

Van Horn, Adelia Parlince (Patten) (1839–1922)

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Adelia Patten Van Horn.

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Adelia Van Horn was an assistant to Ellen G. White, the editor for *The Youth's Instructor*, and the first female treasurer for the General Conference.

Early Life

Born Adelia Parlince Patten to Levi Curtis and Adelia Patten in Clay, Onondaga County, New York, on June 30, 1839,¹ Adelia Van Horn was the oldest of five children. At age 19, Patten became the first Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) convert from her father's family,² after hearing the preaching of Elder Alexander Ross, James White, and J. N. Loughborough. She was baptized in 1861 at Battle Creek by Elder White.³ Following her baptism, Adelia Patten moved into the White's home, where she assisted Mrs. White with her publications, while tutoring and caring for the children.⁴ James White described Adelia as having "an excellent influence over our children,"⁵ and although she was never formally adopted, one biographer notes that "in some ways, she became the daughter that James and Ellen never had."⁶

Work and Ministry

After observing the lack of writings for young children, early in 1863 Patten began a series of Sabbath-school lessons in the *Youth's Instructor*, entitled "Bible Knowledge for Little Children."⁷ This was the first full series of original Sabbath-school lessons prepared for the children of Seventh-day Adventists. In August, Patten accompanied the White family to Topsham, Maine, where she looked after the boys while their parents travelled.⁸ The Whites were particularly intent on moving Henry and Edson from Battle Creek, as the boys had developed a fascination with war activities.⁹ In December, Henry developed pneumonia. The Whites returned home, but Henry worsened and subsequently passed away with his family and friends—including Patten—in the room.¹⁰ Patten gave the life sketch at his funeral, which was later captured in the book *Appeal to the Youth: A Funeral Address for Henry N. White*.¹¹

In July 1864, Patten was appointed the fourth editor of the *Youth's Instructor*, a role she held for four years.¹² During that time, Adelia met Isaac Van Horn, a convert of Joseph Bates and Seventh-day Adventist minister. James White later recalled that when "Elder I. D. Van Horn asked [for Adelia's] hand, we consented, and gave her to him with the interest parents feel for their daughters."¹³ The couple were married in Battle Creek on April 29, 1865.¹⁴ This was a busy season, as Adelia was working as a clerk in the counting room of the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association in addition to her editorship,¹⁵ and was called back to the White's home in Dansville late in 1865 to help care for James White following his stroke.¹⁶ The couple subsequently lived with the Whites during their early years of marriage, with many duties pressing on Adelia—not least of which was the shepherding of Edson and his increasingly worrying behavior.¹⁷

In 1869, Adelia van Horn was appointed as the executive secretary of the SDA Publishing Association,¹⁸ a role she held until poor health forced her to resign three years later.¹⁹ However, her managerial and clerical talents were evident, and in 1871 Adelia became the fifth treasurer of the General Conference. She was the first woman to serve as a General Conference officer.²⁰ She remained in this role until 1873, at which time ill health again forced her from this role. James White described her tenure as completed with "great ability and unparalleled devotion," arguing for a generous financial package to be awarded in the wake of her resignation.²¹

Later that year, the Van Horns answered the call to establish the Seventh-day Adventist church in the Pacific Northwest. They travelled to California in December over the transcontinental railroad and spent the winter working with believers in California, before travelling to Portland, Oregon, and transferring to a steamboat for the trip up the Columbia River.²² This was likely a difficult trip for Adelia, who was still unwell and pregnant with her first child.²³

The couple began evangelistic services in Walla Walla, Washington, in a 50-foot tent in the spring of 1874. The campaign was successful, with a congregation officially organized and a newly built church dedicated on July 3, 1875, with Isaac Van Horn as the pastor.²⁴

A year later, the Van Horns shifted their evangelistic focus to the Willamette Valley, making their home in Salem, Oregon.²⁵ Adelia's sister, Francis Patten, came to visit in 1877, but decided to stay after meeting and falling in

love with Isaac's assistant, Alonzo T. Jones. They were married and moved in permanently with the Van Horns, a decision that both couples came to regret over time due to the ill health of both sisters and differing opinions on ministry between the husbands.²⁶

Ellen White visited the Van Horns in Oregon in 1878, meeting two of Adelia's three children, Burt Isaac (born 1874) and Newman Curtis (born 1878). Charles Wesley was born in 1880.²⁷ At that time Adelia was the secretary of the North Pacific Conference.²⁸ Ellen White praised their evangelistic work, observing that "Elder Van Horn is a missionary in the true sense of the word, and a man of excellent ability and deep spirituality. His wife is equally talented and self-sacrificing." She also noted that both Adelia and her sister Frances had suffered from ill health: "at times it was feared that both would lose their lives," but that prayers had been answered and both were in much better health.²⁹ However, after Ellen White visited again in 1880, she wrote to her husband that both Isaac and Adelia had neglected their ministry work, reporting that "Adelia holds [Isaac] back from his labour and he will consent to be held. They have three children. She centres all her powers on them and labours to have him do the same, and she has about succeeded."³⁰ The next summer, the Van Horns were transferred to California, and shortly after, they returned to the East.³¹

Final Years and Death

Over the next decade, the couple lived and ministered in Michigan, with Isaac Van Horn travelling extensively throughout the Atlantic Union Conference and beyond, while Adelia managed the home, contributed to local church ministries, and cared for her ailing father, who passed away of paralysis in 1893.³² The couple's youngest son, Charles Wesley Van Horn, tragically died on August, 10, 1908, the same year Isaac Van Horn was moved to a sanitarium because of ill health. He, too, passed away two years later at the age of 76.³³

Adelia Van Horn continued her ministry and service through the Battle Creek Sanitarium and College, until her death on July 8, 1922.³⁴ She was buried with her husband in Kalamazoo, Michigan. Elder A. E. Serns, who conducted her funeral service, wrote of Adelia Van Horn: "Her faith and confidence in a soon-coming Christ was unbounded. Her beautiful life of usefulness is now ended. She sleeps, awaiting the call of Him who is the Resurrection and the Life."³⁵

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