

# Howland, Stockbridge (1801–1883)

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Stockbridge Howland was a layman who organized Sabbath conferences and provided hospitality for traveling preachers during the formative years of the Sabbath-keeping Adventist movement in Maine.

## Early Life

Stockbridge Howland was born in Topsham, Maine, in 1801. While his parents' names are unknown, his father was from Massachusetts and his mother from Maine. In 1833 Stockbridge purchased a large (1200 square feet) three-story house called "Fort Howland" on the corner of Main Street (now State Route 201) and Elm (today Winter) Street (now County Road 24), across the street from the Baptist Church in Topsham, where he lived for the next thirty-eight years. Between 1821 and 1841, Howland served as a deacon in the local Congregational Church.

A trained civil engineer, Howland specialized in the construction of roads, bridges, and mills to grind grain and saw lumber in an era when mill factories lined the banks of the nearby Androscoggin River and its tributaries. In 1828 he married Louisa M. Morse (1806-1897), and together they raised two daughters, Frances (Howland) Lunt (b. 1829) and Rebecca (Howland) Winslow (b. 1836), and one son, Henry (b. 1848).

## Sabbatarian Adventist Hub



Stockbridge Howland

Photo courtesy of Ellen G. White Estate, Inc.

In 1841, the Howlands accepted the message of William Miller (1782-1849) that Christ would come sometime in 1843 or 1844. When the Howlands withdrew from the local Congregational church and donated their savings to spreading the news of Christ's imminent return, their neighbors held that Stockbridge was mentally incompetent. His associates appointed a legal guardian to oversee his financial affairs. Later, when Topsham needed a stone bridge built across the Kennebec River and no one else qualified could be found to build it, the citizenry turned to Howland. Now deemed stable, his legal guardianship was quickly terminated.

Following Bible studies with Joseph Bates (1792-1872) in the spring of 1845, the Howlands became the first family in Maine to keep the seventh-day Sabbath. They opened their spacious home, now called "The Advent Fort," to traveling preachers like Bates and James (1821-1881) and Ellen White (1827-1915), and many early conferences were held in their parlor.

At one of these gatherings in 1845, their daughter Frances, her hands painfully swollen with rheumatic fever, was instantly healed following prayer and the laying on of hands. At another gathering in their home, William Hyde (1828-1915), a poet and hymn writer, was healed of cholera after anointing and prayer.

Here in 1847 Ellen White had the so-called "halo vision" affirming the correctness of the seventh-day Sabbath. Soon after this vision, James White printed *A Word to the "Little Flock"* in Brunswick, across the Androscoggin River from Topsham.

At a conference held in the Howland's home on October 20-22, 1848, attendees studied the meaning of the Sabbath as the seal of God. A month later, the Whites laid plans at the Howland's home to begin publishing a new paper called *Present Truth*, to propagate what James White called "the principal points on which we dwell as present truth...the seventh-day Sabbath and [the] Shut Door."<sup>1</sup>

## Support for the Whites

Between 1847 and 1852, James and Ellen White lived on the second floor of the Howland home, setting up housekeeping with borrowed furniture, no two pieces of which matched. To earn money, James worked on the nearby railroad, cut firewood, and hauled stones. Years later, reflecting on that experience, James declared: "With this family we have ever found true friends and a hospitable home."<sup>2</sup>

During their travels, the Whites often left their son Henry (1847-1863) with the Howlands. Although James offered him a dollar a week, Stockbridge refused the money. Instead, he and Louisa fed, clothed, and educated Henry free of charge. In 1848 James instructed Stockbridge and Louisa to "Kiss Henry for me" but "whip him if he is not a good boy. That agrees with the good book."<sup>3</sup> Years later, Stockbridge, observing Henry's talent for music, purchased a new pump organ, and Henry often played it when the Whites visited the Howland home during their travels in the East. James praised them in the *Review*, stating that they had returned Henry to them "a well-trained, praying boy."<sup>4</sup>

When the Whites with their son visited the Howlands in December 1863, Henry caught a bad cold that turned into pneumonia while he was gluing prophetic charts onto a cloth backing. He died in their home on December 8 at sixteen years of age.

## Lay Ministry in New England

Howland helped to strengthen the conviction of J. N. Andrews (1829-1883) to join the Sabbath-keeping Advent band. Howland's courageous words and steadfast example also helped to quell fanaticism in Maine during the late 1840s.

At one meeting attended by the Whites at Paris, Maine, on September 18, 1849, Stockbridge shouted at a fanatic named F. T. Howland (no relation): "Go out from this meeting! You have torn the hearts of God's children and made them bleed. Leave the house, or God will smite you."<sup>6</sup> The man fled from the house, and those who remained were prostrated with God's presence and power; confessions of sins and wrongdoing followed, and the cause in Maine grew more united.

During the 1850s and 1860s Howland was one of six lay preachers who went around New England sharing Sabbatarian Adventist beliefs.

## Later Life

Sometime before 1870, the Howlands moved into a large house in Allegan, Michigan (their household included eleven boarders). There Stockbridge worked in a window sash factory. Then in 1872 they bought a much smaller house on 81 Champion Street in Battle Creek, Michigan, and Stockbridge occasionally found work as a millwright to design and build mills.

They regularly attended Sabbath school, church, prayer, and testimony meetings in the third Adventist meetinghouse, and after 1878 in the Dime Tabernacle. During the last eleven years of his life, Stockbridge never missed a single quarterly meeting (as Communion services were then called). In the spring of 1883, he contracted pneumonia and died without a struggle on April 8, 1883, at age 82. Two days later, *Review* editor Uriah Smith presided at his funeral in the Dime Tabernacle. Stockbridge Howland was buried in Oak Hill Cemetery in Battle Creek. Four years later his wife Louisa died and was buried beside him.

## Contribution

During the formative years of the Sabbath-keeping Adventist movement in Maine, Stockbridge Howland provided hospitality for traveling preachers (including the Whites), helped to combat fanaticism, and through his lay preaching, brought unity among the often contentious believers.

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## NOTES

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2. James White, "Eastern Tour," *Adventist Review*, September 29, 1853, 140.
3. James White to Stockbridge and Louisa Howland, November 19, 1848, quoted in Gerald Wheeler, *James White: Innovator and Overcomer* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2003), 53, 68n.
4. James White, "Eastern Tour," *Adventist Review*, November 1, 1853, 133.
5. Quoted in Wheeler, 59.

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