

# Dyason, Arthur Prescott (1908–1988) and Laurie (Baird) (1901–1978); later Carmel Aildeen (Crossley)



Arthur P. Dyason

Photo courtesy of Adventist Heritage Centre, Australia.

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## RAYMOND WILKINSON

Raymond Wilkinson, Ed.D. (Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, USA) was born to missionary parents and grew up in Fiji. He was educated at Longburn College, Massey University New Zealand, and Avondale College Australia. With wife Ruth, his Church service involved teaching and educational administration in the South Pacific Islands. He retired 1994 but since then has enjoyed volunteer service in the islands. Now married to Lola, Raymond has four adult children and eight grandchildren.

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Arthur Dyason served as a teacher and pastor of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, together with his wife Laurie. Nearly half of their service was given as missionaries in Fiji where Arthur served as principal of Fulton College for over thirteen years.

## Early Life

Arthur Prescott Dyason<sup>1</sup> was born on September 2, 1908, at Fairfield, a Melbourne suburb, Victoria, Australia.<sup>2</sup> He was the youngest of four sons born to Alfred and Matilda Dyason. At the time of Arthur's birth Alfred was a qualified industrial chemist, working in the family's successful food manufacturing business. In 1911 Alfred and Matilda joined the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) church, and Alfred resigned from the family business. In 1912 he went to the Australasian Missionary College at Avondale, New South Wales, to train as a minister. At Avondale

he was offered work at the Sanitarium Health Food (SHF) factory to help meet his expenses, and soon became their production manager. Arthur first attended school at Avondale. In 1919 Alfred Dyason was asked by the SHF Board to go to Christchurch in New Zealand to establish a new SHF factory.<sup>3</sup> In Christchurch Arthur completed his primary and secondary education. While in Christchurch, Arthur developed an interest in printing and did some work at a printing press.

In 1924 Arthur attended the Adventist college at Longburn, New Zealand, and while there continued working as a printer. In 1925 Arthur's parents returned to Avondale, where his father, Alfred, worked as assistant manager in the SHF factory. That year Arthur worked as a printer in the Signs Publishing Company at Warburton in Victoria, Australia, to earn fees to go to the Australasian Missionary College. In 1926 and 1927 he attended the College at Avondale, training as a primary school teacher and continuing to work as a printer.<sup>4</sup>

## Early Service and Marriage

In 1928 Arthur traveled to Western Australia, appointed to the Gosnells SDA Primary School in Perth. While serving as a full time teacher he also completed state registration as a qualified teacher.<sup>5</sup> Arthur was additionally in demand as a singer, both as a soloist, and with three others (one, Leonard Wilkinson) as a male quartet, singing at camp meetings, evangelistic campaigns, and other events. Arthur taught at the Gosnells school from 1928 to 1930, and then at the SDA Victoria Park school, also in Perth until December 1932.<sup>6</sup> During that time he formed a special bond with Laurie Baird, a fellow teacher, who had been born in Sydney, February 3, 1901, and who worked for her father's photographic business, particularly as a painter of prints to produce colored pictures. Arthur and Laurie were married on January 11, 1931, and their daughter Merlyne Leila was born in Perth.<sup>7</sup>

## Fiji

Near the end of 1932 Arthur and Laurie were appointed to go to Fiji in 1933, to take charge of an isolated SDA mission school at Navuso, replacing Leonard Wilkinson. Arthur quickly learned the Fijian language and became a fluent speaker.<sup>8</sup> After two years at Navuso the Dyasons were transferred to head another mission school at Vatuvonu, Buca Bay, Fiji, again replacing Leonard Wilkinson, where they served for three years. During their time at Vatuvonu, their son Glenn Arthur was born in Suva, Fiji.<sup>9</sup> Before the end of 1938 they were called to transfer to Buresala Training School on the island of Ovalau, Fiji, where Arthur served as principal.

During 1939 serious consideration was given to the need for a more central and accessible site for the Church's training center, and finally a formal request was made by the Fiji Mission to the Australasian Union Conference to transfer the training program to a more suitable site on Fiji's main island of Viti Levu, and at the same time centralize the training of teachers. For various reasons teachers were being trained at four different Adventist schools in Fiji – Pacific Island men at Buresala, Indians at Samabula, and Pacific Island women at Navuso and

Vatuvonu. Training staff and some buildings were also to be transferred to the new site. The Australasian Union Conference carefully considered and approved the plan. Arthur was given the difficult task of organizing and supervising the complex operation.<sup>10</sup>

Buresala ceased operating as a training center at the end of 1939, and in 1940 Arthur, with a group of ten staff members and thirty Buresala students who had volunteered a year of work for minimal pay, set about the task of moving the college. Arthur often referred to his workforce as "The Mighty 40." He organized the group into several teams. One was stationed at the newly acquired site in the area of Viti Levu known as Tailevu, forming roads, preparing building sites, and starting gardens. Other teams began the task of dismantling buildings from three school sites, ready for transfer. From Buresala the transfer was by barges towed by a mission boat. From two sites on the main island transfer was by truck, a difficult task. But with his usual cheerful nature and encouraging leadership Arthur kept the teams active and enthusiastic. The nearly impossible task was completed, despite meagre funding and difficulty obtaining building materials due to war conditions. The new center, known then as the Fulton Training School, was able to commence classes on April 25, 1941.<sup>11</sup>

On March 9, 1940 Arthur was ordained as a minister during meetings in Suva, Fiji.<sup>12</sup> In 1941 he was called to the North New Zealand Conference where he served for most of 1941, as Sabbath School and Home Missions Secretary. In 1942, however, he returned to Fiji as principal of the Fulton Training School and continued in that position until March 1949. During that time, on November 27, 1943, Arthur's adopted daughter, Shirley Joan, was born.<sup>13</sup>

In April 1949, Arthur was transferred to the Trans Commonwealth Union Conference to serve as educational, young peoples, and Missionary Volunteer Secretary, and continued that service until December 1958. In 1959 he was again called to be principal at Fulton Missionary College. The name of the institution had changed in 1950, when Fulton became the training center for the Central Pacific Union Mission. In the early 1960s Arthur suffered a serious heart attack and was on sick leave for some months. He then returned to Fulton and continued as principal until December 1964. The highlight of Arthur's association with Fulton College was possibly April 30, 1964 when a central building for the college, incorporating classrooms, a chapel, library, and administrative offices was opened by Fiji's Governor, Sir Derek Jakeway. The £60,000 building was made possible by a Sabbath School overflow offering and a grant from the Australasian Division.<sup>14</sup>

## Later Years and Contribution

In 1965, due largely to increasing health needs, Arthur returned to Australia, closer to medical services and served as church pastor of the Hamilton Church, in Newcastle, New South Wales until his retirement in December 1970.<sup>15</sup>

Arthur typically possessed a friendly, cheerful, and enthusiastic manner, and a particular gift for developing team spirit and encouraging cooperation. He often began a college chapel exercise with a winning smile and the

remark, "Isn't it good to be alive?" That approach to life, coupled with a lovely singing voice and the ability to get a congregation to sing like a choir helped make him a popular and effective youth worker and college principal.

Laurie Dyason was a supportive and cooperative companion who took a motherly interest in the college staff and students. Her help was also shown in practical ways, as when with the assistance of some artistic and enthusiastic Fulton students she developed a sewing industry which not only helped meet some needs of the college community, but also supplied some tourist shops in Suva with well-made and artistically decorated items, the sale of which benefited the college in practical ways. A new piano was purchased for the college chapel,<sup>16</sup> and further earnings also made possible improvements and an extension in the girls' dormitory.

After Arthur's retirement the Dyasons continued living at Warners Bay near Lake Macquarie, and as helpful members of the Hamilton Church. Laurie died on December 21, 1978, and will always be remembered as a loving and caring worker for the Lord.<sup>17</sup>

Arthur remarried on July 29, 1979 to Carmel Aildeen Crossley,<sup>18</sup> and they continued in happy companionship until Arthur's death on April 20, 1988.<sup>19</sup> He was survived and mourned by his wife Carmel, his three children, Merlyne Runnalls, Glenn Dyason, and Shirley Pringle, and their families, along with many others whose lives had been blessed by his faithful service as an educator, administrator, minister of the Gospel, and friend.

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## NOTES

1. Much of the data in this biography is written from the personal knowledge of the author as a personal friend and colleague of Arthur and Laurie Dyason. The author acknowledges the assistance of Merlyne Runnalls (Nee Dyason – daughter) and Valmae Hills (Nee Dyason – niece).
2. Arthur Prescott Dyason Biographical Records; South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives; Folder: Dyason, Arthur Prescott; Document: 'Dyason, Arthur Prescott.'
3. R. W. Dyason, *Melon and Lemon Jam* (Melbourne, Victoria, Australia: Privately Published, 1991), 137-138.
4. Arthur Prescott Dyason Biographical Records; South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives; Folder: Dyason, Arthur Prescott; Document: 'Biographical Information Blank.'
5. Merlyne Runnalls (Nee Dyason, Daughter to Arthur and Laurie Dyason) confirmed this.
6. Arthur Prescott Dyason Biographical Records; South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives; Folder: Dyason, Arthur Prescott; Document: 'Biographical Information Blank.'
7. Arthur Prescott Dyason Biographical Records; South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives; Folder: Dyason, Arthur Prescott; Document: 'Dyason, Arthur Prescott.'

8. S. W. Carr, "Wainibuka School, Fiji," *The Missionary Leader*, June 1933, 8.
9. Arthur Prescott Dyason Biographical Records; South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives; Folder: Dyason, Arthur Prescott; Document: 'Dyason, Arthur Prescott.'
10. Australasian Union Conference Executive Committee Minutes, 232<sup>nd</sup> Meeting, Held at Wahroonga, April 2, 1940. 721-723.
11. Personal knowledge of the author supplied by Arthur Dyason when working together at Fulton College, 1960-1965.
12. Arthur Prescott Dyason Biographical Records; South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives; Folder: Dyason, Arthur Prescott; Document: 'Biographical Information Blank.'
13. Arthur Prescott Dyason Biographical Records; South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives; Folder: Dyason, Arthur Prescott; Document: 'Weekly Rates.'
14. R. A. Millsom, "Fulton Lifts its Head," *Australasian Record*, July 20, 1964, 8-9.
15. Arthur Prescott Dyason Biographical Records; South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives; Folder: Dyason, Arthur Prescott; Document: 'Dyason, Arthur Prescott.'
16. "Selections from 'Fulton Review' Fiji," *Australasian Record*, September 26, 1960, 5.
17. A. K. Gersbach, "Mrs Laurie Dyason obituary," *Australasian Record*, January 29, 1979, 14.
18. A. K. Gersbach, "Dyason-Crossley marriage," *Australasian Record*, August 27, 1979, 14.
19. Laurie McMurtry, "Arthur Dyason obituary," *Australasian Record*, January 11, 1988, 14.

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