Borgas, Ludwig “Lou” Alfred (1887–1981) and Ruth Kate (Giblett) (1889–1975)

Michael Vernon Steed
Michael Vernon Steed, M.Hlth. Sc. (PHC), (University of Western Sydney, Hawkesbury, New South Wales, Australia), retired in 2018 as Nurse/Counsellor from Hunter New England Addictions and Mental Health, New South Wales, Australia. As a South Australian by birth, Mr Steed has been employed in government and private health sectors around Australia. He also served the church as a nurse, Adventist College teacher and administrator at the Sydney Adventist Hospital, Avondale College Faculty of Nursing and Health, and Mamarapha Adventist Aboriginal College.

Lou Borgas was a mission superintendent and sawmill manager who worked together with his wife, Ruth Kate (Giblett), mostly at the Mona Mona Aboriginal Mission in North Queensland, Australia in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s.

Early Years

Ludwig Alfred Borgas was born on August 24, 1887, in Hawker, Northern South Australia, to Heinrich Johann Martin and Fredericka Willamina (Menz) Borgas. Lou’s father was a respected, innovative farmer who settled on a property near the foothills of the Flinders Ranges. Lou’s primary school years were at Hawker. Then, at 13, he attended the German College in Petersburg, South Australia, where in 1902 he was confirmed in the Lutheran church. Violent sandstorms caused havoc in the Flinders Ranges to many properties in the 1900s, and this led the Borgas family to move to the Narrogin area in Western Australia in 1905. Farming endeavors occupied his father and older brothers. Lou spent his time traveling the district with a chaff-cutting plant and tractor, purchased by his father. In 1906, American Nils J. Waldorf conducted a tent meeting series in Narrogin, resulting in Lou and his brothers and then later his parents becoming Seventh-day Adventists. A church company was organized in 1909, and in 1914, a stone church was built by Lou’s family. Lou attended the Darling Range School (later Carmel College). He spent 1912 in literature evangelism before returning to complete his schooling.

Ruth Kate Giblett, born in 1889, arrived in Narrogin in 1915 to open the Narrogin church school. She had graduated from the preparatory course at the Darling Range School in 1913 and, prior to being assigned to Narrogin, had been employed in office work for the Western Australian Conference office. After three years in Narrogin and a year teaching in Kalgoorlie, Western Australia, Ruth married Lou at the Giblett home in Manjimup in November 1919, with Pastor E. S. Butz officiating.

Ministry at Mona Mona

Lou and Ruth Borgas were appointed in 1919 to the Mona Mona Aboriginal Mission in North Queensland, Australia. This mission had been in operation for four years before they arrived. Emaciated Aboriginal inhabitants on the settlement had been coerced there by the police for their “protection.” The Queensland Government provided 4,000
Cooranbong briefly but eventually returned to Northern Queensland. At Mona Mona, the Borgases reared Vohnray Borgas, an Aboriginal boy left orphaned at birth. He lived in with an increase in teachers. Borgas conducted Bible study classes for the young people, resulting in baptisms. While forward, taking 15 years to complete.

The mid 1940s saw the start of a major rebuilding of the entire mission settlement. Initially there were difficulties in securing the necessary materials, but progress slowly went forward, taking 15 years to complete. By the late 1940s, the mission school had grown rapidly in student numbers, with an increase in teachers. Borgas conducted Bible study classes for the young people, resulting in baptisms. While at Mona Mona, the Borgases reared Vohnray Borgas, an Aboriginal boy left orphaned at birth. He lived in Cooranbong briefly but eventually returned to Northern Queensland.

A severe cyclone in early 1920 caused devastating damage to the settlement, flattening most of the buildings and destroying crops, fences, and trees. Rain caused flooding and left the settlement flood bound. Thirteen Aborigines died of exposure. Lou’s house was one of the few left standing. His brother, Gustav Borgas, was sent to help rebuild the settlement and assist with the farm. It took about two years of rebuilding before the settlement was functional.

The main support of the mission was timber hauled by ox teams to the railway siding to sell in Cairns and other districts. For the mission to be self-supporting, the role of the sawmill under Borgas was central not only in the rebuilding program but in the production of timber to cover expenses. In 1924 Lou Borgas was appointed the assistant manager of the mission, and his wife was appointed the matron. But after further discussion, the Union Conference made Lou the superintendent. This released James Branford (superintendent since the Mona Mona Mission’s inception) to give more time to spiritual work among the mission family. The Borgases’ daughter, Beryl Eulalia, was born in 1925.

In 1926 both Borgas and Branford dedicated the first church building at the mission. Lou’s new role led to him being more resourceful in continuing to keep the mission on a self-supporting basis, which was a government expectation. He was to be judge and to provide fatherly counsel to all those under his care. He found it challenging to try to correct bad habits, which often resulted in administering stern disciplinary measures to mission and non-mission Aborigines.

Positive recognition was acknowledged by visiting Queensland officials and Dr. Baselow. The methods used at the Mona Mona Aboriginal Mission in training and management of residents were seen to be ahead of other government- or denomination-run settlements. Visits to the Mareeba, Cairns, and other districts by Lou and the Aboriginal choir left positive impressions in people’s minds toward the work at Mona Mona. Lou and Ruth’s son, Warren Lloyd, was born in 1927. By 1930, additional duties led to Lou and Ruth also being in charge of the boys’ dormitory. Ruth attended to the secretarial and office work of the mission.

**Solomon Islands**

Lou and Ruth were next appointed to the Solomon Islands mission field in 1932. Prior to the family move, Lou visited the Solomon Islands alone. The visit with other missionaries left from Batuna for Tulagi (Marovo Lagoon), Malaita, Guadalcanal, and the Russell Island group. On his return to Australia, he was ordained to the ministry at Wahroonga, Sydney, in 1932. Now based in Batuna as superintendent and being aware of teacher shortages, Borgas saw the need for prioritizing and addressing the needs of this vast field. There was the dedication of the ship Portal for Malaita, which had been two years without an expatriate to oversee the advancement of the work, and a replacement was now imminent. Previously Norman Ferris had made initial contact with a young Rennell Islander, and prospects for opening this unentered field looked bright. Both Borgas and Ferris traveled to Rennell Island, where they were welcomed by islanders and an influential chief. However, in discussing their intentions with the acting resident commissioner, they were denied approval to conduct a mission. A second visit to the island was futile, but Borgas promised the chief that they would return at another time. Some years later this promise was honored by Pastor Ferris. In 1933 Borgas took some independent teachers with him to assist the work on the Bougainville Islands. He visited isolated missions, giving Bible studies and talks, and he provided medical treatments to a large number of sick islanders. Lou Borgas found time for overseeing the work of the sawmill because timber was needed for the upgrade of buildings and boat building. Logs were floated down to the mill, and some were taken by rail to the wharf to be used for other mission projects.

**Return to Mona Mona**

In 1934, Borgas and his family returned to Australia, and Lou was again superintendent of the Mona Mona mission. He immediately set about to make the settlement self-sustaining. While there were new initiatives such as granting married Aborigines their own farms, the timber supply was gradually diminishing, and the run-down sawmill needed a lot of attention. The Queensland Minister for Health praised the notable progress of the mission under Lou’s administration. A visit by Adventist Church officials resulted in discussions with Pastor Borgas over the continued support of the Aboriginal workers’ future on the mission. The mid 1940s saw the start of a major rebuilding of the entire mission settlement. Initially there were difficulties in securing the necessary materials, but progress slowly went forward, taking 15 years to complete. By the late 1940s, the mission school had grown rapidly in student numbers, with an increase in teachers. Borgas conducted Bible study classes for the young people, resulting in baptisms. While at Mona Mona, the Borgases reared Vohnray Borgas, an Aboriginal boy left orphaned at birth. He lived in Cooranbong briefly but eventually returned to Northern Queensland.
New Britain Mission

Pastor and Mrs. Borgas gave their last years of mission service on the island of New Britain, New Guinea. Lou joined the building team at Put Put (later Kambubu), which had been destroyed during the war and was to be rebuilt. Lou’s building and mechanical skills were well recognized, and he was put in charge of the sawmill to provide timber for the building program and timber for stations in the territories.30

Final Years

Pastor Lou and Ruth Borgas retired to Cooranbong, New South Wales, in 1951.31 Their daughter, Beryl, trained as a Sydney Sanitarium nurse and married Alleyne Thompson on May 5, 1955. After Ruth passed away in 1975, Lou lived with his daughter in Mullumbimby, Queensland, until he died in October 1981, at the age of 94. Their son, Warren, worked at the Signs Publishing Company until 1992.32

SOURCES

———. “Written on Board the Melanesia.” Australasian Record, February 15, 1932.
———. “Second Visit to Rennell Island.” Australasian Record, June 26, 1933.
———. “Visit to Rennell Islands.” Australasian Record, February 6, 1933.
———. “Monamona Mission, North Queensland.” Australasian Record, October 6, 1930.
“Brother L. A. Borgas, the recently appointed . . .” Australasian Record, April 25, 1932.
Cormack, A. W. “Notes from Western Australia.” Australasian Record, April 22, 1918.
Dyason, F. J. “One Church’s Memories.” Australasian Record, October 1, 1994.
“Farewell Socials—To Mr. H. M. Borgas.” Quorn Mercury Hawker and Great Northern Courier, March 14, 1905.
“Monamona Aboriginal Mission.” Australasian Record, November 18, 1935.
“On November 5 at 3 p.m. . . .” Australasian Record, December 8, 1919.
“Pastor and Mrs. L. A. Borgas . . .” Australasian Record, November 5, 1934.
“Pastor and Mrs. L. A. Borgas . . .” Australasian Record, April 9, 1951.
Peterson, A. W. “In the Coral Sea Union.” Australasian Record, September 5, 1949.
Piper, A. H. “Fifteen Hundred Miles in a Thirty-Five-Foot Boat—Part 1.” Australasian Record, July 24, 1933.
——. “Fifteen Hundred Miles in a Thirty-Five-Foot Boat—Part 2.” Australasian Record, July 31, 1933.
——. “Western Australia.” Australasian Record, May 31, 1915.
Piper, H. E. “A Visit to Monamona.” Australasian Record, July 14, 1941.
Smart, M. M. “Monamona.” Australasian Record, September 9, 1940.
“Union Conference Proceedings—Sixteenth Meeting.” Australasian Record, October 18, 1926.
“Union Conference Secretary’s Report.” Australasian Record, October 14, 1946.
Westerman, W. J. “Visit to Monamona.” Australasian Record, November 28, 1921.

NOTES

3. Ibid., 23.
6. “Life-Sketch.”
7. Dyason, “Church’s Memories.”
9. “On November 5 at 3 p.m. . . . ,” Australasian Record, December 8, 1919, 8.
10. Ibid.
17.


29. “Life-Sketch.”

30. C. E. Mitchell, “‘But Satan Hindered,’” *Australasian Record*, October 4, 1948, 5; see also “Pastor and Mrs. L. A. Borgas . . . ,” *Australasian Record*, April 9, 1951, 8.

31. “Life-Sketch.”
