

Garry Duncan (Avondale College): "Converging edges of the Midnight Cry: A journey of select Seeker and Rogerene descendant faith paths in mid-state Connecticut"

The digitisation of historical documents such as the early **Second Advent Review and Sabbath Herald** and the mass popularity of tracing family history through a new array of online genealogical records is making powerful search capabilities readily available to historians. What once took years of painstaking research can now be done in a matter of minutes or even seconds. Word patterns of common phrases can be analysed to observe the commonality or difference of phrases between different religious groups. When similar patterns are observed with language and similar patterns of surnames using those phrases across different groups from supposed different backgrounds and time periods the curiosity to find the common links abounds.

This paper sets out to begin the journey of connecting the dots looking for overlapping networks of surnames, places, ideas, doctrines and practices to look at new areas yet unexplored in where Adventism's roots may lie.

Adventists have traditionally looked to the immediate generation from where its pioneers came from and to the places and the denominational faith of each family of origin. We have observed a strong link of heritage among the Christian Connection of New England and have seen some significance in the Methodist background of Ellen White. William Millers call for his followers to come out of the corrupted churches of the day saw a variety of people from differing backgrounds come together in his Midnight Cry movement of the 1830s and 1840s. The development of the Seventh-day Adventist identity in the post Great Disappointment era of the late 1840s saw new doctrinal developments such as the Seventh day Sabbath attributed to the Seventh Day Baptist input of Rachel Oakes (nee Harris). Classically Adventist historians have seen this as the single sole seventh day Sabbath input.

However an analysis of the letters and contributions in the early editions of the **Present Truth** and the subsequent replacement in the **Second Advent Review and Sabbath Herald** shows a broader earlier Seventh-day Sabbatarian story emerging. While Adventist historians have traditionally seen it as a story that takes early and later shape in New Hampshire, Vermont, Maine, Massachusetts and New York State it is to Connecticut, the state of the first Sabbath Sanctuary conference, that an example of an earlier heritage with some common surnames, doctrines and word patterns of common phrases can more easily be examined.

It is in the early days of Connecticut that we find a distinctly separate expression of both Seventh day Sabbath belief and an Advent expectation expressed in another Midnight Cry movement.

The historical record begins in the journal of the early Irish Quaker founder William Edmondson who in 1675 was storm swept into Connecticut's New London harbour and sought to gather a Quaker Meeting for Worship. He was prevented from doing this by the Puritan authorities. Instead he was taken a few miles out of town that May Saturday morning by some sympathetic locals where he found a startled but welcoming group of newly converted Seventh Day Baptists meeting with their slaves uniquely in a similar manner as that of a silent Quaker Meeting for Worship. How they came to meet in this manner, in the first instance, has been a mystery yet unsolved though this paper may go some way in beginning to tease out those origins.

Unique for its time this group formed out of the wealthiest family of Connecticut, the Rogers family, dissenting from the organised church and became known as Rogerenes, often as Rogerene Quakers and at times as Rogerene Baptists. It was not for long that this newly established group were able to meet outside the established Congregational church system of Connecticut without interference. Indeed the founder John Rogers was to protest their religious liberty with vigour against the state for a near half century gathering his small group of New London families into what he described as the little flock and addressed as Brethren and Friends; common phrases also found in early Seventh-day Adventist literature. The Rogerene seventh day Sabbath observance pattern was most commonly expressed in the 6PM to 6PM scheme that we see early Adventist pioneer Joseph Bates adopt and advocate for a decade before the current sundown to sundown Biblical pattern became normative.

Rogerene descendants would continue their dissent though it would moderate after the death of John Rogers but again reignite in subsequent clashes with the state and the Congregational established church. Of interest is a small strand of Rogerene descendants who continued a lingering interest in Seventh day Sabbatarianism long past the time the other Rogerenes had lapsed their one time exclusive seventh day Sabbath observance and formally separated from their Seventh Day Baptists neighbours of Rhode Island. Rogerenes almost uniquely for their day held to an acceptance of some diversity of belief with the younger brother of John Rogers, Jonathan Rogers, marrying into a Seventh Day Baptist family and continuing his Seventh day advocacy until his death. A degree of theological variety along a spectrum of orthodox belief was a pattern that would continue well into the 18th and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries including a continued acceptance of the validity of the seventh day Sabbath by some.

While never a numerous group of people Rogerene dissent was a key focal point in New England attracting widespread interest amongst other dissenting families elsewhere. Interaction between the Rogerene descendants and other dissidents would continue as these descendants would be joined by fellow Seekers of English separatist origin navigating their journey in their generational American migration paths across and beyond Connecticut as they continued to anticipate the return of Christ in the late 17<sup>th</sup> Century and beyond. This study is concerned with the family faith journeys of these people. It may well be that the more vocal expression of Rogerene faith is indeed a public Connecticut expression of what is an otherwise underground seeker movement. The surnames of those associated with these two movements has a very high overlap with those that appear as letter writers and financial contributors in the **Present Truth** and the **Second Advent Review and Sabbath Herald**.

Persecution has a habit of spreading the flames of faith through the often underground movements that become public through passionate people such as the Rogerenes seeing their persecution as evidence of the imminence of the coming Kingdom of God. So it was the case as John Rogers published in 1692 his **Midnight Cry from the temple of God to the ten virgins slumbering and sleeping, Awake, awake arise and gird your loyns, and trim your lamps, for behold the bridegroom cometh, go**

**ye therefore out to meet him.** Others to respond to its call included the Seeker Noah Whipple. Among his broader family descendants would be a continued line of dome of combined Rogerene and select Seeker descent. Some would move beyond the reaches of New London travelling also from neighbouring Rhode Island and Massachusetts toward the Connecticut states Capital Hartford in sparse clusterings of individual families centred in the mid-state towns and villages.

An analysis of the theologies expressed in John Rogers published **Midnight Cry** of 1692 give some striking similarities with themes in common with the early Seventh-day Adventist pioneers. Hints to the origins of the Rogerene belief and worship pattern suggest it being reminiscent of a variety of much earlier radical reformation Continental European groups that influenced the 16<sup>th</sup> Century South German Anabaptist theologies. Among the notable similarities with Christian Hebraic themes are references to the two Adams, the significance of the Seventh day Sabbath in regard to the Temple of God, the work of Jesus in his High Priestly office and his desire to dwell in the human habitation of the temple of his faithful followers. Typical of the theological interweaving is this quote:

“And whereas the High Priest under the first Testament, did his Priestly Office in the temple of God, which temple was made with hands, which things were but shadows of heavenly thing (sic); but Jesus Christ is a high priest of the real temple of God not made with hands, being tipified by those high priests of the Old Testament, so likewise the Saints Bodies, or Church of God, was tipified by that Temple built by Solomon; for that temple was but a figure of the true Temple of God, as appeareth by these following Scriptures Acts 7:48. But Solomon built him an house howbeit the most high dwelleth not in Temples made with hands, as saith the prophet, but the Saints Bodies are the true Temple of God, where God dwells, and where Christ doth his Priestly Office in...” (pp 109- 110)

Historically this theological teaching occurs within a setting of a long lasting Seeker movement heralded by many other diverse Seekers of Truth including New England's chief dissenter Roger Williams. These Seekers are waiting often in silence together searching for truth and awaiting an apostolic restoration of the Church of God and the coming of his kingly presence. The earlier theological commonalities of John Rogers **Midnight Cry**, with themes of interest to those that attend the earnest prayerful Sabbath Sanctuary conferences first beginning in mid-state Connecticut in 1847 can be seen among the adherents of Millers **Midnight Cry** movement with faith having been transmitted across the generations.

Thus it is possible to link these 19<sup>th</sup> century mid-state Connecticut Millerite **Midnight Cry** believers with the family descendants of those interested in John Rogers 17<sup>th</sup> Century **Midnight Cry**, through family surnames, similar patterns of language of common phrases, doctrines, thematic ideas and practices. Proximity of the places of meeting of the first and second Sabbath Sanctuary conferences to be held in Rocky Hill and Bristol in mid-state Connecticut and the pattern of the location of the family migrations is also of interest.

Albert Belden's home becomes the location the first conference at Rocky Hill held as an earnest prayer meeting where the search for Bible truth emerged out of a gathered silent and searching melting meeting. The descriptions of this matches that of the early Seeker meetings from whom the Quakers emerged. While the role of silent collective expectant waiting would characterise some of the Millerites before the Great Disappointment its ongoing practice amongst Seventh-day Adventists would eventually lapse.

**The Present Truth**, the Seventh-day Adventist movements first periodical, is first published out of Rocky Hill by James White in 1849. Soon after the Harmon family more formally joined the small mid-state Connecticut Sabbatarian network when Ellen Gould Harmon's sister Sarah married Stephen Belden in August 1851. Longer connections are seen when Ellen Harmon's parents reside for a time in Connecticut and 1866 saw the death of her father Robert at Berlin, Hartford, Connecticut. George W Holt of mid-state Connecticut would certainly have to come close to Joseph Bates and James White in being the most frequent to travel and visit the far flung Advent little flock, described by Ellen White as a people to be gathered.

Thus we see that well known Millerite Adventist surnames such as Belden, Chamberlain, and Holt are a small sample of the wider seeker and intermarried Rogerene surnames some of whom had mid-state connections such as the Wilcox family with the Rogerene Watrous family. Most notably there is the Rogerene descendant connection through the marriage of Erastus Chamberlain's daughter in becoming Mrs Frances Rogers.

Erastus Chamberlain was the key Seeker Sabbatarian patriarch in the mid-state Connecticut area. He was a significant local citizen being a member of the local bank board and a key shareholder of the bank and had been a Colonial in the army. He is the elder statesman anchor of the mid-state Sabbatarian Advent group. While pacifist identification would be notable among Seeker and Rogerene descendants the reality of wars and the growing patriotism of the young nation saw pragmatic factors at play in succeeding generations of descendants.

Though small in number of adherents Chamberlain writes earnestly in the early **Second Advent Review and Sabbath Herald** of his concern for the scattered flock of God in Connecticut. A letter of 1851 describes , "hidden jewels" scattered through Connecticut.

Certainly not all Advent believers in the region were seventh-day Sabbatarian. The first day versus seventh day debate had emerged in the pages of the **Bible Advocate** of Hartford Connecticut in 1847 and again in 1848. Merlin Burt has presented this interaction well in his doctrinal dissertation. The ongoing debate would resurface again as the geographic focus of the surviving advent movements moved further north and west in the decades to follow.

The interaction of the Seeker and Rogerene descendants of mid-state Connecticut with the Seventh Day Baptist Church close to Rocky Hill in the mid-state town of Bristol, also known as Farmington and as Burlington, is an area requiring much more detailed research. The outreaches of those in the orbit of this Sabbatarian group appear to stretch as far as Springfield, Massachusetts. The key reason why this locality of Bristol is of interest is because of the lesser known second Sabbath Sanctuary conference that occurs there soon after the first. Its hosting occurs at a time when the Seventh Day Baptist Church had been disbanded in that location for two decades however several Seventh-day Sabbatarians remained scattered in the surrounding communities verified by an analysis of the Seventh Day Baptist Cemetery records there in the decades to follow.

Many of these families had left the region to settle in another Seventh Day Baptist settlement in New York State at Brookfield. Interestingly this is the location where James and Ellen White later visit the home of Ira and Rhoda Abbey in 1848 after the third Sabbath Sanctuary conference. It is but one indicator of continued peripheral settlement interaction of Seeker descendants living in close proximity to Seventh Day Baptist communities in the areas of Central and Western New York State.

The significance of Ellen White's visionary role to bring gospel order, a Quaker s]and seeker phrase, to the often threshing small Sabbatarian groupings would continue well beyond those first two Sabbath Sanctuary conferences of the late 1840s in mid – state Connecticut. There and elsewhere we see a pattern of common usage of what are some common Seeker, Quaker and Rogerene language distinctives. Some would be variations of expressions found in the contemporary vernacular of mid 19<sup>th</sup> century Quaker life. Each would be distinguishable to some extent in manifestation though frequency and manner of usage is another discernible difference. Variations of phrases and themes such as friends of truth, “waiting for the way to open”, leadings, sufferings, opportunities, present truth, the spirit of prophecy, speaking to an individual’s spiritual condition, testimonies, faith and practice, and the plain dating of the days of the week, would feature in the wider developing Seventh-day Adventist movement. Wider geographic evidence of the usage of these and other common phrases is found in the early years of Seventh-day Adventist literature.

It is at the first two Sabbath Sanctuary Conferences held in mid-state Connecticut that we see the beginnings of a common synthesise of key ideas, doctrines, phrases and practices begin to collectively emerge as a newly emerging movement progresses forward with an overlapping network that predates its eventual expression in early Seventh-day Adventism. It is a unity of old truths made new again that continued to slowly develop and solidify as the newly forming Seventh-day Advent movement held conferences over the succeeding years before finally determining to formally organise as a church in 1863. And so it is that today we end our commemoration of the 150<sup>th</sup> year of that event and reflect upon the patterns emerging from the findings of this new research evidenced in the lives of select Seeker and Rogerene descendants of the Midnight Cry in mid-state Connecticut.