



## Robert W. Olson

October 25, 1920 - April 15, 2013

Robert W. Olson, 92,  
Former White Estate Director, Dies

When the hot flame of controversy lapped at the work and legacy of Ellen G. White, an outgoing academic whose friendliness was renowned stepped up to defend her ministry and confront her critics.

Robert W. Olson, 92, for 12 years director of the Ellen G. White Estate, passed to his rest on April 15, 2013 at his residence in the Fletcher Park Inn, Hendersonville, North Carolina. Before his 1990 retirement, Olson had accrued 47 years of denominational service. His ministry included work as a pastor, evangelist, youth pastor and educator, before succeeding Arthur White, Ellen's grandson, as White Estate director, confronting changing technology and opposition with equal aplomb.

"When the ministry of Ellen White came under attack in the 1980s, Dr. Olson provided solid leadership and honest answers to the questions raised," said Tim Poirier, associate director of the White Estate. "And it was under his administration that the first Ellen G. White CD-ROM was produced."

WHITE ESTATE LEADER: Robert W. Olson, 92, director of the Ellen G. White Estate from 1978 to 1990, passed to his rest on April 15, 2013. The

production of a computer-readable disc containing the writings of Mrs. White, a pioneering co-founder of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, was something of a daring step in the first decade of personal computing. CD-ROM drives were relatively expensive, and the first White CD-ROM was not inexpensive. But thousands of units were sold, White Estate officials said, beginning the digital dissemination of her work, which today is available on smartphones and tablet devices through specialized, free applications, and on computers via the Internet, also free.

Olson brought what Poirier called “an academic approach” to the mission of the White Estate, something that was necessary when two Seventh-day Adventist ministers, Walter Rea and Desmond Ford, challenged both the veracity of Mrs. White’s writings as well as, in Ford’s case, the Church’s understanding of the Investigative Judgment, a key Seventh-day Adventist belief taken from Daniel and Revelation.

In March of 1981, the White Estate published Olson’s book, “One Hundred and One Questions on The Sanctuary and Ellen G. White,” which the author hoped would “help the reader to see truth more clearly, and so have strong confidence in the gift of prophecy and in the special message being proclaimed by the Seventh-day Adventist Church.”

Robert Wesley Olson was born October 25, 1920 in Oshawa, Ontario, Canada, a child of A.J. Olson, a Seventh-day Adventist minister and educator. His uncle was Albert Victor Olson, an ordained minister who served the movement as president of the Southern European Division, and later as a vice president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. A.V. Olson also chaired the Ellen G. White Board of Trustees and authored “Through crisis to victory, 1888-1901,” a history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church from the famous 1888 General Conference Session through the 1901 reorganization.

Olson earned a bachelor of arts degree from Pacific Union College, Angwin, California, in 1943, the year he became a pastor-evangelist for the Northern California Conference. He was ordained to the gospel ministry in 1946 the year he became youth pastor and associate professor of religion at the College of Medical Evangelists (now, Loma Linda University).

In 1954, having earned an M.A. from the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, he began a two-year post as an associate religion professor at Columbia Union College (now, Washington Adventist University) in Takoma Park, Maryland. This was followed in 1956 by four years as principal (or, president) of Newbold College in Bracknell, England, and another year of teaching at Columbia Union College before he became religion department chair and professor at PUC, his alma mater.

By the time he was called to the White Estate as an associate director in 1974 , Olson had earned a Master's of Divinity from the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary and a Doctor of Theology from the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

Olson's first wife, Rowena, and second wife, Rose, preceeded him in death. His two children, A. Wesley and Evelyn Georgeson, and his wife Lorraine, survive.

"He was a friend to everyone, had a great sense of humor and thought the best of everyone," Poirier said. Noting that Olson had hired him as a 23-year-old, Poirier added that Olson was "confident in giving young people a chance to serve" the Seventh-day Adventist Church.