, in their health. A number of members of the family, including, Robert, learned to speak the Maori language.⁷ As Robert grew into manhood he, like his father, became a lay preacher in the Methodist congregation.⁸ In November, 1885 Edward Hare, then living in Auckland, brought Pastor Stephen Haskell to visit with his family in Kaeo.⁹ At the invitation of Father Joseph Hare, Haskell preached a number of sermons in the Methodist Church. He also held biblical readings with the Hare family. As a result, led by Father Joseph, the family accepted the sacredness of the seventh-day Sabbath and other distinctive Adventist teachings.¹⁰ At this time Robert determined to travel to America to attend Healdsburg College in preparation for ministry. He took passage on the "*Alemada*" for America, leaving Auckland on January 5, 1886.¹¹

Marriage and Early Ministry in Public Evangelism: 1887–1898

It was at Healdsburg that Robert Hare met a young lady staff member named Henrietta Johnson; the lady destined to be his life-partner for some sixty-five years. As a twenty-two year-old, she had enrolled at the College to train as a Bible Instructor but on arrival was made a faculty member due to her four years' experience as a teacher.

Having spent his summer vacations in public evangelism, 1888 became a significant year in Robert Hare's life.¹² He graduated from the Ministerial Course at Healdsburg College, and in the morning of May 22, was ordained to gospel ministry. That same afternoon, he was married to his beloved Henrietta Johnson. Their honeymoon was spent on board the "*Alemada*" as they sailed for Auckland, New Zealand to commence tent evangelism.¹³ They arrived on Sabbath, June 23, 1888, and, after a brief visit to Kaeo to meet with family, sailed south to Napier to associate with Arthur Daniells in tent evangelism in that regional centre.¹⁴

Robert Hare's first solo attempt at public evangelism in Australasia took place in Gisborne, a coastal town with a population of 2000 some 140 miles north of Napier.¹⁵ The opening meeting was held on Sunday evening, January 27, 1889 and drew the attention of the editor of the *Poverty Bay Herald* resulting in favourable publicity.¹⁶ However, the seventy-nine meetings did not take place without opposition. But in spite of this opposition the Gisborne Seventh-day Adventist Church was organised with an initial membership of fourteen, some of whom were of Maori heritage.¹⁷

At the completion of the Gisborne meetings the Robert Hare family moved south to Palmerston North where he repeated his series of lectures.¹⁸ As a preacher Hare revealed a love of words, and audiences were attracted by his oratory.

On the 6th of November, 1890, at the request of the leadership in Australia, the Hare family were transferred to Tasmania. Robert commenced evangelistic work in the village of Latrobe, with a population of 1500 at the time. Then in 1892, and 1893 Hare, in association with David Steed, conducted evangelistic meetings in Parramatta and Kellyville, to the west of Sydney.¹⁹

Ellen White's Response to the Public Ministry of Robert Hare Ellen White had been shown weaknesses in Hare's ministry - particularly in the meetings he conducted in Palmerston North. He had attracted a following to his oratory more than to the message. The rebuke was so strong that it caused Robert Hare to declare at first that he may as well give up preaching, a reaction Mrs. White indicated she anticipated.²⁰ Fortunately, he was humble enough to accept the rebuke after a time and continued in ministry. Ellen White wrote two letters of rebuke during his early ministry followed by one letter of encouragement. In April, 1895 she wrote: "I am constrained to write to you some things, not to discourage, but to lead you to gird on more firmly the heavenly armour . . . Brother Hare, God will strengthen and bless you if you will make Him your trust. Do not, I entreat of you, leave the field of battle. The God of Israel is on the side of truth and righteousness. Press the battle to the gates...." She signed the letter with the words, "In much love."²¹

In 1896 the Hares were appointed to replace Pastor Corliss in pioneering the work of the Church in West Australia; a colony in the throes of a gold rush.²² On November 7, 1896, Pastor and Mrs Hare, together with their sons, Reuben and Eric and baby Ruth, arrived at the Port of Fremantle only to be confronted by numerous issues: accommodation difficulties; moral issues in the life of the minister Corliss left to care for the work on his departure for America; massive unemployment and its consequent social problems; sickness amongst those who had identified themselves with the Adventist message, and the largest and most deadly outbreak of epidemic typhoid in Australian history in Perth and the goldfields of Kalgoorlie and Coolgardie due to poor sanitation and a polluted water supply.²³ Thousands hopeful immigrants were arriving in the Port of Fremantle on a weekly basis only to find the town of Perth logistically incapable of coping with such a population explosion.²⁴ Little wonder that Robert and Henrietta found their ministry a challenging experience as they endeavoured to reach a gold-crazed community with the gospel. The Adventist presence was aided by members re-locating from the eastern states; this enabled Robert Hare to report a Sabbath School membership of around forty members.²⁵

Editor and Bible Teacher: 1898 – 1919

Towards the end of 1898 Robert Hare received an invitation to become the editor of two of the denomination's periodicals - The Bible Echo and Signs of the Times and The Southern Sentinel.²⁶ This appointment necessitated a return to Melbourne, Victoria. His departure from West Australia was keenly felt by the struggling church in that State.

Robert Hare excelled in this position until 1902 when he returned to Tent evangelism in Victoria and South Australia.²⁷ It was while running an evangelistic series in Broken Hill in 1908 that he was invited to become the Bible teacher at what is now known as Avondale College.²⁸ His initial tenure was from 1908 to 1911. He showed great interest in the music at the College, as he was an E flat Bass Horn player.²⁹ The students loved his classes and profited from his experience in conducting evangelistic series in large tents. He then returned to teaching in 1914 and remained there until 1919.³⁰

The Later Years: 1920–1946

Having completed his years of service as the Bible Teacher at the Australasian Missionary College (now Avondale College) Robert Hare returned to public evangelism. He remained an evangelist until his retirement. Altogether he was to spend 41 years of his ministry as a public evangelist.³¹ Many of his evangelistic series were conducted in small rural towns as well as in the larger metropolitan centres.

In his later years Robert Hare became a popular and much loved speaker on the camp meeting circuit.³² It was in this aspect of his ministry that his influence reached the minds and hearts of people who would not have otherwise come in contact with this veteran pioneer.

March 1924 found Robert and Henrietta departing from Wellington, New Zealand on board the "SS *Remuera*," bound for Pitcairn Island.³³ Their six month stay on this isolated outpost in the Pacific Ocean culminated with a baptism of sixty-five candidates.³⁴ Other Pacific Islands to profit from Robert Hare's ministry included Fiji (six months), Norfolk Island (five months), and Lord Howe Island (five weeks).³⁵

In 1928 Robert Hare retired at 70 years of age. Altogether Robert and Henrietta had lived in fifty-eight homes.³⁶ Their final years were spent in their own home in Wahroonga, New South Wales. Here they loved to keep up to date with the progress of the work in which they had played such a significant part.

Five children had been born to Robert and Henrietta Hare: Reuben Ethelbert, born in Gisborne, New Zealand, June 16, 1889; Eric Burnham, born in Auburn, Victoria, October 12, 1894; Ruth Naomi, born in Glenferrie, Victoria, August 19, 1896; Nettie Roberta, born in North Fitzroy, Victoria, July 23, 1899; and Enid Lucy, born in Stawell, Victoria, July 17, 1905. All of Robert and Henrietta Hare's children, with their partners, made a significant contribution to the work of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.³⁷

Contribution

Robert Hare was one of the first and most successful public evangelists in Australia and New Zealand. Many others were to follow in his footsteps. He combined his gift for evangelism with gifts for oratory and writing. In 1948 Robert Hare was made an honorary member of the International Mark Twain Society for his contribution to the world of literature. In his lifetime he composed more than 2000 poems, many of them published in the

denomination's journals.

At his funeral Pastor A. G. Stewart stated: "Few workers in the cause of God have made such a contribution to the spiritual life of the church in this field [the Australasian Division] as Robert Hare, who by pen, voice and deportment has ever inspired God's people. Monuments of his ministry are found in many places. His books, his articles, his poems live on in the lives of many."⁸⁸

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