Niue

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.

Niue is a large coral atoll in the South Pacific. One young woman of Niuean-Samoan parents, Vaiola Malama Kerisome, became a Seventh-day Adventist while overseas and returned to Niue in 1915 as a self-supporting missionary.

Location and History of Niue

Niue is located northeast of New Zealand, on the eastern side of the International Date Line, and is 11 hours behind Greenwich Mean Time. It has an area of 260 square kilometers (100 square miles) and a population of approximately
1,300. The capital is Alofi.\(^1\)

Niue enjoys a unique relationship with New Zealand. Formerly, the island was a territory of New Zealand. While the country has been self-governing since 1974, Niueans have retained New Zealand citizenship, and a large number of Niueans live in New Zealand, particularly in Auckland.\(^2\)

The island was inhabited by Polynesians some 1,500 years ago. In 1774 Captain James Cook received a hostile reception from the inhabitants of Niue Island, their mouths looking fierce from eating red bananas. Cook named it the Savage Island.

**First Contact by Seventh-day Adventists**

The London Missionary Society first introduced Christianity to the inhabitants in the early 19th century. On July 27, 1893, when the *Pitcairn* called at the southwestern village of Avatele on its second voyage, it was warmly welcomed. After a few hours in Avatele, the ship went north to Alofi. Dr. Merritt Kellogg was on board and decided to walk the nine kilometers (5.6 miles) to meet the ship again at the village of Alofi. During a stay of two weeks, Kellogg busied himself by treating 51 patients and performing two simple surgeries. “There is a very great need for a medical missionary here,” he wrote to his American headquarters.\(^3\) But no fully trained medical missionary was sent, neither on the subsequent voyages of the *Pitcairn* nor for the next 23 years.

**A Solitary Witness**

One young woman of Niuean-Samoan parents, Vaiola Malama Kerisome, became a Seventh-day Adventist while overseas and returned to Niue in 1915 as a self-supporting missionary. She began with a small elementary school.\(^4\)

The following year, April 1916, Septimus and Edith Carr sailed from Sydney to assist Kerisome.\(^5\) Sabbath Schools were organized at Alofi, Avatele, and Sialiuta. On Sunday, September 2, 1917, Carr baptized two Niueans at the Avatele beach. These were the first fruits of what would become a very small group of believers.\(^6\) In a report published in June 1919, Carr described progress on the first Seventh-day Adventist church building, one of native timbers and thatch roof on rented land at the capital, Alofi.\(^7\) Its opening and dedication went unmentioned in the *Australasian Record*, but it was most likely early in 1919.

The Carrs transferred in November 1919 and six months later were replaced by Ephraim and Agnes Giblett. The new missionaries had difficulty finding passage from Auckland, eventually taking a small sailing ship, the *Jubilee*, after the hurricane season ended in April 1920. The Gibletts settled into the tiny mission home at Lalotuake, north of Alofi, and quickly adjusted to their new culture.\(^8\) Their only medical training was a few months spent learning massage and water treatments at the Sydney Sanitarium. These they used to good advantage at times.\(^9\) In his reports, Giblett spoke of trying to establish an elementary school for 24 students twice a week at Tialeuta village. The initiative met with strong opposition from London Missionary Society (LMS) members, but Giblett persevered. At the same time, he assisted Kerisome with her Sabbath School in Alofi. This effort continued to strengthen to approximately 70 children. An average of 40 individuals attended church services. They brought coconuts for offerings, which were processed into copra for sale.\(^10\)

**Expatriate Assistance Withdrawn**

After two decades, little results were evident. More and more children were delighted to attend Kerisome’s Sabbath School, but adult baptisms were rare. The 1923 statistical report of the Australasian Union Conference recorded one church and only five members on Niue Island.\(^11\) The Gibletts were transferred in 1924, leaving Kerisome alone.\(^12\)

Statistics remained the same up to 1950. One church and five baptized members were continually reported.\(^13\) The Niue Island Mission was then incorporated into the Tongan Mission.\(^14\) Until her death in 1963, Kerisome continued her Sabbath School (see Vaimola Malama (Kerisome) Head).

Any mission work on Niue stalled with the loss of Kerisome. When the Tongan Mission sent a man to continue her work, the London Missionary Society opposed his work throughout the island. Nevertheless, efforts were continued. One missionary, Palu Fuatapu, reported in 1973 that one church and two companies were still meeting, and he was engaged in building another church at Mutalau in the north of the island.\(^15\) He was very appreciative of the literature mailed to him from Australasia for his Sabbath School and hospital visitation.\(^16\)

Reorganization in the Tongan Mission in 2005 relegated Niue to the status of an attached church; that is, one church administered directly by the Trans Pacific Union Mission with headquarters in Suva, Fiji. It was renamed Niue Field Station in 2017.\(^17\) Three resident directors have served on the island since the reorganization. According to the Seventh-day Adventist yearbooks, they were Sairusi Sugamai (2005–2010),\(^18\) Tevita Waqamaileu (2011–2016),\(^19\) and Sione Moala (2017–2018).\(^20\) Titau Tavita replaced Moala in mid-2018 to nurture a membership of 16.\(^21\) The church office is located in Alofi, and the mailing address is P.O. Box 7; Alofi, Niue.\(^22\)

**Sources**

1. 1300. The capital is Alofi.
2. The island was inhabited by Polynesians some 1,500 years ago. In 1774 Captain James Cook received a hostile reception from the inhabitants of Niue Island, their mouths looking fierce from eating red bananas. Cook named it the Savage Island.
3. First Contact by Seventh-day Adventists
4. A Solitary Witness
5. Expatriate Assistance Withdrawn
6. Sources
Carr, S. W. “Niue Island.” Australasian Record, December 31, 1917.
Carr, S. W. and E. M. “Niue Island.” Australasian Record, 1919.
Giblett, E. J. “Jottings from Niue.” Australasian Record, August 22, 1921.
———. “Word from Niue.” Australasian Record, June 12, 1922.
Kellogg, M. G. “Work in the South Sea Islands.” ARH, December 12, 1893.
“On Wednesday, April 5, Pastor S. W. Carr. . . .” Australasian Record, April 17, 1916.

NOTES

5. “On Wednesday, April 5, Pastor S. W. Carr . . . .,” Australasian Record, April 17, 1916, 8.


