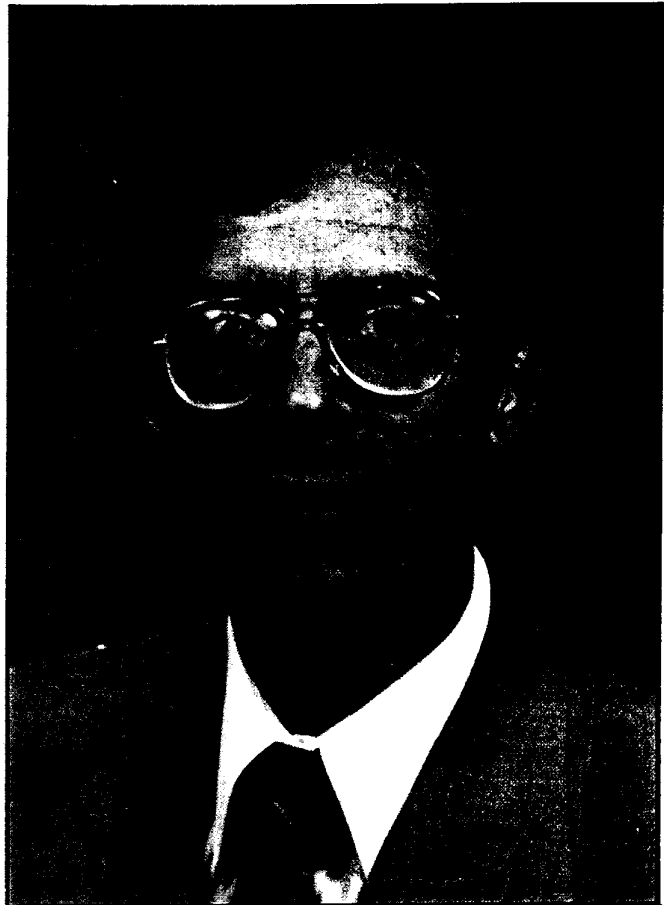


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RICHARD C. NICKELS

## Why Study the History of Sabbathkeepers?

**A**N Indian proverb states, "A people without history are like the blowing wind." Today there is an abysmal lack of knowledge among Sabbathkeepers of their own history. This dearth has motivated me to write a couple of books on the fascinating subject of church history.

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*"Unless we learn the lessons of the past, we are destined to repeat the mistakes of our ancestors."*

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Why should we study church history? Because we cannot understand what is happening today in the Sabbathkeeping Churches of God without a background of what has happened in the

past. Unless we learn the lessons of the past, we are destined to repeat the mistakes of our ancestors. The history of God's Church is both thrilling and educational. "He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches" (Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22).

I have long been interested in the history of Sabbathkeepers. Not knowing one's history is like starting to watch a movie in the middle. You don't know what happened before, and have difficulty understanding what is happening now. When you look into the history of Sabbathkeepers, you see striking examples of the maxim, "history repeats itself." You see the relationship between different groups and appreciate more fully how they arrived at their position today. You find characters such as John James, Dr. Peter Chamberlen, Gilbert Cranmer, and many others, with whom you can identify. You can appreciate their

work for the Master, their problems and their trials.

Giving & Sharing has recently reprinted a revised, expanded, edition of my book, *Six Papers on the History of the Church of God*, originally published in 1972. This book covers the history of Sabbathkeepers from seventeenth century England to America, through the Adventist period and the formation of the modern Church of God (Seventh Day) as well as the independent movement of G. G. Rupert. John Kiesz, elder statesman of the Church of God (Seventh Day), wrote paper number six. A companion book is *History of the Seventh Day Church of God, Volume I*, which gives further details of the formation of the Church of God (Seventh Day) in the mid-1800's down to the present.

**Who "Owns" Sabbatarian History?** History has not as much to do with *time*, as with *how we live and believe*.

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In updating my book *Six Papers on the History of the Church of God*, part of which covers the history of Sabbatarian Baptists in England and America from the 1500's to the 1880's, I was inspired and encouraged to learn that early Sabbathkeepers practiced nearly the same beliefs that we hold today. Through the pages of history, I have discovered my spiritual ancestors.

Yet some would deny my claims of spiritual kinship with early English and American Sabbatarian Baptists. Don Sanford, today's official historian of the Seventh Day Baptist Church, has recently written a revised Seventh Day Baptist history, *A Choosing People: The History of Seventh Day Baptists* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1992). Sanford holds that other Sabbathkeepers cannot rightfully appropriate Seventh Day Baptist history as their own (see *The Sabbath Sentinel*, October, 1992, pages 6, 7).

I believe many Sabbathkeepers of today can indeed validly claim early English and American Sabbatarian Baptists as their spiritual predecessors. Actually, many Church of God groups today are doctrinally *closer* to early English and American Sabbathkeepers than are today's Seventh Day Baptists. Early American Sabbatarians rejected the Trinity doctrine as well as the immortal soul teaching, and eschewed Christmas and Easter, all of which are generally contrary to modern Seventh Day Baptist doctrinal teaching.

Who "owns" Sabbatarian history? Those who believe and practice what early Sabbathkeepers believed and practiced (John 8:39). Sabbatarian history should not become the intellectual property of any particular group.

#### Recent Historical Developments

A revision and update of my material on church history was necessary due to developments over the past twenty years. There have been at least three significant books published, which have expanded the horizon of knowledge on the history of Sabbathkeepers. They are: 1) Sanford's book, mentioned previously; 2) *Andreas Fischer and the Sabbatarian Anabaptists*, by Daniel Liechty (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1988), and 3) *Sabbath and Sectarianism in Seventeenth-Century England*, by David S. Katz (New York: E. J. Brill, 1988). Liechty adds interesting data about Sabbathkeepers in Slovakia during the early 1500's. Katz, a non-Sabbatarian, makes the astounding conclusion that the Adventist Movement (of which the Seventh Day Church of God is a derivative) is the direct spiritual descendant of the seventeenth-century Sabbatarian who kept the Sabbath and believed in the soon-coming millennial rule of the Messiah.

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*"The past twenty years have seen dramatic doctrinal changes in many Sabbathkeeping groups."*

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There is yet another reason why it was necessary to revise and update this history. The past twenty years have seen dramatic doctrinal changes in many Sabbathkeeping groups. At this point in time, some Sabbathkeepers are saying that they do not have a need anymore to support their doctrinal position by showing that other believers down through the ages have upheld the Sabbath and related doctrines. While Katz and Liechty have provided additional proofs that we have indeed found our spiritual ancestors, some today are ignoring the lessons of this history.

I do not hold such views. A careful study of the evidence shows that in every age, there have been a few who have not "bowed the knee to Baal." I have written about a small portion of these valiant individuals. May we always remember how we have received and heard the Truth of God (Revelation 3:3, 4) and remain faithful, holding fast to the end, no matter what others do!

*Note: Six Papers on the History of the Church of God, and History of the Seventh Day Church of God, Volume I, are available from Giving and Sharing, PO Box 100, Neck City, Missouri, USA 64849.*

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## News

### Fired Sabbathkeeper Wins Suit, Job and \$100,000

A former Sparks Regional Medical Center employee who was fired in 1992 because he refused to work on Saturday for religious reasons has been awarded almost \$100,000 by a US District Court jury and was given his job back by the judge. The jury of nine women and three men deliberated for six hours Wednesday before returning the verdict in favor of computer operator Eddie Kilgore and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission which brought the suit against Sparks for job discrimination and for resulting damages. The jury awarded Kilgore \$58,271.85 for lost wages from his discharge in October 1992 and \$40,000 for emotional pain and suffering, inconvenience, mental anguish, loss of enjoyment of life and other non-wage damages. After the jury returned the verdict, the trial resumed with US District Judge Jim Hendren taking up the question of reinstatement. After hearing testimony, Hendren ordered Kilgore reinstated. Kilgore, a member of the Church of God, Seventh Day, had been a computer operator at Sparks for 18 years when, in the spring of 1992, a supervisor revised the work schedule and put Kilgore on call to work Saturdays. Before then, he had never worked Saturdays. According to court records, he refused to work Saturdays because it was contrary to his religious beliefs, one of which was that no work was to be done from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday except in emergencies. Because he did not comply with the conditions of his employment, he was fired in October, 1992. He sued the hospital last January, charging Sparks did not make reasonable accommodations for his religion and deprived him of his opportunity for equal employment.

— Times Record