

Some Highlights of the Life of **John Byington** (1798-1887) ([www.APLib.org](http://www.APLib.org))

See *The Sickness and Death of Eld. John Byington*, George Amadon, RH Jan. 25, 1887, pp. 57, 58

<i>Date</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Event</i>
1798/10/08	0	Hinesburg, Chittenden Co., Vermont

His father's name was Justus Byington, who was long an itinerant Methodist preacher, and who had served as a soldier in the Revolutionary War, for the independence of our country. Justus Byington was formerly a deist, in consequence of the doctrines of election and reprobation, but was finally aroused by a sermon on the law of God, by the well-known Lorenzo Dow. He at once obtained pardon and peace, and soon began itinerant labor among the Methodists. He was a delegate to the first convention held in Baltimore, Maryland, which organized the Protestant Methodist Church of America.

1816	17	Converted at a Methodist camp meeting in St. Albans, Vermont
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...In the year 1816, being then past seventeen years of age, at a Methodist camp-meeting at St. Albans, Vermont, he found full pardon and peace through our Lord Jesus Christ. He then broke away from old associations, and began the religious life in earnest. As his father was a traveling circuit preacher, it became his duty to attend to family worship, his mother being a woman of great diffidence. This was a heavy cross, as most of the family made no religious profession; but in discharging this duty he was particularly strengthened by the Lord. While still young in experience he united with the Methodist class, and was soon appointed as leader. Not long after he received license to exhort, and subsequently was licensed as a local preacher in the Methodist Episcopal Church.

1819	21	Health failed
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When about twenty-one years of age his health completely failed, so that for over three years he was a mere walking skeleton. He then experienced great depression of spirits, doubted his conversion, and felt very miserable; but while earnestly seeking God in the silent grove, a power rested upon him, and he felt that he was completely bathed in the ocean of God's love. This baptism of the Spirit was a sheet-anchor in after years when assaulted by infidelity and unbelief. As a means for the recovery of health, he took a long wagon journey to the State of Connecticut, and spent some time on a fishing vessel in the mackerel business. His prospects for health being favorable, he returned again to Vermont, and was soon able to labor as formerly.

1837	39	Built Methodist Church in Buck's Bridge, New York; farm was stop on "underground railway"--Sojourner Truth, Will Locket both known to the family; named three sons after Methodist preachers, Fletcher, Luther Lee, and William Wilberforce; daughter Martha
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Eld. Byington was a very active member in the Methodist Episcopal Church, and for many years he divided the time between laboring on his farm and planning and preaching, erecting a meeting-house and parsonage, and otherwise working for the upbuilding of this religious branch.

1841	43	Joined with others on anti-slavery question, and formed the Wesleyan Methodist church in Morley, New York ( part of wide-spread split from the Methodist Episcopal Church)
1844	46	Heard one sermon on the great second-advent proclamation, in Cleveland, Ohio, while attending a Wesleyan Methodist convention
1852	54	Found Sabbath in copy of <i>Review</i> ; impressed but disturbed; studied to prove it wrong, but convinced; baptized with his wife on July 3 and two older children in the Grasse River near Buck's Bridge; regular meetings in his home for several years with others who accepted the message
1855	57	Helped build the first SDA church to be constructed, next to the Methodist church he had built
1858/10	60	Moved to Michigan at strong encouragement of James White, bought farm at Newton, near Battle Creek, and brought his family there

With his own horse and carriage, and meeting traveling expenses from his private purse, he traveled extensively in Michigan, laboring in public and at the fireside for the upbuilding of the cause so near his heart. So extensive was this kind of labor that he visited the homes of nearly all the believers in Michigan. He

baptized many children, so that twenty or twenty-five years afterward quite frequently strangers would come and introduce themselves, saying that he had baptized them years before.

He ultimately settled his family on a farm in Newton, near Battle Creek, and began visiting from church to church. Frequently his Catharine would accompany him. These trips took him as far north as Muskegon on the west, and Port Huron and Saginaw on the east. These ministering tours were not merely Sabbath-day meetings, but they were day-by-day intercourse with the people. He ate with them, prayed with them, and slept in their homes. He sold them Bibles and hymnbooks, received their tithes and offerings, and baptized their children. At intervals he returned to his farm at Newton, attending to its needs, and taking wheat and corn to the mill to be ground into flour and meal. But he was always uneasy for another missionary journey, either winter or summer. He did not forget his neighbors around Newton. He gave them papers, and lived the truth before them. Seldom did anyone leave his house without prayer.<sup>1</sup>

1863/05	64	Accepted first presidency of the General Conference of SDA's after James White refused it; served 1863-1865
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...His beloved Catharine died suddenly of pneumonia after she had been sick only a week [1885]. He speaks of her triumphant death! Before she died, she asked him to give up his cares and visit the brethren. This he did, visiting churches in Michigan. He never lost his keen interest in young people. "I must feed the lambs of the flock," he wrote. When he could no longer go to prayer meeting, he sent to them a message on a little slip of blue paper. "Tell, O tell them," he urged the district leader, "to leave the world, and come to their Saviour!"

By December, 1886, he had been to the Tabernacle for the last time, but he was still writing in his diary. It looked very serious to him to have all his life brought into judgment. He prayed that all his wrongs might be forgiven. "I have felt sad," he continued. "The wrongs of my life all come up, and can they be forgiven? Only through the atoning blood of Jesus."<sup>1</sup>

1886/12/03	88	Wrote, " This is a day of comfort and peace. I have felt my sins were very many; have asked and found mercy of the Saviour, and would declare His loving-kindness to all."
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Eld. Byington was a man of excellent judgment in temporal affairs, and a wise counselor in matters of the church. He has served as a member of the General Conference and the Michigan Conference, and has been a regular minister in the denomination since the year 1852. Being a prudent manager in worldly matters, he always had means at command, which, he freely distributed to the wants of the needy, and particularly was he liberal toward our various institutions, which he regarded as important agents in the hands of God for spreading abroad the knowledge of the "present truth." At the commencement of his sickness, he was barely able to attend two meetings of the late General Conference, which he did feeling that his next meeting would be with the church triumphant at the sounding of the last trump.

During his sickness he carefully looked over all the points of the religious faith which he had maintained and defended for the last thirty-five years. He felt that he was on a solid foundation, and especially was the doctrine of the resurrection to his mind one of exceeding comfort. Born in 1798, he had been permitted, as he said, to live thus far through "the time of the end." His last sickness was to him a time of deep searching of heart. Sometimes he experienced great depression, then there would be a rift in the clouds, and his joy would be almost ecstatic. Particularly did the Lord comfort him with very remarkable dreams. All who visited his room were exhorted to be living, earnest Christians; and especially did he warn the ministers, in view of the Judgment, to preach holiness of heart and life. He patiently bore his painful illness without murmuring, and often when praying that he might depart, he would add the petition, "Thy will be done." He chose the text for the funeral occasion, naming two brethren in the ministry whom he wished to speak on the passage: "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne." Rev. 3 :21. Eld. Butler was to speak from the clause on "overcoming;" but being absent, his place was supplied by Eld. Lamson; while Eld. U. Smith dwelt upon the part of the text which speaks of the throne of God.

1887/01/07	88	Died
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1. "The First President of the General Conference: John Byington, Farmer-Preacher," Grace Amadon, Granddaughter, *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* June 22, 1944, pp. 6, 7