

Chamberlain, Ezra L. H. (1798–1855)

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Colonel Ezra L. H. Chamberlain played a variety of influential supporting roles in the emergence of Sabbatarian Adventism. He was born in Connecticut in 1798. By trade he was a house painter. He and his wife Mary A. (Rogers) Chamberlain (1919-1900) had nine children: Ezra, Henry, Frances, Mary, William, Jane, George, Joseph, and Alice.

In 1842 Chamberlain accepted the predictions of William Miller (1782-1849) that Christ's Second Coming would occur around 1843 or 1844. When local Millerites were expelled from the mainstream churches, Chamberlain invited them to hold meetings at his spacious home in Middletown, Connecticut.

In 1848 the Chamberlains accepted the seventh-day Sabbath, becoming perhaps the first Millerites in the State to do so. Also that year, Ezra became the first known Sabbath-keeper to speak in tongues. During a meeting in the Chamberlain home, James White (1821-1881) related that "the Holy Ghost came down [and] Brother Chamberlain was filled with the power. In this state he cried out in an unknown tongue. The interpretation followed which was this: 'Give me the chalk, Give me the chalk.'" Someone handed him a piece of chalk and he drew the figure of a clock on the floor. He said God wanted them to keep Sabbath from 6 p.m. Friday to 6 p.m. Saturday, but that "Satan would [try to] get us [away] from this time."¹ Joseph Bates (1792-1872) likewise urged believers to keep the Sabbath from 6 p.m. to 6 p.m., which they did until better informed in 1855.

In April 1848, Chamberlain arranged for the first of many Sabbath conferences to meet in the home of Albert Belden (1820-1893) in Rocky Hill, Connecticut, eight miles from Middletown. Fifty delegates attended. Then in August, Chamberlain traveled with the Whites by steamboat from New York City up the Hudson River and across the Erie Canal to attend the Sabbath conference held in David Arnold's barn in Volney, New York. There they joined with Joseph Bates (1792-1872), Heman Gurney (1818-1896), and Hiram Edson (1806-1882), and prayed over Ellen White (1827-1915), who at the time was suffering from a serious illness. She was immediately healed. During their travels through Connecticut, the Whites often stayed in the Chamberlain's home. In the late 1840s and early 1850s, Chamberlain attended other weekend conferences held in Rocky Hill, Connecticut; Topsham, Maine; and Dorchester, Massachusetts.

At his home in Middletown in July 1849, Chamberlain assisted James White in launching the first issue of *Present Truth*. Two months later, Chamberlain exposed the errors of six fanatics in Paris, Maine. During the 1850s he served as a local deacon, an exhorter (lay preacher), a delegate to several Sabbath conferences, and as the marketing agent for the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* in Connecticut.

Chamberlain was not an effective public speaker. Ellen White counseled him that “it was not his duty to travel” and that “he was not one of the messengers [traveling preachers]” that God had called to that ministry. She rebuked him for his pride and self-centeredness and told him that he flattered others too much and encouraged some to attend Sabbath conferences who would be better off staying at home.²

After receiving these counsels, Chamberlain seldom ventured beyond the Middletown, Connecticut, area. Sometime in the mid-1850s he contracted smallpox. His last recorded words were, “I am going and shall RISE SOON.” He died on November 18, 1855, at home in Middletown, Connecticut. Three weeks later on December 8, his daughter Alice also died of smallpox. Joseph Bates, who preached at Ezra Chamberlain’s funeral, called him “one of their [Connecticut Sabbath-keeping Adventists] most estimable members... The cause of God occupied his mind to the end.”³ He was buried in Mortimer Cemetery in Middletown, Middlesex County, Connecticut.

Ezra Chamberlain was among those who helped build the Advent movement in ways other than preaching or writing. His primary contributions to the Advent movement included organizing and participating in several early Sabbath conferences, providing hospitality for traveling Advent preachers (including the Whites) in the 1840s and 1850s, and promoting Sabbath observance from 6 p.m. Friday to 6 p.m. Saturday.

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NOTES

1. James White to Stockbridge Howland, July 2, 1848, James White Correspondence, Ellen G. White Estate, accessed August 2017, <http://ellenwhite.org/content/correspondence/white-js/020007pdf>.
2. E. G. White to "Brother Hastings," March 18, 1850, Letter 10, 1850, Center for Adventist Research, James White Library, Andrews University; E. G. White to "Dear Friend," October 25, 1852, Letter 4, 1852, Center for Adventist Research, James White Library, Andrews University.
3. Joseph Bates, "E. L. H. Chamberlain," *Adventist Review*, January 24, 1856, 134.

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