Captain Bates and the Mayflower

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The year 2020 marks the 400th anniversary of the arrival of the Mayflower in the New World. Millions of people in North America will commemorate this significant event. Settled in 1640 and 1659 respectively, the twin-towns of New Bedford and Fairhaven, Massachusetts will be central places for the commemorative events.

You may ask, “What does that have to do with Seventh-day Adventists?” Actually, more than we might think. The boyhood home of Joseph Bates (1792-1872), cofounder of the Seventh-day Adventist movement, is one of Fairhaven’s principal historic sites. Behind the home are the remains of Thomas Taber’s house (ca. 1678) who was the son-in-law to John Cooke, passenger on the Mayflower and early settler in the Plymouth Colony. The remains of Taber’s house are surrounded by the property of Joseph Bates’ boyhood home, which is owned and operated by Adventist Heritage Ministry. Thus, one might say that the beginnings of American history are right next door to the beginnings of the history of our church. Bates’ home is being transformed into a modern multi-visual museum that takes visitors into an experience through the history of the property, Bates’ childhood, seafaring years, abolitionist and temperance activities, involvement in the Millerite movement (Jesus’ Second Advent), development of our understanding of the seventh-day Sabbath, and significance for the progress of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Visitors are going to learn about major aspects of American history and the beliefs, principles, and practices of Seventh-day Adventists.

At this point, people not of our faith constitute about one third of those visiting Adventist historic sites. Thus, those sites are not merely places for us to learn about our heritage but they are considerable evangelistic tools. The Fairhaven, MA Office of Tourism considers Joseph Bates as one of the most prominent sons of the town and invites people to visit the site. As the 400th anniversary of the arrival of the Mayflower approaches, many people of different backgrounds will tour the town and the site. Your donations will help them to experience the Adventist story.