

## **Secrets of Love and Life in the E. G. White House:**

### **Men: Lost and Found.**

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The recent discovery and publication of a previously unknown photograph of Ellen White at age 78 should not be passed over too quickly. The un-posed snapshot picture shows Ellen, on the arm of her fifty-year old son, W. C. White. She is wearing a flowered scarf around her neck and a rather stylish Edwardian hat. The image, captured apparently at the General Conference session in 1905, significantly enriches and enlarges our perception of Ellen White as a person.<sup>1</sup>

At age 12, at the time of her baptism, Ellen had wrestled with what it meant to be a fully committed Christian and had resolved that even if her friends did not, she would take a stand against fancy hats and dresses that might be considered vain. Even if her fellow believers were not concerned, she knew, she later wrote, “I must be plain in my dress.”<sup>2</sup> This was a kind of a testing truth for the validity of her Christian experience. With her father being a successful milliner one could imagine that discussions of hats and fashion in her home would have been a common topic of conversation. Was this why the question of dress was her “besetting sin” and one she felt she had to overcome? Somehow the image of the prophet in a stylish hat and wearing pince-nez in her old age helps to mellow the image of austerity of the plain dress image of her earlier years and introduces us to a more human Ellen White. But who is the other woman in the picture wearing an even more stylish hat?

Accompanying Ellen White in the newly discovered photograph is Ellen White’s daughter-in-law, W. C. White’s distinguished looking Australian wife May White (nee Lacey).<sup>3</sup> A decade before the shutter clicked, Willie had persuaded May, a woman half his age, to become his second wife. The story of Willie’s proposal and marriage to May in the mid-1890s is worth exploring because, like the new photograph, it also helps provide a warmer, more human picture of Ellen White than is often portrayed when emphasis is placed only on her prophetic preaching and leadership roles. How did May Lacey come to be Ellen White’s daughter-in-law?

A more complete understanding of this fascinating love story becomes possible when contemporary documents from the White family collection in the 1890s are rounded out with little known oral history accounts that give May Lacey’s own perspective.<sup>4</sup> Hearing May’s own take on the event that

changed her life and her perspective on her mother-in-law adds important dimensions to our picture of this important church founder. Valuable clues from May's older brother, Herbert Lacey also draw back the curtain for us on a little known romantic episode for Ellen White herself in her later years.

### **A Wedding on the Run**

Contemporary sources tell us that Willie's marriage to May Lacey took place in a quiet, matter of fact kind of wedding conducted with "the greatest solemnity" on a late Thursday afternoon, May 9, 1895. The vows were exchanged in Father Lacey's spacious home in Glenorchy just outside Hobart, the capital city of Tasmania (Australia). It was not a flashy affair nor anything of a romantic event. There had been "no sentimentalism," in this courtship and marriage observed Ellen White.<sup>5</sup> That was not the White's style. There had been, in fact, hardly any courtship at all. For May, undertaking the marriage was much more a carefully considered duty, the taking on of heavy new responsibility than a decision based on any flight of passion. And the event was squeezed in between speaking appointments.

Ten family members attended the simple service along with 11 invited friends of the bride. Because no Adventist ministers were legally licensed in Tasmania to conduct weddings, a Methodist minister acquaintance, Mr Palfryman, performed the service. Willie gave his wife a gold wedding ring during the service because May's father, "a gentlemanly English type," had insisted on it.<sup>6</sup> It was the local custom and Father Lacey, a very proper, retired British Police Commissioner did not at all like the idea of his attractive 21-year-old daughter travelling around the country in the company of a forty-year old American man without at least some outward sign that they were husband and wife.<sup>7</sup> Ellen White, normally opposed to wedding bands as extravagant, understood the circumstances that necessitated the ring and gladly agreed to offer the closing prayer for the service.

According to Ellen White, "an attractive wedding supper" in the crowded dining room followed the service. But by 6.00 pm with all the friends departed, the Groom himself also headed out the door to a church committee meeting while the bride was left to finish packing suitcases. By 8.30 pm the couple were catching the train with mother-in-law in tow for a slow overnight trip North to Launceston, Tasmania. Willie slept on the carriage floor between his mother and May who stretched out on the seats. But at least, for this occasion, the compartment was first class.<sup>8</sup> Not until Friday night did the new couple get to spend their first time alone together. At Launceston the groom and his mother spoke at Sabbath meetings and again on Sunday and then they all caught the overnight steamer at Devonport for Melbourne. May slept in a cabin with the groom's mother and the crossing was so rough they were both violently sick. The next two weeks were spent in committee meetings and speaking appointments in Melbourne. The party of three then headed back up to Ellen White's home in Granville, Sydney where

the new bride would meet for the first time her two newly acquired step children Ella aged 13 and Mabel, aged 8. This was not what we today would call a honeymoon.

May's two new step-daughters had very recently arrived in Sydney from the United States where, for the last three-and-a-half years they had been staying in their father's home in Battle Creek under the care of family friend Mary Mortenson. Their biological mother, Mary (nee Kelsey) had died of Tuberculosis in mid-June 1890 at age 33. The family was bereft. In late 1891 the girl's widowed father accompanied their grandmother out to Australia for a sojourn that originally was intended to last only a short time. But duty seemed to call them to stay on and on – indefinitely – and by 1895 Willie was missing his daughters.

May Lacy had had lost her mother, also to Tuberculosis in 1891. 17 years of age at the time, she knew what it was to lose a beloved parent and could sympathize with the children. This was clearly a significant part of the calculus that figured in her decision to marry Willie.<sup>9</sup> But what other reasons were there for taking on these new duties and marrying a man twice her age? Who really was May Lacey?

### **A Noble-Looking Girl with a Fine Mind**

May was born in India in 1873 in Cuttack, the former capital of Odissa State not far from the coast in Northeast India. Her Father served with the British Civil Service as a district Police Superintendent with a force of hundreds under his command. Boats, elephants and horses facilitated his travel throughout his district. At the age of three-and-a-half May had been sent back with her elder brother to a boarding school in London where their parents visited them on furlough. The tropical climate of northeast India, however, was hard on her father's health and he soon took early retirement on half-pay and returned to England. Damp weather and the absence of blue sky during long winters in Leicestershire in the British Midlands where the family had settled didn't help his health either, however, and in 1883 when May was 9, the family migrated to Hobart, Tasmania where they found to their surprise an extensive network of British ex-civil service acquaintances from India. The family settled at first in suburban Newtown, attended St John's Anglican Church and became close friends of the minister whose 12 children became good chums with May and her siblings. May's mother, an accomplished musician, played the large pipe organ for services at St John's.<sup>10</sup>

In 1887, when May was 14, her father accidentally walked into an Adventist evangelistic meeting in Federal Hall, Hobart. (He was actually on his way to attend another Anglican "Federation" meeting at the invitation of his minister friend and mistook the meeting place.) He liked what he heard at the meeting about Daniel 2, read Uriah Smith's commentary and soon the family had become devout observers of the seventh-day Sabbath and joined the small group of Advent believers. Their Anglican clergyman friend

continued his friendship with them even though they became “Jewish” and mother Lacey kept right on playing the pipe organ at St John’s even after her baptism into the Adventist church.<sup>11</sup>

At the age of 17, May left school and spent a year caring for her mother who suffered a slow death from tuberculosis. Then she spent the next year caring for her grieving father and younger siblings. It was also during this time that she found success in selling Adventist publications door-to-door around Hobart. She enjoyed giving Bible Studies to interested customers and resolved that she wanted to become a Bible Instructor. In 1894, at the age of 19 after her father remarried, she left home to attend the newly opened Adventist Bible School in North Fitzroy, Melbourne. She had borrowed money for her fees from a minister friend and mentor. A bright student who played the organ and piano well in church, May had a notable singing voice and soon made an impression at the school. Attracted by her voice, it was here that the 20 year old May first began to stir Willie’s imagination although he had first made her acquaintance six months earlier when he and his colleague A. G. Daniells had stayed at the Lacey home during a brief visit on church business.<sup>12</sup>

W. C. White, in January 1894, had been appointed as President of the new Australasian Union Conference based in Melbourne.<sup>13</sup> The demands of the role seemed to necessitate a wife and he began to give new thought to getting married again. By mid-1894 Willie and his mother had considered the problem seriously. The absence of his daughters was distressing. Finding a wife was clearly a priority.<sup>14</sup> But finding the right person who could relate to his new role and also fit into his particularly complex family situation was not easy. Besides his church administration work fostering publishing and school development work, Willie had to give large chunks of time to caring for the publishing and church development interests of his mother. She had become anxious that his other duties did not allow him to give enough time to her work even though to a large extent during the ten years since his father’s death Willie’s work had revolved very largely around his mother. Any new wife would have to be someone whom his mother would approve and with whom she could live. As he thought about it a plan evolved in his mind.

### **The Schemer**

One day, toward the end of May’s third term at the Bible School in Melbourne Willie approached her, and told her about a vacancy occurring on his mother’s staff that needed to be filled fairly urgently. May Walling, Ellen White’s niece and personal assistant had had to return to America for legal reasons on August 30, 1894. Would May consider going to work for Ellen White at Granville in Sydney? Thinking that this would be a simple interim arrangement to meet a short-term need, she agreed. Looking back on the decision years later she perceived that there was indeed scheming behind the plan. She also

acknowledged that it would have defeated Willie's purpose for her to have known his real intent or for his mother to have guessed what might be his purpose. Thus, he kept his thoughts to himself.

May signed on to Ellen White's staff as Ellen's personal assistant and travelling companion, sometime in early August 1894. It was a time of financial crisis in Australia when May joined the busy household. During this period there was an average of 14 people at the meal table each day, some in serious economic distress. Ellen reports that her house was almost like a "free hotel" with people coming and going and while she gladly accommodated this and was a gracious and entertaining hostess. Nevertheless, underneath it all, it stressed her greatly because it was a drain on her finances and her emotional resources.<sup>15</sup> May reports that her assigned tasks included driving Ellen White's horse and carriage taking her on outings to the community, to speaking appointments or on shopping expeditions. Ellen White's compassionate generosity impressed her new assistant. She recalled that Ellen would buy large bolts of "beautiful cloth" at market and have it made up by her own seamstress for needy parishioners. She "never gave away old clothes." At other times she would purchase substantial grocery supplies to help support needy families. She would borrow from others in order to be generous. According to May "she was very, very generous."<sup>16</sup>

May also reported that her new role included a nightly routine of unbraiding Ellen White's hair as she sat on a small stool in front of her. Then she would "brush and comb it" for 20 minutes or so. "That rested her head," she explained. Then she followed the dowager prophet and preacher upstairs to give her "a full massage" four evenings a week. A "sweat bath and salt glow" occupied the other two nights before May tucked her charge into bed and kissed her goodnight. Only on Friday nights was there no treatment.<sup>17</sup>

May also recalled that after speaking publicly at a meeting at a church for an hour or so the diminutive preacher would get "wringing wet with perspiration" and she knew it was not healthy for her to stand and talk to people afterwards. It was May's task, therefore, to "take her to some room and give her a sponge bath" and take "fresh underwear for her because it was all wet through with perspiration." It required "a lot of effort" for Ellen White to make herself heard in public arenas without a public address system. Australian summers could also be fiercely hot. Thus there was no time for chatting. Avoiding catching a cold was more important.<sup>18</sup>

During the last months of 1894, May enjoyed being part of the White household and related to her employer very warmly. The two women got on famously. Spending so much time together in such intimate settings Ellen quickly came to develop a high appreciation and much affection for her twenty-year old assistant. She was in Ellen's estimation a "noble-looking girl" and she possessed "a fine mind."<sup>19</sup> And May was able to relate to Ellen as to her own mother. She felt a deep affection for her.

Willie's secret scheme was working. Ellen came to see that May "loves the truth and loves the Lord and is content with anything. Everyone acquainted with her loves her," his mother enthused. "She loves me and I love her."<sup>20</sup> Five months after May's arrival in the house and the bonding with his mother that he had hoped for, it was time for Willie to spring his trap.

### **The Surprise**

As May tells the story, it happened "very sudden." At about ten o'clock one summer evening, (probably late December), she was finishing a "salt glow and sweat" treatment in the massage room and "Elder White" appeared and offered to help her "empty the water." Stating that he would "like to talk . . . a little bit this evening," he took her out onto the upstairs verandah overlooking the garden. As if conducting a business interview he asked her what she wanted to do in the future. Recalling the memorable conversation years later, May said that she replied that she wanted to train to be the "matron" of a school. "Well," he responded, "how would you like to be the matron of a private home?" And then he explained to May about his two daughters who did not have a mother. Would May like to "come and be with them." May recalls that she was flustered and surprised at the suddenness of it all. She had not discerned any affection from him. She "didn't know hardly what to say." I didn't know he liked me, she recalled. "I don't think he told me he loved me."<sup>21</sup>

Finding her voice, as they stood on the Vernadah, May expressed surprise that Elder White was not asking one of his mother's other helpers. Did he not know that "Miss Campbell was very much in love with him?" American, Emily Campbell, was a very efficient editorial assistant and general administrative helper in the household who had been spending much time in his company and was holding out strong hopes.<sup>22</sup> White replied that he understood how Emily felt but she wasn't the one. Later it dawned on May that, besides Emily's bossy temperament, Emily may have not qualified as a candidate because she was an older woman and may not have been able to have any children.<sup>23</sup> May reports that she then suggested two or three other women more the Elder's age. She was very much aware that she was nineteen years his junior. But here was the senior church leader in Australia, someone twice her age, telling her that she was the one the Lord wanted him to marry. Every time he prayed about it, he explained, May was the one who "always came up before him." Pressure? Duty? Hardly knowing what to say she told him she could not answer him then. Awkwardly she replied that she would have to have time to think about it and pray about it. What she didn't feel able to tell "Elder White" that night, she recalled, was that she was already "terribly in love" with someone else.<sup>24</sup>

Back in her room May recounts that she sat staring at the wall for three or four hours trying to sort through her jumbled thoughts and praying before she tumbled into bed. How long the process of thinking

and praying took is not clear from the records but at least she viewed the proposal seriously. Which should prevail, love or duty? As she prayed and thought about it, she came up with three signs the Lord would have to give her if accepting this proposal was to be her duty; signs that what the Lord was apparently telling Willie was also something the Lord also intended her to hear and thus something she ought to do.

First, her father would have to approve. That was a major concern given the age difference. Second, she had major debts to care for at the school. That was a large obstacle. They would have to be paid somehow before she could even consider marriage. The third was an even more difficult problem. Her love for her boyfriend Arthur. The Lord would have to “take away the love for Arthur Currow from my heart,” she recounted. Arthur L. Currow was a fellow ministerial student from College who had captured May’s heart. They had not agreed yet upon marriage, nor even specifically talked about it but she knew in her heart that it would not be long before Arthur was going to ask her and she was planning to say yes.

At what point Willie White told his mother about his proposal to May, is not clear. May suspected that he had probably talked to her before the deed.<sup>25</sup> With the advantage of hindsight May later observed that Willie was “a very obedient boy,” and that “he wouldn’t do anything in which his mother didn’t agree.”<sup>26</sup> Whenever it was that his mother learned of her son’s plan she was absolutely delighted and intrigued by his clever scheme. And she soon became an agent for Willie. By the time she wrote to tell the news to her elder son Edson in Mid-January she had known for some time and was kind of pleased that she had been let in on the secret. At first, “I had not the slightest thought when she came to my home,” she reported.<sup>27</sup>

As May remembered things, Ellen White asked a number of times how her decision making process was going. Upon learning of the school fee problem she quickly came up herself with the money to repay the minister who had loaned the school fees for May’s education.<sup>28</sup> That was one problem cared for. Father’s permission would have to wait until Willie could talk in person to him. May’s love for Arthur would also take time. When Ellen White asked later “have you decided yet” she responded that there was still “one sign that hasn’t been fulfilled.” May sensed that Willie’s Mother “seemed to want me to say, Yes.” “She really was anxious that we should be married, I’m sure,” May later recalled. And in time, “gradually,” she reported “the love for Arthur was taken out of my heart.” Whether Willie ever learned about the near miss with Arthur is not clear.

May noted that she certainly did not love Willie at this time. “I didn’t love him when he asked me. I wasn’t in love with him. . . . I learned to love him.”<sup>29</sup> But with the matter of her love for Arthur diminishing to the point of being resolved, May felt able to write to Willie and tell him that yes, she

would marry him. By this time he was on his way to Melbourne and en route to a three month absence in New Zealand.

Ellen White, didn't learn of May's final answer until January 15, 1895. "I told her [May] today," she wrote to her eldest son, "that I would like to understand if the matter was settled between her and Willie. She said it was, if her father would consent." It seems that Willie was a confident and determined suitor for even in advance of May's firm answer he had already planned to visit Tasmania to call on May's father and set "before him his love for his daughter."<sup>30</sup> Ellen White was as bubbly over the affair as she had been in a long, long time. "She is a treasure. I am glad indeed for Willie," she told Emma and Edson. "She is just the one I should choose. . . . this is all right."

Willie boasted to his elder brother that May did not have a "little sallow, pinched-up body" but was rather a good big wholesome woman." She was surrounded by "sunshine, comfort and peace." But if Willie was already deeply in love with May, she still had love to learn. "I didn't love him when he asked me. I wasn't in love with him," she observed. "But I learned to love him and he was a very kind husband . . . We were always very happy together."<sup>31</sup> But there were several unhappy people affected by the decision.

### **The Disappointed**

What the heartbroken Arthur himself felt when he heard the sad news we do not know but he may well have figured, that with a Union President who had a prophet for a mother, the odds would have been well and truly stacked against him. He completed college found a new love and became a valued pastor and teacher in Australia.

Arthur was not the only heartbroken one.<sup>32</sup> Emily Campbell when she heard the news of the engagement was also heartbroken. "She got ill," and "had to go bed. She was terribly in love," recalled May. Soon Emily left Ellen White's employ, returned to America and married someone else. Another heartbroken hopeful was Mary Mortenson back in Battle Creek. Mary had been caring for Willie's two daughters and had fallen in love with their father by correspondence, nurturing her conviction that the Lord wanted her to become mother to the two girls, wife to Willie and daughter-in-law to Ellen. According to Ellen, Willie "had plainly stated to her" that such a scenario was not in his mind but she apparently was too much in love to hear. She had confided her hope to the two girls and when the news of the engagement to May broke in Battle Creek, O. A. Olsen, the GC President, reported that both Mary and the girls were in "a high state of excitement." Mary's reaction, and the ordeal that the children experienced led to the cancelling of the White's plans for her to accompany the two girls to Australia to

join Ellen White's staff. The new venture for May was going to have enough complexities as it was without a disappointed rival on the staff.<sup>33</sup>

### **Adjusting to a dominating Mother-in-Law**

In the meantime, and it seems even before May had fully made up her mind about the marriage proposal, mother-in-law-to-be was already taking in hand the preparing of a trousseau for her daughter-in-law. Ellen explained that she wanted to prepare May for married life "with a real becoming wardrobe, but not expensive or extravagant." "You know," she commented to Edson and Emma, "That is not my besetting sin."<sup>34</sup> As May recalled it, her mother-in-law-to-be "bought a whole lot of materials to make dresses" and Mrs. Rousseau, the school principal made them up. The colors included cream, black, tan, white and red. "She had one the color of grape juice, that dark red." Was this too much interference from the groom's mother? Apparently not. May thought it was wonderful. As Ellen White had noted, May really was a woman who was "cheerful, kind, and tenderhearted and is . . . always satisfied and thankful." From May's perspective, Ellen White was just a "wonderful mother-in-law," in fact, "a wonderful companion to be with."<sup>35</sup> She was "very kind" and "very sweet." She could "laugh heartily, and was certainly entertaining."<sup>36</sup> But that is not to say that she was not a dominating presence. She continued to intervene in ways that other wives would certainly have considered to be intrusive. To be part of the White household necessitated the possession of the special gift of submission although that did not mean being submerged. Before the marriage Ellen White had expressed herself to her son that she was pleased that May had "an individuality which cannot be submerged even in you." May should not be "cramped to any person's ideas." She was glad that May's "perceptive faculties are of no ordinary character."<sup>37</sup> Part of the social skills that enabled May to thrive in the White house was knowing when to be submissive and when not to be.

After the wedding in Tasmania, May and Willie moved back to Sydney and then with Willie's mother they moved on up to Cooranbong and settled themselves on a 40 acre property that Ellen White had bought on the edge of the new college estate. At first they lived in Ellen White's camp meeting tent pitched on the property and then in time moved into homes erected on Avondale Road. May and Willie lived just across the street from where Ellen had built her home, "Sunnyside."

Eleven months later in early April 1896, May fulfilled the wildest dreams of both her husband and her mother-in-law. She produced twin boys. Ellen reported that she had been awakened at 10.00 pm by her nurse Sarah McEnterfer with the news of the two noisy arrivals. May, however, recalls her mother-in-law actually being in the room around the time when they were born and that she "just clapped her hands" with joy and then quickly took charge of the naming. "She herself, named them all," May reported. She

noted that Ellen White in choosing names for her two boys “got in her husband’s name” and the names of her own boys. She decided on James Henry, and Herbert Clarence. “In those four names she got the names of her husband, and all her boys. . . . She had them all named up that night!”<sup>38</sup> At one level, May “didn’t mind her naming them.” That was the way things were in this household, she reasoned to herself. But it did cross her mind that this might be a mother-in-law extending her reach too far. When pressed she conceded that this was meddling “a little bit” too far. “I didn’t resent anything,” she recalled. “I knew it was all right.”<sup>39</sup>

The first years of marriage for Willie and May were not without their stresses and tensions, however, particularly after the arrival of the twins. Caring for two new babies, a frequently absent husband, (9 months in 1897) and having two step-daughters (one of them a fourteen-year-old) who were learning to adjust to a new inexperienced step-mother was not easy. Having May’s elder brother and his new wife boarding with the family added to the demands on the family as did the strong presence of mother-in-law across the street who noticed everything and was not above intruding. In late 1896 Ellen criticized May’s untidy kitchen, the children’s garments that were sometimes not mended on time, the lack of “heavenly atmosphere” and a sense of “too much stir and bustle, noise and confusion, disorder and untidiness.”<sup>40</sup> The fact that the criticism and the mother-in-law advice about how to do better and how to organize the house was expressed as sourced from a dream and clothed with the authority of the prophetic voice somewhat blurred the boundaries of the relationships involved. But May’s willingness to submit to duty, her strong spirituality and her deep affection for her mother-in-law clearly helped her to cope. This, however, was no ordinary situation. Nevertheless May was glad that Ellen White was fond of her grandchildren and made time for them, counseled with them, worked with the girls in the garden and took them for rides in her carriage.<sup>41</sup> Ever practical, she bought the boys a small red and blue wheelbarrow each when they turned two years of age and she was always available to help nurture them spiritually.

The next time May gave birth to a baby boy she related that she was much more proactive about who would do the naming. With the arrival of her fourth child, on October 6, 1907, after the family had returned to the United States, May staked a claim for Arthur as the child’s first name and Lacey as his second. Her reason, she explained, was that she had always liked the name and no one objected. Asked by the interviewer whether any of her family twigged to the special meaning the name had for her she was inclined to think that no one noticed.<sup>42</sup> And so it was. If Ellen White’s first two grandsons carried the names of her own special men, her third grandson carried the memory of May’s own long-ago love. May reported that she was never unhappy as part of the White household. She was loyal, loving and true. But that might not always stop one being wistful. Just when her son Arthur learned of the significance of his name is not clear but it seems clear that he eventually learned the secret.

### **A new love for Ellen?**

The mid-1890s was a season of tension between love and duty in the White house. In 1896 shortly after her son's marriage, Ellen White found herself also having to make a difficult decision about whether to give priority to love or to her sense of duty when it came to marriage and her work. That year, her long-time friend and colleague Stephen Haskell who had lost his wife two year earlier made so bold as to approach the widowed Ellen with a proposal of marriage. It was a very appealing proposal. In many ways the two were soulmates. They shared together a deep love for the church and its mission and it is clear from her many, many letters to Haskell that Ellen felt a tenderness for him. As Jerry Moon notes, the correspondence with Haskell is the most prolific of any that she had outside that with her own family.<sup>43</sup> In mid-1896 she arranged things with the brethren and pressed an invitation to Haskell to come and share in the work in Australia and help with the new college in Cooranbong. W. C. White was initially hesitant but Ellen pressed and the personal warmth of the invitation may have given hope to Haskell that a proposal might be considered.<sup>44</sup> Haskell arrived in Adelaide from South Africa about October 12 in mid-Spring and joined Ellen White in ministering at the camp meeting. They then made their way back to Melbourne for meetings, travelling together north to Sydney and arriving back at Cooranbong sometime during the last week of the month. Haskell stayed with Ellen White for about six weeks before going to New Zealand. He apparently chose this time to press his suit.

In many ways it was an attractive proposal for Ellen White and she wrestled with it. As Ron Graybill notes, her last decade of marriage with James had been a difficult time with its lengthy periods of stress and separation because the downside of James' temperament had been aggravated by a number of strokes.<sup>45</sup> The loneliness of 15 years of widowhood and the tenderness, affection and admiration she felt for Haskell were a strong pull on her emotions. The natural affinity they had for each other was apparently noticed by a member of the extended family, Herbert Lacey, who reports that the two "were very frequently together." Something about the chemistry between the pair prompted Lacey to ask Ellen White about the possibility of a marriage to Haskell.<sup>46</sup>

Duty and a sense of the importance of her larger responsibilities, however, persuaded Ellen White that accepting Haskell's proposal would not be the best way forward, although deep down she might long for the affection and the companionship. As she explained to Lacey, changing her name to Haskell would create insurmountable problems for her publishers and for her identity as a writer. How could she continue to write as Ellen G. White? The consolation she found came from an assurance she said had been given in a dream. Her son W. C. White had been designated by the Lord to care for her until her work was done.<sup>47</sup> And indeed, in mid-1897, the General Conference finally formally assigned the salary

and budget for to be utilized in caring for his mother's interests. Discussions had been going on about this possibility since mid-1894 when it became clear that W. C. White was not coping with his work as President and was nearing a nervous breakdown. But what to do with Haskell?

Ellen had earlier also invited a Miss Hetty Hurd of California, now working in South Africa to come and assist with the new college in Australia. Hetty had been reluctant. Now Ellen persuaded the disappointed Haskell that he should think about marrying this younger woman of their mutual acquaintance. Haskell dutifully obeyed and wrote Hetty a letter of proposal. Hetty responded almost at once, booked passage to Australia and the couple were married in Cooranbong on February 27, 1897. "We can sympathize and unite in the grand work that you and I love, . . ." Ellen White wrote to Haskell later when congratulating him on his marriage to Hetty.<sup>48</sup> "In everything which relates to this we are united in bonds of Christian fellowship." In the years that followed, the Haskells often worked closely with Ellen White both in New South Wales and later in California and the correspondence between them continued to be warm and steady.

The episode of Ellen White's forfeited opportunity for re-marriage would probably be unremarkable were it not for the existence of another photograph. Just how much Ellen White experienced the cost of turning down Haskell's proposal may be indicated by the fact that in her last years she kept a portrait photograph of the handsome preacher on a shelf of the mirror cabinet opposite her bed in her bedroom at her Elmshaven home.<sup>49</sup> At Elmshaven today Haskell's photograph has joined the collection of photographs of the other men in her life, (her husband and her four sons). The opportunity for love passed by in submission to duty was quietly treasured by Ellen White it seems as a memory of what might have been.

### **Arthur's Return**

May (Lacey) White was more fortunate than her mother-in-law. For May, the love passed over in submission to duty in 1895 was to be found again in her later years.

Just as May's marriage to Willie had developed rather unexpectedly in 1895 so it came to an end unexpectedly in September 1937 catching her by surprise. After he turned 80 years of age, May reported, Willie travelled much less and spent more time at home with her. The massage skills she had learned in order to treat his mother forty years previously, now came in handy for her husband. For three and a half years she observed, she gave him a full hour-long massage that would send him off to sleep each night. But on the night of September 2 she noticed something wrong. He had been overworking and woke up during the night struggling to breathe. The next morning he slipped away suffering a heart embolism. He was buried in Battle Creek.

For the next 17 years May lived on her own enjoying her children and grandchildren. And then in 1955 Arthur Currow, now a widower, made an unexpected re-appearance in Glendale City, California where his physician son served at the Glendale Adventist Hospital. May and Arthur's paths crossed again. The old chemistry so long dormant still worked and the flames of love blossomed anew. They were married a week before Christmas amid the Christmas lights at the romantic little chapel on the third floor of Mission Inn in Riverside. And in a delightful turn of events it was Elder Arthur Lacey White who performed the wedding of his mom to the boyfriend she had turned aside for the cause of duty six decades earlier. They enjoyed eight-and-a-half years together. After Arthur's death in 1963 May lived another six years and on her demise was interred with Willie in the family plot in Battle Creek.<sup>50</sup>

The other woman in the stylish hat with Ellen White in the newly discovered 1905 photograph opens a wide window for us and reveals a side of Ellen White not often in view but which helps to give a more complete picture of her remarkable life.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The photograph came to light during Graybill's recent research on the history of Glendale Adventist Hospital. See "Rare Photo Provides a Walk with Ellen White Down Memory Lane." <http://www.adventistreview.org/church-news/rare-photo-provides-a-walk-with-ellen-white-down-memory-lane>

<sup>2</sup> *Youth's Instructor* December, 1852 p 22. The article is the earliest biographical reflection written by Ellen White.

<sup>3</sup> Formally Ethel May, she preferred to be called by middle name, May.

<sup>4</sup> Records of three interviews with May White Currow are preserved. Interviewers were Olaf Reno (June 4, 1960), James R. Nix (June 11, 1967) and Ed Peterson (1968) (DF791a, Oral History Collection, EGWE-LLU).

<sup>5</sup> EGW to Edson and Emma White, May 15, 1895. EGWE-DC.

<sup>6</sup> The expression is Ellen White's. She also reported that David Lacey had been "a strict vegetarian for years" but was considered "a very intelligent, kindhearted man." EGW to Emma and Edson White Jan 15, 1895.

<sup>7</sup> Ed Christian Interview, p 4. May Lacey to W. C. White, February 13, 1895. EGWDC, DF 121.

<sup>8</sup> EGW to Edson and Emma White, May 15, 1895. Nix Interview (1967) p 32.

<sup>9</sup> Nix Interview (1967) p 32.

<sup>10</sup> According to her son, H. Camden Lacey, Mrs Lacey also played both at Anglican Services in Leicester and for the famous Baptist Evangelist F.B. Meyer in Melbourne Hall, Leicester. HCL to A. W. Spalding, April 2, 1947.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Nix Interview p 1.

<sup>13</sup> The Union Conference was a new departure in Adventist church governance. Australasian Union Conference Session Minutes Jan 18, 19, 25, 1894. CAR. For an account of W. C. Whites relative lack of success as a church administrator see Gilbert M Valentine, "A. G. Daniells, Administrator, and the Development of Conference Organization in Australia," in *Adventist History in the South Pacific: 1885-1918*, ed Arthur J. Ferch, Warburton, Signs Publishing Company, 1986) pp 81-84.

<sup>14</sup> Jerry Moon, *W. C. White and Ellen G. White*, ( Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1993) p 167.

<sup>15</sup> Nix Interview p 29. "She was a very pleasant hostess. She always had something to say, all the time. . . always had plenty to say." P 29. See also EGW to Edson and Emma White May 15, 1895. See also EGW to Lucinda Hall, April 15, 1895.

<sup>16</sup> Nix Interview p 24.

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<sup>17</sup> May was given special training as a masseuse for this purpose by a visiting nurse recently graduated from Battle Creek Sanitarium and at first practiced on the cook and the seamstress before starting the treatments with Ellen. Nix Interview p 23.

<sup>18</sup> Nix Interview p 28

<sup>19</sup> EGW to Emma and Edson January 15, 1895

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Nix Interview p 31.

<sup>22</sup> Nix Interview p 31. According to May, Emily was “a rather dictatorial woman” and they thought for sure she would be the one. They used to say among themselves “I wonder how bossy she’ll be when she’s Mrs White?”

<sup>23</sup> Nix Interview p 33. It was later that May learned that Ellen White very much wanted some more boys as grandchildren.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, pp 30-31.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p 32.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p 37

<sup>27</sup> EGW to Emma and Edson White, January 15, 1895

<sup>28</sup> Reno Interview (1960) p 6.

<sup>29</sup> Nix Interview p 34.

<sup>30</sup> EGW to Emma and Edson White, January 15, 1895.

<sup>31</sup> Nix Interview p 34.

<sup>32</sup> According to a Brandstater family recollection, one of the Brandstater brothers (Hermann) was also a disappointed suitor and laid the blame on Ellen White for his missing out in the marriage stakes for May’s hand. Interview with Bernard Brandstater, Redlands CA. October 10, 2015. This jilting may have occurred two years earlier however when a date was cancelled by May with a lawyer friend at the time that W.C. White and Daniells first visited the Lacey home.

<sup>33</sup> EGW to Lucinda Hall, April 15, 1895.

<sup>34</sup> It is not clear if Ellen White is speaking ironically, tongue-in-cheek, here with her family. If she is then the sense would be that this was an occasion that warranted a frill or two.

<sup>35</sup> Nix Interview p 37.

<sup>36</sup> Reno Interview p 6; Christian interview p 4.

<sup>37</sup> EGW to W. C. White, March 15, 1895.

<sup>38</sup> Nix Interview p 5. That May’s brother’s name was also Herbert seemed just a coincidence.

<sup>39</sup> Christian Interview p 5.

<sup>40</sup> Ellen G. White, “Words to the W. C. White Household,” November 27, 1896. The letter is a detailed critique of the way May was running the house and of the unhelpful attitudes that the two step-daughters were beginning to manifest and habits they were adopting. Tensions in the family may be noticed in the fixed expressions on the faces of May’s step daughters in a late 1896 photograph.

<sup>41</sup> The eldest granddaughter, Ella, recalled having to “greatly reduce” the size of the velvet bow in her felt hat and discard her fashionable flared riding gloves because they were considered too extravagant at the time and given the circumstances, to wear to church. Nix Interview with Ella Robinson, (1967) p 13.

<sup>42</sup> “I don’t believe any of the family ever thought of that, but I did.” Christian Interview (1968)

<sup>43</sup> Deny Fortin and Jerry Moon, *The Ellen G White Encyclopedia*, (Washington D. C.: Review and Herald, 2013) p 404. There are 271 letters from Ellen and many more received from him.

<sup>44</sup> EGW to S. N. Haskell, June 1, 1896. The letter is to him as an individual and offers him a room in her house and the freedom of her home which he can make his “headquarters.”

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<sup>45</sup> Ronald D. Graybill, "The Power of Prophecy: Ellen G. White and the Women Religious Founder of the Nineteenth Century," Dissertation submitted to John Hopkins University, 1983 pp 25-53. Graybill documents the conflict and the lengthy separations and reconciliations that characterized the last years of James and Ellen's relationship.

<sup>46</sup> H. Camden Lacey to A. W. Spalding, April 2, 1947. Lacey's letter is written to church historian Spalding in response to a request for information about the founding of Avondale College.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> EGW to Brother and Sister Haskell March 1, 1897. EGWE-DC

<sup>49</sup> The photograph was not of Hetty and Stephen - just of Stephen. Photographs of the room at the time of her death show the photograph on the nightstand.

<sup>50</sup> "In Brief," RH September 18, 1969, p 32; Obituary Notices. Ella May Lacey Currow White, *Pacific Union Recorder* October 23, 1969 p 7.