

# Following in the Footsteps of the Pioneers

Picture Removed

**L**earning so much about my Adventist heritage greatly impacted my life,” remarked Ashley as she thanked her teacher for choosing an Adventist heritage theme for the 5th and 6th graders to work on in preparation for the school’s upcoming Social Studies Fair.

Concurring with Ashley, her classmate, Rachel P., said, “Most people might think that Adventist heritage would be boring to a group of children, but I would say that we all had a great time. It was quite an experience to learn about all of the men and women who helped to found our church, and I think we should all follow in the footsteps of our pioneers.”

## Passing the Mantle

For some time, Emma Wortham, teacher of grades 5 and 6 at the Highland Seventh-day Adventist Elementary Church School in Portland, Tennessee, had felt it was time for her to “pass the mantle” to the next generation! She remembered doing one “Spirit of Prophecy Emphasis Week” early in her teaching career but, because of all the other curriculum demands, had not made it a regular part of her program and now wondered if her students really understood why they were Seventh-day Adventists.

Having participated in a conference-sponsored church history tour led by James R. Nix, director of the Ellen G. White Estate at the church’s world headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland, Wortham had walked where the pioneers walked; sat where the pioneers sat; sung early Advent hymns in the historic William Miller Chapel; and listened to heartwarming stories about the



Three homeschoolers who participated in the fair are pictured with some of the artifacts they brought.

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By Alice R. Voorheis

commitment of our pioneers. Standing on Ascension Rock, she thought, "This I must share with my students!"

Back at school, Wortham searched, collected, and organized books and materials she had laid aside years ago and soon was ready to begin. Adventist heritage now had a time slot in her daily schedule! She showed her students a video from the New England trip along with the Heritage Attic video of C. Mervyn Maxwell telling stories of the pioneers to a group of children in an old attic. This helped to acquaint Wortham's students with some of the people they would be studying about and prepared them to tackle the planned activities and experiences.

### Preparing for the Fair

Feeling they were now ready to "dive into" the program, Wortham asked each student to select an early pioneer and do enough research on this person to be able to write a report and give a short speech at the fair. The students also researched clothing of the time period so they could prepare a costume to wear for their presentations. Three local home-

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schooled students were invited to join the 24 students in the class, which meant the students had to search for information on 27 pioneers, not just a dozen or so of the more familiar ones.

Metal piercing, apple drying, making cornshuck dolls, and other art projects relating to the time period were included in the activities. Each student chose an event relating to an Adventist pioneer and wrote a story describing how early pioneer children might have acted it out after hearing their parents discuss the event. Using their cornshuck dolls as characters, the students presented several "Cornshuck Dramas."

All students participated in the

try-outs, and the class chose the best presentation to use in the upcoming fair.

The students also enjoyed illustrating pioneer Adventist stories with the use of a felt board. In her collection of teaching aids, Wortham had a full set of Ellen White felts and a companion book. As one student selected and read a particular story, several other students illustrated it on the felt board. Thus, in addition to learning the story, students also learned to work together successfully to create a meaningful activity.

### A Variety of Exhibits

Many antique and old-fashioned items were collected for an exhibit. The students handled the artifacts carefully as they discussed how the pioneers might have used them. The students also collected many pictures from old Adventist calendars and other sources. These were used to make beautiful posters about each pioneer's life.

Among the vast array of skits, poems, and other materials Wortham had collected, the students discovered instructions for using a voice choir to describe Ellen White's first vision. They were excited about this activity and quickly began memorizing their parts, putting forth earnest efforts to master the challenge.

Fair Day finally arrived and, despite an overnight snowfall, several hundred people made their way to the school to participate with the students in an enriching educational experience. Each classroom had chosen a different theme. In the 5th- and 6th-grade room, the air was charged with excitement as 27 students in 19th-century dress scurried about putting finishing touches on their exhibits. Parents darted about to get the best angle for their picture-taking while helpers set up folding chairs for the expected audience. The students' desire to "Walk in the Footsteps of the Pioneers" was visibly represented by a wall-length bulletin board of marching footprints. Each student had created personal footprints and



Ellen and James White, portrayed by Aubrey Sherman and Stephen Jenks. In the background are the "footprints of the pioneers."

placed the first and last names of his or her pioneer on each footprint.

As a former superintendent, I visited all of the classrooms, but I spent the major part of my time in the 5th- and 6th-grade room to see what the students had done with their “Adventist Heritage” theme. I was not disappointed! I had expected to see some posters and perhaps a few artifacts, but I was not prepared for the feelings of joy I experienced. I listened carefully to each speech, sensing how personally involved the students had become with “their pioneers” and how meaningful it was to them to represent the humble people who were willing to let God use them to build His church for the last days of Earth’s history.

### Concluding Activities

Following the individual classroom programs, the students, teachers, parents, and other guests assembled in the auditorium for the closing activities, which continued the classroom themes. When their turn came, the 5th and 6th graders took to the stage and presented several numbers,

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including a delightful arrangement of the 19th-century temperance song “Smoking and Chewing”; a pioneer story narrated by one student and illustrated on the felt board by two other students; a “Cornshuck Drama” play with scenes from the life of John and Mary Loughborough; and, what I

considered the highlight of the entire program, a faultless performance of Ellen White’s first vision by the students in a voice choir!

The day after the fair, Miss Wortham asked the students to each write a short paragraph telling what it had meant to them personally to be involved in this study unit about their Adventist heritage. Here are a few of their comments:

*Christen* - “I was very honored to be a part of this study because we got to share the past that became our future.”

*Manuel* - “It was fun and hard work, but it was an honor to represent someone who helped to start our church.”

*Devin* - “It was a real pleasure, and I hope someone was touched by our speeches.”

*Brianna* - “I thought doing the Adventist pioneers was great! I never really thought about the pioneers until now.”

*Josh* - “It meant to me that it was important to learn about our Adventist heritage.”

*Amber* - “Well, it meant a lot to



The students performing on Fair Day.



me that I could represent someone who did a lot of things for God even though she may not have been Miss America or a beauty queen. She worked for God then and she still works for Him now through books.”

*Aubrey* – “Doing this made me feel like someone needed to be touched by the Holy Spirit, and it made me a better Seventh-day Adventist.”

*Rachel H.* – “What it meant to me? Well it was very fun! I had no idea that our hard work would mean anything! Maybe speeches are worth more than I expected. I sure did learn a lot!”

Wortham told her students that they had barely scratched the surface and that someday, they might want to continue their search. She then asked herself the question—“Was it worth

all the effort?”

Her answer was, “Yes, yes, yes!” ✍



Alice R. Voorheis

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## Resource Materials

A variety of materials for teaching Adventist history, including books, charts, posters, and a songbook, are available from the Adventist Heritage Shoppe at the Adventist Heritage Ministry, P.O. Box 1414, Battle Creek, MI 49016-1414, U.S.A. To order, log on to <http://www.adventistheritage.org>, call (269) 965-5600, or e-mail [adventistvillage@tds.net](mailto:adventistvillage@tds.net). To be put on the mailing list, write to: Adventist Heritage Ministry, P.O. Box 1414, Battle Creek, MI 49016-1414; or call (269) 965-3000.

### **Materials that are available from the Heritage Shoppe include the following:**

*Early Advent Singing*, a selection of Millerite and early Seventh-day Adventist hymns, along with stories of the pioneers and ways the music was used by the pioneers. A CD by Andrews University Singers entitled *What Heavenly Music* accompanies this songbook.

*Grandma Ellen and Me*, stories of Ellen White as told by her great granddaughter, Mabel Miller.

*Stories of My Grandmother*, as told by Ellen White's granddaughter, Ella Robinson.

Joseph Bates' autobiography, written in 1868.

*Tell It to the World*, book on Adventist history by C. Mervyn Maxwell.

*The Great Second Advent Movement*, written by our first historian, J. N. Loughborough.

*Memoirs of William Miller*, a biography written by Sylvester Bliss four years after Miller died.

*Miracles in My Life*, stories of early Adventist experiences written by J. N. Loughborough.

*Advent Preaching*, sermons preached by several of our pioneers and prepared for today's youth to use.

*Ellen, Trial and Triumph*, stories of Ellen White by Paul B. Ricchiuti.

*Footprints of the Pioneers*, a do-it-yourself guide to New England, New York, and eastern Canada Adventist history sites, along with stories of the pioneers and what happened at each place.

*Herald of the Midnight Cry*, a biography of William

Miller written for children by Paul A. Gordon.

*Laughter and Tears of the Pioneers*, stories about the lives of our pioneers showing they were real people with real feelings, by Jim Nix and Paul Gordon.

*Magnificent Disappointment*, an explanation of the events of 1844, by C. Mervyn Maxwell.

*The Spirit of Sacrifice and Commitment*, stories of actual experiences of the pioneers in their own words, compiled by Jim Nix.

*William Miller, Herald of the Blessed Hope*, a compilation of Ellen White's writings about Miller.

*Pioneer Stories*, a reprint of the classic by Arthur Spalding.

*Playing Our Past*, six heritage plays written for youth to perform.

*Pioneer Portraits*, 10 full-color pictures of well-known pioneers, complete with biographical sketches.

*A Star Gives Light*, stories with photos of many Adventist African-American pioneers, by Norwida Marshall.

The Lake Union Conference Office of Education has prepared a dramatic audio series of 22 CDs called *Pathways of the Pioneers*, which includes 117 historical stories, with music, spanning the time between William Miller and the death of Ellen G. White. Prepared over the past 20 years by various knowledgeable professionals and produced in the late 1990s, this series covers the development and growth of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Schools can obtain discounts for multiple orders. Contact Gary Randolph, director of education, for ordering information: telephone: (269) 473-8274; or e-mail: [randolphg60@cs.com](mailto:randolphg60@cs.com).

### **Available from Adventist Book Centers**

*Light Bearers: A History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church* by Richard W. Schwarz and Floyd Greenleaf (revised and updated edition) (Pacific Press, 1995).

*In Passion for the World*, new history of Adventist education, by Floyd Greenleaf (Pacific Press, 2005).