

Ward, Henry Dana

(1797–1884)

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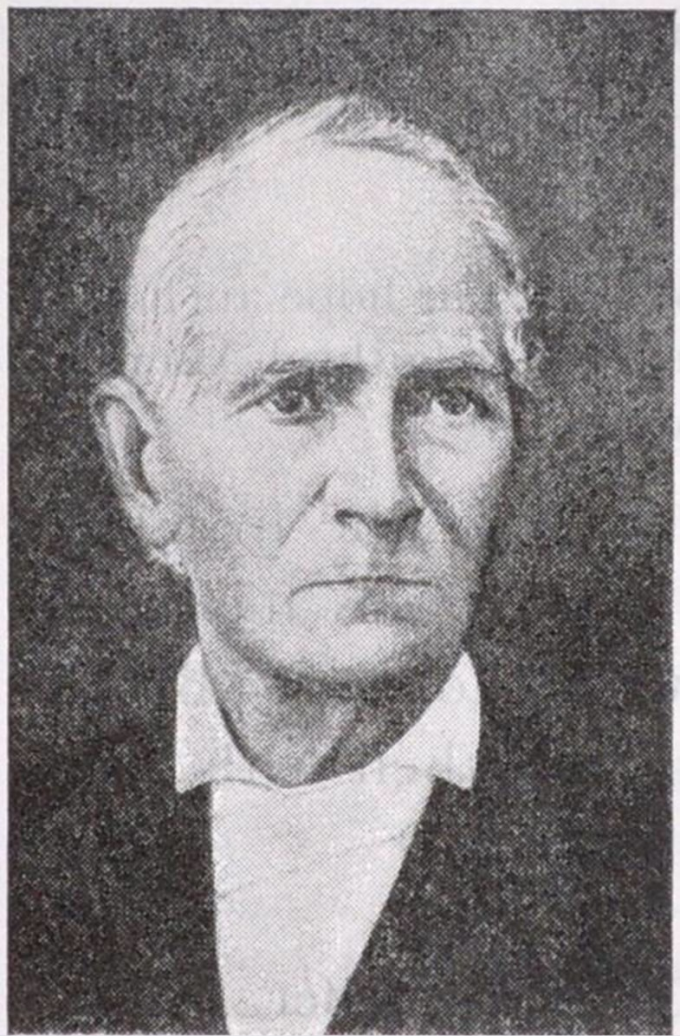
Henry Dana Ward, a Harvard-educated Episcopalian clergyman, authored numerous works on biblical prophecy and became a leading figure in the Millerite movement.

Early Life

Henry was born in Shrewsbury, Massachusetts on January 13, 1797 to Thomas and Elizabeth Ward (1758-1835; 1760-1846), the seventh of their nine children.¹ The Ward family was part of the rural elite of Massachusetts, living in “very respectable” homes and farming hundreds of acres.² In the American Revolution, Henry’s grandfather, Artemas Ward (1727-1800) was appointed major general in the Continental Army, second only to General George Washington, and placed in command of the siege of Boston in July 1775. He was elected speaker of the Massachusetts House of Representatives in 1786 and served two terms in the United States Congress (1791-1795).³ Henry’s father, Thomas Ward, was appointed Sheriff of Worcester County in 1805—a post he held until 1824.⁴

By seventeen, Henry Dana Ward was off for Harvard where he studied to become a clergyman, graduating with a B.A. in 1816 and an M.A. three years later. He did some teaching, and then became a minister of the Episcopal Church.⁵

Ward had a brief stint in Freemasonry in the 1820s. But he left soon after initiating and published a book renouncing the fraternity in 1828. This work, coupled with other publications, made him an influential figure in



Henry Dana Ward

From the digitized edition of Le Roy Edwin Froom, *Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, Vol 4 (Review and Herald, 1954), p. 570 at egwwritings.org.

the Anti-Masonic movement then gaining traction.⁶

In 1833 Ward married Abigail Porter in New York City, but her death just four years later brought their union to a premature end.⁷

Involvement with Millerism (1833-1842)

On November 15, 1833 Ward published an article in the *Journal of Commerce* entitled "The Falling Stars," in which he maintained that the meteor storm that had astonished the nation two days before was a sign of the soon return of Christ (see Matthew 24:29).⁸ Following its publication, Ward embarked on a deep study of the biblical prophecies. He came to conclusions concerning the soon return of Christ -- published in an 1838 essay entitled *Glad Tidings* -- that bore a striking similarity to what William Miller was preaching, even though the two had not been in contact.⁹ The Second Advent movement gained momentum as Ward and other clerics such as Henry Jones, Josiah Litch, Charles Fitch, and Joshua V. Himes joined Miller in devoting their voices and pens to advancing the message.

A series of general conferences were of central importance in energizing and coordinating the movement. Ward was called upon to chair the first of these, convened October 14, 1840, at the Chardon Street Chapel in Boston.¹⁰ During the conference, Ward delivered an address, published under the title *History and Doctrine of the Millennium*, that garnered strong approval from the conference and was widely disseminated.¹¹

In this work, Ward presented a rationale for the Millerite belief in an imminent premillennial second advent in contrast to the widespread consensus among American Protestants on postmillennialism, which relegated the advent to a distant future, after the millennium. He characterized the Second Advent movement as the culmination of a faithful lineage that extended back to Adam, Abraham, David, Daniel, and Paul and down to reformers such as Luther and Melancthon. Ward thus gave Millerites an identity that transcended American national boundaries, and indeed, all the boundaries of nation, race, culture, language, and religion. He believed that the purpose of the movement was "to revive this apostolic doctrine, and to review the faith of the gospel after the image of primitive Christianity."¹²

Ward held that the kingdom of God was not the church; it was the "world to come."¹³ As early as 1838 he argued that the prophetic messages of Daniel clearly showed that "the kingdom of heaven" would come "from heaven with its king," and would rule "over all the earth for ever and ever;" and it was "yet to come." In this historical-prophetic timeframe, the 2300-days of Daniel 8:14 were to be understood as years, and would culminate in the near future. At that time, he believed, the stone "from on high," depicted in Daniel 2, would smite "the image" representing a succession of earthly empires and destroy it "altogether, so that no more place is found for any particle of it." He repeatedly emphasized that a millennium of peace did not fit in the equation "until after the Ancient of days comes to judgment; until after the little horn ceases to make war with the saints, and to prevail" (Daniel 7). The arrival of the kingdom would only occur after Christ finished his ministry as priest in heaven,

which Ward saw as distinct from Christ's roles as prophet and king.¹⁴

While the general conferences accomplished much toward harmony and concerted action in the Second Advent movement, there was disagreement regarding date-setting. Ward, along with others such as Henry Jones, opposed attempts to reckon a specific date for the return of Christ. In December 1841, Ward argued in the *Signs of the Times* that God "did not intend" that the time be made known, "and for this cause He 'hath put' them 'in His own power,' that men may be constantly on the watch, and never at liberty to say, 'The Lord will not come this day, this year, these thousand years, but He will come at such a time.'"¹⁵

Yet, he contended that both postmillennialists and premillennialists had succumbed to the same error: "Those who limit the times to two years, are no more transgressors for this, than those who extend them to a thousand or more." Both were "dealers in prophetic times, but the larger class on much the larger scale." Thus, Ward declared that although he disagreed with any kind of date-setting, in the name of "fair play" he would still "defend a small minority for taking the liberty which the great majority freely use, to discuss and predetermine the times."¹⁶

At first, Ward's irenic outlook enabled him to take leadership roles in the movement despite the disagreement.¹⁷ But, the Boston general conference of May 1842 marked a turning point after which the "time element" became an increasing point of focus. The conference passed a resolution declaring that "God has revealed the time for the end of the world and that time is 1843" and this claim needed greater emphasis than ever in view of "the shortness of the time we have to work." After the conference, Ward's involvement with Millerism gradually faded.¹⁸

Later Life

The same month that the Boston general conference took place, Ward married Charlotte Galbriath (1808-1887), an Irish woman from Dublin.¹⁹ From 1843 to 1851 four children were born to the couple. In 1845, Ward became minister of the Episcopal Church in Charleston, Virginia (later West Virginia). Here he remained for four years until accepting the rectorship of St. Jude's Free Church in New York in 1849.²⁰ The *New York Tribune* welcomed the changes he made, adding that "the discourses of the learned and pious Rector are instructive and improving."²¹

Ward evidently kept up the study of prophecy to some extent. In 1878, for example, Ward, by then residing in Philadelphia, joined the many prominent clergy assembled at the Church of the Holy Trinity in New York for a "Prophetic Conference." Josiah Litch also attended but neither he nor Ward had a part in the public discussions.²²

On February 28, 1884, 87-year-old Henry Dana Ward was walking the streets of Philadelphia when he was stricken with paralysis and fell to the ground. He was taken to his home where he died the next day. Interment

occurred on March 4 in his native town of Shrewsbury, Massachusetts.²³

Contribution

Henry Dana Ward contributed scholarly depth to the Second Advent movement and, as chair of its first general conference, helped make it cohesive. As M. E. Olsen observed in his history of Seventh-day Adventism, the fact that Ward and others prominent in the movement “co-operated so heartily with Mr. Miller” despite their opposition to preaching a specific year for the return of Christ “is eloquent testimony to the Christian charity and broad-mindedness of both parties, as well as to the unifying and consolidating influence of the belief in Christ’s soon coming.”²⁴

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17. *Ibid.*, 125.
18. Knight, *Millennial Fever*, 128-129.

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