

Wade, Pitt Abraham (1867–1947)

LORON T. WADE

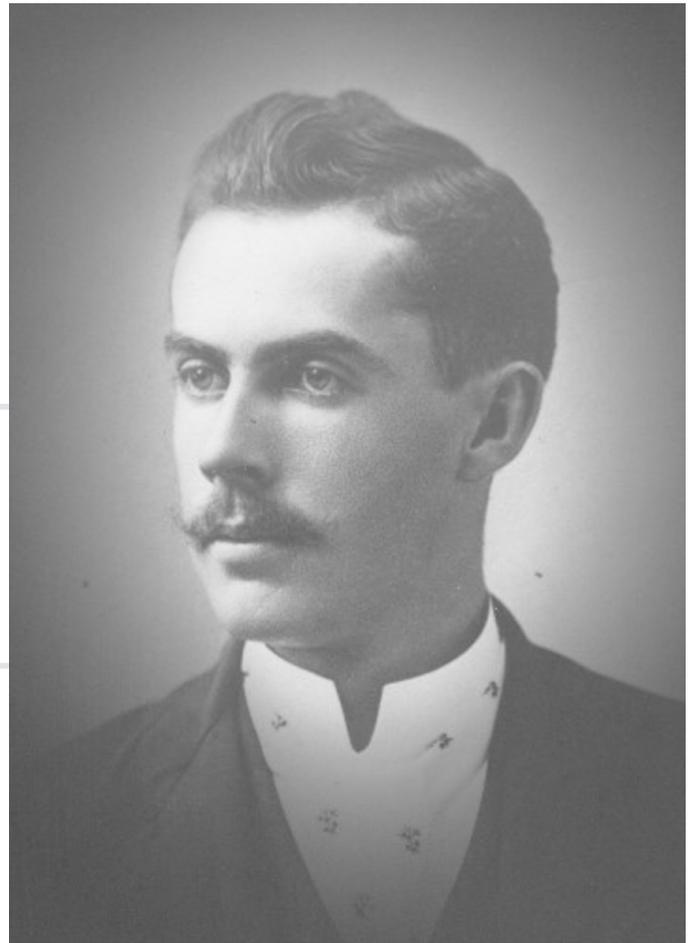
During a career that spanned 40 years in 11 countries Loron T. Wade was an educator, pastor, teacher of pastors, evangelist, and theologian. Now retired, he dedicates a major portion of his time to editorial and writing work.

Pitt Abraham Wade was an entrepreneurial physician whose endeavors to establish a sanitarium in Colorado during the first decade of the twentieth century entailed substantial interaction with Ellen G. White.

Early Life, Education, and Marriage

Pitt was born on August 23, 1867, in Grant County, Wisconsin.¹ His father, a physician and a Baptist preacher, died in 1881. Young Pitt converted to Adventism around 1886 after his debating team drew lots to defend Saturday as a day of rest in a Saturday versus Sunday debate. In his enthusiasm for his new faith he quickly convinced his mother, siblings and grandparents who had been lifelong Baptists.

In 1887 Pitt left home and got a job selling shoes in La Crosse, Wisconsin. He turned out to be a gifted salesperson, an ability he exercised in nearly all the activities of life. Through a series of sales jobs he put himself through medical school while contributing to the support of his mother and sisters. In 1897 he graduated cum laude from Barnes Medical College in St. Louis, Missouri.² At the Adventist church in St. Louis Pitt met Alice Zener, a St. Louis native, who soon left for Battle Creek, Michigan, to study medicine at American Medical Missionary College, established by J. H. Kellogg.



Pitt Abraham Wade

Photo courtesy of Loron T. Wade.

Pitt also headed for Michigan, where he took an internship at the Battle Creek Sanitarium, followed by further training at the Chicago Lying-in [maternity] Hospital.³ In 1899 he moved to Cañon City, Colorado, where he would practice medicine for the next 44 years. Pitt and Alice were married on December 31, 1900.

The Cañon City Hot Springs Sanitarium Project

By a series of creative publicity strategies, Pitt quickly built up a successful practice in Cañon City. From the start, though, he and Alice shared a vision for doing something more than spending a lifetime seeing patients and making money.⁴ They wanted to start a sanitarium where they could apply the principles of “hygienic diet” and drug-free treatments promoted at Battle Creek.

An initially promising project to establish the sanitarium in the Colorado mountains near Mount Princeton fell through in the fall of 1903. But shortly after returning to Cañon City, the Wades took an option to acquire property near the city where there was an artesian well flowing with of hot water per day and a separate cold-water spring. The property included , and they believed part of this could be divided into lots and sold to pay for future development of the institution.⁵

With his usual brimming enthusiasm, Wade soon convinced a number of prominent citizens in Cañon to support his project, naming two of them to his five-man board of directors. He secured a recommendation from the governor of the state, and persuaded the officers of the Colorado Conference of Seventh-day Adventists to support his cause, naming the president of the conference, G. F. Watson, to his board. The corporation he established was authorized to offer 200,000 shares of capital stock at \$1 each. He planned to sell \$40,000 of the total amount to Seventh-day Adventists.

Colorado's Sanitarium Conflicts

Dr. Wade's project was complicated, however, by concurrent developments involving two other Adventist ventures in Colorado. The sanitarium established in Boulder, 140 miles to the north, had been struggling financially since its inception in 1895. Adding to its challenges, Dr. O. G. Place, who had been the Boulder Sanitarium's medical director during its first year of operation, opened a competing institution a short distance away in 1901.⁶

Then in 1905 Dr. Place offered to buy the Boulder Sanitarium for \$50,000. The transaction might have been approved at the General Conference session that year, had it not been for the intervention of Ellen White, who urged support for the sanitarium and rebuked Dr. Place for his disloyal competition.⁷

The matter was referred to the Colorado Conference constituency meeting to be held in August. Under these circumstances it is understandable that when, during the first week of August, Colorado newspapers published a glowing account of Pitt Wade's sanitarium project in Cañon City⁸ and it became known that the conference

president was a member of its board, the leaders of the Boulder San saw this as one more stab in the back.

At the Colorado constituency meeting in Denver, August 17–27, General Conference vice president George A. Irwin presented counsel from Ellen White just received during a visit to her home in Elmshaven, California, that persuaded Colorado Adventists to vote unanimously for giving the sanitarium in Boulder the support necessary to make it a success. As for the project at Cañon City, Ellen White did not condemn it as she had the institution established by Dr. Place, but urged its leaders to hold off on their project and support the Boulder enterprise until the latter could be placed on a firm footing.⁹

Struggling With Ellen White's Counsel

Pitt Wade could not attend the meetings because Alice, who had just given birth to their daughter Julia Margaret, was "very, very ill."¹⁰ But after he received word about Ellen White's counsel, his initial response was favorable. Irwin reported to W. C. White that Dr. Wade had "telephoned down that he felt in harmony with what the Lord had said."¹¹

However, after further reflection, Wade's feelings changed. He concluded that he and his project had been judged and condemned without a fair hearing. It seemed to him that if Ellen White could get a true picture of the situation, she would urge him to go ahead with the project at once.

So, with his colleague Dr. Willard Hills, Dr. Wade took the train for California, where they succeeded in arranging a meeting with Ellen White at Elmshaven on September 24. Ever the enthusiastic and fervent salesperson, Wade described the Cañon City project in glowing terms.

In response, Ellen White emphasized that she had not received additional light that would justify her saying anything beyond what she had already written. She mentioned three points of concern that reflected her earlier counsels. She had been shown that there was danger in "linking up with unbelievers," referring to the non-Adventist members of the board and those who would be stockholders. Furthermore, the Lord did not want financial support drawn away from the Boulder Sanitarium until it could be established on a firmer basis. Regarding her third concern, she was not as definite. This one had to do with the "persons involved" in the enterprise, but she wanted to be clearer before saying much about it.

The two doctors insisted that they were eager to comply with every point of counsel from the Lord, but also urged that under no condition should the project be delayed. Finally Ellen White said, "The presentation is very favorable that you make. But why the matter should have been presented before me in the matter of warning, I do not know." She promised to review what she had written previously on the subject, and if she received any further light she would write.¹²

Apparently Pitt Wade's fervent desire to receive Ellen White's support led him to interpret her words as a promise. However, when he received her message after returning to Colorado, it was not the one he had hoped

for. Ellen White wrote that she was “now prepared to speak positively” on the matter because on “Thursday night [September 28] the matter was presented to me more fully.” She told the doctor that the principal problem was not the location of his project or the way he planned to finance it; the problem was his tendency to give way to “passion”—he had a hot temper—and to cherish feelings of hatred and bitterness and lash out against anyone who did not agree with him and support his plans. “My brother, you need a new spiritual life,” she told him. “For the reasons that I am presenting to you, I beg of you to keep free from the burdens that would come to you in connection with a sanitarium.”¹³

Ellen White urged Wade to recognize that the Lord was warning him with a longing desire that he avoid bitter heartache and sorrows. She pictured a dark and difficult path ahead if he failed to submit and make the changes that were so urgently needed. Dr. Wade’s initial reaction again appears to have been almost entirely positive. He replied expressing gratitude for the letter of personal counsel and stating that he had told Dr. Hills “we had better wait. . . . I want to get everything out of my character that is contrary to the Spirit of Christ.”¹⁴ A month later he wrote that night after night he was spending “almost the entire night in prayer, asking [God] to remove from my character everything that will in any way stand in my way from being used of Him.”¹⁵

He stated that he believed the delay in moving forward with the project had been beneficial in making him aware of his sinful traits and the importance of having well-grounded Adventists on the board of directors. At the same time Dr. Wade made clear that he had no plans to pull back from the sanitarium project. “If the work had been stopped before so many different people had become involved financially, I would have thought that [God] did not want a sanitarium at Cañon City,” he reasoned, “but . . . he has blessed my plans in a way that cannot be doubted.”¹⁶

A few months later, though, after concluding that his hopes of establishing a sanitarium were now gone, Dr. Wade’s initial spirit of acceptance had changed, as had his recollection of events. By June or July of 1906 he stated that in the “interview with Mrs. E. G. White she told us (Dr. Hills and myself) that she thought we should take advantage of this most wonderful opening.” There is nothing in the transcript of the interview to support this statement. “We returned home overjoyed,” he wrote.

It had been “a communication from W. C. White” three weeks later “that killed the whole thing,” he now claimed. The letter he was referring had been from Ellen White, but he attributed the contents to her son, charging that W. C. White, George Irwin, and Boulder Sanitarium manager F. M. Wilcox were forging testimonies to “boost” projects that met their approval and “crush” others. This is a “wicked, wicked work,” he declared!¹⁷

Apparently Dr. Wade was unaware of how clearly he was illustrating the truth of the testimony he had received regarding his character defects. The Cañon City sanitarium never did become a reality.

Later Life and Legacy

In the following years Dr. Wade initiated several other business ventures, including sheep ranching and mining, none of them successful. In the 1920s he was involved in a bitter church conflict that resulted in the Cañon City Adventist Church being disbanded on June 4, 1924. When it was reorganized, he and his family continued to attend although they were not readmitted, and for a number of years they were ostracized by the church.

Pitt Wade did, indeed, tread the path of sorrows that Ellen White had foreseen. However, the setbacks and hurts he suffered accomplished what the inspired counsel had not achieved. He continued to enjoy success in his medical practice, and his four children all died as church members. The next generation remembered him as an affectionate grandfather with a great sense of humor and an endless supply of stories. Shortly before his death on March 19, 1947,¹⁸ in National City, California, he told a close family member that his heart was at peace and free from the bitterness and anger of the past.

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———. Ellen G. White to Drs. Wade and Hill. October 10, 1905. Letter 283, 1905. Ellen G. White Writings. egwwritings.org.

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NOTES

1. "Pitt Abraham Wade obituary," *ARH*, May 29, 1947, 22.
2. Pitt A. Wade to Ellen G. White, September 14, 1903, Ellen G. White Estate, ellenwhite.org; Cañon City *Daily Record*, March 20, 1947.
3. Wade to E. G. White, September 14, 1903.
4. Alice Zener Wade letters to her family, 1903, in author's possession.
5. "Sanitarium Company Chartered Tuesday," Cañon City *Record*, August 3, 1905, 4.
6. See Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White: The Later Elmshaven Years* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1982), vol. 6, chap. 3 ("Meeting Crises in Colorado").
7. Ellen G. White to Francis M. Wilcox, June 29, 1905, Letter 163, 1905; Ellen G. White, "An Appeal on Behalf of the Boulder-Colorado Sanitarium," *Special Testimonies*, Series B, no. 5, 39, Ellen G. White Writings, egwwritings.org.
8. For example, "Sanitarium Company Chartered Tuesday" and "Cañon City to Have \$200,000 Sanitarium," *Denver Post*, August 2, 1905, 3.
9. E. G. White, "An Appeal on Behalf of the Boulder-Colorado Sanitarium," 32; A. L. White, 38.
10. Pitt A. Wade to William C. White, July 13, 1906, Ellen G. White Estate, ellenwhite.org.
11. George A. Irwin to William C. White, August 28, 1905, Ellen G. White Estate, ellenwhite.org.
12. Ellen G. White "Interview With Drs. Wade and Hills Regarding the Cañon City Sanitarium," Manuscript 185, 1905, Ellen G. White Writings, egwwritings.org.
13. Ellen G. White to Dr. Wade, October 2, 1905, Letter 285, 1905; Ellen G. White to Promoters of the Canon City Sanitarium, October 2, 1905, Letter 287, 1905; Ellen G. White to Drs. Wade and Hill, October 10, 1905, Letter 283, 1905, Ellen G. White Estate, egwwritings.org.
14. Pitt Wade to Ellen G. White, October 22, 1905, Ellen G. White Estate, ellenwhite.org.
15. Pitt Wade to Ellen G. White, November 27, 1905, Ellen G. White Estate, ellenwhite.org.
16. Wade to E. G. White, October 22, 1905.

17. Pitt Wade to unidentified recipient, 1906 (after April), Ellen G. White Estate, ellenwhite.org; Wade to W. C. White.

18. "Pitt Abraham Wade obituary," *Pacific Union Recorder*, April 30, 1947, 11.

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