



Students: Middle Row - Pastor Wicks, Peo, and Mrs Wicks, at Batuna, c. 1930.  
Photo courtesy of Glynn Lock.

## Batuna Training School, Solomon Islands

### GLYNN LESTER LOCK

Glynn Lester Lock was born in Mackay, North Queensland. He is third generation missionary to Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, and is now retired after working in primary, secondary, tertiary and aviation education. He was married to Bette-Joy (Rosendahl), now deceased and mother of his two adult children, Joyanne and Kent, for forty-eight years, six of those in the Solomon Islands and PNG. Lock enjoys visiting family, including three grandchildren, and friends, woodwork, caravanning, gardening, volunteering and participating in music. He now lives with his wife, Lorraine, in Swansea, NSW.

Batuna Adventist Vocational School is located in the Central Marovo Lagoon of the Western Solomon Islands. Since 1980 it has been a vocational school, but the story of the presence of the Seventh-day Adventist Church goes back to the early twentieth century.<sup>1</sup>

### Early History

As in much of the history of the work of Seventh-day Adventists in the Pacific, the history of the work in the Solomon Islands was predicated on the availability of land and resources. Captain Griffith Frances Jones and his wife, Marion, both from Wales, pioneered the work of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Solomon Islands? En route they spent October 8, 1913, to May 1914 at the Sydney Sanitarium and Hospital (SAN) as chaplain and Bible teacher? While at the SAN they met and became friends with a planter/trader, Norman Wheatley, from the Solomon Islands, a contact that would prove pivotal in the development of the church in the Solomon Islands.

Captain and Mrs. Jones arrived in the Solomon Islands on board the Burns Philp vessel S.S. *Mindini* on May 29,

1914, a Friday.<sup>4</sup> On board with the missionaries and their personal goods, as deck cargo, was a small boat, *Advent Herald*, some 32 feet long and equipped with a 12-horsepower petrol engine.<sup>5</sup> They also had a small 12' x 12' prefabricated house.<sup>6</sup> The Joneses were to use the boat in the development of mission work. Although Jones was a qualified sea captain and navigator, he was not an engineer, so while en route to the Solomons Jones took the opportunity to learn about operating and maintaining engines from the engineers of the *Mindini*. The missionaries with all their goods and equipment were unloaded at Gizo in the Western Solomons.<sup>7</sup> On arrival the couple immediately set about work in the Roviana Lagoon, already being worked successfully by the Methodist Church.<sup>8</sup> Here they met Norman Wheatley's wife, an indigenous Roviana woman, who extended hospitality to them.<sup>9</sup>

Moving on to Rendova, still a non-Christian society, they met and attempted negotiations with Chief Romiti for permission to set up a mission station in that community.<sup>10</sup> As these negotiations were not successfully concluded, the missionaries moved on to Viru Harbour. Here the previously mentioned Norman Wheatley had a plantation.<sup>11</sup> A small piece of land was made available to the Joneses on which to erect their house, and they started work.<sup>12</sup>

Jones realized they needed to get access to, buy, or lease land for a mission station. Jones, the British district commissioner, Mr. Barley, and Norman Wheatley<sup>13</sup> jointly decided to meet with Chief Tatagu of the Babata tribe in the Marovo Lagoon<sup>14</sup> to explore the possibility of acquiring land for a mission station.<sup>15</sup> After successful negotiations with Chief Tatagu the Joneses moved into the Marovo Lagoon and settled at Sasaghana village.<sup>16</sup> For some time they worked from this post, planting a garden, including a mango tree still standing. Results from their work included commencing a school in 1915. At the first baptism, 1918, 11 people were baptized<sup>17</sup> and joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church.<sup>18</sup> However, the Sasaghana site was limited because of restrictions imposed by the size of the land available to them. After further negotiations Jones moved to an island village, Telina. The school was moved from Sasaghana to Telina in 1920, and the first church was organized in the same year, with H.B.P. Wicks joining as superintendent.<sup>19</sup> Wicks had a facility for language and soon learned the Marovo language, becoming fluent and very proficient.<sup>20</sup> Headquarters for the church was set up at Telina. It became evident that the site at Telina was limited, so again the search for a large piece of land was commenced. In 1922 a gathering of 80 elders from throughout the Marovo convened to find land that was substantial enough for a boarding school to train mission workers, and for gardens to feed the students and to accommodate the mission headquarters.<sup>21</sup> Various sites were suggested and inspected, with final selection being a piece of land at Batuna.<sup>22</sup> The delegation inspected the site and decided a home for the mission had been discovered. Preparatory work at the new site was commenced in 1923; development continued until 1926, when the school was moved from Telina.<sup>23</sup> Archibald and Hilda Barrett joined the staff in 1923. Barrett's tasks were to oversee the building of the training school at Batuna and be secretary /treasurer for the Solomon Islands Mission.<sup>24</sup>

## Batuna Training School

Batuna (head, in the Marovo language) became the focal point for the church in the Solomon Islands. The Batuna Training School was established in 1924 after several years of preparation.<sup>25</sup> Only boys were included in the first cohort, girls coming in subsequent years.<sup>26</sup> The second year saw full enrollment at the school.<sup>27</sup> The school continued to grow, predominantly with students from the Western Solomon Islands. In 1934 the first six students from Rennell Island arrived at Batuna, having been sent there, by the chief, to be taught to "read, write, and sing, as they saw our boat boys doing."<sup>28</sup> They were to be in school for just five months before returning to Rennell.<sup>29</sup> The next contingent of boys from Rennell numbered only four.<sup>30</sup> Students initially progressed through all the grades offered, then were sent out as missionaries throughout the Solomon Islands.<sup>31</sup> Barrett reported that as early as 1924 two students had left to take up teaching positions in villages calling for help.<sup>32</sup> By 1932 another subject, translation, had been added to the school curriculum.<sup>33</sup> Translating text was not new at Batuna, as much had been done by both local and expatriate staff to provide materials, including Sabbath School quarterlies, for church members in their own language.<sup>34</sup> A report by the resident commissioner, British Solomon Islands, indicates that by 1934 girls were regularly attending school and that year Ragoso's grade 4 class included two girls. At the time Kata Ragoso had been a teacher at Batuna for 10 years.<sup>35</sup>

Neither the Batuna Training School nor the Betikama Missionary School are listed in the 1948 *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*. The year 1948 was a transition year, when the Batuna Training School ceased to exist, and its successor, the Betikama Missionary School, in Honiara, Guadalcanal, was opening. By 1954 the new school was renamed Betikama Central School.<sup>36</sup> The Coral Sea Union Mission established a new school. In 1951 at Kambubu, near Rabaul, on New Britain a training school was established. This became the senior school for the church in the Western Pacific, and students completing grade 6 could apply for post-primary education.<sup>37</sup>

## Batuna Press

To support the work of the church and its constituency, a simple printing press had been installed at the Telina School. Stencils for various subjects were cut on a typewriter, then printed using a Gestetner duplicator. The missionaries in the Solomon Islands Mission submitted their need for a larger press to the Australasian Union Conference in Sydney. A complete printing plant was donated by Signs Publishing Company, installed and operating by 1924.<sup>38</sup> One of the first three sawn timber buildings to be built at Batuna, under the supervision of Harry Martin, was the press building, indicative of the value placed on the printed word by the pioneers. Tati, a student from Gatokae, later an ordained minister, was one of the first to work in the Batuna press.<sup>39</sup> Equipment was installed in the new press building, and it was operating by September 1924, with D. H. Gray supervising work at the facility.<sup>40</sup> By

1926 regular Sabbath School quarterlies were being printed in four languages, and Week of Prayer readings were being printed. A book of 166 hymns had been printed, and the Gospel of John was translated and printed.<sup>41</sup> Peo, son of Chief Tatugu, did the translating for the Sabbath School quarterly from English to the Marovo language. He would spend hours poring over English Bible texts with a dictionary to ensure he understood the meaning of the text and had translated it correctly. Another of his aims was to translate the entire New Testament so that his people could have the Bible in their own language.<sup>42</sup> Peo translated many hymns into the Marovo language, one of which was sung at his funeral at Telina on March 9, 1926.<sup>43</sup> A new press building was built and dedicated in 1932.<sup>44</sup> After World War II the press was moved to Betikama when the new Betikama Training School was established, but disappeared from the *Yearbook* after 1953. By 1947 the mission headquarters had moved to Honiara, with H. White the superintendent of the Solomon Islands Mission.<sup>45</sup>

## Batuna Sawmill

School development required building materials, so a sawmill was built. Timber was milled both for the school and for communities nearby.<sup>46</sup> Logs were supplied by the nearby communities with a percentage of the timber for the school, the rest for the landowners. As well as meeting local needs, the Batuna sawmill provided timber to construct the Aymes Memorial Hospital at Kukudu on the island of Kolombangara further west from Batuna.<sup>47</sup> The mill went through various development phases and was a significant facility for many years, providing employment to many local people. Among other expatriates, Bill Baines, Frank Cherry, and Ron Ringrose directed operations at the mill.<sup>48</sup> After many years of operations, accessing logs became a problem, as they had to be hauled by ship through the lagoon over increasing distances, with *Batuna II* being the last mission boat to be used to haul logs.<sup>49</sup> The sawmill ceased operations in 2009.<sup>50</sup>

## Batuna Clinic and Hospital

Medical work came with the establishment of the church at Batuna. A decision was made to build a small clinic to care for the physical needs of the school and the nearby communities. The first structure shown in a 1924 photo taken by Wicks was of bush material with thatch for the roof and walls.<sup>51</sup> Evelyn Totenhofer arrived at Batuna in 1925 and served as a nurse at the Batuna Clinic for 17 years.<sup>52</sup> The clinic was enlarged and fitted with an iron roof in 1927.<sup>53</sup> In time this primitive clinic building was replaced by one built from timber milled at Batuna.<sup>54</sup> This new building was constructed over the water near the beach and dedicated by A. R. Barrett.<sup>55</sup> A new maternity ward was added then dedicated on February 4, 1930.<sup>56</sup>

Life was never dull for Totenhofer, who usually carried the responsibility of sole care provider. In one busy day she completed 250 treatments and in the same week helped 960 patients.<sup>57</sup> On one occasion, Dr. Finkle, appointed to Aymes Memorial Hospital at Kukudu, spent a few weeks at Batuna Clinic with Totenhofer, and on another, Dr. Parker spent seven weeks assisting Totenhofer at the Batuna Hospital.<sup>58</sup> By the late 1960s the hospital building was so poor, the floorboards rotting so badly, that the nurse, Elaine Donaldson, fell through the floor twice.<sup>59</sup> Another new facility was built with a concrete floor and constructed on land.<sup>60</sup> An inspection in 2008 revealed that this building was suffering badly from white ant infestation, dry rot, and sinking foundations from armies of land crabs and the effect of tidal surge.<sup>61</sup> Several groups banded together and under the Adopt-a-Clinic program developed by Dr. Chester Kuma built a new facility with help from the community, building students from Batuna Vocational School, and expatriate volunteers.<sup>62</sup> The new clinic building was opened in 2016 and named the Batuna Pioneer Memorial Clinic to honor both indigenous and expatriate missionaries who worked in the Solomon Islands.<sup>63</sup>

## Ships, Shipbuilding, and Wharves

When Jones arrived in 1914, he brought a small boat, *Advent Herald*, to be used in development of the church.<sup>64</sup> By 1917, this little boat had become inadequate for the work, so another boat was commissioned and built in Sydney by W. M. Ford of Berry's Bay.<sup>65</sup> Funds for the new mission ship were raised by the young people of Australia and New Zealand selling literature.<sup>66</sup> On June 3, 1917, *Melanesia* was dedicated and ready for service. *Melanesia* was a much bigger boat and served the church into the early postwar years.<sup>67</sup> Smaller boats were needed as the church grew. As the fleet grew, the need for a maintenance facility was recognized and a slipway was built at Batuna to provide for the maintenance. First mention of the slipway is in a report by the resident commissioner, British Solomon Islands.<sup>68</sup> With more ships needed, shipbuilding became part of the work at the Batuna slipway. Several mission boats were built at Batuna, including *Vinaritokae* (1931) and *Dadavata* (1936).<sup>69</sup> W. O. Broard reported on the launching of a new boat for Guadalcanal, probably the *G. F. Jones*. By 1936 two other boats had been built at Batuna, with timber milled locally, by a Japanese shipbuilder, Snanaga, with two local men assisting as carpenters.<sup>70</sup> The slipway survived until after the war. In 1951, after the organization of the Coral Sea Union Mission, the decision was made to amalgamate the marine services at Rabaul and Batuna. A new facility at Rugen Harbour, near Kambubu College, on the island of New Britain, was created, with Captain Jack Radley holding responsibility for the move.<sup>71</sup>



Early on it was apparent that with the coming of ships to Batuna it was necessary to have a wharf, and by 1924 construction of a wharf was under way.<sup>72</sup> Although the wharf has fallen into disuse, even today, 2019, remnants of it are still used. Part of the wharf was constructed from stone and part from coconut tree trunks (which have long since rotted). To construct the wharf without machinery would have been an enormous task, a testament to the commitment of those pioneers.

## Conclusion

For the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Solomon Islands, Batuna was pivotal. It was the center of activity for the church. Here were the church headquarters, training school, hospital, slipway, press, boat maintenance, and sawmill. The loyal national workers and nearby villagers, led by Kata Ragoso, did much to protect the estate during the war. After the war things changed, as elements of the estate were moved to other locations or closed down. Today, 2019, some of the buildings from those early days still are in use.

Two schools currently operate at Batuna, a primary school to grade 6, and a vocational school. Batuna Adventist Vocational School was established in 1980, having moved there from Kukudu.<sup>73</sup> The first principal was Gideon Ross, a graduate of Jones Missionary College.<sup>74</sup> Courses offered include agriculture, accounting/computing, building/plumbing, electrical maintenance, mechanics, and home skills, with a typical school cohort of around 300.<sup>75</sup>

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