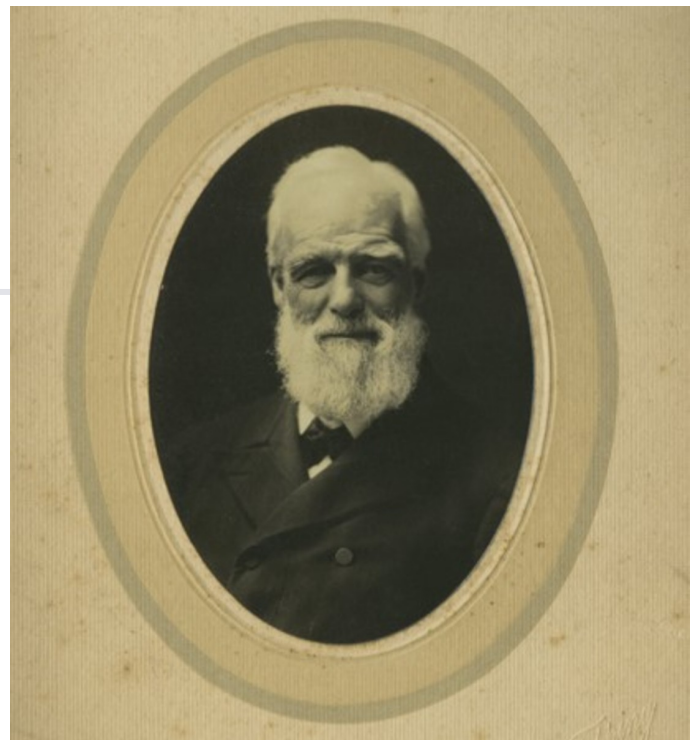


Van Horn, Isaac Doren (1834–1910)

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Isaac D. Van Horn.

Photo courtesy of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Archives.

Isaac Doren Van Horn was an evangelist, minister, and conference president. Among his many roles, Van Horn is credited with bringing Seventh-day Adventism to the Pacific Northwest and establishing the first Adventist church in Walla Walla, Washington.

Early Life

Isaac Doren Van Horn was born in Cato, Cayuga County, New York, on March 28, 1834.¹ The following year, his family moved to Jackson, Michigan, where Van Horn spent his youth, completed his education, and became a school teacher.² At the age of 25, Van Horn attended a series of meetings held by Joseph Bates. He accepted the Sabbath and became an Adventist in 1859, showing early promise and zeal as an evangelist.³ In April 1865, he married Adelia P. Patten, who at the time was living with James and Ellen White and serving as the editor of the *Youth's Instructor*.⁴

Work and Ministry

In 1863, Van Horn began working as an evangelist and was ordained for ministerial work the following year.⁵ At the third annual meeting of the General Conference, Van Horn was nominated treasurer, a role he held from May 17, 1865, to May 12, 1868. Interestingly, his wife was to follow him as the first female in this role, just three years later.⁶ Van Horn continued his ministry as evangelist and secretary for the Michigan Conference of

Seventh-day Adventists over the next several years.

In 1872, the *Review and Herald* published a call for volunteers to take the Adventist message to the Pacific Northwest. Isaac and Adelia Van Horn were chosen from over 100 respondents, and in December 1873, they began the first leg of their journey over the transcontinental railroad.⁷ After spending the winter with believers in California, in the spring of 1874, they travelled by ocean steamer to Oregon and then by steamboat up the Colombia River to Wallula, Washington.⁸

Van Horn's ministry was successful from the beginning. Evangelistic meetings held in a 50-foot tent resulted in a congregation of sixty members. The newly-converted men cut down trees in the nearby Blue Mountains to provide lumber for a new church; it was dedicated on July 3, 1875.⁹ Van Horn was joined in ministry by a new convert, Alonzo T. Jones, a soldier from the garrison stationed nearby who had recently heard the Adventist message and been baptized.¹⁰ Together, Van Horn and Jones organized churches in Milton (now Milton-Freewater), Oregon, and Dayton, Washington, before moving to the Willamette Valley to conduct evangelistic meetings.¹¹ In 1876, Adelia's sister, Francis E. Patton, came to visit and decided to stay after meeting and falling in love with Alonzo T. Jones. The couple were married in April 1877 and lived with the Van Horns in their home—a situation that caused tension due to both women's poor health and strains on the men's working relationship.¹² Nevertheless, Van Horn continued his evangelistic efforts and established the third church in the Pacific Northwest in Salem, Oregon, in the spring of 1877.¹³

During this period, three boys were born to Isaac and Adelia Van Horn: Burt Isaac (born 1874), Newman Curtis (born 1878), and Charles Wesley (born 1880).¹⁴ It was a busy time for the family, as along with the children, Van Horn's ministry included the role of president of the new North Pacific Conference, while Adelia was appointed secretary and Alonzo T. Jones served as treasurer. In its first year, 1877, the conference was comprised of five churches and 200 members.¹⁵ The first camp meeting in the Northwest was organized by Van Horn and Jones in 1878; John Loughborough and Ellen White were both in attendance and pleased with what they observed!¹⁶

However, Van Horn's leadership was called into question in public just two years later when Ellen White visited Oregon again and found the work neglected. As she wrote to her husband, Van Horn "is not the man for this field. He lacks promptness and energy. Adelia holds him back from his labor and he will consent to be held. They have three children. She centers all her powers on them, and labors to have him do the same and has about succeeded."¹⁷ Indeed, Mrs. White appealed directly to both Van Horn and Jones, pressing on them the need to prioritize their ministry. She later reported: "I then bore to them a most pointed testimony and charged the state of the churches upon the course Elder Van Horn has pursued in doing nothing, letting the flock go without labor while he was making it his principal business to raise up a family....It was a weeping, confessing time. There was an humbling of the soul before God."¹⁸ The next summer, the Van Horns returned to California and, after a short time, moved back to Michigan.

Van Horn returned to leadership roles in the East; he was appointed president of the Michigan Conference in 1889 and held that position for three years.¹⁹ This followed another interaction with Ellen White: Van Horn had attended the 1888 General Conference session in Minneapolis but rejected the message of righteousness by faith as presented by E. J. Waggoner and A. T. Jones, his brother-in-law with whom he had fallen out. Van Horn responded to Ellen White's correspondence humbly, writing, "This communication by your hand to me I heartily accept as a testimony from the Lord. It reveals to me the sad condition I have been in since the Minneapolis meeting, and this reproof from the Lord is just and true."²⁰

From 1893 to 1898, Van Horn travelled extensively throughout eastern Canada, the Midwest, along the Atlantic Coast, and inland to West Virginia as superintendent of the General Conference District No. 1.²¹ He used this time to reinforce the importance of the publishing ministry, evangelism, and support of local ministries.

Final Years and Death

Following the intense demands of travel, after 1899 Van Horn focused his ministry and administration in Battle Creek until an attack of pneumonia in 1903 left him weakened. Over the next five years, failing health limited Van Horn's ability to travel and minister. In 1908 he was moved to a sanitarium in Otter Lake, Michigan, where he lived his final days. Isaac Van Horn passed away on August 22, 1910, at the age of 76, in Otter Lake.²² He was buried in Battle Creek.

In an assessment of Van Horn's impact, one historian writes "I. D. Van Horn was one of the best beloved ministers through the last half of the century. He had the gift of the common touch."²³ As a pioneering evangelist in the Pacific Northwest, Van Horn had a deep and lasting impact on the fledgling Seventh-day Adventist Church. His subsequent ministry did much to guide, support, and establish the Church from the local level to the General Conference.

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