

# Snook, Benjamin Franklin

## (1835–1902)

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Benjamin Franklin Snook was a Seventh-day Adventist minister and administrator from 1860 to 1865, and afterward joined an offshoot group.

### Early Years

Snook was born on June 20, 1835, in McArthur County, Ohio,<sup>1</sup> to parents John and Selina Snook, the oldest of five children. About 1840 the family moved to Indiana and “settled on a farm near Crawfordsville.” Then, in 1855, Benjamin accompanied his parents on their move to Mahaska County, Iowa.<sup>2</sup> The state of Iowa became the center of his activities and work for the remainder of his life. Later his passport gave his height as 5 feet 10 inches (1.78 meters), having blue eyes, black hair, a dark complexion, a high and broad forehead, and a prominent nose and chin.<sup>3</sup>

On October 4, 1857, Benjamin married Catherine Moore in Warren County, Iowa.<sup>4</sup> She was born to Samuel Alexander Moore and his wife, Mary (née Seirs), on February 17, 1837.<sup>5</sup> Benjamin and Catherine had seven children: Benjamin Franklin, Jr. (“Frank”) (1859–1915),<sup>6</sup> Arthur L. (1860–1896),<sup>7</sup> Ellen A. Burleson (1863–1954),<sup>8</sup> George Albert (1865–1948),<sup>9</sup> Herbert Ernest (1866–1949),<sup>10</sup> Anna Grace Whitacre (1871–1915),<sup>11</sup> and Theodore P. (1873–1909).<sup>12</sup>

### Work as a Seventh-day Adventist Minister



Benjamin F. Snook.

J. Warren Bacheller collection of Adventist Pioneers, Center for Adventist Research Image Database.

Early in his life Benjamin joined the Disciples of Christ and served that church as a minister.<sup>13</sup> In the spring of 1860, he became acquainted with and embraced the Seventh-day Adventist message.<sup>14</sup> Immediately he began to share his new beliefs and started to work as an Adventist minister. In early April 1860 he was ordained to the gospel ministry at a conference in Knoxville, Iowa.<sup>15</sup> James White thought highly of Benjamin Snook and considered him “a good preacher” and a “strong,” “sweet,” “good,” “humble” man.<sup>16</sup>

Initially he labored alongside Moses Hull. Both enjoyed debate with ministers of other churches on the distinctive points of Adventist doctrine, then a common evangelistic style employed by Adventist ministers.<sup>17</sup> Later he worked alongside Merritt E. Cornell and Joseph Harvey Waggoner.<sup>18</sup> One time, for example, a Disciples of Christ minister called off a debate when he discovered that Snook, a former minister of his church, was supposed to meet him in the debate.<sup>19</sup> However, Cornell stated that “like most of the preachers, Bro. S[nook] [had] feeble health, and [could] not endure much hard labor and constant wear of the mind.”<sup>20</sup>

In addition to his traveling evangelist work, Snook occasionally wrote expositions of Seventh-day Adventist faith. The *Review* office published two pamphlets from his pen. In October 1860 it issued his 95-page *Review of W. G. Springer (Disciple Minister) on the Sabbath, Law of God and First Day of the Week, With an Appendix on the Perpetuity of the Sabbath and Law*, a discussion of “the inconsistencies of the no-law system.”<sup>21</sup> John Nevins Andrews, Adventism’s leading scholar on the Sabbath, noted about the pamphlet, “I have seen the recent work of Bro. Snook, and am highly gratified with it.”<sup>22</sup> Similarly, James White stated, “Are you crushed down by the sophistry of no-lawism? Send for the book and read up. Are you doubting? Then send for the book and read it, and it will help you. Are you low-spirited? Obtain the book and read it, and Bro. Snook’s good-natured styled of handling his opponent will cheer you. Send for the book and let the light shine.”<sup>23</sup> Snook’s second pamphlet, *The Nature, Subjects and Design of Christian Baptism*, 91 pages long, was published in the spring of 1861.<sup>24</sup>

After writing those two pamphlets, Snook turned to writing occasional smaller articles for the *Review and Herald*. During the next couple of years the periodical contained articles on various topics from his pen, such as a sermon on 1 Peter 4:7,<sup>25</sup> the law of God,<sup>26</sup> the organization of the church and order during worship,<sup>27</sup> a warning against marriage with unbelievers,<sup>28</sup> the education of children,<sup>29</sup> the blessedness of the kingdom of heaven,<sup>30</sup> the Sabbath-Sunday question,<sup>31</sup> the persecution of God’s people,<sup>32</sup> the nature of humans in death, the resurrection of the righteous dead and the destruction of wicked,<sup>33</sup> end-time prophecy and the urgency of the present times,<sup>34</sup> and the preparation for Christ’s second coming.<sup>35</sup> In addition, the *Review* contained many reports of Benjamin Snook’s ministerial work.

In the fall of 1860 Snook and his family decided to move to Marion, Linn County, Iowa.<sup>36</sup> When Ellen and James White visited the church at Marion in March 1861, Ellen commented that the Snooks were “an excellent family.” She said of Catherine, “Sister Snook is an excellent woman, so quiet and even in her ways. I enjoy her society very much.”<sup>37</sup>

Snook and his family did not have a home they could call their own, yet instead of asking the church for funds for himself, he urged church leaders to raise funds to lift the mortgage on the home of another Adventist minister, Elias Willits Shortridge. Then, in August 1862, Shortridge separated from the denomination, leveling severe accusations against Benjamin Snook, “well nigh crushing” him who had “ever been his best friend.”<sup>38</sup> Three months later, when a conference of disenchanting believers took place at Marion, Iowa, Snook warned church members that this was not an official conference—the organizers were rebellious and antagonistic toward organization and sympathetic with Shortridge, who was lashing out at Ellen White and her visions.<sup>39</sup>

Meanwhile, the American Civil War began to affect the movements of Adventist ministers. In August 1862 the state of Iowa was “put under martial law,” and Joseph Harvey Waggoner and Benjamin Snook were detained “under military arrest” until they could procure “a certificate from the county judge setting forth their place of residence, their present occupation, and calling.”<sup>40</sup> As they were traveling to southern Iowa to hold evangelistic meetings, they “were suspected of being a company of secessionists going south, and some persons followed [them] ten miles.”<sup>41</sup>

James White publicly stressed that Seventh-day Adventists were not secessionists, yet in the article “The Nation,” published in the *Review* on August 12, 1862, he stated that Adventists could not voluntarily engage in a war and join a military in which it would be very difficult to obey God’s law, particularly the fourth and the sixth commandments. He nevertheless conceded that, in case of a general draft, “for us to attempt to resist the laws of the best government under heaven, which is now struggling to put down the most hellish rebellion since that of Satan and his angels, . . . would be madness.”<sup>42</sup>

Snook, among others, initially opposed and criticized James White’s article because he felt that engaging in war was against the spirit of the New Testament.<sup>43</sup> Together with other ministers in Iowa, Snook filed a petition with the state of Iowa for noncombatant status. James White perceived this step as a form of fanaticism that might be misunderstood by the government and have damaging repercussions.<sup>44</sup>

“After much prayer and serious investigation,” Snook eventually concluded: “The doctrine of universal nonresistance is an untenable extreme.” He further considered it a mistake that he had participated in filing a petition to obtain an exemption from military service for the church. Like James White, he now took the position that Adventists should comply when drafted into the military.<sup>45</sup>

Benjamin Snook was a firm believer in the visions and testimonies of Ellen G. White, so much so that he urged new and undecided church members to accept them and to follow her counsel on matters of health, particularly smoking or chewing tobacco.<sup>46</sup> In late 1862 he confronted a group of church members at Marion that opposed the formal organization of the church and the visions of Ellen White.<sup>47</sup> Shortly afterward Ellen White wrote in *Testimony for the Church*, no. 9: “Some, especially in Iowa, make the visions a rule to measure all by. . . . Some are unacquainted with me and my labors, and they are very skeptical of anything bearing the name of visions. This is all natural, and can only be overcome by experience. . . . The course pursued with some in Iowa who are

unacquainted with me has not been a careful and consistent one. Those who were comparatively strangers to the visions have been dealt with in the same manner that they would deal with those who have had much light and experience in the visions. Some have been required to endorse the visions when they could not conscientiously do so, and in this way some honest souls have been driven to take positions against the visions, and against the body, which they never would have taken had their case been managed with discretion and mercy."<sup>48</sup>

Snook promptly responded, "I know and feel that much of this applies to me. . . . I feel that what is said in reference to the 'petition' question [regarding military service] is all true, the wrong use of the visions, etc."<sup>49</sup>

In September 1863 Snook became the president of the Iowa Conference, joined by William H. Brinkerhoff as secretary.<sup>50</sup> One of Snook's successors later suggested that he had a loose leadership style. Supposedly he left "new churches . . . to get along as best [as] they might," and he scheduled appointments with churches, "often never filling them, bringing disappointment upon" those churches.<sup>51</sup>

## Opposition to the Whites

During the spring of 1865 Snook gradually became unsatisfied with Ellen White's prophetic claim and the leadership of the General Conference. He contacted William S. Ingraham, a fellow minister in Wisconsin, and suggested that they both withdraw from the Seventh-day Adventist Church and launch their own movement.<sup>52</sup> Ingraham gave Snook's letter to James White, who, together with his wife, had come for the session of the Iowa Conference at Pilot Grove in June.<sup>53</sup> At the meeting Ellen White settled all their doubts about the visions "to their professed satisfaction." When she proposed to clarify the points also to the assembled group of believers, they declined, as they may not have wanted their weaknesses to be exposed to the public.<sup>54</sup> James White vehemently opposed Snook and his "rebellion," a procedure that dissatisfied some of the people, such as Brinkerhoff and Henry Carver.<sup>55</sup>

The session also voted to place the cases of Brethren Snook and Brinkerhoff into the hands of the General Conference Committee to make a recommendation to the Iowa Conference on how to handle them.<sup>56</sup> At some point in the fall of 1865 Benjamin Snook and William Brinkerhoff sent their resignations to the General Conference Committee.<sup>57</sup>

At the beginning of 1866 several Adventist ministers and church members found that both had fallen into rebellion once again. In January, Isaac Sanborn went to the church at Marion and witnessed both men trying repeatedly to invalidate the three angels' messages of Revelation 14:6–12.<sup>58</sup> When William S. Ingraham queried him on various matters of belief, Snook replied that he no longer believed the second beast of Revelation 13 symbolized the United States. He also stated that he now believed that the Waldenses and Miller already preached the three angels' messages before 1844, and that he was undecided whether or not Sundaykeeping was the mark of the beast and the seventh-day Sabbath was the seal of the living God.<sup>59</sup> Ingraham offered to

answer his objections, but Snook declined to state them, even though, in Ingraham's absence, he was sharing them with other believers.<sup>60</sup>

As Snook and Brinkerhoff desired to visit several Adventist churches in Iowa, the churches at West Union, Elgin, Waukon, Palestine, Vernon, Pilot Grove, and Washington officially took action stating that they objected to and dissociated themselves from the course of the two men.<sup>61</sup> Subsequently, the churches at Knoxville, Fairfield, Sandyville, Mackford, and Marquette took similar actions.<sup>62</sup> On May 17, 1866, at its annual session, the General Conference finally recommended that the Iowa Conference drop the names of Snook and Brinkerhoff "from their minutes."<sup>63</sup>

Many years later Ellen White conceded that Snook's doubts and questions may have resulted from a lack of knowledge and experience with her visions. To Uriah Smith, who served as editor in chief of the *Review and Herald* for 35 years and went through his own struggles with her reproof of him, she remarked that "Brinkerhoff [*sic*] and Snook, had they had the light and knowledge you have had of the work God has given me to do, might have stood to this day."<sup>64</sup>

## Work as Minister for the Marion Party

In late 1865 Benjamin Snook, together with William Brinkerhoff, joined a group of former Seventh-day Adventists at Marion, Iowa, that, four years earlier, had separated from the larger congregation in opposition to Ellen White's visions. They formed a congregation under the name "Church of Jesus Christ." Seventh-day Adventists would later refer to that group as the "Marion Party," whereas they called themselves the "Church of God." Nevertheless, it should be noted that the *founding* of the Marion Party built upon a network of already-existing congregations.<sup>65</sup>

A few months later Snook and Brinkerhoff published *The Visions of E. G. White, Not of God*, a tract intended to outline their arguments against Ellen White and her visions.<sup>66</sup> Snook also answered calls of Seventh-day Adventist Church members who took issue with Ellen White and explained his view of the inconsistencies of her visions. As a result, a number of Adventists withdrew from the church and affiliated with the Church of God.<sup>67</sup> In November 1866 Snook and Brinkerhoff organized a conference at Marion, Iowa, to which they invited Sabbathkeeping believers from Iowa and Illinois. At the conference they formally organized the Iowa Conference of the Church of God.<sup>68</sup>

Brinkerhoff became the editor of the *Hope of Israel*, the periodical of the network of alienated believers, and Snook assumed a leading role in that group. These newcomers almost immediately hijacked the periodical to continue their fight against the church that they had just left. The periodical took on a more aggressive attitude toward Ellen White, her visions, and Seventh-day Adventists. By November 1867, however, many of the readers seemed to have had enough of the continuous fight against the visions.<sup>69</sup> For example, one reader wrote, "We presume the article on [the] second page will be highly satisfactory to the vision-fighting lovers, unless they

might think the matter overdone (otherwise we think the article is a good one), but many of our readers are tired of reading about the visions, two-horned beast, &c. Would not the Hope sustain a better character by dropping these subjects, and devoting its columns to more practical subjects and theories?"<sup>70</sup>

The subjects continued to come up occasionally, albeit not as frequently. In June 1868 the publishing association dismissed Brinkerhoff as editor of the *Hope of Israel* and replaced him with Snook.<sup>71</sup> The latter nevertheless maintained his active itinerant ministry, leaving most of the day-to-day editorial and publishing work to the office manager.<sup>72</sup>

Brinkerhoff was hurt by the dismissal and eventually dissociated himself from the group, and by March 1869 it became known that he had abandoned the primary tenets of Adventist Sabbatarianism and joined the Universalist Church.<sup>73</sup> Benjamin Snook was reportedly "the only preacher" the Marion Party still "had in active employ."<sup>74</sup> His activities nevertheless seemed to be quite effective. In October 1870 Ellen White spoke at a series of meetings in Civil Bend, Missouri, where about half of the members had previously left the church "through Snook's influence" so that the place truly became "a nest of Snookites."<sup>75</sup> In a letter to her son Edson and his wife, Emma, she further described her visit: "There were two parties divided about equally, both parties possessed moral worth. Snook had, previous to his going into Universalism, visited Missouri and blacked your father and myself, making us before the public as mean, dishonest and wicked as he could until I was regarded as a very witch. I was called "old Mother White" and was despised and hated most thoroughly. Here a division took place in the body of Seventh-day Adventists and has continued for years. Our coming in among them, speaking to them, told wonderfully upon them. They were never so astonished as when they saw that we were not old and haggard, but looking like decent, respectable people. Suffice it to say, in the providence of God a union was formed between these two bodies and we left them very happy. Confessions were made of their prejudice against us and the great change in their feelings. This union was all we could effect at that time, for the people had stood where they could not be helped. Neither party had any influence to bring souls to the truth, for they would say, 'Get first united yourselves. We will wait to see how you come out and etc.' The meetings in Missouri were very important and accomplished more than we had feared at first."<sup>76</sup>

## Work as Universalist Minister

Snook resigned from his editorial position and followed his friend and associate Brinkerhoff into Universalism. In 1875 the Universalist Church employed him as a minister.<sup>77</sup> He labored in different towns in the state of Iowa, such as "Vinton, Cedar Rapids, Tipton, Cedar Falls, Bloomfield, Clarinda, Iowa Falls, Steamboat Rock, Storm Lake, and Webster City."<sup>78</sup> In 1878 he went abroad and visited the exposition in Paris, France. For a period he traveled through several countries in Europe and the Middle East. After his return he lectured on his travels in Palestine.<sup>79</sup> Snook also joined the Iowa Brigade of the "Uniformed Rank," a secret society then located at Cedar City, Iowa, and served the society as a chaplain.<sup>80</sup>

Benjamin and his wife, Catherine, spent the last decades of their lives at Webster City, Iowa.<sup>81</sup> He died on December 4, 1902, at the age of 67. Catherine survived her husband for almost twenty years. She passed away on April 28, 1921. Both are buried at Graceland Cemetery in Webster City.<sup>82</sup>

## Contribution

Benjamin Franklin Snook served the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Iowa for five years as a pastor, writer, and administrator during the early years when it was formally organized as a denomination. Disagreements caused him to separate from the church and attack several tenets of his former faith. He eventually left Sabbatarian Adventism behind altogether and became a Universalist minister. Later, Adventists came to view the tensions and divisions surrounding his separation from the denomination somewhat like a prototype for later divisions and offshoots.<sup>83</sup>

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## NOTES

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