

Dr. William Henry Harrison Adams (1840-1890)

Dr. William Henry Harrison Adams was born on March 30, 1840, in Effingham County, Illinois. He was the oldest son of Christopher Beeks and Sarah (Gannoway) Adams. William's father came from a family connected to John Quincy Adams, and his grandfather was one of the first settlers in Ohio. His mother, a strong Christian, influenced William to become a minister later in life.

As a young boy, William loved reading in his free time. In the summer, he helped his father on the farm and read when he could. In the winter, he attended a one-room school in Coles County, Illinois. After high school, he went to Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois. At 17, William became a Christian, and soon after, he started studying to become a pastor at Garrett Biblical Institute, also at Northwestern. He was licensed to preach when he was 19 and worked as a student pastor in Chicago while still in school. He graduated in 1870 and became a pastor in Monticello, Clinton, and Atlanta, Illinois.

During the United States Civil War, William took a break from his education to join the Union Army. He served for nine months with the 111th Illinois Volunteers and was promoted to 1st Lieutenant. He then led one of the first African American artillery regiments in the Western Army and reached the rank of Major. He left the Army in July 1865 to finish his studies.

Before joining the Army, William married Sarah E. Campbell in 1861, but she died in 1866. He then married Hannah Westfall Concklin in 1867, and they had four children: Lulu May, Grace Greenwood, Charles C., and Katherine Kellogg. After their marriage, William and Hannah moved to Clinton, Illinois, where William became a pastor. He helped eliminate a \$14,000 debt at the church, which made him well-known and respected.

In 1875, William was asked to become president of Illinois Wesleyan University (I.W.U.) in Bloomington, Illinois, which had a large debt of its own, around \$30,000 to \$40,000. At 35 years old, William became the youngest president in the school's history. In addition to being president, he also taught Ethics and Metaphysics.

William worked hard to erase I.W.U.'s debt, which grew to \$50,000 by 1880. He organized a celebration to raise money for the university's 30th anniversary, but he was still \$9,000 short. When the loan holders threatened to sell the university, William raised the money in time to save it. He became known as a "debt killer" for his ability to fix financial problems. As a reward, the university gave him a three-month vacation with pay.

William also secured two large land donations for I.W.U. and helped establish the College of Music and the College of Commerce. Under his leadership, enrollment grew. He worked tirelessly, but by 1887, his health suffered. He had severe arthritis and retired from I.W.U. to become a minister again in Atlanta, Illinois.

To ease his pain, William traveled to Hot Springs, Arkansas. He used small doses of chloroform for relief, but after one dose, he fell asleep and never woke up. He died on March 12, 1890, from an accidental overdose of chloroform. He was brought back to Bloomington and buried in Evergreen Memorial Cemetery.

William's wife, Hannah, fought a legal battle to claim his life insurance, which had been denied because William had missed the final payment. She won the case and received \$10,260.66, which today would be around \$211,000. After William's death, Hannah never remarried and lived with their three unmarried daughters in Chicago. She died at the age of 90 on November 19, 1932, and was buried next to William.