

Claude Adams McKinney

(February 20, 1873 – January 1, 1940)

Compiled by Richard J. McKinney, a great grandson

Claude Adams McKinney (also known as C.A. McKinney) was the only surviving child of Francis Melvin McKinney and Mary Teresa Adams McKinney. His father, who had worked for Standard Oil Company, had passed away in Florence, Colorado in 1892 when Claude was only 19 years old and had been attending Columbia University in New York City, but the company gave the young man a good position in Florence while his mother returned to their previous home in New York. While his parents were devout Christians in the Methodist Church and prayed fervently for his soul, according to his uncompleted auto-biography entitled "The Story of the Supernatural in My Life," it was only after his father had passed away that he had his own conversion experience. Claude was a very good tennis player, but before an important competition with a tennis player from back East, Claude decided, after much wrestling in his heart, that tennis and whatever glory he found in it, was of the world, and he had consecrated his life to Christ. So he gave it up and instead gradually began leading either open air or tent meetings to preach the gospel, sing songs, and see souls coming to the altar to get saved. At this time it was said that he asked God to be able to play the piano and play he did, by ear. During this part-time mission work he was introduced to Libbie Sawyer, who was a full-time captain in the Salvation Army doing similar work. Later he went to Colorado Springs where she had been arrested for preaching in the street outside a saloon. There was a great revival going on in that city and Libbie was an important part of it. Claude was so impressed that before he left Colorado City he was engaged to one, Elizabeth Ream Sawyer (1870-1950).

In 1895, hearing that his mother, Mary, was quite ill, Claude was granted leave from the Standard Oil Company to be with her in New York City. She recovered and was delighted to find her son so intent on doing mission work and that he was engaged to a "Salvationist." In New York City Claude attended a Christian and Missionary Alliance convention. The Alliance was a para-church organization that emphasized the "holiness experience" and missionary work, and it eventually became a Christian denomination. At the convention he met A.B. Simpson, the founder of the Alliance as well as William Macomber who asked Claude to consider going back with him to do mission work in the Belgian Congo. The Congo was the last place on earth that Claude wanted to go, but after much prayer Claude felt called to do just that and resigned from his secure employment at Standard Oil, which was something his father had told him never to do. However, his widowed mother said that when he was a small child and sick with scarlet fever and diphtheria, she and his father had made a covenant with God that if God would heal their son, then their son would belong to God for whatever purpose He called him to. She told him, "Go then. God will take care of you. He will help me I know and give me grace."

Claude then went into intensive training at the Alliance Bible School in New York City under men like A.B. Simpson and William Macomber, who taught him and his classmates the basic Fioti language of West Congo. It was the Alliance Mission Board's policy to have the men first learn the language in the field for about a year before their prospective brides were also sent and he had persuaded Libbie, apparently by mail, to join him in Africa. So in 1896 Claude and some 11 other males in his Congo Class missionary group, said goodbye to their families and friends set off on the White Star Line steamer to Antwerp, Belgium, and then after a few days they took another steamer, the Leopodville, to Boma, a river port city

in the Belgian Congo. The men then went into the interior of the Congo to set up various mission stations and learn the language better.

In the mean-time, Libbie Sawyer also attended Alliance Bible School while living with Claude's mother in Brooklyn, and after a rough voyage she arrived in Boma, Congo in July of 1897. There she and Claude were married on August 18, 1897. By then Libbie had already contracted typhoid fever and was shaking when they exchanged their vows. They journeyed to the interior where Claude had established a mission station and language studies was her first on her agenda. However, Libbie got pregnant right away and she was ill throughout her pregnancy. Harold Claude McKinney was born in the Belgian Congo on May 14, 1898.

In the spring of 1899, after three years of mission work in the Congo, Claude McKinney was due for a furlough, so they closed the mission station and journeyed on foot to the coast with a number of native men carrying their baggage on their heads and with Libbie and their one year old son, Harold, being carried in a hammock. They were delayed by a driving rain and almost missed catching the ship in Boma. Eventually, on June 5, 1899, they arrived back in New York City where Claude's mother and some friends were there to greet them. What they saw, however, was a pale, 135 pound man that had suffered through malaria and blackwater fever. Nonetheless, A.B. Simpson soon told him about an immediate opening for a pastor at a Christian and Missionary Alliance church in Akron, Ohio. After some prayer, Claude accepted this call and in early July, 1899 moved his entire family – wife, son, mother, and all his mother's furniture to Akron, Ohio.

Unfortunately for the McKinneys, the congregation he was supposed to pastor had a change of heart after seeing such a frail man and withdrew their offer. Undaunted, the McKinneys rented a hall on Main Street in Akron to sit some 200 and began playing music and singing songs until enough folks had gathered in the street to be invited to hear Claude preach about Jesus Christ crucified and his saving grace and love. The hall was also partitioned off for lodging accommodations, but after a year this facility became too small and so they rented an old hotel on North Howard Street as a mission to the poor. At the same time Rev. McKinney began pastoring a small church on East South Street. Around this time in 1904 Claude had a house built for he and his family at 2025 5th Street in Cuyahoga Falls just north of Akron. This house remained in McKinney family for over a hundred years and was a home base for the family's missionaries. It was finally sold in 2017 by Jim McKinney, one of Claude's grandsons.

In the year 1906, there was much talk about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at the Azusa Street Mission in Los Angeles, California. The Azusa Street revival was something like an almost non-stop praise and worship meeting with reports of healings, miracles and speaking in other tongues. Thousands of people, from all races, came from all over the world to see what was happening and often took back the Pentecostal message that the baptism in the Holy Spirit, as promised in the scriptures, was evidenced by speaking in other tongues and other phenomenon. It was said that Claude dearly wanted to go there but his wife, Libbie, told him, "If it is from the Lord, it will come here."

Come it did, as two sisters, the Campbell sisters, had recently returned from there and were asked to share at the East South Street Church. They simply gave their testimony and asked all who would like to receive the Holy Ghost to come forward. Claude's wife, Libbie, came forward that night and began to speak in other tongues, which some natives from Hawaii who were attending the service, said was in their own tongue. That seemed to seal it for Claude that this outpouring was of God and later that year month he also "received the Baptism" and began speaking in other tongues. Along with tongues there were

reports of healings and other miracles. However, not everyone welcomed these matters as those in the Methodist Holiness Movement, which had been part of Claude and Libbie's faith tradition, taught that the Baptism in the Spirit was a "holiness experience," after conversion, which led the recipients to desire to live a holy life and to no longer desire the things of this world.

Thus there came a division and in 1908 Claude McKinney resigned from the East South Street church to spend most of his time at the Gospel Mission on North Howard Street and also travel to various cities preaching the gospel. The mission was an outreach to the poor of Akron with various churches supporting it. Many homeless people were lodged, many meals served, and many souls were won for Christ. "No one was idle. Those who came for help and were without work were asked to compensate by helping with menial tasks until they found employment. "Many was the day that Mrs. McKinney stood over a hot stove cooking soup to provide food for the hungry" (from "Our Heritage: A History of the First Assembly of God in Akron, Ohio" by Nellie Sparlin, 1965).

A church building of cement block was erected in 1918 and in 1926 the congregation purchased an existing church building on Cedar Street and renamed it as the North Hill Pentecostal Church which became affiliated with the national Assembly of God Church. Various other Pentecostal churches began to form in the Akron area with C.A. McKinney's help and encouragement. C.A. and Libbie's church also supported a number of missionaries including two of the McKinney children. Missionary work had also been at the forefront of Libbie McKinney's prayers.

In 1930 C.A. McKinney felt called to pastor an Assembly of God Church in Battle Creek, Michigan while his son, Rev. Harold McKinney, Sr. became the interim pastor in Akron until Claude returned in 1932. Later, his son Harold wrote that in the 1930's his father's ministry in Akron became the best years of his life with many souls being saved and baptized in the Spirit. Sick bodies were healed, and people came from all over the city. His father had a radio ministry in which he sang songs and this attracted more folks to the regular Sunday service and there was a men's adult Sunday School class of 300 men that Claude taught. He also journeyed to California and played the piano and sang on mission with Aimee Semple McPherson, one of the most famous American evangelists of her day. None the less, on January 1, 1940, Claude Adams McKinney passed away at the age of 66. He and his wife, Elizabeth, are both buried at in the Oakwood Cemetery in Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio.

Claude and Elizabeth McKinney had eight children – four boys and four girls. Harold was the oldest boy followed by Francis, Joseph and Marvin. Grace was the oldest girl, followed by Faith, Hope and Mary Love. Grace married Harry Wright and they became missionaries to Africa. Francis married Laura Allison and they became missionaries to Mali in West Africa. Faith married a Mr. Scott, a businessman in from Western New York and Libbie lived with them during the last few years of her life. Hope married Gordon Atter, who was a Pentecostal pastor and historian from Ontario, Canada. Mary Love married Bill Reynolds, a Cleveland businessman whose financial support was very important to his wife's siblings who were missionaries. Marvin went to West Point and became a colonel in the U.S. Army and he married a Catholic girl. Joseph went to the Naval Academy and he commanded the U.S.S. Marshall during World War II and later became a rear admiral who commanded the Naval Amphibious Warfare School in Coronado, California. He married Mary Mae Maude (Mims), a Catholic widow with two daughters whom he adopted. One of them, Shelia McKinney, married James Watkins who also became an Admiral, head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Secretary of the U.S. Department of Energy during the Reagan and Bush administrations.