

Haskell, Hetty (Hurd) (1857–1919)

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Hetty Hurd Haskell was a pioneer Bible instructor and second wife of Stephen Nelson Haskell.

Early Life and Conversion

Hetty Hurd was born January 23, 1857, in Jacksonville, Illinois. As a child, she had a religious bent, being converted at the age of 8, but after the death of her father five years later, she lost interest in religion.

As a young woman, Hurd was hired to teach in a large district school in Lemoore, California, and while there lived with the family of her brother-in-law, William Gray, who was a Seventh-day Adventist. The parents of her students regarded her so highly that they asked her to teach there for life, something unusual during a time when teachers did not have tenure and could be easily fired. Furthermore, the school gave her a salary of \$75 a month, a significant amount for a woman teacher during that era.

During the summer break in 1884, Hurd worked in William Gray's orchard and vineyard. When Gray decided that he and his family would attend an Adventist camp meeting in Oakland, California, that fall, he invited Hurd to accompany them. At first, she declined, but he persisted, suggesting that she could skip the religious meetings, but join them in visiting the beach where seals congregated and other tourist sites around San Francisco. Finally, she reluctantly agreed, but with the understanding that she would stay away from the meetings themselves.



Hetty Hurd Haskell.

Photo courtesy of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Archives.

Once at the camp grounds, Hurd became intrigued by the singing and slipped into the main tent. John N. Loughborough's popular sermon on the "Saints Inheritance" especially captured her attention. Afterward, she told Loughborough that she wanted to be in the New Jerusalem and accepted Bible studies from him, eventually requesting baptism. She donated her jewelry to be sold for missions.¹

Bible Instructor in California, England, South Africa and Australia

After Hurd finished her teaching duties in May 1885, she attended one of the first Adventist training schools for Bible instructors, opened that year in San Francisco. With this step she began thirty-four years of denominational service. From 1887 to 1892, she served as a Bible instructor and also trained others for the work, first in California and then in London, England. In 1892, she transferred to South Africa.²

Though the prominent Adventist leader Stephen N. Haskell had employed Hurd and two other women to start a Bible instructor training school in London, it was in South Africa that he came to know her better and was especially impressed with her. Hurd sold books and conducted Bible studies with the converts at an evangelistic series that Stephen Haskell and A. T. Robinson conducted. Admiring all that Hurd did, Haskell wrote to Ellen White that "Sister Hetty runs what she has on her hands with a stiff team."³

As he worked with Ellen White in Australia, having come there at her request, Haskell began to show a romantic interest in her and proposed that they marry (she had been a widow since the death of her husband James White in 1881).⁴ Believing that she should remain unmarried, she instead suggested that Hetty Hurd would make a good life companion for Haskell. Ellen White said that she had had a vision in which an angel had placed one hand on Haskell's shoulder and the other on Hurd's and said to Mrs. White, "Have I not raised up two [Stephen and Hetty] to stand by you?"⁵

Marriage to S.N. Haskell

Accepting Ellen White's suggestion, Stephen Haskell proposed to Hurd and he soon happily told Ellen White that Hurd was planning to come to Australia. Unfortunately, when she arrived in Sydney, the presence of a passenger who had contracted smallpox aboard ship caused the port authorities to quarantine the vessel. Stephen Haskell had to decide whether to join her in quarantine or remain ashore. Because he had evangelistic meetings to conduct, he chose the latter. Finally, Hetty Hurd disembarked on February 24, 1897, and they were married at 9:00 a.m. that same day. Hetty Haskell, who had just turned 40, was about the same age as Mary, Stephen Haskell's first wife, when he married her in 1851 not yet 18 years old himself.⁶ He was now 64.

Immediately after the wedding, A. G. Daniells, then president of the Australian Conference, summoned Hetty Haskell to Adelaide to be a Bible instructor, and Stephen Haskell assumed that he should join Eugene William Farnsworth in the latter's evangelistic program. But Ellen White told the couple that the new Avondale school

about to open at Cooranbong needed them, so they remained there, spending their honeymoon in Ellen White's camp meeting tent erected near her home, Sunnyside. They participated in constructing the school buildings, with Hetty Haskell doing carpenter work, nailing down floors. When the school opened, Stephen Haskell became head Bible instructor and Hetty served as school matron and also taught a verse-by-verse course on the book of Revelation.

As Stephen Haskell had appreciated her work in South Africa, Hetty Haskell now greatly impressed Ellen White. She wrote that Haskell's wife was "a woman of rare ability as a manager. She takes hold most earnestly, not afraid to put her hand to any work. She does not say, 'Go,' but she says, 'Come, we will do this or that,' and they cheerfully do as she instructs them."⁷

A Shared Ministry

Unlike Mary Haskell, who remained at home while her husband constantly traveled for the denomination, Hetty Haskell went everywhere with him (something still not common at the time) and worked closely with him. Her correspondence indicates that she had a forceful personality. The couple had a shared ministry. Hetty Haskell was perhaps even more of an administrator than her husband was in the major urban evangelistic campaigns that they conducted between 1901 and 1912 in New York City; Nashville, Tennessee; San Bernardino and Oakland, California; and Portland, Maine. She organized and oversaw the Bible instructors, visiting nurse programs, and magazine salespeople, and took care of finances and other logistics. According to Stephen Haskell, she had a ministerial license from the church.⁸

Hetty Haskell was not hesitant to express her opinion on a matter. At the encouragement of Ellen White, Stephen Haskell had decided to return to the United States after four years in Australia and departed August 5, 1899, for San Francisco. Ellen White felt that the church needed him to confront a rash of theological aberrations that had been spreading through the denomination. After traveling to camp meetings and denominational centers, Hetty Haskell observed tongue-in-cheek to Ellen White:

In some of the states they have been having "most wonderful and glorious" meetings preaching some doctrines that seem contrary to all sound doctrine. Elder I [Irwin] is anxious for Eld. H [Haskell] to be there and preach the 3d Angel's Message. It is almost amusing sometimes They keep Eld. H preaching the same things over and over. At each place, he says to Bro I "Well, what shall I preach on." Bro I is sure to reply I wish you would give the 3d Angel's Message, and Bro I listens each time with as much interest as if he had not heard it before. There is nothing that interests the people like the old time subjects. They seem tired of the new fancys and hungry for solid rock bottom principles.⁹

Because Stephen Haskell was in his 60s (an advanced age when the average life expectancy for Americans was only in the 40s), Hetty Haskell was especially protective of him, hovering near their tent during their many

speaking appointments at camp meetings so that he could get needed rest. In her correspondence she habitually referred to him as “the Elder” and kept Ellen White informed about all that he accomplished. Not only would she write to Ellen White herself, but whenever Stephen Haskell corresponded with Ellen White, Hetty Haskell would routinely add her own postscript at the end of the letter. She would stand up for her husband when he came under criticism or attack. In 1902, for example, when fellow New York City evangelist E. E. Franke, apparently as a maneuver to gain the presidency of the Greater New York Conference, accused Stephen Haskell of trying to get his ministerial credentials suspended, Hetty Haskell expressed her frustration about the episode to Ellen White.¹⁰

In the controversy over the meaning of “the daily” in Daniel 8 that took place during the first decade of the twentieth century, Hetty Haskell strongly supported her husband against some major leaders in the church. After advocates of the two views met to explore the matter, she regarded the discussion as a failure. Her forceful personality enabled her to declare to General Conference president A. G. Daniells, “Brother [W. W.] Prescott [the leading proponent of the new understanding that Haskell opposed] is so sure he’s right and everyone else wrong.” It greatly annoyed her that Prescott had gone on for four hours presenting his position before permitting Stephen Haskell and J. N. Loughborough to speak. She protested that “two old men over seventy-four years of age” had “hardly a fare [sic] chance” to respond to the younger Prescott’s arguments.¹¹

Her strong sense of fairness could equally lead her to come to the defense of others as illustrated in the case of Louise Scholz, a German nurse who had become an Adventist before immigrating to the United States around 1907. The woman had greatly impressed the Haskells. Hetty Haskell described her as “a person of real ability and deep conviction. In fact, of all the nurses who have been connected with us in our home the last twenty years we have never found one who had as great a burden for souls as Louise. From that time on we have always told Louise to consider our home her home and she has looked to us as about her best earthly friends.”¹²

Eventually, Scholz went to India as a missionary. When World War I broke out, the British authorities sent all missionaries of German extraction back to their native land. Once Church officials at General Conference headquarters learned what had happened to her, they recommended that the European division hire her. But she did not receive a job offer. According to Scholz, Louis Conradi, the division president, did not want to have anything to do with her after she refused to remain in Germany after the end of the war to work for the division. She then wrote to Hetty Haskell, who launched an avalanche of letters to the General Conference seeking help for the woman.¹³

When Hetty Haskell had served as a Bible instructor while she was still single, she had been paid \$10 a week. But after she married Haskell, the salary decreased. As the couple did urban evangelism in New York City, the local conference gave her only \$8 a week. That greatly bothered Stephen Haskell and he poured out his frustration to Ellen White, stating that his wife did the work of “three paid conference laborers,” gave “as many Bible readings [lessons] as any one of the conference laborers in the mission,” did evangelistic work equivalent to a full-time

minister, and did the mission's bookkeeping, often not finishing until 1:00 or 2:00 a.m.¹⁴

For CME, White Memorial Hospital, and Women as Medical Missionaries

As the denomination struggled to gain accreditation for its College of Medical Evangelists (CME) in southern California, one of the greatest needs was for a clinical training facility in a large city. In 1913, the school had established a small clinic on First Street next to a tannery in the Los Angeles neighborhood of Boyles Heights. Equipped with second-hand instruments, it sought to provide free care to area patients, but such a clinic would hardly be sufficient to earn CME its accreditation. The denomination had to decide whether to divert some of its limited funds to establish an adequate clinic and, thus, reduce its mission outreach, or close the medical school. A subcommittee of the 1915 Autumn Council appointed to study the issue reluctantly concluded that the denomination should shut down the Loma Linda medical program.

Then, unexpectedly, a group of four non-delegate women requested permission to speak to the council. They included Hetty Haskell, her widowed sister Mrs. Emma Gray, Dr. Florence Armstrong Keller (a pioneer physician in New Zealand), and Mrs. Josephine Gotzian, a wealthy widow who had made numerous donations to the denomination's mission programs. The women offered to help raise \$61,000 to build and equip the vital clinical hospital. In addition, they suggested that the church name the facility after the recently-deceased Ellen G. White, who had long urged that the denomination have a medical school. Hetty Haskell, the chair of the women's committee, elaborated in the *Review and Herald*:

Because of the heavy burden carried by the servant of the Lord for the medical school, it seems fitting that the hospital should bear her name. No building or column of granite could be a fitting memorial of the noble life whose influence, under God, has molded the lives of so many; but if she could speak, we think her choice would be some humble building where the poor and needy could receive spiritual and physical help. Such will be the work of the hospital when completed.¹⁵

After the Autumn Council voted to keep CME open, the four women, under the name "Women's Committee on the Los Angeles Hospital," began their fundraising. One of them had noticed that the council meetings had included many ministers more than 70 years of age. Not only that, five of them (J.N. Loughborough, G. I. Butler, S. N. Haskell, H. W. Decker, and J. H. Rodgers) were more than 80 years old. Assembling the men, she had photographs taken to make into postcards as a fundraiser for the hospital.

When the aged brethren heard that their photographs were to be sold for money, they at first objected, but when they learned that the money secured from the sale of their photographs would be used to build The Ellen G. White Memorial Hospital, they were glad to help in equipping the school for which Sister White carried such a heavy burden the last few years of her life. . . It is the long years of self-sacrificing labor these aged workers have

spent in the upbuilding of the cause we love, that endears them to us. Some of them are too feeble to do aggressive work in collecting funds for this enterprise, yet the sale of their photographs will give them a part in this work.¹⁶

Sold for fifty cents each, the postcards had printed on the back the name, age, and years of service of each minister depicted.

Church leaders requested a number of special promotional articles for the project, including one by Hetty Haskell. Commenting to T. E. Bowen about her particular article, Hetty Haskell said that she “knew the brethren [writing the other promotional articles] would set forth the general needs, and I thought it would not be amiss for me to present it from the woman’s side of the question, showing God designed our women should be medical workers and make a special plea for them.”¹⁷ Her article urged church members to “remember the millions of shut-in women of heathen lands that can be reached only by women medical missionaries. And give liberally to equip our medical school so that our young women may be educated as medical missionaries to minister to their sisters waiting in heathen darkness for light.”¹⁸

Contribution

During the winter of 1918-1919, Hetty Haskell began to tell people that she did not feel well and she started to lose weight. After the Haskells attended the New Jersey camp meeting and returned to their South Lancaster, Massachusetts, home, her condition worsened. X-rays taken at a Clinton, Massachusetts, hospital revealed a serious problem, most likely cancer. Surgeons at the New England Sanitarium, where she was transferred on July 28, decided to operate on July 31. Because Hetty Haskell had miraculously recovered from various diseases a number of times in the past, she believed that God would again heal her. Stephen Haskell frantically telegraphed the General Conference leadership for their prayers.

After struggling with her illness for several weeks, Hetty Haskell died October 21, 1919, one day before the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Great Disappointment of October 1844.

A few days after Hetty Haskell’s death, Stephen Haskell wrote to W. A. Spicer what she had meant in his life:

Twenty five years my first wife died while I was away from home. Two years after I was married to her who now sleeps in Jesus. She bore a three[-]fold burden from day of our marriage, [*sic*] First she was my right hand helper under God Spiritually. Always ready to step in any spiritual work. Second Physically, she always by night or day to help me by giving [hydrotherapy] treatments or in any way possible. Third Financially. She was a good financier kept an account of all my affairs except my expense to the General Conference. Now she sleeps and none can appreciate my feelings save those who have passed through the same. But I would not have it otherwise for it is my God that has done it.¹⁹

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NOTES

1. J. N. Loughborough, "Life Sketch of Mrs. S.N. Haskell," *ARH*, November 20, 1919, 24-25.
2. Loughborough, 25.
3. S. N. Haskell to E. G. White, July 26, 1895, Ellen G. White Estate.
4. H. C. Lacey to A. W. Spalding, April 2, 1947, copy in author's possession.
5. S. N. Haskell to E. G. White, December 10, 1906; see also S. N. Haskell to E. G. White, April 7, 1908, Ellen G. White Estate.
6. Gerald Wheeler, *S. N. Haskell: Adventist Pioneer, Evangelist, Missionary, and Editor* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2016), 14.
7. E. G. White to Gilbert Collins, June 9, 1897, Letter 33, 1897, Ellen G. White Estate.
8. S. N. Haskell to W. A. Spicer, May 20, 1903, copy in author's possession.

9. H. H. Haskell to E. G. White, June 24, 1900, Ellen G. White Estate.
10. Hetty's postscript S. N. Haskell to E.G. White, September 5, 1902, Ellen G. White Estate.
11. H. H. Haskell to A. G. Daniells, January 26, 1908, copy in author's possession.
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13. Wheeler, 321-323.
14. S. N. Haskell to E. G. White, May 23, 1902, Ellen G. White Estate.
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17. H. H. Haskell to T. E. Bowen, August 23, 1916, General Conference Archives.
18. Mrs. S. N. Haskell, "Do We Need a Thoroughly Equipped Medical School?" *ARH*, February 24, 1916, 19-20.
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