

# Pambu

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## MEMORIES OF THE PACIFIC ISLANDS 70 YEARS AGO

Living in a home for the aged in a Seventh-Day Adventist village at Blacktown, N.S.W., is an old man whose memories of the Pacific islands stretch back almost 70 years to the days when there were still a few tattooed islanders in the Marquesas and the 69-year-old Premier of the Cook Islands, Sir Albert Henry, was still only a small boy.

The old man is Pastor G.L. Sterling, a former SDA missionary, who served his church in the Society Islands, Cook Islands and Marquesas for 30 years from 1908 to 1938.

The PMB learned about Pastor Sterling towards the end of 1973 when he was living at Cooranbong, N.S.W., and wrote to ask him if he had preserved any diaries or letters of his years in the Pacific; and, if not, whether he would consent to be interviewed.

Pastor Sterling replied that he was then 89 years old, that he had destroyed his diaries about nine years earlier, and that he was becoming very forgetful about the names of people and places. 'I fear that any information that I could give you would be very fragmentary owing to my failing memory and that it would not be worth much to you,' he said.

Despite this caveat, the PMB's executive officer travelled to Cooranbong to talk to Pastor Sterling and found that, although he was almost blind, he was otherwise in excellent health. He had an extremely good memory for events of his early career, and was able to provide many basic and little-known details about the work of his church in the eastern Pacific.

It was intended to publish a record of the interview with Pastor Sterling in Pambu at the time. However, because of a plethora of other material then on hand this was not done, and the transcript found its way into a "pending" file where it lay forgotten until recently rediscovered. Having ascertained that Pastor Sterling is still going strong, it is now published in the expectation that the information in it will be of value to Pacific scholars.

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*The Pacific Manuscripts Bureau was established in 1968 as part of the Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University, Canberra. Its purpose is to locate unpublished documents of value concerning the Pacific Islands and to obtain copies of them on microfilm for five world libraries specialising in Pacific research. The five libraries are the National Libraries of Australia and New Zealand; the Mitchell Library, Sydney; the Library of the University of Hawaii, Honolulu; and the State Library of Victoria.*

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Pastor Sterling said that he was born on 27 December 1884 at Otsego, 40 miles from Kalamazoo and about 50 miles from Battle Creek, Michigan. In those days Battle Creek was the headquarters of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church in the United States. The headquarters are now at Tacoma Park, Washington.

With his wife, Pastor Sterling went to Tahiti as a missionary in 1908. This was about 23 years after John I. Tay had become the first Adventist missionary to visit the Pacific. Tay's visit had created considerable interest in SDA circles in the United States in missionary work in the Pacific, and church members were asked to contribute to a fund to build a touring vessel. The vessel that was eventually built was called the Pitcairn and she made seven or eight trips to Pitcairn and other Pacific islands between about 1890 and 1900. Missionaries were landed on Pitcairn, Tahiti, the Cook Islands, Samoa and other islands west to Norfolk Island. The captain (Marsh) died in Auckland. Tay died in Fiji.

The first missionary to Tahiti was H.A. Read. He was assisted by a Mr. Green who brought out a small printing press. Read and Green arrived in Tahiti at the end of 1890. They established themselves in Papeete and Pirae. When Pastor Sterling arrived 18 years later, Pastor B.J. Cady was in charge of the mission. He had been in Tahiti for 13 or 14 years. There was also a Mr. Chapman and his wife, but they returned soon afterwards to California.

After a few weeks, the Sterlings were sent to Raiatea where they remained for about two years. They opened a school there. Pastor Sterling quickly learned the Tahitian language. As neither he nor his wife knew French, they taught only in English and Tahitian. When the French authorities learned of this, they compelled the Sterlings to close the school.

The Sterlings then went to Borabora, where they carried on evangelistic work. After about a month, an SDA missionary from New Zealand, F.E. Linden, was sent to Tahiti from the Cook Islands to take charge of the mission in place of Pastor Cady, who was returning to the United States. The Sterlings were then transferred to the Cook Islands to take over Linden's work. They remained there for the next nine years - 1910-19. Pastor Sterling preached his first sermon in Tahitian just before his departure from Borabora.

In the Cook Islands, the Sterlings were first stationed on Rarotonga, then on Aitutaki, and then on Mauke. For the first six months Pastor Sterling used the Tahitian language, which the Rarotongans could well understand, until he became familiar with the local language. The pioneer SDA missionaries in the Cook Islands were a Dr. Caldwell, J.D. Rice and a Mr. Wellman, who was there only a short time.

The first Adventist church was built at Titikavata by A.H. Piper, of Sydney. He was Linden's predecessor, and the first SDA missionary in the Pacific from Australia or New Zealand. A church was built at Aitutaki in 1914. This was the year after Pastor Sterling made his first visit to Sydney. A church was also built at Atiu at this time, and one has since been constructed at Pukapuka.

Pastor Sterling sent the first SDA 'worker' to Pukapuka about 1915. He was a member of the Strickland family of Aitutaki, and a widower. He eventually married a Pukapuka woman.

On Rarotonga in Pastor Sterling's time there was a SDA congregation of about 50, mainly from the Avarua area. There were also a few interested people from Palmerston Island.

While the Sterlings were on Aitutaki, there was a European missionary on Rarotonga called Howse. After his departure the SDA church was left in the hands of the local people.

The Sterlings enjoyed their time on Aitutaki more than their sojourns on any other island. The main reasons for this were that there were more people of European descent on that island than elsewhere, and the Sterlings were more successful there. Prominent church members included members of the large Strickland family, some of whom knew English. Pastor Sterling was acquainted at this time with the present Premier of the Cook Islands, Sir Albert Henry, then a small boy. His father, Geoffrey Henry, was a school teacher on Aitutaki, who later went to Pukapuka.

On leaving the Cook Islands in 1919, the Sterlings went to Tahiti and waited for six months to get a ship to the Marquesas. They established the first SDA mission station in those islands - at Taiahoë, Nukuhiva. They also visited Hivaoa, Fatuhiva and Ua Pou. On one occasion in 1922, they went to Ua Pou with the famous solo yachtsman Harry Pidgeon who spent four months at Nukuhiva. Pidgeon later published an account of his voyage, The Cruise of the 'Islander': Around the World Single-handed (London, 1932).

The Sterlings found the Marquesas a rather depressing place. The people had suffered a serious setback from an epidemic of yellow fever which had wiped out a large number of them. Many islanders had also died of tuberculosis. The population of Taiahoë was only about 200 at that time. This number included a few Tahitians and Chinese.

Pastor Sterling made a translation of the New Testament into Marquesan, but the British and Foreign Bible Society would not print it because the number of Marquesan speakers was then so small. The manuscript of the translation, which was kept in a trunk, was eventually ruined by termites.

When the Sterlings left the Marquesas, they were succeeded by a Tahitian SDA couple. As far as Pastor Sterling knew in 1973, there were then no SDA missionaries anywhere in the Marquesas.

The European community in the Marquesas in the Sterlings' time included a French gendarme on both Nukuhiva and Hivaoa, an English trader,

Bob McKittrick, and a Swiss trader, Alfred Tissot. A small group of native Protestants traced their origin back to missionaries from Hawaii. Their leader was Samuel Kekela, a son of Tissot. A few tattooed islanders were still to be seen, but they were all old people, as the French government had outlawed the practice of tattooing.

The Sterlings left the Marquesas Islands in 1922 and went home on furlough to the United States. It was originally intended that they should return to the Marquesas, but they were posted instead to the Society Islands because of a shortage of SDA missionaries there. They were in the Society Islands from 1924 to 1938. Pastor Linden was in charge until 1930 when Pastor Sterling took over as president.

From 1926 to 1930, the Sterlings were stationed at Uturoa, Raiatea. The pastor had a motorboat in which he visited branches of his church on Huahine, Borabora and Tahaa.

'We like to think of our period in the Society and Cook Islands as the seed-sowing period', he said, 'when things weren't too encouraging. The work was slow and difficult in those days. At Aitutaki we had 25 converts; now there are over 200.'

Pastor Sterling recalled that the Brothers and Brotherson families on Raiatea were strong Adventist supporters. The Brothersons were of Scandinavian descent. The original Brothersen, Peter, who spelt his name with an 'e', married into the Hunter family and lived at Uturoa. His son Charles is the present leader of the SDA church at Uturoa.

'The church is thriving in the Society Islands at present,' Pastor Sterling said. 'We attribute this to the fact that it is now under French leadership.'

'I was about the last American called out for missionary work in this part of the world. After me practically all the missionaries were from Australia.'

'I think the change to French leadership was a great advantage. I never learned French and if we had any business with the government, it had to be done through an interpreter and that was not very satisfactory to us or to them....'

'The reason we did not get French leaders earlier was the difficulty in getting them. We finally got one from Canada.'

When the Sterlings left the Society Islands in 1938 to go to New Zealand, a Mr. Wright from New Zealand took over from them. He was later replaced by Pastor Heggie, a French speaker. Heggie's successor was a Canadian, who was succeeded in turn by R.V. Esposito, who came from France and returned home in 1973.

For four years after his departure from the Society Islands, Pastor Sterling was a Bible teacher at the SDA college at Longbourne, near Palmerston North, New Zealand. He was then engaged in church work at Christchurch for

three years, after which he and his wife came to Australia. By that time his wife was beginning to suffer from arthritis, and the doctor recommended a warm climate.

The Sterlings lived at Tamworth, N.S.W., until the early 1950s and then at Coorinda. In 1964 they moved to Cooranbong where Mrs. Sterling died in 1971.

A daughter, Bernita, born in Papeete in 1924, was educated by correspondence until she left the islands in 1938. She married an Englishman, Cresswell, and lives at Blacktown near her father.

Among the books on Pastor Sterling's bookshelf at Cooranbong in 1973 was one entitled In Coral Isles by E.H. Gates, published by the Review and Herald Publishing Association, Washington D.C., in 1923. It is a 256-page account of SDA missionary work in the South Pacific, including the Society Islands, Cook Islands, Samoa, Tonga, Fiji and Pitcairn Island. The book is not included in the Bibliographie de Tahiti et de la Polynesie francaise of Father Patrick O'Reilly and Edouard Reitman (Paris, 1967) nor in Philip A. Snow's A Bibliography of Fiji, Tonga and Rotuma (Canberra, 1969).

Pastor Sterling was the compiler of a Rarotongan hymn book in which about half of the hymns are his translations. The book is entitled E Buka Imene Evangelia El Akapaapaa Anga i te Atua. It was published by the Seventh-Day Adventist Printing Press, Papeete, Tahiti, in 1926. Not surprisingly, it, too, is not included in the O'Reilly-Reitman bibliography.

#### EASTER ISLAND MEDICAL RECORDS FILMED

Detailed medical records of all islanders living on Easter Island in 1964-65 have recently been obtained in microfilm from the Université de Montréal, Quebec, Canada. The records were compiled by the Canadian Medical Expedition to Easter Island sponsored by the World Health Organization and the Canadian Government. The expedition's purpose was to study the relative roles of environment and heredity in the Island's population before the international airport was completed there in 1971. The expedition reached Easter Island on 13 December 1964 and left on 10 February 1965.

The medical records of the expedition include a photograph of each islander, his/her father's name, mother's name and other vital statistics. A list of the islanders examined, with the serial numbers assigned to them, appears on pp. 183 - 222 of Georges L. Nogrady, ed., Microbiology of Easter Island, vol. 1, Montreal, 1974. A copy of Dr. Nogrady's work will be deposited in each of the Bureau's member libraries together with the microfilms. The microfilms fill five reels numbered PMB 532-536. The Bureau obtained copies of them through the co-operation of Dr. Nogrady of the Department de Microbiologie et d'Immunologie, Université de Montréal, who took part in the Canadian expedition and is still keenly interested in the results of its investigations.

Helen Evans Reid's book, A World Away: A Canadian Adventure on Easter Island, Toronto, 1965, gives a popular account of the expedition's work.

JOURNAL OF VOYAGE  
IN HMS BASILISK

Microfilm copies of a journal kept in HMS Basilisk from 1871-73 by the first officer, Lieutenant Francis Hayter, have recently been obtained for the Bureau's member libraries. The reference number is PMB 626.

It was during the Basilisk's voyage along the southern coast of Papua under the command of Capt. John Moresby that Port Moresby, now the capital of Papua New Guinea, was seen by Europeans for the first time. Moresby also discovered China Strait at the eastern end of Papua, which shortened the journey from Sydney to China by 300 miles. The two discoveries were made during a 1,200 mile survey of the New Guinea coastline.

The Basilisk covered no less than 73,915 nautical miles while under Moresby's command. Other places visited during her cruise were New Zealand, the northern outliers of Tonga, Wallis, Futuna, the Ellice (now Tuvalu) Islands, the Santa Cruz group, the New Hebrides, and the islands of Torres Strait.

Lieutenant Hayter's journal of his voyage in the Basilisk was made available for microfilming by his grandson, Mr. B.N. Alexander, of Christchurch, New Zealand. The journal adds much new information to the official account of the voyage published in London in 1876 by the vessel's commander, under the title Discoveries and Surveys in New Guinea and the d'Entrecasteaux Islands: A Cruise of HMS 'Basilisk'.

ADDITIONAL FINDING AID ON  
U.K. NAVAL VESSELS

Several years ago the PMB sponsored the compilation of a provisional index to source material on British naval vessels that visited the Pacific islands from 1800 to 1900. The index was compiled by Mrs. Catherine Dengate, of Canberra, and was microfilmed as PMB 516 (2 reels).

The index is in alphabetical order by ship and gives the captain's name, description of the vessel, period of voyage, the location of published and unpublished accounts of the voyage, and the vessel's itinerary especially in the Pacific islands.

Mrs. Dengate's work has proved of considerable value to Pacific scholars interested in locating accounts of voyages by particular ships, but those who have been more interested in knowing what ships went where have still had a fairly long research job ahead of them. The Bureau has now made things easier for such scholars by compiling an index to the places visited in the Pacific islands by British naval vessels between 1800 and 1900. The index is published in the following pages. It is meant to be used in conjunction with microfilm PMB 516. Like the original index, the present one is only provisional, and so is not necessarily exhaustive.