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The Loving Letter Part 3

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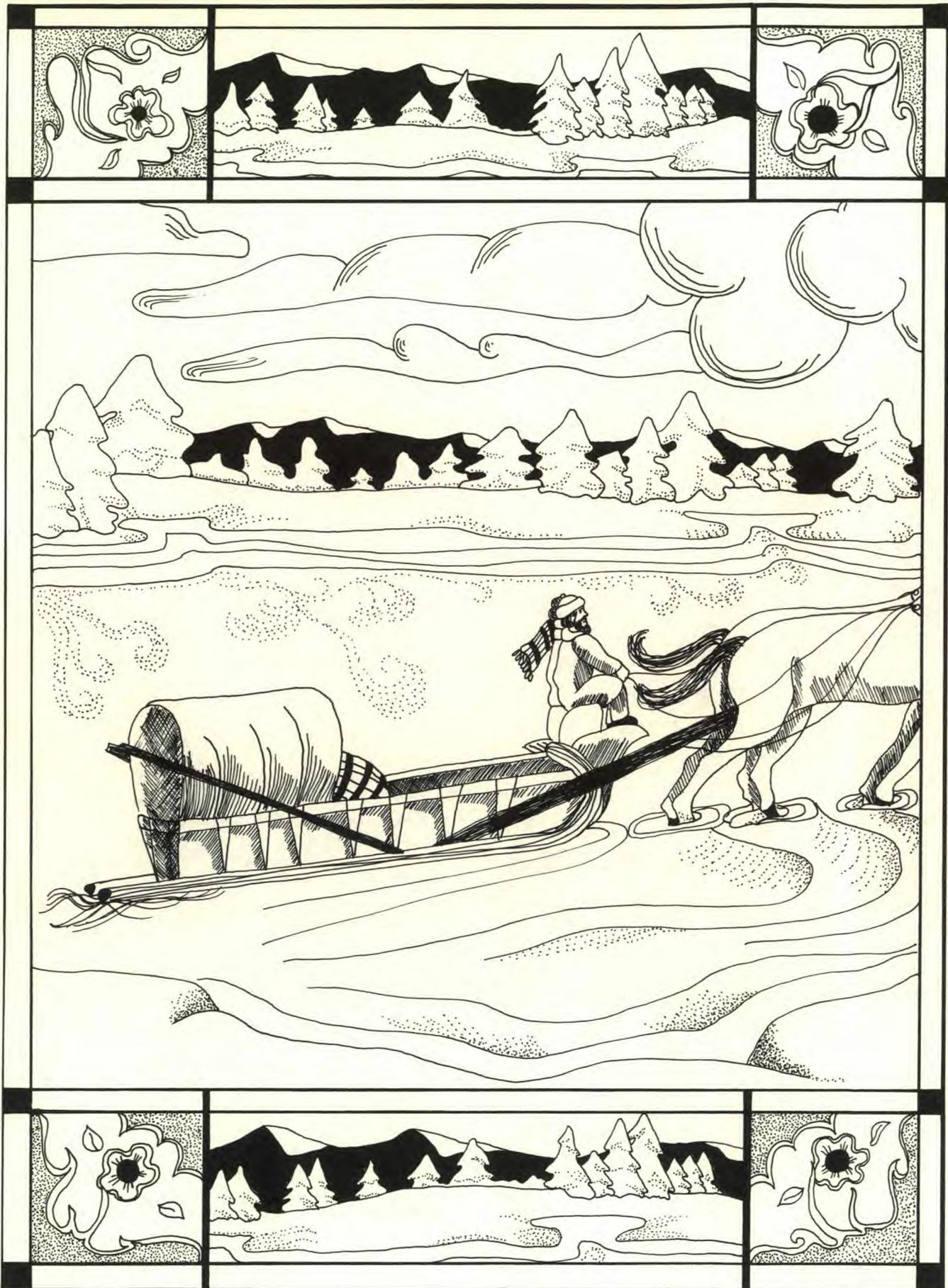


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The Loving Letter

by C. Mervyn Maxwell
illustration by June Nowlin

The story of how the loving letter to Laodicea came to the Adventists in Waukon, Iowa, will be concluded next week.

In our last installment we left John Loughborough atop a carpenter's ladder in Waukon, Iowa. He was a thoroughgoing Laodicean. The date was December 24, 1856.

Some three months earlier, James White had walked into the little press building in Battle Creek, Michigan, and had been overwhelmed by what he saw. Piles of unpurchased literature were gathering dust everywhere. A year before, he hadn't been able to print enough. What had gone wrong?

Adventists were proud of their faith! Letters to the Review sounded a litany of praise for their crystal-clear doctrine. And the church was growing, up from 200 in 1850 to more than 2,000 now. So what *was* wrong?

Adventists were becoming materialistic. Many were moving west, hoping to make money on rich soil to give to the cause. Instead they were adding farm to farm. "We've lost our first love," Elder White sighed. "We're lukewarm. We're Laodicean."

Up to this point Sabbath-keeping Adventists called themselves Philadelphians. They applied "Laodicea" to the other Adventists who wouldn't keep the Sabbath.

A Review editorial shaped itself in his mind.

C. Mervyn Maxwell is professor of church history at Andrews University's Theological Seminary. This story about John and Mary Loughborough is available on cassette from Studio 91, WAUS, Andrews University.

Elder White published it on October 9 and held his breath.

He needn't have worried. During the next several months, more than 300 letters thanked him for telling the truth.

But no letters came from Waukon, Iowa. The folk there were feeling fine.

James and Ellen visited around the country. They wanted Laodiceans to hear Christ's loving knock and invite Him in. They were in Round Grove, Illinois, in late November and early December. Josiah Hart and Elon Everts rededicated themselves. Then in vision Ellen learned that John and Mary Loughborough had joined the Waukon group.

Stunned, they sought a sign. Should they go *now* to win them back, or should they wait?

Ellen peered through a window in the blue light of dawn. "It's our sign!" she cried. Some sign! Snowflakes.

Snow would make the roads slick for sledding. They started out that evening. Josiah Hart and Elon Everts accompanied them.

Deep drifts caused delay. Then the weather cleared—and thawed. "Don't attempt the Mississippi," everybody warned. When they reached its banks, they understood. Ice had formed, but now a foot of water covered it.

Josiah Hart held the reigns. "We've reached the Red Sea," he exclaimed. "Is it on to Iowa or back to Illinois?"

"Go forward, trusting Israel's God," James and Ellen replied.

The horses eased the sleigh onto the uncertain ice. Water swirled. The Mississippi seemed to widen endlessly.

The loving letter to Laodicea was on its way to Waukon.