

Rice, Jesse Dan

(1857–1952)

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.

Jesse Rice and his wife, Cora, were missionaries to Rarotonga.

Early Life

Jesse Dan Rice was born in December 1857 in Cache Creek near Sacramento, California.¹ His parents

owned a farm that employed two other young men as laborers. Jesse was the youngest of three children. His older siblings were Emma Jane (b. 1853) and William (b. 1855).²

A Change in Direction

Jesse became a schoolteacher. In order to conduct a series of evangelistic meetings, Elder William Healey rented the school at which Jesse was teaching. Jesse attended the crusade and was persuaded by Healey's message. Jesse left his position and joined the evangelism team in the California Conference. He was ordained in 1877.³

Following his ordination, Jesse conducted a crusade in Locust Grove in 1878 and formed a company of believers⁴ before joining Healey in a similar series at Santa Rosa.⁵ In 1880, Jesse was ministering in the Freshwater district.⁶

On May 18, 1882, Jesse married Barbara Stickney, a former schoolteacher who was serving as the California Conference secretary. Soon after their marriage, the dreaded tuberculosis took hold of Barbara, ending her life on September 6, 1884. She was only 32 years of age.⁷ She rests in Little River Cemetery, Mendocino County,



Jesse D. Rice

Photo courtesy of Michael Campbell.

California.⁸

Jesse continued to minister in the California Conference, first at Williams in Colusa County⁹ and later at St. Helena in Napa County.¹⁰ In 1889, he married Cora Abercrombie (Swain) Marshall.¹¹ They transferred to serve in the Ohio Conference in the rural Winameg district¹² and then in the city of Cleveland. Cora was elected as the secretary/treasurer of the Ohio division of the Health and Temperance Society, and Jesse was given the role of vice president for the same organization.¹³ After two years in Ohio, they returned to their previous conference to minister in Ogden, Utah, that area then included in the California Conference.¹⁴

To the Cook Islands

The Foreign Mission Board selected Jesse and Cora to sail on the fourth voyage of the "Pitcairn" to assist pioneering efforts begun by Dr. Joseph Caldwell in Rarotonga in the Cook Islands group. Maud Marshall-Rice, the teenage daughter of Cora from her first marriage, was also aboard when the vessel sailed from San Francisco on April 30, 1895. Three months sailing via Pitcairn Island and French Polynesia brought them to Rarotonga in early August.¹⁵ In order to be partly self-supporting, they agreed to teach at the public school in Aorangi on the western rim of the island. At the same time, they applied themselves to learning the local language. They found it difficult to find suitable housing, so the "Pitcairn" carried lumber, doors, and windows on its fifth voyage in 1896 to supply their needs.¹⁶

However, these mission endeavors did not run smoothly. The medical and educational work was appreciated, but any proselytizing aroused opposition. Some influences in government circles brought about the closure of public schools in mid-1897, leaving another denomination free to operate all the schools on the island.¹⁷ Jesse and Cora took a handful of young people into their home for private tuition.¹⁸ When, in 1900, Cora went to Australia to enrol her daughter in the Avondale School for Christian Workers,¹⁹ she applied to also take two of her best students. However, government authorities blocked her endeavour.²⁰ She was pregnant during her travelling to and from Australia, and she gave birth to Gwendoline on April 15, 1900, after she arrived back in Rarotonga.²¹

Bitter opposition accelerated when Elder Edward Gates visited Rarotonga and baptized 20 individuals. There was talk of the introduction of a Sunday law to make life difficult for the new converts. Jesse distributed tracts about religious liberty that furthered angered some of the opposition, who then mounted attacks in columns of the local newspaper. Despite religious liberty principles, a Sunday law was voted by the island parliament. It took effect on January 1, 1900.²² Soon after, church members were arrested for working on Sunday. They were fined 10 shillings each and forced to work on bridge and road construction for a month.²³ Jesse was fined for trading in coffee and bicycle parts.²⁴ The new converts, however, remained resolute, and better judgment on the part of the opposing forces soon brought a conciliatory climate. Nevertheless, in the heat of the opposition, both

Caldwell and Rice considered it diplomatic to withdraw. By mid-1901, both men had transferred elsewhere, and a missionary couple from Australia arrived soon after to make a fresh start.²⁵

Back in California

Residing in Oakland, Jesse resumed work in the California Conference until 1910.²⁶ The couple retired to Piedmont, where Jesse and Cora employed a senior French lady as a servant.²⁷ Gwendoline married, but Maude remained a spinster and moved with her parents to Alameda,²⁸ finally locating at Paradise in the Sierra Nevada foothills. Cora passed away on July 30, 1948, and was laid to rest in the Paradise Cemetery near the Seventh-day Adventist Church there.²⁹ Jesse was placed alongside her when he passed away on December 31, 1952.³⁰ Later, when Maude died on December 30, 1974, she also was laid to rest in the same family plot.³¹

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