

# Piper, Reginald Kingsbury (1880–1965) and Emily Jane Johnstone (1874–1964)



Reginald Kingsbury Piper

Photo courtesy of Adventist Heritage Centre, Australia.

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## MARYE TRIM

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Reginald Kingsbury Piper, together with his wife, Emily, served the Church in the Cook Islands and New Zealand. They worked with the Maori people of

Tauranga, and gave spiritual ministry in Taranaki. Piper spoke strongly against compulsory unionism and helped to provide recognition of bona fide conscientious objectors against carrying arms in military service.

## Early Life

Reginald Piper was born in Christchurch, New Zealand, on April 2, 1880. He was the third son of Mary (Kingsbury) and Joseph Piper, members of the Church of England and early settlers in the British colony. By 1893 the family had grown to seven children and lived in Petone in the North Island.<sup>1</sup>

In 1890 Arthur G. Daniells began religious meetings in the Petone Exchange Hall, attended by Mary Piper.<sup>2</sup> With six of her children, she continued to attend during 1891, when Stephen McCullagh, from South Australia, preached in a tent. Convinced that the seventh-day Sabbath was biblical, she resolved to observe it and be baptized. A Piper family diary reference states that “the Piper family . . . kept Sabbath, March 7, 1891.”<sup>3</sup>

From the age of ten years, Reginald attended Sabbath meetings held in private homes and in a local schoolroom. Of the school room he said, “This was situated two blocks from our home, and every Friday afternoon my brother Wensley and I carried a small organ for the Sabbath services, and then transported it back after Sabbath—a laborious task for two boys. And we got a lot of untoward remarks on the main street, especially when we halted to change hands!”<sup>4</sup> According to his older brother, Albert, who was converted later and became a pioneer missionary to Rarotonga, his brothers told him how they were accosted by locals shouting, “Jew boys, Jews!”<sup>5</sup>

Reginald Piper was strongly influenced by the ministry of Ellen White in Petone in 1893. In later life he wrote: “I well remember her inspiring services and particularly her interest in our young people’s society, of which my sisters and two brothers were members.”<sup>6</sup> He went on to report on the memorable camp meeting at Petone in 1893 when he was 13 years old; how Ellen White’s unamplified preaching had been heard by the large congregation extending far down the street. Deeply impressed, he referred to the ignored visit to the campground by “two men of noble bearing,” reporting the messenger of the Lord’s words: “Brethren, those two men were none other than angel visitors from the heavenly courts above.”<sup>7</sup>

Shortly after the start of the 12-day camp meeting, the missionary schooner *Pitcairn* arrived and was anchored in Wellington harbor. The young Piper boys, Wensley, Reginald, and Harold, went to see the graceful vessel with a glowing white hull. They saw the initials “S.D.A.” on its flying pennant, and enjoyed mission stories told by its skipper, Merritt G. Kellogg, who attended the camp-meeting.<sup>8</sup>

From 1891 to the year 1900 these many influences combined to shape Reginald’s life. Ellen White wrote of the family.<sup>9</sup> She also employed Reginald’s sister, Nina, whom she described as “a sincere Christian,” taking her as a helper to Napier and Sydney.<sup>10</sup>

Further influences were the examples of faith by his three brothers, and particularly by the charismatic eldest brother, who, after a remarkable conversion experience, went to Australia in 1897 to attend the missionary training school at Avondale. In 1900 Albert and his bride visited Petone, on pre-embarkation leave before going to Rarotonga. A photograph taken on that visit shows the full family, including a young, eighth child!<sup>11</sup>

The death of his brother Wensley was a sobering experience. A church deacon 22 years of age, Wensley drowned in an accident in Wellington harbor in 1900.<sup>12</sup> Reginald was baptized in January 1901,<sup>13</sup> which led to his leaving his occupation as a qualified plumber and sheet metal worker to begin colporteur ministry in July 1909.<sup>14</sup>

In 1900, in Dunedin, South New Zealand, Emily Jane Johnstone (b. 1874<sup>15</sup>), known as “an industrious and happy worker,” was a helper in an evangelistic series of meetings in the city.<sup>16</sup> Later that year she was baptized by E. W. Farnsworth and crossed the Tasman Sea to attend Avondale School for Christian workers in Cooranbong, New South Wales, Australia. After finishing her course, she was employed at the Sydney Sanitarium and then at the Sanitarium café in Wellington, New Zealand. On March 27, 1910, she and Reginald were married by Jesse Pallant in Christchurch. They then became literature evangelists together before being appointed to mission service.<sup>17</sup>

## Missionary Service

Reginald and Emily Piper arrived in Rarotonga, Cook Islands, in 1911, and with energy and willing hearts accepted the challenge to continue the work begun by older brother Albert. With his background in literature ministry, Reginald continued to distribute Adventist literature. In doing so, he encountered determined opposition, but he persisted. By 1912 he was able to report that “the high standard of the *Tuatua Mou* has won its way to the hearts of kings and native London Missionary Society pastors. That the seed thus sown awakens interest in eternal things is evident by the many conversations and questions asked by the natives. . . . Every monthly mail brings to the mission 1,500 copies of our pioneer paper, every copy of which is used.”<sup>18</sup> In his report of the period, J. E. Fulton, president of the Australasian Union Conference, mentioned literature distribution and Sabbath-keepers in Rarotonga.<sup>19</sup>

Unfortunately, Reginald Piper succumbed to repeated attacks of dysentery, frequently living under conditions hostile to good health. Finally, in 1913, the doctor’s diagnosis was that “the humidity of the climate was not only against . . . recovery, but that there were grave dangers of serious complications unless they left at once.”<sup>20</sup>

By early 1914, Reginald Piper was sufficiently recovered to begin a ministry for the Maori people of North New Zealand. It began in Taumarunui in the rugged King Country. In particular he sought out the Ringatu tribespeople, who, from ancient times, held the seventh day as sacred and would not work or fight on that day. He was welcomed as a *minita* (missionary), and many were pleased to listen and accept Maori literature.

In a lengthy report in the *Australasian Record* of June 29, 1914, Reginald Piper describes his cycling journeys to witness to Maoris over much of the North Island. In the Waikato district he encountered Mormons who responded with interest. In the Hauraki Gulf he met with some dispersed Ringatu Maoris, one of whom in particular lived abstemiously and would not work on the seventh day. Through his influence, Piper held regular services in their *pah* (meeting house). As well as teaching Scripture, Piper found that his Maori friends needed education about tobacco.<sup>21</sup> At Coromandel he organized a Sabbath School in 1916.<sup>22</sup>

By about 1924 Reginald and Emily Piper had returned to Wellington, where his aging parents required support. Reginald chose to take up his father’s plumbing business and, with Emily, to add strength to the local Adventist community. He may also have worked for the Sanitarium Health Food Company.<sup>23</sup>

In 1936 the Labour government introduced compulsory unionism. Reginald Piper's application for nonmembership was made a test case. He wrote of his appeal: "When called upon to speak, I felt that a Presence was standing by my side . . . The vote of that big meeting was overwhelming in my favor."<sup>24</sup>

Emily Jane Piper died in New Plymouth, New Zealand, on June 18, 1964.<sup>25</sup> Reginald Kingsbury Piper died in New Plymouth, New Zealand, eight months after Emily's death, on February 13, 1965. Both were greatly loved by the New Plymouth congregation; his obituary states: "His leadership in church affairs and his confidence in the Lord were ever reflected in his consistent Christian life."<sup>26</sup>

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## NOTES

1. Reginald Piper Service Records, South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives (Folder: "Piper, Reginald"; Document: "Piper, Reginald Kingsbury"); also personal knowledge of the family as a colleague, by the author.

2. Personal knowledge of the author as a colleague in ministry with Reginald Piper's older brother, A. H. Piper, and with his sister, Mabel, wife of H. C. White, 1949– 1990.
3. R. K. Piper, "Angels Came to the Camp-Meeting in New Zealand," *Australasian Record*, April 4, 1956, 2, 3.
4. Ibid.
5. Personal knowledge of the author in ministry with A. H. Piper, 1949–1955.
6. Piper, "Angels Came," 2, 3.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid. Personal knowledge of the family in ministry, 1949–1965.
9. Ellen White to W. C. White, August 13, 1893, letter 138, 1893, Ellen G. White Estate.
10. Ibid.
11. Marye Trim, "Considering the Past Means Facing the Future," *Australasian Record*, January 12, 1985, 1.
12. Piper, 3.
13. Reginald Piper Service Records.
14. Ibid.
15. E. A. Robinson, "Emily Jane Piper obituary," *Australasian Record*, July 27, 1964, 7.
16. Piper, 2.
17. Robinson, "Emily Jane Piper obituary."
18. R. K. Piper, "Delivering the 'Tuatua-Mou' in the Cook Islands," *Australasian Record*, April 1, 1912, 4.
19. J. E. Fulton, "Our Island Literature," *Australasian Record*, September 28, 1914, 4.
20. "After repeated attacks of the dysentery . . .," *Australasian Record*, April 21, 1913, 4.
21. R. K. Piper, "The New Zealand Maoris," *Australasian Record*, June 29, 1914, 5.

22. "A Sabbath School has recently been organized . . .," *Australasian Record*, November 13, 1916, 8.

23. Piper, "Angels Came," 3.

24. Ibid.

25. Robinson.

26. I. W. White, "Reginald Kingsbury Piper obituary," *Australasian Record*, March 22, 1965, 7.

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