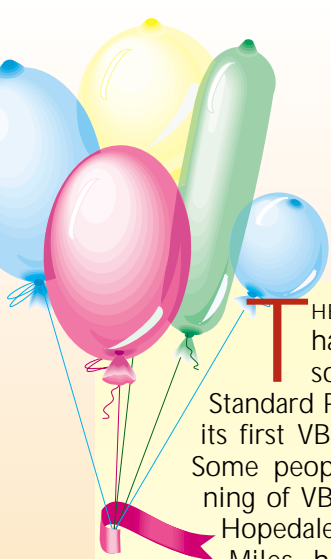


# Standard Publishing's VBS Celebrates 80th Birthday



**T**HE MINISTRY OF VBS had been around for some time when Standard Publishing produced its first VBS program in 1923. Some people trace the beginning of VBS back to a park in Hopedale, Illinois. Mrs. D. T. Miles had been a public school teacher before her marriage and continued teaching Sunday school classes afterwards. Because she felt that the short time she had with the children on Sunday mornings was not nearly enough to teach them all they needed to know, she came up with the idea of organizing a daily school for teaching the Bible during the summer months.

Four years later, Mrs. Eliza Hawes began what she called an "Everyday Bible School" in a rented beer parlor in New York City. This pioneering woman continued her efforts for seven years, incorporating the use of Bible stories, music, and crafts.

Dr. Robert Boville of the New York City Baptist Mission Society became aware of the work and believed it could be a useful model for other churches. He began conducting schools, enlisting the help of students from Union Theological Seminary. One thousand students were enrolled one summer in five schools. He founded the World Association of Daily Vacation Bible Schools in 1922.

One year later, Standard Publishing produced the very first printed VBS curriculum. Enough material was provided for a five-week course for three age levels (kindergarten, primary, and junior).

## Still Relevant

From those beginnings a ministry has grown that reaches to every state and spans the globe. It has touched the lives of millions of young people and adults. From time to time people question the relevance of this more-than-century-old

program to today's fast-paced and ever-changing culture.

Still, the ministry of Vacation Bible School has continued to grow and expand. In a recent VBS focus group, many VBS directors and children's ministers stated emphatically that VBS was their main evangelistic outreach each year. (It is also one of the most economical.) The few who did not consider it an evangelistic outreach considered it to be their main discipleship emphasis for their own kids.

Although Mrs. Miles and Mrs. Hawes might notice many differences between their schools and the programs of today, they would no doubt be pleased to note that the ministries they envisioned are just as relevant in the 2000s as they were in the 1890s.

## Still Reaching

Not only are VBS programs still relevant, they continue to reach the unreached. Standard Publishing regularly receives feedback not only from churches in the U.S., but from missionaries and nationals around the world.

A missionary in Indonesia wrote after conducting a VBS using materials produced by Standard Publishing, "Maybe the whole world is in a dark situation, but especially for Indonesia, we feel it is becoming darker for us, the Christians. Therefore, whatever might happen, we will always shine for Jesus."

A worker in the Philippines rejoiced that last year they had 28 teams of people who went out to 35 places to teach around 9,000 children. From Australia came these comments: "As I went back to Australia this year and saw the growing band of young adults we have been nurturing, it made my heart glad. Every Sunday morning at Sunday school, they choose to sing the VBS songs."

## Still Rewarding

The VBS materials produced today by Standard Publishing are different than those produced 80 years ago.

More materials are available today, implementing current teaching techniques and seeking to take advantage of today's technology.

But one thing has not changed—the underlying desire to impact lives for Christ. How rewarding it is to read letters from those who have invested themselves in VBS and have seen the Lord work through their efforts.

A short-term mission worker wrote: "We had a total of 36 Navajo children accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. Praise the Lord!"

From a worker in a small church came these comments: "We have not had Bible School in our small church for about seven years. We launched out on *An Extreme Adventure with Jesus...* and had one of the best VBS's our church had ever experienced."

Another wrote, "This was the most fun and exciting VBS we have had in a long time. Everyone at church is still talking about it. . . . A young man came and gave his life to Christ."

For those who pioneered this program in the 1890s and those who pour their hearts and energies into VBS today, there could be no greater reward than seeing young people give their lives to Christ or be drawn into a deeper walk with him.

Happy birthday, Standard Publishing's VBS. May you be found faithfully and effectively serving in another 80 years! ■

*Kay Moll is the director of VBS at Standard Publishing.*

