

Pomare, Sir Maui

(1876–1930)

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Gilbert M. Valentine, Ph.D. has served internationally in teaching and senior administrative roles in Adventist higher education in Europe, Asia, the South Pacific and North America. He has written extensively in Adventist studies and has authored several books, including biographies of *W. W. Prescott* (2005) and *J. N. Andrews* (2019). *The Prophet and the Presidents* (2011) explored the political influence of Ellen White. He has also written for the *Ellen G. White Encyclopedia* (2013).

Maui Pomare was the first Maori New Zealander to qualify as a physician.

Pomare was born at Pahou Pa near Urenui in Taranaki, New Zealand, in 1876, of high rank, his grandmother Kahe Te Rau-o-te-rangi being one of the few women to sign the Treaty of Waitangi.¹ At the age of five, Pomare lost a toe when a soldier's horse trod on his foot in a Taranaki land rights

confrontation between his community, led by the Maori prophet Te Whiti, and the armed constabulary at Parihaka in November 1881. The incident helped shape his lifelong concern for Maori welfare and prosperity.

Pomare became a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church at Napier in 1893 while a student at Te Aute College south of Hastings, in the Hawke's Bay Region of the North Island of New Zealand. He had become interested in Maori health issues in 1891 after reading James Pope's school text *Health for the Maori*.

Subsequently, with school friends, he had become involved in raising health awareness among Maori Pas and campaigning for prohibition. The college cook, a Mr. Everson, who was studying about Adventism, introduced Pomare to Adventists in Napier, and after some time, the young chieftain was baptized and stayed for a short time with the Adventist dentist Dr. Margaret Caro of Napier when things became difficult at school.² Church leaders A. G. Daniells and Ellen White, attending meetings in New Zealand at the time, were impressed with Pomare's potential as a church worker.³

With the intention of training to be a medical missionary, Pomare traveled to America in August 1893 to study at the Battle Creek Sanitarium with Dr. John Harvey Kellogg. Dr. Caro and Ellen White had agreed to help sponsor



Sir Maui Pomare

Photo from J. F. Cody, *Man of Two Worlds* (1953).

him.⁴ Upon his arrival in Michigan, he was advised to study first at Battle Creek by Kellogg and W. W. Prescott, the college president. This would enable him to take some newly introduced Bible courses. After his preparatory courses, he still planned to go on to complete a medical degree at Ann Arbor in Michigan.⁵ The period of study at Battle Creek College exposed him to educational reform issues that were being vigorously debated in Adventism at the time.⁶ Kellogg viewed him as “a remarkably bright young man” of “marked ability” and “very enthusiastic in health principles.”⁷ At the conclusion of his college study, at the point of transition to medical school, difficulties arose over sponsorship. Friends were apparently suggesting careers other than that of medical missionary. Consequently, he received conflicting advice from his church counselors. Some thought he should return to New Zealand for practical experience; others advised him to continue in Michigan with his medical studies.⁸ The lack of clear understanding resulted in a vigorous exchange of correspondence and confusion among the leadership about what work to assign him should he return to New Zealand, and this resulted in “great perplexity” for Pomare. The lack of cross-cultural sensitivity complicated the situation.⁹ Pomare thus returned to New Zealand for only a short time, experiencing significant embarrassment and loss of face among friends and family. In 1896 he returned to America, feeling “wronged and falsely dealt with,” according to New Zealand Conference President W. M. Crothers.¹⁰ He undertook his medical degree study with help from Kellogg and Dr. Caro.

Following the completion of his study, Pomare served for a short time in the Chicago Cook County hospital and then returned to New Zealand in August 1900. By this time, although he was an ardent advocate of Adventist healthcare and reform principles, it appears he was no longer a practicing Sabbath keeper. He returned to New Zealand just as an outbreak of bubonic plague threatened the colony, and he was appointed as Maori Health Officer, a position that enabled him to quickly become involved in advocating health reform principles and undertaking a number of campaigns to improve Maori health. His skills in oratory enabled him to achieve considerable success in addressing issues of sanitation, public health, and housing and registration of Maori births and deaths. Some of his views, such as the need for the Tohunga Suppression Act of 1907 (to correct superstitious traditional health practices), and his strong emphasis on assimilation, considered progressive in his day, had both a positive and negative impact on Maori culture over the longer term.¹¹

In 1912, Pomare entered politics and was elected as an independent to represent Western Maori. During his six terms as a member of parliament, he served in the cabinet first as minister without portfolio (1912) and then as Minister for the Cook Islands (1916), Minister of Health (1923), and Minister of Internal Affairs (1928–1930). His distinctive achievements in these roles helped address the decline in Maori health as he campaigned for safe maternity practices and mental health care reform. He helped achieve the alignment of Cook Island educational and legal systems with those of New Zealand, but his attempts to resolve tribal land confiscation grievances met only mixed success. For his services to public life, in 1920 Pomare was made a Companion of the Order of Saint Michael and Saint George (C.M.G.) and, in 1922, Knight Commander of the British Empire (K.B.E.). He is remembered also for his work to preserve a written record of Maori culture. He partnered with Sir James Cowan in producing a two-volume publication, *Legends of the Maori*.¹²

During his career in politics, Sir Maui Pomare continued to maintain periodic contact with Seventh-day Adventist physicians with whom he had studied in medical school and with the Caro family. He assisted Dr. Martin and Dr. Nettie Keller to obtain medical registration in New Zealand, and they subsequently established a highly regarded practice in Auckland. Dr. Keller became involved in numerous social causes.¹³

In 1928 Pomare contracted tuberculosis. With the continued deterioration in his health, he returned to America to seek treatment at Glendale Adventist Hospital in California in early June 1930 under the care of former classmates Dr. Martin and Dr. Nettie Keller. Martin Keller was then Medical Superintendent at the hospital.¹⁴ However, the disease was too far advanced. Dr. Maui Pomare died on June 27, 1930. In a controversial departure from Maori custom, his body was cremated. Upon the return of his ashes enclosed in a casket to New Zealand, the remains lay in state in Parliament House and were then interred with traditional Maori ceremonies at his birth village in Taranaki on August 28, 1930.

In 1936 a statue of the Maori health pioneer was erected at Owaē Marae in Waitara, Taranaki, and each year the community celebrates Maui Pomare day (Te Ra o Maui Pomare), recognizing his work in health reform and politics.

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NOTES

1. A school register gives his birth date as August 24, 1875, but his death certificate states January 13, 1876. See Graham Butterworth, "Pomare, Maui Wiremu Piti Naera," *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, first published in 1996, *Te Ara: The Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, accessed December 1, 2017, <https://teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/3p30/pomare-maui-wiremu-piti-naera>.
2. Ellen White gives an account of Maui Pomare's introduction to the Seventh-day Adventist Church in her Diary entry for September 15, 1893 and in "Maori Boys Interested in the Truth," July 13, 1893, MS 41, 1893, Ellen G. White Estate.
3. E. G. White to J. H. Kellogg, July 10, 1896. Letter K 54, 1896. Ellen G. White Estate.
4. Ibid.
5. W. W. Prescott to E. G. White, October 5, 1893. See also W. C. White to Board of Foreign Missions, August 3, 1893. General Conference Archives.
6. Gilbert M. Valentine, "Maui Pomare and the Adventist Connection," in *In and Out of the World*, ed. P. H. Ballis (Palmerston North, NZ: Dunmore Press, 1985), 85–86.

7. J. H. Kellogg to W. C. White, August 7, 1895; J. H. Kellogg to E. G. White August 12, 1895; J. H. Kellogg to M. Caro, August 12, 1895, Incoming Correspondence, Ellen G. White Estate.
8. Kellogg voiced concerns about influences perceived to be distracting him from his goal of becoming a medical missionary. E. G. White to J. H. Kellogg, April 15, 1895, Letter K 46, 1895, Ellen G. White Estate; J. H. Kellogg to E. G. White, June 13, 1895, Incoming Correspondence, Ellen G. White Estate.
9. There was no budget, and some thought to send him selling books. M. Pomare to W. C. White, June 21, 1895; M. Pomare to J. H. Kellogg, August 7, 1895; J. H. Kellogg to E. G. White, August 7, 1895, Incoming Correspondence, Ellen G. White Estate; W. C. White to J. H. Kellogg, August 19, 1895, W. C. White Letterbook 8, 118–120; “Report of the New Zealand Conference,” October 24, 1895, W. C. White Letterbook 8, 404–409; E. G. White to M. Pomare, September 26, 1895, Letter P 66, 1895, Ellen G. White Estate.
10. W. M. Crothers to W. C. White, [undated but likely August] 1896. General Conference Archives.
11. Butterworth, “Pomare.”
12. Sir Maui Pomare and Sir James Cowan, *The Legends of the Maori*, 2 vol. (Wellington: AMS Press, 1930).
13. C. P. Sorrenson interview with Dr. Frances Keller-Harding, September 4, 1976, Oral History Collection, Loma Linda University Heritage Research Center, California.
14. Ibid.

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