

Gage, William Claggett (1842–1907)

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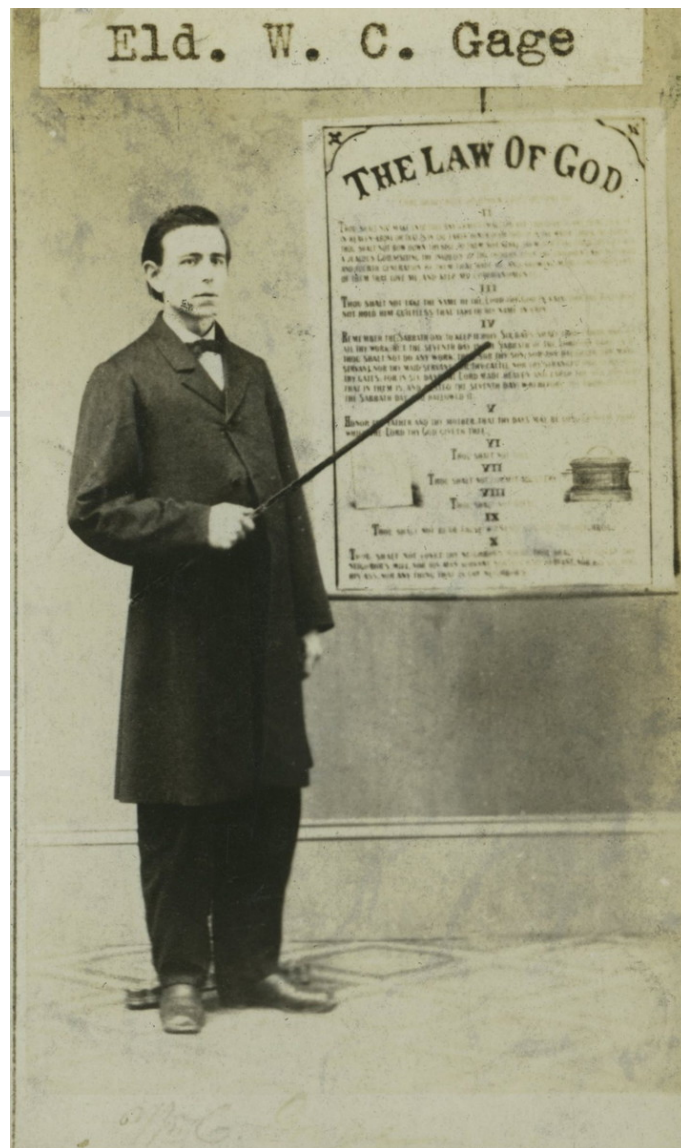
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William Claggett Gage was a publisher, preacher, health reformer, and the first Adventist elected mayor of a city.

Early Life

William Claggett Gage was born October 1, 1842 in Massachusetts to Caleb and Susan C. Gage, as the youngest of four children, three older ones being: Melindia C. (b. 1832), Leander (b. 1834), and George F. (b. 1839). Sometime before 1850 the family moved to Manchester, Hillsborough County, New Hampshire.

In 1860 William married Nellie Lydia Jones (1844-1924), sister of Charles Harriman Jones (1850-1936), the future manager of both the Review and Herald Publishing Association and the Pacific Press Publishing Association. Their children included Frederick K. Gage (b. 1866) and Mable E. Gage (b. 1881). In 1864, after attending tent meetings led by Merritt E. Cornell (1827-1893) in Manchester, New Hampshire, William and Nellie joined the Seventh-day Adventist church.¹ For several months, Gage was the tent master and song leader for Cornell's meetings.²



William Claggett Gage.

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

Early Career

By 1865 the Gages had moved to Battle Creek, where William became a foreman at the Review and Herald press. During the many weeks that year when James White (1821-1881), Uriah Smith (1832-1903), J. N. Loughborough (1832-1924) and others were bedridden at Dr. James Caleb Jackson's "Our Home on the Hillside" sanitarium in Dansville, New York, Gage managed to print the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* on time. From 1868 to 1870 he served on the Review and Herald Editorial Committee.

A strict vegetarian, Gage wrote articles about dyspepsia and the principles of healthful living for the new paper, *The Health Reformer*, which he edited in the late 1860s. At times, however, he and his associate, Dr. Russell T. Trall (1812-1877), took extreme positions against milk, sugar, and salt that differed from the more moderate views of James and Ellen White.³ In his tract "Dyspepsia: Its Causes, Prevention, and Cure," Gage explained that poor diet and nervous conditions caused stomach upsets. The cure lay in eating a healthful diet of vegetables and fruit while avoiding all meats, stimulants, coffee, tea, tobacco, and snacks. Regular exercise and hot baths also helped relieve dyspepsia. In his tract "Principles of Health Reform," Gage explained how following nature's laws in diet and dress could alleviate most illnesses. He cited many physicians who warned against the use of popular drugs that arrested the disease but did not cure the patient.

In 1870 Gage edited the first Seventh-day Adventist cookbook, *The Health Reformer's Progressive Cook Book and Kitchen Guide*. Sometime later, possibly in the 1870s, he wrote "Sixteen Short Answers to Sixteen Common Objections against the Second Advent Faith," a 32-page pamphlet that addressed some of the fallacies and misunderstandings people had concerning the Second Advent of Christ.

Political Success and Church Conflicts

During a holiday trip to Chicago in 1870, Gage became seriously ill; he moved back to Manchester, New Hampshire, to recover. He became press foreman for the *Daily Mirror and American* newspaper. During this time Ellen White wrote Gage several letters pointing out his deficiencies of character and expressing concern about his pleasure-seeking tendencies. For several years in the 1870s he drifted away from Seventh-day Adventism, but returned to the Church in 1876.

In 1878 Gage and Nellie moved back to Battle Creek where Gage worked once again at the Review and Herald office and occasionally preached in the Dime Tabernacle. In 1881 he was ordained to the gospel ministry. That same year he collaborated with Uriah Smith (1832-1903) and John Harvey Kellogg (1852-1943) in publishing a memorial tract after the death of James White.

The following year Ellen White admonished him regarding his love of praise and excitement and urged him to be careful about exerting a worldly influence in Battle Creek. She considered him "wholly unfitted to engage in the work of God" due to his lack of "heart holiness." Although "he talks glibly, poll-parrot-like," she declared, he

“catches at Satan’s bait” and “will prove a snare to the people of God wherever he shall take an active part.” She asserted “he has ever been a curse to the church in Battle Creek.”⁴ Nonetheless, in 1882 Gage was elected secretary of the Michigan Conference and appointed to the Battle Creek College board of trustees.

In a December 1882 testimony to the Battle Creek Church, Ellen White added that Gage’s bad influence would send many church members to their graves with unconfessed sins. However, his popularity among local citizens continued to grow during the 1880s. In 1882 he was elected to the Battle Creek Public School Board and to the Battle Creek Board of Public Works. At a time when the citizens of Calhoun County were debating temperance issues, Uriah Smith openly championed Gage for city mayor in the pages of the *Review*, predicting that he could do much for the public good.⁵ Running as a strong prohibition candidate, Gage was elected as the first Adventist mayor of the city (1882-83). When a large crowd gathered in front of his home to celebrate his victory, he gave a speech assuring them that during his administration they would not be able to tell whether he was an Adventist or a Methodist.⁶

Ellen White continued to express concerns that Gage’s conduct, especially in forcing Goodloe Harper Bell (1832-1899) out of Battle Creek College, was bringing the Church into difficulty, and that Uriah Smith was trusting too much in him as a “blind counselor.” Despite these rebukes, in August 1883, Gage helped write a sixteen-page rebuttal to the charges levelled against Mrs. White by the Church of God opponents in Marion, Iowa. This *Review* insert of August 14, 1883 explained the necessity and roles of the Spirit of Prophecy in the Bible and in the history of the Christian church throughout the ages.⁷

Later Life

Nonetheless, Gage lost his ministerial credentials that same year. Subsequently he resigned from his position at the *Review* and Herald press and set up his own establishment, William C. Gage and Son, Printers, in Battle Creek. However, two years later, Gage and five Adventist ministers-- George I. Butler, D. M. Canright, Eugene Farnsworth, Uriah Smith and H. M. Kenron--collaborated in delivering a series of Bible studies covering key Adventist doctrines which were originally printed in a Battle Creek newspaper and then published by the *Review* and Herald press as *Tabernacle Lecture Course*. Gage wrote Lecture #6 (“The U.S. in Light of Prophecy”) and Lecture #32 (“The Home of the Saved”).

In 1890 Ellen White urged Gage and Uriah Smith to seek Goodloe Harper Bell’s forgiveness for mistreating him, telling William that he had “bruised” his soul and would answer to God on the judgment day. Three years later, she sent William and Nellie a final warning letter expressing deep concern about their “spiritual decay” and the bad influence they had exerted on their son Fred Gage (1866-1945), who had become a Congregationalist that year and worked on Saturdays in his father’s press (although Fred’s wife, Katherine Amadon, daughter of George and Martha Byington Amadon, remained a Seventh-day Adventist all her life). White urged them to “set their house in order,” pray often, and put away self-conceit and worldliness.⁸

Following several years of illness, William C. Gage died September 9, 1907 at age 65 and was buried in Oak Hill Cemetery in Battle Creek, Michigan. In an untitled editorial note, the *Review* observed that “[t]here are many who esteemed him highly, both as a friend and as a brother [fellow Adventist believer and],” called him one of “the early believers in this message.”⁹

Contribution

William Gage’s primary contribution to the Seventh-day Adventist Church was in his roles as a printer, publisher, and writer at the *Review* and *Herald* press, as editor of the *Health Reformer*, and as a popular preacher at the Dime Tabernacle. As Battle Creek’s first Adventist mayor (1882-1883), he promoted the cause of prohibition and engendered much good will toward Adventists among local citizens and civic leaders.

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2. Merritt E. Cornell, "Report of Work in New England," *Adventist Review*, July 19, 1864, 61.

3. James White, "Western Tour," *Adventist Review*, November 8, 1870, 165.
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