

Arnold, David

(1805–1889)

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David Arnold grave marker. Credit: Shared by Anne Cady at *Find A Grave* (findagrave.com).

David Arnold¹ was a carpenter² who accepted the Millerite message and became a stalwart early supporter of James White (1821-1881), Ellen White (1827-1915), and Joseph Bates (1792-1872). At the Arnold home there was a pivotal 1848 gathering of the nascent Sabbatarian Adventist movement. He was ordained as a local church elder and functioned as a “local preacher” who became the first president of the New York and Pennsylvania Conference (1862-1863).

Early Life and Marriage

David Arnold was born November 10, 1805, in Lenox, Massachusetts.³ At age 11 he moved with his parents to New York state where he remained for the rest of his life. At age 16 he joined the Methodist Episcopal Church.⁴ He became a Millerite who experienced the Great Disappointment of 1844, and subsequently accepted the seventh-day Sabbath. He was one who made “many sacrifices for the furtherance of the message.”⁵

On May 29, 1825, David married Lucretia “Lydia” Susestice née Root (1812-1899). They had three daughters: Julia (b. 1834 [lived at least until 1850]), Martha (b. 1844 [lived until at least 1865]), and Louisa (b. 1855 [lived until at least 1889]). The two oldest preceded their parents in death. The youngest, Louisa, was adopted.⁶ It has been suggested that Julia and Martha likewise were adopted, but definite evidence for this is lacking. At the time of David Arnold’s death (1889), Louisa was still living.

Around 1849, due to Lydia's illness, Maria C. Stowell (1829-1913) moved into the Arnold home to assist the family.⁷ The 1855 New York census lists "Maria C. Stowell" as living with them as a "servant."⁸ When James and Ellen White moved west to Battle Creek (1855) to re-establish the Review and Herald there, the Arnolds took in Amanda Westcott (1829-1870), from Rochester, who lived with them until her death in 1870.⁹ The Arnolds, despite personal tragedy, continued to care for others who were in want and needed employment. They lived on a prosperous, albeit somewhat modest, farm as compared to their neighbors. The 1860 U.S. Census shows that they owned a 16-acre farm worth \$1,000 along with a horse and dairy cow.¹⁰

1848 Sabbatarian Adventist Meeting

The first Sabbatarian Adventist Conference, held at Volney, New York, took place in the Arnold barn (sometimes described as a "carriage house") from August 18-20, 1848.¹¹ It is generally considered the third among the earliest Sabbath and Sanctuary conferences as a unique understanding of Sabbatarian Adventist theology began to coalesce during the late 1840s.¹² Hiram Edson (1806-1882) organized the conference.¹³ An earlier conference had been held in Bristol, Connecticut, at the home of Albert Belden (1800-1893) in April, followed by a second one that June. At the Volney conference hosted by Arnold, Joseph Bates shared his Sabbath convictions and James White and Hiram Edson presented their understandings of the sanctuary. The gathering was significant because it united those Sabbatarian Adventists from the east (Bates and the Whites) with those from the west (Edson and Arnold).¹⁴ A fourth conference would take place soon afterward (August 27-28, 1848), at Edson's home in Port Gibson. J. N. Loughborough (1832-1924) recalled being present at this meeting along with James and Ellen White.¹⁵ Joseph Bates, Hiram Edson, Ezra L. H. Chamberlain (1798-1855),¹⁶ and Heman Gurney (1818-1896)¹⁷ were also present. From New York, in addition to Edson and Arnold, there was the William Harris (1801-1873)¹⁸ family (Centerport), Ira (1817-1894) and Rhoda (1813-1895) Abbey (Brookfield), and Jesse Thompson (1795-1858) (Ballston Spa).¹⁹ James White described the gathering:

Friday P.M. the brethren came in to our meeting in Volney. There were thirty or forty who met with us. Brother Bates preached the Sabbath to them with strong argument, much boldness and power. My principal message was on the Matthew 25:1-11 [the ten virgins]. The brethren are strong on the Sabbath and the shut door. Almost all confessed that they had gained much strength from the meeting. Ellen had two visions at that meeting. She spoke to them with power to their comfort.²⁰

Arnold for his part had some rather unusual theological convictions. In an article that he published in the *Girdle of Truth*, Arnold wrote about how Michael stood up (Daniel 12:1) in October 1844 and that the 1260, 1290, and 1335-day prophecies were literal numbers.²¹ He also believed that "the thousand years of Revelation xx were in the past," a viewpoint inspired by recent editorials about the millennium in the *Bible Advocate*, a periodical Arnold had subscribed to since its inception in 1846.²² Also, he held "that the 144,000 were those raised at Christ's resurrection," and that the Lord's Supper should be only observed once a year as "a continuation of the

Passover.” These three “strange differences of opinion” created tension. As Arnold “spoke of the 1,000 years being in the past,” Ellen White “knew that he was in error.”²³ Yet she didn’t know how to refute these strange teachings. “Great grief pressed my spirit,” she wrote, “for it seemed to me that God was dishonored.”²⁴ She was told in vision to admonish those contentious elements and to unite around the third angel’s message of Revelation 14:9-12.²⁵

The intensity of such strife about “strange differences of opinion” ultimately caused Ellen White to faint.²⁶ At what was supposed to be the last meeting (on Sunday) of the conference in his barn, J. N. Loughborough recounted how they:

thought it would be helpful to have a communion service before parting, and the elements for the communion were brought in. Brother Arnold then arose and said, in a very emphatic manner, *“I have no faith in what you are about to do. The Lord’s Supper is a continuance of the Passover, to be observed but once a year, and that on the anniversary of the Passover. That time is in the spring of the year. This is fall. I FORBID YOUR HAVING THIS SERVICE IN MY HOUSE.”*

Sister White, being in feeble health, fainted under the shock of this sudden protest. Prayer was offered for her, and the Lord poured his blessing upon her, and restored her to consciousness, but the same blessing placed her in vision.²⁷

Alexander Ross later (1884), as quoted by Loughborough, recalled what happened next:

Sister White, while in vision, arose to her feet and took the family Bible upon her left hand. The book was of ordinary size. While holding it open high up, without looking toward it, with her right hand she would turn from text to text, and placing her finger on the scripture, would repeat the same. I looked at many of the texts to see if she was repeating the one to which she pointed. Some of the company looked at them all. In every case she not only repeated the text to which she pointed, but she did it while her eyes were looking upward and in an opposite direction from the Bible. It was these scriptures which she said repeated that overthrew the false theories of the Sabbath keepers met at Volney in 1848, and caused us to unite firmly on the truth.²⁸

What finally convinced Arnold that he was wrong were the biblical texts “As *oft* as ye drink it,” and “As *often* as ye eat.” These texts settled the question for him. It was reported: “They had a glorious communion service, Brother Arnold taking part with the rest.”²⁹ Thus despite the “discordant views” expressed, “our meeting ended victoriously,” wrote Ellen White. “Truth gained the victory.”³⁰ For his part, Arnold not only upheld Ellen White’s visions as inspired, but at times, he urged that belief in her writings be made a test of fellowship (as did Josiah Hart [1817-1858])—a position that James and Ellen White rejected and admonished them against holding.³¹

Publishing Catalyst

In response to appeals from the Whites for support to print the *Present Truth* and *Advent Review* (combined in 1850 as the *Second Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*), Arnold expressed his conviction that they should have a press of their own. He believed that they were engaged in “the great work that engages the attention of the heavenly host, and for the accomplishment of which the mighty arm of the Lord is especially stretched out.” In order to make this possible believers must make “a covenant by sacrifice.” He suggested three primary questions: “First, shall we have a press, workmen, and office of our own, or at our control? Second, where shall it be located? Third, how often shall the paper be issued?”³² He answered his own questions:

1. It appears to me that it would be pleasing to Him who “owns the cattle upon a thousand hills,” to have His truth published from a press, by hands, and through an office that could be brought to bow in strict obedience to the fourth commandment.
2. In reference to the location, a few considerations present themselves. It should be central, so that each extremity of the field of labor can be reached with as little delay and expense as possible. It should be ready of access to steam conveyances.
3. To me it appears that the requirement to “exhort one another and so much the more as we see the day approaching,” and the extended and extending demand for the present truth calls for a weekly issue of the paper.³³

The proposal resulted in relocating the fledgling work from Ballston Spa to Rochester, New York, in 1852. This was made possible through generous donations, notably from Hiram Edson, who with his wife Esther, personally raised funds to loan the Whites in order to purchase a Washington Hand Press.

Further Contributions

The Arnolds remained close friends of Hiram Edson. When Edson felt impressed to look for Samuel Rhodes (1810-1883), who had withdrawn from ministry, Ellen White, after initially discouraging such efforts, now found in vision that the Lord was in fact leading them. Edson made another trip, this time with Ralph Mack, and together they found Rhodes in the Adirondack mountains. On their way back they stopped first at the Arnold home to encourage and pray for him.³⁴ In November 1849 Ellen White had a vision warning about a “dividing spirit” in which she saw that both sides, of which Arnold was one, were wrong.³⁵ A significant formative aspect of the prophetic gift in Sabbatarian Adventism was simply helping early believers learn how to get along.

In the 1850s Arnold wrote a series of important articles on the evolving Sabbatarian Adventist theology. He was one of the earliest, if not the first, to apply the Laodicean message to the Sabbatarian Adventists themselves, connecting it with their need to spiritually wake up.³⁶ Their core identity, he believed, was centered around the “standard” or banner of those who patiently “keep the commandments of God” and “the faith of Jesus.”³⁷ He also

explored in detail the meaning of the shut door, the 2300 days ending in 1844, and Christ's priestly sanctuary ministry.

Arnold contended that the two legs of the image of Daniel 2 represented the eastern and western divisions of the Roman empire, and that the little horn of Daniel 7 was the civil power of Rome. In both cases, as L. E. Froom has observed, these were minority positions that differed from a wider Sabbatarian Adventist consensus.³⁸ Despite such heterodox views, Arnold affirmed the seventh-day Sabbath and adopted the position of Edson and Crosier about a sanctuary in heaven:

But what shall we understand by the cleansing of the antitypical sanctuary?

The Mosaic priesthood, sanctuary and services were all types or shadows, sanctuary and services; yet there is this difference between them. By reason of death the earthly had many priests, the heavenly but one; the earthly had many victims, the heavenly but one; the earthly sanctuary was cleansed at the end of every 364 days, the heavenly at the end of 2300 years . . . In the earthly, when the daily ministrations ceased, and the day of atonement came, the high priest prepared for the atonement, or cleansing, by shutting the door of the outer apartment [see Lev. xvi, 17,] and by putting on the holy garments, with the breast-place of judgment, and opening the door into the inner apartment or holy place, then proceeded to cleanse the sanctuary as recorded in the sixteenth chapter of Leviticus. So in the heavenly; when the daily ministrations for the world ceased, and the 2300 days, and time of the Gentiles ended, and the time to cleanse the heavenly sanctuary came, Christ Our High Priest prepared for the atonement, or blotting out of the sins of all Israel, and cleansing the sanctuary.³⁹

When the *Advent Review* began in 1850, Arnold was part of the publishing committee while it was in Auburn, New York. He continued to write articles affirming the validity of the Sabbatarian movement's prophetic beliefs.⁴⁰ In 1853 he contrasted modern spiritualism and the Fox sisters with Ellen White's ministry based upon "a more sure word of prophecy" (2 Peter 1:19).⁴¹ Early on (1855) Arnold was instrumental in articulating how the Old Testament system of ceremonial laws or ordinances that expired at the cross represented "all laws of a moral nature . . . ordained to last."⁴² He thus made an important distinction between the moral and ceremonial laws. The ceremonial law doesn't save, he wrote, explaining that just as Christians view the Lord's Supper as reflecting back on the atoning sacrifice of Christ, the Levitical system of sacrifices pointed forward to the Messiah's atoning death. By 1858 Arnold was part of a committee that oversaw the evangelistic tent in New York state. Over the subsequent year he was instrumental in the establishment of the Roosevelt, New York, church, where he served as a trustee.⁴³

Arnold was a consistent and stalwart financial contributor to the emerging Sabbatarian Adventist cause.⁴⁴ In 1855 he participated in a conference of Sabbatarian Adventist believers in Oswego, New York, in which he and Hiram Edson were selected as church elders and ordained.⁴⁵ A few months later Ellen White sent an admonishment stating that Arnold, after his ordination, had taken "an exalted position . . . that God had never assigned him."⁴⁶ In humility he made public confession about his wrong.⁴⁷ Also, that same year Arnold wrote an

important article offering biblical arguments, moving beyond the often cited Joel 2 and Acts 2, to articulate a theology defending the prophetic gift. Texts he used included Acts 9 and 10, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4, and Matthew 28:18-20, all of which he believed showcased the perpetuity of all spiritual gifts (including the gift of prophecy) and their manifestations in the “last days.”⁴⁸

At an 1862 conference in Roosevelt, New York, chaired by J. N. Andrews (1829-1883) with Arnold serving as secretary, the believers who gathered recognized that they must take “immediate action in the formation of a state conference” to help facilitate outreach efforts.⁴⁹ On October 25, 1862, the New York and Pennsylvania Conference was officially organized. David Arnold was chosen as the first president.⁵⁰ For effective organization of financial support for ministers, Arnold suggested that local churches collect their funds each week, utilizing “our new S. B. [Systematic Benevolence] blank books,” and then once a month forward pledges to the conference treasury for the support of ministers.⁵¹

In 1863, when the General Conference was organized, it was noted that Arnold purchased \$10 in shares in the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association that was organized only two years earlier.⁵² As the new president of the New York and Pennsylvania Conference, he was responsible for preparing and organizing the following year’s constituent gathering. In preparation for the second conference (1863), as a parliamentarian, he reminded congregations that they could only have one delegate per church for up to 15 members. For every 10 additional members they could have another delegate. When questions arose about whether James White was ethical in his business practices, Arnold testified that after 15 years of interactions he had “ever found in the character of the editor, persevering industry, frugal economy, business tact, sterling integrity, strict honesty, and a self-sacrificing devotion to the cause of present truth.”⁵³ A new president, Avery Lanphear (1815-1866), was elected at the 1863 conference session, bringing Arnold’s tenure as president to an end after one year.⁵⁴

In 1867, Arnold received a “license” from the New York and Pennsylvania Conference (as opposed to “ministerial credentials” issued for full-time ministers).⁵⁵ In 1872, 1873, and 1874 he was issued credentials.⁵⁶ Notably, in 1871, Arnold was listed as a “local preacher” as distinguished from “ministers” who traveled more widely.⁵⁷ The extant evidence suggests that he was ordained as a local church elder. He does not appear to have baptized anyone or officiated the Lord’s Supper.

As the denomination was developing a system of clergy as well as an organizational system, ministers were increasingly identified as those who had a wider spiritual role, officiated church ordinances, and publicly proclaimed the gospel.⁵⁸ Still, there were others such as Arnold who had a more regional influence and even provided conference leadership but who ultimately would be distinguished from ordained clergy. Early on it does not appear that administrative functions and accountability, such as serving as a conference president, were directly tied to being a fully ordained minister. During the 1870s the denomination was still developing its system of how to recognize and credential church leaders. Arnold’s influence tended to center on western New York and Pennsylvania as he worked with a pastoral heart to build up local congregations, visiting members,

settling differences, and preaching the Word. These functions continued, as his health allowed, into his golden years.

By 1880, Louisa, who in 1879 married James H. Bishop (1840-pre-1900), was living with her parents.⁵⁹ James presumably was helping to run the farm while Arnold traveled around for ministry. David Arnold died June 11, 1889, in Volney, New York.⁶⁰ Lucretia died November 23, 1899.⁶¹ Both are buried in Mount Pleasant NorthSide Cemetery.⁶²

Legacy

As early as 1896, the 1848 Sabbath and Sanctuary Conference held in Arnold's barn was recognized as one of the significant dates in the development of Seventh-day Adventism.⁶³ His continued stable leadership of the church's work in New York state earned him the designation by Arthur W. Spalding as one of Adventism's "bright shining lights."⁶⁴ Although Arnold initially held some rather unusual theological convictions, he early on adopted and supported the emerging Sabbatarian Adventist consensus, contributing a number of early pivotal articles explaining the shut door, orienting the movement's theology (especially about the validity of visions and applying the message of Laodicea), and also explaining the difference between the ceremonial versus moral law. Although his stances were at times heterodox, he remained committed to work with his brothers and sisters, and demonstrated loyalty and repentance when admonished by the prophetic voice of Ellen White.

In the 20th century the site of Arnold's barn was recognized as a significant Adventist heritage site. Spalding included it in his list of historic sites, and others through the 20th century have continued to note it.⁶⁵ By 2020 the barn was gone, and the home, built after the 1848 conference, was abandoned. The only thing marking the site is a historical marker describing how an important "Adventist Meeting" had once taken place at that location. The local historical society added that the "slow demise" of the barn marked "the faded remnants of a moment in history."⁶⁶ Unfortunately no photograph appears to exist of the Arnolds. In 1943, L. E. Froom issued a call for photographs of early Adventist pioneers specifically hoping to find a photograph of the Arnolds, apparently without any success.⁶⁷

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NOTES

1. Special thanks to Kevin Morgan for input on this article.

2. Census records consistently list his occupation as a carpenter.
3. For detailed genealogical records, see: Ancestry.com, <https://www.ancestry.com/invite-ui/accept?token=F7NBWxtl4-b7WmK6VfcU4ncZsBUyaJOf320KDuUxYHM=>
4. A.E. Place, "David Arnold obituary," *ARH*, July 23, 1889, 479.
5. Ibid.
6. Louisa's brother, Jerome Prosper, was living with her in 1900, see US Census, Volney, New York, at FamilySearch, accessed December 11, 2023, <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MSLZ-D2S>. Their birthparents were Guemon J. Prosper and Sarah Prosper née Graves.
7. Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White: The Early Years: 1827-1862* (vol. 1) (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1985), 224; Marion C. Stowell Crawford to Ellen G. White, October 9, 1908, at <https://ellenwhite.org/correspondence/236643>. At the time James and Ellen took her to Saratoga Springs, in February 1852, she says that she had been at Arnolds' for two and a half years. See also Sarah Belden to Polly D. Lawrence, July 29, 1850, <https://ellenwhite.org/correspondence/261019> where she mentions that Sarah was living with the Arnolds.
8. New York State Archives, Albany, NY, USA; Census of the state of New York, 1855, accessed September 17, 2023, Ancestry.com.
9. D[avid] and L[ucy] K. Arnold, "Amanda Westcott obituary," *ARH*, March 7, 1871, 95; 1870 United States Federal Census, accessed September 17, 2023, Ancestry.com; New York State 1865 Census, Volney, *FamilySearch*, accessed December 11, 2023, <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:QVNJ-XCCV>.
10. U.S. Selected Federal Census Non-Population Schedules, 1850-1880, 1860 Oswego, New York.
11. One early description describes it as an "important meeting" that was held in David Arnold's barn. See "Historical Data of Denominational Work," *The Home Missionary*, May 1896, 114.
12. Jerry Moon, "Wrestling Till Dawn: Close Bible Study and Fervent Prayer Launched This Movement," *ARH*, July 9, 1998, 12-14. Moon identified a second conference that took place soon after the one in Middletown in nearby Bristol, Connecticut, in June 1848 (see James White to Dear Brother, July 2, 1848, where he twice calls this the "Bristol Conference.") Previously Adventist historians such as Arthur L. White and George R. Knight placed the Arnold conference as the second such conference until Moon identified an interim gathering that took place between the one in Middletown and the one at the Arnold residence. For point of comparison, see Arthur L. White, "Why Seventh-day Adventists Have No Creed," *ARH*, July 12, 1984, 6-8; George R. Knight, *A Brief History of Seventh-day Adventists*, 3rd ed. (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2012), 53.
13. James White to "My Dear Brother," July 2, 1848, Ellen G. White Estate; for information on Edson see Brian E. Strayer, "Edson, Hiram (1806-1882)," *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists*, October 17, 2022, accessed December 11, 2023,

<https://encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=BJIN>.

14. A. W. Spalding, *Captains of the Host: First Volume of a History of Seventh-day Adventists Covering the Years 1845-1900* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1949), 176-177.
15. "Recollections of the Past," *ARH*, March 3, 1885, 137-138.
16. Brian E. Strayer, "Chamberlain, Ezra L. H. (1798–1855)," *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists*, January 29, 2020, accessed December 11, 2023, <https://encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=E93X>.
17. Michael W. Campbell, "Gurney, Heman Stetson (1818–1896) and Anne 'Eliza' Elizabeth (Randall) (1831–1921)," *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists*, October 3, 2022, accessed December 11, 2023, <https://encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=B9E9>.
18. E.S. Lane, "Wm. Harris obituary," *ARH*, April 22, 1873, 151; Wm. Harris, "From Bro. Harris," [August 30, 1857] *ARH*, September 10, 1857, 151. In this latter source William Harris states that he accepted the First Angel's [Millerite] Message in 1842, and then in 1847 learned about the seventh-day Sabbath from someone who stayed overnight in their home and told them that they were keeping the Pope's Sabbath. This prompted them to study the Bible and the next week begin to observe the seventh-day Sabbath.
19. Arthur W. Spalding, *Footprints of the Pioneers* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1947), 109-110. The Pettis family may have also been participants. See David Pettis, "'Review' Reader Seventy Years," *ARH*, August 15, 1929, 29.
20. James White to Leonard and Elvira Hastings, August 26, 1848, cited in Arthur L. White, Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White: The Early Years* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1985), 140.
21. David Arnold, "Letter from Bro. Arnold," *Girdle of Truth, and Advent Review*, August 14, 1848, 52-54, American Antiquarian Society.
22. David Arnold, "Letter to the editor." *Bible Advocate*, June 24, 1847.
23. Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts* (Battle Creek, MI: James White, 1860), 2: 97, 98.
24. *Ibid.*, 98.
25. James White to Brother and Sister Hastings, April 27, 1848, Ellen G. White Estate.
26. E.G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, 2:98.
27. J. N. Loughborough, "Communion Service—No. 2," *The Church officers' Gazette*, February 1917, 1.
28. *Ibid.*, 1-2.

29. Ibid., 2.
30. E.G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, 2: 99.
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33. Ibid.
34. Hiram Edson, "Beloved Brethren, Scattered Abroad," *Present Truth*, December 1849, 34-36.]
35. James White to SH, November 13, 1849, James White to Lenoard & Elvira Hastings, January 3, 1850; E.G. White, *Spiritual Gifts* 2:120.
36. David Arnold, "The Standard," *ARH*, March 1851, 50-51.
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39. David Arnold, "Daniel's Visions, the 2300 Days, and the Shut Door," *Present Truth*, March 1850, 59-63.
40. "Advent Experience—No. 7," *ARH*, March 24, 1885, 185.
41. David Arnold, "Rapology Explained," *ARH*, July 21, 1853, 34-37.
42. David Arnold, "The Oneness of the Church and the Means of God's Appointment for its Purification and Unity," *ARH*, June 26, 1855, 250.
43. F. Wheeler and H. Edson, "New York Tent," *ARH*, March 11, 1858, 133.
44. "Receipts," *ARH*, August 5, 1852, 56.
45. J. N. Loughborough, "Oswego Conference," *ARH*, December 27, 1855, 101.
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47. David Arnold, "From Bro. Arnold," *ARH*, April 23, 1857, 199.

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50. M. Ellsworth Olsen, *A History of the Origin and Progress of Seventh-day Adventists*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1926), 280.
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53. *Vindication of the Business Career of Elder James White* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press of the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1863), 33.
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