

Piper, Albert Henry
(1876–1956), and
Hester “Hettie”
Elizabeth
(Newcombe)
(1874–1912); later
Eleanor “Nellie”
Elizabeth
(Kreutzberg)
(1882–1973)



Albert Piper

Photo courtesy of Adventist Heritage Centre, Australia.

MARYE TRIM

Marye Trim, Ph.D. (Loughborough University, Leicestershire, England), retired in 2008 as a Senior Lecturer in Australia, England, India and Thailand, also at the University of Western Sydney and Loughborough University. A New Zealander, married to Pastor John B. Trim with five adult children, she supported his pastoral and leadership roles for over fifty years. Trained in journalism and creative writing, she has published books, stories, poems and inspirational articles world-wide, also 21 significant academic publications.

Albert Henry Piper was the first missionary from Australasia to serve in the Pacific Islands, and he also served as Australasian Missionary College principal, conference secretary and president, and Australasian Union Conference secretary for 12 years.¹

Early Life

Albert Piper, born February 21, 1876,² was the eldest child of pioneer settlers, Mary and Joseph Piper, who emigrated from England to New Zealand, there making a home on the Canterbury Plains in the South Island.³ Albert had four brothers and three sisters.⁴ His mother and father attended church services every Sunday at the Christchurch cathedral. His mother took the time with her son to teach him to be obedient and to honor his parents and God as the Bible instructed.⁵

In the late 1880s, the Piper family moved from their home in Sydenham to live in Petone, a growing settlement just across the harbor of Wellington City in the North Island of New Zealand. There, in 1891, his mother attended public meetings about Bible prophecy conducted by a young preacher named Stephen McCullagh from South Australia. As a result of a growing understanding of the Bible, on March 7, 1891, Mary Piper wrote on the flyleaf of her Bible, "Kept the Sabbath."⁶ She continued to observe seventh-day worship services with other Sabbath keepers, the younger children accompanying her. Albert, however, had now left school with honors, which had gained him employment in the Stamp Department of the New Zealand Civil Service, and having to work, he did not attend. Rather, he chose to be an active member of the Presbyterian Church on Sundays with other young people with whom he played tennis every Saturday afternoon. He learned about the Sabbath from his mother and siblings. However, his relationship with his parents was strained as his father also began attending the Bible prophecy program.⁷ Moreover, the situation was worsened by knowing the influence and beliefs of "that prophet woman, Mrs. White," as Albert thought of her then,⁸ for whom his sister, Nina, worked as a housekeeper.⁹

Some years later, by which time he was observing the Sabbath with his parents and siblings, Albert resigned from his position in the New Zealand Civil Service. In February 1897, he became tent master for an American Adventist evangelist, Eugene Farnsworth, who was holding meetings in Ferry Road, Christchurch.¹⁰

When the tent meeting series finished, Albert was invited to move to the coal-mining town of Westport on the bleak northwest coast of the South Island to conduct evangelistic meetings. There he discovered that he had a gift for preaching. Also while there, Albert received a letter from an Australian believer named Martha Brown, who, prompted by Ellen White, offered to lend him £50 to enroll at the Avondale School for Christian Workers.¹¹ He accepted the loan and made plans to go to Australia.¹²

Albert Piper arrived at the Avondale School for Christian Workers in late 1897 to become a student. Soon Ellen White sent for him.¹³ As A. G. Stewart wrote:

This made a profound impression on his mind, the influence of which never left him. It was further impressed when he was later called to live in Sister White's home during her residence at "Sunnyside," Avondale.¹⁴

After a summer vacation spent in the colporteur work in South Australia to pay fees for the coming year, as well as repaying Martha Brown, Albert returned to Avondale in 1898. At that time, he moved into a small upstairs bedroom with a dormer window in "Sunnyside," a bush walk away from the campus.¹⁵

Missionary Service

In 1899, after attending the Balaclava camp meeting in New Zealand, Albert was appointed to the organized work of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in New South Wales, Australia,¹⁶ becoming the first minister of the congregation at Hamilton and working to promote and plan a church building.¹⁷ At the same time, he worked as Secretary-Treasurer of the New South Wales Conference.¹⁸ While in attendance at the Maitland camp meeting, he was invited to take up the leadership of gospel book work in South Australia.¹⁹ During the year, he married Hester Elizabeth Newcomb, who accompanied him to South Australia, setting up home there. They had little money because the conference treasury often had insufficient funds to pay them, so their meals were scanty and plain, yet they felt rich in service together for the King of kings.²⁰

Known as Hettie, Hester Elizabeth Newcomb was born in London on November 19, 1874, of French descent.²¹ She became a Seventh-day Adventist in Adelaide in 1896 and attended the Avondale School for Christian Workers as one of its first students.²² She received training as a Bible worker under Pastor and Mrs. Haskell at Stanmore, New South Wales, and worked as a secretary for the Sabbath School Department for New South Wales and also in South Australia.²³ After her marriage, she became a Bible worker until 1900.

During 1900, Piper received a letter from Eugene Farnsworth, written on behalf of the Australasian Union Conference, inviting the couple to missionary service in the islands of the South Pacific. This was followed by correspondence from Ellen White, dated July 16, 1900.²⁴ Serious in tone and content, with both rebuke and instruction, it emphasized Christian stewardship and included spiritual guidance. It would appear that Ellen White acted toward him as a surrogate parent, for she had visited his home and family in Petone many times, had invited him as a guest to live in her home, and knew of his certain call to ministry.²⁵ Three months later, with all debts repaid and supplies prepared for mission service, the Pipers sailed to the Cook Islands, which were under administration by New Zealand. They were the first missionaries from Australia to the South Seas.²⁶

As the mission superintendent, Albert began by teaching school at Aorangi and establishing a school at Titikaveka, always assisted by Hettie in educational and healing ministry. They learned to know and love the Polynesian people, who resembled the Maori population of New Zealand with whom Albert was familiar. He also began to prepare bricks for a church at Titikaveka on land bought and paid for personally by Dr. Caldwell in 1896. In an article for May 1, 1902, issue of the *Union Conference Record*, Albert described his work, the medical and spiritual needs of the islanders, and his expectation that a teacher, Miss Evelyn Gooding, might arrive to assist them soon. He also referred to an invitation from the island of Aitutaki to start an Adventist mission program, suggesting that a married couple should establish the work.²⁷ As chief carpenter himself, he rejoiced

with 26 Rarotongan members when the foundation stone of the Titikaveka church was laid on November 25, 1903. The church was dedicated on May 26, 1904.²⁸ Details of the history of the mission, its persecution, and its progress were written by the church clerk, Kuro, and hidden in a bottle within the walls.²⁹

While in New Zealand on furlough in January 1904, Albert was ordained during the camp meeting at New Plymouth.³⁰

After Albert's ordination, Albert and Hettie spent time in New Plymouth, New Zealand. By the middle of the year, they were reassigned to Rarotonga.³¹ After a brief visit to Adelaide, South Australia, to visit Hettie's mother, they were ready to depart.³² However, Albert was not able to go right away, and Hettie went to Rarotonga without him,³³ taking her young son, Albert Joseph (b. June 6, 1902).³⁴ Albert sailed from Sydney on October 27, 1904, a month after Hettie.³⁵ G. F. Jones later wrote of Hettie's neat and "unextravagant organization" at Arurangi.³⁶

In 1905, their second son, Laurence Alvin, was born on July 28.³⁷ In 1907, after seven years of service in the Cook Islands, Albert and Hettie and their two sons sailed for furlough.³⁸ Hettie was in poor health,³⁹ so Albert began working in New South Wales, first at Morpeth⁴⁰ and then Raymond Terrace,⁴¹ on evangelistic campaigns before moving to Petersham, engaging with churches at Stanmore, Marrickville, and Bondi on the "missionary campaign and temperance *Signs* work."⁴²

At the Australasian Union Conference Committee Council held in September 1907, Albert Piper was recommended for the position of President of the West Australian Conference.⁴³ At the West Australian camp meeting in April 1908, he was unanimously elected as president.⁴⁴ In June 1907, just a few months before his first tenure as president, the Darling Range School, later to become Carmel College, was established.⁴⁵ In March 1909 he was reelected as president of the conference.⁴⁶

Piper's second term as President of the West Australian Conference was short-lived, however. At the Australasian Union Conference Council held September 9–20, 1909, he was appointed as Field Missionary Secretary of the union.⁴⁷ Just over 12 months later, he was elected as Secretary of the Australasian Union Conference.⁴⁸

He was Secretary of the Australasian Union Conference for just one year. At the union conference council held in September 1911, he was appointed as President of the New South Wales Conference.⁴⁹ While he held this position, Hettie died on June 1, 1912.⁵⁰ She was buried in the Gore Hill Cemetery, Sydney, New South Wales.⁵¹

Remarriage and Further Service

Piper was reelected as President of the New South Wales Conference during the camp meeting held October 15–28, 1912.⁵² The following year, he was one of the delegates from the Australasian Union to the General Conference Session.⁵³ He traveled with Pastor J. E. Fulton, visiting churches in Samoa, Fiji, and Tonga on their return journey.⁵⁴

Soon after his return, Albert Piper was married for the second time. His bride was Eleanor Kreutzberg, known as Nellie, who was one of the nurses from the Sydney Sanitarium who had helped the Piper family during Hettie's illness. They were married by J. E. Fulton in the New South Wales Conference office.⁵⁵

Nellie was born in London on April 20, 1882, and left for Australia with her parents when she was young. One source of delight to the child was music. From her music teacher, Nellie learned of the seventh-day Sabbath, and at the age of 13, she resolved to keep it as a day of rest to honor God in her life. Her father would not allow her to do this, forcing her to leave home to work as a house servant and babysitter in Mudgee, a country town in New South Wales, before her 14th birthday.⁵⁶

Eventually, at the age of 18, she enrolled at the Summer Hill Medical and Surgical Sanitarium, the predecessor of the Sydney Sanitarium and Hospital. In 1902, she joined the first nursing class at Wahroonga Sanitarium in New South Wales and worked as a nurse.⁵⁷

In 1903, her training completed, she went to Adelaide to be the head nurse at the Adelaide Sanitarium. Later she was invited to engage in Bible work in the New South Wales Conference, where A. H. Piper was then president. Following this experience, she resumed nursing at the Sydney Sanitarium.⁵⁸

During 1912, Nellie often visited the Piper's simply decorated yet charming home as a member of a nurses' singing group to cheer Hettie, who was ill. She felt awed by Pastor Piper, that tall, gracious man, so clearly in love with his wife, sons, and Christian ministry. She heard him preach and read his articles and sermons in the church paper, responding with admiration and respect.⁵⁹ The following year, on September 17, she became his wife, and thereby mother to his two grieving sons.⁶⁰

Within a few weeks of their marriage, Albert Piper was invited to become President of the West Australian Conference once again.⁶¹ He was reelected at the conference session held not long after the family arrived in Western Australia⁶² and again at the session held at the end of 1914.⁶³

At the conference session at the end of 1916, Piper was not reelected as president.⁶⁴ He had been asked by the Australasian Union Conference to be the Principal of the Darling Range School.⁶⁵

From Western Australia, Albert and Nellie, together with their children, Clarice Muriel, born December 28, 1915, and Athol Vivian, born February 23, 1918, moved to the state of Victoria, where he served as President of the Victorian Conference. A second daughter, Heather, was born, February 20, 1920.⁶⁶ Later, he became President of the New South Wales Conference once again.⁶⁷ The next move was back to Wahroonga, where, from 1927 to 1937, Albert Piper was again Secretary of the Australasian Union Conference. In this role, he was Vice President for Island Missions, a responsibility he shared with Pastor A. G. Stewart, the pioneer missionary to Fiji and the New Hebrides. This role included purchasing various mission sites, one being for the Amyes Memorial Hospital on the island of Malaita in the Solomon Islands.

Various reports in the *Australasian Record* indicate many activities, such as being responsible between January 1930 and July 1932 for the promotion of Foreign Missions Sabbaths, a monthly event in the Church calendar.⁶⁸ A spiritual man who spent much time in prayer, he was known for the Scripture-based messages he preached, which were at times published in the *Australasian Record*.⁶⁹

He was recognized as an excellent committee member and chairman.⁷⁰ At the end of a discussion, he would summarize the flow of ideas, presenting it with spiritual insightfulness.⁷¹ He was in frequent demand as counselor and preacher.⁷² He was also an inaugural member of the Hornsby Hospital Board, indicating his interest in the local community.⁷³ He was a friendly man, an encourager who took a genuine personal interest in church members and others. His daughter Clarice and son Athol described how, as children growing up, it was difficult for the family to exit the Wahroonga church on Sabbaths when her father sat with them because he paused frequently to shake hands and greet people.⁷⁴

In 1938, A. H. Piper became Principal of the Australasian Missionary College. Then in his 60s, he was known as a man of wisdom and wide experience, remembered afterward as “a talented, dedicated, happy, courageous man, . . . a wise administrator.”⁷⁵

The postwar years became years of trial and challenge in the Adventist denomination in Australia during which Pastor Piper again assumed the presidency of the South New South Wales Conference. One area of religious dissent came from the Seventh-day Adventist Reform Movement, led initially by Dimitry Nicolici. His preaching that the SDA Church was the Babylon of prophecy disturbed many congregations. A further challenge came from a movement called The Shepherd’s Rod, and in these situations, along with C. H. Watson and W. R. M. Scragg, Pastor Piper acted as defender of the faith, writing, speaking with small and large groups, and traveling widely as Seventh-day Adventist spokesman to restore confidence and order.⁷⁶

Retirement Years

In 1950 Albert Piper officially retired at the age of 75.⁷⁷ He and his wife settled into a home at Cooranbong, New South Wales, close to the Australasian Missionary College. He continued to travel and preach, focusing upon the story of Adventist missions in the South Seas and his knowledge of Ellen White.⁷⁸

In the autumn of 1955, he returned to his home near Dora Creek after visiting Tamworth Church, where he had presented a series called “Living in the Home of the Prophet.”⁷⁹ He felt unusually tired. By the year’s end he felt a little unwell, but he attended the annual camp meeting at Eraring in December, where he spoke for the early morning prayer meeting and, as was his usual custom, endeavored to visit every camper, something that no other minister ever attempted and which the campers recognized with appreciation.⁸⁰

He died in the Sydney Sanitarium on January 18, 1956, in his 81st year.⁸¹ Pastors L. C. Naden, E. J. Johanson, R. E. Hare, J. F. Halliday, W. G. Turner, S. V. Stratford, and W. G. Turner, all church leaders, associated in the funeral

service at Wahroonga and at the burial at Avondale.⁸²

Nellie loved and supported Albert Piper for 43 years. She died at the Charles Harrison Home, Cooranbong, June 29, 1973, and was buried in the Avondale Adventist Cemetery.⁸³

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NOTES

1. A. G. Stewart, "A Brief Biography of the Late Pastor A. H. Piper," *Australasian Record and Advent World Survey*, February 20, 1956, 14–15.
2. Albert Henry Piper Biographical Records, South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives, Folder: "Piper, Albert Henry," Document: "Biographical Information Blank."
3. Mary Trim, personal knowledge as a colleague in ministry of Albert and Nellie Piper between 1949 and 1960.
4. Marye Trim, "Considering the Past Means Facing the Future," *Australasian Record*, January 12, 1985, 1. Photo of Piper family in 1900 with Albert and Hettie on second row right. Note that A. G. Stewart says "four girls" in his "Brief Biography of the Late Pastor A. H. Piper." However, Mary Trim, with personal knowledge of the family, was informed there were three daughters as the photo and other sources support.
5. Mary Trim, personal knowledge as a colleague in ministry of Albert and Nellie Piper between 1949 and 1960.
6. Ibid.
7. Joseph respected the temperance program that was advocated but never joined the church. He was publicly recognized as a man of high principles and was elected a city councilor. This was told to Mary Trim by his daughter, Violet Mabel, younger sister of Albert Piper, in about 1959.
8. Mary Trim, personal knowledge as a colleague in ministry of Albert and Nellie Piper between 1949 and 1960.
9. Ellen G. White to W. C. White, August 13, 1893, Letter 138, 1893, Ellen G. White Estate.
10. Stewart, "A Brief Biography," 14.
11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.
13. Ibid. The same incident is also elaborated on in Marye Trim, *Courage in the Lord: The Story of Albert Henry Piper* (Wahroonga, New South Wales: Education Department, South Pacific Division of Seventh-day Adventists, 2004).
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18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. J. E. Fulton, "Hester (Hettie) Elizabeth Piper obituary," *Australasian Record*, June 17, 1912, 7.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid.
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27. A. H. Piper, "The Cook Islands," *Union Conference Record*, May 1, 1902, 3.
28. A. H. Piper, "Rarotonga Cook Islands," *Union Conference Record*, June 15, 1904, 2-3.
29. George C. Porter, "New Church Dedicated During Cook Islands Session," *Australasian Record and Advent World Survey*, June 28, 1976, 8.
30. George A. Irwin, "The New Zealand Camp Meeting," *Union Conference Record*, March 1, 1904, 3; Albert Henry Piper Biographical Records, "Biographical Information Blank."
31. "Distribution of Labour," *Union Conference Record*, August 15, 1904, 4.

32. "Pastor A. H. Piper and wife . . .," *Union Conference Record*, September 15, 1904, 7.
33. "On the same day . . .," *Union Conference Record*, October 1, 1904, 7.
34. Albert Henry Piper Biographical Records, South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives, Folder: "Piper, Albert Henry," Document: "Piper, Albert Henry."
35. "Pastor A. H. Piper sailed from Sydney . . .," *Union Conference Record*, November 1, 1904, 7.
36. G. F. Jones, "From Mangareva to Rarotonga," *Union Conference Record*, November 1, 1903, 5.
37. Albert Henry Piper Biographical Records, "Biographical Information Blank."
38. "A letter from Brother Piper . . .," *Union Conference Record*, February 18, 1907, 7.
39. Brother and Sister Piper . . .," *Union Conference Record*, February 25, 1907, 7.
40. J. E. Fulton, "Report of the New South Wales Conference," *Union Conference Record*, September 30, 1907, 10.
41. "Brother James of Raymond Terrace . . .," *Union Conference Record*, June 26, 1907, 7.
42. "Pastor A. H. Piper . . .," *Union Conference Record*, September 16, 1907, 7.
43. "Distribution of Labour," *Union Conference Record*, September 30, 1907, 15.
44. J. E. Fulton, "The West Australian Camp Meeting," *Union Conference Record*, April 27, 1908, 4.
45. Lilian Clarke, "Darling Range School, West Australia," *Union Conference Record*, August 12, 1907, 6; "West Australian Conference," *Union Conference Record*, August 5, 1907, 5.
46. A. H. Piper, "West Australian Conference," *Union Conference Record*, May 17, 1909, 4.
47. "Distribution of Labour," *Union Conference Record*, October 4, 1909, 4.
48. "Nominations," Special No. 2, *Union Conference Record*, November 7, 1910, 68.
49. J. E. Fulton, "Union Conference Council," *Australasian Record*, October 2, 1911, 2.
50. Fulton, "Hester (Hettie) Elizabeth Piper obituary."
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54. A. H. Piper, "Notes of Travel," *Australasian Record*, August 4, 1913, 2-3; "Brother A. H. Piper . . .," *Australasian Record*, September 15, 1913, 8.
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56. Mary Trim, personal knowledge as a colleague in ministry of Albert and Nellie Piper between 1949 and 1960.
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61. "Pastor Piper and family . . .," *Australasian Record*, November 10, 1913, 8; "West Australian Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook 1916* (Washington D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1916), 138; Stewart, "A Brief Biography."
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65. W. W. Fletcher, "Western Australian Camp Meeting," *Australasian Record*, December 18, 1916, 5.
66. Albert Henry Piper Biographical Records, "Biographical Information Blank."
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68. "Foreign Missions Day," *Missionary Leader*, January 1930, 1; "Foreign Missions Day," *Missionary Leader*, July 1931, 1.
69. A. H. Piper, "The Why of the Woe that Wounds," *Australasian Record*, September 24, 1945, 1.
70. W. G. C. Murdoch to Mary Trim, August 21, 1980, private letter, personal collection of Mary Trim.
71. Comments made to the author during research in 1970s by fellow ministers and administrators of the period: E. J. Johanson, Ben McMahon, George Sterling, A. G. Stewart, W. G. Turner, Dr. A. K. Tulloch.

72. An example of a memorable sermon is Piper, "The Why of Woe That Wounds."
73. Trim, *Courage in the Lord*, 26; Mary Trim, personal knowledge as a colleague in ministry of Clarice and Frank Breaden, 1950–1981.
74. Mary Trim, personal knowledge as a colleague in ministry of Clarice and Frank Breaden, 1950–1981.
75. L. C. Naden, interview with the author, September 14, 1971, Wahroonga, New South Wales.
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79. Piper stayed in the Tamworth home of Mary Trim, with whom he reminisced about his life.
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82. Ibid.
83. Ferris, "Nellie Piper obituary."

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