

Howe, Florence

Muriel (1908–1992)

LESTER DEVINE

Originally trained as a secondary history teacher, a career long Adventist educator, Lester Devine, Ed.D., has taught at elementary, secondary and higher education levels and spent more than three decades in elected educational leadership positions in two divisions of the world Church, NAD (1969-1982) and SPD (1982-2005). He completed his forty years of denominational service with a term as director of the Ellen G. White/Adventist Research Centre at Avondale University College in Australia where his life-long hobby of learning and presenting on Adventist heritage issues became his vocation.

Florence Muriel Howe was a nurse and missionary to China and Africa.

Early Life and Education

Florence Muriel Howe was born on February 19, 1908, at Plattsburg, New South Wales, Australia, to parents David and Phillippa Violet Matilda Howe, nee Eade.¹

In 1931 Muriel left her home at Kurri Kurri, New South Wales and enrolled at the Australasian Missionary College (now Avondale University College) and for three years there she paid her own fees as a full 'industrial student.'² While there she was the secretary of the Missionary Volunteer Society.³ During this time the conviction grew that the Lord was calling her to devote her life to China. But the Church had not appointed any workers from Australia to China in 20 years, so she knew that she would have to 'find her own way there.'⁴ Muriel decided that she would go to China, train there as a nurse, and during that time learn the language with a 'roof over her head' for the three years she was studying. Her father was opposed to these plans, but she was over 21, so she asked the Lord for three signs that what she was doing was His plan for her. The first sign was that she would be accepted as a nursing student by the Shanghai Sanitarium Board even though no European had ever previously trained with the national students. The second sign was that, without any personal request to others, the Lord would provide 60% of the money she needed. The final request was that everything would fall into place in time so that she could sail for China on



Muriel Howe

Photo courtesy of Lester Devine.

a ship scheduled to leave Sydney, Australia on April 28, 1934.⁵ She then waited to see how the Lord would lead. Seven weeks prior to her scheduled departure Muriel received her acceptance as a nursing student from the Shanghai Sanitarium. She had saved 40 percent of the funds she needed and the 60 percent remaining soon came to her, unsolicited, from several sources. In fact she had more than she needed, as the Australasian Division leaders provided sufficient funds to thoroughly outfit her with warm clothing; something she was unaware she would need. In the meantime her father, who had expressed strong objection to her plans, told her, "If the Lord wants you to go, let the Lord provide; but if you want to come back at any time I'll help you."⁶ At her last Friday evening Vespers service at the College before she sailed to China Muriel stood with those who wished to give their testimony and sang the well-known hymn, 'Take My Life and Let It Be.'⁷

Missionary to China

Muriel Howe sailed for China on April 20, 1934.⁸ Once in China, Muriel went without many things due to her lack of finances, but she graduated from her nursing course in 1937.⁹ Her experiences while a student nurse are chronicled in a series of articles in the *Australasian Record*, published in 1937.¹⁰ Rather than pursuing post-graduate work, she then chose to travel some 2,000 miles to the hospital at Lanchow on the borders of Mongolia and Tibet.¹¹ During her time there the Chinese-Japanese war was raging and the hospital suffered. Twice Muriel had to be evacuated. Eventually, the Japanese took over the hospital at Lanchow with the expatriate staff having to leave with just two hours' notice, abandoning most of their possessions. Muriel travelled for weeks with 18 others on a truck through lawless bandit country and endured considerable hardship as they crossed 10,000-foot mountains. At one stage their truck got bogged in a river. It took twelve mules and thirty coolies to pull it out; it was covered all over with mud which all had to be cleaned off, and the engine had to be dried out before the faithful 'Chevie' could continue the journey. Once the truck got going again it took eight hours to cover the first 20 miles because the roads were so bad; armed guards accompanied them through bandit country. There was illness among the 19 in the group and Muriel spent of a lot of time treating them; she was glad she had not left her medical kit behind in Lanchow. Her health had suffered during this ordeal and she returned to Australia to recuperate arriving in September 1939.¹² She wrote of her experience during that harrowing journey and her story was published in two parts in the *Australasian Record*.¹³ The Second World War made it necessary for Muriel to remain in Australia where she was appointed initially to the Health Food Department to be engaged in house to house health educational work in Victoria.¹⁴ Before long, however, she settled in Tasmania.¹⁵ Because her foreign nursing qualifications were not recognized in Australia, Muriel sat the Tasmanian Nursing Board examination and on passing studied midwifery during the three years she lived there. She then took up employment with the Sanitarium Health Food Company working in both Tasmania and Melbourne where she opened the Camberwell branch Health Food Store.¹⁶ However, Muriel wanted to return to China. In mid-1944 a cable was received from the General Conference asking that passage

be arranged for her return.¹⁷ In October 1944, she received clearance from the Australian government and it was reported that she was awaiting passage to China.¹⁸ She was not reported as on her way until October 1945, however.¹⁹

Muriel worked in Chunking until 1949 when she had to leave China again because of the Communist takeover of the country. During those four years in Chunking, Muriel worked with Harry Willis Miller, who had her look after the national leaders of China, and their families, such as Madam Chiang Kai-Shek and other prominent citizens who came to him for treatment.²⁰

Missionary to Africa and Service in Taiwan

Leaving China, Muriel moved to the United States at the end of 1949 and upgraded her qualifications to a Bachelor's Degree in Nursing Education at Washington Missionary College.²¹ As it was unlikely she could ever return to China, she accepted an invitation to mission service in Africa in 1951, remaining there until 1954.²² During that time she worked at Malamulo Hospital in the then Nyasaland in Central Africa. There she had the responsibility for the general nursing and the midwifery training programs in that large (then 290 beds) hospital.²³

But as much as Muriel enjoyed her time in Africa, her heart was still in China, and so continued her life of service in Formosa (Taiwan) from February 1955.²⁴ There she had charge of the nurses' training program in the hospital for which the Thirteenth Sabbath Offering had been allocated at the end of 1954.²⁵ Study of the Seventh-day Adventist Yearbooks between 1955 and 1976 reveals that from 1955 until the end of 1966 she remained at the Taiwan Sanitarium and Hospital holding a number of positions at various times including director of nurses, director and dean of the School of Nursing; also teaching in the Public Health Faculty at the Taiwan Training Institute and in the Nursing Education Faculty at the Taiwan Missionary College. In 1967 she transferred to the Kettering Memorial Hospital in Ohio and remained there until June 1972.²⁶ She then responded to an invitation to be the director of the School of Nursing at Hong Kong Adventist Hospital where she remained until 1975. Her last year of active service was spent in 1976 back at the Taiwan Adventist Hospital.

Muriel Howe retired to live in Loma Linda in 1976.²⁷ She spent the last months of her life, after a stroke, in a nursing home in Loma Linda operated by two young women, both former students from her Taiwan years. She died on August 19, 1992 and was buried at the Montecito Memorial Park in Loma Linda, California.²⁸

Years earlier, in a national radio broadcast across Australia, journalist Frank Legge, commented about Muriel Howe, "Now we have someone here who is not famous but deserves to be. She is loved by all sorts of people from the Gobi desert to the lepers of Africa."²⁹

SOURCES

"A cable message . . ." *Australasian Record*, "July 31, 1944.

"A. M. C. News Notes." *Australasian Record*, October 31, 1932.

"A recent arrival . . ." *Australasian Record*, October 9, 1939.

Bradley, Thomas J. "Francis Muriel Howe obituary." *Australasian Record*, November 14, 1992.

Carrall, Lynnette J. Lynette J. Carrall to Lester Devine. August 25, 2013. South Pacific Division Heritage Centre, Avondale College of Higher Education, Cooranbong, New South Wales, Australia.

"En route from Africa . . ." *Australasian Record*, January 31, 1955.

Frame, Robert R. "The Caves Superintendent Visits Avondale." *Australasian Record*, April 23, 1934.

"From private correspondence . . ." *Australasian Record*, July 30, 1951.

Harvey, L. R. "Evangelism in Tasmania." *Australasian Record*, January 31, 1944.

Howe, Muriel. "Into the Far North West of China." *Australasian Record*, August 30, 1937.

Howe, Muriel. "*Ma Ching Teh*." *Australasian Record*, November 27, 1939.

"Howe, Muriel Biographical Summary." South Pacific Division Heritage Centre, Avondale College of Higher Education, Cooranbong, New South Wales. Box 996.

Kuhn, May Cole. "How Muriel Came to China, Part 1." *Australasian Record*, March 29, 1937.

Kuhn, May Cole. "How Muriel Came to China, Part 2." *Australasian Record*, April 5, 1937.

Kuhn, May Cole. "How Muriel Howe Stayed in China." *Australasian Record*, May 24, 1937.

[Kuhn, May Cole.] "How Muriel Stayed in China." *Australasian Record*, May 17, 1937.

Lee, Helen. "Taiwan Sanitarium and Hospital Opens Its Doors." *Australasian Record and Advent World Survey*, June 27, 1955.

"Miss Muriel Howe . . ." *Australasian Record*, April 30, 1934.

"Miss Muriel Howe . . ." *Australasian Record*, February 5, 1940.

"On her way to China . . ." *Australasian Record*, October 18, 1945.

"She Deserves to be Famous." *Australasian Record*, February 14, 1955.

"Some time ago . . ." *Australasian Record*, October 9, 1944.

Wallsend, New South Wales. Birth certificate registration number, 9392/1908. Florence Muriel Howe. Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages. <https://familyhistory.bdm.nsw.gov.au/lifelink/familyhistory/search/res>

1. Wallsend, New South Wales, Birth certificate registration number, 9392/1908, Florence Muriel Howe, Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages, <https://familyhistory.bdm.nsw.gov.au/lifelink/familyhistory/search/res>; Thomas J. Bradley, "Francis Muriel Howe obituary," *Australasian Record*, November 14, 1992, 14.
2. "She Deserves to be Famous," *Australasian Record*, February 14, 1955, 3-4.
3. "A. M. C. News Notes," *Australasian Record*, October 31, 1932, 5.
4. "She Deserves to be Famous," 3.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.; Lynette J. Carrall to Lester Devine, August 25, 2013, South Pacific Division Heritage Centre, Avondale College of Higher Education, Cooranbong, New South Wales, Australia.
7. "She Deserves to be Famous," 3-4; See also Robert R. Frame, "The Caves Superintendent Visits Avondale," *Australasian Record*, April 23, 1934, 6.
8. "Miss Muriel Howe . . .," *Australasian Record*, April 30, 1934, 8.
9. Muriel Howe, "Into the Far North West of China," *Australasian Record*, August 30, 1937, 6
10. May Cole Kuhn, "How Muriel Came to China, Part 1" *Australasian Record*, March 29, 1937, 3; May Cole Kuhn, "How Muriel Came to China, Part 2," *Australasian Record*, April 5, 1937, 3-4; [May Cole Kuhn,] "How Muriel Stayed in China," *Australasian Record*, May 17, 1937, 5; May Cole Kuhn, "How Muriel Howe Stayed in China," *Australasian Record*, May 24, 1937, 3-4.
11. Muriel Howe, "Into the Far North West of China," *Australasian Record*, August 30, 1937, 6.
12. "A recent arrival . . .," *Australasian Record*, October 9, 1939, 8.
13. "Letter from Miss Muriel Howe," *Australasian Record*, January 10, 1938, 2-3; "Letter from Miss Muriel Howe, Concluded," *Australasian Record*, January 17, 1938, 2-3.
14. "Miss Muriel Howe . . .," *Australasian Record*, February 5, 1940, 8.
15. L. R. Harvey, "Evangelism in Tasmania," *Australasian Record*, January 31, 1944, 3.
16. "Howe, Muriel Biographical Summary," South Pacific Division Heritage Centre, Avondale College of Higher Education, Cooranbong, New South Wales, Box 996.

17. "A cable message . . .," *Australasian Record*, July 31, 1944, 8.
18. "Some time ago . . .," *Australasian Record*, October 9, 1944, 8.
19. "On her way to China . . .," *Australasian Record*, October 18, 1945, 16.
20. Thomas J. Bradley, "Francis Muriel Howe obituary," *Australasian Record*, November 14, 1992, 14.
21. "Howe, Muriel Biographical Summary," South Pacific Division Heritage Centre, Avondale College of Higher Education, Cooranbong, New South Wales, Box 996.
22. "From private correspondence . . .," *Australasian Record*, July 30, 1951, 8.
23. "She Deserves to be Famous." *Australasian Record*, February 14, 1955, 3-4.
24. "En route from Africa . . .," *Australasian Record*, January 31, 1955, 8.
25. Ibid.
26. Muriel Howe, "Answering the Call," *R&H*, August 3, 1972, 31.
27. Helen Lee, "Taiwan Sanitarium and Hospital Opens Its Doors," *Australasian Record and Advent World Survey*, June 27, 1955, 1-2; Thomas J. Bradley, "Francis Muriel Howe obituary," *Australasian Record*, November 14, 1992, 14.
28. Thomas J. Bradley, "Francis Muriel Howe obituary," *Australasian Record*, November 14, 1992, 14.
29. "She Deserves to be Famous," *Australasian Record*, February 14, 1955, 3-4.

encyclopedia.adventist.org is an official website of the [Seventh-day Adventist World Church](https://www.adventist.org/)

© 2020 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists 12501 Old Columbia Pike Silver Spring , MD 20904 USA 301-680-6000