



George Holt, a member of *The Advent Review* publishing committee. Shared by Douglas Morgan.

Holt, George W. (1812–1877)

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George W. Holt was an early Adventist preacher and a farmer. Active in the 1850s, he helped pioneer Sabbatarian Adventism in Canada, New England, New York and Ohio.

Early Life and Marriage (1812-1834)

Holt was born in Abington, Connecticut, on April 18, 1812. He was the third of eight children born to Oliver Holt (1772-1821) and Sidney Clapp Holt (1774-1837).¹ Oliver Holt died when George was 9, on November 14, 1821.² On May 31, 1833, at 21, George Holt married Elizabeth West (1815-?), a native of New York.³ They had 11 children, though only five would outlive their father.⁴

Early Ministry (1835-1850)

Holt played a minor role in the Millerite movement as a “public laborer” in New England.⁵ In the summer of 1844, he met Stephen Belden, later brother-in-law to Ellen White. From 1844-1848, the Holt family lived in a house owned by the Beldens in Rocky Hill, Connecticut.⁶ After October 23, 1844, George Holt was one of the first Adventists to accept the seventh-day Sabbath. This marked a turning point in his theology, leading him to focus on “the commandments of God, and not on [the] *time*” of Christ’s Second Advent.⁷

In July 1848, George Holt and John Belden helped James White mow 100 acres of hay—at \$0.87 an acre. Mowing with hand scythes, the aim was to “get a few dollars here to use in the cause of God.”⁸ By 1850, Holt had moved his family to Oswego County, New York. During the week, he farmed; on weekends, he preached throughout New York.⁹

Sabbatarian Adventism (1850-1857)

In the spring of 1850, Holt lectured in Canada West and East (now Ontario and southern Quebec, respectively). In Ameliasburgh, he preached “on the necessity of keeping the commandments.” Returning to New York, Holt recruited Hiram Edson to join him in Canada. The two men returned to Ameliasburgh with books and papers for the new converts.¹⁰ A few weeks later, Hiram Edson returned to Canada with Joseph Bates, bringing more books and pamphlets.¹¹

In the summer of 1850, Holt joined the publishing committee of the *Advent Review*, published in Auburn, New York. Along with Holt, the committee included David Arnold, Hiram Edson, Samuel Rhodes, and James White.¹² In November 1850, the periodical was merged with the *Present Truth* to form *Second Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, the flagship Adventist paper.¹³

In January 1851, Holt travelled for three weeks with Hiram Edson. After returning to Oswego, Holt reported that several “precious souls” had accepted the Adventist message.¹⁴ In February, Holt preached throughout New York, from West Wilton to Halfmoon.¹⁵ In March, controversy was stirred up surrounding Holt’s visit to Ballston, New York. H. H. Gross wrote in the *Advent Herald*, the leading “first day” Adventist paper, that “a deceiver has passed this way of late, by the name of—Holt, of Auburn.” Jesse Thompson, a Sabbatarian Adventist, refuted Gross’s harangue, noting that Holt lived in Oswego, not Auburn. “I am also personally acquainted with Bro. Holt, and his faithful labors, and know him to be a humble, devoted servant of God. Would to God that I could say as much of Bro. Gross,” Thompson wrote.¹⁶

In June 1851, Holt attended conferences in Camden and West Wilton, New York.¹⁷ After West Wilton, Holt travelled to Vermont, where he baptized several believers. He also took part in the ordination of Washington Morse “to the administration of the ordinances of God’s house.”¹⁸

In September, a “general conference”¹⁹ was held in Sutton, Vermont. George Holt, James White, and John Andrews were the expected speakers.²⁰ After Sutton, Holt travelled to a conference at his hometown of Oswego, which was a success. Attendees reported that “this was like Second Advent meetings in 1843 and 1844.” Holt spoke on “the commandments and law of God in the New Testament.” His preaching was reportedly “very clear, spirited, and convincing.”²¹

In October 1851, rumors circulated that Holt was a “spiritualizer,” meaning that he had adopted the view that Christ had in some sense come spiritually on October 22, 1844.²² Stephen Belden came to the rescue, writing that he had “been personally acquainted with Bro. Holt since the summer of 1844.”²³ Holt ignored the rumors and continued travelling. In Boston, he preached “with his usual clearness and energy.”²⁴ He also attended a conference held at Washington Morse’s home in Bethel, Vermont. James and Ellen White were present, as well as Frederick Wheeler. According to James White, the meeting was of singular importance in uniting the Adventists in Vermont.²⁵

In December 1851, John C. Day wrote that Holt’s arrival in Winchester, Massachusetts was like “the coming of Titus to his brethren.”²⁶ That same month, Holt published a front-page article in the *Review*, summarizing his outlook on the relationship between God’s law and the heavenly sanctuary.²⁷ In January 1852, James White and George Holt coauthored an article rebuking the tendency of interpreting personal dreams as divine revelations. “We exhort the scattered brethren to take the Word as the only rule of faith and duty,” they wrote.²⁸

In late January, Holt travelled to Dorchester, Massachusetts, reporting that “the Lord is at work.”²⁹ From Dorchester, Holt went to Topsham, Maine. On January 30, he attended a conference at Stockbridge Howland’s home. “I can say of a truth, it was one of the best meetings of the kind that I ever attended,” he reported.³⁰

After conferences in East Boston, Leverett, and Ashfield, Massachusetts, in February 1852,³¹ Holt moved on to Ballston, New York, where a conference was held on March 12-15 at the home of Jesse Thompson. At this gathering Holt was chosen to travel, with a fellow minister yet to be determined, throughout New York state and Canada West to conduct small conferences intended particularly to build up the faith of recent converts.³² One week later, Holt published a mammoth article in the *Review*, explaining why he disagreed with William Miller’s views on premillennialism, particularly Miller’s teaching that after the earth has been purified by fire at the second coming of Christ, the righteous will dwell on the earth throughout the millennium.³³

On July 3, 1852, while ministering in northern New York state, Holt baptized John Byington, who would become the first president of the General Conference, in the Grasse River along with Byington’s wife, Catharine, their daughter, Martha, and son, Fletcher.³⁴ As the mid-1850s progressed, Holt sought new territories in which to preach, gradually moving west. In February 1858, Holt lectured for two weeks at a schoolhouse in Bowling Green, Ohio. By the end of the lectures, 30 people began keeping the Sabbath.³⁵

Disillusionment (1858-1862)

After approximately ten years in Oswego, Holt moved his family to Ohio. While visiting in the spring of 1858, Ellen White reported receiving a vision that uncovered egregious faults in the Holt family. This upset George Holt. According to Ellen White, he began “circulating reports to stir up wrong feelings” among the Ohio believers.

³⁶ White later wrote that “the frown of God has been upon him [Holt] because he did not restrain his children.”³⁷ From 1858 onwards, Holt grew “increasingly estranged” from the Adventist leadership, especially the Whites.³⁸

In 1861, Ellen White published *Testimony No. 6*, part of which dealt with Holt’s waywardness.³⁹ Holt was apparently convinced. On May 14, 1861, he wrote: “I beg the privilege of confessing my sins, which the Holy Spirit has pointed out.”⁴⁰ For the time being, Holt put aside his differences with the leadership. In “hope for better days,” he was chosen as elder in Lovett’s Grove, Ohio, in February 1862.⁴¹ The apparent harmony was short-lived. By July, the believers in Ohio were “legislating independently of the body, and running the cause into the ground,” according to James White. Holt, one of the “ablest preacher[s],” was “laid upon the shelf.”⁴²

Later Life and Legacy (1863-1877)

After 1862, Holt left public ministry altogether. His health took a downturn, and he moved back to Oswego with Elizabeth. He “kept to the faith” until the end of his life, according to Arthur W. Spalding.⁴³ However, Holt was gradually forgotten among Adventists, dying “from a complication of diseases” at his house in North Scriba, Oswego County, on December 27, 1877.⁴⁴ The funeral was conducted by two ministers, a Methodist and a Baptist.

Despite becoming disillusioned in later life, Holt was one of the most prolific early Adventist evangelists. As Spalding put it, Holt was, “next to [Joseph] Bates and [James] White,” one of “the most active Sabbath-and-sanctuary preachers in the early days, though now so much forgotten and neglected.”⁴⁵ His contribution was vital to the establishment of Sabbatarian Adventism in Canada, New England, New York, and Ohio.

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7. "George Holt obituary," *ARH*, February 21, 1878, 63; George Holt, "Bro. Holt Writes," *ARH*, August 19, 1851, 16.
8. Ellen White, *Life Sketches* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1915), 109; Arthur W. Spalding, *Origin and History of Seventh-day Adventists*, Vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1961), 193.
9. 1850 United States Federal Census, Scriba, Oswego, New York, Records of the Bureau of the Census; Record Group Number: 29; Series Number: M432; Residence Date: 1850; Home in 1850: Scriba, Oswego, New York; Roll: 577; Page: 377a.
10. Henry J. Shears, "Bro. Shears' Communication," *ARH*, August 19, 1852, 57-58.
11. Spalding, *Origin and History*, Vol. 1, 248.
12. "George Holt obituary," *ARH*, February 21, 1878, 63.
13. Spalding, *Origin and History*, Vol. 1, 204.
14. "Bro. Geo. W. Holt," *ARH*, February 1851, 18.

15. "Letter from Bro. Holt," *ARH*, March 1851, 56.
16. Jesse Thompson, "Smiting," *ARH*, August 5, 1851, 8.
17. George W. Holt, "Conferences," *ARH*, May 19, 1851, 88.
18. F. M. Shimper, "Dear Bro. White," *ARH*, August 19, 1851, 15.
19. Prior to organization of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in 1863, a "general conference" was simply a conference open to all who wished to attend.
20. George W. Holt, "Dear Bro. White," *ARH*, September 2, 1851, 23-24.
21. "Oswego Conference," *ARH*, September 16, 1851, 32.
22. Regarding the "spiritualizers," see George R. Knight, *Millennial Fever and the End of the World* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1993), 245ff.
23. Stephen Treat Belden, "A Note on the Above," *ARH*, October 21, 1851, 47.
24. "Our Tour East," *ARH*, November 25, 1851, 52-53.
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26. John C. Day, "Dear Bro. White," *ARH*, December 9, 1851, 64.
27. George W. Holt, "The Covenant Made in Horeb," *ARH*, December 23, 1851, 65.
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30. George W. Holt, "Dear Bro. White," *ARH*, February 17, 1852, 95.
31. George W. Holt, "Dear Bro. White," *ARH*, March 2, 1852, 102.
32. "The Conference," *ARH*, March 23, 1852, 108.
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39. Ellen G. White, *Testimony for the Church: No. 6* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press of the Review and Herald Office, 1861), 36.
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42. "General Conferences," *ARH*, July 1, 1862, 37.
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