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The Man at the Heart of Adventism's First Black Family

By Larry Onsager and Jim Nix



Michigan, in 1827. His father died when William was about seven years old. When he was about fourteen, his mother bound him out for seven years to a farmer near Ann Arbor. Recognizing the young man's exceptional abilities, the farmer released William before the seven-year contract ended.

In 1844 William, then about 21 years of age, married Eliza Watts, a member of a free Black family from Pennsylvania. In 1846, William and Eliza purchased a farm in Gaines Township, Kent County, Michigan (near Grand Rapids). The following August, William and Eliza had their first child, a daughter they named Alice. Eventually five more children—four boys (Eugene D., Asher, W. Loyd, and William H.) and one girl (Mary Ellen)—were added to the Hardy family.

In June 1857, Joseph B. Frisbie, a former Methodist minister, held a series of meetings in Caledonia, Michigan. In a letter William Hardy wrote to the *Review* in 1858, he recalled, "Through the instrumentality of Bro. Frisbie last summer, I was led to see a beauty in what is termed 'present truth,' especially the commandments of God."

Follow-up meetings were held in Caledonia on October 3 and 4, 1857, conducted by Joseph Frisbie, John Byington, and James and Ellen White. On Monday, Oct. 5, Joseph Frisbie baptized eight people. John Byington recorded in his diary that he stayed that night with the Hardy family. Elder Byington noted that Eliza was in the Truth, but that William was not yet decided. Byington described them as a very good and kind mulatto family.

Whether then, or shortly thereafter, William also decided to join the Sabbathkeepers in Caledonia. In his letter in the *Review*, he went on to say that "after being connected with the Free Baptists a number of years, I was led to cast my lot with the Sabbathkeepers of Caledonia; and I have never regretted that step."

On Tuesday, January 25, 1859, Ellen White, John Loughborough, and his wife, returning home to Battle Creek after an almost three-week trip, visited the

WILLIAM HARDY IS CREDITED WITH TWO IMPORTANT FIRSTS. In 1857, William J. Hardy and his wife, Eliza Watts, became the first black family to join the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In 1872, William Hardy was the first Black elected to public office in the state of Michigan.

William Hardy, the son of Henry and Mary Hardy, was born on January 9, 1823, in New York state. He moved with his parents to Washtenaw County,

▲ Sketch of William J. Hardy. Source: Grand Rapids History & Special Collections, Archives, Grand Rapids Public Library

