

Wellcome, Isaac Cummings (1818–1895)



Isaac C. Wellcome

From *History of the Second Advent Message and Mission, Doctrine and People* (Boston, MA: Advent Christian Publication Society, 1874).

MILTON HOOK

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Isaac C. Wellcome was a leading Advent Christian preacher in the Millerite heritage. A prolific writer, his classic work was *History of the Second Advent Message and Mission, Doctrine and People*(1874).

Early Life and Ministry

Isaac Wellcome was born at Minot, Maine, on May 8, 1818. His parents were Timothy Levi Wellcome and wife Mary Williams (Cummings). There were seven children raised on their farming property: Michael (b. 1815), Isaac Cummings (b. 1818), Louisa (b. 1819), Jacob Bray (b. 1825), Solomon Cummings (b. 1827), Mary Elizabeth (b. 1827) and Cyrus Haskell (b. 1834).¹

Skepticism characterized Isaac's early years. He then dabbled in Universalism. A conversion experience in 1840 led him to join the Methodist church.² When Millerite preachers entered their region in 1843, the Wellcome family accepted their message, both Michael and Isaac taking up preaching for the Millerite cause.³ Eventually joined by Solomon, the Wellcome brothers continued their preaching after 1844, not having lost hope in the imminence of the Second Advent. Isaac located at Hallowell in the Kennebec River valley. There, on December 24, 1845, he married Mary Decker of Gardiner, a little further down-river. Three sons were born into their home: Charles (1852-1864), Henry (1858-1860) and Frank Orville (1862-1943).⁴

After moving to Wisconsin, Michael and Solomon accepted the Saturday Sabbath in the mid-1850s. Having a background in Wesleyan teachings about sanctification, Solomon, especially, carried a preference for perfectionism. He gravitated to the view that sin in human nature could be totally eradicated. His congregations manifested fanaticism and eventually he separated from the Seventh-day Adventists, reuniting with the Advent Christian community.⁵

Back in Maine, Isaac Wellcome continued to nurture the “first day” Adventist believers in Hallowell. He was ordained on June 6, 1851.⁶ In the course of his duties he acted as the local agent for *Advent Herald*,⁷ the Millerite periodical for which both he⁸ and his wife, Mary, contributed articles.⁹

Wellcome became the leading Advent preacher and conference-organizer within the Kennebec River. One successful gathering was held “in the yellow schoolhouse” near Brunswick, September 1858.¹⁰ The following year another conference was held in Yarmouth, Isaac serving as secretary.¹¹ Wellcome identified with the stream of Second Adventism that organized as the Advent Christian Association in 1860.¹² By 1863 he was serving as president and treasurer of the Advent Christian conference in Maine and chairman of their Board of Missions.¹³

Second Advent Historian

In 1855 Wellcome demonstrated an interest in recording the history of the Millerite cause, especially its leading preachers. He made plans to publish a memoir of the prominent Millerite preacher Charles Fitch but relatives of Fitch made objections and he abandoned the project.¹⁴ Two decades later he included his tribute to Fitch in his scholarly work, *History of the Second Advent Message and Mission, Doctrine and People*. Wellcome portrayed himself as “an impartial historian.”¹⁵ It is a legitimate assessment. He drew on his own memory in addition to periodicals of his day in discussing both the productive Christian witness of the Millerite cause and the chief evils that emerged in what he regarded as its fanatical fringe.

Wellcome depicted Millerism as an international phenomenon, not one confined to New England. He highlighted, for example, the contribution made by Dr. Joseph Wolff, a Bavarian Jew who became a Christian missionary and at one time believed the Second Advent would occur in 1847.¹⁶ Wellcome regarded Delos Mansfield and his wife, missionaries to the British West Indies (1846-1849), as true apostles of the Advent cause.¹⁷ He drew attention to the Dutchman, M.H. Hentzepeter, a pamphleteer of the Second Advent.¹⁸ Without endorsing Edward Irving’s late lapse into ecstatic utterances, Wellcome spoke highly of Irving’s vibrant preaching in London about the Second Coming.¹⁹

On the other hand, Wellcome’s history was not a white wash. He documented cases of fanaticism that rose to the surface in the melting pot of Millerism. One instance was a woman who claimed she could walk on water. Another was Silas Lamson, a former patient in a lunatic asylum who always wore white clothing and carried a white umbrella and was allowed to speak for hours about himself at some Millerite gatherings under the guise of free speech. Another notable example was John Starkweather of Boston who, in 1843 and 1844, took over the

pulpit during an absence of Joshua Himes. He would regularly convulse like an epileptic and encourage the audience to do the same, claiming it was a gift of the Spirit or sealing power. He was a divisive force in the Boston Millerite community and eventually advocated spiritual wifery (the notion that one could identify someone other than his spouse as his “spiritual” wife for eternity).²⁰

Wellcome’s history is informative for early Seventh-day Adventist history, its parlance and context having similar origins. At the same time, it gives the perspective of one whose antipathy towards Seventh-day Adventism is clear. He reported hearing Ellen Harmon (later Ellen White) speak on several occasions in Maine early in her career, and witness her speak until exhausted and fall on the floor in “a mesmeric state” (and claimed to have himself twice helped catch her so she did not hit the floor). He made much of the fact that she and other Seventh-day Adventist founders initially held the “shut door” belief that those who had given up their faith in the 1844 movement would be eternally lost.²¹

James White, wrote Wellcome, had preached “the Advent near” with “good success” in Maine but was then “captivated by fanaticism.” He acknowledged that the Whites had abandoned the “shut door” teaching but castigated them for lack of openness about their early views. Writing in the 1870s, Wellcome observed that the Seventh-day Adventists “have some able preachers and writers . . . and many worthy Christian members,” who he thought to be ignorant of the historical facts that he related about their movement’s origins. He also noted that “Eld. White has shown much ability as a financier and theological manager” and that the Seventh-day Adventists “have a large printing establishment, under systematic arrangement worthy of imitation by the Second Advent body.” On the other hand, they had organized “a church, or class of churches, with rules more stringent and autocratic, we believe, than any of the other Protestant churches.”²²

Prolific Author and Publisher

In 1872, Wellcome established the Scriptural Publication Society and Home and Foreign Tract Mission in Yarmouth, Maine. He managed the enterprise until his death, publishing 10 million tracts, 150,000 copies of religious books and numerous pamphlets. He was instrumental in establishing the Wellcome Press for the Advent Christian mission work in India.²³

Mary Wellcome, too, became a noted author, writing mainly religious articles for the local *Portland Transcript*. She remained a member of the Methodist Episcopal Church and in 1874 was granted a minister’s licence. It was written of her, “For the first time in New England, and probably within the limits of the Methodist Episcopal Church, a woman was granted by a Quarterly Conference of ministers the rights and freedom to exercise her gifts as a local preacher.” Her licence was renewed annually for two decades.²⁴

Isaac Wellcome suffered a stroke and died at age 74 on March 26, 1895, in Yarmouth. He was laid to rest in the Riverside Cemetery, Yarmouth.²⁵ Less than three months later, on June 6, 1895, Mary also passed away and was

interred with him.²⁶

Publications by Isaac Wellcome

The Plan of Redemption by Our Lord Jesus Christ: Carefully Examined and Argued by Inquiring Into God's Revealed Purpose in the Creation of Man. Co-authored with Clarkson Goud. 460 pages.

The Seventh-day Sabbath Claims Examined: The Lord's Day Vindicated 72 pages.

History of the Second Advent Message and Mission, Doctrine and People 720 pages.

A Treatise on the 24th and 25th Chapters of Matthew: Showing the Fulfilment of Most of the Predictions of Christ, by Copious Extracts from History; Consequently, That the Gentile Times are Nearly Ended and the Kingdom of God Soon to Come. 150 pages.

The Duty and Object of Christian Baptism. 84 pages.

A Pamphlet on War. 48 pages.

The Tobacco Plug and Cigar. 48 pages.

The New World. (Also in Norwegian language). 24 pages.

The Inquirer: Catholic or Protestant - Which? 48 pages.

Church Spectacles. 24 pages.

God's Special Gift: Mortal or Immortal Sinners - Which? 36 pages.

Our King is Coming. 12 pages.

Lost, or Saved? 4 pages.

The Berean's Casket and Repository, Containing Select Portions of the Sacred Word on a Great Variety of Subjects

The World's Crisis and Second Advent Messenger.

Should Christians Fight?

The Ottoman Turks.

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Waggoner, Joseph H. "The Mark of the Beast." *ARH*, November 15, 1864.

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NOTES

1. "Isaac Cummings Wellcome," *FamilySearch*, accessed December 30, 2022, <https://www.familysearch.org/tree/pedigree/landscape/K8ZZ-4P8>.
2. "Isaac Cummings Wellcome," *Find A Grave*, Memorial ID 65892459, February 20, 2011, accessed December 30, 2022, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/65892459/isaac-cummings-wellcome>.
3. A.D. Chilson, "Saved From False Teachings," *ARH*, March 10, 1977, 4-6.
4. "Isaac Cummings Wellcome," *FamilySearch*.
5. Chilson, "Saved From False Teachings," 4-6.
6. "Isaac Cummings Wellcome," *Find A Grave Memorial*.
7. See, for example, "Agents," *Advent Herald*, December 30, 1854, 415.
8. Isaac C. Wellcome, "Prayer for Laborers," *Advent Herald*, February 26, 1853, 71.
9. Mary D. Wellcome, "Letter from Augusta, Me.," *Advent Herald*, March 26, 1853, 102-103.
10. "If the Lord permit . . .," *Advent Herald*, October 2, 1858, 320.

11. H.B. Sevey, "The Maine Conference," *Advent Herald*, October 1, 1859, 310-311.
12. Denis Fortin, "Advent Christian Church," *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists*, February 15, 2023, accessed March 15, 2023.
<https://encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=H8SW>.
13. Isaac C. Wellcome, "Report of the Maine Advent Conference," *Advent Herald*, November 3, 1863, 331.
14. "To Correspondents," *Advent Herald*, January 26, 1856, 32.
15. Isaac C. Wellcome, *History of the Second Advent Message and Mission, Doctrine and People* (Boston, MA: Advent Christian Publication Society, 1874), 382. Historian Gary Land assesses Wellcome's contribution to the historiography of Millerism in his essay "The Historians and the Millerites," included in the posthumous publication of Everett N. Dick, *William Miller and the Advent Crisis, 1831-1844* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1994), xiv-xvi.
16. Wellcome, *History of the Second Advent Message*, 147-149.
17. Ibid, 565.
18. Ibid, 532.
19. Ibid, 527-528.
20. Ibid, 386-394.
21. Ibid, 397-398, 402. For fuller understanding of the "shut door" teaching in the experience of the founders of Seventh-day Adventism, see Merlin D. Burt, "Shut Door," in *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, ed. Denis Fortin and Jerry Moon. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2013), 1158-1162
22. Wellcome, *History of the Second Advent Message*, 401-402, 406-407.
23. "Isaac Cummings Wellcome," *Find A Grave*.
24. Obituary in *Old Times of Yarmouth, Maine* (Somersworth, NH: New Hampshire Pub. Co., 1971), 692-693, reproduced at "Mary (Decker) Wellcome," *Find A Grave*, Memorial ID 102206378, December 15, 2012, accessed December 30, 2022,
<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/102206378/mary-wellcome>.
25. "Isaac Cummings Wellcome," *Find a Grave*.
26. "Mary (Decker) Wellcome," *Find A Grave*.

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