

Appendix 2

The Making of Ellen G. White's 1912 Will

Most of this Appendix is from materials supplied by Elder Jeff Wilson, retired General Conference director of the Planned Giving & Trust Services Department, and Elder Merlin Burt, now the Director of the Ellen G. White Estate at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

Ellen G. White had her Will drafted at least four times: signed on 10-16-1901, signed on 8-14-06, an unsigned draft of 1909, and the final one signed 2-9-1912. The 1912 Will is included here as Appendix 3.

Reading those drafts suggests that she went through a progression of thought that led her to a clear understanding of what she wanted to do that would harmonize with her sense of love and duty for God and family, making provision for her work to continue after her death.

“We'll be there, we'll be there in a little while, We'll join the pure and the blest; We'll have the palm, the robe, the crown, And forever be at rest.” “The Better Land” a Hymn by William Hyde 1845

As 1915 dawned, Ellen G. White entered her 88th year.

She was still able to aid in her book work and move up and down the long curving staircase in her Elmshaven home unaided. As she went about her chores the words of this old hymn written in 1845 by William Hyde called “The Better Land,” could be heard on her lips. Hyde had written this song back at the beginning of Ellen's ministry after hearing her describe her first vision of God's people on their way to the Kingdom. It is in the SDA Hymnal #453 inaccurately dated as 1850. William Hyde was only 17 when he heard Ellen White's vision that inspired him to write this hymn. Unfortunately, he later left the church. He used a popular tune of the day. This is the oldest SDA hymn. Unfortunately, we don't sing it much today.

Ellen White's Counsel for Us That She Followed

“You must now, while alive, make diligent, faithful work, that after your death gifts and offerings may come into the treasury of the cause of God. By making this provision you express your interest in the work of God, which must be sustained and the standard of truth lifted in new places. Your treasure is loaned to you in trust and is the Lord's. Now, you are to select stewards of God to pass the same along. Your helping hand may be still in death, yet your works follow you through living, faithful stewards as your representatives, and you are thus fulfilling your appointed work. Said Christ to John, “Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them.” {GH, December 1, 1901 par. 3} (An article in The Gospel Herald of 12-1-01)

More Than A Week's Wage To Get A Will Made?

While Ellen G. White lived in rural northern California near Angwin where Pacific Union College is located. Her final Will was drafted by an attorney in San Francisco, California at a cost of \$25.85. At the time, an ordained Seventh-day Adventist pastor received a salary of

\$18 per week. Google Search reveals that the average inflation rate from 1912 to September 13, 2022 is 3.16%. Simple Math: 120 years X 3.16%=379.2% inflation X \$25.85= \$9,802.32.

Why Would Ellen White Use A Lawyer To Draft Her Will?

“Wills should be made in a manner to stand the test of law. After they are drawn they may remain for years and do no harm, if donations continue to be made from time to time as the cause has need.

“Death will not come one day sooner, brethren, because you have made your will. In disposing of your property by will to your relatives, be sure that you do not forget God's cause.

“You are His agents, holding His property; and His claims should have your first consideration. Your wife and children, of course, should not be left destitute; provision should be made for them if they are needy. But do not, simply because it is customary, bring into your will a long line of relatives who are not needy. {4T 482.3}” (Testimonies for the Church, Volume 4, page 482)

Provisions Of Ellen White's Will

“Her will reveals that ten percent of the income from her properties was to go to one son, ten percent to another (and after the death of this son and his wife their ten percent was to go to the denomination), and five percent of the income was to be set aside each year for an educational fund for the grandchildren and great-grandchildren and other worthy persons. That would total at the outset twenty-five percent, or only one fourth of the income. Seventy-five percent—later to rise to eighty-five percent was to go to the church. If every individual who made out a will designated that this percentage of the anticipated income of his estate should go to the church, we think that the church would be in a marvelous well-fortified financial position, and the ministry at large would be ready to say that God's claims had had ‘first consideration’ in the minds of the testators.

“It is true that Mrs. White made provisions for certain bequests at the time of the probating of her will. The grand total of these was only \$6,006.75, and was constituted of certain cash gifts and her furniture and personal belongings.” (Ellen G. White And Her Critics by Francis D. Nichol)

No Social Security or other government Retirement Plans were in existence when Ellen White's will was done. In light of this, it seems appropriate that she provided \$500 gifts in her will to each of some individuals who worked for her.

Primary Objective In Ellen White's Will—Manage Her Writings

The “Ellen G. White Estate” that we know today as an operation of the Church at the General Conference in Silver Spring, Maryland—with branch offices in various places of the world—was established by her will.

“When on February 9, 1912, Ellen White drew up her last will and testament, in which she provided for the management of her writings, she named Arthur G. Daniells as one of the five

men of her choice who were to take care of these writings after her death.” (Biography of Ellen G. White by her grandson, Arthur L. White, Volume 6, page 230)

“The Lord requires that those to whom He has lent talents of means make a right use of them, having the advancement of His cause prominent. Every other consideration should be inferior to this.” {2T 658.2} (Testimonies for the Church, volume 3, page 658)

“I was shown the awful fact that Satan and his angels have had more to do with the management of the property of God's professed people than the Lord has. Stewards of the last days are unwise.” (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol.1, p. 199)

Her Work Would Go On—To Hasten Publication “While I live, I want you to do all you can to hasten the publication of my writings in the English language. . .and after I die, I want you to labor for their translation and publication in foreign languages. . . .There is precious truth and light in these writings which should go to the ends of the earth.”--WCW to "Dear Friend," Oct. 20, 1915.

Ideas Presented to Her Attorney“ After shaping up roughly these ideas, we took the matter to Theodore A. Bell, and told him exactly what was aimed at in the will. He gave the matter some study, and worked out a plan that seems to us to be very good.” 6Bio 462.

Percentages for God & Family

25% for family

75% for church work

Mrs. White's Wishes

“It is mother's desire, and she has made provision to the effect that after her death, 75 percent of the income from her publications shall go to the . . . Seventh-day Adventist denomination, and that 25 percent of the net income shall be divided among her heirs”.--W TO L. H. Christian, Nov. 3, 1912. 6Bio 454

Generous to Family in Life

“When father died without a will, my brother and I signed off all claims to property so that everything went to mother.” “From time to time mother has given to us that which she considered to be our portion....”

Two Oldest Granddaughters

“She also helped my two oldest daughters \$700 each to help them in securing modest homes....”

For the Twin Grandsons

“And recently she gave my twin boys, 16 years old, a strip of mountain land which they have been clearing and...selling with the intention of depositing the proceeds in the college to help them in their schooling.” (William C. White letter to L. H. Christian, November 3, 1912.)

Concern for family

“Ellen White had clearly in mind that all members of her family had lived on a very restricted basis financially. “In recognition of their dedicated and self-sacrificing service to her work and in the Cause of God, she desired to have them benefit somewhat from her estate...

“All this was arranged in her will, dated February 9, 1912, carefully drawn up by a competent attorney and duly executed. But it didn’t work out that way.” 6Bio 456.

The Estate, Incorporated

An organization created by the Last Will and Testament of Ellen G. White of February 12, 1912, to act as her agent (her personal representative):

The custody of her writings,

Handling her properties

“conducting the business thereof”

“securing the printing of new translations”

And the “printing of compilations from my manuscripts.”

On July 16, 1915 – This self-perpetuating board began to function. It soon sold Ellen White’s real estate, then began the continued care of her literary properties.

Under the Terms of Her Will—Three duties:

Hold copyrights to her writings.

Prepare manuscripts for and promote the translation and publication of writings

Custody of the files

Added later: acquainting Adventists and others with her work.

Original Trustees of the Ellen G. White Estate

A. G. Daniells, GC President

F. M. Wilcox, Editor, Review

C. H. Jones, Manager, Pacific Press

C. C. Crisler, 14 years her lead secretary

W. C. White, Assistant, 34 years.

Continuation of Board in Perpetuity

Appointment of the trustees was for life, Ellen White providing that “if a vacancy shall occur for any reason ...a majority of the surviving ...trustees are hereby empowered and directed to fill such vacancy by the appointment of some other fit person...”

After Death—The Chair of the EGW Estate Board was occupied by:

1915-1935 A. G. Daniells

1935-1936 J. E. Fulton

1936-1937 J. L. Shaw

1938-1944 F. M. Wilcox

1944-1951 M. E. Kern

1951 D. E. Rebok

1952-1963 A. V. Olson

1963-1966 F. D. Nichol

1966-1980	W. P. Bradley
1980-2008	Kenneth H. Wood
2008-2013	Don C. Schneider
2013-2022	G. T. Ng
2022-	Audrey E. Anderson

Current Board of Trustees in 2022:

Audrey E. Anderson, Chair
Edward E. Zinke, Vice Chair
Merlin D. Burt,* Secretary
Paul H. Douglas, Treasurer
Lisa Beardsley-Hardy
G. Alexander Bryant
Orathai Chureson
Abner De los Santos
Erton C. Kohler
Almir M. Marroni
G. T. Ng*
James R. Nix*
Kathryn L. Proffitt
Artur A. Stele
Ted N. C. Wilson*
*=Appointed for life

Accounting Records At the Time of Death in 1915

\$121,000 in assets
\$88,000 in liabilities

Probate Judge Appointed Appraisers

J. H. Steves, St. Helena, California hardware merchant
L. M. Bowen, St. Helena Sanitarium manager.
H. S. Davis, St. Helena, California businessman

Probate Appraiser's Values of the Estate's Assets

Literary properties
Book plates
Copyrights
Ellen G. White manuscripts
An arbitrary total value of \$40,000—much less than the liabilities.

THUS, FOR LEGAL PURPOSES THE ESTATE WAS A Baffling Matter: How to Meet the Bequests of the Will? The General Conference advanced money to meet outstanding obligations at 4% interest. Each of sons to whom 10% due relinquished their claim for a modest sum. The four to whom \$500 was due received their money from royalty payments later. Because the trust was “dry” the 5% available for educational scholarships was not carried out.

No Heir Benefits Today

Thus, no heir (person) of Ellen G. White benefits financially today from the fact that she was an author.

Obligations Finally Met

With the money advanced by the General Conference Corporation all financial obligations were promptly met and the estate closed. The property was sold to help provide funds. Because the royalty rate was reduced by 50% in 1918 and because the royalties were divided between the work of the White Estate and the debt reduction, it took until 1933 for the White Estate to repay the debt.

Today The Ellen G. White Estate is on a Stable Basis

The General Conference makes a regular appropriation for the Estate's work. No royalties are collected on the Ellen G. White books since 1911.

Ellen White's Legacy

So today the Ellen G. White Estate serves the Church well and would delight the heart of the woman who served God so tirelessly.

How Ellen White Used Income From Her Books:

In the education of teachers, ministers, and medical missionaries.

Support of home and foreign missions.

Building of churches, schools, colleges, & sanitariums.

Translating, typesetting, and illustration of her many books.

Care of her family.

Danger of Waiting Too Long

"Those who wait till death before they make a disposition of their property, surrender it to death rather than to God. In so doing, many are acting directly contrary to the plan of God plainly stated in His word." CS 325

Seize the Golden Moment

"If they would do good, they must seize the present golden moments, and labor with all their might, as if fearful that they may lose the favorable opportunity." CS 325

Counsel on Will Bequests

"We must acknowledge that our possessions are absolutely His, by using of them freely whenever means is needed to advance His cause." CS p. 324.

Worst Kind of Robbery

"Such excuse their covetousness by informing you that they have made arrangements to be charitable at death. They have considered the cause of God in their wills. Therefore they live a life of avarice, robbing God in tithes and in offerings, and in their wills return to God but a small portion of that which He has lent them, while a very large proportion is appropriated to relatives who have no interest in the truth. This is the worst kind of robbery. They rob God of His just dues, not only all through life, but also at death." CS 324, 325.

Lessons from Ellen White's Experience

She took time, sought counsel from family, professionals, and God in the preparation of her will. She was generous to family and God's work. She gave most before her death, so there was little to distribute in her will. She provided that broad aspects of God's work and her ministry would go on until Jesus' Return.

Greatness Comes From Serving

"Jesus made it so clear that greatness came not from being first, not from being the richest, the smartest, the most spiritual, or religious but from a willingness to serve others." Sabbath School Quarterly, June 16, 2003.

"All that he possessed, he invested in the ark." PP, p. 95.

"Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on...they shall rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them." Rev. 14:13 NIV.

Conclusion

"For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever! Amen." Romans 11:33-36 NIV