

## Potato Chips and Sabbath School?

Pop quiz: What do potato chips have in common with Sabbath School?

Answer: Both had their beginnings in 1853.

The first potato chips were produced in Saratoga Springs, New York. That same year just a couple hundred miles away, in Rochester, New York, the first Sabbath School was established.

In 1853, only a few years after the first group of Sabbath-keeping Adventists was formed in Washington, New Hampshire, James White organized the first regular Sabbath School in Rochester. In 1852, estimating an informal membership of about 1,000 in the state of New York, White had written a series of 19 lessons appearing in the new *Youth's Instructor*.

"He published the first four in the initial issue of the *Youth's Instructor*, August 1852, only a few months after the *Review and Herald* publishing house had acquired its first press, at Rochester, New York."<sup>1</sup> James White authored some of these earliest lessons in question-answer form as he traveled in a covered carriage with his wife and 3-year-old son, Edson, throughout New England. Ellen White describes in *Life Sketches*, pages,<sup>2</sup> how he composed much of this material during noon stops.

"He often sat down at noon, and while his horse was feeding, used the 'dinner box' or the top of his hat for a table on which to write material for the *Review and Herald* and for the *Youth Instructor*."<sup>3</sup>

### Gathering Outsiders

From its inception Sabbath School has focused on four emphases that are still prominent to this day: fellowship development, community outreach, Bible study, and foreign mission. A solid balance of these elements characterizes the most vital Sabbath Schools around the world.

As local members grow closer together in small groups, they help one another to grow spiritually as individuals, hold one another accountable in positive Christian relationships. Potlucks, picnics, socials, and a variety of other outlets bring members into closer relationship with Jesus and with one another. In the family of God there are no outsiders.

Vibrant Sabbath Schools also provide rich spiritual growth through an array of community outreach projects: Vacation Bible Schools, Branch Sabbath Schools, hospital and nursing home visitation, singing bands, and a host of other creative approaches to the community. Personal ministries have always been an integral part of the vitality of any Sabbath School, and members are ever seeking new ways to represent Christ in outreach to their community. The view from Sabbath School is outward!

### Heart and Soul

The study of God's Word forms the very heart and center of Sabbath school.

When members interact with Scripture and with one another, they are exposed to the everyday value of the Bible in drawing them into closer relationship with Jesus and with the world around them. Where else can they go for answers to the questions that occur to any half-awake viewer of televised evening news?

Throughout Sabbath School's history its focus on foreign mission has led to some creative and exciting projects that have impacted the far corners of the earth. The Thirteenth Sabbath Offering, weekly mission stories, and *Mission Spotlight* have focused attention on ministry needs around the world. In 1890 Sabbath School offerings were the sole source for the building of the *Pitcairn*, a schooner used for 10 years to transport missionaries, medical supplies, and literature across the Pacific Ocean. The hemispheres of the heart of Sabbath School are north and south, east and west.

Based on these four emphases, from its beginning in 1853, Sabbath School membership has exploded from a handful of believers in upstate New York to more than 18 and a half million worldwide today.

Former General Conference president Jan Paulsen once said that Sabbath School is like breakfast. It has provided the spiritual nourishment that is needed to meet the challenges that arise during the rest of the week. And that's much better than potato chips!

This year the General Conference Sabbath School Department is celebrating its 160th year! It is a time to look backward with thankful hearts and forward with eager anticipation to what God has promised.

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<sup>1</sup> *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, vol. 11, p. 513

<sup>2</sup> Pp. 144, 145.

<sup>3</sup> *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, *ibid.*