

Amadon, George Washington (1832–1913)

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George Washington Amadon contributed to the success of the Review and Herald publishing office during its earliest decades as a typesetter, foreman, administrator, editor, and author.

Early Years

George Washington Amadon was born on August 30, 1832 at Sandlake, New York, to Philanda Amadon (b.1808) and Eliza Amadon (b. 1809). He was the oldest of five children, including Samantha (b. 1833), Liland (b. 1837), Lewis (b. 1839), and Emeline (b. 1841). Very early in his life George was sent to live with his grandfather near Boston, Massachusetts.

A few years later, back in upstate New York during the 1840s, he served as a "hoggee" (mule driver) on the Erie Canal towpath in upstate New York. Sometime in the late 1840s, he studied at Oberlin College in Oberlin, Ohio, although he may not have completed a degree.

Publishing House Pioneer

In 1853 James and Ellen White and J. N. Loughborough led Amadon to Sabbath-keeping Adventism. He was then hired as a typesetter at five dollars a week at the press in Rochester, New York.



George W. Amadon

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

With the move of the publishing work to Battle Creek, Michigan, in 1855, Amadon moved with it, and in time he became a printer, writer, editor of the *Youth's Instructor* (1858-1864), foreman in charge of foreign language publications, and vice-president of the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association. A strong advocate of "Gospel Order" in the 1850s and early 1860s, he helped organize local churches throughout Michigan. In 1858-59, however, Hiram Edson persuaded Amadon to go to Waukon, Iowa, to take J. N. Andrews' (1829-1883) place on the family farm.

According to his diaries, Amadon was largely a self-taught man, reading widely and learning eighteen ancient and modern languages, including Hebrew, Greek, German, Danish, Swedish, and French, in order to set type for foreign publications. He could set 10,000 pieces of type a day. (Despite this James White was critical that Amadon was not laboring hard enough. However, Amadon's diaries show that he often worked twelve to sixteen-hour days, including Saturday nights and Sundays).

Marriage and Family Life

In 1857 Amadon met Martha Dorner Byington (1834-1937), who had recently moved to Battle Creek from Bucks Bridge, New York, to live with the Whites. Their friendship led to marriage on November 24, 1860, solemnized by Martha's father, John Byington (1798-1887), who bought them a house on Van Buren Street where they lived for twenty years until they moved into a house at 19 Hill Street in 1880. They had two daughters: Kate, born on March 15, 1866, and Grace, born on February 24, 1872. They adopted a son, Claude, who was born March 15, 1876.

An indulgent father, Amadon hated to discipline his daughter Katie; he played with her on the living room floor, planned elaborate birthday parties and Christmas celebrations for her, took her to see Fanfough's Caravan (a circus) and to visit with the famous abolitionist and women's rights advocate Sojourner Truth, and paid for her piano, organ, and vocal music lessons. In 1877 he taught her to set type at the Review office, and when she grew adept at it, he hired her. Unlike many Adventists in the 1870s and 1880s, George and Martha regularly attended public concerts, circuses, and meetings of the Christian Philosophical Society and the Literary Society.

Author, Editor, and Churchman

Amadon's frequent articles in the *Instructor*, and in the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* focus on church organization, Sabbath/Sunday issues, and health reform (George and Martha were strict vegetarians). For many years, Amadon served as an elder and Sabbath school superintendent in the Battle Creek Tabernacle, a religion teacher at Battle Creek College, and treasurer of the Michigan Conference. When the General Conference was formed in 1863, he was elected to the Committee on Nominations. Amadon served on the General Conference Executive Committee for many years.

A strong believer in the prophetic gift of Ellen White and the divine leadership of James White, Amadon served on a committee in March 1863 that cleared the Whites of charges of profiteering, presenting 74 affidavits (character witnesses) in a 39-page "Vindication of the Business Career of Elder James White." He and Martha were present on June 6, 1863 when Ellen received a health reform vision at the home of Martha's cousin, Aaron Hilliard (1820-1875), in Otsego, Michigan.

On August 3, 1864 Amadon (along with John Byington and J. N. Loughborough) signed a letter to Michigan Governor Austin Blair explaining the Church's pro-Union, anti-slavery, and noncombatant position during the Civil War (1861-1865).

Following James White's first stroke in 1865, Amadon helped care for the partially paralyzed General Conference president and he and Adelia Van Horn (1839-1922) took charge of the publishing work in September and October while James recovered. Amadon also traveled extensively with Mrs. White in 1867-68 when James was unable to do so. To relieve the Whites of hospitality duties, the Amadons often opened their home to visiting Church workers. Again in October 1867 Amadon signed a statement supporting the Whites' sacrifices, faithfulness to the testimonies, Ellen's visions, and James' right to rebuke wrongdoers. Further he apologized for not supporting them better.

Conflicts

George's sharp wit and acid pen got him into trouble with the Whites when in 1869 he and Uriah Smith (1832-1903) wrote a satire on the behavior of certain Battle Creek Adventists who wore copper-toed shoes, agate shirt buttons, long bonnet strings, and "artificial" (prostheses). Ellen sent him letters rebuking him for criticizing her husband and others, for his lack of good judgment, for his self-confidence, and for his "long prosy speeches."

Although in his letters and diaries Amadon occasionally bemoaned his "exalted, puffed up...jealous, censuring, backbity, hypocritical" state, this spiritual sensitivity did not save him and Martha from being dropped from church membership during the "purge" of 1870 when the Battle Creek Church was reduced from nearly 400 members to only 12. Amadon resigned from the press on March 22 and spent the next eight months living with Martha's parents, John and Catharine Byington, near Newton, Michigan, planting, weeding, watering, and harvesting their huge gardens, enjoying family picnics at Goguac Lake, and taking care of his ailing in-laws. He and Martha were restored to church membership in November 1870.

Later Life

Although Amadon set the type for hundreds of other authors' articles, tracts, and books, he published only four of his own: *Much in Little: Being a Selection of Brief Testimonies on Man's Present Condition, the Intermediate State, Future Punishment, etc.* (Review and Herald, 1884); he was one of nine contributors to *The Bible Students' Library*

(Review and Herald, 1889-1894); "A Sketch of the Battle Creek Sabbath School from Its Commencement to October 1, 1901" (printed posthumously in the *Sabbath School Worker*, February 1947); and *Which Day Do You Keep?: And Why?* (Review and Herald, 18--?).

After a fire burnt down the publishing house on December 20, 1902, Amadon went to Nashville, Tennessee, where he helped Edson White (1849-1928) publish his book *Gospel Primer* and the periodical *Southern Watchman*. In 1904 he returned to Battle Creek as the visiting pastor at the Dime Tabernacle. At 72, he was ordained to the ministry by the West Michigan Conference. Encouraged by Ellen White to carry on a ministry of reconciliation with estranged Adventists like A. R. Henry, A. T. Jones, and John Harvey Kellogg, Amadon and A. C. Bourdeau met with Kellogg for seven hours at his home on November 10, 1907, seeking to bring him back to the Church, but to no avail.

Amadon (like Ellen White) attended his last General Conference session in 1909. In 1911 she sent him an autographed copy of her new book *Acts of the Apostles*. That same year, George, Martha, and their daughter Grace (1872-1945) moved to St. Joseph, Michigan. Here they entertained many international guests and enjoyed relaxing near Lake Michigan and the St. Joseph River.

George Amadon died at 80 on February 24, 1913 in St. Joseph. Following his funeral, presided over by Elder Kit Carson Russell, he was buried in Oak Hill Cemetery in Battle Creek.

Contribution

George Amadon's primary contributions to the Seventh-day Adventist Church are the hundreds of articles, tracts, pamphlets, and books he helped to publish during his more than fifty years of service at the Review and Herald and Southern Publishing Association presses (1853-1904). As a church elder, Sabbath school teacher, and ordained minister, he was widely respected as a man of prayer and fasting in his spiritual life and as a methodical, systematic, and accurate worker in all of his business relations at the Review and Herald press.

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Note

1. Ellen G. White to Brethren Smith and Amadon, April 23, 1869, Letter S-3-1869, Center for Adventist Research, James White Library, Andrews University.

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