

Gaskell, Elijah B.

(1833–1909)

DEWITT S. WILLIAMS

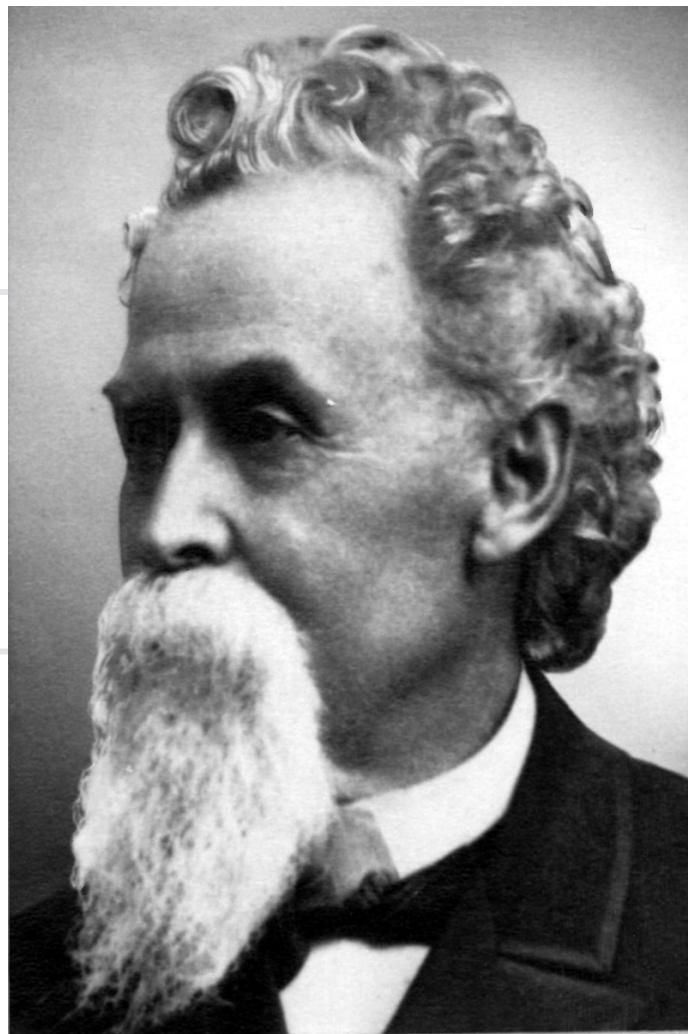
DeWitt S. Williams, Ed.D. (Indiana University) lives in Maryland after 46 years of denominational service. He pastored in Oklahoma, served as a missionary in the Congo (Departmental and Field President), and Burundi/Rwanda (President, Central African Union). He served 12 years in the General Conference as Associate Director in both the Communications and Health and Temperance Departments. His last service was Director of NAD Health Ministries (1990-2010). He authored nine books and numerous articles.

Elijah B. Gaskell, the seventh treasurer of the General Conference (1873-1874), also contributed to the work of the church as a canvasser and as a missionary in South Africa.

Elijah was born on May 4, 1833, to “godly parents” who lived near Niagara Falls, New York. In 1861 he married Mary Lindsay (1836-1888), whose parents were said to be “among the pioneers of the message in New York State.”¹ Gaskell (often spelled Gaskill), a farmer, was one of four members of the Olcott, New York, church who placed a notice in the *Review* in 1868 stating that each were “desirous of hiring a Sabbath-keeper to do farm work” and promising “*good wages for good work.*”²

General Conference Treasurer

Highly active in the church, Gaskell served on the New York and Pennsylvania Conference Committee³ and was a delegate from that conference to the 11th session of the General Conference held March 11-14, 1873, in Battle Creek, Michigan. There he was elected the seventh treasurer of the General Conference, serving alongside George I. Butler, president, and Uriah Smith, secretary.⁴ Though re-elected at the 12th General Conference, held just eight months later (November 14-16, 1873),⁵ Gaskell held the treasurer’s office for only a year and a half, his service concluding at the 13th session in August 1874. As seen in the sample included with this article, the



Elijah Gaskell

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

General Conference treasurers' reports in that era were quite straightforward and succinct.

During the Gaskells' time in Michigan, Elijah served as Sabbath School superintendent of the Battle Creek church and on the board of the Western Health Reform Institute, Adventism's first health-care institution. Mary was secretary of the Michigan Tract and Missionary Society, a position of considerable responsibility.⁶

Returning to upstate New York, Gaskell became known for his achievements as a canvasser—"a successful book worker"—especially for his sales of *Bible Readings for the Home Circle*.⁷ In 1888, though, Mary, his wife of 27 years died suddenly after a brief illness at the age of 52.⁸

Mission Work in South Africa

In 1891 Elijah married Jane (Jennie) England (1850-1941). The couple left the United States on December 6, 1893 for Cape Town, South Africa, to join the staff of Claremont Union College—Jennie as matron and E. B. as business manager.⁹ He also did some Bible teaching at the college but for eight of his ten years in South Africa Gaskell devoted the majority of his time to "ship missionary work." At seaports, he visited thousands of steamships, mail boats, sailing vessels, and warships. He sold books, tracts, and health literature and gave away papers by the thousands. He also visited war camps and hospitals in Cape Town during the Boer War. The officers, doctors, and nurses often expressed thankfulness for the good literature that he distributed, and the patients, as Gaskell described it, would "reach out their thin, feeble hands" for his papers.

When I consider the conditions of the country, with martial law in full force so long, I can but thank the Lord for the many favors and privileges which the authorities have granted me, which have greatly helped us in our work here. I have always been able to get from the authorities what I have asked for, even being allowed to go among the prisoners to distribute literature. We are very thankful that the Lord sent us here!¹⁰

After returning from South Africa in the summer of 1903, the Gaskells settled in Hildenbran, North Carolina. Though now in his 70s, Gaskell remained prominent in church work as a lay leader. When a fire destroyed the small, church-operated Piedmont Sanitarium in June 1904, the North Carolina Conference authorized E. B. Gaskell and D. T. Shireman as "solicitors" to raise funds for rebuilding.¹¹

Elijah B. Gaskell died March 8, 1909, at Hildebran, North Carolina. He was 75 years of age.¹² Jennie Gaskell remained in North Carolina until her death at the age of 90 on May 24, 1941.¹³

SOURCES

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"North Carolina Conference Proceedings." *ARH*, September 1, 1904.

NOTES

1. Jennie Gaskell, "E.B. Gaskell obituary," *ARH*, April 8, 1909, 23.
2. Business and Personal, *ARH*, March 17, 1868, 16.
3. "Camp-meeting for New York and Pennsylvania Conference," *ARH*, July 25, 1871, 48.
4. "The Conference," *ARH*, March 18, 1873, 108.
5. "Business Proceedings of the Twelfth Annual Meeting of the S.D.A. General Conference," *ARH*, November 25, 1873, 190.
6. Geo. W. Amadon, "Sabbath School Work," *ARH*, November 26, 1901, 5; listing of E.B. Gaskell on the Health Reform Institute board of directors in *ARH*, September 2, 1873, 96 and July 29, 1875, 40; Mrs. E.B. Gaskell listed as State secretary for the Michigan T. & M. Society in *ARH*, November 3, 1874, 152 and July 29, 1875, 40.
7. Wm. Goff, "E.B. Gaskell obituary," *New York Indicator*, March 31, 1909, 4; A.E. Place, "Pleasant Experiences in the New York Conference," *New York Indicator*, July 23, 1902, 2.
8. H.E. Robinson, "Mary A. Gaskell obituary," *ARH*, May 1, 1888, 286.
9. "Claremont Union College," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*, 1894, General Conference Online Archives, <https://documents.adventistarchives.org/Yearbooks/YB1894.pdf>.
10. E. B. Gaskell, "Colporteur Work in South Africa," *ARH*, November 17, 1904, 17; Gaskell's assignment "to devote a portion of his time to Bible instruction" is mentioned in "South African Conference," *ARH*, February 26, 1895, 141.
11. "North Carolina Conference Proceedings," *ARH*, September 1, 1904, 16.
12. Jennie Gaskell, "E.B. Gaskell obituary."

13. W.F. Kneeland, "Jane Josephine England Gaskell obituary," *Southern Tidings*, June 25, 1941, 6.

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