

Poroi, Agnes (Parker) (Deane) (1887–1977)

MILTON HOOK

Milton Hook, Ed.D. (Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, the United States). Hook retired in 1997 as a minister in the Greater Sydney Conference, Australia. An Australian by birth Hook has served the Church as a teacher at the elementary, academy and college levels, a missionary in Papua New Guinea, and as a local church pastor. In retirement he is a conjoint senior lecturer at Avondale College of Higher Education. He has authored *Flames Over Battle Creek*, *Avondale: Experiment on the Dora*, *Desmond Ford: Reformist Theologian*, *Gospel Revivalist* the *Seventh-day Adventist Heritage Series*, and many magazine articles. He is married to Noeleen and has two sons and three grandchildren.

Agnes Poroi, fluent in four languages, served the church as a translator and editor for the Eastern Polynesian magazines, Sabbath School lessons, and books at the Rarotongan press in the Cook Islands and the Papeete Press in Tahiti.

Early Life

Agnes Parker was born on June 27, 1887, at Tautira, Tahiti.¹ She had two older sisters, Grace Adeline and Lydia.² Agnes was raised on the island, and as a child, she participated in fire walking ceremonies.³ She was baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist church in July 1903. She trained as a nurse and worked on the ladies' ward in the public hospital at Papeete.⁴ When she was 21 years old, she married 30-year-old George Tuhi'ava Deane on April 21, 1908.⁵ The marriage did not last long.

Changing Her Career

Agnes was fluent in Tahitian, Rarotongan, French, and English. She did some translation work for the missionaries in Tahiti and demonstrated an aptitude for it. When her marriage broke down, she went to the



Agnes Poroi, c. 1925.

Photo courtesy of South Pacific Division Heritage Centre.

Avondale Press at the Australasian Missionary College, Cooranbong, New South Wales, in order to improve her work under the guidance of Frances Waugh.⁶ At the same time, she did some college studies, beginning in May 1912. She remained at Cooranbong until the end of 1914 and returned for the 1917 college year.⁷

In December 1917 Agnes was appointed to assist at the Rarotongan Press.⁸ It was a rudimentary enterprise, but good translation skills were required for the Eastern Polynesian magazines, Sabbath School lessons, and the occasional book. Late in 1920 or early in 1921, the process of transferring printing operations took place with another press established at Tīpaeru'i in Papeete, Tahiti. Agnes moved back to her homeland at that time after marrying Pori Philippe Poroi, an assistant with her in the Rarotongan Press.⁹ He was usually known as Philip Poroi. He, like Agnes, was part Tahitian and was baptized about the same time as Agnes. He left the church but returned and did some canvassing and print shop work.¹⁰ His previous wife had died in 1918.¹¹

In the *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbooks* Philip is listed as having a missionary license from 1917 through 1923.¹² Agnes was not listed until 1935 and continued to appear until 1954.¹³ This was not an accurate reflection of their years of service. Agnes was doing translation work in the 1920s at the Papeete press.¹⁴ Andrew Stewart, on a visit to Papeete in 1933, spoke of Agnes as “a kind of manageress of the printing press,”¹⁵ and a 1947 news item said both Philip and Agnes were employed in the press.¹⁶

Agnes required some medical attention in 1947, so she boarded the *Ville de Amiens* and disembarked at Sydney on July 19. For two months she received treatment in the Sydney Sanitarium and Hospital and was given holiday time to visit friends she had made at Cooranbong 30 years earlier. She returned refreshed to Papeete via New Caledonia on the *Ville de Strasbourg*, arriving March 10, 1948.¹⁷

Retrospect

No obituary for Agnes appeared in the church magazine. Her niece, Wanda (Niebuhr) Boulting, published a tribute saying Agnes passed away in late 1977, having worked at her typewriter until she was over 80 years old. Failing eyesight brought an end to her long career.¹⁸ She had no children. Her life was her invaluable translation work.

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NOTES

1. Agnes Poroi Work Service Records, South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives, Folder: "Agnes Poroi," Document: "Agnes Poroi Biographical Information."
2. "Agnes Poroi," Ancestry.com, accessed March 16, 2017, <http://person.ancestry.com.au/tree/47002280/person/6891000921/facts>.
3. Agnes Deane, "From Fire Walking to Walking with God," *Missionary Leader*, December 1915, 14.
4. Agnes Poroi Work Service Records, "Agnes Poroi Biographical Information."
5. "Agnes Poroi," Ancestry.com.
6. W. E. Boulting, "A Belated Life Sketch of Mrs. Agnes Poroi," *Australasian Record and Advent World Survey*, April 2, 1979, 13.
7. Agnes Poroi Work Service Records, "Agnes Poroi Biographical Information."
8. F. E. Lyndon, "Eastern Polynesian Mission," *Australasian Record*, December 17, 1917, 3–4.
9. "Sister Agnes Deane . . . ," *Australasian Record*, April 18, 1921, 7.

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12. E.g., "Eastern Polynesian Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook 1917* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1917), 145.
13. E.g., "Eastern Polynesian Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook 1935* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1935), 72.
14. Geo. L. Sterling, "A Greater Interest Than Ever Before," *Australasian Record*, July 20, 1925, 2.
15. A. G. Stewart, "Visit to the Society Islands," *Australasian Record*, August 21, 1933, 4.
16. "The French ship . . .," *Australasian Record*, August 11, 1947, 8.
17. Agnes Poroi, "Home Again in Tahiti," *Australasian Record*, June 7, 1948, 2.
18. Boulting, "A Belated Life Sketch."

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