

# Masters, George Maitland (1899–1997)

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## LESTER DEVINE

Originally trained as a secondary history teacher, a career long Adventist educator, Lester Devine, Ed.D., has taught at elementary, secondary and higher education levels and spent more than three decades in elected educational leadership positions in two divisions of the world Church, NAD (1969-1982) and SPD (1982-2005). He completed his forty years of denominational service with a term as director of the Ellen G. White/Adventist Research Centre at Avondale University College in Australia where his life-long hobby of learning and presenting on Adventist heritage issues became his vocation.

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George Maitland Masters, an Adventist teacher and minister, was born on March 7, 1899, in Perth, Western Australia.<sup>1</sup> His father, Fairley Masters, was, together with his parents, the first overseas missionary sent from Australia.<sup>2</sup> On his return to Australia from India in 1896, Fairley met and married Esther Beatrice York.<sup>3</sup> George Masters was the first born of their four children, which included Percy Franklin, Olive Dorothy, and Gordon Fairley.<sup>4</sup>

Reared in a Seventh-day Adventist home, Masters became a student at the Australasian Missionary College in 1913 where he trained as a teacher, graduating from the normal course in 1918.<sup>5</sup> He married Elsie Mae Mitchel, known as Mae, on April 9, 1923, in the Toorak Indian Church, Suva, Fiji.<sup>6</sup> The wedding was conducted by Pastor A. G. Stewart<sup>7</sup> who, together with his wife had accompanied, Elsie Mae Mitchel to Fiji so that the wedding could take place there.<sup>8</sup> Mae Mitchel was born in Victoria, Australia, on May 27, 1900,<sup>9</sup> attended the Australasian Missionary College, and graduated from the nursing course at the Sydney Sanitarium and Hospital in 1922.<sup>10</sup> Two sons were born to the Masters: Floyd George, born on February 27, 1927, at the Sydney Sanitarium, and Allan Milton, born on January 25, 1932, in Suva, Fiji.<sup>11</sup> After an extended illness, Mae Masters died on November 22, in Wahrenoga, New South Wales.<sup>12</sup> Just one year later, George Masters married his secretary, Thelma M. Plane,<sup>13</sup> who was born in Hobart, Tasmania, on July 10, 1902.<sup>14</sup>



George Masters.

Photo courtesy of Milton Hook.

A man of multiple talents, Masters served the Church in many ways for forty years.<sup>15</sup> Among his many contributions, he was a teacher in both New South Wales, Australia, and Fiji; engaged in evangelical work in the Fiji-Indian Mission, the South Australia Conference, and Queensland; and was ordained in 1934.<sup>16</sup> He was president of the Fiji-Indian Mission from 1945 to 1946, acting as mission treasurer for a time. Masters was Australasian Union Conference Sabbath School Secretary from 1941 to 1944, and Home Missions Secretary from 1947 to 1948. From 1949 to 1953 he was the principal of a correspondence school operated by the Australasian Union Conference. For some years he was also the principal of the Avondale College campus Kindergarten-Grade 12 school.<sup>17</sup>

But when one spoke with Masters, there was no doubt that his heart was with the Indian people, both in India itself, where he and his first wife spent two years learning Hindustani and Urdu, and later in Fiji where he labored for fifteen years<sup>18</sup> working with the substantial Indian population. He considered this his most important contribution. He mastered the Hindustani language and used it at every opportunity to his great personal satisfaction.<sup>19</sup>

The pioneering Indian work George Masters did in Fiji was difficult and accessions to the Church few in number during his years of service there. The Indian people he loved had difficulty in responding to Christianity. "Family ties were strong and loyalty to traditional beliefs reached back for many generations."<sup>20</sup> Thus, for him to learn late in life that the Indian work in Fiji was progressing well, and that his dream of many years earlier of seeing the gospel message accepted among the Indian people was becoming a reality was a great joy to him.<sup>21</sup>

During his career, Masters faced severe health problems on at least two occasions. In 1939, while living in Fiji, he was diagnosed with tuberculosis, but after a period back in Australia made a full recovery.<sup>22</sup> In 1970, Masters had a stroke and for a time he could not write, speak, read, or even pray. While he eventually recovered his speech and physical mobility, he lost his knowledge of the 'Hindi' language. He could not remember a single word of it and this was a great disappointment to him.<sup>23</sup>

Masters retired in March 1959 and in 1967, with his second wife, took a lengthy caravan trip touring Australia. Ever missionary minded, during the trip Masters would often set up his projection equipment and chairs at night, and then invite other campers to come and watch slides and movies about the work of the Church and its mission around the world.<sup>24</sup> Not long after returning to their home at Hornsby Heights, on the outskirts of Sydney, Thelma Masters became ill and died on December 2, 1974.<sup>25</sup> For some years afterward, George Masters conducted workshops for men who had lost their wives in death and were not equipped to deal with the loneliness that resulted from that reality.

George Masters died on October 17, 1997,<sup>26</sup> having lived a full and active life in service especially for the people of India and Fiji for whom he cared for so deeply.

Fairley Masters Biographical Records. South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives.

George Maitland Masters Biographical Records. South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives.

George Maitland Masters Sustentation Records. South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives.

Lawson, T. C. "Masters-Plane." *Australasian Record*, December 13, 1948.

New South Wales, Australia. Death Certificate, registration number 38134/1997. George Maitland Masters. Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages, New South Wales, Australia.

"On Monday April 9..." *Australasian Record*, May 14, 1923.

"On the 8<sup>th</sup>..." *The Bible Echo*, vol. 9, no 37, September 17, 1894.

Pietz, A. D. and O. D. F. McCutcheon. "George M. Masters obituary." *Australasian Record*, December 6, 1997.

Silver, D. J. "Pioneer Rejoices at Fiji's Recent Harvest." *Australasian Record*, October 14, 1989.

Stewart, A. G. "Elsie Mae Masters obituary." *Australasian Record*, January 5, 1948.

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## NOTES

1. George Maitland Masters Biographical Records; South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives; Folder: "Masters, George Maitland;" Document: "Biographical Information Blank, January 6, 1940."
2. "On the 8<sup>th</sup>..." *The Bible Echo*, vol. 9, no 37, September 17, 1894, 296.
3. Fairley Masters Biographical Records; South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives; Folder: "Masters, Fairley;" Document: "Biographical Information Blank."
4. Ibid.
5. George Maitland Masters Biographical Records; South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives; Folder: "Masters, George Maitland;" Document: "Biographical Information Blank, January 6, 1940."
6. "On Monday April ...," *Australasian Record*, May 14, 1923, 8.
7. Ibid.
8. A. G. Stewart, "Elsie Mae Masters obituary," *Australasian Record*, January 5, 1948, 7.
9. George Maitland Masters Biographical Records; South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives; Folder: "Masters, George Maitland;" Document: "Biographical Information Blank, January 6, 1940."

10. A. G. Stewart, "Elsie Mae Masters obituary," *Australasian Record*, January 5, 1948, 7.
11. George Maitland Masters Biographical Records; South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives; Folder: "Masters, George Maitland;" Document: "Biographical Information Blank, January 6, 1940."
12. A. G. Stewart, "Elsie Mae Masters obituary," *Australasian Record*, January 5, 1948, 7.
13. T. C. Lawson, "Masters-Plane," *Australasian Record*, December 13, 1948, 7.
14. George Maitland Masters Biographical Records; South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives; Folder: "Masters, George Maitland;" Document: "Biographical Information Blank, May 4, 1950."
15. George Maitland Masters Sustentation Records; South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives; Folder: "Masters, George Maitland;" Document: "Weekly Rates."
16. George Maitland Masters Biographical Records; South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives; Folder: "Masters, George Maitland;" Document: "Biographical Information Blank, May 4, 1950."
17. George Maitland Masters Sustentation Records; South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives; Folder: "Masters, George Maitland;" Document: "Weekly Rates;" George Maitland Masters Biographical Records; South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives; Folder: "Masters, George Maitland;" Document: "Biographical Information Blank, May 4, 1950."
18. George Maitland Masters Biographical Records; South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives; Folder: "Masters, George Maitland;" Document: "Biographical Information Blank, January 6, 1940."
19. L. D. Devine, personal knowledge, as a neighbor of George Masters.
20. D. J. Silver, "Pioneer Rejoices at Fiji's Recent Harvest," *Australasian Record*, October 14, 1989, 11.
21. Jean Masters, interview with author, July 10, 2018, Cooranbong, New South Wales, Australia.
22. George Maitland Masters Biographical Records; South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives; Folder: "Masters, George Maitland;" Document: "Biographical Information Blank, January 6, 1940."
23. L. D. Devine, personal knowledge as a neighbour of Pastor George Masters.
24. L. D. Devine, personal knowledge as a neighbour of Pastor George Masters.
25. George Maitland Masters Sustentation Records; South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives; Folder: "Masters, George Maitland;" Document: "G. M. Masters (Pr)."

26. New South Wales, Australia, Death Certificate, registration number 38134/1997, George Maitland Masters, Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages, New South Wales, Australia; A. D. Pietz and O. D. F. McCutcheon, "George M. Masters obituary," *Australasian Record*, December 6, 1997, 14.

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