

# Hewitt, David

## (1805–1878)

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### SAMUEL GOMIDE

Samuel Gomide is a freshman in high school, and currently lives in Maine. He has twice lived in the north of Brazil where his father taught systematic theology at the Adventist seminary.

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David Hewitt, the first Sabbatarian Adventist convert in Battle Creek, Michigan, became a prominent figure in the early development of Seventh-day Adventism in that city.

Born March 14, 1805, to Amos and Nancy Hewitt (1776-1843; 1777-1852) in New London, Connecticut, David Hewitt became a merchant in Byron, New York. There he married Olive Hewitt (1809-1876), a cousin from Lewiston, New York, on April 24, 1831. They had four children, Herbert (1833), Phebe (1835), Olive (1838), and Henry (1841).<sup>1</sup> The Hewitts moved to Michigan around 1840. A letter sent to David and Olive Hewitt from James Hewitt, Olive's brother, in 1841 was addressed to Climax Prairie, a village between Battle Creek and Kalamazoo.<sup>2</sup> Eventually they settled in Battle Creek, where Hewitt made his living as a peddler.<sup>3</sup>

According to J. N. Loughborough's account, it was a strong impression from a dream that prompted Adventist pioneer Joseph Bates to change his travel plans and go to Battle Creek in 1852, when no Adventists were known to live there. Upon his inquiry, the postmaster told Bates that David Hewitt was the most honest man in town. Going to the Hewitt home early in the morning, Bates gave a day-long study on the Sabbath. The Hewitts accepted it, and soon some of their neighbors did so as well.<sup>4</sup>

The small band of believers found a place to meet in the Hewitt home. It was there, in 1853, that James and Ellen White, along with Loughborough, met with believers in their first visit to Battle Creek. The arrival of workers from the Review and Herald publishing office after its move from Rochester, New York, to Battle Creek in the fall of 1855 overcrowded the Hewitt's front room. A small cabin, 18 x 28 feet was built nearby for a meeting-place.<sup>5</sup>



David Hewitt

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The Hewitts, who were Presbyterians prior to their contact with Bates, were among the earliest converts to Sabbatarian Adventism who had not been part of the Millerite movement. Until 1852, Sabbatarian Adventists had largely understood their mission to be confined to reaching other Millerite Adventists with the truth concerning the seventh-day Sabbath. The fact that the Hewitts readily accepted the “third angel’s message” without previous connection with the Advent movement contributed to a shift on the part of Sabbatarian Adventists toward a broader conception of their evangelistic mission.<sup>6</sup>

David Hewitt made diverse contributions to the early development of the church in Michigan. Soon after the move of the Review publishing office to Battle Creek, he was appointed to a committee charged with investigating the financial condition of the publishing enterprise.<sup>7</sup> He witnessed to his faith in surrounding towns, and wrote several articles for the *Review and Herald* in which he expressed interest in the welfare of his fellow church members. In one article Hewitt warned against harmful medicines that were being used at the time, stating that “his spirit felt stirred in him, when he saw so many believers using deadly things.”<sup>8</sup> At a conference in Battle Creek in 1860 that addressed the subject of organizing as a denomination, it was David Hewitt who introduced a resolution proposing that “we take the name of Seventh-day Adventists.”<sup>9</sup>

Olive Hewitt, who graciously welcomed fellow believers into her home over the years also, due to her deafness, relied on others to help her benefit from church services. Her church sisters would write out portions of the sermons and testimonies for her. She would then read them over several times to herself and her husband. After a short illness that caused her “intense suffering,” she died November 18, 1876, at the age of 67.<sup>10</sup>

David Hewitt died just over a year later, in early 1878.<sup>11</sup> He was a key figure in the early development of the Seventh-day Adventist church, aiding its expansion west and its organization, particularly in proposing the name it adopted. Furthermore, he played an integral part in founding the Adventist church in Battle Creek, which became the headquarters of the denomination until 1903.

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## SOURCES

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Hewitt, David. “Faith and Medicine.” *ARH*, October 9, 1856.

Hewitt Family Ledger. Gary Young family collection, Scottsdale, Arizona.

Hewitt, James. James Hewitt to David and Olive Hewitt. September 22, 1841. Private letter. Gary Young family collection, Scottsdale, Arizona.

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Loughborough, J. N. "Battle Creek." *ARH*, November 7, 1878.

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## NOTES

1. Hewitt Family Ledger, Gary Young family collection, Scottsdale, Arizona; Fred Q. Bowman, *10,000 Vital Records of Western New York, 1809-1850* (Baltimore, MD: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1985), 109, accessed June 13, 2019, <http://ancestry.com> (this source gives the spelling "Hewett").
2. James Hewitt to David and Olive Hewitt, September 22, 1841, Gary Young family collection.
3. C.W. Stone, "Olive Hewitt obituary," *ARH*, November 30, 1876, 175; 1850 United States census, Calhoun County, Michigan, roll M432\_348, page 54a, digital image, "Hewitt, David," [ancestry.com](http://ancestry.com), accessed June 12, 2019, <http://ancestry.com>.
4. J.N. Loughborough, "The Second Advent Experience — No. 7," *ARH*, July 26, 1923, 5. Bates baptized David Hewitt at a meeting in Jackson, Michigan in August 1852 (Joseph Bates, "Jackson, Mich. Conference," *ARH*, September 2, 1852, 69). Loughborough gives 1851 as the date of the Bates-Hewitt encounter but other historians place the experience in 1852: see, for example, Arthur Whitefield Spalding, *Origin and History of Seventh-day Adventists*, Vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.; Review and Herald, 1961), 254-257; George R. Knight, *Joseph Bates: The Real Founder of Seventh-day Adventism* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2004), 132.
5. Loughborough, 5.
6. Knight, 132-133; Richard Schwarz and Floyd Greenleaf, *Light Bearers: A History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Department of Education, 2000), 76-77.

7. Henry Lyon, David Hewitt and Wm. M. Smith, "Report of the committee chosen to investigate the financial condition of the Review Office," *ARH*, December 18, 1855, 96.
  8. David Hewitt, "Faith and Medicine," *ARH*, October 9, 1856, 183.
  9. "Business Proceedings of B.C. Conference (concluded)," *ARH*, October 23, 1860, 179. Hewitt's resolution was withdrawn in favor of a new one modified to state that "we call ourselves Seventh-day Adventists," which passed after a "lengthy discussion."
  10. Stone, "Olive Hewitt obituary."
  11. "Death of David Hewitt," *Battle Creek Daily Journal*, February 6, 1878, 4.
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