

Fuller, Nathan

(1825–1895)

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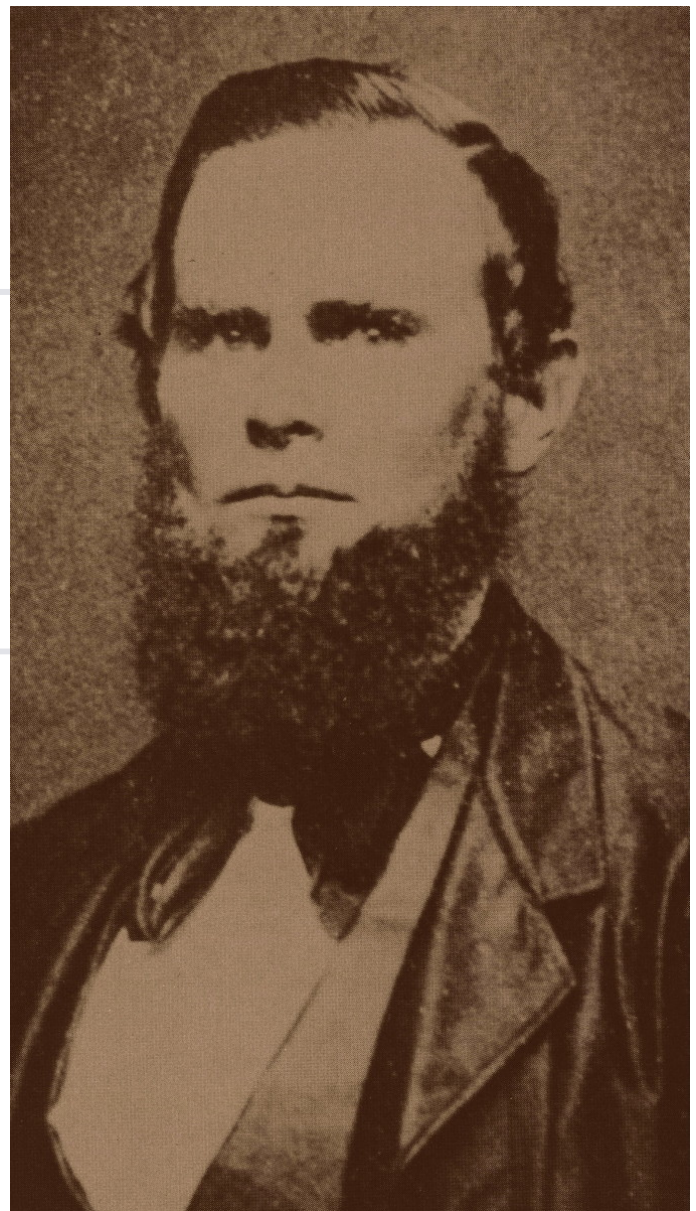
Nathan Fuller was an evangelist and president of the New York-Pennsylvania Conference before moral failure brought an end to his ministry in 1869.

Early Life and Marriage

Born in 1825 to Thomas and Sally Fuller, Nathan Fuller was brought up in Methodist Episcopal Church. In 1839 when Nathan was fourteen and his brother Daniel was eight, the family moved to Ulysses, Potter County, Pennsylvania, where they purchased a large farm and continued their family profession of farming.

In 1848, Nathan Fuller married Susan Artamyssia (b.1832), also from Ulysses, and they had five children: Warren N. (b. 1849), Henry Isaac (b.1850), Eliza Lorette (b.1854), Elton Devillo (b.1857), and Fred T. (b. 1861 or 1862). Like his parents, Fuller too turned to farming.

Early Career



Nathan Fuller (Adventist Heritage Journal).

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

Between 1854 and 1857, the Southern Tier area of northern Pennsylvania and southern New York witnessed a series of evangelistic meetings conducted by leading Adventist preachers, W. S. Ingraham (1821-1874), R. F. Cottrell (1819-1892), and J. N. Loughborough (1832-1924). During the summer of 1857, the evangelists pitched their tent near Ulysses for two weeks of meetings, after which thirty people were baptized, including the Methodist Episcopalians Nathan and Susan Fuller.¹

Although Fuller continued to earn his living from the farm, in 1858 he began preaching his newly found Adventist truth throughout the Southern Tier. By 1859 he had converted at least fifteen persons to Sabbath-keeping Adventism. At some of his meetings, however, he faced strong opposition from local citizens, with some throwing rocks and firing guns at one communion service. Despite this, Fuller persevered in his lay ministry, and during 1860 he converted several dozen more listeners and established the first Seventh-day Adventist church in Alleghany County, New York. Initially opposed to “gospel order” in 1860, by September 1861 he changed his mind and strongly supported the necessity of organizing local churches and conferences, telling readers of the *Review* that “order is heaven’s first law” and that they needed to “press together.”²

Evangelist and Organizer

On October 25, 1862, at the Roosevelt (NY) Seventh-day Adventist Church, Fuller and six other men were chosen to write the first constitution for the New York-Pennsylvania Conference (the two conferences were not separated until 1878). Also at this historic session, J. N. Andrews (1829-1883), R. F. Cottrell, and Nathan Fuller were appointed as Conference evangelists. Fuller served in this capacity for four years (1862-1866). Despite Nathan’s shock when his brother Daniel lost both arms at the Battle of Antietam in the U.S. Civil War, his ministry blossomed during the 1860s. In 1863 he led out in sixty meetings in seven weeks and baptized three times the number of his previous results. An extremely charismatic preacher, Fuller rejoiced when his emotional appeals brought tears, loud praises, and confessions from his listeners. Opponents who challenged him to debates soon discovered that he was an unbeatable defender of Adventist doctrines. Typically his revivals brought “a soul-reviving and sin-killing time.”³

In May 1863 the New York-Pennsylvania Conference sent Fuller as a delegate to a conference of church leaders that met in Battle Creek, Michigan, to formalize the structure, organization, and policy of the General Conference. There, Fuller and seven other men, wrote the first constitution of the General Conference.⁴ In 1864 James White praised Fuller for strengthening the cause in New York and Pennsylvania; Ellen White likewise admired the large new meetinghouse he had built at Niles Settlement, outside Wellsville, New York. When Fuller was elected president of the New York-Pennsylvania Conference in the fall of 1866 the Conference had twenty-four churches with 500 members. He served as president until 1868.

Expulsion From Adventist Ministry

Despite these successes, by the late 1860s Fuller's life was also fraught with tragedies. He frequently suffered from exhaustion and caught lung fever and spring measles. In 1867, when the entire family was prostrated by typhoid fever, Church leaders sent Dr. Fletcher Byington from Battle Creek Sanitarium to nurse them back to health, and then raised \$392 through appeals in the *Review* to pay the medical expenses.

Despite Fuller's physical recovery from typhoid, many signs indicated that his ministry was waning. Both the frequency of his meetings in 1866 and the number of his converts that year declined sharply. For nine months he sent no reports to the *Review*. After reading Ellen White's Testimony 11 (published in 1867), which rebuked unnamed ministers on the Southern Tier for their selfishness, hypocrisy, deception, and immorality, Fuller confessed that he was facing "severe trials" and "heavy affliction."⁵

Nonetheless, he attended the 1867 General Conference in Battle Creek. In 1868 he was one of only four ministers who preached at the first official camp meeting held on the Elihu Root farm near Wright, Michigan, in September 1868. In 1869 he was chosen as the sole Seventh-day Adventist delegate to the Seventh Day Baptist General Conference in Alfred, New York. Perhaps responding to the plethora of *Review* articles in 1868 and 1869 focusing on immorality, adultery, and theft, Fuller confessed: "I feel the need of a deeper work in my own heart...I will get all on the altar [and confess my sins]."⁶

When nothing of that nature happened, J. N. Andrews, J. H. Waggoner, and D. M. Canright wrote scathing exposés in the *Adventist Review*,⁷ charging Fuller with multiple seductions, adultery, embezzling church funds, and purchasing five different pieces of property in Pennsylvania and New York (on one of which the Wellsville Seventh-day Adventist Church is currently located) with the pilfered funds. In October 1869 Conference officials, with James and Ellen White present, voted to remove his ministerial credentials and expel him from church membership. Ellen White wrote, "My confidence in humanity has been terribly shaken."⁸ She hoped that Fuller's sordid life would provide a warning for others.

Later Life

Despite losing his ministerial credentials and church membership, Fuller remained in the Southern Tier region for several months. But when he attempted to seduce his son Warren's wife, in 1870 enraged citizens from Wellsville, New York, chased him out of town. He fled to Macomb County, Michigan, and joined a group of Methodists there. But they too expelled him for immorality. During the 1870s Fuller and one of his sons joined the Church of God in Marion, Iowa, and helped them publish their paper, the *Hope of Israel*. But once again, his immoral conduct forced his expulsion. In 1876 Adventist evangelist William B. Hill (fl. 1870-1900) encountered Fuller in Minnesota, promoting a new chronology for the age of the earth and defending Sunday as the Bible Sabbath. Sometime later, Fuller returned to Michigan and was apparently reconciled with his wife Susan, who was with him when he died in November 1895 at age 70.

Contribution

Despite Nathan Fuller's unfortunate end, during his active ministry (1858-1869) on the Southern Tier, he baptized over 300 converts into the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In addition, he helped to write the first constitution for the New York-Pennsylvania Conference (1862), where he served as an evangelist (1862-1866) and as president (1866-1868). He also helped to write the first constitution for the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (1863).

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NOTES

1. Artamyssia Fuller, "From Sister Fuller," *Adventist Review*, January 6, 1859, 55; N. Fuller, "From Bro. Fuller," *Adventist Review*, February 17, 1859, 103.
2. Nathan Fuller, "From Brother Fuller," *Adventist Review*, February 9, 1860, 94; N. Fuller, "The Cause in Southern N.Y. & PA," *Adventist Review*, September 17, 1861, 126; N., "Report From Bro. Fuller," *Adventist Review*, December 2, 1862, 6-7.
3. N. Fuller, "Encouraging Meetings in N.Y.," *Adventist Review*, April 9, 1867, 211; J. Eggleston, "From Sister Eggleston," *Adventist Review*, March 12, 1867.
4. John Byington and U. Smith, "Report of General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists," *Adventist Review*, May 26, 1863, 204.
5. N. Fuller, "Report From Bro. Fuller," *Adventist Review*, June 26, 1866, 29-30.
6. N. Fuller, "Report for Review," *Adventist Review*, March 2, 1869, 75.
7. J. N. Andrews, "Apostasy and Crime," *Adventist Review*, July 20, 1869, 30.
8. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 2, 468-469.

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