

John Alexander Dowie

[1847–1907]

During the time God was pouring out His Spirit in the United Kingdom, John Alexander Dowie was born in Edinburgh, Scotland in 1847. His father was a tailor, his mother illiterate.

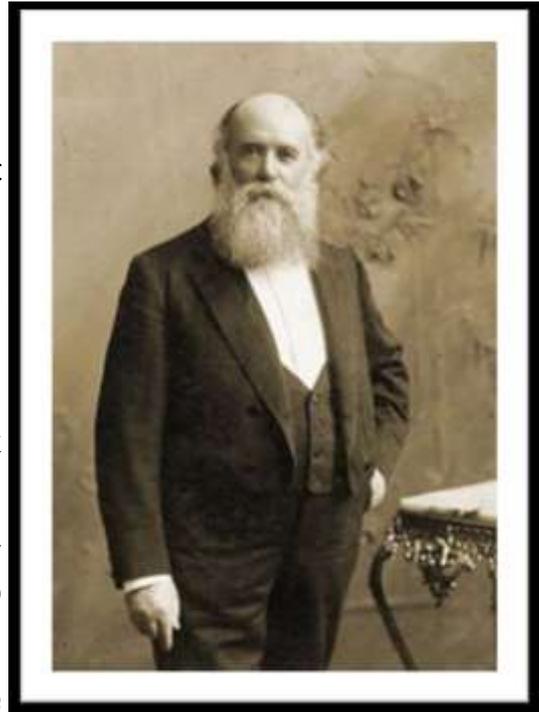
In 1860, as a thirteen year old, he travelled to his uncle in Australia, who set him to work as a shoe salesman.

He found Christ as his Saviour through Henry Wright. Later he returned to Scotland to study for the ministry.

Upon the completion of his studies, he returned to Australia, where he assumed the pastorate of a Congregational church in Alma, South Australia, in April 1872.

He tried without success to become a Member of Parliament, fought a bitter struggle against the liquor companies and was imprisoned for holding open-air meetings without permission. The liquor manufacturers set a bomb off in his church and this brought him much publicity.

In 1875, he transferred to Newtown, Sydney, in New South Wales. It was at this time, because of an epidemic that was sweeping the eastern states and his anger at the impotence of the medical profession that he gave himself to the study of divine healing. 'He was a fighter in the true sense, boldly battling the sin and compromise he found all around him – even as a young minister in Australia.'



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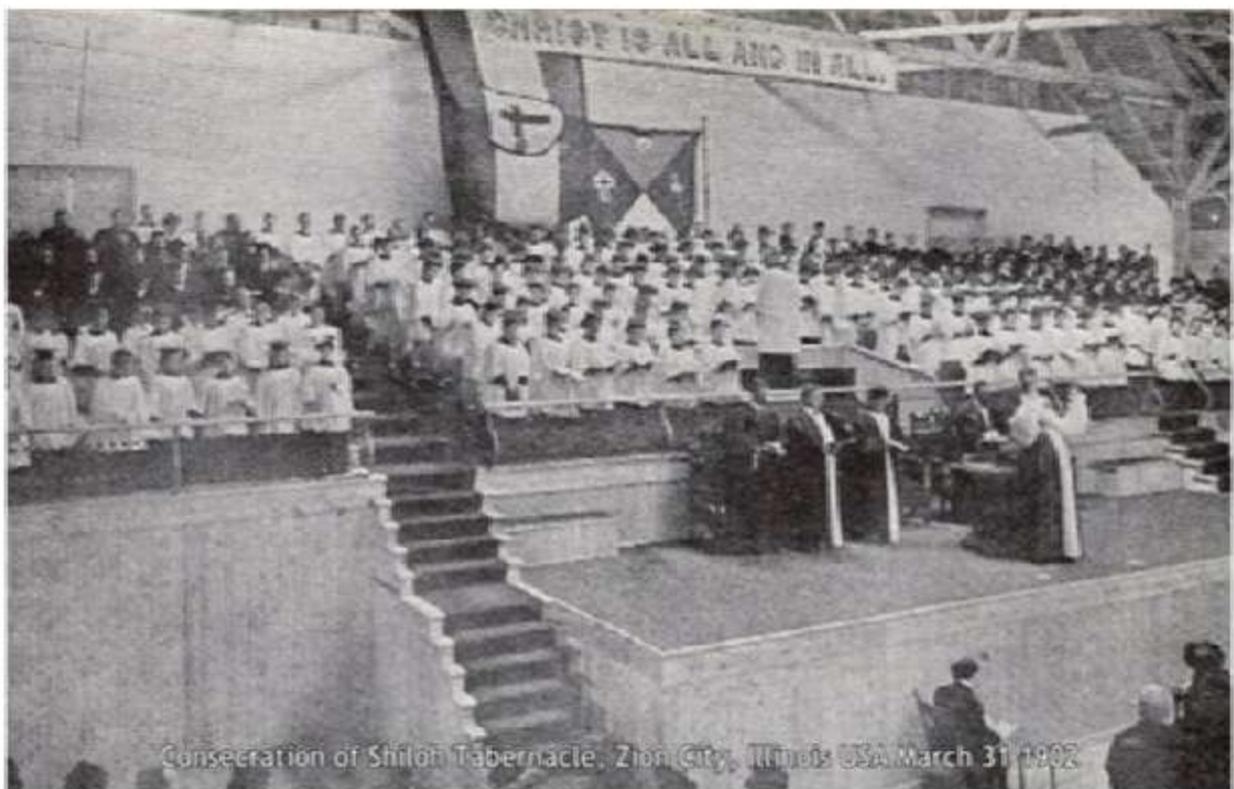


John and Jane Dowie

He came next to Melbourne, Victoria, where, after a time in the Collingwood Tabernacle, he established the **Free Christian Church** in Fitzroy. With a renewed emphasis upon divine healing, he conducted successful meetings, later forming the International Divine Healing Association. Preaching in the Free Christian Tabernacle which he built, he attracted many people to his meetings.

He was a short [5' 4"; 162.5 cm] and unusual mixture of a man, and in 1888 travelled to the United States to spread the message of healing. He formed the Christian Catholic Church there in 1896. [Ministry Aflame, Herbert W. Knight p116]

Pioneers of Pentecost in Australia – John Alexander Dowie



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Gordon Lindsay wrote of him, 'when any man is chosen of God to be used in an unusual manner, God permits him to go through a training period, which sometimes includes trials and tribulations of the most severe nature.'

Near Chicago, Dowie established Zion City, with some 10,000 people living on the site. He established a printing firm to publish the weekly paper "Leaves of Healing;" ran 13 healing homes [similar to half-way houses] and started a worldwide mission program. After much controversy and conflict in Chicago, Dowie had decided to establish his own community so the church congregation could worship in a Christian environment. He purchased 6,800 acres of farmland in Lake County and the City of Zion was founded in 1890.

All economic, social, political, educational and religious activities were coordinated through church leadership. "Dowie had generated a large following [about 6,000 by 1901] and had recruited the finest minds in the Chicago area to provide managerial skills for the new city. The population grew and the monetary contributions came in. The worldwide distribution of the "Leaves of Healing" reaped positive responses. The *Zion Bank* and the *Zion Land Investments* issued stock and land was leased to the newcomers while being held in trust by the church.

Dowie moved the *Zion Lace Factory* in its entirety from Nottingham, England, and fought Labor unions and the U.S. Government in court to have the lace workers and their families enter the United States. Thus the first lace factory in the U.S. was located in Zion and laces were shipped all over the world. The *Zion Cookie Factory* was established, sending fig bars to Europe and Asia and the *Zion Candy Factory* sent "Beauties" around the world.

Dowie also had the *Zion Hospice*, later known as the *Zion Hotel*, built to house workers involved in the developing the city. Zion had its own planned streets, boulevards, alleys and park designs complete with a golf course and open spaces to accommodate the children.

Dowie had designed a full marina on the waterfront with manufacturing and recreation considerations. He envisioned the uniqueness of the land and the harbour areas hoping to develop permanent ideas for Zion's future. He had established a lumbering mill, brick kiln factory, and electric plant, the general store and even Zion's own postage stamps. Dowie also created a fine parochial school system complete with a four year college." [Alice Marshall, Zion Historical Society published in The News-Sun on August 28, 1996]

Dowie experienced exceptional success in Chicago, where the power of God was being constantly demonstrated, and hundreds were being healed of every affliction. It appeared as if the devil was summoning every demon from hell to attack and somehow bring him down. He was arrested over one hundred times on trumped-up charges, ceaselessly attacked by the most prominent media men in the city and even suffered street-riots and attempts upon his life.

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Unfortunately, he became obsessed with delusions of grandeur, eventually appointing himself to the rank of Apostle and High Priest.

In 1904, he returned to Australia as part of a world tour.

After ministering with little success, he returned to the United States, where he died in 1907. Zion City eventually failed through financial mismanagement and his Utopian dream faded quickly. [The Pentecostals, Walter J. Hollenweger, p116]

Dowie's last days were not as good as his beginnings. For many years he had fought a great fight, but was defeated in the latter part of his life.



When great men and women of God fall from God's intentions for them, the harm that they do and the derision that they can bring upon the Gospel, almost undoes much of the good that originally came from their ministry.

Postscript

"Dowie died still believing he was Elijah, an ill and broken man, crippled in a wheel chair. His ministry was gone, Zion City was almost bankrupt, and he had lost everything that he once thought of as his own." He died on March 9, 1907 an ill and broken man – a shadow of his former self having lost his ministry and literally everything he owned.

This is an object lesson to us all – good starts need good finishes!

Dowie influenced people in Australia to consider a message that was vitally related to the New Testament.

Many would testify to the part he played in the formative years of the growth of the Pentecostal churches.

Dowie was a 'restorationist' and sought to recover the 'primitive condition' of the Church as it was recorded in the Acts of the Apostles"

Denis V Smith – 2014

For a detailed background on early Pentecost in Australia, "A River is Flowing," interactive eBook, is highly recommended.



Denis V Smith