



Seated L-R: Cleora Green, Sophia Whatley, Millie Dexter, Arthur Young (Pitcairner sitting on the ground). Standing L-R: Joseph Green, William Floding, child Leroy Whatley, Jonathon Whatley, Alfred Young (Pitcairner), Herbert Dexter.

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Dexter, Herbert Hildreth (1871–1970)

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* and the *Seventh-day Adventist Heritage Series*, and many magazine articles. He is married to Noeleen and has two sons and three grandchildren.

Herbert Dexter and his wife, Millie, were missionaries to Tahiti, France and Switzerland.

Early Life

Herbert Hildreth Dexter was born in San Francisco, California, on August 26, 1871.¹ His parents were Georges and Elisabeth (Adams) Dexter. His siblings were an older brother, Willie Charles, and two younger sisters, Edith May and Lillian.² His mother was an Australian who had married an English trader in Tahiti. Both parents were sympathetic to Seventh-day Adventism but were not baptized members.³ Prior to transferring to California in 1885, they raised their children in Tahiti, and Herbert became fluent in both the French and Tahitian languages.⁴ Details of Herbert's training remain unknown. He began evangelistic work for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1893.⁵ On May 22, 1895, he married Pamela "Millie" Gilmore Hill in Oakland, California. Millie was of Canadian heritage.⁶

"Pitcairn" Voyage

Almost 12 months to the day after their wedding, Herbert and Millie sailed south from San Francisco harbor aboard the "Pitcairn" with a group of missionaries sent to the Pacific Islands. On Sunday evening, May 17, Herbert was ordained in a solemn service prior to their departure on May 19.⁷ They reached Pitcairn Island on June 20, remained there a week, and then continued on to Tahiti where they disembarked.⁸ They rented a small house in Pape'ete, and Herbert was able to conduct meetings in the local languages without delay.⁹ Herbert was arguably the most suitable missionary ever to sail on the "Pitcairn." He had grown up in the Tahitian culture. It was no small tragedy that he and Millie decided to return to America having scarcely unpacked their suitcases. Elder Benjamin Cady, director of the Tahitian Mission, wrote: "We felt very sorry to lose the help of Brother Dexter, but on account of Sister Dexter's poor health, and as she needs a long course of medical treatment, they have returned again to the States."¹⁰ Cady may not have been aware of Millie's true condition. The fact is she had become pregnant with their first child soon after arrival in Tahiti, and apparently she wanted more sophisticated care than the Tahitian medical facilities offered. Their child Pamela was born in Oakland, California, on April 27, 1897. Their second child, Bessie, was born on November 12, 1898.¹¹

Further Service

Upon their arrival back in America, Herbert's ministry took place briefly in several locations, first in places such as Salinas in California,¹² then later in the state of Maine, and briefly in Georgia¹³ and Louisiana.¹⁴ His situation stabilized when he was appointed to direct the new French Mission about 1904. He worked chiefly in the Rhône Valley at such places such as Saint Jean-du-Gard,¹⁵ Nimes,¹⁶ and Lyon.¹⁷ During this period, Herbert visited America to attend the 1909 General Conference Session held in Washington, D.C.¹⁸ Following his return to Europe, he extended his ministry among French speakers, alternating between the presidency of the Leman

Conference (French Swiss) in Lausanne¹⁹ and the French Conference in Marseille until the end of World War ²⁰. These roles meant he was an *ex-officio* member of the Latin Union Conference executive committee.²¹

Once again, his return to America brought some short-term appointments. In 1919, he was listed among the executive committee members of the Quebec Conference, Canada,²² and in 1921, he was mentioned as the Religious Liberty secretary of the California Conference.²³ By 1924, he was back in Europe among the French, first in Strasbourg, Alsace,²⁴ and later once again in the Lemman Conference.²⁵ It proved to be his final term in Europe, and it extended until 1927.

Herbert accepted pastoral roles in the Northern New England Conference from 1927 through 1929,²⁶ and then he was appointed as superintendent of the fledgling French West Indian Mission that was headquartered in Fort-de-France, the capital of Martinique.²⁷ He was in office less than 12 months when Millie became seriously ill. They arrived back in New York in December 1930,²⁸ and she was admitted to the New England Sanitarium in Melrose, Massachusetts. For a time, there was some recovery, but she then relapsed and suffered until her death on April 10, 1932.²⁹ She was laid to rest in Lindenwood Cemetery, Stoneham, Massachusetts.³⁰

The remaining years of Herbert's service were chiefly devoted to chaplaincy work. In that capacity, he remained at the New England Sanitarium until 1937³¹ and then transferred west for a similar role at the Paradise Valley Sanitarium in National City, California.³² He married a widow named Susan Fiske,³³ and during 1940 and 1941, he nurtured churches in Brawley and Orange of the Southeastern California Conference.³⁴ His denominational career therefore spanned 48 years.

Retirement

Herbert and Susan remained in the Orange/Santa Ana area for 30 years during retirement. Herbert passed away on December 14, 1970, at the age of 99, and was laid to rest in the nearby Melrose Abbey Memorial Park in Anaheim.³⁵ Susan passed away several months later in her mid-nineties, and she was interred in Olivewood Cemetery at Riverside.³⁶

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