

III. What Ellen White Remembered

By Kit Watts

Ellen White told the locating committee in 1903 that Adventists should have established memorials to God in Washington, D.C., twenty years earlier. What she was remembering was how the church began in this city and how little encouragement it had received ever since.

S. N. Haskell was probably the first Seventh-day Adventist to come to Washington, D. C. He reported in the May 1874 Review that “the present truth has, within the past nine months, through an interesting series of providential circumstances, found its way to Washington, D.C.”

But follow-up of Haskell’s converts was sparse. Adventism through the next twenty years was a traceable but unpromising thread.

In 1880 Isaac Sanborn reported that he was meeting with five Sabbath keepers in Washington and that he had baptized two persons in the Potomac River.

The first organized Adventist work was established in 1886 when William H. Saxby opened a city mission at 1831 Vermont Avenue. That year he sold Review and Herald books door-to-door, took more than a hundred subscriptions to Good Health (the denomination’s popular medical journal edited by Dr. Kellogg) and gave Bible studies.

By the time E. W. Farnsworth visited Washington, D.C., in April 1888 Saxby had drawn around him a group of nearly fifty Sabbath keepers. He baptized 12 persons that year and shortly thereafter the group rented meeting quarters in Claybough hall at 1630 14th Street.

From this tiny cell grew the body of the First Church in Washington, D.C. (it still goes by that name). Elder J. O. Corliss organized the company into a proper church on February 24, 1889. (When Ellen White first visited Washington D.C., in December 1890, she held a Week of Prayer for the church at Claybough Hall).¹⁰

Judson Washburn entered the scene at this point. He was present during Mrs. White’s visit. After a trip to England he began his evangelistic series of 1902. This resulted in raising up the second Washington congregation, the Memorial Church, or forerunner of today’s Capital Memorial Church.

The congregation bought a church on the corner of 12th and M streets. On her second visit to Washington in 1904 Ellen White preached for the church’s dedication service.

It was the same trip which brought her to inspect the newly chosen spot for denominational headquarters, a publishing house and a school and sanitarium on the banks of Sligo Creek.

Footnotes:

10. Summarized from Graybill.