

Wicks, Harold Bulmer Priestly (1884–1984) and Madeline (Bates) (1887–1937); later Gwendolen Hope (Hadfield) (1904- 1993)



Harold and Madeline Wicks and children Allan and Ethel.

Photo courtesy of Adventist Heritage Centre, Australia.

JENNIFER FAYE STELEY

Jennifer Faye Steley, B.Ed. (Avondale College of Higher Education, Cooranbong, NSW Australia) was born in Sydney Australia and taught in SDA secondary schools in the Solomon Islands and Auckland New Zealand before teaching at St Leo's Catholic College, Wahroonga, Australia. Later she was employed in Human Resources at Adventist Aged Care, Wahroonga. Since retirement in 2010, she has been part of a number of church sponsored overseas 'fly'n'build' projects. Jennifer has 2 adult sons, Jared and Daniel.

Harold Bulmer Priestly Wicks was a missionary to the Cook Islands, Solomon Islands, and Tahiti. His first wife, Madeline, was a devoted missionary who died of a stroke in the Cook Islands. Gwendolen served with Harold in Queensland and New South Wales, Australia.

Early Life, Education, and Marriage

Harold Bulmer Priestly Wicks was born on September 25, 1884, at Burnham, a small town near Christchurch, NZ.

¹ He was the second child to parents William Henry Wicks and Mary Bulmer Wicks. His father was the

headmaster of the Barnham Industrial School.²

His father died August 1, 1933, aged 79 years, and is buried in the Bromley cemetery in Christchurch NZ.³ His mother died September 4, 1941, at 84 years of age, and is buried beside her husband in the Bromley cemetery.⁴

Wicks's education began at the Barnham District School. His secondary schooling was at the Boys High School in Christchurch.⁵ At 15 he left school to work in an engineering shop and began attending Canterbury College of Engineering at night.⁶ He soon was appointed as the foreman, but in 1906 left his employment in New Zealand and traveled to Britain and the United States, eventually securing employment in 1907 with General Electric despite the fact that the company was retrenching workers because of the recession. At Schenectady, the location of the General Electric complex, he worked for 17 months in the General Electric standardizing laboratory and became a member of the American Institute of Electrical Engineers. He resigned in October 1908 and returned to New Zealand.⁷

During his two-year absence, his mother had become a Seventh-day Adventist (SDA). She invited him to accompany her to church, but he refused to attend on Saturday. However, after some months of independent study, he was baptized in September 1910.⁸ This decision meant the loss of his job as manager in his old firm. So in January 1911 he began selling SDA books from door to door.⁹ He continued doing this for a year before becoming a Bible worker.¹⁰

Because he dreamed of going to the Pacific Islands, he was advised to do the nursing course at the Sydney Sanitarium and Hospital in Australia, but while studying he also set up his own workshop performing many electrical and mechanical repairs.¹¹ He also desired to develop his ability to preach. At the hospital he met his future wife, Madeline Bates. Madeline had been born in Newcastle, NSW, in 1887.¹² She spent time as a child and young person in New South Wales, Western Australia, and South Australia. About 1909 she became an SDA and shortly afterward attended the Australasian Missionary College. She then joined the nursing staff at the Avondale Health Retreat, and when this institution closed in 1912, she was accepted as a student nurse at the Sydney Sanitarium, where she met Harold Wicks.¹³

After graduation they were married by C. H. Watson on December 1, 1914.¹⁴ Harold and Madeline were to have two children: Allan William, born on July 19, 1918, at Mauke in the Cook Islands, and Ethel Emily (Stafford), born on June 23, 1925, at Wahroonga, NSW.¹⁵

Mission Work in the Cook and Solomon Islands

At the time of their marriage they were under appointment to the Cook Islands.¹⁶ They worked there until 1920 when they were transferred to the Solomon Islands.¹⁷ From 1920 until 1927 he was the superintendent of the Solomon Islands Mission, taking over from the first pioneer superintendent, G. F. Jones.¹⁸ While there, with the help of Peo, Ragoso, and others, Wicks published a hymnbook in the Marovo language on the Batuna press. It

also contained the complete Gospel of John. *Buka Va Hechi* contained 166 hymns in 232 pages. Two thousand copies were printed.¹⁹

In 1927 they returned to the Cook Islands. Harold was superintendent of the mission.²⁰ After a term of service of ten years in the Cook Islands, they received news of an appointment to Tasmania, but Madeline died in the Cook Islands on September 11, 1937.²¹ Her burial service was conducted by her husband, and she was buried in the SDA church yard at Titikaveka, Raratonga, Cook Islands.²² Harold Wicks paid tribute to his wife in a moving obituary written after her death. He said of her:

Never at any time did she spare herself when any one was in trouble or in need, and often she faced dangers at which many a stouter heart might quail, spurred on by the thought that someone was in need, and knowing full well that she would have to suffer several days from malaria fever as a result. After six years in the Solomon Islands, the malaria fever had so undermined her constitution that the doctors' counsel was for her not to return again to a malaria area; so, late in 1927 we again went to the Cook Islands. Here she continued her work of helping the sick and needy, right up to the day that she was stricken. She was a devoted wife and mother, a good missionary and nurse, a wise counselor, and a friend to all. Her motto ever was "Spend and Be Spent."²³

Mission Work in Tasmania and Tahiti

Wicks subsequently took up his appointment in Tasmania. He left the Cook Islands in 1938 and worked for the next three years in Tasmania.²⁴ In 1941 he conducted a series of evangelistic meetings in Launceston.²⁵ Late in 1941 he was appointed to Queensland, where he cared for many isolated believers.²⁶ It was wartime, and petrol was in short supply, so he made his own methane producer and fitted it to the back of his car.²⁷

He met Gwendolen Hope Hadfield while working in Queensland, and married her in the Maryborough SDA Church on May 25, 1943.²⁸ Gwen was the daughter of Ernest Clawes Hadfield and Ida Tunstall Hadfield of New Zealand.²⁹ She was born on April 28, 1904, in Auckland. After graduating from Longburn College in 1928, Gwen taught for a year at the Gisborne Adventist School. From 1930 to 1934 she served the North New Zealand Conference as assistant Sabbath School and Missionary Volunteer leader. She later served in the Queensland and South North South Wales conferences.³⁰

Just a few months after their marriage they were appointed to Tahiti.³¹ He preached his first Sabbath sermon in the native language, which he had studied on the boat on the way over. However, they left Tahiti after just five weeks, as Gwen had severe dermatitis.³² She was hospitalized in Auckland for three months. Gwen remained with friends in Auckland, and Harold returned to Tahiti for about a year.³³

Back in Australia and Later Life

Next they were appointed to Macksville in northern North South Wales, where Wicks organized the purchase of land and built a new church which was dedicated on June 28, 1952.³⁴ Later they retired to Toronto, NSW, and in 1968 they moved to Kressville SDA Retirement Village, Cooranbong. There they had a home with a double garage so that one of those garages could be used as a workshop, where Harold reconditioned treadle sewing machines to send to the Pacific region.³⁵ His artifact collection from the Solomon Islands and the Cook Islands are now an important part of the South Sea Islands Museum in Cooranbong.³⁶

Harold Bulmer Priestley Wicks died on May 1, 1984, in his hundredth year.³⁷ He was buried in the Avondale SDA Cemetery, Cooranbong, NSW.³⁸ His second wife, Gwendolyn, died on December 13, 1993 at the Toronto Private Hospital.³⁹

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NOTES

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11. Wicks, interview by Steley, November 16, 1978.
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20. "Sixty-four Years of Service: For God and His Fellow Men," *Australasian Record*, February 2, 1975, 6.
21. H.B.P Wicks, "Madeline Wicks obituary."
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid.
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