

# Shepherd, William (c. 1903–1985) and Minnie Pathanga (Smith) (1903–1969)

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## 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.



Bill and Minnie Sheppard with daughter Rowena.

Photo provided by Stephen Piez; original held in trust by the Adventist Heritage Centre, Cooranbong.

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William and Minnie Shepherd were Aboriginal missionaries to Papua New Guinea in 1930s.

William Shepherd (or Willie Sheppard) was born about 1903 in an aboriginal camp on the banks of the Barron River near Kuranda, north Queensland. Much of his childhood was spent at the nearby Seventh-day Adventist Monamona Mission. In his youth he worked at the mission timber mill and attended elementary school classes. During the evenings he would read by candlelight to improve his grades. He was baptised and married at the mission station.<sup>1</sup> His bride on March 3, 1929, was Minnie Pathanga Smith<sup>2</sup> who had been among the first group of aboriginal candidates baptised in a ceremony at Monamona on Friday afternoon, July 21, 1916.<sup>3</sup>

Minnie had worked on the mission station as a domestic assistant. Willie had eventually trained as a carpenter at the mission.<sup>4</sup> Both were excellent vocalists and entered into the worship services with enthusiasm.<sup>5</sup> In 1933 they were chosen to be missionaries in New Guinea, the second and last aboriginal couple to serve in the Pacific

Islands. They sailed from Cairns aboard the S.S. "Montero" in April<sup>6</sup> and began their mission service at Vilirupu station.<sup>7</sup>

Willie used his carpentry skills to build a mission home for themselves and led in worship services. Minnie did some elementary school teaching.<sup>8</sup> They enjoyed their work and remained at the station until Second World War activities forced them to return to Australia in early 1942.<sup>9</sup> Willie remained a leading figure among the Kuranda aboriginal church community. When enemy forces were repelled and it was safe to return to New Guinea Minnie went back to Vilirupu to assist for another term. Their son Stanley joined her until they permanently returned to Australia about 1944.<sup>10</sup>

In the 1960s Willie was still taking a leading role in the aboriginal community. He was the elder in the Kuranda church<sup>11</sup> and led their choir which at times rendered performances at church camp meetings and the Townsville General Hospital.<sup>12</sup>

Minnie passed away on July 21, 1969, and was laid to rest in the Kuranda Cemetery. Their adopted daughter, Rowena, two sons and Willie survived her.<sup>13</sup> Willie died peacefully on June 25, 1985, and was also buried in Kuranda Cemetery.<sup>14</sup>

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## NOTES

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2. "Minnie Pathanga Smith," FamilySearch.org, Intellectual Reserve, 2020, accessed August 29, 2020, <https://www.familysearch.org/tree/pedigree/landscape/GS8B-CCD>.
3. J[ohn] J. Dever, "Minnie Sheppard," *Australasian Record and Advent World Survey*, August 18, 1969, 15.
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5. [Helena] Mills, "Monamona Mission, North Queensland," *Australasian Record*, May 1, 1933, 2.
6. "For Papua," *Brisbane Courier*, April 15, 1933, 12.
7. Nafitali Navara, "Letter From a Fijian Minister in Papua," *Australasian Record*, August 12, 1935, 2.
8. Minnie Sheppard, "From Ronnie's Nurse Girl," *Australasian Record*, January 16, 1933, 5.
9. D[avid] Bryce, "Willie Shepherd," *Australasian Record and Advent World Survey*, October 5, 1985, 14.
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11. "Splendid Gift to Kuranda Aborigines," *Australasian Record and Advent World Survey*, June 13, 1966, [1].
12. H[oward] F. Rampton, "Special Events During Townsville Camp Meeting," *Australasian Record and Advent World Survey*, June 22, 1964, [1].
13. J[ohn] J. Dever, "Minnie Sheppard," *Australasian Record and Advent World Survey*, August 18, 1969, 15.
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