

Crisler, Violet Minnie Jane (Hawkins) (1874–1963)

HEIDI OLSON CAMPBELL

Heidi Olson Campbell, M.A. in English (Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI) is currently a Ph.D. student at Baylor University where she focuses on the impact of climatic disruption on women and religion in early modern England. Campbell taught at the Adventist International Institution for Adventist Studies in the Philippines. She wrote a chapter on Adventist women for the forthcoming *Oxford Handbook of Seventh-day Adventism* and contributed to the *Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*.



Minnie Hawkins Crisler, 1917.

Source: U.S. Passport Applications, 1795-1925.

Minnie Hawkins Crisler was a proofreader and editor for multiple denominational papers, one of the first teachers at Avondale School and at Far Eastern Academy, a missionary to China, a World War II Japanese internment camp survivor, and a literary assistant to Ellen G. White.

Early Years

Minnie was born in Hobart, Tasmania, Australia on January 28, 1874, to Christiana Fairbairn Hawkins (1845-1905) and Robert Hawkins (1831-1880).¹ Widowed by Robert's death in 1880, Christiana Hawkins married Colonel David Lacey (1838-1929) on February 20, 1893. Lacey was a former Inspector of Police for the British colonial government in India who had lost his first wife the previous year. He was the father of Ethel May Lacey, who later married Ellen G. White's son, William Clarence. Through these marriages, Minnie was related to the Whites. The Lacey family was among the earliest families in Tasmania to become Seventh-day Adventists.²

Editor and Teacher in Australia

During the 1890s, Minnie worked in the printing office of the denominational periodical, *The Bible Echo*, in North Fitzroy, a suburb of Melbourne. Ellen White hired Minnie in 1896 as a literary assistant. Beyond editing, Minnie

developed a close relationship with White and accompanied her, along with longtime assistant Sara McEnterfer, on her travels and evangelistic endeavors throughout Australia.³ Minnie was particularly involved in the children's programs at Dora Creek, near Cooranbong, NSW, Australia.⁴

When White returned to the United States in 1900, Minnie remained in Cooranbong where, on October 5, 1902, she became one of the first five students to complete a training course at the Avondale School for Christian Workers (now Avondale University).⁵ Subsequently, she became a much beloved teacher at Avondale, fondly remembered decades later by former students.⁶ In late 1904, Minnie returned to Tasmania to take Ella Boyd's teaching position and care for her ailing mother. Shortly thereafter, Tasmanian Conference elected Minnie Hawkins as Educational Secretary. Close to a year later her life took a new direction.⁷

Editor for Ellen White in California

After the death of Minnie's mother on June 12, 1905, Ellen White asked Minnie to join her in California to help prepare manuscripts for publication.⁸ From 1906 to White's death in 1915, with the exception of a brief sabbatical in 1910 to care for her ailing sister and her sister's children in Tasmania, Minnie worked as a trusted editor, proofreader, and researcher for White. During that time and while working for White at Sunnyside, Australia, Minnie helped with the preparation and editing of White's manuscripts for the following books: *Christian Temperance*, *Gospel Workers*, *Testimonies*, vol. 9, *Counsels to Parents and Teachers*, *Prophets and Kings*, *The Acts of the Apostles*, and *The Desire of Ages*. Presumably she also helped with other books produced during these years, such as the revision of *The Great Controversy* and *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*.⁹ More than just a literary assistant, Minnie also served as a personal companion, giving White baths and salt rubs when McEnterfer was away.¹⁰

While in California, Minnie became acquainted with another of Ellen White's literary assistants, Clarence Creager Crisler (1877-1936), his wife, Carolyn Hathaway, and their daughter, Beatrice (1908-2002).¹¹ Carolyn died suddenly from a heart attack in 1911. Two years later, on December 26, 1913, Minnie married Crisler.¹²

Missionary to China

When Ellen White died in 1915, both Crislens had an uncertain future. General Conference president A.G. Daniells approached Clarence Crisler about serving as a missionary in Asia. In 1916, Crisler left with him on an extended tour of Asia and stayed afterward to help develop the publishing work. Minnie and Beatrice joined him in China the following year. That same year Minnie was elected editor of the English denominational paper, *Asiatic Division Outlook*, and her husband was elected as secretary of the Asiatic Division, later called Far Eastern Division.¹³ When China became the sole territory of a new division organized in 1930, Clarence was chosen as the general secretary.¹⁴

Minnie served as the official editor of the *Asiatic Division Outlook* from 1917 to 1922 and the later *China Division Reporter* from 1939 to 1941. At the end of 1922, Minnie's name was removed from the masthead as editor and instead the division Secretary, Clarence, was listed on the masthead as the ostensible editor of the English periodicals produced by the division during the intervening years until his death in 1936. Yet, due to his extensive travels and administrative work, Minnie clearly functioned as the managing editor, arranging content and making sure that the publication regularly went out on time.¹⁵

On a trip to a remote area of northwest China, near Lanzhou, Clarence, who had been sick prior to the trip, fell fatally ill with pneumonia. Despite frantic efforts to obtain airplane transport, Minnie and Beatrice were unable to reach Lanzhou before he died.¹⁶ Shortly after her husband's death, Minnie compiled and published his mission reports in the book *China's Borderlands and Beyond*.¹⁷

In 1937, Minnie briefly returned to her native Australia and visited her sister, but then went back to Shanghai where she taught English at Far Eastern Academy and served in a variety of additional capacities, including as secretary of the China Division's Home Commission.¹⁸ She occasionally wrote articles on China for the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*.

World War II

As war in Asia between Japan and the Allied nations appeared increasingly inevitable, the General Conference, in April 1941, directed the missionaries from Allied nations and the United States should evacuate from China.¹⁹ As Minnie was already 67 years old, the General Conference Committee recommended she return to the United States. She only made it as far as Manila. She arrived there on the day of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor (December 7, 1941), resulting in the United States' entry into the war.

Minnie was interned by the Japanese on December 28, 1941. She spent most of the war in Camp Holmes in Baguio where food was scarce, but internees attempted to maintain a semblance of normalcy and remain busy. Work was shared among the internees, and internees created their own hospital and school.²⁰ The Japanese treatment of the interned in Camp Holmes was relatively lenient compared to other Japanese internment camps in the Philippines. However, conditions, especially the availability of food, deteriorated rapidly in the last twelve months of the war. The internees at Camp Holmes were civilians, mostly foreign businessmen and their families. Approximately 40 percent were missionaries from a variety of denominations, with Seventh-day Adventists comprising the largest single denominational group. Most of the internees were American. Some Filipinos contributed to preserving the lives of internees by donating food.²¹ Filipino Adventists also smuggled in money to enable the missionaries to purchase food.

On December 28, 1944, the Japanese transferred the prisoners from Camp Holmes to Bilibid Prison.²² That prison was liberated on February 4, 1945. Minnie reported feeling that "she was getting near the end and could not have endured the life much longer."²³ When she arrived in the United States on April 6, 1945, she was still

extremely thin although gaining weight. The General Conference voted a special rehabilitation allowance after World War II for Minnie Crisler along with other missionaries who survived internment camps.²⁴

Later Years and Historiographical Significance

Despite her harrowing experience during World War II, Minnie lived for another eighteen years. The General Conference invited her to attend the 1954 General Conference session in San Francisco with all expenses paid.²⁵ During her last years, Minnie lived with Florence Shull (1888-1967), a fellow missionary to China.

Minnie Hawkins Crisler died on September 17, 1963, at St. Helena Sanitarium in California.²⁶ In the years after her death, Minnie's story was forgotten or mentioned only as a footnote to her husband's legacy.²⁷ Despite her importance as a missionary to China and editor for Ellen White, she is not even mentioned under her husband's entry in the *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (1996) and is only mentioned as the spouse of C. C. Crisler in *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia* (2013).²⁸ This conspicuous omission is indicative of the overall eliding of women in Adventist historiography.

SOURCES

"An Island Trader's Son Becomes a Denominational Leader." *Australasian Record and Advent World Survey*, September 26, 1955.

"Brevities." *Australasian Record and Advent World Survey*, April 28, 1958.

Campbell, Michael W. "Crisler, Clarence Creager (1877-1936)." *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists*. Accessed October 28, 2021, <https://encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=BB1D>.

General Conference Committee Minutes. General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Online Archives, <https://documents.adventistarchives.org/Minutes/Forms/AllFolders.aspx>

Letters and Manuscripts. Ellen G. White Writings, <https://m.egwwritings.org/en/folders/253>.

Miller, H. W. "Obituary and Life Sketch of Pastor C.C. Crisler." *China Division Reporter*, May 1936.

Minchin, H. E. "Children's Missionary Society at Dora Creek." *Union Conference Record*, April 1, 1900.

"Minnie H. Crisler." Find A Grave. Memorial ID No. 47732190, February 7, 2010. Accessed October 28, 2021, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/47732190/minnie-h.-crisler>.

"Pastor C.C. Crisler returned . . ." *Asiatic Division Outlook*, March 15, 1924.

Semmens, [Sister]. "News of Sister Minnie Crisler." *Australasian Record*, July 16, 1945.

Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook. General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Online Archives, <https://documents.adventistarchives.org/Yearbooks/Forms/AllItems.aspx>

"The Shanghai Conference." *Australasian Record*, July 2, 1917.

White, Arthur L. "Ellen White's Last Four Books—Part 1." *ARH*, June 1, 1981.

White, Arthur L. *Ellen G. White: The Australian Years: 1891-1900*, Vol. 4. Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1983.

White, *Ellen G. White: The Later Elmshaven Years: 1905-1915* Vol. 6. Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1982.

White, Ellen G. "A Trip to Queensland." *ARH*, March 21, 1899.

NOTES

1. U.S. Passport Applications, 1795-1925, accessed August 11, 2021, Ancestry.com.
2. "[Christiana Hawkins Lacey] Obituary," *Union Conference Record*, July 1, 1905, 8; "Writing from Stanborough Park, England . . .," *Australasian Record*, May 13, 1929, 8; E.G. White to Mary Watson, July 9, 1896, Letter 128, 1896, this and all E.G. White letters cited hereafter are in Letters and Manuscripts, Ellen G. White Writings, <https://m.egwwritings.org/en/folders/253>.
3. See for example, Ellen G. White, "A Trip to Queensland," *ARH*, March 21, 1899, 1; E.G. White to Sarah Belden, September 28, 1896, Letter 11, 1896; E.G. White to O.A. Olsen, May 25, 1896, Letter 87, 1896; E.G. White to J.H. Kellogg, October 5, 1898, Letter 84, 1898, .
4. E.G. White to J. H. Kellogg, November 30, 1898, Letter 114, 1898; H.E. Minchin, "Children's Missionary Society at Dora Creek," *Union Conference Record*, April 1, 1900, 5.
5. "Avondale School," *Union Conference Record*, October 15, 1902, 8; "After Seventy-Five Years," *Australasian Record and Advent World Survey*, November 20, 1972, 12.
6. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*, 1904; "Brevities," *Australasian Record and Advent World Survey*, April 28, 1958, 8; "An Island Trader's Son Becomes a Denominational Leader," *Australasian Record and Advent World Survey*, September 26, 1955, 2.
7. "Progress in the Australasian Field," *Union Conference Record*, August 15, 1904, 4; "Notes and Personals," *Union Conference Record*, November 1, 1904, 7; "Tasmanian Conference," *Union Conference Record*, January 1, 1905, 2; *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*, 1906.
8. E.G. White to Marion Stowell-Crawford, December 13, 1908, Letter 356, 1908.
9. E.G. White to Edson and Emma White, May 6, 1896, Letter 150, 1896; E.G. White to R. Weber, December 8, 1897; E.G. White to Edson White, October 1, 1908, Letter 310, 1908; Arthur L. White, "Ellen White's Last Four Books—Part 1," *ARH*, June 1, 1981, 3-5; Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White: The Australian Years: 1891-1900*, Vol. 4 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1983), 261; idem., *Ellen G. White: The Later Elmshaven Years: 1905-1915*, Vol. 6 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1982), 342, 381, 403.

10. E.G. White to S.N. Haskell, January 12, 1909, Letter 14, 1909; E.G. White to S.N. Haskell, February 11, 1909, Letter 38, 1909.
11. E.G. White to Brother and Sister S.T. Belden, September 11, 1906, Letter 298, 1906; Letter 258, 1908, E.G. White to J. E. White, September 11, 1908, Letter 258, 1908.
12. Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White: The Later Elmshaven Years*, 403, 447.
13. "The Shanghai Conference," *Australasian Record*, July 2, 1917, 7.
14. H.W. Miller, "Obituary and Life Sketch of Pastor C.C. Crisler," *China Division Reporter*, May 1936, 2.
15. See for example, "Pastor C.C. Crisler returned . . .," *Asiatic Division Outlook*, March 15, 1924, 8. Note that Crisler arrived back in China according to the paper one day before it was printed.
16. Miller, "Obituary and Life Sketch of Pastor C.C. Crisler."
17. Michael W. Campbell, "Crisler, Clarence Creager (1877-1936)," *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists*, accessed October 28, 2021, <https://encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=BB1D>.
18. "Returning to Australia . . .," *Australasian Record*, August 23, 1937, 8; "Far Eastern Academy Opening," *China Division Reporter*, October 1936, 3; *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*, 1939-1941.
19. General Conference Committee, April 10, 1941, 1807, accessed October 28, 2021, <https://documents.adventistarchives.org/Minutes/GCC/GCC1941-04.pdf>.
20. "An Australian Writes from a Japanese Internment Camp," *Australasian Record*, February 28, 1944, 7.
21. Donald E. Mansell with Vesta W. Mansell, *Under the Shadow of the Rising Sun: The True Story of a Missionary Family's Survival and Faith in a Japanese Prisoner-of-War Camp during World War II* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2003), 68-69, 214.
22. V.T. Armstrong, "The Far Eastern Division in Days of Crisis," *ARH*, April 12, 1945, 12-13.
23. [Sister] Semmens, "News of Sister Minnie Crisler," *Australasian Record*, July 16, 1945, 3.
24. General Conference Committee, July 22, 1945, 1977, accessed October 28, 2021, <https://documents.adventistarchives.org/Minutes/GCC/GCC1945-07.pdf>.
25. General Conference Committee, February 4, 1954, 1431, accessed October 28, 2021, <https://documents.adventistarchives.org/Minutes/GCC/GCC1954-02.pdf>.

26. "Minnie H. Crisler," *Find A Grave*, Memorial ID No. 47732190, February 7, 2010, accessed October 28, 2021, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/47732190/minnie-h.-crisler>.
27. Ronald D. Graybill, *Visions & Revisions: A Textual History of Ellen G. White's Writings* (Westlake Village, CA: Oak & Acorn, 2019), 117.
28. *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, 2nd rev. edition (1996), s.v. "Crisler, Clarence Creager"; Kenneth H. Wood, "Crisler, Clarence Creager," in *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, ed. Denis Fortin and Jerry Moon (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2013), 353-354.
-

encyclopedia.adventist.org is an official website of the [Seventh-day Adventist World Church](#)

© 2020 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists 12501 Old Columbia Pike Silver Spring , MD 20904 USA 301-680-6000