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James White Library Hidden Treasures Isaac Newton: Early Adventist Pioneer? A Physicist's Perspective

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MEU is constantly seeking for innovative ways in which their facilities and infrastructure can be positively altered, however, the re-cataloging of the library archives of an entire faculty is exceptionally noteworthy because it would make MEU's George Arthur Keough Library the first academic library in Lebanon to utilize the precise Library of Congress Classification System.

"I found the MEU library personnel intelligent and eager to learn," says Tan. "I enjoyed the exposure to the culture of the Middle East and learned a lot from mingling with the people. The Lebanese are friendly, approachable and eager to learn and move forward. I was glad for the opportunity to help Middle East University."

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James White Library Hidden Treasures

Isaac Newton: Early Adventist Pioneer? A Physicist's Perspective

Sarah Kimakwa

Many use the James White Library on a regular basis but may not be aware of the treasures the Library holds. The Library has rare materials, some of which are unique. There are many scholars who come from all over the world to use the James White Library for research on very specific topics, using some of the rare materials in our collection.

To give a recent example, when Dr. Gary Burdick, Professor of Physics, requested that the library display an original manuscript of Isaac Newton, the famed physicist, for his presentation entitled, *Sir Isaac Newton: Early Adventist Pioneer?*, Jim Ford, the Associate Director of the Center for Adventist Research, brought from the vault Newton's manuscript on the second advent of Christ and an early edition of Newton's 1733 book, [*Observations Upon the Prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse of St. John*](#). The students were able to closely examine the original manuscript and were fascinated both at how Newton wrote on the paper in various directions and by the good condition of the manuscript, although it is nearly 350 years old.

The Center for Adventist Research received the Newton manuscript through the research and collecting by LeRoy E. Froom during the 1930s and 1940s. Froom had a commission from the General Conference to study the history of prophecy, which resulted in the publication of a four volume work entitled, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*. In 1936, many of Newton's non-scientific writings were sold at [Sotheby's](#) auction in London, England. Subsequently, Froom purchased one of the manuscripts, a 40-page folio titled [*Prophecies Concerning Christ's Second Coming*](#). Later, the manuscript came to Andrews University through its inclusion in the papers and manuscripts collected by Froom, which were originally housed in the Seminary Library when it was in Washington, DC, and later moved to Berrien Springs. With proper care and preservation, this manuscript should last many more years. It is printed on rag paper, which makes it more durable than the paper we have today, as Jim Ford explained to the curious students.



Dillon Zimmerman, Robbie Polski, Samantha Easton, and Michael Hess examine the manuscript of Sir Isaac Newton's "Prophecies Concerning Christ's Second Coming." Jim Ford, associate director of the Center for Adventist Research, brought the manuscript out of the Center's vault as part of a University workshop. (Photo by Kelly Youngberg, administrative assistant for the Department of Physics)

Sir Isaac Newton is most famous for his great contributions to physics and mathematics. He invented calculus, explained the universal law of gravity, and described the laws of motion. Few people know that Newton was also an alchemist, theologian, and scholar of biblical prophecy. He dedicated much of his time to the study of biblical chronology, especially about the books of Daniel and Revelation and the second coming of Jesus Christ. Newton was deeply religious. Here are a few quotes that reflect his theological perspective:

"The supreme God exists necessarily, and by the same necessity He exists always and everywhere." (Newton 1687, *Principia*; see also Caputo 2000, 88).

"Atheism is so senseless. When I look at the solar system, I see the earth at the right distance from the sun to receive the proper amounts of heat and light. This did not happen by chance." (Newton, as cited in Tiner 1975).

"I have a fundamental belief in the Bible as the Word of God, written by men who were inspired. I study the Bible daily." (Newton, as cited in Tiner 1975).

"I find more sure marks of authenticity in the Bible than in any profane history whatsoever." (Newton, as cited in Morris 1982, 26). (Daniel, 2010)

On prophecy, Newton wrote the book, *Observations Upon the Prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse of St John*. This is another treasure in the James White Library. In this book, Newton discusses in detail interpretations of Daniel's visions which are mirrored in Adventist pioneer William Miller's teachings. Miller admired Newton's work so much that he had a copy of the book in his library, and even named one of his sons Isaac Newton Miller.

In his research for the volumes, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, Leroy Froom discovered the central historical importance of Newton's work on Biblical prophecy. Newton's influence on later scholars, such as William Miller, is undeniable, particularly with respect to the historicist interpretation of Daniel. For this reason, Froom commissioned artwork, called *The March of the Reformers*, which he included as the frontispiece to *The Prophetic Faith of Our*

Fathers. This frontispiece shows Isaac Newton in the central position, passing the torch of truth on to future generations. The original artwork hung on the walls of the General Conference headquarters in Takoma Park, MD, until the General Conference moved into their present location in Silver Spring, MD.



March of the Reformers: Artist Kreigh Collins ©1949

The [Newton Project](#), a nonprofit organization, is dedicated to publishing an online edition of Newton’s works, scientific and theological. The Newton Project has published over 6.3 million words of text since 2001 (Newton, 2014).

Dr. Burdick has had an interest in the intersection of faith and science his entire life. He says, “However, the event that made me

interested in the Newton manuscript was when I was at a Faith & Science conference in Italy in 2009, and I sat at the stone table in the historic Waldensian Seminary and listened to Abraham Terian (former professor of Old Testament at Andrews University) talk about the manuscript, and how he helped Leroy Froom move it from Washington DC to Andrews University. From Terian, I learned that Froom had purchased the manuscript for \$10,000. Ever since I learned about the manuscript, I have desired to hold a science colloquium so that our science students could see the historical document.”



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This is an article about the lecture given by Dr. Gary Burdick, professor of Physics and Associate Dean for Research and Creative Scholarship, on March 4, 2014 at Andrews University, Tuesday Choices.

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