



Henry Lyon's home at West Main and Kendall Streets, 1935.

Photo courtesy of Center for Adventist Research.

Lyon, Henry (1796–1872) and Deborah (Davis) (1796–1874)

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Henry and Deborah Lyon were early Sabbatarian Adventist converts and philanthropists. In 1854, they sold their farm so that they could contribute funds for James and Ellen White to establish the publishing work in Battle Creek, Michigan. The Lyons relocated to Battle Creek and became charter members of the first Sabbath-keeping Adventist congregation in that community.

Early Life

Henry Lyon was born on June 14, 1796, in Lima, Livingston, New York, to Seth (1768-1849) and Sarah (1772-1840) Lyon. Deborah Davis from New York was born on October 8, 1796. While not much is known about their early life, they likely were married by 1817. Their oldest child, Orville (b. 1818), was born in New York. By the time their second child, Corrinna (b. 1820), was born, they had relocated to Plymouth, Michigan. The Lyon family was one of two pioneer families to settle in Plymouth (today located about fifteen miles northwest of Detroit)¹

Involvement with Adventism

After the creation of Plymouth Township in Wayne County, Henry was elected as a tax assessor. The Lyons subscribed to the “age-to-come” theory (promulgated by Joseph Marsh) that asserted that before Jesus’ return, the Jews would return to Palestine. They became Sabbatarian Adventists in 1852.² Joseph Bates led Henry Lyon and disciplined another young convert, Merritt E. Cornell (1827-1893), to join the fledgling cause. Afterward, Cornell raised up several new churches and later married their daughter, Angeline (1837-1901). Henry expressed appreciation for his newfound beliefs: “The more I examine our position, the plainer it looks. It presents a strait, harmonious chain of events, and I see plainly the path of duty.”³ Later, when James and Ellen White made their first visit to Michigan, they stayed as guests in their home.⁴

From the beginning, the Lyons were pivotal financial contributors to the Sabbatarian Adventist cause. About August 1853, he contributed \$25 to help defray the cost of printing volume 3, number 3 of *The Review and Herald*.⁵ On Nov. 29, 1853, he wrote a letter addressed “To the Saints Scattered Abroad” about “how great is our responsibility” as stewards to share “this message of mercy . . . to every honest soul.” It is both a duty to publish as well as sustain through one’s means. He appealed to his fellow believers to “lay all upon the altar” and that soon even “our property will be useless.”⁶ In late 1853, Henry and Deborah followed their own admonition and sold their farm in Plymouth for \$4,000 so that they could support the work and relocate to Battle Creek.⁷ They became charter members of the first Sabbath-keeping Adventist congregation in that community.⁸

Henry wrote a letter of comfort to James White when his younger sister, Anna (1822-1854), died from tuberculosis.⁹ He assured the Whites of their “fervent prayers” on their behalf and that they had no sympathy with those who attacked them. “Our brethren here are firm and unshaken on the present truth, and have no fellowship with those that have gone out from us, and are endeavoring to divide and distract the flock.” He urged early believers to “go forward” because “We have got the truth.” He appealed: “Dear brethren, let nothing

turn you aside from the one object of getting ready to meet Jesus.”

Henry was part of a finance committee with Dan R. Palmer and Cyrenius Smith that, on September 23, 1855, voted to relocate the Advent Review Office to Battle Creek.¹⁰ The report noted that “four brethren have purchased a building lot, and are erecting a building suitable for the Printing Office, Editor’s room, &c.”¹¹ While not specifically identified, Henry, Palmer, and Smith were joined by John Preston Kellogg in contributing \$300 each to make this possible. Adventist historian A. W. Spalding later credited Henry for conceiving the idea of relocating the publishing work to Battle Creek and soliciting his friends for the requisite funds.¹² Together, these men made it possible for the publishing work to develop and prosper in a way that had not been possible before this point. They allowed James White to use the building effectively rent free until 1861, when a much larger brick building replaced it (and the original wooden building was moved down the street to a lot along the Kalamazoo River).¹³

On November 16, 1855, Henry was part of another committee (with David Hewitt and William M. Smith) to investigate the financial condition of the Review Office. At this same meeting, Uriah Smith was appointed as “resident Editor of the ADVENT REVIEW.”¹⁴ Henry also continued to actively take part in the publishing committee with his name appearing on the masthead.¹⁵ After careful review, Henry (with Smith and Palmer) reported that the moving costs to relocate the Advent Review Office amounted to \$291.75 with an additional \$311.89 owed to James White for personal money expended on previous printing work.¹⁶ Henry posted updates on his fundraising efforts, and his name remained on the masthead until May 15, 1856,¹⁷ when due to ill health, he stepped aside and his spot on the publishing committee was given to J. P. Kellogg.¹⁸ This committee took the pressure off of James White, making it possible to expand the publishing work. Notably, the *Review* shifted from being a biweekly to a weekly publication, and the subscription price was fixed at “one dollar” for a volume of 26 numbers (\$2 per year).¹⁹ The subscription list started to increase steadily.

Legacy

Several Adventist historians have noted the importance of the Lyons’ early financial and administrative contributions, beginning with J. N. Loughborough.²⁰ Loughborough described him as “liberal when the cause owed its very existence to the liberality of its few friends.”²¹ Uriah Smith described Henry and Deborah as those “aged pilgrims who have so long stood in the love of the truth.”²² Henry died on May 13, 1872.²³ A large crowd gathered in the meeting house, and J. N. Andrews officiated the funeral.²⁴ On January 29, 1874, Deborah also passed away. They are buried next to one another in unmarked graves in Oak Hill Cemetery in Battle Creek, Michigan.

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NOTES

1. See Obituary, *ARH*, September 20, 1881, 206.

2. Henry Lyon, "From Bro. Lyon," *ARH*, September 16, 1852, 79, 80.

3. Henry Lyon, "From Bro. Lyon," *ARH*, April 14, 1853, 192.

4. *Ellen G. White Encyclopedia* (2013), s.v. "Henry M. and Deborah Lyon."
5. See note *ARH*, September 8, 1853, 72.
6. Henry Lyon, "To the Saints Scattered Abroad," *ARH*, December 6, 1853, 173.
7. J. N. Loughborough, "Uncle Elkins and His Nephews," *ARH*, January 12, 1897, 18.
8. Geo. W. Amadon, "A Sketch of the Battle Creek Sabbath-School From Its Commencement to the Present Time," *ARH*, November 26, 1901, 765.
9. Henry Lyon, "From Bro. Lyon," *ARH*, December 26, 1854, 152.
10. "Meeting at Battle Creek," *ARH*, October 2, 1855, 56.
11. Henry Lyon, Cyrenius Smith, and D. R. Palmer, "To the Church of God," *ARH*, October 16, 1855, 60.
12. Arthur W. Spalding, *Footprints of the Pioneers* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1947), 160-162.
13. J. N. Loughborough, "Sketches of the Past—No. 100," *Pacific Union Recorder*, July 7, 1910, 1.
14. "Business Proceedings of the Conference at Battle Creek, Mich.," *ARH*, December 4, 1855, 76.
15. His name appears on the masthead beginning *ARH*, December 4, 1855, 73.
16. Henry Lyon, Cyrenius Smith, D. R. Palmer, "To the Church," *ARH*, December 18, 1855, 96.
17. Cf. *ARH*, May 15, 1856, 33.
18. W. C. White, "Sketches and Memories of James and Ellen G. White: XXVI. The Conference of 1856," *ARH*, January 9, 1936, 9.
19. William C. White, "Sketches and Memories of James and Ellen G. White: XXIV—Settling in Battle Creek," *ARH*, August 22, 1935, 9.
20. J. N. Loughborough, *The Great Second Advent Movement: Its Rise and Progress* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1905), 287.
21. Obituary, *ARH*, May 28, 1872, 191.
22. Obituary, *ARH*, February 16, 1864, 95.
23. <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/15329664/henry-lyon> [accessed 11/6/22].
24. Obituary, *ARH*, May 28, 1872, 191.

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