

I. The Smoke in Battle Creek

By Kit Watts

Battle Creek Sanitarium burned to the ground on February 18, 1902. And on the next to the last night of the same year—December 30, 1902—the Review and Herald Publishing House was demolished by fire.

These were catastrophic events for the young Seventh-day Adventist Church, The denomination had been formally organized only 39 years earlier. It owed its existence to publishing. James White, a Millerite follower during the revivals that swept the Eastern United States in the 1840s, and a survivor of the great Disappointment on October 22, 1844—began printing a little paper in 1848. He named it Present Truth. This, with the Advent Review in 1850 and the Youth's Instructor in 1852, was his fragile probe to search out other believers in the Second Coming across the country.

Drawn together through these papers, they eventually hammered out the doctrine and theology of a new church.

A scant 3500 people banded together under the name Seventh-day Adventist when it was adopted in 1863.¹ Three years later Ellen G. White, wife of James and acknowledged by the young church as a special messenger of the Lord, urged that health principles were as important as spiritual insight for a well-rounded life. On September 5, 1866, four months after her message, the first Adventist health center opened a residence situated on the outskirts of Battle Creek. But now in the winter cold of 1902 the sacrifice that the pioneers had lavished upon their publishing house and upon their sanitarium, seemed to have been in vain. What was to be done?

Footnotes:

1. Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia, p. 1181.