Potter, John James (1879–1945)

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.

John and Ada Potter, c. 1925.

Photo courtesy of South Pacific Division Heritage Centre.

John James Potter was involved in the publishing work of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and manager of the Signs Publishing Company.

Early Life

John James Potter was born on June 16, 1879, to Thomas and Elizabeth (White) Potter in Balaclava to the north of Adelaide, South Australia.[1] It was farming territory, a life in which Potter was first nurtured. He trained as a blacksmith, specializing in forging and fitting carriage parts in the coach-building trade. According to his own hand, he became a Seventh-day Adventist and married about the same time, in December 1901.[2] His wife, formerly Ada Pengelley, was born in nearby Kadina to James and Keturah (Harman) Pengelley on February 19, 1887.[3] She was only about fifteen years of age at the time of their marriage.

Church Ministry

Potter entered the colporteur ministry in 1904, selling *The Great Controversy* in South Australia. He logged long hours and was successful in gaining many orders.[4] For five years, he remained in South Australia moving from town to town and offering various books including *The Coming King*,[5] *The Home Handbook*,[6] and *The Ladies'*

Guide.[7] In 1909, he was made a field agent in charge of the colporteur team in the Victoria-Tasmania Conference,[8] a position he held until 1913 when he to the South Australian Conference where he continued the same work.[9]

From 1917 through 1925, Potter chose to engage in private enterprise. At the time, the Potters had six children to support. They were named, in order of birth, Reginald James, Pansy, William David, Zetta May, John Walton, and Lancelot Pengelley.[10]

In 1926, Potter decided to join the evangelistic team in South Australia. He first assisted Elder Patching in Murray Bridge, a town with no Seventh-day Adventists, but where Potter had previously sold books. They raised a group of believers and before the year ended a church building was under construction.[11] The following year, Potter assisted three others with a tent crusade in the fruit-growing district of Berri.[12]

In 1930, Potter returned to the administration of colporteurs, this time as assistant field missionary secretary at the Australasian Union Conference.[13] The following year, he was appointed to lead the department.[14] It was while he was engaged in this work that he was ordained in Sydney in 1933.[15]

The most significant move of Potter's career transpired in 1935 when he was appointed manager of the Signs Publishing Company in Warburton, Victoria.[16] This proved to be the assignment for which he was best remembered. The disastrous Warburton flood of November 1934,[17] when thousands of pounds worth of damage was caused to the printing works, had just occurred. Potter successfully steered the enterprise through this difficult period, overseeing the rebuilding of the facility on higher ground and repayment of the consequent expenses in just four years.[18] This calamity was followed by equally hard times during the Second World War when paper was scarce. His 1941 report spoke of a fortuitous delivery of paper from Germany at the start of the war and a loyalty to the Burnie Paper Mill in Tasmania, which guaranteed supplies for a reduced production line.[19]

An Untimely End

When nearing retirement Potter's health declined rapidly, forcing him to give up active work early in 1945. Within a few months, he died at Warburton on September 15, 1945.[20] Ada Potter experienced a long widowhood, passing away in the Seventh-day Adventist Homes for the Aged at Nunawading, suburban Melbourne, on December 1, 1969.[21]

It was said of John James Potter at his memorial service that "he came to this work [of canvassing books] practically an untutored man from the coach-building sheds and, passing through years of service doing his very best, reached the highest responsibility in leadership in his chosen field of service."[22]

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