



Ralph Mackin and Mary (Mamie) Levin Mackin

Source: Ancestry.com

Mackin, Ralph (1875–1961) and Mary Levin (1879–1942)

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Ralph and Mary Mackin were an Adventist couple from Ohio who sought Ellen White's counsel regarding their experience of speaking in foreign tongues and casting out demons.

Married in 1899,¹ the Mackins were, by 1903, operating a “treatment room,” or small clinic, offering hydrotherapy and other natural remedies, in Findlay, Ohio, about 45 miles south of Toledo. Though independently financed, it was conducted as an Adventist health ministry and was one of eight treatment rooms listed in the *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* for 1905 as operating under the auspices of the Ohio Conference. Ralph Mackin was the elder of the Adventist church in Findlay.²

The couple became controversial for their ecstatic worship practices. The last positive reference to them in denominational publications came in early 1906. In August 1908 they were placed under arrest for causing a disturbance at the Ohio Conference camp meeting held near Mansfield. A newspaper reported that after the Mackins arrived at the camp grounds on August 23 with a small entourage from Findlay, “the wife commenced to sing.” The head of a twelve-man special force either assigned or hired to keep order on the camp grounds arrested them for disorderly conduct, stating in the warrant that they had been uttering “loud and discordant [sic] cries.” Police officers from Mansfield then took Ralph and Mary Mackin, along with his mother, their seven-year-old daughter, Zelma, and another woman to the city jail.³ It is unclear if they were prosecuted or how long they were incarcerated.

Not long after this incident, in November 1908, the Mackins traveled to Ellen White’s residence in California to ask her whether their unusual experiences were endorsed by God or were a delusion. A verbatim transcript of the interview was kept in the Ellen G. White Estate files (Manuscript 115, 1908, published in *Selected Messages*, book 3, 362-375).

Although Ellen White did not have an immediate response to their query, she highlighted how in her early years of ministry she had opposed various forms of fanaticism. “There is constant danger of allowing something to come into our midst that we may regard as the working of the Holy Spirit, but that in reality is the fruit of a spirit of fanaticism,” she told them. She warned them also about relying upon such emotional experiences instead of the evidence found in the word of God. “We are to be sanctified through obedience to the truth. I am afraid of anything that would have a tendency to turn the mind away from the solid evidences of the truth as revealed in God’s Word. I am afraid of it; I am afraid of it. We must bring our minds within the bounds of reason, lest the enemy so come in as to set everything in a disorderly way.”⁴

Always mindful of the reputation of the church, Ellen White added that “we cannot allow excitable elements among us to display themselves in a way that would destroy our influence with those whom we wish to reach with the truth. It took us years to outlive the unfavorable impression that unbelievers gained of Adventists through their knowledge of the strange and wicked workings of fanatical elements among us during the early years of our existence as a separate people.”⁵

When Ralph Mackin asked Ellen White whether this history of her past experience applied directly to the Mackins’ case, she replied that she “could not say,” but that she was “afraid” of the type of experience they were having because it appeared to be “along that line that I have met again and again.”⁶ She emphasized that

emotions and feelings were not the proper foundations on which to establish one's faith in the Seventh-day Adventist message and that the only safe course was to turn to the Bible for evidence.

A month later, after receiving a vision regarding the Mackins' experience, Ellen White wrote to them that they were "making some sad mistakes" and that their situation was similar to those she encountered in her early years of ministry. "Your wife, in speech, in song, and in strange exhibitions that are not in accordance with the genuine work of the Holy Spirit, is helping to bring in a phase of fanaticism that would do great injury to the cause of God, if allowed any place in our churches."⁷ She urged them to stop these experiences because they "not only endanger your own souls, but [also] the souls of many others."⁸

In her correspondence with Stephen Haskell at about the same time, Ellen White told Haskell that she had not sanctioned the Mackins' experience, in fact she thought it was a deception of Satan.⁹ She also told Haskell that as their interview was concluding, Mackin had asked if they could pray and see if his wife would have such an experience during the prayer. Ellen White had refused to have this prayer.¹⁰ Even more forthright was her response to workers in California. "I was shown that it was not the Spirit of the Lord that was inspiring Brother and Sister Mackin, but the same spirit of fanaticism that is ever seeking entrance into the remnant church."¹¹

This letter was published in the December 31, 1908 issue of the *Pacific Union Recorder* under the title, "A Warning."

Publication of the letter followed a brief notice on the front page of the previous issue of the *Recorder* (December 24, 1908), warning readers to "beware of one Ralph Mackin and wife, who are now in the State of California." The notice stated that Mackin's claim to be a Seventh-day Adventist minister was false, and reported that the couple had caused "much trouble" at the Ohio camp meetings.¹²

In general, Ellen White's early experiences with various forms of fanaticism in the years following the end of the Millerite movement (1845-1848) made her very skeptical of any such enthusiastic or charismatic experiences later in her ministry. As Adventists dealt with the "holy flesh" movement in Indiana in the early 1900s, as well as the beginning of the Pentecostal revivals also in the early 1900s, the Mackins' experience served as an example of her hesitation and warning about any religious enthusiasm as proof or evidence of God's favor, rather than relying on the promises of God in Scripture.

The Mackins continued operating a "sanitarium" in Findlay for a few years but by 1920 relocated to Canton, Ohio, where they ran an office as chiropractors. Within a few years, though, the couple divorced and Ralph married Julia Arnold in 1927. He died at age 86 in Louisville, Ohio, on October 23, 1961. Mary (identified in some records as "Mamie") died on September 25, 1942, and is buried in Affton, Missouri.¹³

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NOTES

1. "Marriage Licenses," *Kansas City Times*, April 18, 1899, 5.

2. "Bowling Green," *Welcome Visitor*, January 27, 1904, 1; "Ohio Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*, 1905 (GCA), 39; G.P. Gaede, *Welcome Visitor*, May 8, 1902, 4.
3. "Religious Frenzy a Road to the Jail, 'Gift of Tongues Enthusiasts' Are Arrested in Mansfield Sunday For Making Noise," *Elyria Chronicle-Telegram*, August 24, 1908, 1.
4. Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 3 (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1980), 373.
5. *Ibid.*, 374.
6. *Ibid.*, 375.
7. Ellen G. White to Ralph and Mary Mackin, Letter 358, December 11, 1908, published in *Selected Messages*, book 3, 376-378.
8. *Ibid.*
9. Ellen G. White to S. N. Haskell, Letter 352, December 16, 1908, Ellen G. White Writings, <https://m.egwwritings.org/en/book/14073.9269001#9269001>.
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12. "Beware!," *Pacific Union Recorder*, December 24, 1908, 1.
13. "Mamie Levin," Ancestry.com, accessed November 19, 2021, <https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/family-tree/person/tree/48715864/person/280077738181/facts>; "Ralph Mackin," Ancestry.com, accessed November 19, 2021, https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/family-tree/person/tree/48715864/person/280077738179/facts?_phsrc=XEI402&_phstart=successSource.

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