

Healey, William Mayhew (1847–1932)

MILTON HOOK

Milton Hook, Ed.D. (Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, the United States). Hook retired in 1997 as a minister in the Greater Sydney Conference, Australia. An Australian by birth Hook has served the Church as a teacher at the elementary, academy and college levels, a missionary in Papua New Guinea, and as a local church pastor. In retirement he is a conjoint senior lecturer at Avondale College of Higher Education. He has authored *Flames Over Battle Creek*, *Avondale: Experiment on the Dora*, *Desmond Ford: Reformist Theologian*, *Gospel Revivalist* the *Seventh-day Adventist Heritage Series*, and many magazine articles. He is married to Noeleen and has two sons and three grandchildren.

William M. Healey was a prominent figure throughout the first half century of Adventist work on the west coast of the United States, recognized particularly for his effectiveness as an evangelist and religious liberty advocate.

Early Life and Ministry

William was born in rural Alexandria, New Hampshire, on December 12, 1847, to Betsy and W. P. Healey, who were Baptists. Along with William, their only son, the Healeys had four daughters. The family later moved west to Minnesota and then to California, at some time becoming Seventh-day Adventists. In California, William married Clarissa Morrison, usually known as Clara, on January 18, 1875.¹

Five months prior to his marriage, August 1874, Healey was given a license to preach by the California Conference. He proved to be a persuasive evangelist with “a calm and deliberate manner.”² Within twelve months he was recommended for ordination at the fourth annual session of the California Conference which was held at a camp meeting in Fairfax, September 1875. At the same meeting Healey represented the Middletown company of believers that he had brought together during his brief ministry.³ An indication of the continuing recognition of his preaching gift was evident when he was assigned the main platform at subsequent



William and Clara Morrison Healey, c. 1875.

Photo courtesy of Ellen G. White Estate, Inc.

camp meetings, such as the September 1877 gathering near Yountville.⁴ The 1880 United States Census found William located in Churchill County, Nevada, evangelizing under the auspices of the California Conference. Clara was teaching music.⁵

In 1885 the General Conference sent the Healeys to Honolulu, Hawaii, to follow up on literature distribution carried out for twelve months by Abram La Rue and Henry Scott. Healey conducted evangelistic meetings for approximately three months, December 1885 through April 1886, encountering strong opposition from representatives of other denominations. Healey held a baptism of nine adults before he returned to California and one young convert enrolled at Healdsburg College, the Adventist school north of San Francisco.⁶ These results formed the nucleus of the Hawaiian Mission.⁷

The 1888 Controversy

At the 1887 General Conference session held in Oakland, California, Healey was one of seven delegates who represented the California Conference.⁸ Controversy was brewing around the teachings of A. T. Jones and E. J. Waggoner, editors of the Oakland-based *Signs of the Times*. General Conference president George I. Butler and *Review* editor Uriah Smith saw the influence of the young editors, who also taught at Healdsburg College, as undermining the “old landmarks” of Adventism. In the run up to the divisive Minneapolis session the next year (1888), Healey is alleged to have written letters to Butler warning that opposition was organizing against him in California.⁹

A few weeks after the 1888 session, Ellen White wrote to Healey, criticizing him for his role in the resistance against giving Jones and Waggoner a fair and open hearing, and with that, opposition to her own testimony at Minneapolis. Butler claimed to have destroyed Healey's letters, so their specific contents remain a mystery. But in Ellen White's perception, the letters, though they may have been well-intentioned, had the effect of encouraging “a spirit that would close the door to investigation of points of truth in a Christlike manner.”¹⁰

Evangelism, Administration and Religious Liberty

Nevertheless, Healey continued to hold the confidence of church officials and laity. A fellow minister, John E. Fulton, later said of him that “he was one of the most able defenders of the [Advent] Message and was used of God to earnestly contend for the faith.”¹¹ In 1894 Healey was elected president of the North Pacific Conference, serving in that office for three years.¹²

Healey returned to the California Conference in 1897 as one of their leading evangelists. When, in 1901, the possibility arose that he might become manager of the St. Helena Sanitarium, Ellen White advised him not to take the position. She again brought up the letters sent to Butler more than a dozen years before as evidence that Healey was not well-suited for institutional management. “When you act as a supervisor, you hinder the

work, placing the stone in front of the wheel instead of behind," she wrote. On the other hand, she had a favorable view of him as an evangelist, and thought he would do better to continue to "work in new fields."¹³

In addition to evangelistic work, Healey served in a variety of capacities on the west coast for more than two decades to come. He became particularly noted for his many years of work on behalf of religious liberty, representing the Southern California and later the Southeastern California Conference. Many state legislators held Healey in high regard for his work in this area, according to Fulton.¹⁴

1924 appears to have been Healey's final year of full-time ministry, though he did not fully retire until 1930, having labored in the Adventist cause for 57 years.¹⁵ He and Clara lived in San Diego during their retirement. William Healey passed away at age 84 on August 8, 1932, and was laid to rest in the Greenwood Memorial Park, San Diego.¹⁶ On January 31, 1947, Clara passed away at the age of 94 and was interred alongside William.¹⁷ They were survived by their two married daughters, Birdena Estella (b. 1875) and Emily Leila (b. 1891).¹⁸

SOURCES

Breed, A. J. "The North Pacific Camp Meeting." *ARH*, June 11, 1895.

"Clarissa 'Clara' (Morrison) Healey." *Find A Grave*. Memorial ID no. 122853128. Accessed March 12, 2021, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/122853128/clarissa-healey>.

Fulton, J. E. "William Mayhew Healey." *Pacific Union Recorder*, September 1, 1932.

General Conference Session Minutes. November 13, 1887. General Conference Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research, Silver Spring, MD (GCA).

Hall, L. M. "California Camp-Meeting." *ARH*, October 11, 1877.

Healey, W. M. "Hawaiian Islands." *ARH*, April 27, 1886.

Henton, G. E. "The North Pacific Conference Proceedings." *ARH*, July 31, 1894.

Loughborough, J. N. "California State Conference of S.D. Adventists." *ARH*, October 28, 1875.

Owen, R. S. "Betsy Healey obituary." *ARH*, June 9, 1891.

St. John, H. A. "W. P. Healey obituary." *ARH*, April 2, 1895.

White, Ellen G. *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*. Washington, D.C.: Ellen G. White Estate, 1987.

W. M. Healey Sustentation File. RG 33. General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Archives, Silver Spring, MD (GCA).

"William Mayhew Healey." *FamilySearch.org*. Accessed March 12, 2021, <https://www.familysearch.org/tree/pedigree/landscape/KDM7-RH1>.

"William Mayhew Healey." *Find A Grave*. Memorial ID no. 122854145. Accessed March 12, 2021, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/122854145/william-mayhew-healey>.

NOTES

1. J. E. Fulton, "William Mayhew Healey," *Pacific Union Recorder*, September 1, 1932, 6; R.S. Owen, "Betsy Healey obituary," *ARH*, June 9, 1891, 367; H. A. St. John, "W.P. Healey," *ARH*, April 2, 1895, 223.
2. Fulton, "William Mayhew Healey."
3. J. N. Loughborough, "California State Conference of S.D. Adventists," *ARH*, October 28, 1875, 135-136.
4. L. M. Hall, "California Camp-meeting," *ARH*, October 11, 1977, 116-117.
5. "William Mayhew Healey," *FamilySearch*, accessed March 12, 2021, <https://www.familysearch.org/tree/pedigree/landscape/KDM7-RH1>.
6. W. M. Healey, "Hawaiian Islands," *ARH*, April 27, 1886, 267-268.
7. Raymond D. Tetz, "Hawaii Conference," *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists*, accessed July 19, 2021, <https://encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=49G9>.
8. General Conference Session Minutes, November 13, 1887, GCA.
9. Ellen G. White, "Engaging in Worldly Speculation," Manuscript 2, September 7, 1888, in *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials* (Washington, D.C.: Ellen G. White Estate, 1987), 55.
10. Ellen G. White, "To W.M. Healey," December 9, 1888, in *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, 186-189.
11. Fulton, "William Mayhew Healey."
12. G. E. Henton, "The North Pacific Conference Proceedings," *ARH*, July 31, 1894, 492-493; A.J. Breed, "The North Pacific Camp Meeting," *ARH*, June 11, 1895, 378; W.M. Healey Sustentation File, GCA.
13. Ellen G. White, "To W.M. Healey," August 21, 1901, in *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, 1757-1761.
14. Fulton, "William Mayhew Healey."
15. See the *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* for 1924 and following years; W.M. Healey Sustentation File, GCA.

16. "William Mayhew Healey," *Find A Grave*, Memorial ID no. 122853145, accessed March 12, 2021,

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/122853145/william-mayhew-healey>.

17. "Clarissa 'Clara' (Morrison) Healey," *Find A Grave*, Memoria ID no. 122853128, accessed March 12, 2021,

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial.122853128/clarissa-healey>.

18. "William Mayhew Healey," *FamilySearch*.

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