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Introducing Sunnyside

Marian de Berg

Administrative Assistant at the Ellen G White Seventh-day Adventist Research Centre at Avondale College of Higher Education and author of *Stories from Sunnyside*

As an administrative assistant working at the Ellen G White Seventh-day Adventist Research Centre at Avondale College of Higher Education for the past two decades, I've been privileged to read Ellen White's correspondence and manuscripts. She wrote a large portion of her writings, particularly those on the life of Jesus, while living in Australia. I've been encouraged and moved by her life's journey while she lived in Cooranbong, a town near Lake Macquarie, New South Wales, where Avondale is located. Her correspondence during this time reveals Ellen White as a caring Christian woman giving her all to the work of the gospel.

She had a broad vision for the Adventist Church's work in Australia and was instrumental in helping establish Avondale—the Avondale School for Christian Workers, as it was originally known. The purchase of the bush land for the school came when Seventh-day Adventist membership in Australia had not yet reached 1000.

For the past six years, I've also been actively involved in various ways with her Australian home—"Sunnyside." I lead group tours for those ranging from Year 1 students to retirees. I train volunteers and organise a roster each month. Visitors come from all around the world to see the home Ellen White built and lived in for six years in the 1890s.

This is the background to my book *Stories from Sunnyside*. It's not a scholarly work, but it draws significantly on letters and other materials she wrote while in Australia. To this extent, the stories draw on primary source materials, which will be of interest to scholars of Adventist history in particular, and religious history in general.

Ellen White was born in Gorham, Maine, on November 26, 1827, and died peacefully at her "Elmshaven" home in California, USA, on July 16, 1915, at 87 years of age. During her lifetime, she ministered to many people in homes, churches and camp-meetings around the world. She lived in Basel, Switzerland, for two years in the mid-1880s and in November, 1891 set sail for Australia, intending to spend a similar amount of time assisting the newly developing church in the South Pacific. However, her stay—in Australia and New Zealand—lasted nine years, from 1891 to 1900.

The stories in *Stories from Sunnyside* come from this period, with particular emphasis on Ellen White's everyday activities at "Sunnyside" from 1895 to August, 1900, and her travels to various camp-meetings and speaking appointments. From the time she arrived in Australia, she travelled extensively along the east coast of Australia, from Rockhampton in Queensland to Hobart in Tasmania. She also ventured as far west as Adelaide in South Australia and spent 10 months on the North Island of New Zealand.

The colonisation of Australia began in January, 1788, when the British established a penal colony at Sydney Cove. The First Fleet of 11 ships left the shores of Great Britain on May 13, 1787, and arrived at Sydney Cove in mid-January, 1788. Free settlers arrived as early as January, 1793. By the 1890s, Australia was a group of six British colonies: Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania, South Australia and Western Australia. It was not until January 1, 1901, that these states became an independent nation under Federation to become the Commonwealth of Australia. Queen Victoria, the reigning British monarch, was Australia's Head of State. By 1900, Australia's population had almost reached four million.

Transportation around the country was rough. Roads needed attention after rain and carriage wheels created deep ruts. Boats reeked of cigar smoke, and train engines spat out smoke and cinders onto people and clothing through the open carriage windows.

Seventh-day Adventism reached Australia in 1885, only six years before Ellen White arrived. There was a six-day working week, with Sunday considered sacred and a financial depression had hit hard with banks foreclosing many properties. Most working converts to Adventism lost their jobs for refusing to work on Sabbaths. Many of these had large families to support and wanted to build churches so they could worship on the seventh day. Young men and husbands were also being sent from Australia to South Africa to fight in the Boer War.

Times have changed dramatically over the past 100 years, from the horse and buggy era of Ellen White's time in Australia, to motorised vehicles, airplanes and ships. In *Stories from Sunnyside*, I

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invite you to come back in time with me and re-live Ellen White's life "down under" and the blessings she brought to this fledgling group of believers.

Truly, we can say her life here in Australia was an living example of Matthew 25: 35—40. Her farewells potentially included , "I was hungry ... I was thirsty ... I was a stranger ... I needed clothes ... I was sick ... I was in prison ..." And Jesus' affirmation, "When you did this for anyone, you gave me something to eat ... you gave me something to drink ... you invited me in ... you clothed me ... you looked after me ... you came to visit me."