

# Charlotte Leonora Geddie

The First Presbyterian Missionary Wife in the New Hebrides



1846



Salome (Fila) and Leitamat (Mele)

1945



1890



2012

Rosemary Zurrer



# Charlotte Leonora Geddie

The First Presbyterian Missionary Wife  
in the  
New Hebrides

*This mystery is that through the Gospel the Gentiles are  
heirs together with Israel, members together of one  
body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ  
Jesus.*

Ephesians 3 verse 6.

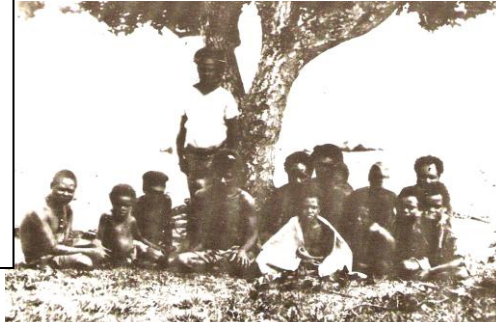
All Scripture quotations in this booklet are from the *Holy Bible,  
New International Version, 1973*, International Bible Society.

Rev Walter and Rosemary Zurrer were missionaries in New Hebrides  
(Vanuatu) from 1969 to 1979.



Charlotte Leonora Geddie,  
wife of Rev John Geddie, as they  
prepare for mission service in  
1846

Some of the  
Aneityumese people  
soon after the  
Geddies arrive at  
Anelgauhat, on the  
southern most  
island of the New  
Hebrides



A photo of the New Hebrides Mission Synod in the early 1860s.  
Rev Geddie is 2<sup>nd</sup> left at back, Charlotte 3<sup>rd</sup> left in front.  
Rev John and Jessie Inglis are 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> from left at back –  
The Inglises were the Geddies' valued colleagues on Aneityum.



## Dedication

Giving praise and glory to God, I dedicate this small booklet to all women who have taken the step of faith to go out into the lands of darkness, there to shine the Light of Christ.

I also present this booklet to the women of Aneityum, whose great grandmothers embraced Charlotte Geddie and the message she bore, and along with their husbands were the first New Hebrideans (niVanuatu) to turn from darkness to the Light.

Luna Baniuri, an Aneityumese woman married to a Pastor, who in 2012 was continuing the work amongst the island women started by Charlotte Geddie in 1848. I took this photo while we waited together at Tanna Airport in August 2012. Sadly Luna died shortly after returning home.



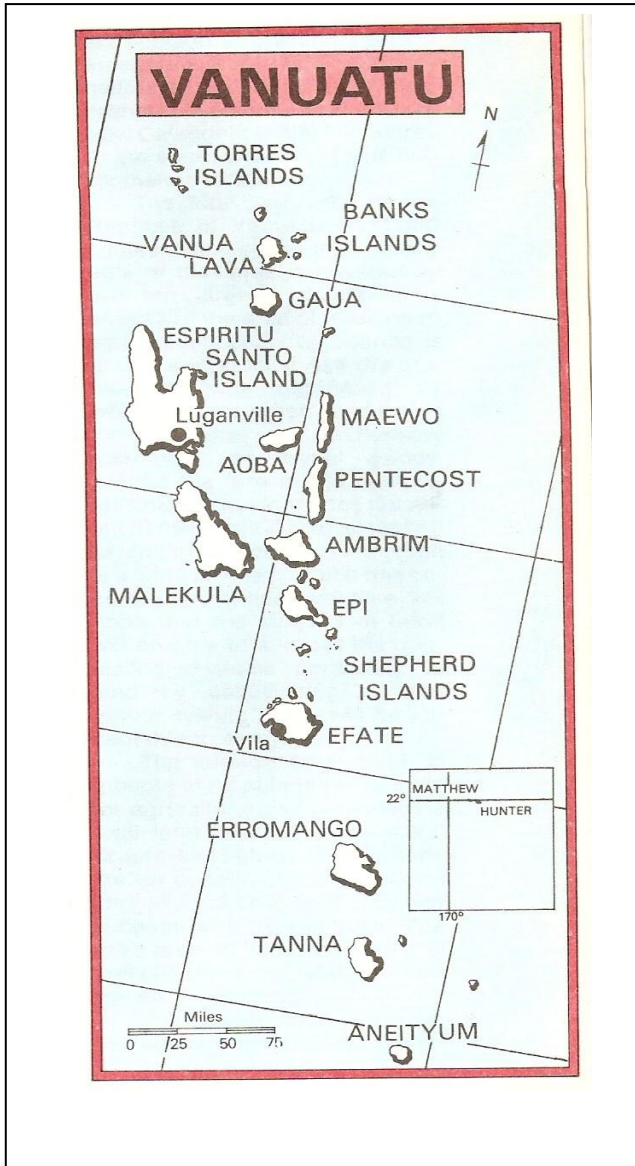
I have been privileged to be part of the Presbyterian Women's Missionary Union of Victoria. of which Charlotte Geddie was a founding member in 1890. I was also a member of the Presbyterian Women's Missionary Union of Vanuatu, which is the fulfilment of the very first Christian women's meetings started by Charlotte around 1850 on Aneityum.

This booklet is also for the encouragement of the work of these Unions.

May God continue to bless the work of our Presbyterian Women's Missionary Unions and our women missionaries.

*Rosemary Zurrer 2012*

This map of the South West Pacific island nation, known initially as the New Hebrides, and now Vanuatu since gaining independence in 1980, was copied from Walter Hadye Lini's book, *Vanuatu*, page 11.



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A work begun at the dawning of evangelism in the South West Pacific continues today, blessed and sustained by Almighty God. Women of the Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu in 2012.



## Foreword

My interest in the story of Charlotte Leonora Geddie was rekindled in a delightful way. In 2012, as a representative of the PWMU (Presbyterian Women's Missionary Union) of Victoria, I travelled to Aniwa, a small island in the south of Vanuatu. It is in the same region as the larger islands of Aneityum, where the Geddies had worked, Tanna, where my husband Walter and I had worked from 1969 to 1971, and Erromanga. Meeting on Aniwa with the women of the PWMU of Vanuatu at their Annual Conference, I realised that Charlotte's story was very much part of the story of their Church and their women's organisation. I was encouraged when talking with some of the Vanuatu women leaders and with two Aneityumese women in particular, to write the following account of Charlotte's life and work. The island people referred to her husband, Rev Geddie, as *Missi Geti (Missionary Geddie)*, as I will later refer him, and the people most likely called Charlotte *Missis (Mrs)*.



PWMU of Vanuatu members from all over the island nation meet for their Annual Conference on Aniwa, August 4th to 12th, 2012.



The story of the life and work of Charlotte Leonora Geddie encompasses the story of the first island in the South West Pacific to embrace Christ, the story of British Colonialism, both the good which enabled the spread of Christ's love and peace, and the bad which saw people dispossessed and abused. It also covers the establishment of a support network for the ongoing help of Christian missions, and later for indigenous churches, which endures to this day. Charlotte's story links the women of the island Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu (New Hebrides) with the women of the Presbyterian Church of Victoria, Australia. Praise be to God!



The *Dayspring*, the sailing ship on which Charlotte travelled in the late 1860s. The PWMU of Victoria continues to use the name *Dayspring* in relation to its children's work.



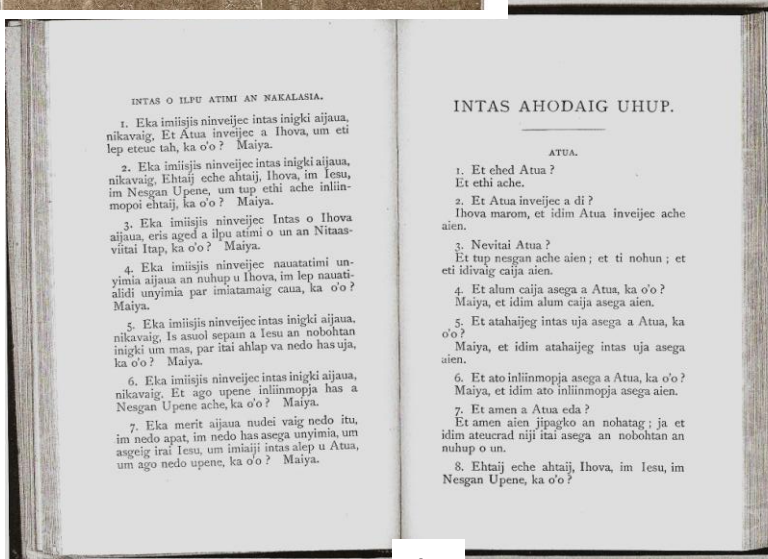
The plane on which I travelled to Aniwa in 2012.

## Acknowledgements

I gratefully acknowledge the help I have received from many friends and family members who assisted with research, proof reading and advice. Unless otherwise noted the information I have used is from R S Miller's book *MISI GETE – John Geddie, Pioneer Missionary to the New Hebrides*. I thank Mrs Margaret Miller who agreed to me using her husband's well researched book for most of the story of Charlotte's life on Aneityum to the retirement of her husband, and his subsequent death, in 1872. I am also grateful that many old documents have been preserved in libraries and archives.



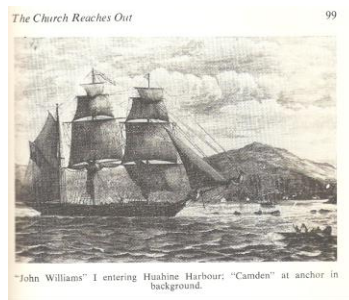
Charlotte was involved in the translation of Psalms and a First Catechism, printed initially by Rev Geddie on Aneityum and later in a booklet *INTAS TA NATGA U KRISTIAN*



## Timeline

All times and events are part of God's plan for His people and the world He created. Some of those times and events are woven into the most wonderful stories. The times and events around the life of Charlotte Leonora, nee MacDonald, Geddie, are indeed a wonderfully amazing account of God's people taking Christ to the heathen world against enormous difficulties.

To anchor the story of Charlotte Leonora Geddie within the palette of world and Church history, I am placing this timeline at the beginning of the story.



Two of the early ships used by the London Missionary Society (LMS) in the South and West Pacific

***The age of sailing ships able to navigate around the world had begun. Nations sent ships out to both spread their name abroad, find suitable places to colonise and to bring booty home. Dates relevant to New Hebrides (Vanuatu), Pacific islands in general, New Zealand, Canada and Australia are as follows:***

**1604** – The Spanish Crown sends Portuguese Pedro Fernandez de Quiros in search of the great southern land. He is the first known European to sight the Vanuatu island group.

**1752** – The first Frenchmen settle in Canada.

**1768** - Frenchman Louie Antoine de Bouganville sails through the island group.

**1770** - The first Scots settle in Canada.

**1774** – Captain James Cook is the first explorer to make detailed maps of the islands and name them the New Hebrides after the Scottish Hebrides Islands.



**1788** – The first European settlement in Australia – British convicts.

**1792** – Carey starts the Baptist Missionary Society in London.

**1795** – The London Missionary Society (LMS) is started.

**1796** – The *Duff*, the first ship owned by the LMS, takes the first missionaries to the Pacific Islands.

**1815** – John Geddie is born in Banf, Scotland.

**1815** – After many years of LMS labour Tahiti becomes the first central Pacific Island to convert to Christianity.

**1816** – John Geddie's family migrate to Nova Scotia, Canada.

**1817** – Aged 21, John Williams, the LMS's most famous missionary, sails for Tahiti. He becomes the first missionary to use national 'indigenous' workers in evangelism.

**1822** – March 21<sup>st</sup> – Charlotte Leonora MacDonald is born in Nova Scotia Canada, to Scottish immigrants.

**1825** – Peter Dillon is the first sandalwood trader to land in the New Hebrides, first on Tanna and then Erromanga. Whalers had already begun to use Aneityum as a base.

**1827** – The London Missionary Society (LMS) directs its mission efforts towards the New Hebrides and New Caledonia

**1833** – A British Resident (official government position) is sent to New Zealand as many Europeans start to settle in that country.

**1837** – 31<sup>st</sup> December – the first Presbyterian service was held in the new Port Phillip settlement, part of the colony of New South Wales and later to be known as Melbourne, Victoria.

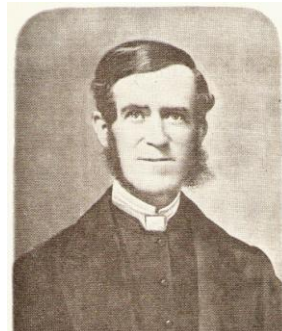
**1838** – The Women’s Missionary Society was formed on Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia.

**1838** – John Williams of LMS sails in the *Camden* to Samoa, which becomes the base for the push into the New Hebrides.

**1839** – 21<sup>st</sup> September – aged 18, Charlotte marries 24 year old Rev John Geddie.



Nova Scotia, Canada, where many Scottish families, including the Geddies, settled.



The young John Geddie.

**1839** – 3 Samoan Christians who are placed on Tanna by the LMS become the first Christian missionaries to the New Hebrides. **On the same trip Rev John Williams and one of his crew, James Harris, were killed and cannibalised on Erromanga, 20<sup>th</sup> November 1839.**

***The Martyrdom of John Williams and James Harris creates an increased zeal amongst British folk, to reach out to the unsaved people of the South West Pacific.***

**1839** – *The Camden* delivers two brave Samoans to Erromanga, and two more to Tanna, just 4 months after the death of the first Christian Martyrs in the South West Pacific.<sup>1</sup>

**1840** – The Aneityumese people have become used to traders and whalers using the Anelgauhat harbour.

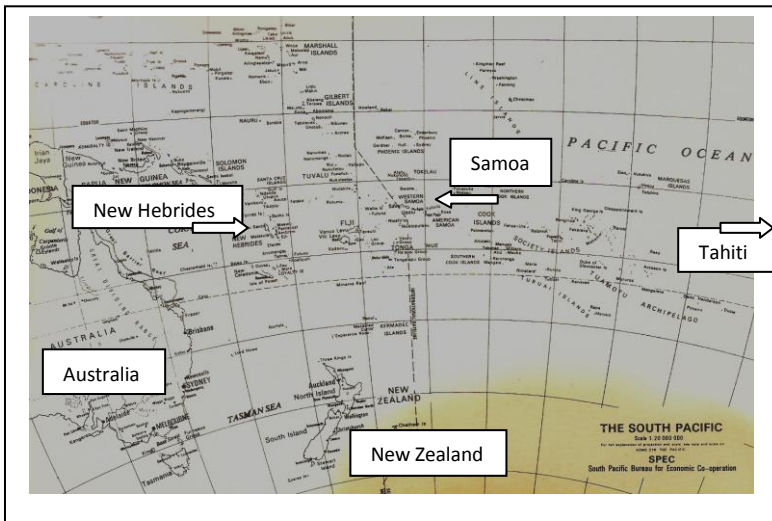
**1841** – Rev George Selwyn is appointed Bishop of New Zealand and later the New Hebrides becomes part of his diocese.

**1841** – The first Samoans are placed on Aneityum.<sup>2</sup>

**1842** – Europeans Messrs Nisbett & Turner are placed on Tanna by the LMS but are forced to return to Samoa after 8 months. Samoan Christians had previously been placed on all the southern islands, Futuna, Aneityum, Aniwa, Erromanga and Tanna, but little progress was made.<sup>3</sup>

**1842** – A group of 3 sandalwood ships cause a lot of trouble, death and sickness in the southern islands and Efate.<sup>4</sup>

**1846** – Rev John and Mrs Charlotte Geddie and two children begin an eighteen month journey from Canada to the New Hebrides, stopping at Tahiti and Samoa for orientation. Charlotte Jnr is left on Samoa awaiting passage to London.



**1848 – 29<sup>th</sup> July - The Geddies begin work on Aneityum.**





**1855** - Rev J Coleridge Patteson joins Bishop Selwyn and in 1860 becomes Bishop of Melanesia. Fifteen years later he is martyred on Santa Cruz.

**1857** – Charlotte Jnr arrives from London on the *John Williams* to assist her parents in their work.

**1858** – Rev John G Paton arrives from Scotland to work on Tanna.

**1859** – Mary Ann Robson Paton, wife of Rev John G Paton and her new born son die on Tanna.

**1859** - Helen Jessie Geddie, the 7<sup>th</sup> child, is born on Aneityum.

**1860** – Rev John Inglis travels to London to petition the British Government to become involved in law and order in the New Hebrides. Two previous petitions were sent by letter.

**1861** – The Gordons, also from Canada, are murdered on Erromanga.

**1861** – Alexander Geddie, the 8<sup>th</sup> and last child, is born.

**1862** – Mary Matheson, Rev Geddie's niece, dies at Aneityum, and her husband dies on Mare soon afterwards.

**1864** – Young Alexander Geddie dies at 2½ years on board ship as the family leaves Aneityum for their first break since 1848. They go to Australia, Britain and Canada.

**1867** – Lucy marries Rev Thomas Neilson of Scotland, in Melbourne. They go as missionaries to Tanna, 1868 to 1883.

**1866** – The British war ship *Curacoa* shells two Tannese villages.

**1866** – The family returns to Aneityum, leaving Helen Jessie at school in Geelong.

**1866** – The forced labour trade becomes a concern.

**1871** – Ill health forces Charlotte and two youngest children to return to Victoria for a few months, they stay in Geelong.

**1872** – **May** – Elizabeth married Rev Daniel Macdonald of Australia, on Aneityum. They were missionaries at Havanah Harbour, Efate, from 1872 to 1907.

**1872** – Rev Geddie experiences serious ill health and is forced to give up the work on Aneityum.

***On December 16<sup>th</sup> 1872 Rev John Geddie dies in Geelong, Victoria, Australia, aged 57 years.***

**1882** – The first mission boxes are sent to the New Hebrides. Boxes continued to be sent for the next ninety years.

**1882** – It is estimated that 17,000 New Hebrideans are working in Australia, Fiji and New Caledonia, most were forced labour.

**1887** – Charlotte Geddie forms a ladies auxiliary to help support missionaries in the New Hebrides.<sup>6</sup>

**1887** – A Franco-British Joint Naval Commission is formed to try to bring law and order to the New Hebrides.

**1890** – Charlotte becomes the first Vice President of the Presbyterian Women's Missionary Union (PWMU) of Victoria.

**1906** – The French British Condominium is formed to govern the New Hebrides. It was the only Condominium in the world.

***Charlotte Geddie dies in Malvern, a suburb of Melbourne, on January 1<sup>st</sup> 1916, aged 93. She is buried beside her husband in the Geelong Cemetery.***

**1945** – The PWMU of Victoria sends Amy Skinner and Cath Ritchie to find out how the Presbyterian Church of the New Hebrides could be helped. Amy Skinner returns as a PWMU missionary to set up the PWMU of the New Hebrides and to do educational work.

**1978** – Rt Rev Courcy and Mrs Marie Rayner from the Presbyterian Church of Canada make an official visit to the stations of all the early Canadian missionaries, including the Geddies' station on Aneityum.

**1980** – The New Hebrides Condominium becomes the independent Republic of Vanuatu.

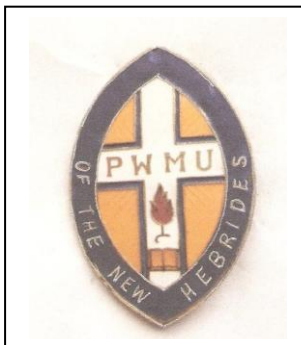
**2011** – November – A delegation of PWMU ladies from Vanuatu visit Church groups in Melbourne, South Gippsland and Geelong, and the graves of Charlotte Geddie, Amy Skinner and Cath Ritchie. They renew the ties between the PWMU of Victoria and the PWMU of Vanuatu.



Representatives of the PWMU of Vanuatu and Pastor Pakoa at the Geddie memorial in East Geelong cemetery, Victoria, Australia in Nov 2011.

Footnotes;

- 1. *They Came for Sandalwood* page 58/59
- 2. *They Came for Sandalwood* page 103
- 3 *They Came for Sandalwood* page 59
- 4. *They Came for Sandalwood* page 60
- 5. *They Came for Sandalwood* page 119
- 6. *The Presbyterian Church of Victoria – Jubilee History* page 93



The badge of the PWMU of the New Hebrides The wording has now been replaced with PWMU of Vanuatu.

## A Step of Faith – The Story Begins

At the same time as a network of sailing ships carried the news that two men from the London Missionary Society (LMS) had been killed and cannibalised at Dillon's Bay on Erromanga, New Hebrides, in the South West Pacific, the young Charlotte Leonora MacDonald Geddie was starting her married life in far off Nova Scotia, Canada.

The news of the deaths, far from putting fear into the hearts of would be missionaries, stirred a greater desire throughout the Christian world to take Christ to the dark world of the Melanesians.

In 1839 Charlotte settled into the life of a minister's wife in a parish on Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, Canada. Her husband, Rev Geddie, encouraged the parish to take an interest in and to support mission outreach to the unsaved people in countries which at the time were being settled by European traders.

At the time of John Geddie's ordination a Women's Missionary Society<sup>1</sup> was formed in the parish. This was Charlotte's first interaction with a part of the work for God's Kingdom with which she would be involved in for the rest of her life. She would teach, encourage and support women in their faith and missionary endeavour in vastly different situations in different parts of the world.

Rev Geddie's groomsman, Sir William Dawson, described Charlotte at the time of her marriage as *'having the graces of a fine personal appearance and good manner', 'a woman of eminent piety, and zealous in every good work,' 'content to*

*bury herself in the quiet duties of a country manse, or go afar off to the heathen, as the Lord might indicate*'.<sup>2</sup> Rev Geddie himself had a determination to become a missionary but had never been a robust man, in fact as a child he had not been expected to survive. When some people agreed that he was a man fit to be a missionary others queried whether he was physically strong enough to withstand the strains that island life would put on his health. Charlotte however enjoyed good health.

In 1846, as Rev Geddie prepared himself and his supporting churches for his departure to the mission field, and while Charlotte was pregnant with her fourth child, their third child, Mary, died in February, aged 1 year and 9 months. Their second child, Jane, died a month later aged 3 years and 8 months. Undeterred by the tragedy, late in the same year, with six year old Charlotte Jnr and baby Lucretia, Rev. John and Charlotte Geddie left for the field as the first missionaries of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church of Nova Scotia. They intended to settle in a South West Pacific Island mission field and were bound initially for New Caledonia.

The young couple climbed the gang plank of the sailing ship at Halifax, headed for Boston, in November 1846. It was a step of faith that can hardly be imagined today. In Boston they spent some time trying to find a ship headed around Cape Horn and across the Pacific towards Australia. After finding a ship prepared to take them, they boarded it knowing that they would face hostility and tropical diseases, and that it was possible their lives too might end in martyrdom. But they also had the conviction that this was God's plan for their lives and He would be with them.

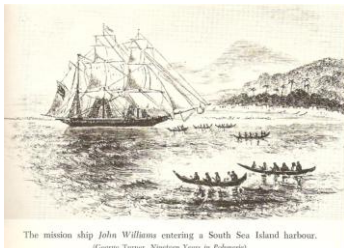


Rev Geddie later wrote in his journal, *'...there is something solemn and impressive in the departure of missionaries to the heathen. It is an event peculiarly trying to the finest sensibilities of our nature, and can be fully understood only by those who have known it themselves...On the night after we sailed...I thought of my two dear children whom I had devoted to missionary work, but whom an all-wise and merciful God was pleased to recall to Himself ere their work begun'*.<sup>3</sup>

In his last address to friends he met in Boston, while already aboard the ship *Eveline*, that would carry them 19,429 miles away in 140 days, Rev Geddie challenged those assembled; *'if you lift up your hands before God on our behalf, we shall succeed; if not, we must fail'*.<sup>4</sup>

Charlotte and her husband thus became part of the first group of European missionaries to head for the islands surrounding and including Erromanga in the New Hebrides, and the first Presbyterians to join the work. They knowingly faced the trials and tribulations that would be ahead of them in the hope that God would use them mightily to bring the islanders into the light of the Gospel.

*'...go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'*  
Matthew 28 verses 19 & 20



The LMS ship, named after Rev John Williams, who was martyred on Erromanga, in service in the South Pacific

## **Charlotte's Mission Service on Aneityum**

On January 28<sup>th</sup> 1847 the Geddie family left Boston on that long journey away from familiar shores towards the unknown. After surviving the perils of such a journey in 1847 with two young children to care for, the family reached the London Missionary Society (LMS) base in Samoa. Charlotte is convinced, during their orientation period there, that Charlotte Jnr should not continue with them, and, when able, be transported to London to be cared for and educated by the LMS people there. It was deemed that the customs of the island people at the time were so abhorrent that a child would be unable to cope with witnessing, or even hearing about such things.

It is hard to imagine the heartache that this young mother had to endure sailing further on towards the unknown horizons not knowing when, or even if, she would see her eldest daughter again, and this after having already buried two of her four children.

In those early years the LMS only placed European missionaries where they had previously placed Samoan missionaries. It was in fact the Samoans, and some Raratongans, who were the true first Christian missionaries to the New Hebrides, and amongst the first martyrs. The LMS had also decided that each new couple should at first be accompanied by experienced missionaries. Henry Nisbett, who had previously spent 8 months on Tanna, was chosen. A catechist, Mr Archibald and his wife and Rev Thomas Powell travelled with the Geddies. Rev Powell intended to set up a mission on Efate, but initially stayed to help them.

It was the wind that forced the Geddie's party to go ashore at Anelgauhat, Aneityum on July 29<sup>th</sup> 1848, and give up their intentions to go to New Caledonia. Two Samoan teachers, Simeona and Pita, were already working there and a Catholic mission was already being built. Sandalwood traders and whalers also had bases on the island, but the islanders remained in a totally heathen state.

The first letter that we have from Charlotte, written to the ladies of Pictou (Canada) in October 1848 States; *'We (referring to herself and Mrs Archibald) have been here 3 months, but we have not had time to feel lonely yet; our husbands have been very busy building, we have attended to cookery etc., that our servants may assist them. ... I may mention that our servants are Samoans whom we brought with us. ... The scenery of this island is romantic, especially around this place. We are living inside a pretty little harbour, the water is quite near our door; the spot our house stands on is quite elevated, and slopes gently to the shore, which gives us a fine view of the harbour. ... We now have a nice little chapel, and have commenced a school. ... We sing the alphabet with them. ...'*<sup>5</sup>

Charlotte delivered her fifth child, Elizabeth Keir, at the end of this first year on Aneityum.

A letter written in 1851 states, *"My school is very well attended by females of all ages. Grandmothers, middle aged women with infants on their backs, young women and children meet every morning and again at midday. Some are learning their letters, others can read, and several are learning to write. ... I have a great deal to attend to, and little time to call my own. It is very difficult for me to write a connected letter, I have so many calls; do not criticise this*

*closely; really I speak so little English, that I am often at a loss for words to express what I have to say. ...*<sup>6</sup>

Charlotte, still only aged 29, having given birth to five children and having endured the death of two of them and the oldest child being thousands of miles away in a school in London, was now totally engaged in evangelising the women on Aneityum. She started to translate material into their language and teach the women to read it. She also dispensed medicines and taught them to sew. It was widely believed at the time that when you became a Christian you must wear European style clothing, and supplies of material were sent from Canada for this purpose. When her own children were older she had to teach them too.

At first the local sandalwood trader, James Paddon, was friendly and helpful. In the early years of the mission work the missionaries were dependant on the help of the whalers and traders to transport them between the islands. The LMS ship visited each station at least once a year and brought them much needed supplies but it was not until Rev Geddie obtained a wooden whale boat (large dinghy), the *John Knox*, that he was free to move between islands whenever necessary.

The relationship between the Europeans on Aneityum changed as the missionaries worked hard at building, learning the language and translating. The missionaries had very different views to the traders of what was right and what was wrong. During the early 1850s Charlotte faced the antagonism of James Paddon, who dared to call her husband a liar and a hypocrite, and refer to her as someone '*a good deal worse*'!<sup>7</sup> She had no doubt been involved in trying to prevent the local women from becoming concubines for the

traders. Charlotte, whom her daughter later recalls as having been described at the time of her marriage as *‘the daintily nurtured daughter of that outstanding physician and surgeon’*<sup>8</sup> was already showing that she was a woman of immense strength, ready to stand beside her husband, and even alone, in the face of strong opposition to the Gospel and its values.

*‘Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines.....Yet will I rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Saviour.’* Habakkuk 3 verse 17 & 18



The Geddies' stone and thatch house at Anelgauhat



Melanesia is the region inhabited by the fuzzy haired Melanesian people.

## **Bishop G A Selwyn and Rev John and Jessie Inglis**

Early in their time on Aneityum the Geddies were left alone without the support of other Europeans. The island people tested their resolve in many ways and the family suffered often from malaria.

After some repeated illness, Mr Archibald had defected to the traders. At the same time Rev Powell returned to Samoa, too ill to continue. But one man who would stand beside Rev Geddie throughout his mission service came to visit.

August 28<sup>th</sup> 1849, Rev Geddie writes in his journal; *'The Bishop of New Zealand has just paid us a visit. He came in the UNDINE, a small mission schooner about 18 tons burden. We had much profitable intercourse with him during his short sojourn...I have seldom met a man of more ardent missionary spirit.'*<sup>9</sup>

The Geddies applied themselves to the work at hand, encouraged by Bishop Selwyn's visit, and some of the islanders started to turn to Christ. By 1852 the miracle of some conversions was evident, and the first Christian Church in the South West Pacific was formed on Aneityum. Just six weeks after the first baptisms were conducted in the presence of some LMS missionaries, Rev John and Mrs Jessie Inglis from the Presbyterian Church of Scotland joined the mission. They started a station at Aname on the north of Aneityum. Robert Miller records the following letter written by Charlotte and dated February 18<sup>th</sup> 1853.<sup>10</sup>

*'...Our esteemed associates, Mr and Mrs Inglis, are getting on very well at this station. They pursue much the same system as we do; we try to do everything as uniformly as possible...We visited them in October and spent ten days with*



*them... Mr Geddie is very busy at present, in printing the second edition of our catechism; he is also getting on with translation.'*

*'The foreign establishment [The sandalwood trade station headed by James Paddon] is being removed from this island....it will be a blessing when it is quite removed...they did all in their power to annoy and hinder our usefulness; vainly thinking that they could prevent God's word from taking root.'*

Rev John and Jessie Inglis, building on the start made by Rev John and Charlotte Geddie, began an effective work which they would continue until 1879.

In an article J H Proctor,<sup>11</sup> discussed the role John Inglis played in trying to bring law and order to the island of Aneityum and later to the whole of the New Hebrides. In 1857 Rev Inglis carried a petition to London asking that the British Government be more active in the protection of the natives from the traders. He supported the use of British warships to threaten and discipline both British subjects and natives.

The Geddies and Inglises worked well together but they differed regarding the use of warships to intimidate the islanders. At this point Rev Geddie also had different opinions to other members of the Mission.

Rev Geddie stated; *'I have always opposed the punishment of natives for crimes committed by the heathen against the Mission, under the influence of superstition, or at the instigation of our own countrymen.'*<sup>12</sup>

Bishop Selwyn, and later his colleague Bishop Patterson, supported Rev Geddie's view that the use of warships to threaten or retaliate against the island folk was wrong.



New Zealand  
Anglican Bishops  
George Selwyn (left)  
and John Patteson  
(right)



British Warships did indeed come and exact punishment on some natives after the death of Mary Matheson and her baby after being starved on Tanna and Rev John Paton having been forced off Tanna by hostile Tannese.

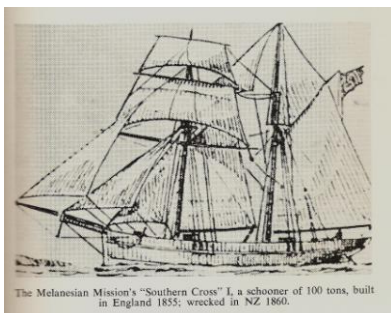
In 1866 Rev John Paton and Rev John Inglis assisted the master of the British warship *Curacoa* in the shelling the island of Tanna. Rev Paton, although supporting the action of the ship in firing on two villages, had no intention that anyone be killed, only frightened into submission. Unfortunately his efforts to warn the people and convince them to vacate the villages failed and some men were killed. In defending his role as interpreter during this event, Rev Paton<sup>13</sup> explained that it was the Queen's decision to punish those people, both native and British, who would murder or injure other people. Rev Geddie, who was in Canada at the time, saw the issue very differently to Rev Paton and he considered the bombardment '*one of the most humiliating events in the history of modern Missions*'.<sup>14</sup> The incident is well dealt with in the books *Misi Gete* and *John G. Paton* but must be mentioned here as it was a greater blow to Rev Geddie and his work than the death of his colleagues at the hands of the natives.

This incident and ensuing enquiries were reported in Australian and New Zealand papers and provoked some vigorous debate that effected the support of the Mission. Rev Geddie's efforts to further the work on Tanna when he

returned were hindered as a result of the death of the Tannese men.

Rev John and Jessie Inglis, though valued colleagues who shared the work well, had not shared the initial experience of the Geddies. The Inglises had arrived on Aneityum after the first Church was already formed. They had not travelled the same difficult road the Geddies had travelled. After the Curacoa incident the two men no longer shared all the same views. We find no record of Rev Geddie making any adverse comments about any of his colleagues. But this difference of opinion between him and Rev Inglis made the friendship with Bishop Selwyn and later Captain Fraser of the *Dayspring* very important to the Geddies.

*'Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ.'* Galatians 6 verse 2.



One of the New Zealand Melanesian Mission ships which carried Bishops Selwyn and Patterson around the SW Pacific.



Anelghaut Harbour Aneityum

Photos sourced from website 'Math teaching on Aneityum'



The offshore airstrip near Anelghaut

## A Turbulent Background

All through the time when Charlotte and her husband were befriending and teaching the Aneityumese people, and the Mission was steadily growing, the island nation around them was facing very turbulent times. Sandalwood traders from 1825 onwards had progressively shown the worst side of humanity in their interactions with the island people. They provoked much of the hostility of the local people against the Europeans, and some of the Europeans retaliated in the most inhumane ways. In the eyes of the Geddies both the provocation and retaliation enacted by the traders far outweighed the heathen customs of the islanders.

William Johnstone records the following account,<sup>15</sup> *‘LMS missionary Rev George Turner was arguing with some traders regarding their actions towards the island people: “Mr Turner,” said one (trader) seriously, “You do not mean these Erromangans are men, do you?” Rev Turner replies, “Not men! What do you suppose they are? Nonsense! Don’t you realise that your fathers were just such naked savages as these?”’* It had been the Erromangans who had killed LMS missionaries John Williams and James Harris in 1839 and these traders had deemed it all right to infect the Erromangans with measles, decimating the population. As the missionaries knew, these people were indeed men: – men made in God’s image who could come to know and love Him.

The Geddies railed against the traders and their behaviour but remained faithful to the love of Christ which had borne them to the islands. They never punished the Aneityumese people for their heathen behaviour although at times they tried to intervene in a ritual murder and had to endure

failure. They continued their work of teaching until God turned the people's hearts from these heathen ways.

Helen Rose Gillan recounts the Geddies' first years on Aneityum. *'They arrived in Vanuatu during the cool season. They visited all five islands (the southern half of New Hebrides) – Aneityum, Erromanga, Tanna, Futuna and Efate - where Polynesian [mainly Samoan, some Raratongan] evangelists had been trying to witness. The Lord guided them to settle on Aneityum on 29 July 1848. At first the Geddies enjoyed the company of other Christians but after they left, John and Charlotte had to carry the whole responsibility of the Christian work.'* Helen adds the quote,

*'Mr and Mrs Geddie had to pass through a very hard and trying experience...Their property was stolen and the natives threatened to burn their houses and to take their lives. Hurricanes, diseases and deaths were all traced to the missionary, and efforts were made more than once to destroy him and his family. Nevertheless, they persevered, and hoped to gain a place in the affections of the people. During their first year's residence eleven cases of strangling of widows occurred. The missionary used every effort to dissuade the people from so revolting a custom, and it was marvellous how he succeeded. Gradually a number attended their instructions and in two years Mr Geddie could report that forty-five assembled on Sabbaths to listen to his words and worship God. (Steel 1880:93)<sup>16</sup>*

It was during the Geddies' time of service on Aneityum that the traders started the practice of taking islanders as contract labour to cut sandalwood on other islands where the local people had refused to co-operate. Once Rev Geddie had made a trip to Erromanga to rescue two Tannese men, after some of their number had been killed. He returned them safely home. Later in 1864 the Erromangan people killed 22 such islanders and one European. Those who escaped fled to Aneityum, no doubt a safe haven because of the attitude of the Geddies.

Despite the protests of the missionaries, the traders' practise of taking contract labour to other islands eventually turned into the 'slave labour' later known as 'blackbirding'. All such trading was just for financial gain, and without any rule of law despite the loss of life it involved. Although the British Government kept sending warships to the region threatening to punish both British citizens and islanders who caused harm to others, the move was mostly unsuccessful in protecting the islanders.

Around 20,000 islanders<sup>17</sup> were taken to Australia and Fiji to work on sugar cane plantations. Many died there. After 3 year 'contracts' some were returned home to the wrong islands and killed. This, along with great loss of life from epidemics of European diseases such as measles, caused a big reduction in the population of the New Hebrides.

Charlotte in her work with the women had firstly tried to help prevent the strangling of widows, then she tried to prevent the traders stealing women from their husbands and now she had to comfort women whose husbands were lost to the labour trade.

Another group of people also headed to the New Hebrides for financial gain during the Geddies' time on Aneityum.<sup>18</sup> The American Civil War of 1861 to 1865 prompted a world-wide demand for cotton, and some Australians, who were still colonials of Britain at the time, started to colonise the New Hebrides and clear land to grow cotton. A short time later the cotton was no longer needed, and so instead the colonists established coconut plantations on the land they had acquired. Other white and mixed race people from nearby countries also joined this 'colonisation'. Despite this growing population there was still no overall governing body for the expanding community of traders, planters and missionaries.

When the Rev George and Mrs Gordon, also from Canada, were killed on Erromanga in 1861, after only four years labour, the Geddies were bereft. Death at the hands of the islanders, or death from sickness, were ever present realities of life in the New Hebrides in the mid 1800s. It was not only Europeans, or labourers from another island, who were murdered. Bishop Selwyn, who provided invaluable help to all of the missionaries from his base in New Zealand, recorded that *'Forty martyrs – men, women and children – from Samoa and Rarotonga have lost their lives by disease and violence in the New Hebrides.'*<sup>19</sup>

With this difficult environment around them the Geddies found the Lord preserving them and blessing their work as more of the Aneityumese people become Christians, ceased the practise of strangling widows and started to live in peace.

*'You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.'* Psalm 23 verse 5a



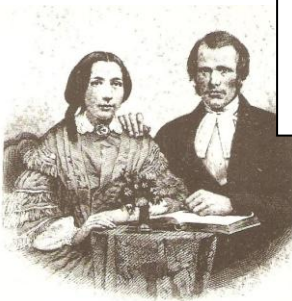


## The Trials Continue

Charlotte wrote in 1852 telling of her greatest personal trial,<sup>20</sup>

*'...we had letters from our dear Charlotte...We have the prospect of sending our dear Lucretia to Britain two years hence. I cannot bear to think of it, but try to banish the subject from my mind. When I think I shall never know the happiness of enjoying the society of my beloved children, as they grow up; and that they will never know the happiness of living together, as a united family; it is almost more than I can bear.'* In another letter she wrote,<sup>21</sup> *'It is very painful to be separated from our beloved child, but it is our duty to submit to the sacrifice.'*

Mary Matheson, John Geddie's niece, had already lost a baby on Tanna and then she died on Aneityum in 1862 after fleeing the Tannese people. The family had been starved. After her death her husband moved to Mare to help with translation work, but also died soon afterwards. In two years five of the eight Nova Scotian missionaries, including the Gordons who were martyred on Erromanga, had died during their service. Despite this Rev Geddie could write; *'Let not our hearts faint, our faith waver.....Let us trust in God, and gird on our armour for the great work before us.'*<sup>22</sup>



REV. G. N. & MRS. GORDON

Rev G and Mrs Gordon, martyred in 1861 and his brother, Rev J Gordon, also martyred on Erromanga in 1872, and their memorials. The third stone commemorates John Williams and James Harris, the LMS martyrs in 1839.



REV. J. D. GORDON

Charlotte endured the death of her loved colleagues, accepting this as part of mission work in the mid 1800s. Her resolve to live a sacrificial life was not dented and she continued to be rewarded with seeing the Aneityumese people come to Christ. More missionaries kept answering the call and joining the team, and the support network grew, especially in Australia and New Zealand.

In the fifteen years on Aneityum four children were born to Charlotte; Elizabeth, John, Helen and Alexander. The death of Alexander, aged 2 years, while the family were on the ship going from Aneityum to Melbourne in 1864 was particularly hard for Charlotte.

In 1864 as the Geddies were preparing for this first trip away from Aneityum, a ship, the *Dayspring*, was already headed for the New Hebrides. Built in Canada from funds raised by Rev Paton this ship was for the sole use of the Mission and became a great encouragement and help. The captain, Mr Fraser, also became a close friend of the Geddies.

Hugh Robertson, who later became a missionary on Erromanga, travelled on the *Dayspring* on its maiden voyage. He wrote of meeting Rev Geddie and Charlotte when the *Dayspring* was taking on supplies in Melbourne,<sup>23</sup>

*'...meeting with the noble Father of the Mission, Mr Geddie, and his devoted wife. His was akin to the spirit of Williams; he would have given himself, his strength, and his life, if need be, to the task of evangelising the many. ...Mrs Geddie bowed down with grief at the loss of a darling child...but when we saw her, though grief stricken and worn with work, her face still wore the charm of an early beauty.'*

This was the first time in fifteen years that Charlotte had left the island of Aneityum. They went from Melbourne to

London then to Canada where all the family were together for the first time since 1848 in Samoa.

It was in 1866 that Rev Geddie, while on this first return visit to Nova Scotia, Canada, received the news regarding the British Navy ship HMS *Curacoa* having shelled two villages on Tanna. Charlotte, always at her husband's side, must have shared his grief at this incident. Subsequently the Geddies' return to Aneityum in 1866, after the *Curacoa* affair, was as if the 'bubble' of pure, sacrificial, ground breaking evangelism had burst. The character of these two faithful people was tested even more than that first step onto the sailing ship in 1846.

Rev Geddie wrote; *'I have never made a complaint against natives and never intend to do so. Our enterprise is one of mercy and not of judgement. ... we must draw them (the natives) by cords of love, ... 'For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them'*<sup>24</sup>

Also after two years without Rev Geddie's continuous peacemaking efforts amongst the people, and a further depletion of the local population by disease, the Geddies were deprived of some of their converts and helpers.

Returning to this very difficult background, Charlotte continues to write in 1866 in her relaxed and delightful way,<sup>25</sup> *'So many missionaries were never collected on Aneiteum before...They were detained here a week, but we found room for them...I had a great deal to do, and just coming home (first 2 weeks after their return), things were not quite at hand, but we got along nicely...Now the vessels are away I commenced school again...Children here learn very quickly when they get proper attention...I hope we will be able after a few months to take a good number of orphans into the*

*school, but at present there is no room for them here. We have found people as willing as ever to help us.'*

This was the last of Charlotte's letters to be preserved, and Rev Geddie no longer wrote his journal. Other records of their continued work give no hint that they were discouraged, but their live and work was no longer as it had been in the first fifteen years.

*'God is our refuge and strength, ...*

*Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way ...*

*The Lord Almighty is with us;'* from Psalm 46



MRS. JOHN GEDDIE.

The photo of Charlotte Geddie in *The Life of Rev Dr John and Mrs Geddie*, page 28.

## Charlotte's Letters

Although Charlotte's last preserved letter was written in 1866 her letters between 1848 and then tell us much about her life and work on Aneityum.

In 2012 it is hard to imagine just how important letters were in the 1800s. Learning to read and write was still a privilege in most European countries, but although a message could be carried by word of mouth throughout a village and its surrounding countryside, a letter was still the only means of accurately sending information from one side of the world to the other. Letters were conveyed by sailing ships, sometimes in the care of the Captain, at other times carried by a trusted friend. Postal services for collection and delivery of mail were being established in England and the colonies.

Charlotte wrote letters to her supporting churches in Nova Scotia, to her daughter in England and her family and friends. Before the times of radio and phones, letters were not only a very important source of information but also a very important source of comfort for people separated from their loved ones. In 1908 many of Charlotte's letters, some of which had been published in church magazines, were collected together resulting in the booklet *The letters of Charlotte Geddie and Charlotte Geddie Harrington* (Charlotte Jnr).The following are extracts from this booklet;

In September 1851 Charlotte writes to her dear friend Mrs James Waddell, and through her to other friends;

*'Your very welcome and long looked for letter reached me safely, and we were rejoiced to hear of your welfare. My dear*

*friends you cannot imagine how delighted we are to receive letters from those whom we have known and loved in our own native land, if you could form the least idea of the pleasure we experience, I am sure you would not be so sparing in your letters.'*

To the church folk of Pictou, Charlotte writes a long and detailed letter of life and work on Aneityum and indicates she expects her readers to also read her husband's journal at the same time.

*'...We have three hymns printed too. Mr Powell is our poet. The people are very much pleased to hear us sing in their own language. We attempted to teach the women to sew after our arrival; but we were so straitened for room, we were obliged to give it up until we could get a building. We have now a nice little chapel, and have again commenced school. ...we have had different scholars every day. They appear highly delighted.*

*...There is an establishment here of foreigners, the head of the establishment (Captain Padden) has treated us with greatest kindness...He is engaged in the sandalwood trade, which of course we do not approve of...The Roman Catholics have also an establishment...There are three or four priests and as many lay brethren; they do not appear to be doing anything among the natives.*

*...We are not often long without a vessel in the harbour...there have been several in on their way to China. There is now a large English Barque in the harbour. The Captain has been very kind to us...one of the London Society missionaries, whom he brought out to Sydney, gives him a very high character...we know that several missionaries have been unkindly treated (by other seamen).*

*...We have a great deal of writing to do, to send by this vessel. She goes to Britain by way of China...I trust you will use your exertions for our cause...Needles, thimbles, thread and clothes for our schools, will be thankfully received...I hope when the 'John Williams' goes to Britain, to send you some curiosities.*

*...Since I commenced this letter, I have heard of two women being strangled on the death of their husbands...they also put to death any hapless children these women may have. Surely when we hear of such cruelties we should not count any sacrifice too great, if we can be instrumental in leading them to the Saviour.'*

Another long and detailed letter that Charlotte wrote was to her parents, dated October 18<sup>th</sup>, 1853.

*We have been very busy during the last year with our new house...The natives are most willing to help...The house is of stone, and when finished, will be very convenient, substantial and comfortable...When we first settled here the natives removed inland to get away from us: but they are now building all around us.*

*...While I am writing I am honoured with the company of two Fotuna (Futuna) Chiefs. One of them has stretched himself on the sofa...The gentleman looks just as these poor people did when we came among them: with his long hair, painted face and large white feather in his head...We hope to keep one of these men, who understands the language of the island, for a time, and when he returns send teachers with him...You are aware that the Fotunese killed the Samoan teachers who were settled among them...We have at present on this island (Aneityum) natives of Fotuna, Erromanga, Fati and Tanna besides the Rarotongan and Samoan*

*teachers...there are none of them more mild and docile than the Erromangans; and the truth is they are not naturally more savage, but they have met with more cruel usage than others.*

*This morning we had a severe earthquake...the tide went out in a moment, and returned suddenly: then again and went out and returned four times. The volcano on Tanna has been more active in the last three months...explosions took place every fifteen minutes...We still hear it...The shock of an earthquake produces a singular feeling...I cannot get over the feeling of awe they cause while the very earth is rocking under one's feet.*

*A few weeks hence melons will be coming up in every direction, and they are so refreshing in the hot weather...indeed almost any vegetable will grow here. The soil is splendid, and the natives are cultivating a great deal...They have merely a sharpened stick, and yet their plantations are beautifully neat and produce a good deal...The pretty reed fences, woven like lattice work, and also the foliage of different trees and vegetables, have quite an elegant appearance...vines trained over the fences look very pretty.*

*You have no idea of the bustle and stir about us...I wrote this letter some time ago expecting to send it on the John Williams when she arrived from Sydney; but when she arrived the missionaries insisted on our accompanying them on their visit to the islands...We left Lucy with our kind friends Mr & Mrs Inglis, and took Elizabeth and John Williams with us. At every place we found people willing to receive teachers...especially at Mare...but alas! We had none for them.*

*...When we returned we found HMS Herald in the harbour...There are several gentlemen on board. Mr Wilson,*



*who is the artist, has taken several sketches...He has taken too, our likenesses, by the photographic process, which we will send home by the John Williams.*

*...They (the Herald) came from the Isle of Pines...The French have taken possession of New Caledonia and are busy building forts on it. Their right to do so may, however, be disputed.*

The next letter in the book is to her sisters, dated December 25<sup>th</sup>, 1853 about the weather and her vegetables.

A later letter was sent to Mrs McColl in November 15<sup>th</sup>, 1856. Mrs McColl was one of the family and friends back home whom she was missing;

*'My Dear Mrs McColl, ...*

*I am happy to say that we have great reason to be thankful for what our eyes have been permitted to see on this island. It has been our great privilege to see the most degraded heathen abandon their idols and horrid superstitions and serve the living God. ...What an unspeakable blessing has the Gospel conferred on this once degraded isle.*

*...My dear friend, we have had many trials and difficulties to contend with, but we have been abundantly repaid in seeing so many who were once slaves of Satan sitting clothed and in their right minds.'* After explaining her many duties she continues.. *'But do not suppose that I wish you to think that I am suffering from these numerous duties; far from it. I enjoy excellent health for which I have great reason to be thankful.*

*...We have lately had a letter from our dear Charlotte [Jnr] informing us that she is coming out in the John Williams. She is very anxious to be engaged in missionary work...You may imagine that I feel very much delighted at the prospect of*

*having my dear child with me again. Parting with our children is the greatest of our trials... You are aware I suppose, that our second daughter has been in England for the last two years.*

*...I would be much pleased to get a letter from you.'*

Dated August 1858, a letter without address, but obviously to all the churches in Nova Scotia, includes the following;

*By the John Williams...we had a large package of letters from Nova Scotia. We were delighted to see dear Mary. She is now with us. (Mary Matheson was Rev John's niece, she and her husband had arrived to work on Tanna.)...Dear Mary looks very well...I trust she and her dear husband may be long spared to labor in the Lord's vineyard.*

*...Mr G. And Mr Matheson accompanied the John Williams to Erromanga... this is the second time Mr G. has been away from home this season visiting the islands. He has been away two weeks each time. He intends going to Tanna again very soon...getting a house up for the missionaries. I have a great charge when he is away from home, but the natives do all they can to assist me, and are very kind to me.*

*...Charlotte [Jnr] teaches the children [her sister and brother] every day and they are improving under her. ...Our boys, of which we have seventeen, are all steady and doing well. Several of them are printers and others of them are quite good sawyers and have been busy sawing frames and boards for homes for the new missionaries.*

Charlotte's letters seldom give any sense of the difficulties she was facing daily, other than her concern for her dear children and her desire to receive more letters from home. She was content with her living conditions and the load of work that she was called upon to do. There was never a hint of regret or a sense of deprivation.

A letter she wrote to Charlotte Jnr while she was away at school in London shows Charlotte's deep concern for the spiritual welfare of her children, *'...but my dear child my greatest desire and wish for you is, that you are a child of God – that you are one of the lambs of Christ's fold,... 'Remember thy creator in the days of thy youth &c.; seek Him while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near.'*

Her concern for the wider work of the Mission is expressed in another letter, *'There are many open doors but we want the men. Thousands and thousands will leave country and kindred, and suffer every privation, to get gold, but how few will go and instruct the perishing heathen!!'*

The way that the Geddies accepted the islanders into their home and the way the islanders responded to them is demonstrated by another of Charlotte's letter,

*'Our old Chief is fond of a cup of tea and often calls in at meal times. The other day he sent us a large pig, and when asked what he wanted for it he said,...it was an expression of his gratitude for the tea he so often got from us. The people often make us presents of food. ... When we visit the out stations we always get presents of taro, bananas, and sometimes a pig.'*

*'Be imitators of God, therefore as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.'*

Ephesians 5 verse 1

## Charlotte's Translation Work

Early in their time on Aneityum Charlotte also helped with the work of translation. Both Missi Geddie and Charlotte spoke the language constantly and translation was a priority. Missi Geddie trained local young men to work his printing press and later had significant translations printed in either London or Melbourne. Charlotte translated a simplified Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* on her own.

Translation work, both in its accuracy and in the choice of material to be translated, was crucial to the work of ground breaking evangelism. Teaching the people to read the translations was equally important. One of the first tasks undertaken by the Geddies and Rev Powell was translating hymns and singing them to the people, in one sense a demonstration of reading.

*'Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord.'*

Ephesians 5 verse 19

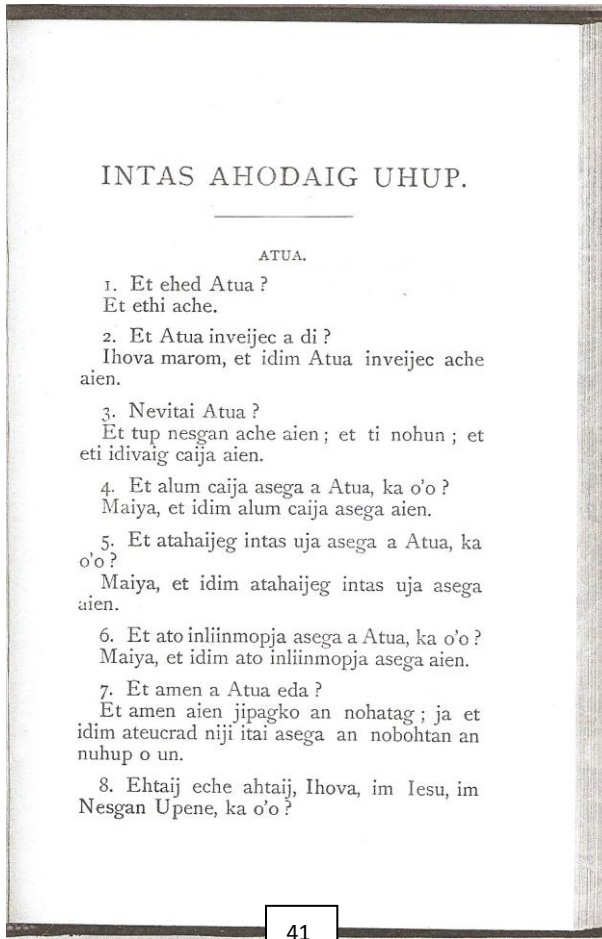
In a letter dated 25<sup>th</sup> December 1849 Missi Geddie writes,<sup>26</sup>

*'A Catechism and also detached portions of Scripture are in course of preparation for the press. (The first book printed was a few thoughts on important basics of the Christian faith) But this is work that we cannot hurry. The difficulties of translation, especially in a language which has never before been reduced to writing...New words must be continually sought out, terms must be found to express ideas altogether new, and native idioms must be acquired. The study however is one of intense interest and delight; and those are privileged indeed, whom God permits to prepare the key, which shall*

*unlock the hidden treasures of divine truth, which makes the soul rich to all eternity.'*

Below is a page from Geddie's translation of the First Catechism, possibly using the English version produced by W. H. Drew for the LMS in 1848. It is in the book titled; *INTAS VA NATGA U KRISTIAN*. Inside the cover of the book sighted is the following inscription, '*Presented to the Public Library of Victoria the 25<sup>th</sup> day of October 1889 by Rev C Cosh.*'

Rev James Cosh of Scotland was a missionary on Efate from 1866 to 1872.



As well as Rev Thomas Powell, later Rev John Inglis was also involved in the translation work on Aneityum. The Geddies' translation of a simplified ten commandments follows;

INTAS ALEP U ATUA.

1. Etmu jim eteuc tah intak Atua imi euc an nuhup unyak.

2. Namu jim ago tah natmasimai imi euc aiek, im nalmuitai jipagko an nohatag, im sepamki an nobohtan, im injap ithan nobohtan : um jim atpuse an nuhup ura aiek um aheca ura : ek Ihova ainyak Atua unyum, et idivaig nedemda u natimi oporei nedemda unyak, ekpu aru nedo has u ilpu atmil ura ainyak irai ilpu hal ura, um yetpan irai ilpu

mapora, el era ilpu atimi amcel vai nyak ara : ja ekpu aiheuc va atimi iji ig im ilpu mapora yi itu ira ra ainyak, el et aiyu inliinmopora ara vai nyak, um imiaiji intas alep unyak.

3. Namu jim tup asaig nidai Ihova Atua unyum aiek ; etpu aru nedo has ura a Ihova era tup asaig nidan ara.

4. Imiehva nadiat atumop um apos upene. Namu ago nauritai asega unyum aiek an nadiat et siks, ja et adiat u Ihova Atua unyum nadiat sevend : namu jim ago tah nauritai iran aiek, im inhalav atamaig unyum, im inhalav atahig unyum, im naheca atamaig unyum, im naheca atahig unyum, im niji itai eklim edo irai pece unyum, im natimi an taka uarin anliin nokoro unyum : is ago nohatag a Ihova, im nobohtan, im injap, im niji itai asega amen iran an nadiat is siks, um atumop an nadiat sevend, va nitai inigki is ago upene nadiat atumop a Ihova um ika yi itap.

5. Namu ago nedo ecen vai etmam im risum aiek, mika yi pu ahinag nadiat iram an pece inig et alupai euc a Ihova Atua unyum.

6. Namu jim atgei atmas aiek.

7. Namu jim ago ingeijid aiek.

8. Namu jim ehneg itai aiek.

9. Namu jim asan tas ahcil aiek va atimi eblaamnem unyum.

10. Etmu jim has iram aiek neom u natimi eblaamnem unyum, um jim has iram aiek ehgai natimi eblaamnem unyum, im naheca atamaig o un, im naheca atahig o un, im kuri-matau o un, im togke o un, im hal itai u natimi eblaamnem unyum.



1. Church. 2. Court House. 3. School. 4. Printing House. 5. Study. 6. Mission House. 7. Chief's House. 8. Burying Ground Point

## ANELGAUHAT

The Geddies progressively built up the Mission Station at Anelgauhat, Aneityum. Missi Geddie initially did the building with the help of Samoans, but he trained up local men who became very good with the stone work and carpentry. He also helped with building on other mission stations.

Note the study, the printing press and the schools, where the translation work was done, the books produced and the people taught to read them.

### III Health Ends John Geddie's Work

In 1854 Lucy is sent away to school in London joining Charlotte Jnr. In 1857 Charlotte Jnr returned from London to Aneityum after finishing her basic schooling and helped her mother by teaching her younger siblings, but there were many difficulties to face.

Missi Geddie had never been a robust man and he suffered many attacks of malaria while in the New Hebrides. He had worked to the limit of his physical ability, building, sailing and walking around Aneityum, printing and visiting neighbouring islands. As Hugh Robertson had previously written of him, he was a man prepared to work to the limit of his strength and even to the end of his life if need be. By 1863 his health began to fail. In 1864, while in Australia on their first break many of their speaking engagements were cancelled due to Missi Geddie's ill health.<sup>27</sup> They went on to London and then Nova Scotia, Canada. The Geddies did indeed return to Aneityum physically refreshed in late 1866, but the benefit was short lived.

The return to face the work load on Aneityum, and no longer having a really good understanding between themselves and their colleagues, soon saw Missi Geddie's health deteriorate again. Charlotte herself became ill, possibly compounded by her grief at leaving her two youngest children in Victoria, Australia. Charlotte Jnr had stayed in Canada, later marrying Mr Harrington, and Lucy had married Rev Thomas Neilson in Melbourne. Lucy and Rev Thomas returned with the Geddies to Aneityum, but they were making efforts to settle on Tanna. The *Curacoa* incident had upset the Tannese people and so the placement of the



young Neilsons had to be postponed, causing concern about the work.

Missi Geddie, as the father of the New Hebrides Mission, was often making trips on the *Dayspring* around the islands to visit or settle other missionaries and carried a huge workload. By 1871 Charlotte was forced to go to Geelong, Victoria, for a break because of ill health. She returned to Aneityum but by this time Missi Geddie was having serious health problems. On his last trip around the islands in the *Dayspring* he appears to have suffered a stroke and after returning to Geelong early in 1872 he died later that year aged 57.

Despite some setbacks God continued to bless the work of the New Hebrides Mission and new missionaries continued to arrive. The Rev Paton, originally from Scotland, and who had worked on Tanna and Aniwa, raised much interest and much money from the Churches at home. By the time the Geddies left there were Presbyterian Mission stations from Aneityum in the south to Santo in the north.

Missi Geddie, although not a martyr like many of his Canadian colleagues, had indeed given his life in the service of his Lord and the people of Aneityum and the work of the New Hebrides Mission. Throughout his working life Missi Geddie had Charlotte at his side to help him.

Robert Miller, quoting Robert Steel,<sup>28</sup> describes the inscription placed on a plaque in the stone Church on Aneityum, *'When he landed there were no Christians here, when he left in 1872 there were no heathens. 1 Thess i.5'*

*For our Gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance; as you know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.'*

1 Thessalonians 1 verse 5.

## The Legacy of Charlotte Geddie

On Aneityum Charlotte had been part of a team with her husband and the faithful Samoans and Raratongans, and from 1852 on with Rev. John and Jessie Inglis. A wider team was spread around the world, with the supporters at home in Canada, in Scotland and Australia, with people such as Bishop Selwyn and his regular visits from New Zealand, and Captain Fraser of the *Dayspring* providing friendship. It was a team mightily used by God.

After the first baptisms in 1852 Missi Geddie wrote,<sup>29</sup>

*'Thirteen natives were baptised, partook of the Lord's Supper and were formed into a Christian Church. ...It is the dawn of brighter and happier days than have ever yet dawned on these beknighted islands.'* Graham Miller's comment on this monumental event gives Charlotte the following praise, *'The presence of seven women among the first members points to the effectiveness of Mrs Geddie's work, which many of our islands would follow.'*<sup>30</sup> He also comments that the method used by the Geddies was of one on one conversions, not a mass movement dominated by Chiefs.

Helen Rose Gillan makes the comment that,<sup>31</sup> *'Aneityum had become a haven of safety and peace. Many of the islanders trained as evangelists and went to the other islands to prepare the way for future work. This is an amazing example of the power of God as the people of Aneityum turned so quickly from darkness to Light.'*

*'If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation, the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God.'*

After Missi Geddie's death Charlotte continued her work to aid the advancement of the Kingdom during 43 years of retirement in Victoria. She again became part of several teams – among them the Young Women's Christian Association and the Melbourne Ladies' Benevolent Society. She began an Auxiliary to the New Hebrides Mission in 1887.

One team that joined together various mission interests was the Presbyterian Women's Missionary Union of Victoria (PWMU of Victoria), formed in 1890. Charlotte was the first Vice President. Her daughter Helen Jessie, with whom she lived for much of her retirement, was also involved.

Macrae Stewart writes,<sup>32</sup> *'One of the most important developments of missionary activity in the Victorian Church was the formation of the Presbyterian Women's Missionary Union, in the year 1890. From the beginnings made with a ladies' auxiliary to the New Hebrides Mission, formed three years earlier ... is doing a fine work in stirring the Church to deeper sympathy with missions ...'*

Charlotte died at the home of her daughter Elizabeth MacDonald in Melbourne in 1916, aged 93. From the Women's Missionary Society in her home church in Nova Scotia from 1839 to 1846, to her school for women on Aneityum from 1848 to 1872, her work with several organisations in Melbourne from 1872 on, to the PWMU of Victoria from 1890 until her death, Charlotte was a *good and faithful servant*.

It was 30 years after Charlotte's death that the PWMU of Victoria sent Deaconesses Cath Ritchie and Amy Skinner to

New Hebrides to find out how the Presbyterian Church there could be helped. Amy Skinner stayed to work in both education and women's work. The result was that PWMU of New Hebrides (Vanuatu) was formed in 1945.



Salome (Fila) and Leitamat (Mele)



The first leaders of the PWMU of Vanuatu (New Hebrides) in 1945.

The leaders of the PWMU of Vanuatu in 2012, Ann Karie and Cyrilline Bani. Cyrilline is 'woman Aneityum', a descendant of the women with whom Charlotte Geddie worked 160 years ago.

In 1948 the New Hebrides Mission became the Presbyterian Church of the New Hebrides, and after Independence in 1980, the Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu.

Both the PWMU of Victoria, and the PWMU of Vanuatu, continue the work of Christian evangelism, and in particular work amongst women. Both are significant organisations in the Victorian and Vanuatu Presbyterian Churches.

Alexe Talsma refers to the Geddies,<sup>33</sup> as '*gentle people*'. Despite the sacrificial role the Geddies had played in the evangelism of Aneityum they did not receive as much recognition in Victoria as they did in Canada. The Geddies sought no earthly recognition, their reward was in Heaven alone.

Charlotte's story is one of unwavering faith and sacrifice during a period of great global zeal when those who carried

the Christian Gospel to the unsaved world faced death and unimaginable hardships. Should God call on Christians for such zeal in this, the 21<sup>st</sup> century since He sent His Son, Charlotte's example will surely help light the lamp for each one He calls.

*How can they hear without someone preaching to them?  
And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is  
written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good  
news!"*

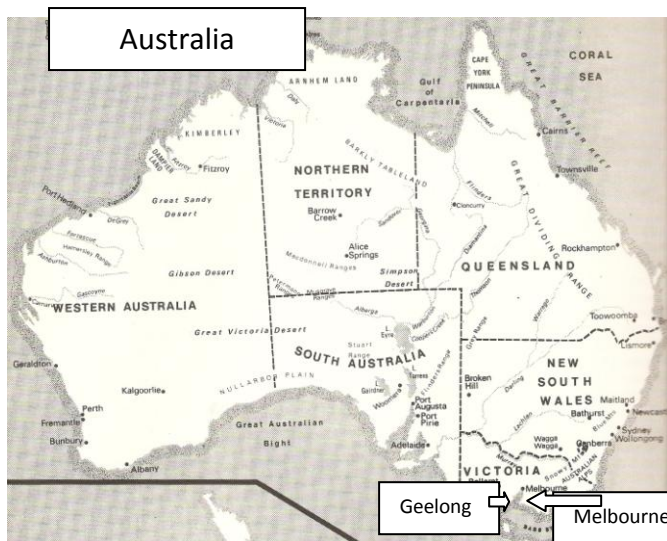
Romans 10 verse 14



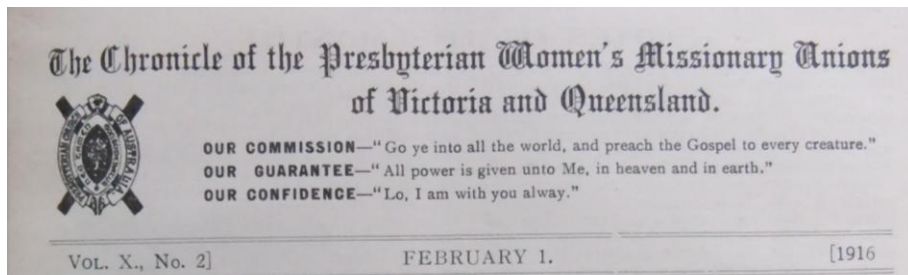
The  
Geddie  
Memorial,  
Geelong  
Cemetery  
Victoria

The  
PWMU of  
Vanuatu  
celebrating  
the life of  
Charlotte  
Geddie in  
2011.

## Charlotte Geddie and the PWMU of Victoria



The Geddie family had come to call Geelong and Melbourne home. This is where Charlotte had continued her work. Canada had proved to be too far away.



It was in this edition of the PWMU Chronicle that a eulogy to Charlotte Geddie appeared following another eulogy to Mrs Henderson.

Mrs. Geddie, on the other hand, spent the most active years of her life in the foreign field. About sixty-eight years ago she went, with her husband, from Nova Scotia to take up work in Aneityum, New Hebrides; and, as the missionaries to the neighbouring islands of Erromanga and Tanna had all been murdered or driven away, none but the stoutest of hearts could have made the at-

tempt. The Geddies succeeded in establishing themselves, but it is beyond our power to imagine the hardship that they must have endured. The horrible degradation of the natives must have been a daily martyrdom to a refined woman, especially to one who had little children to bring up in their midst, and the infrequency of the visits of ships meant often the want of the bare necessities of civilised life. It was eighteen years before Dr. and Mrs. Geddie left Aneityum for their first holiday, but long before that time the island had become Christian, and its sons and daughters were going, as teachers, to work under the missionaries who were being settled on the other islands of the group.

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A third part of her long life remained when Mrs. Geddie's work in the New Hebrides was finished, and she spent it in service here in Melbourne. Through the Ladies' Benevolent Society she touched the lives of the poor, and all good and Christlike work claimed her interest. One day last year a speaker at a meeting of the Malvern branch of the P.W.M.U., of which Mrs. Geddie was latterly a member, saw the tiny, frail, indomitable woman in her audience, and her heart failed her at the thought of speaking before one who should be her teacher. Yet her very presence was an inspiration, and even now these two women, being dead, yet speak to us. We cannot all be pioneers and leaders as they were, but their courage, loyalty, and faithfulness may be ours if we seek them where they found them—in an unwavering trust in God. They are witnesses to His power to save and to uphold even to the end, and we thank God for their inspiring example.

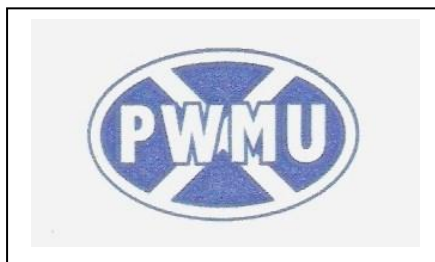
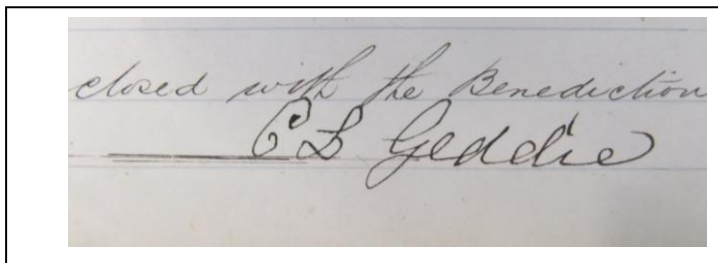
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Although Charlotte was instrumental in the formation of the PWMU of Victoria, and the Vice President for many years she seldom moved or seconded motions. One significant motion however, found in the minutes of July 27<sup>th</sup> 1891, was recorded as moved by Mrs J G Paton and seconded by Mrs Geddie. The two ladies who had worked on neighbouring islands for the New Hebrides Mission and who both had children still serving there, were continuing to be in partnership in God's work. The motion reads;

*'..That the Committee recommend to take up work amongst Chinese women in Little Bourke Street.'*

This work did indeed become a significant outreach of PWMU of Victoria.

The following is taken from the end of one set of Central Committee minutes when Charlotte, as Vice President, was standing in for the President, Mrs Hardie.





## The Memorials

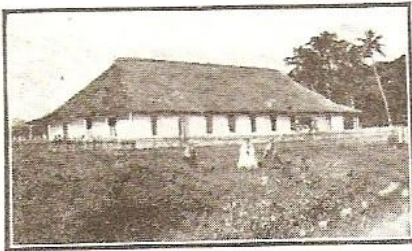
In a booklet, written in Canada, to honour the Geddies, W Johnstone<sup>34</sup> referred to Rev Geddie as having unassuming piety and self-denying zeal, and also acknowledged him as the first foreign missionary of the Canadian Presbyterian Church and founder of the New Hebrides Mission. Rev John Inglis provided a long eulogy of praise recorded in the same booklet. When referring to Rev Geddie's language skills he also includes the statement,<sup>35</sup> *'...he was ably assisted by Mrs Geddie who acquired an extraordinary command of the language, ... The natives used to say that she spoke their language just like a person of Aneityum.'*

On Prince Edward Island, Canada, a Church was built in their honor.

A memorial was placed in Geelong Cemetery – see page 55,a.



GEDDIE MEMORIAL CHURCH  
NEW LONDON  
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND



DR. GEDDIE'S CHURCH.

A stone memorial was placed in the Church at Anelgauhat, Aneityum.

Some closing thoughts;

John Williams of the London Missionary Society was the first to enact the great vision to take Christ to the South West Pacific.

The Samoans and the Raratongans made the great sacrifice in preparing the way.

Rev John and Charlotte Geddie were the first to make systematic progress in taking the islands of the South West Pacific from darkness into the light of Christ.

Charlotte Jnr wrote of her mother, *'From the beginning our dear lady's heart ached for the condition of the women ... How bravely she bore the abuse of depraved whitemen (sandalwood traders) whose evil designs she frustrated.'*<sup>36</sup>

After the death of her son Alexander, Charlotte was *'grief stricken and worn with work'* and 'J I' (probably Rev John Inglis) wrote a poem for her. Joan Peters, one of her descendants, recorded it in her notes,<sup>37</sup> some verses follow,

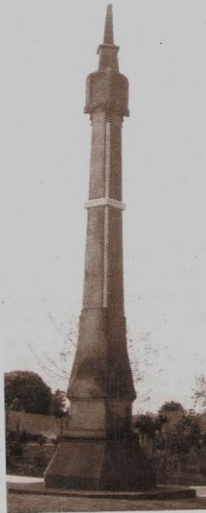
*'My son, my Alexander,                      Has reached his long abode;  
He sleeps in the deep, deep ocean,      None see his grave but God.  
Our little son when dying,                So calm so patient lay,  
He tried to sing 'The Happy Land'      And fold his hands and pray.  
My sweet, my angel boy,                  Now sings the praise of Jesus.  
My son for whom I'm grieving,          In heaven I hope to see;  
For the grace of my Redeemer          Is boundless, rich and free.*

Charlotte had suffered for the Saviour who had suffered for her and still could write at the end of one of her letters;

*'I must now draw this communication to a close, with the prayer that God will watch over, bless and be with each one of you in every trial through which you may be called to pass, and at last receive you to that place where there will be no more sorrow, and where we shall meet never more to part.'*<sup>38</sup>

**Geddie Memorial  
Eastern Cemetery, Geelong**

**1873**



**2003**



Original **1873** obelisk, (height 8.780 metres or 28'9") was restored in **1988** with funds raised by Rev Pat Wood and members of the Geddie families,

In May **2003**, for safety reasons the obelisk was restored and shortened (height 7.090 metres or 23'3") by Bartlett Brothers, Monumental Masons, Financed by the Geelong Cemeteries Trust and the Uniting Church Synod of Victoria Property Trust.

**Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Rev Dr John Geddie and Mrs Geddie, and Early Presbyterian History 1770 – 1845*, page 11

<sup>2</sup> *Misi Gete*, page 12

<sup>3</sup> *Life of Rev Dr John Geddie and Mrs Geddie, and Early Presbyterian History 1770 – 1845*, page 19

<sup>4</sup> *Life of Rev Dr John Geddie and Mrs Geddie, and Early Presbyterian History 1770 – 1845*, page 20

<sup>5</sup> Notes on Charlotte Geddie, page 1

<sup>6</sup> Notes on Charlotte Geddie, page 1

<sup>7</sup> *They Came for Sandalwood* pages 103 – 106

<sup>8</sup> *Misi Gete*, page 12

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- <sup>9</sup> *Misi Gete*, page 56
- <sup>10</sup> *Misi Gete*, page 151
- <sup>11</sup> 'Scottish Missionaries and the Governance of the New Hebrides', *Journal of Church and State*, Spring 1999, Emalus Library Online Documents Collection – Vanuatu.
- <sup>12</sup> *Misi Gete*, page 284
- <sup>13</sup> *John G. Paton – Missionary to the New Hebrides – An Autobiography*, page 229
- <sup>14</sup> *Misi Gete*, page 284
- <sup>15</sup> *Life of Rev Dr John Geddie and Mrs Geddie, and Early Presbyterian History 1770 – 1845*, page 25
- <sup>16</sup> *Vanuatu Victory* page 17
- <sup>17</sup> *Vanuatu*, page 27
- <sup>18</sup> *New Hebrides* page 17
- <sup>19</sup> *Live Book 1* page
- <sup>20</sup> *Letters of Charlotte Geddie and Charlotte Geddie Harrington*, page 28
- <sup>21</sup> Notes on Charlotte Geddie, page 3
- <sup>22</sup> *Misi Gete* page 275
- <sup>23</sup> *Misi Gete* page 281
- <sup>24</sup> *Misi Gete* page 285
- <sup>25</sup> *The Letters of CG & CGH* page 54
- <sup>26</sup> *Misi Gete*, page 63
- <sup>27</sup> Trove, various Australian newspapers
- <sup>28</sup> *Misi Gete* page 332,333
- <sup>29</sup> *Live Book 1* Page 81
- <sup>30</sup> *Live Book 1* Page 81
- <sup>31</sup> *Vanuatu Victory* page 19
- <sup>32</sup> *The Presbyterian Church Of Victoria Jubilee History*, page 98
- <sup>33</sup> *There were many Women – United in a Century of Service – 1890–1990*, P.W.M.U. of Victoria, page 128
- <sup>34</sup> *The Life of Rev Dr John and Mrs Geddie, and Early Presbyterian History 1770 – 1845*, page
- <sup>35</sup> *Misi Gete* page 337
- <sup>36</sup> *Letters of Charlotte Geddie and Charlotte Geddie Harrington*, page 15
- <sup>37</sup> Notes on Charlotte Geddie, page 2
- <sup>38</sup> *Letters of Charlotte Geddie and Charlotte Geddie Harrington*, page 2

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  - It is possible to view and read some of JOHN GEDDIE's translation work on the internet. One book dated 1856 and printed on his own printing press on Aneityum, is photographed and available to read online

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- **Appendix 1**

- **The Children of Rev John and Charlotte Geddie**

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- 1840 - Charlotte Ann is born in Nova Scotia – she marries William Harrington – she dies in Halifax, Canada in 1906
- 1842 – Jane Fraser is born in Nova Scotia – she dies there in 1846
- 1844 – Mary Sophia is born in Nova Scotia – she also dies there in 1846
- 1846 – Lucretia Young is born in Nova Scotia shortly before John and Charlotte leave for the mission field, she married Rev Thomas Neilson and died in Melbourne in 1909
- 1849 – Elizabeth Keir is the first white child born on Aneityum, she marries Rev Daniel MacDonald and dies in Melbourne in 1945
- 1852 – John Williams is born on Aneityum – he dies at the home of his maternal uncle, Dr Archibald MacDonald in Sale, Victoria aged in his nineties.
- 1858 – Helen Jessie is born on Aneityum – she does not marry and cares for Charlotte after John’s death and was also a founding member of the PWMU of Victoria, she dies in Melbourne in 1945
- 1861 – Alexander was born on Aneityum - he dies at sea in 1863

Charlotte Jnr, and later Lucy, were sent to Walthamstow School in Essex England, a boarding school of 42 students from all over the world. Most students were children of LMS missionaries. Charlotte was away from her parents for 9 years. Helen was sent to school in Geelong.

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- **Appendix 2**

- **The Missionaries who served on Aneityum until 1880**

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- The first Christian missionaries to be placed in various islands of the New Hebrides were Samoans, under the guidance of Rev John Williams of the London Missionary Society. They travelled in the ship *Camden*. Unfortunately the names of many are lost, and many lost their lives following John Williams into martyrdom. Pita and Simona were still on Aneityum when the Geddies arrived.

- Samoans and Raratongans 1841onwards
- Rev John and Charlotte Geddie 1848 to 1872
- Rev Thomas and Mrs Powell 1848 to 1849
- Mr Isaac and Mrs Archibald 1848 to 1849
- Rev John and Jessie Inglis 1852 to 1879
- Rev William and Mrs McCullaugh 1864 to 1866
- Rev J. D. And Mrs Murray 1872 to 1876
- Rev J Copeland spent some time on Aneityum between 1858 and 1881 but mostly worked on Tanna and Futuna
- Rev Joseph and Mrs Annand 1877 to 1895
- Rev J. H. And Mrs Lawrie 1879 to 1892
- Not only were the first Christians in the region Aneityumese, but, in the early years of the New Hebrides Mission, many Aneityumese went as teachers to unreached villages and to neighbouring islands. Nakoai was the first to go. The first indigenous Pastor of the New Hebrides Presbyterian Church was Epeteneto of Aneityum.



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