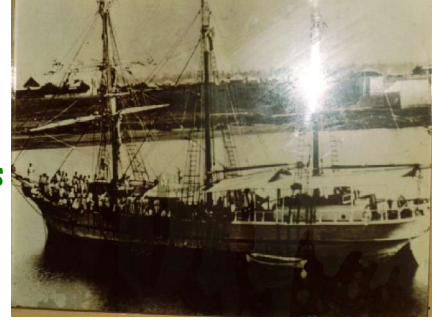


Florence Young - Called Out From Australia

By Gordon Griffiths

One hundred years ago in April 1904, Florence Young led the first Australian team made up of members of the Queensland Kanaka Mission to Solomon Islands. This was to be one of the first overseas Australian based missions ever to be established. They landed in Malaita, the most populated island in Solomon Islands. Malaita was known as a place inhabited by a fierce and war-like people, with a very unhealthy climate, a place where European missionaries found it almost impossible to settle.



Men from Malaita had been returning home after years of heavy labouring work in the cane fields of Queensland. Some of them had been converted to Christ, and had started planting small churches which were to pave the way for European missionaries to follow.

Leader of the Australian team, Florence Young had, as a young woman, started a "Sunday school" for Pacific Island workers on her brother's sugar plantation in 1882. By 1904 she was a middle aged woman of 48, an experienced missionary leader as well as an intrepid pioneer. The "Sunday school" she had started had become the Queensland Kanaka Mission (QKM) with 101 Islander missionaries and 17 European missionaries working in 11 different centres along the Queensland coast.

Florence had also had 6 years experience in China with the China Inland Mission, but had never been to the Solomon Islands.

From about 1900 a number of Island Christians, including Peter Ambuofa from Malu'u (north Malaita), had started sending urgent messages asking for European missionaries to come and help them. Three Australians - Mr Pillans, Mr Schweiger and Mr Ruddell had already gone to help Peter with his church of 200. The first two had died within five months of arriving and Mr Ruddell had returned home very sick.

In 1901 Australia became a nation, and legislated at once for Pacific Island labourers to sent back home by 1906. Because the deportation of the Islanders was compulsory, some Australian Christians felt they had a duty to continue to care for the young and often lonely Islander Christians.

Left: Solomon Islanders celebrate the Centenary (1994) of coming of the Gospel to Solomon



Islands through Peter Ambofa at the little church at Fairymeade at Bundaberg (Queensland). QKM work was founded here by Florence Young.

Before QKM leaders made the decision to send personnel to Solomon Islands, they prayed for seven months during 1903 about what to do next. They prayed unceasingly for the filling of the Holy

Spirit throughout the mission. Whole days were set aside for united intercession. Florence said "God was preparing us for a work HE had 'before ordained' for us. It was not yet in our thoughts. Work in Queensland - Yes! But in the Islands! That was beyond our vision - Impossible, too." ("Pearls from the Pacific", pp 139) . The QKM missionaries were of one mind, feeling intensely both the need , and their responsibility. United they waited upon God, and sought for His guidance and direction. Florence described how " the burden grew insupportable, more and more insistent the call; until the conviction became clear that this call was from God, and not of man.' (Pearls from the Pacific, pp142.)

In January 1904, during the Katoomba Convention and in what is now the CMS Centre, the Solomon Island Branch of the QKM was formed. This QKM Council decided to send a team made up of Florence Young, Mr & Mrs Thomas, James Caufield, A Abbott & Mrs Fricke to Malaita knowing that it was a place of violence and death, fast acting killer diseases and uncharted waters. They were on their way from Sydney on 1st March, less than two months later.

The team must have been preparing for some time, because when Florence left Sydney she was well equipped to start a work in the Solomon Islands that could endure. The cargo they took with them included: stores for six months, a 40 foot sailing boat called the "Daphne", tools, books and a prefabricated house.

When they arrived at the Solomon Island capital, two of the men rigged the 'Daphne'. Florence commented, " It is a good thing for missionaries to use their hands - an essential for pioneer missionaries". (Pearls from the Pacific, pp 146).

The Solomon Island British Administrator was most reluctant to let the team travel from the capital, Tulagi to Malaita as he was not confident they would be safe. But they finally arrived at Langa Langa Lagoon, Malaita on 8th April 2004. A week or so later Florence was able to see and encourage the island men, including Peter, who she had taught so many years before.

The cost of that first incursion to Solomon Islands was great. Even in the first few months, the team experienced strong winds, rough seas, uncharted waters, danger from high fevers and from treacherous islanders, but the beach head, opened by the returning Christian Islanders, had been re-enforced, and the infant church was encouraged. It was now ready to expand.

Special Note: Archives of South Pacific Partners (formerly South Sea Evangelical Mission and Queensland Kanaka Mission) are located at Robert Menzies College, Macquarie University, Sydney Australia.

