Mears, Oliver (1820–1913)

BRIAN E. STRAYER

Brian E. Strayer, Ph.D. (University of Iowa). Strayer taught history at Jackson (MI) Junior Academy, the University of Iowa, Southern Adventist University, and Andrews University for 41 years. He has written 10 books, 120 scholarly and professional articles, 40 reviews and critiques in French and Adventist history and directed three Adventist heritage tours of New England. He writes a weekly column ("The Past Is Always Present") in the Journal Era and shares Adventist history at camp meetings, schools, and churches.
Oliver Mears was the first president of the Ohio Conference of the Seventh-day Adventists.

**Early Life**

Oliver Mears was born on January 6, 1820 in Danville, Caledonia County, Vermont, to John Mears (d. 1856) and Elizabeth (Chapman) Mears (d. 1856). His younger brothers included William Moody Mears (1822-1901) and John Mears (1825-1887). A farmer with no previous religious affiliation, Mears in 1858 became a Sabbath-keeping Adventist after hearing George W. Holt preach at meetings in the schoolhouse at Lovett’s Grove, a small town near Bowling Green in northern Ohio. It was here that Ellen White received the “Great Controversy” vision on March 1, 1858. ¹

On February 13, 1844, in Erie County, Ohio, Oliver Mears married Abigail Jeffrey (1821-1904) and together they had nine children, of whom two died young (Abigail, d. 1848; Mary E., d. 1848). The other seven children are: Sarah (1849-?), Sophronia (1851-1944), Martha Ann (1854-1912), Fremont John (1856-1952), Mary (1859-1941), Ella (1860-1951), and Bert Oliver (1864-1914). By 1850 the Mears’ growing household also included six of Abigail’s siblings (Margaret, Diadem, Charles, Julia, Henry, and Daniel Jeffery).

**Career**

After becoming an Adventist, Mears was elected head elder of the Lovett’s Grove, Ohio, Sabbatarian Adventist congregation, which at that time consisted of about forty members. For several years in the 1850s and 1860s, he was a lay preacher, traveling around Ohio by lumber wagon, visiting families and holding meetings in private homes, school houses, and rented halls. So effective was his ministry in strengthening the Adventist cause that he was repeatedly elected president of the Ohio Conference and served as such for six years (1863-1866, 1869-1870, and 1873-1875).

In 1864, during Mears’ second one-year term as president, Ellen White sent him a letter rebuking him and his wife for being too indulgent with their daughters. She urged them to curb the girls’ “frivolity,” “coquetry,” and “flippant behavior” with men. In the same letter, White rebuked Mears for being “too sharp” in his words with other believers. In addition, his pessimistic temperament caused him to dwell too much on his “discouragement and distress.” Instead, she advised, he needed to manifest more “compassionate tenderness” and “brotherly love.” Only by focusing on Christ could he bring about these changes in his life.² Mears heeded these rebukes, and as his subsequent career in administrative positions attests, he ably served the Church for another decade.

**Later Life**

Little is known about Mears’ life after he retired from Conference administration in 1875 at the age of fifty-five. In 1880 he moved to Clyde, Ohio, and presumably remained active in lay ministry, as he earned a reputation for unswerving integrity, an iron nerve and will, and for living an earnest Christian life. After Abigail died at age 83 in 1904, Oliver, then 84, moved into the home of one of his daughters in Green Creek, Ohio. He died August 9, 1913 at 93 in Green Creek, Sandusky County, Ohio.

**Sources**


NOTES
