



Rarama Publishing House, Fiji.

Photo courtesy of Roger Stokes.

# Rarama Publishing House

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## ROGER STOKES

Roger Stokes, B.A. in theology (Avondale College, Australia), was born in Accra, Gold Coast (Ghana), where his parents served for nearly two decades. He and his parents emigrating to New Zealand in 1956. Stokes served in New Zealand, Fiji and Beirut, Lebanon (as manager of Middle-East Press) before returning home to Sydney, Australia, in 1984 where he worked at the Sydney Adventist Hospital. He retired to the Central Coast of New South Wales in 2004.

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Rarama Publishing House operated in Suva, Fiji, between 1969 and 1981. Throughout its history, the institution was interchangeably referred to as Rarama Press, Rarama Publishing House, and Trans-Pacific Publishers.

Rarama Publishing House was the vision of Barry and Norma Crabtree. Barry Crabtree was the president of the Fiji Mission between 1966 and 1969.<sup>1</sup> Early attempts to establish a printing facility in Fiji in the years before the 1960s were unsuccessful in the long term due largely to the complexity of setting type by hand among untrained personnel. While on furlough in 1965, the Crabtrees were given a Multilith offset press, IBM electric typewriters, and other graphics arts equipment for the purpose of setting up a press in Fiji. These gifts were installed in basement rooms under the meeting hall on the Suva mission compound.<sup>2</sup>

Roger and Pamela Stokes were appointed to Suva in August 1966.<sup>3</sup> Roger Stokes was to be a district director. Crabtree asked Stokes to see if something could be made of the equipment that had been installed in the basement rooms. By the end of that year, Stokes had the press operational and a Fulton graduate, Losana, was employed by the mission to commence setting type in Fijian on the electric typewriters. Losana was taught to justify type and in 1967 the first edition of *Rarama* (meaning "light" in Fijian) was printed. Losana's training was the first of many local staff who were trained by Stokes in the many facets of offset printing despite the fact that he himself had no formal training in either the graphics arts or offset printing.<sup>4</sup>

The infant press immediately started printing the Sabbath School lessons as well as *Rarama* and other material, all in Fijian. Offset printing had made possible what had been extremely difficult using the letterpress technology of previous eras.

Suva, Fiji, was also the home of the Central Pacific Union Mission and the presidents of the missions within that union took a great interest in the now operational press. The dream of printed material not only in Fijian, but Samoan, Tongan, Cook Island Maori, and the other languages within the union mission also became a vision of these mission presidents. The possibility of the union mission taking over the Fijian operation was raised, discussed, and acted upon. Consequently, in 1969 the Rarama Press became a Central Pacific Union institution with Stokes as manager. The charter required it to print in all the languages within the union mission.

This operational development saw the union mission provide funds to purchase additional equipment. A larger Heidelberg offset press was added and became the main production unit. Ancillary equipment such as a paper slicer, a folder, IBM composers, and sundry graphic arts equipment made possible a much greater vision for a greatly expanded publishing program in the local vernacular languages within the Pacific.

By 1973, lack of space was making it extremely difficult to expand the program. While additional basement rooms and the old mission office were occupied by the press, it was evident a new building was necessary. Funds were added to the union budget, the Fiji mission made land available at their Suvavou headquarters, and by December 1975 the publishing operation was housed in a purpose-built two-story building. The new building was opened by the governor general of Fiji, Ratu Sir George Cakobau, with full Fijian honors.<sup>5</sup>

In 1976, Headley and Judy Anderson from the Signs Publishing Company in Australia joined the press staff with the aim of giving more specialized training to local Fijian staff.<sup>6</sup> By this time, the press had been printing the Sabbath School Lessons in simple English and these lessons were being distributed across the three union

missions of the Australasian Division. Simple English copy for these lessons had been prepared each quarter by Pamela Stokes many years before the General Conference undertook this program. It became an important element of the publishing program. The production of these lessons led to the development of books in simple English that could be sold by colporteurs throughout the union missions in the division.<sup>7</sup>

During its lifetime, Rarama Press, which was re-named Trans Pacific Publishers, printed material in thirteen different languages.<sup>8</sup> Setting type in all these languages was a challenge.

In 1981, the Australasian Division, the Central Pacific Union Mission, and the Signs Publishing Company reviewed the developing book publishing program with a view to expanding the number of literature evangelists across the three union missions of the division. As a result, the Trans-Pacific Publishers was merged with the Signs Publishing Company in Australia. It ceased operation in July 1981 and most of the equipment was moved to the Signs Publishing Company in Australia.<sup>9</sup>

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## SOURCES

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"Flash Point." *Australasian Record*, November 24, 1975.

"Flash Point." *Australasian Record*, June 29, 1981.

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Peaty, N. K. "The Publishing Department in Fiji Moves Forward." *Australasian Record*, June 27, 1977.

"Rarama's Historical Highlights." *Australasian Record*, December 15, 1975.

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## NOTES

1. See Fiji Mission.
2. See "Rarama's Historical Highlights," *Australasian Record*, December 15, 1975, 9, 10.
3. Unless otherwise credited, the information in this article comes from the personal knowledge and experience of the author as manager of Rarama Publishing House between 1969 and 1981.
4. W. J. Ellis, "Greetings to You All," *Australasian Record*, March 16, 1970, 6, 7.
5. N. K. Peaty, "Official Opening of Rarama Press," *Australasian Record*, December 15, 1975, 8,9.

6. "Flash Point," *Australasian Record*, November 24, 1975, 16.

7. N. K. Peaty, "The Publishing Department in Fiji Moves Forward," *Australasian Record*, June 27, 1977, 8, 9.

8. N. K. Peaty, "Records Broken in the Cook Islands," *Australasian Record*, May 24, 1976, 11.

9. "Flash Point," *Australasian Record*, June 29, 1981, 16.

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