



William and Irralee Petrie, June 1969.

Photo courtesy of Arthur Petrie.

## Petrie, William Woodfield (1900–1991) and Irralee Blanche (Ball) (1908–1994)

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### ROSS GOLDSTONE

Ross Goldstone, M.A. (Avondale College, Cooranbong, New South Wales, Australia) retired in 1998 as Senior Pastor, Avondale Memorial Church, Cooranbong, NSW, Australia. New Zealand born, Goldstone has served the Church as a pastor, Conference Youth Director, teacher, and Sessional Lecturer at Avondale College. He has authored nine books relating to Adventist history, including *The Angel Said Australia*. He is also co-author of four other books on Adventist history in Australasia. In retirement Ross Goldstone continues to research and write Adventist Church history.

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Trained teachers, William and Irralee Petrie served at Matupi, near Rabaul on the island of New Britain, and at Kainantu in the Eastern Highlands of New Guinea, then transferred to Samoa before returning to clerical, secretarial, and presidential responsibilities in Australia and New Zealand.

## Early Life

William Woodfield Petrie was born on November 5, 1900, at Wright's Bush, near Invercargill, New Zealand, the 8th of 10 children born to John and Mary Petrie. They were employed in the drapery industry at the time.<sup>1</sup> Irralee Blanche Ball was also born on November 5, but eight years afterward, in 1908.<sup>2</sup> She was the 8th child of Arthur and Mavis Ball of Northam, Western Australia.<sup>3</sup>

While working as a drapery salesman, William Petrie was contacted by a literature evangelist. He committed to the Seventh-day Adventist Church on June 3, 1923, as a result of studies with Louis Were and was baptized by Pastor Robert Hare on December 8, 1923.<sup>4</sup> Petrie studied at the New Zealand Missionary School from 1924 until his graduation in 1926.<sup>5</sup> With intent to enter the teaching profession, he then attended the Australasian Missionary College and graduated in November 1930. Irralee Ball, his future wife, also graduated that year as a teacher.<sup>6</sup> They both spent 1931 as colporteurs in the South New South Wales Conference.<sup>7</sup> Both were appointed as teachers in 1932: William to North Sydney in New South Wales and Irralee to Bendigo in Victoria.<sup>8</sup> Pastor E. E. Roenfelt officiated at William and Irralee's marriage in the Ball family home at Northam on January 9, 1933.<sup>9</sup>

## Mission Service

In 1930, a new mission station had recently been established at Matupi near Rabaul on the island of New Britain, New Guinea. William Petrie was appointed to commence a school there in 1933.<sup>10</sup> After their wedding, the newlyweds left Sydney on board the *Montoro* on February 22, 1933.<sup>11</sup> Awaiting their arrival were Dr. McLaren and 60 students.<sup>12</sup> While Matupi was a magnificent setting for a mission station, the Petries found the constant humidity to be enervating, particularly William, who was used to the colder climate in the deep south of New Zealand. A new home was built, which the Petries moved into by September 1933, and Irralee was able to enjoy the latter months of her pregnancy in comparative comfort before the birth of Arthur John Petrie.<sup>13</sup>

One of the features of Petrie's curriculum was daily physical education. He drilled the students in marching and calisthenics. A. G. Stewart described a demonstration by the school students when he visited Matupi on March 26, 1933.<sup>14</sup> Extra responsibilities were added to Petrie at the Annual Council of the Australasian Division in August/September 1933. At that session, he was appointed secretary-treasurer of the Territory of New Guinea Mission.<sup>15</sup> In July 1934, Dr. McLaren, together with 10 New Guinea workers, flew into the Eastern Highlands of New Guinea and marked out a new mission station site. Accommodation was constructed, and McLaren assigned Petrie to "hold the fort" in Kainantu.<sup>16</sup> Irralee and little Arthur remained in Matupi while William spent three months establishing the new mission station.<sup>17</sup> The family moved to Kainantu in 1935 and found the

cooler climate invigorating and beneficial to their health.<sup>18</sup>

At the 1935 Annual Council, the Petries were appointed to Western Samoa to take charge of the Vailoa Training School.<sup>19</sup> Following furlough, they sailed to Samoa to take up their new responsibilities.<sup>20</sup> Petrie arrived in Apia on April 9, 1936, followed by his wife and son on May 11.<sup>21</sup> The training school, which was for male students only, was located on a hillside overlooking the sea and a beautiful harbor. A visitor described it as “one of the finest training centres in all the island field,” and it was instrumental in training Samoan youth for service within the denomination.<sup>22</sup> Associated for the next six years with William Petrie were a number of Pacific Island teachers. Visitors to the school noted the cleanliness and orderly conduct of the students and their teachers.<sup>23</sup> Good discipline was manifested in precision marching, something loved by Samoan youth.<sup>24</sup> A feature of the training at Vailoa was a brass band using donated instruments.<sup>25</sup>

At the Australasian Union Conference committee in September 1938, Petrie was appointed secretary-treasurer of the Samoan Mission.<sup>26</sup> This responsibility was in addition to his teaching responsibilities. On December 19, 1939, three young men became the first graduates from Vailoa College. The graduation exercises were conducted in the presence of a large gathering, including Mr. Turnbull, the administrator of Samoa.<sup>27</sup>

Two children were born into the Petrie family during their years of service at Vailoa: Ivor William Petrie<sup>28</sup> and Lorna June Petrie.<sup>29</sup> While busy with her young family, Irralee fostered Junior Missionary Volunteer (J.M.V.) progressive classwork for the boys and girls. The first investiture of 32 J.M.V. Friends in Samoa took place at the general meeting (*fono*) in July 1939.<sup>30</sup>

The constant high degree of humidity eventually caused health issues for the children, necessitating in August 1941 the return of Irralee and the children to the Blue Mountains in New South Wales, where it was hoped “the salubrious climate” would be “beneficial to their health.”<sup>31</sup> William remained at Vailoa until the end of the school year and, on his return, joined the Australasian Union Conference Treasury Department at Wahroonga.<sup>32</sup>

## Years in Finance and Administration

At the 1942 Australasian Union Conference annual meeting, William Petrie was appointed to the position of Australasian Union Conference secretary.<sup>33</sup> His change from a career in teaching to one in finance and administration was complete. He was ordained to the gospel ministry on December 18, 1942.<sup>34</sup> Eight years as secretary-treasurer of the Queensland Conference (1944–1952) were followed by a welcome return to Petrie’s home conference, South New Zealand, for the following eight years as secretary-treasurer (1952–1954) and president (1955–1960). William Petrie’s final appointment prior to retirement was to North New Zealand as secretary-treasurer (1961–March 1967).<sup>35</sup> Throughout these years in administration, he demonstrated a penchant for the visitation of isolated members and the country churches.<sup>36</sup>

Irralee gave faithful support to her husband, occasionally visiting around the churches as home duties permitted. Her hobby was the creation of baby clothes, the sale of which financed her children through college. William was a keen gardener and an expert at knitting.<sup>37</sup>

## Retirement Years

In July 1967, Pastor and Mrs. Petrie moved into the Retirement Village at Cooranbong and took pleasure in hearing of the work of their children as they served the denomination both in mission service and in Australasia. It gave the parents joy and a degree of pride that their offspring followed in their faith and work responsibilities. Lorna remembers her father as a great reciter of poetry.<sup>38</sup> Arthur recalled that while in Samoa, the family became fluent in the Samoan language and often took pleasure in discussing fa'a-Samoa around the family table.<sup>39</sup>

William Woodfield Petrie's death came unexpectedly on September 28, 1991.<sup>40</sup> Irralee died on October 31, 1994.

<sup>41</sup> They are buried in the Avondale Adventist Cemetery.

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William Woodfield Petrie birth certificate N. 246535. Personal collection of Arthur J. Petrie.

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7. For example, see "South New South Wales," *Australasian Record*, April 18, 1931, 4.
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36. Arthur John Petrie, interview.
37. Ibid.
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