



Arch and Hilda Barrett
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Barrett, Archibald Robert (1885–1968), and Hilda Elfrida (Heinrich) (1892–1955); later Jessie (Laird) (1914–1998)

HELEN MILLER

Helen Miller, born to William and Nancy Hay and educated in Brisbane, Australia, felt called by God to become a missionary nurse after hearing of health needs in the Pacific. She graduated from the Sydney Sanitarium and Hospital (now Sydney Adventist Hospital) in 1969 with high distinction before proceeding to nurse in the Solomon Islands and Australia and then in New Zealand and Pitcairn Island with first husband Pastor Lewis Barker. Helen's Master of Ministry (Family Life) degree (2009) reflects her love of study and is used in Toowoomba, supporting her husband, Pastor Keith Miller.

Pastor Robert Barrett was a pioneer missionary, administrator, pastor, and Bible translator who together with his wife, Hilda, spent his life in service to the people of the Solomon Islands, the New Hebrides (Vanuatu), and New Guinea.

Early Life (1885–1919)

Archibald Robert Barrett (known as Robert) was born on September 5, 1885, in Adelaide, South Australia to Edward (c. 1845–1894) and Harriet (Fairclough) Barrett (1856–1946).¹ He was the second of four siblings: Hilda (Lampard, 1883–1962),² Walter Knightscales (1887–1965),³ and Stella Gladys (1890–1979).⁴ About 1900 his mother became a Seventh-day Adventist under the labors of Pastor J. H. Woods.⁵ She married Thomas Thatcher⁶ in 1901 and sent Robert to the Avondale School for Christian Workers,⁷ where he was baptized by Pastor Robinson.⁸

When he returned home to South Australia, he “joined in with old associates, and went with them cricketing, footballing etc. on Sabbaths.”⁹ Robert worked as a painter, then as a clerk and overseer of works in the Redhill District Council.¹⁰ He tried to enlist in the army but was rejected due to his sight. When he tried again, enlisting (as a Methodist) on July 26, 1916, he was accepted for active service abroad. He embarked for England on December 23, 1916. Robert served in France as a gunner and driver in the Australian Imperial Forces. At the end of the war, he returned to Australia, disembarking on May 14, 1919.¹¹

Hilda Elfrida Heinrich was born on January 2, 1892.¹² Her parents, Friedrich Wilhelm Gotthelf (1864–1916)¹³ and Maria Elisabeth (Schaefer) Heinrich (1871–1957),¹⁴ lived in Wiltunga (a farming area including the town of Bute), South Australia. Hilda, the third of nine siblings, grew up with five sisters and three brothers.

How Robert and Hilda met is not known, but Hilda had been waiting for Robert’s return from the war.¹⁵ Three weeks after Robert’s discharge, they married at the Wiltunga Methodist Church on July 9, 1919.¹⁶ Robert took up civil employment in the Blythe District Council.¹⁷

Early Married Life (1919–1923)

Barrett’s mother sent him *The Great Controversy*, and he recalled that

in the evenings when my wife was sewing or mending, I read “*Great Controversy*” aloud, and we decided to go back to school. Three weeks after our decision to leave, we were at school: successor appointed, house and effects sold and everything cleared up. I had previously asked that Council meetings be not held on the Sabbath.¹⁸

They spent 1920 and 1921 at Cooranbong, New South Wales, Australia, where Robert studied at the Australasian Missionary College. He graduated from the ministerial course on November 28, 1921.¹⁹ His first appointment was to sell *Christ’s Object Lessons* from February 1922 to April 1923, with Hilda also selling briefly (and successfully).²⁰

Solomon Islands (1923–1942)

Barrett was called to take charge of the Missionary Training School²¹ on Vangunu Island in the Marovo Lagoon, Western Solomon Islands, and to be Secretary-Treasurer for the Solomon Islands Mission.²² In 1922 over one hundred men had cleared the jungle on the spot now known as Batuna²³ before groups of boys from different islands worked to establish the new school. Barrett’s first task on arrival in mid-1923 was to help clear the site and “get in” foundations for their house.²⁴ On opening day, a photo of at least 35 students was taken, which was published with the caption “Our future native workers for the group.”²⁵

The first two and a half years were physically exhausting, with more accommodation, paths, and a jetty²⁶ to build and gardens to plant.²⁷ Pastor Wicks officially organized the Batuna church of 31 members, with Barrett as the elder and Hilda, a deaconess. Wicks also performed the first baptism of 18 students.²⁸ Malaria affected Barrett severely, so they returned to Sydney on December 5, 1925, for treatment and furlough.²⁹ It took almost a year before he recovered, enabling their return to Batuna.³⁰

The next 16 years at Batuna, they were “well and happy.”³¹ Help came for the Batuna Training School.³² As the gospel spread and members increased, so did Barrett’s workload as Secretary-Treasurer, and later, as Sabbath School Secretary.³³ He traveled throughout the Solomon Islands, visiting and reporting on new areas including Choiseul,³⁴ Malaita,³⁵ and Rennell.³⁶ He spoke at district meetings³⁷ and various dedications³⁸ and interpreted for visiting speakers.³⁹ During his furlough in 1936, he was ordained to the ministry.⁴⁰

World War II and Beyond (1942–1951)

The next phase of the Barretts’ service began with their hurried departures ahead of the imminent arrival of the Japanese Army. Hilda (with other expatriate women and children) left from Gizo on the *Malaita* in early January 1942.⁴¹ Barrett, John Howse, Jim Cormack, John Gosling, David Ferris, Charles Tucker, and Hamley Perry left Batuna on January 27, 1942, at four o’clock in the morning on the *Melanesia*. The Lord guided and protected them for the perilous voyage to Australia, and they finally reached Sydney with great rejoicing.⁴²

At the end of April 1942, the Barretts were located in Mackay, North Queensland, for pastoral and evangelistic work.⁴³ They were subsequently appointed to the New Hebrides. Barrett went ahead, arriving on April 22, 1943.⁴⁴ His tasks were to reopen the Aore Training School (closed in 1942 due to war conditions)⁴⁵ and be Secretary-Treasurer for the New Hebrides Mission.⁴⁶ Hilda, together with Mrs. Charles Tucker and Mrs. Bert Piez, arrived in the New Hebrides a few months later.⁴⁷ The Barretts remained at Aore until mid-1945.⁴⁸

In November 1945 the Barretts with 13 other SDA missionaries left for the Solomon Islands via Milne Bay and Bougainville.⁴⁹ After an eventful voyage, they arrived home at Batuna. Barrett, delighted his books had survived, reported that “the work ahead is mountainous, with every indication of a long, hard pull. . . . The spirit here is good. . . . We are all glad to be here.”⁵⁰ During his extensive visitation, financial and statistical matters formed part of his workload,⁵¹ but he also noted the reaction of the people to the war years and reported, “Their faith is stronger than ever.”⁵²

The Barretts accompanied new missionaries John and Merle Newman to Kwailabesi station on Malaita and stayed three weeks, helping them settle in.⁵³ Back at Batuna, Barrett taught the Bible lessons in the training school while Lyndon Thrift was away.⁵⁴ His experience was also useful, relieving the secretary-treasurers of the Bismarck-Solomons Union Mission⁵⁵ and Papua North-East New Guinea Mission for eight and five months, respectively. However, completing the translation of the Old Testament into Marovo remained a high priority, with their time in the Solomon Islands limited.⁵⁶

Robert and Hilda Barrett arrived in Sydney in January 1948⁵⁷ and enjoyed a short furlough with relatives before concentrating on completing the translation of the Marovo language Bible at Long Jetty on the Central Coast of New South Wales.⁵⁸ Three Solomon Islanders came to assist: Pastors Pana and Rini with translating and Tasa, a teacher, doing the typing.⁵⁹ Later, Pastor Kata Rangoso came to review the whole Bible, and Tasa (later Pastor Tasa) returned to Australia to type it.⁶⁰ Finally, after a marathon 30-year effort by many people at various times, the task was complete.⁶¹

Final Years

Following the completion of the translation work, the Barretts retired from mission work in South Australia, where he pastored churches at Nuriootpa and Angaston.⁶² Hilda’s health caused concern in mid-1955, and she was anointed⁶³ but died on October 3, 1955, aged 63.⁶⁴

Robert later married Jessie Laird.⁶⁵ He pastored the Kadina, South Australia, church from 1957 to 1960.⁶⁶ In 1967 the Barretts moved to Sherwin Lodge, Western Australia, where Robert Barrett died on May 19, 1968, aged 82.⁶⁷ Jessie died on May 8, 1998.⁶⁸

Contribution

Robert and Hilda Barrett spent most of their 36 years of marriage in overseas service. Their language skills facilitated communication with their colleagues and students.⁶⁹ It also enabled the completion of translating the Bible into the Marovo language. They had no children of their own but took a keen interest in all people, communicating positively and commending faithfulness and dependability.⁷⁰ Pastor A. G. Stewart, who knew Pastor Barrett well, testified that “he never found a man more faithful to his tasks and duties.”⁷¹

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