On Thursday, September 26, 2019, a group comprised of 73 Seventh-day Adventist university presidents, division education directors, General Conference education staff, and several spouses who work as educators assembled in the church’s world headquarters auditorium in Silver Spring, Maryland, U.S.A., in preparation for a 10-day journey into the past: the Adventist History Study Tour. Together, the group represented all 13 divisions of the Seventh-day Adventist world church. From September 26 through October 6, they would have the opportunity to read about the early Adventist pioneers and visit renovated and preserved replicas of homes, historic churches, and marked gravesites. By visiting these historic locations, participants would not only learn about the past, but also be inspired and re-energized to continue the work of Adventist education and mission.

Two experts in Adventist heritage and history led the tour: James R. Nix, director of the Ellen G. White Estate in Silver Spring, Maryland, U.S.A.; and Merlin D. Burt, director for the Center for Adventist Research and professor of church history at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan, U.S.A.

Participants assembled for an orientation session led by Lisa Beardsley-Hardy, General Conference (GC) director of education, and translated by Julián Melgosa, GC associate director of education. The session provided participants with an opportunity to introduce themselves, to share information about the division each represented, and to describe their roles.

Nix offered a brief background for and overview of the study tour, after which participants collected their tour materials, schedules, and luggage, boarded the buses, and departed on an expedition that would travel through Massachusetts, Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, New York, and to Battle Creek, Michigan.

Through engaging storytelling, readings, visits to a variety of sites, and several worship experiences, tour participants collaborated, networked, and established new friendships while renewing old ones. Nix and Burt utilized their own unique storytelling skills and humor to weave together inspirational human-interest stories, historical details, and songs to transport tour members to the time of the early Adventist pioneers. Readings from the tour textbooks, *Adventist Pioneer Places: New York and New England* and *Battle Creek: A Guide to Historic Adventist Sites,* allowed each participant to follow along with the tour guides at each designated stop.

Several morning and evening devotionals and presentations on early Adventist education pioneers and medical evangelism provided insight into the challenges faced by early Adventist educators seeking to advance Adventist education with limited resources. Historic sites of the homes of pioneers such as Joseph Bates, John Nevins Andrews, William Miller, and others provided attendees with a glimpse of the daily life and challenges faced by the early Millerite and Adventist pioneers. Memorable experiences such as sharing in a communion service at the Miller Chapel, singing together while standing on Ascension Rock or in Hiram Edson’s barn, and...
worshiping together at the Historic Adventist Village in Battle Creek, Michigan, created a bond among the participants, not just as fellow educators and colleagues, but also as fellow believers in the soon return of Jesus Christ.

Several participants shared how these experiences increased their knowledge of early Adventist history. Many were inspired by how much the early Adventist pioneers were able to accomplish with limited resources—and committed themselves to doing more with the resources currently available to them. Beginning on page 40 are a few of the many reflections shared by study-tour participants about the impact of the experience.

An outcome of the study tour was the establishment of a restoration project supported by Seventh-day Adventist university presidents and institutions. Educators were made aware of the various restoration needs and were inspired as a group to launch the Little Red School House Restoration Project at the William Miller farm, Whitehall, Low Hampton, New York. The budget, which included not only restoration of the school house, but also reconstruction of the attached woodshed, was set at US$45,000, which includes US$10,000 for furnishings (historical desks, etc.), and US$5,000 for landscaping. By the end of the tour, the study tour group had raised US$41,386 in pledges. The fundraising project is well underway and is open to any individual or institution that would like to contribute. More information on how to do so is available on page 43. (See also the “Little Red School House Restoration Project” on page 42 of this issue of JAE.)
For some, this was the first time they had visited historic Adventist sites in North America, while many others had either taken the tour before or at least visited individual sites. However, for many of the participants, experiencing the study tour with fellow colleagues in Adventist education added another dimension—one of camaraderie, support, and shared mission. From spending time in conversation and sharing challenges and solutions on the hours-long bus rides between sites, to fellowshipping at mealtime and worshipping together, singing old Advent hymns, and praying for one another, attendees built and strengthened bonds of friendship and support. The experience of walking in the footsteps of the pioneers will continue to have an impact on Adventist education leaders as they return to their home institutions and continue fulfilling the mission of Adventist education.


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A. Singing at Annie Smith’s grave.
B. Merlin Burt tells the story of Annie Smith.
C. James Nix tells the story of Joseph Bates.
D. Efrain Velazquez-Hernandez washes the feet of Nathaniel Velazquez, his son, on Ascension Rock.
E. Julián Melgosa translates for Merlin Burt in Hiram Edson’s barn.
“O For That Flame”
My first encounter with the Adventist pioneers—James and Ellen White, Joseph Bates, and others—was in Missionary Volunteer (now Adventist Youth) meetings in the 1960s. When I later joined the teaching service, I found myself teaching about these people in the primary (elementary) school classes. Of all the pioneers, I was the most fascinated and obsessed with William Miller, especially his reconciliation of historical events with meticulous mathematical calculations of when the Second Advent should occur.

In my wild imagination, I thought of William Miller as a person who lived in a town or village, moving from one place to another within the same town/village, preaching and teaching about Jesus’ return. Thus, I very eagerly looked forward to visiting this place. After seeing how isolated the site is, I wondered how he managed to go to different places to preach. The forest must have been much thicker at that time, infested with many dangerous wild animals and snakes. Possibly that was why he carried a gun so he could defend himself from big ferocious animals.

The walking paths may have been narrower back then, the rivers filled with more water, and bridges rougher and crudely built; yet, Miller went about preaching. So did others such as Joseph Bates and James and Ellen White. Then I thought: With incomparably better transport and communication systems, why do we appear obsessed by issues we face today?

The old Adventist hymn spontaneously popped into my mind: “O for that flame of living fire Which shone so bright in saints of old; Which bade their souls to heaven
aspire, calm in distress, in danger bold!"\(^1\)

I wondered to myself: “Where is that Spirit, Lord, which dwelt in William Miller, made the hearts of Bates, the Whites, and Andrews glow with energy divine?” (a paraphrase of No. 264, verse 2 from the Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal).\(^2\)

I have decided to adjust my attitude toward evangelism, to see it differently from what I am used to, by God’s grace. Never had it ever crossed my mind that one day I would physically visit the sites, trample over possible footprints or sit where possibly Joseph Bates, William Miller, James and Ellen White, or Hiram Edson sat or touched. Oh, how wonderful, how marvelous God’s grace is, especially to me!

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REFERENCES
2. Ibid.

Affirmed Faith
The Adventist History Study Tour for university presidents was an eye-opener for me. It made real and vivid the stories of pioneers like William Miller, J. N. Andrews, and James and Ellen White that we heard back in Missionary Volunteer and Adventist Youth classes. The trip affirmed my faith in our beliefs. It confirmed that we have not followed after some cunningly devised fables. My eyes have seen, my hands have touched (the tombstones), my ears have heard the stories and experiences of our pioneers. Now I know that the pioneers were men and women of like passions as we have. They defied all challenges, loss of loved ones prema-
tremely, endured diseases and deprivations. In the sun, in the rain and sunshine, they gave their all. Imagine Joseph Bates spending his all [money] in printing tracts on the Sabbath message while trusting God to provide food for his family. Or Ellen White listening as [her son] Henry requested to be buried near his baby brother, awaiting the resurrection morning. And what more can we say about this amazing crop of very young, ordinary people who turned the world upside down?

I asked myself the question, “What is my excuse in a world where technology has made preaching, traveling, and education easier?” What is hindering me from giving my best and doing my best to touch lives and to further the course of God’s work on our campuses? Absolutely nothing! I pray that this once-in-a-lifetime experience will transform our lives to make us better instruments in the hand of God.

My sincere appreciation to Dr. Lisa Beardsley-Hardy and her team at the General Conference Department of Education. Thank you for the opportunity given to spouses of the university presidents to participate in the trip. The humor and passion with which Elder Nix and Dr. Burt presented the stories have made an indelible mark on my heart. God bless you. May God keep us faithful until we meet again as a group to “No! Never part again!”*


**The Lord Will Provide**

For me and my wife, joining the Adventist History Study Tour was just like stepping backward 200 years. History is for us no longer just a body of knowledge; it is now a personal experience. By observing closely the passion of our pioneers in searching for the truth and proclaiming it, our sense of mission has been strengthened. By understanding the beginning of the church’s journey, our sense of direction toward the future has been more assured. By learning about how God has been with the church in its ups and downs, our faith in His leading to bring us to our heavenly destination has been revived. By fellowshipping with colleagues from around the world during the tour, our sense of unity and involvement in God’s work has been reaffirmed.

If you ask us of just one message we have carried along from the tour, we would echo the motto of Joseph Bates, “The Lord will provide.”*


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**Strengthened and Affirmed**

I have always enjoyed reading and meditating on the stories of the early Adventist pioneers and what they contributed to the advancement of the Adventist work. I had even had the privilege of visiting most of these historic places.

But this time, I set as my objective to capture experiences that could help me in my duties as an administrator at an Adventist institution. I wanted to look for ways in which our pioneers dealt with issues related to church leadership and relationships between and among themselves, with different backgrounds and peculiar personalities.

For me, having served as a church leader for several years and recently given the responsibility for the general direction of a higher education institution, I always like to have a united team, working together, sharing friendship because in this way God will bless more and the results will be better and bigger. However, anyone who deals with human beings knows that this ideal is not always possible.

With that in mind, I was comforted to hear about relationship difficulties and different views that our early leaders also experienced—at different levels of the church, in diverse subjects such as choosing the name of the organization, how to use the institution’s resources, how to deal with issues of ecclesiastical discipline, doctrinal themes, and so on, including their personal and marital relationships. And yet God used them!

I am left strengthened and comforted as a leader, and inspired to work better with different people, seeking that the Lord would use the varied talents and dispositions to advance His work, until the day when He Himself decides that the time has come to finish it.

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