

Faulkhead, Nathaniel D. (1860–1923)

LESTER DEVINE

Originally trained as a secondary history teacher, a career long Adventist educator, Lester Devine, Ed.D., has taught at elementary, secondary and higher education levels and spent more than three decades in elected educational leadership positions in two divisions of the world Church, NAD (1969-1982) and SPD (1982-2005). He completed his forty years of denominational service with a term as director of the Ellen G. White/Adventist Research Centre at Avondale University College in Australia where his life-long hobby of learning and presenting on Adventist heritage issues became his vocation.

Nathaniel Faulkhead was active in the Seventh-day Adventist church in Australia. It is because of Faulkhead's early association with Freemasonry that he is best remembered.

Early Life

Nathaniel Faulkhead was born near Avoca, Victoria, Australia in 1860. Little is known of his early life other than shortly after settling in Melbourne, his family was one of the first in Australia to embrace the Seventh-day Adventist message in 1886 or 1887. When the publishing work was first established, Faulkhead began work there, initially with a business paper printed by the new press, then later as the accountant for the publishing house, a position he was to hold for many years.¹ He later worked in the New Zealand Conference for a year or two as treasurer before being recalled to his old position at the publishing house near Melbourne. After eight more years there he left to become the accountant for a business in Melbourne. As a member of the Windsor church, he served as an elder until his unexpected death ten years later, in 1923, on the railway station platform while waiting to board his train home.²

Association with Free Masonry



Nathaniel D. Faulkhead.

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

A well-planned funeral service was conducted in the Windsor church and subsequently, at the cemetery, an interment service was conducted according to the traditions of the Freemasons. Although Faulkhead had not been active in the Masonic movement for many years, he had once held high office and was still held in high regard by those involved in the movement.³

An able man, Faulkhead served the church well but in time his Masonic duties became so extensive that they affected the quality of his work for the Church and negatively impacted his spiritual life. He had been initiated into the Victorian Kilwinning Lodge No. 93 on July 23, 1890 and became Master there on August 24, 1892. Faulkhead soon after held office in three lodge communities and responsible positions in an additional three lodges. This meteoric and most unusual rise in lodge ranks would have required him to attend at least nine lodge meetings per month.⁴

Some who worked with Faulkhead expressed their concern about his involvement but he was not amenable to their advice. Days after her arrival in Australia in December 1891, Ellen White learned of the condition of the press in Melbourne and wrote to a number of persons there, including Nathaniel Faulkhead and his wife. However, the lengthy Faulkhead letter was not mailed, as Ellen White was under conviction that its contents would not be accepted.

A year passed during which it seemed increasingly likely that Faulkhead's attitude would lead to the termination of his denominational employment. On December 10, 1892, Faulkhead dreamed that Ellen White had a message for him. Deeply impressed, he sought her out when she returned to Melbourne a few days later and asked if she had something to say to him. She did have a message she had wanted to deliver for many months, but had been impressed not to do so, as it would have been unwelcome. She then discussed a 50-page document with Faulkhead, focusing mainly on his blunted spiritual perception as a consequence of his heavy commitment to Masonry and several other societies.⁵ She described what happened in the lodge meetings he attended, and twice made hand movements that startled Faulkhead, as they were secret signs known only to the highest ranking members of the Masonic lodge movement — signs no ordinary lodge member and certainly no woman could possibly have known. When he pointed out what she had done, he learned Ellen White was not aware she had provided those signals. This experience convinced Faulkhead that Ellen White's testimony was from God.⁶ Although he resigned from all lodge positions the next day, the resignations were not accepted. The Masons required him to complete the final nine months of his elected term, hoping by doing so to change his mind. This was a time of trial for Faulkhead, but in September 1893 he was able to write to Ellen and Willie White that all of his relationships with Masonry were ended. He also expressed his gratitude to God and His messenger for the direction his life had taken.⁷

Faulkhead remained in contact with Ellen after her return to the United States. In his February 20, 1908 letter to her he recalls the events that led to his resignation from Masonry and the tone is supportive and appreciative of Ellen White. That document indicates that he had "been a great help to many of them (Masons) and many have

withdrawn themselves from the associations as a result of what I had told them took place between us.⁸

Later Life

While Faulkhead subsequently spent many years speaking against Masonry and was an elder in the Seventh-day Adventist Church right up to his sudden death in 1923, Masonic records document periodic membership in various lodges during the remainder of his life and that he was a member at the time of his death on March 23, 1923. The Masons conducted a funeral service for him according to their rites, following the denominational committal at the cemetery.⁹

So while Faulkhead openly acknowledged continuing friendship with colleagues from his lodge years, that does not necessarily mean he was living a double life, as has been suggested in some quarters.¹⁰ While it would not be wise to speculate, it is noted that lodges often renewed the lapsed membership of former or non-attending members in return for donations to worthy community projects.

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NOTES

1. A. W Anderson, "Nathaniel Faulkhead obituary," *Australasian Record*, May 7, 1923, 8.
2. Ibid.
3. Desmond R. Dunn, "Ellen G. White's Testimony to N, D. Faulkhead, unpublished document written June 1990," Ellen G. White/Adventist Research Centre, Avondale College of Higher Education, Cooranbong NSW, Australia, DF 522a.
4. Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White: The Australian Years* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1981), 50.
5. The 50-page document is not extant. In an email to the author, Tim Pourier, Associate director of the Ellen G. White Estate has explained:
"Regarding the 50-pages of material EGW read to Faulkhead, rather than being lost, I believe that it's very likely that the content ended up as several documents, rather than as one single letter. I understand her to be referring to 50 handwritten pages, which, once edited, copied and typed, probably found their way into the file as various related documents. It's described as addressing a number of concerns about the Echo Publishing office and its various workers, as well as Faulkhead. Ms. 13 (and 13a), 1891 could well have comprised material from these 50 pages. Maybe also what became Lt 13, 1893 to Faulkhead, Ms. 53, 1894 ("Should Christians Be Members of Secret Societies?") probably includes material from that 50 pages as well. (It's 22 typewritten pages.) Even though it is filed in 1894, we know from Lt 87, 1893 it was already in article form by late 1892." (Tim Pourier, email message to author December 14, 2017.)
6. Arthur L. White, *The Australian Years*, 55.
7. Nathaniel D. Faulkhead to Ellen White, February 20, 1908, Ellen G. White/Adventist Research Centre, Avondale College of Higher Education, Cooranbong, NSW, Australia, DF 522a.
8. A. W. Anderson, "Faulkhead obituary," 8.

9. Keith Moxon, "The Secret Sign and the Secret Life," Ellen G. White/Adventist Research Centre, Avondale College of Higher Education, Cooranbong, NSW, Australia, DF 522a.

10. G. W. Jackson, Grand Secretary of the United Grand Lodge of the Ancient, Free and Accepted Masons of Victoria, Australia to K. Moxon, April 2, 1968, Ellen G. White/Adventist Research Centre, Avondale College of Higher Education, Cooranbong, NSW, Australia, DF 522a.

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