



PART I

Founder and Foundations

1850-1926

CHAPTER 1

How it All Began

On a Sunday afternoon in late August, 1890, downtown Syracuse, New York, was in the grip of a heat wave. The big church on East Genesee Street was undergoing some major renovations and the smell of fresh paint added its strident scent to the humid air when the church's doors were thrown open to allow its new adornment to dry as well as it could. A group of young men in their late teens was standing on the street corner. They were passing the sweltering afternoon hours talking, laughing, whittling, and telling stories as they waited for their sweethearts (and potential sweethearts) to come out of Sunday school. When they looked up at the church door expecting the young women to emerge, instead, a man came to the door. He was handsome, clean cut, and about forty years of age. Some of the boys may have recognized him as the owner of a profitable crockery business located on South Salina Street, not far away in the main business district of the city.

The teens watched the man, Marshall Hudson, come down the steps directly toward them. Unsure what type of reception they were about to receive, the boys remained wary. Hudson stepped smartly over to them and struck up a conversation. Eventually, the boys heard him invite them to come into the church with him. The teens were very surprised by this. It was Sunday school time and they knew that Sunday school was only for little children, girls, and older folks. But Hudson promised them that they would study the Bible, and that they could have their own class in their own room. The young men wondered at the fact that this successful business man, a pillar of church and society by the age of forty, someone they would love to emulate, would not only offer them a personal invitation, but seemed really to care whether or not they took him up on it! Sixteen young men responded to Hudson's magnetic personality and sincere interest and took him up on his offer.

That first morning they "roosted" on the backs of chairs in a room filled with the dust and dirt of construction. As Hudson looked over the group of young men, they must have reminded him of himself in an earlier time. Hudson wanted very much to change the patterns of history, however. When he was their age he had left the church and did not return until he was in his thirties. Hudson wondered how to begin. "I told them we always began our meetings with prayer, and after a short prayer I had to act rather quickly to know what was the next thing to do."¹ He chose to focus on the Bible lesson that the Sunday school was studying that week. However, he introduced one major innovation. "I told the story in my own language, but said nothing about its being in the Bible until the close..."² When he had told them the ending he confessed to the boys that the story came from Holy Scripture.

Then Hudson turned the table on the teens. He said to them, "I am going to ask you now how this Bible story will make us better men, better scholars, better book-keepers, and more useful men to the place we occupy tomorrow than we would have been had we not listened to the story. I am sure you all have something to teach me, because it comes out of your lives."³ What a revelation this was to the boys! The Word of God was applicable to their lives? It could help them to be successful? And, not only that, but this important man wanted to hear THEIR opinions and insights? When they overcame their shock, the boys all began to speak at once. It was at this moment that Hudson knew he had finally experienced a breakthrough in his quest for the salvation of young men.

Who was this man with a heart for young men? This man who was chosen by God to start a movement that, at its height, would be over a million strong? A native of Syracuse, Hudson was born on November 10, 1850. In fact, he had grown up "...on Orange Street, near where the New York Central trains ran through the street and spoiled Washington St. for much service to others."⁴ Hudson's boyhood home was only a few blocks from the church where he met his first class of young men that day in 1890. By the time Hudson was in his thirties, there was a great deal of debate in the city about the train running at street level through the center of busy Syracuse. Hudson lobbied heavily for a change in track location for the safety and well-being of city dwellers and downtown businesses.

Marshall Hudson had grown up surrounded by family. In his unpublished autobiography he reflected that he had always enjoyed spending time with the older generation. Each summer, at the close of the school year, Hudson made the eight-mile trek on foot from the Irving School (at the corner of Irving and East Fayette in what is now downtown Syracuse) to Fayetteville to stay with his grandparents. His grandfather (for whom he was named), Grandmother Mary, and Aunt Mary shared a home in Fayetteville with another family.^{5,6} The senior Hudsons had little material wealth to share with Marshall. The 1860 census record shows that grandfather Marshall owned no property, and the entire worth of his personal estate was estimated at \$50, a very small sum even for that time. Grandfather Marshall's blindness added to their life of economic hardship.

What Hudson could not receive from his extended family in monetary benefits he collected in emotional dividends. He spoke warmly of the time they spent with him and mentioned one incident that occurred when he was an eight-year-old playing behind a barrel factory in Fayetteville. While running barefoot, Hudson "stepped upon a pile of ashes, only to find that underneath the ashes were red hot coals."⁷ Because this injury made it difficult for Hudson to walk, he spent a great deal of time inside his grandparents' home that summer. He remarked, "The old people probably did not realize the benefit that came to me as they doctored my foot, and made me crutches. Not being able to go much, they showed me their treasures and books, reading from the 'Picture Bible' things that have since become the best part of my life."⁸ Hudson knew the comfort of extended family and the stability of place that was common in those days, even though he did not grow up in financial security.

Hudson's father, Edson Alonzo Hudson, and mother, Adelia (Spencer) Hudson, were born in the early 1820s in New York State.⁹ Adelia worked as a seamstress and Edson had several occupations over the course of his life.¹⁰ In 1850, the year of Hudson's birth, the Syracuse *Daily Standard* mentioned that Edson was both a carrier and an agent for their newspaper.¹¹ For a time, he worked in the field of daguerreotype images.¹² Based on information gathered from the *Syracuse City Directories* of the period it is evident that Edson attempted partnerships with a series of people and moved the location of his daguerreotype studio several times.¹³ One *Directory* recorded that Edson was traveling from town to town with his business in a wagon. Later, as the technology for reproducing still images improved, Edson moved on to photography, again attempting to have a studio. During several years Edson was not listed as a resident of Syracuse. The *City Directories* record that only Adelia lived within city limits. If Edson were merely traveling for business, the *Directory* should have listed him as a resident sharing a home with his wife. This curious absence may raise questions about the level of his young son's sense of security and stability early in life.

Beginning in 1868 Edson's main occupation was as a shoemaker. These were the times which Hudson recalled in his autobiography. His father worked at his cobbler's bench with his Bible open in front of him. "It seemed as though with every nail driven into a shoe a glance was reserved for the leather-bound Bible."¹⁴ Hudson remarked that it was a rare cobbler who studied the Bible while he worked and kept the complete eight-volume set of Edward Gibbon's *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* on the shelf in his shop. While working at this trade Edson tried to guide his son toward spiritual things. "On rainy days I was always with 'Daddy,' who explained the 'Book of Life.'"¹⁵ Edson was an Adventist and was convinced that Christ would return to earth as Lord and King in 1883.¹⁶ Hudson wrote later that although the Second Coming did not occur, Christ appeared as Lord and King in 1883—in Hudson's own life. He wondered if his father had been prophetic in his belief in the importance of that year for the work of the Kingdom.

Along with his sister, Ida, who was five years younger, Hudson was well acquainted with economic hard times. Hudson may not have had the same economic advantages as some of his peers. As a result, from his earliest memories, Hudson's goal was to succeed in business. As early as grammar school, Hudson was very vocal about his ambition. In fact, he spent some weeks trying to decide which business on South Salina Street (the main business district in Syracuse at the time) he would own when he was old enough. "I talked big about the store I should buy when I became a man, and could not make up my mind if it should be Pierce's crockery store, or

J. Dean Hawley's jewelry store."¹⁷ This drive to succeed served Hudson well. Twenty-five years later, his dream would come true as he assumed ownership of one of the businesses he had evaluated so carefully as a child.

Hudson attended the public schools in Syracuse. In fact, he went to grammar school just down the block from the First Baptist Church, a place that would play such a major role in his later life. While he was attending the Irving School, his family moved next door to the school to 32 Irving Street. Here Hudson the entrepreneur began to emerge. The students decided that they wanted to have their own post office within the school. They chose Hudson to be the postmaster. His classmates must have found Hudson trustworthy, since he was not supposed to read the missives that passed through his hands—no matter how tempting that might have been to the young boy. Charisma, good organizational skills, and a natural ability to make friends were the traits that Hudson possessed as early as his grammar school days. The qualities helped him to achieve many of his goals in life. Hudson commented on his ability to cultivate relationships in a newspaper interview in 1906, many years after his role as grammar school postmaster was only a dim memory. When a reporter from the *Syracuse Journal* stopped in at the Hudson home on Seneca Street in East Onondaga he was met with a "hearty welcome." The reporter commented that this kind of reception "has probably been one of the factors in extending his popularity."¹⁸ Hudson told the reporter, "People say I have a faculty for making friends, and it must be so."¹⁹ The evidence of this talent was the growth of the movement he was leading at that time.

After his years at the Irving School, Hudson attended the Putnam School.²⁰ There he met a principal who changed his life. Miss Angis Lounsbury was a strong Christian who prayed regularly for her students and encouraged them to think about their spiritual lives.²¹ While she was in leadership at the school a mini-revival broke out and students began meeting for prayer at the close of the school day. Miss Lounsbury often invited her students to join her at the First Methodist Church where she was actively involved. Since the church was located only a block from the Putnam School it was easy for her pupils to get there. Even after her students graduated, Principal Lounsbury continued her concern for their spiritual welfare. Years later, long after she was retired, she visited Hudson's store regularly to see how he was faring. During each interchange Miss Lounsbury asked if he had yet given his heart to Christ and told him that she prayed for him daily. Hudson said that he found her visits somewhat annoying at the time, but he sorely missed them after her death.²²

During his last year at the Putnam School, a teacher, Mr. T. D. Camp, suggested that it was time for Hudson to strike out into the business world. Hudson found this idea appealing since he was an average student with an above-average desire to become successful in business. He had already been working running telegrams for Western Union (reprising his role as grammar school postmaster), but Mr. Camp was thinking more in terms of an apprenticeship in which Hudson could advance and make a career for himself. Camp said, "Some day I hope to see you a merchant."²³

Hudson's father secured a position for him at the S. P. Pierce Crockery Company as a bundle boy. He worked long hours making deliveries in a wheelbarrow to customers all over Syracuse. Hudson polished and shined, delivered purchases and ran errands, generally making himself useful, from 7:00 in the morning until 9:00 in the evening each day. He learned this new business, quite literally, from the bottom up—as some of his other responsibilities included sweeping off the sidewalk before the store opened for business each morning. It was while he was performing this duty early one morning that Elder Taggart, pastor of the First Baptist Church in Syracuse, approached him, pointed to the sign high above on the roof of the building, and asked, "Young man, can you tell me who owns that store?"²⁴ Hudson responded with incredulity—could the man not read? "Why, S. P. Pierce, of course!" At that, Elder Taggart said, "I ask you whose name is on the back of that sign." When Hudson told him he'd never seen the back, the elder said, "You had better hustle and do so as soon as possible,"²⁵ and walked on. Puzzled, Hudson mentioned this at the dinner table that night. His family helped him to understand that the man had been inferring that Hudson, himself, was the up-and-coming owner of this company. Someday, that sign would be turned over with his name facing out, displayed for all to see. This incident further fueled Hudson's desire to succeed.

During his long days at work, Hudson's active mind and well-primed curiosity helped him to learn a great deal about how such a business was run. Over the years, the S. P. Pierce Company promoted him many times. From bundle boy, Hudson worked his way up to clerk, then into accounting, and finally into sales. His career was off to a good, yet humble beginning. This promising young man would certainly go far in the business world.

1 Marshall A. Hudson, *Autobiography of the "Man Who God His Million."* Unpublished manuscript, 29.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid., 30.

4 Ibid., 2.

5 Living with her parents, 49-year-old Aunt Mary worked as a laborer in a nearby paper factory. No doubt her meager income helped the family keep a roof over its heads.

6 Marshall was born in NJ in 1788, his wife Mary in Rhode Island in 1793, and their daughter Mary in New York in 1811.

7 Hudson, *Autobiography*, 1.

8 Ibid.

9 Edson died on April 15, 1894 according to the family Bible. Adelia followed him on February 28, 1899. Adelia was buried at Oakwood Cemetery in Syracuse and Hudson made frequent pilgrimages to her grave.

10 One directory listed Adelia as a "tailoress." It may well be that Adelia found it necessary to work to assure the economic survival of the family.

11 Syracuse *Daily Standard*, March 8, 1850.

12 This precursor of modern photography was invented in 1839 and involved using iodine coated paper developed by exposure to mercury vapor to create an image.

13 Copies of *Syracuse City Directories* are held by the Onondaga (New York) Public Library at its Syracuse branch location. These were the forerunner of the modern telephone book. In 1851 Edson was listed as a "daguerrian" whose place of business was 38 E. Genesee, upstairs. The family lived at 7 Orange Street during this period. Although he was not listed in the 1853 *Directory*, in 1852 Edson had been in Baldwinsville with a traveling daguerreotype gallery on wheels. The *Syracuse Standard* reported on August 31, 1852 "Mr. Hudson has had considerable experience in the best Galleries of this city, and we understand ranks high as an operator. His Gallery is built upon the most approved plan, and his instruments and chemicals are prepared in the most scientific style, and embracing all the modern improvements in the art of Daguerreotyping. Mr. Hudson is a gentleman of honor and integrity, and persons who entrust him with their business may rely upon the faithful performance of his promise. We advise Baldwinsvillians who wish for anything in his line, to call at his Gallery and see the specimens of his work." In 1854 Edson reappeared with a business in the Granger Block on Tremont. In 1855 his place of business returned to 38 E. Genesee Street and the Hudsons were now living at 32 Irving Street. No listing appeared for Edson in 1856, but in December of that year the *Standard* mentioned that Edson had "located his Daguerrean Car at the North end of Warren St. Bridge." In 1857 no business address was listed. In 1858 Edson again disappeared from city records. He resurfaced in 1859, again with no separate business address. In 1860 and 1861 Edson was unlisted in the *City Directory*. In 1862 Hudson was in partnership with Dempster Moore in Moore's Sunlight Picture Rooms at 12 South Salina over the Syracuse City Bank. After another year's absence, Edson appeared as a partner in Goff and Hudson in the Bastable block. Another year passed and in 1866 Edson's occupation was listed as "photographer." The following year he was listed as "artist." In 1868 and 1870 he was a "shoemaker," but he did not appear in the 1869 *City Directory*. By 1871 only Adelia was listed—still occupying the family home at 32 Irving Street.

14 Hudson, *Autobiography*, 2.

15 Ibid.

16 See Chapter 3 for more on Edson's Adventist beliefs. Many groups at that time predicted a specific year in which the Second Coming was to occur. Although 1844 was the most publicized (followed by "The Great Disappointment" when the prophecy did not prove true), many groups continued to make such predictions through the time of the First World War. One group that predicted that Christ's return in 1883 was the Jehovah's Witnesses following the leadership of Charles Taze Russell. This group remains active today and publishes *The Watch Tower* magazine. ("Russell-JW Prophet": an essay for the Australian College of Theology (no attribution) <http://www.watchtowerinformationsservice.org/russellprophet.htm>. There is some disagreement as to the year Hudson's conversion occurred.

Although he wrote in his autobiography that he was converted in 1883, church records show that he was baptized on November 22, 1885. In some places that discuss Hudson's conversion, it is placed in 1885 rather than 1883.

17 Ibid.

18 "M. A. Hudson Busy in His Cozy Home," *The Journal* (of Syracuse), 1906, clipping in the Hudson file at the Onondaga Historical Association in Syracuse (further dating information not available). See photograph in Chapter 3.

19 Ibid.

20 Located on the corner of Jefferson and Montgomery streets in Columbus Circle where the Carnegie Library building now stands.

21 Hudson, *Autobiography*, 5.

22 Ibid., 7.

23 Ibid.