

History of the Seventh Day Church of God

By Richard C Nickels

V. The Michigan Church of God

On August 10, 1863 a paper was launched at Hartford, Michigan entitled the Hope of Israel. Enos Easton was Resident Editor, and Gilbert Cranmer and John Reed were Corresponding Editors. Some of its founding principles were stated to be "that the Bible, and the Bible alone" contains the whole moral law and all necessary precepts to govern God's people in every age, without the addition of any human creed or articles of faith; that "sin is the transgression of the law," and that the law by which sin is known is the law of the Ten Commandments; that death is the total extinction of being; that God is about to set up His Kingdom on the Earth, that Christ as King will sit upon David's throne, the twelve apostles on the twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel; and that the reward of the righteous, as well as of the wicked, will be on the Earth; and finally, the earth will be restored to its Edenic glory and beauty.¹

The supporters of the little paper, which began with less than forty subscribers, were known variously as "Church of Christ," "Church of God," and Church of the Firstborn."

Origins of the *Hope of Israel*

It appears that the Hope of Israel was a direct successor to the Messenger of Truth, an earlier anti-White paper published in the later 1850's. According to A.N. Dugger, Church of God historian, the Church of God brethren who did not accept the name change at the 1860 Battle Creek Conference met the following year at Battle Creek and began publication of The Remnant of Israel, which was later changed to Sabbath Advocate, and still later, to Bible Advocate. Possibly he had the wrong name, and the Remnant of Israel was in actuality the Hope of Israel; or possibly the Remnant was changed to the Hope of Israel in 1863.

Dugger further reports that the Michigan Church of God brethren obtained a charter with the following names on the document: L.A. Munger, A.E. Case, Seth Munger, Will Slater, and John Campbell. In the 1930's, the Michigan Church of God brethren were said to still have the original charter.²

The leader of the Michigan Church of God, termed by his stepson, M.A. Branch as "the founder of the Church of God in Michigan" and "the first president of the Church of God conference," was Elder Gilbert Cranmer.³

Life of Gilbert Cranmer

Born in Newfield, Tompkins County, New York (near Ithaca) on January 18, 1814, Gilbert Cranmer died December 17, 1903. His father died when Gilbert was eleven. At age 17 he joined the Methodists and was asked by them to preach. Two years later he left them because he felt they were wrong about the God head (he probably rejected the Trinity). He then joined the Christian Church, received a license to preach, and for three years was an itinerant preacher, mostly on foot, in New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Kentucky, southern Indiana and Canada.

Moving to St. Joseph, Michigan around 1840, Cranmer was promised by the Christian Church a \$150.00 yearly salary, but in the end only received \$13.00. "I then resolved I would never engage again to preach for a salary and never have."

In the 1840's, when William Miller's "end of the world" Advent doctrines were sounded, Cranmer "carefully examined" Miller's calculations and interpretations of prophecy, and in 1842 was convinced they were correct. Personally witnessing a meteor shower, Cranmer was convinced this was the fulfilling of the "falling of the stars from heaven," **Matthew 24:29**. He later wrote that he "sincerely believed" that the Advent was near, although his wife did not. On October 22, 1844, he and other Advent believers met in a school house, expecting the return of Christ. Cranmer faced the bitter "Great Disappointment," and the taunts of those who jeered "Well, I thought you were going up last night," without losing his Christian faith, as some did.

The Sabbath question was said to have come to his attention in 1843 through the Midnight Cry (Millerite publication), in an article by J.C. Day of Ashburnham, Massachusetts. S.C. Hancock of Forestville, Connecticut also advocated the doctrine at the same time. Cranmer was not fully convinced of the Sabbath until 1845, when Joseph Bates came to Battle Creek, advocating "the whole Law, the gifts of the Spirit, and many other glorious truths." Cranmer and David Hewett of Battle Creek began keeping the Sabbath the same day. At this time, Cranmer was living at Comstock, Kalamazoo County, Michigan.

Cranmer worked with those who later became Seventh-Day Adventists, but was disappointed in that he never knew of any being healed. He was further disappointed in that the "gift of prophecy" seemed to be wholly confined to a woman. As a Sabbath Adventist preacher, Cranmer raised up several little groups in western Michigan.⁴

Development of Cranmer's Opposition to the Whites

Cranmer, in dictating his life story to his stepson M.A. Branch, documented his disillusionment, and eventual break, with the White Party.

"The shut door doctrine formed a part of the doctrine of the church, that is Mrs. White and had seen in vision, that the door of salvation for sinners was past and those that fully believed in her visions as coming from God also accepted that doctrine. **I did not believe it nor teach it** [emphasis mine], no lines had been drawn in the church up to this time and the visions had not been made a test"5

Upon examining Mrs. White's visions, Cranmer concluded,

I became suspicious that I had got a board the wrong ship. I then commenced giving her visions a thorough investigation. I found they contradict themselves, and they also contradict the Bible. My doubts concerning the visions I made known to the brethren. At once they gave me the cold shoulder, and I was held at bay. Not knowing any people I could unite with, I remained with them for years, hoping they would get sick of the visions of E.G. White, and that we could yet walk together in unity of spirit.⁶

Otsego Incident - White Viewpoint of the Beginning of the Church of God

On the weekend of December 19 and 20, 1857, Elder and Mrs. White held meetings at Otsego, Michigan. Elder Gilbert Cranmer, according to the Seventh Day Adventist historian, J.N. Loughborough, was also there. During the meetings, Mrs. White was given a vision, during which Elder Cranmer examined her and said he was satisfied she knew nothing of what happened about her, and that he believed the visions were of divine origin. When she came out of the trance, Mrs. White told Cranmer, whom she reputedly had never seen before, that he was afraid to engage in family worship because of opposition from his family, and instead retired to his barn for prayer. Further, her vision had told her that Cranmer secretly used tobacco, while at the same time professing to his brethren that he had quit. If Cranmer repented of these two sins, only then would he be qualified to teach the truth to others. Loughborough reports that Cranmer confessed that Mrs. White had told the truth, and went home saying he would carry out the reforms she suggested.

Six weeks later (January or February, 1858), Cranmer came to Battle Creek and applied to Elder White for a license to preach. White asked him if he had reformed; he said no, and was refused his certificate.⁷

Soon Cranmer was again out preaching, complaining that he had been refused a license because he did not believe in Mrs. White's visions.

Loughborough reports that Cranmer gained a few followers, and soon undertook to resurrect the defunct Messenger, giving it the title Hope of Israel. Another Seventh-Day Adventist historian, Spalding, states that the Hope of Israel began in 1863, ran for two years before it died for lack of support.

Seventh-Day Adventists continued to depict Church of God people as "fanatics" who opposed the visions because they had been reprovved by them and refused to alter their sinful conduct. Loughborough reports that a Seventh-Day Adventist who attended one of Cranmer's meetings said many of Cranmer's followers smoked.

Cranmer's Account of the Otsego Meeting

In his autobiographical sketch, Cranmer included a statement signed by Joseph J. and Louise H. Perkins, members of the Otsego Sabbath-keeping church at the time. It reported that Cranmer came there to preach, and stated that he had no evidence whatever that the door to the sanctuary was closed in 1844. At the Perkins' house, Lester Russell questioned him about this. Stating he had proof that the door had been closed, Russell drew from his pocket a copy of Ellen G. White's book of visions. Cranmer replied, "perhaps Mrs. White's visions are proof to you, but they are not to me."

A general church discussion resulted, and a number of pro-White Adventists got rather excited. George Leighton went from Otsego to Battle Creek to confer with Elder James White on the problem. On his return, Leighton said that Elder White told him not to let Cranmer preach at the Otsego church. Cranmer requested an investigative meeting and apparently that is when the Whites came to Otsego to confront Cranmer. And that was when Mrs. White conveniently had a vision to rebuke Cranmer. Cranmer states that the whole purpose of the Whites' coming to Otsego was to bring him into subjection to the visions, and when he refused to yield, he was led to a clean break.

Cranmer thereupon wrote to Battle Creek requesting a decision on whether or not he could continue as a minister. He was denied a license because he held that the visions were not inspired. "The visions were made a test of fellowship from that time," he stated. A number of the Otsego church refused to go along with the White Party, and Cranmer's independent work apparently began with eleven from this church.⁸

In the first issue of the Hope of Israel, August 10, 1863, Cranmer records his break with the White Party: "At last I made up my mind I would not belong to a church that

was ruled by a woman any longer. From that time the Bible has been my creed, with Christ as the head of the Church. I started alone, with my Bible in my hand. God has blessed my labors beyond my utmost expectations. We have some eight ministers, and some hundreds of members in the State of Michigan. God has manifested His power among us in a wonderful manner."⁹

Michigan Churches

Prior to the 1860's, it appears that Cranmer and his following grew considerably in Michigan. He raised up churches in Waverly, Alamo, Gobles, Bloomingdale, Hartford, Casco, Kirby's, Hamilton, West Olive and elsewhere.

In Trowbridge Township Cranmer organized a small church among whom were C.S. Bullock and wife, Isaac Catt and wife, the Galord family, and Edwin Stockwell and wife.

The Alamo, Michigan, church included Daniel Tiffany and wife, A.S. Tuttle and wife, Joseph Perkins and wife, and Mr. Gadsbee.

Waverly, for a time the home of the church paper, contained nearly 100 members, including H.S. Dille, John S. Staunton, Hiram Goble, Henry Whelpley and his two brothers Sam and Wesley, George Howland, old Mr. Strong and Sylvester Baker.

The Bloomingdale, Michigan church was raised in 1859, and included Greenwood Wait and wife, Matthew Munn and wife, M. Remington and wife, John Wait and wife, and H. Davids and wife.¹⁰

Casco was "quite a large church also," with brethren such as Cronk, Steller, Fabun, J.P. Parish, their wives, and many others.

Cranmer held meetings at Bangor, Michigan, and gained many converts there. Hallet Greenman and wife, James Watkins and wife, John McNitt and wife, Charles Kelley and wife, Levi Watkins and wife, and James Greenman and wife are the names mentioned.

From Bangor, Cranmer went to Hartford Village, where a series of meetings resulted in the conversion of Job Dunham and wife, Joseph Stoten and wife, Isaac Hogeboom and wife, Erastus Branch and wife (parents of M.A. Branch), Enos Easton, Azer Hawks and wife, R.W. Hastings, Zelia Hastings, Polly Baldwin, Moses Baldwin and wife, Charles Gibbs, Amanda Kemp, and others. Cranmer faced some heckling and opposition at Bangor, and was met with rotten eggs and a pail of water. He was undaunted by this vicious opposition.

Cranmer's Associate Ministers

Among his early supporting ministers were John Reed, James Jackson, Philip Strong, Newton Wallen, and John Fabin. Elders Strong and Jackson soon denied the faith, the former uniting with the Seventh-Day Adventists. John Reed was said to be an excellent speaker, especially on "prophetic time," using "charts illustrating his position."

Other early ministers, reported by Dugger, were R.V. Lyons of Niagara Falls, New York, Philip Howe and Luther Kerr of Canada, and Thomas Howe of Michigan.¹¹

Organization of the Church of God

Cranmer reports that organization was effected in 1860, the same year the Seventh-Day Adventist name was adopted at Battle Creek. A.N. Dugger reports that it was in 1861 at Battle Creek that the group organized and began their paper.¹²

Another source states that the organization took place in 1865, when some Adventists in Michigan under the leadership of Elder Cranmer "organized in protest on some points of doctrine held by the main body of Seventh-Day Adventists." They refused to acknowledge the divine inspiration of Ellen G. White, and declined to use the name adopted in 1860, but instead clung to "Church of God."¹³

But the Michigan Historical Records Survey, which leans heavily on Dugger, states that the organization was in 1863, and the session minutes from 1863 to the present are in the custody of the Michigan Church of God secretary.¹⁴

Cranmer reports that quarterly meetings were held by the different churches until "a general meeting in which attendance would be present, was held." Cranmer is reported to have been selected the president of the first conference.¹⁵

Beginning of the *Hope*

Conferences in the spring of 1863 at Waverly and in June of the same year at Bangor, Michigan established the decision to publish a paper. The Hope began with less than forty subscribers, possibly first published in Cranmer's home. H.S. Dille became the office editor who assembled and printed the paper, while Cranmer spent most of his time in the active ministry. By November 30, 1864, the Hope circulated in eighteen states and Canada West (Ontario).

Several Scattered Sabbath Groups

The Hope of Israel from its beginning appeared to be supported by scattered groups from Vermont to Missouri. In the east, the supporters usually referred to themselves as the "Church of the Firstborn," while those in Michigan used the term, "Church of Christ" more frequently. In Wisconsin and Iowa, "Church of God" was the most common appellation.¹⁶

Correspondence and occasional exchange of delegates were the main ties between the scattered Sabbath-keepers until 1884, when the Church of Christ in Michigan united in a General Conference with the Church of God in Missouri and Iowa as the "General Conference of the Church of God." It appears that support in the east dwindled and was never effectively revived.¹⁷

What tied the scattered Sabbath groups together in the early days appeared to be various doctrines such as conditionalism, age-to-come doctrine, and opposition to Mrs. White's visions.¹⁸

History of the *Hope of Israel* in Michigan

In the first issue of the Hope of Israel, August 10, 1863, is a letter from Samuel Davison of Iowa. [Note: Samuel Davison was a Seventh Day Baptist pastor of the Marlboro (Salem), New Jersey Seventh Day Baptist church from 1844-46, and of Shiloh, New Jersey from 1846-49. He visited the Snow Hill German Seventh Day Baptist community in 1847. This may have been the same Samuel Davison, who appears as the Church of God leader in the 1860's.] Elder H.S. Dille had written V.M. Gray, leader of the Marion, Iowa Church of God, on the state of the Churches of God in Michigan. Davison found "very interesting" that "unknown to each other," isolated bands in different states "have believed the same things, taken the same position, set out to seek the same objects, by the same means; and, so far as now appears filled with the same spirit, and having the same hope of inheriting the Kingdom of God" Davison noted that the Churches of God in Wisconsin, Illinois, Iowa and Michigan believed essentially the same things, and called for a general conference so they could all get together.¹⁹

The Michigan brethren, as the "Church of Christ," met in a three-day Conference at Elder John Fabins' at Casco, Michigan, beginning Friday, August 21.

They agreed for a general meeting to be held at Alamo, Kalamazoo County, for three days, beginning Friday September 25. All those who "love the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ" were invited to come. Preachers from Wisconsin, Illinois and Iowa were expected to be there, including Elders Waterman Phelps, E.S. Sheffield, Samuel Davison, and E.W. Shortridge.²⁰

H.S. Dille

H.S. Dille (or Dilly) was chosen editor at a conference held in Bangor, Michigan in June of 1863. He was an experienced printer, and served along with Enos Easton for a time. He resigned as editor on April 15, 1864, but continued to run the press, receiving \$4.00 a week.²¹

Hope Moves to Waverly

The first six numbers of the paper were published at Hartford, Michigan. Then the address of the paper was changed to Waverly, Michigan, where it remained until the last Michigan issue of October 18, 1865. Thirty-nine issues of the Hope of Israel were issued from Michigan.²²

Brandywine Corners Conference

On April 15, 1864, a conference was held at Brandywine Corners, Michigan attended by Phelps, Davison, Niel A. Perry, E.N. Fuller, V.M. Gray, and others. The elders met together to "settle any differences of opinion that may exist," and to "form a union, firm, sacred, and never to be broken."²³

Gilbert Cranmer was elected to the chief editorship position, Dille was kept on as printer, and an executive board was chosen, with John L. Staunton, President, H.S. Dille, Secretary, and Hiram Goble, Treasurer. The first quarterly report listed \$52.15 received. Other ministers were added until there were a total of twelve in Michigan.²⁴

The union discussed at Brandywine Corners apparently did not erase all differences of opinion. Waterman Phelps continued to support the Hope in Wisconsin, although he differed materially on some points with the Michigan brethren.²⁵

Eastern Sabbath-Keepers

Eastern "free Sabbath-keepers" wrote to Samuel Everett of Union, Iowa, in 1864, stating that nearly one-fourth of the Sabbath-keepers of New England did not fellowship with the Review and White Party. They were looking for a paper in which they would express their views, and Davison told them of the Hope of Israel. This appeared to open the line of communication between the Hope and eastern Sabbath Adventists. The eastern brethren had held a conference at North Berwick, Maine in February, 1864, resolving to contact brethren in the West. Another conference was planned for May 5 at Portland, Maine. They were given the addresses of Samuel Davison, Norris, Illinois; V.M. Gray, Marion, Iowa; and W. Phelps, Busseyville,

Wisconsin, as people to contact for further information on the western Sabbath-keepers.²⁶

J.C. Day of Chelsey, Massachusetts wrote Dille expressing gratitude for the paper as a means of communication to their western brethren by "those who have been cast off because they have dared to express their doubts as to the inspiration of E.G. White's visions."²⁷

It appears that Samuel Everett was personally acquainted with numerous Sabbath-keepers in the East.

East-West Cooperation

The Portland, Maine conference of May 5 authorized S.C. Hancock and J.C. Day to correspond with the Michigan brethren, calling for a General Conference of the two groups at a point equidistant for both. Further, they called for a minister to come from the West to work with them.²⁸ A letter addressed from the Portland conference to the Hartford Conference (held June 17-19) in Michigan further stated: "in associating ourselves into a church, as begotten by the 'firstborn from the dead,' we have adopted the name of the 'Church of the Firstborn' and we recognize the last invitation, in the parable of the 'supper,' **Luke 14:23**, as being now given."

The Day Star Invitation

The June, 1864 Hartford Conference also considered a proposition from P.E. Armstrong of Celesta, Pennsylvania to merge his paper, the Day Star of Zion, with the Hope of Israel. The Michigan brethren turned down the invitation, preferring to keep the paper in Michigan.²⁸

Armstrong appeared to have some differences with the way the Michigan church governed themselves. He wrote, "We step right out on simple faith in God, and cast all human machinery of creeds, conference voting and appointing, to the winds. And I am sorry to see you trying to know the will of God through a conference."²⁹

Bangor Conference - *Hope Expanded*

August 17-19, 1864, saw another Michigan conference, this time at Bangor. Elders Fabun, Wallen and Cranmer spoke, and a letter from the east was read. The eastern brethren requested either Phelps or Cranmer to come to their next conference in Portland, Maine and stay for a while. Cranmer was chosen to go to the east, while John L. Staunton, Dille, and Hiram Goble remained as President, Secretary, and Treasurer, respectively.

A North Berwick, Maine conference on August 4 had sermons by elders Weston, Howard and Hancock. C.S. Hancock exhorted the Michigan brethren to join in raising up the little paper to a larger size and circulation.

Soon the paper was expanded, and an attempt was made to publish it weekly. The subscription price was \$1.00 for 26 issues. The masthead of the Hope for October 7, 1864, said it was published by the "Church of Christ." A monthly children's paper, "The Little Preacher," was advertised at 25 cents a year.³⁰

Cranmer Travels to New England

Gilbert Cranmer, sent east by the Bangor Conference, attended the Portland, Maine conference of the Church of the Firstborn on November 3, 1864. He traveled three days and nights by rail.

Cranmer reported that he found the people there a "consecrated company of Advent believers." Instead of staying for a while, apparently he shortly returned to Michigan.³¹

Publishing Problems of the *Hope*

With the November 2, issue, the page size of the Hope was considerably reduced. The editor stated: "The Hope will hereafter be published in its present form, and fair print. Its prospects were never so bright."

But the November 30, 1864 issue contained an article by H.S. Dille, entitled "Shall the 'Hope' Live?" Dille told how he had labored to publish and print the Hope of Israel for the past 3 1/2 years, after leaving a better paying job. The financial situation of the work was so severe that he had thought of ceasing to publish the paper. The August, 1864 Bangor Conference had decided to continue the paper, yet sufficient funds were not coming in to support it. He made an appeal for financial support.

M.N. Kramer of Dry Creek, Linn County, Iowa (four miles west of Marion) replied in December with a pledge of support. John Reed, a minister and associate of Cranmer in Michigan, quit using tobacco, saying he would send in the money he formerly used for the "filthy stuff" to support the Hope.³²

By April of 1865, Dille, as office editor, was nearly broke. His \$4.00 per week wages were \$60.00 to \$70.00 in arrears, his board bill was unpaid, and he needed rest because of ill health. Dille quit his post, with the final offer that if the brethren would raise \$400.00 to buy a press and materials for enlarging and improving the Hope he would lead the efforts and publish another issue. It was two months until the next

issue. In the meantime, a conference had met at Waverly, June 9-11, 1865, deciding to continue the publishing work. Samuel Everett was made editor, Hiram Goble, Treasurer, and Dille, Publisher. A new policy was instituted: the paper was no longer to be a free oracle for divergent views, as it had been in the past. In August, Dille became both editor and publisher, worked without pay, and continued to exhort the brethren for support.

A supporter from Lunenburg, Massachusetts, Charles Burlingham, wrote in the November 16, 1864, *Hope* urging support of the paper: "Like every publication which has attempted to advocate vitally important truth, the 'Hope' is very unpopular and hence, must be supported, if at all, by the generous contributions of the despised few who are waiting for the coming of the bridegroom."

M.N. Kramer of Dry Creek, Iowa pledged \$10.00 cash if thirty others would join annually to keep the paper alive. Apparently others did not join. During June and July of 1865 each issue of the *Hope* was only 336 copies. The last issue from Waverly, Michigan was dated October 18, 1865.³³

Divergent Doctrines Expressed

The publishing policy, as set forth in the June 15, 1864, issue, was that the church ordered that the paper "be open for communications from all candid enquirers."

Real unity seemed to be lacking among the scattered Sabbath-keepers. This appears to be the key reason for the failure of the *Hope* of Israel in Michigan. Until June of 1865, the paper was open to many divergent views. Each church was independent, and different views were expressed and argued. On the name question the lack of unanimity was readily apparent.

Name Question in *Hope* Party

In the original issue, Enos Easton used the term, "Church of Christ." But in the early issues anything from "Advent people," to "Advent bands" were descriptive titles. Phelps used the term Church of God for his Wisconsin followers, as did Davison for those in Iowa.

A committee of Cranmer, John Reed, Joseph Perkins, Daniel Tiffany and Philip Strong, Jr., supervised the publication of a hymn book of 105 hymns, published in 1862, and entitled "Hymns for the Church of Christ." The use of the term, "Church of Christ" in Michigan may be connected to the fact that, until 1842, Cranmer was in the Christian Church.³⁴

Eastern Sabbath-keepers who addressed Samuel Everett in Iowa called themselves "free Sabbath-keepers," and organized as the Church of the Firstborn."

C.S. Bullock in an 1864 letter to editor Dille noted that the Hope of Israel company were derisively called "Cranmerites."³⁵

Everett's Stand on Christian Unity

The November 2, 1864, issue contained an article by Samuel Everett on **Ephesians 4** and Christian unity. In it he stated that there is one body, and the church belongs to God, with Christ as its head. "As far as the name is concerned, 'The Church of God, - The Church of Christ,' are scriptural names of the people of God taken collectively We should beware of all sectarian parties and divisions."³⁶

Portland Conference Supports "Church of the Firstborn"

The November, 1864 Portland, Maine conference wrote a letter to the rest of the brethren supporting the name, "Church of the Firstborn." The letter was signed by J.C. Day, O. Davis, and G. Cranmer.

The letter noted that different groups were called "The Church of God", "Church of Christ", "Christians", "Disciples", "Seventh-Day Adventists", and other names. The differences of names led to confusion, and "Church of the Firstborn" was an appropriate name "that all may be free to unite under" because it pointed to the Head of the Church, Christ, the firstborn from the dead.³⁷

Further Suggestions on Church Name

V.M. Gray of Marion, Iowa wrote a letter dated January, 1865, stating his support for the name, "Free Seventh-Day Adventists." Their church name, he stated, "should be indicative of our faith." Further, "It matters not what name we take, we are in fact Seventh-day Adventists"

Samuel Everett apparently wrote an article which concluded, "Let us be living members of the church of God being GATHERED 'into the general assembly and church of the firstborn'."

Luther L. Tiffany of Lansing, Iowa wrote a vehement article in the March 22, 1865, issue, against adopting any name at all for the saints. He wrote against Gray's suggestion, and denounced the Advent people for adopting a name in 1860 and following years.

E. Rowley of Leicester, Dane County, Wisconsin also wrote against adopting a name for God's people.

Editor Dille's position on the name issue was the "Christians need no party names to distinguish them from brother Christians."

Finally, Polly G. Pitts of Union, Rock County, Wisconsin wrote on April 5, 1865 wrote that "For years I have felt that the name, 'Church of God,' had a power in it that no sectarian name ever had, or ever could have. And I feel there is no name so appropriate."³⁸

Name Not Yet Decided

Apparently the Hope of Israel did not officially adopt a name while in Michigan. Examination of the church charter in Michigan and the original issues may give more information on the name issue. In 1866, when the paper moved to Iowa, there was still no general name, and "Church of God" appears but little. There were no letters nor articles on the church name issue in the first issues from Iowa.

Doctrinal Views of Cranmer Party

Cranmer believed that the Judgment will last for 1000 years (Age-to-Come doctrine), and that Christ's kingdom will be set up on this earth upon His coming. The second and third angel's messages he believed to be still future. Seventh-Day Adventists continued to believe that they were sounding the Third Angel's Message.³⁹

The August 24, 1863 issue of the Hope contains an article stating that the doctrine of the immortality of the soul has its origins in Plato and pagan philosophy.

The "earth's restoration, reign of Christ, restoration of Israel, When Abraham . . . with all the righteous dead, will possess the new earth," were doctrines heartily supported by the editorship of the Hope of Israel.⁴⁰

Healing Emphasized

Cranmer was disappointed at the lack of healings when he was associated with the White Party of Adventists. His work seemed to be abundantly full of reports of healings, as well as casting out of demons. In his autobiographical sketch, Cranmer reports that he early learned that God will heal the sick through prayer, as stated in **James 5:14-15**. He said he experienced many miracles.⁴¹

Cranmer wrote, "God has manifested His power among us in a wonderful manner. The eyes of the blind have been opened; the deaf have been made to hear; and almost every disease incident to the climate, has been cured through faith, to the number of about one hundred cases."⁴²

An associate of Cranmer, Elder Wallen, reported that while he was preaching, two young ladies were seized with convulsions. One of them said that the eyes of a certain Spiritualist had fixed upon her previously. Demons were said to have been cast out.⁴³

In a May 26, 1864, letter, printed in the Hope, Cranmer reported that at his meeting at Trowbridge, he had preached four sermons, baptized one, and gained eight or ten Sabbath converts. He also reported a miraculous healing of a Sister Carter of Otsego, who was attending the meeting. Unable to speak for a long time previously, her speech was perfectly restored.⁴⁴

Conscientious Objectors During the Civil War

One clear indication of the beliefs of the Hope of Israel supporters generally was their conscientious objection to participation in the Civil War.

It appears that some Advent groups attempted to buy exemption from the draft for their male members. Eli Wilsey of the Hartford "Church of Christ" spent at least four months in prison "for refusing to fight with carnal weapons."⁴⁵

Frequent news articles on the progress, and staggering costs, of the war were published, with the exhortation to the brethren to have nothing to do with the "war, revenge and murder."⁴⁶

One news report was that brother William Cronk of Casco was drafted, passed examination, "but was declared exempt from field service on account of his religious principles. He is in the government service in the hospital."⁴⁷

N. Wallen and R.C. Horton reported in a letter dated January 16, 1865, from South Haven, Michigan that the brethren of Hartford and Casco were going to try and raise \$300.00 to clear all the brethren who may be drafted.

The April 23, 1865 issue contained a quote from the Harbinger expressing sorrow at the death of President Lincoln, thanking God that Lincoln made laws to deliver Christians from participating in war.

John L. Staunton, a one-time president of the Michigan Conference, enlisted in the Union army, and the Waverly church disfellowshipped him, maintaining that only non-resisters could be in their church.⁴⁸

The Issue of Tobacco

As reported before, Seventh-Day Adventists claim that the "Cranmerites" in Michigan contained several tobacco users, among whom was Cranmer himself.

On the other hand, the Church of the Firstborn, in the east, was apparently strictly against the use of tobacco. In a letter to the Hope dated December 15, 1864, S.C. Hancock states, "as far as the use of tobacco is concerned, I am happy to say the Church of the Firstborn, at the East, regard it as a dirty, loathsome, expensive, unhealthy practice, from which every disciple of Christ should abstain" Editor Dille replied in the Hope that he didn't use it, and never had, contrary to false reports.⁴⁹

John Reed wrote a letter to the Hope, dated Allegan, Michigan, January 8, 1865, stating that, with God's help, he had quit tobacco, and resolved to give his "tobacco money" to the work.⁵⁰

Niel A. Perry of Colomo, Wisconsin, in a letter dated March 12, 1865, likewise stated he had given up smoking almost a year ago. He noted that the Review stated that Cranmer used tobacco.⁵¹

The tobacco issue continued to exist in the Seventh Day Church of God history. In 1928, an unnamed brother in Arkansas wrote the Church of God paper stating that some brethren who said they were too poor to pay tithes were nevertheless heavy tobacco users. The editor, A.N. Dugger, replied that "The Church of God stands on record opposing the use of tobacco in every form, and our ministry is constantly teaching the people their duty along this line."⁵²

Wine, Testimonials, Date Setting

One of the Hope editors, in the third issue (1863), in reply to a letter against the use of fermented wine, stated that it is all right to use wine for medical uses. The "wine question" has long been an issue discussed in the Church of God.

John Kiesz, Church of God historian, states that the pioneer members "believed in what they called social or testimony services."⁵³

James Watkins, who preached at Bangor, Michigan, wrote in the November 15, 1863 issue that the 1335 days of **Daniel 12:12-13** reached until 1873 (beginning at 538 A.D., which he supposed to be the Abomination of Desolation). The year 1873 he stated would be the "end of the world . . . when Jesus will come the second time . . ." ⁵⁴ Again, it is important to note that different views were allowed to be expressed in the Hope, and the editors did not claim responsibility for the different views expressed.

Three Days and Three Nights

In a late 1864 issue of the Hope, for the first time appears an article on the time element of Jesus in the tomb. Written by Luther L. Tiffany of Lansing, Iowa, it shows that Jesus was in the tomb for three days and three nights.

The November 16, 1864 issue contains another article on this subject, written by Horace Cushman of Flushing, Michigan. He stated Christ was crucified on Thursday, resurrected about one hour before sunrise Sunday morning. ⁵⁵

Passover Question

The issue of when to observe the "Lord's Supper" has been another constant issue of dispute in the Church of God, Seventh Day. A passing mention of a January, 1865 observance of communion in the Hartford and Casco churches is the only communion record so far discovered of the early Michigan period.

Phelps Corrected on Time of Sabbath Observance

In number 12 of the Hope (1864), E.S. Sheffield notes that there was a difference as to when the Sabbath should be commenced. Those who became Seventh-Day Adventists originally observed the Sabbath beginning at 6:00 on Friday evening. But Sheffield was part of a little band of brethren at Koskonong, Wisconsin, that began keeping the Sabbath before 1854 through the labors of Waterman Phelps. No one had bothered to explain to them exactly when to begin the Sabbath, and in their simplicity, they had begun it at sunset. Phelps became convinced that he and all those supporting the Review began the day at the wrong time. Several of the Wisconsin group wrote articles on the subject, but the articles never appeared in the Review because the White Party at that time refused to accept a sunset-sunset Sabbath. ⁵⁶

Some Seventh Day Baptists Join Church of God

E.S. Sheffield of Leicester, Wisconsin reported in Volume I, Number 13 (1864) that some of his Wisconsin brethren were once members of the Seventh Day Baptist

church at Albion, Wisconsin. Sheffield apparently preached among some Seventh Day Baptists, convincing them of conditionalism and life eternal only through Christ. The Seventh Day Baptist church expelled Sheffield's converts on the ground of heresy for denying the natural immortality of the soul. Elder Sheffield further reported that some of the elders connected with the Review denounced him and his Wisconsin followers because, though professing to keep the Sabbath, they did not develop moral characters. However, the White Party failed to define just what their immorality consisted of.⁵⁷

Ministers in Michigan

An October, 1865 issue of the Hope lists the regularly ordained elders in the state of Michigan:⁵⁸

Gilbert Cranmer, Galesburg, Kalamazoo County; Daniel Tiffany, same; H.S. Case, Hartford, Van Buren County; Samuel Everett, same; Enos Easton, same; Erastus G. Branch, same; James Watkins, Bangor; Isaac Catt, same; Newton Wallen, South Haven; John Fabun, New Casco, Allegan County

Later History of Cranmer and the Michigan Church of God

Erastus G. Branch worked hand in hand with Cranmer in the ministry until his death in 1873. Of twelve early Michigan ministers, all died in the faith except two: R.C. Horton joined the Seventh-Day Adventists, and James Watkins was disfellowshipped (possibly for joining the army). Gilbert Cranmer outlived them all, and was in his later years affectionately known as "Father Cranmer."

In the winter of 1869 Cranmer made a trip to northern Michigan. At Denver, Newaygo County, he preached for a week and organized a "band" of twelve members, with six more members several miles away. In Ottawa County, Cranmer preached among Seventh-Day Adventists, showing the imperfections and errors of the visions of Mrs. White, and "their unscriptural mode of church government." Six to eight converts were gained here also. The remnants of his trip to northern Michigan appear today in several churches in the area and the Sweet family.⁵⁹

The Hartford, Michigan church was at one time very large and active. Several other churches were mentioned by Cranmer's life sketch. One was at Hamilton, Allegan County, where W.E. Field and wife were converted. Another was at Salem, Michigan, where Brother Howe and wife, and A. Walker and family, were members.⁶⁰

In 1879, Cranmer married Sophia Branch, his fourth wife (the previous ones died), thus cementing his ties with the famous Branch family.

Gilbert Cranmer died December 17, 1903, at the White Cloud Sanatorium. Elder L.J. Branch spoke at the funeral, and a song that Cranmer wrote was sung. Preserved in the modern Church of God hymnal, the song has the words, "When we get in the world to come, Farewell to fears and woe"61

Branches and the Seventh Day Baptists

The four sons of Erastus G. Branch, Mortimer A., Charles R., Erastus G. and Adelbert, were all made step-sons of Cranmer when their mother married him in 1879.

Adelbert Branch's pamphlet, "The Backward Look," published in 1937, sheds some light on the development of the Church of God in Michigan in the later 1800's. Adelbert remembers as a boy the fear that Christ would come in 1873. Apparently a number of Michigan brethren believed in this date.

He refers to the beginning of the Church of God General Conference in 1884 as the union of two conferences, the Church of Christ in Michigan, and the Church of God in the West. Dissension among western members forced out W.C. Long as conference president and editor in 1905, creating a stir in Michigan.

Branch attended the Stanberry General Conference as a delegate from the Michigan Conference for two years, probably early in the 1900's. He became dissatisfied with the General Conference, and the Michigan Conference voted to withdraw its support and membership in the Church of God General Conference. The Michigan state conference continued to be independent until 1917, when it voted to be united with the Seventh Day Baptists.

The Branch brothers had moved from Hartford to White Cloud, Michigan on April 16, 1884. M.A. Branch became elder of the church there. Cranmer visited the church there occasionally, as did L.J. and J.C. Branch, other Branch relatives. Cranmer and Sophia sold the Hartford church buildings and moved to White Cloud in the later 1880's. And between 1888 and 1893, a church building at White Cloud was erected. Others joined to make the White Cloud church very strong.

Previous to the union of some of the Michigan Church of God with the Seventh Day Baptists, the Branches had become acquainted with Rev. D.B. Coon, pastor of the Battle Creek Seventh Day Baptist church. The union was effected on September 27-30, 1917.⁶²

The Churches of God which joined the Seventh Day Baptists were those of White Cloud, Bangor and Kalkaska County.⁶³

Independent Churches and "Have Love Attitude"

Throughout the "Michigan period," and indeed, most of Church of God history, local churches seem to have exercised a great deal of local autonomy. The Waverly, Michigan Conference of June 9-11, 1865 resolved that each church conduct its own local business, unless corrected by a church conference.⁶⁴

Real union was lacking, and obviously this was a key reason behind financial difficulties of the group.

Instead of boldly presenting what they believed to be the truth, the Hope of Israel had the "spirit of love and meekness," towards the White Party and others of disagreeing views.⁶⁵

As a result, confusion and disunity became typical. A ministerial conference at Hartford, beginning on June 29, 1866 withdrew fellowship from H.S. Dille, who had previously left the Church of God for the Mormon church. Dille, former editor and publisher of the Hope for years, and who seemed to keep it going despite financial difficulties, said he was at heart a Mormon even before his connection with the church in Michigan, and left only when he felt those who disagreed with him had permanently gained the upper hand.⁶⁶ Ω

Giving & Sharing, PO Box 100, Neck City, MO 64849