

## **Dr. William Henry Harrison Adams (1840-1890)**

Dr. William Henry Harrison Adams was born on March 30, 1840 in Effingham County, Illinois. He was the oldest son of Christopher Beeks Adams, (born May 12, 1811 in Ohio, died February 13, 1880 in Long Creek Twp, Macon County, IL) and Sarah Gannoway (born abt. 1814 in Kentucky, died Oct 3, 1854 in Coles County, IL). His father Christopher was a descendant of the John Quincy Adams family. William's grandfather was one of the earliest settlers of Ohio. His mother was a devout Christian, and had a great influence on William becoming a minister later in life.

William was very fond of reading in his spare time as a young boy. In the summer months he would help his father farm and read in his spare time. In the winter, William attended school in a one-room log cabin schoolhouse in Coles County, IL. William then continued his education at Northwestern University in Evanston, IL. William was baptized a Christian at age 17. He was then admitted to the Garrett Biblical Institute at the same school. There he studied to become a pastor. In 1859 when he was 19 he became licensed to preach. His first position was as a student pastor in Chicago while still attending school. He completed his training and graduated from the Garrett Biblical Institute at Northwestern in 1870. After he graduated, he was first appointed as pastor at the Methodist Churches in Monticello, Clinton, and Atlanta, IL.

However on August 12, 1862 William temporarily left his education at Northwestern University and joined the Army during the Civil War. While enlisted in the army, he served nine months in the 111<sup>th</sup> Illinois Volunteers and was promoted to the rank of 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant. Following this he was put in charge of one of the first African American artillery regiments in the Western Army where he rose to the rank of Major. He held this position until he resigned his commission on July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1865 so he could return to school and finished his education at Northwestern.

Before he enlisted in the army William married Sarah E. Campbell on August 19, 1861 in Coles County, IL. This would not be a long marriage because Sarah died on August 19, 1866. Not too long after she died William married Hannah Westfall Concklin on August 27, 1867 in Frankfort, Will County, IL. Hannah was born on October 26, 1842 in Plymouth, Ohio. William and Hannah met when he returned to Northwestern to finish his degree and both graduated from the same school. They had four children together: Lulu May (b. December 8, 1869, d. January 26, 1947), Grace Greenwood (b. August 23, 1871, d. July 4, 1960), Charles C. (born about 1874), and Katherine Kellogg, (b. November 11, 1875, d. June 21, 1966). All of William and Hannah's daughters are buried in the family plot at Evergreen Memorial Cemetery in Bloomington, IL.

William and Hannah moved their family to Clinton, IL in the fall of 1872 when he became the minister of the Methodist Church. While ministering at the church, William eliminated the church's \$14,000 debt. This accomplishment made him very well known and desirable to other institutions which had similar debt problems. William was a forceful speaker and a tireless advocate for the needy.

In 1875 William was approached by the Board of Trustees of Illinois Wesleyan University in Bloomington, IL and was asked to become president of the university. I.W.U had a similar debt problem as the Methodist Church in Clinton did, except they owed a great deal more money, between \$30,000 and \$40,000. He was 35 years old when he accepted the presidency at I.W.U, becoming the youngest president in the school's

history at that time. Besides being the president of the university, he also was a professor of Ethics and Metaphysics.

William had inherited the project of eliminating the school's debt, which had grown to \$50,000 by 1880. He came up with a solution to erase the debt by putting on a celebratory function for the university's 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Distinguished guests attended and gave charitable contributions that were applied to eliminating the debt. The function was a success but William was still \$9,000 short of paying off the full amount of debt.

*The Pantagraph* reported this in an article titled "A College For Sale" because Gilbert and Fay of Connecticut, the owners of the loan, attempted to bring the school to sale by offering it to the highest bidder on January 1, 1881 at the south doors of the courthouse in Bloomington. The Board of Trustees at I.W.U took action against the sale of the university and won a thirty-day delay of sale. Again, they charged William with the sole responsibility of securing the funds to wipe out the university's debt once and for all. Miraculously, he was able to secure enough money to erase the debts for good. This act earned him a reputation of being a "debt killer." As a reward for all of his hard work, the Board of Trustees unanimously granted him a three-month vacation with continued pay. To further secure the future of I.W.U, William also secured two large donations of land in 1885; 360 acres in Macon County, IL and a 400-acre farm in Douglas County, IL.

Besides eliminating the enormous debt of I.W.U., he was also responsible for helping to establish the College of Music and the College of Commerce which helped enrollment grow. Also, a branch of the Adelpic Society was established at I.W.U. in 1878. The original Adelpic Society, established at Northwestern circa 1860, was a literary and theological society.

Between trying to raise the funds to eliminate the university's debts and also teaching classes for students, the long hours and heavy workload had taken its toll on William. He was suffering from rheumatism (a severe form of arthritis) by the time he retired from I.W.U. in 1887. He then resumed preaching and took a position at the Methodist Episcopal Church in Atlanta, IL.

After a few more years of ministering, he went on a retreat to Hot Springs, Arkansas in an attempt to heal the pain of his rheumatism which had now become inflammatory. While on his trip, he used small doses of chloroform to temporarily alleviate the pain he endured. After taking these doses of chloroform he stopped at a hotel and immediately went to bed and fell asleep quickly. At one of these stops, a few hours after he had taken a dose of chloroform in the early evening, another guest of the hotel heard William moaning. This person informed the landlord and a medical doctor was sent for. The doctor did everything he could for William but he eventually died at 1:00 a.m. on March 12, 1890. The cause of death was reported as an overdose of chloroform. This was determined by a  $\frac{3}{4}$  empty bottle of chloroform, which was found in a drawer in William's room. The report continued that there were no indications that this was a suicide. Instead, it was determined that he had accidentally overdosed. He was brought back to Bloomington and was buried in Evergreen Memorial Cemetery.

His wife Hannah became embroiled in a legal battle with Mutual Reserve Fund Life Association over her husband's life insurance policy. The company denied the insurance claim based on the fact that William had not paid the final premium of the policy at the time of his death. In the end, Hannah won the suit and was awarded \$10,260.66, more

than the \$10,000, the actual value of the life insurance policy which was the amount of the suit. In today's money, this would be about \$211,329.

Hannah never remarried after William's death. She moved to Chicago to live with her three daughters who had never married either. She died on November 19, 1932 at the age of 90. She was brought back to Bloomington and is buried next to her husband in Evergreen Memorial Cemetery.

By: Candace Summers, 2005