

Agnes Keith House, Sandakan



by Ir. Chin Mee Poon
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SABAH is also known as Land Below The Wind. This is actually the title of the first book by Agnes Keith about her life in North Borneo in the 1930s. The phrase "*land below the wind*" was used by sailors in the old days to describe the lands south of the typhoon belt, but Agnes applied it exclusively to North Borneo in her book and it has since stuck to Sabah as its exclusive tagline.

Agnes Jones Goodwillie Newton Keith (4/7/1901-30/3/1982) was an American author best known for her book, *Three Came Home*, which was made into a film of the same name in 1950. She married Englishman Henry G. Keith, also known as Harry Keith, in 1934. Henry had been working in Borneo since 1925 and was its Conservator of Forests, Director of Agriculture and Honorary Curator of the State Museum in Sandakan at the time of their marriage. The Keiths lived in a government building on a hilltop in Sandakan from 1934 until they were taken prisoners by the Japanese during World War II in 1942.

After the war the Keiths returned to Sandakan to find the house destroyed. They built a new house in 1946/7 on the same site and in a style similar to the original. They named the house *Newlands* and lived there until they left Sabah for good in 1952. After that, the house was left unoccupied and soon fell into disrepair. However, it was restored in 2001 and opened to the public in 2004 as an example of a post-war colonial wooden bungalow. Since then, it has become a popular tourist attraction in Sandakan.

When my wife and I visited the Agnes Keith House a few years ago, it brought back fond memories of the time we stayed in an English cottage in the United Kingdom. There was even a tea house next to the Agnes Keith House where we enjoyed a cup of steaming hot English tea with scones. ■

Ir. Chin Mee Poon is a retired civil engineer who derives a great deal of joy and satisfaction from travelling to different parts of the globe, capturing fascinating insights of the places and people he encounters and sharing his experiences with others through his photographs and writing.