



Arkansas-Louisiana Conference Headquarters.

Photo courtesy of Arkansas-Louisiana Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

Arkansas-Louisiana Conference

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The Arkansas-Louisiana Conference is an administrative unit of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Southwestern Union Conference.

Territory: the states of Arkansas and Louisiana, and the city of Texarkana, Texas.

Statistics (June 30, 2019): Churches, 92; membership, 13,417; population, 7,935,148.

The American Civil War wreaked havoc on the economy of the South, including Arkansas and Louisiana. The destruction of property, crops, and infrastructure caused dire poverty throughout the region. It also caused a deep suspicion of strangers coming from Northern states bringing new teachings about the Second Advent and the Sabbath. Many feared that these were imposters, false prophets, Mormons or worst of all, "soul-sleepers."¹ One effective approach that bypassed this wariness was sending Seventh-day Adventist books and pamphlets to family and friends in Arkansas and Louisiana.² By this method, before colporteurs or missionaries, the belief that Saturday was the Sabbath was developing, one family at a time, throughout the two states.

Arkansas Origins

The two earliest known Seventh-day Adventist families in Arkansas learned of the seventh-day Sabbath from reading. In 1872, DeWitt C. Hunter, founder of the town of Nevada, Missouri, and of the Seventh-day Adventist church in Nevada,³ began sending literature to Andrew B. McAlexander, who had moved from Missouri to Hindsville, Arkansas, a town of about 100 residents.⁴ The McAlexander family began keeping the Sabbath in the spring of 1873,⁵ likely becoming the first Seventh-day Adventists in Arkansas. Allen Meeks, who began keeping the Sabbath in 1879, lived at Star of the West, near Glenwood. He and his wife also became Seventh-day Adventists through reading.⁶

In April 1877, J. H. Cook, visiting churches in Kansas, reported that some Sabbath keepers who had moved to Arkansas were requesting a minister to come work in their state.⁷ Cook arrived in Arkansas in October 1877 for an evangelistic visit, making his headquarters in Fayetteville. After visiting isolated families in Elm Springs, Cook visited the J. D. Powers family about 16 miles from Elm Springs, who had been meeting with a group of six others who had become Sabbath keepers by reading.

Powers accompanied Cook back to Fayetteville to meet with the commonwealth attorney about Sunday laws, which were making it difficult for Sabbath keepers. The men were assured of fairness to all Sabbath observers who were members of a Sabbath-keeping church. Cook concluded that it was time to organize churches in Arkansas as soon as he in good faith could do so.⁸

Zachariah Swearingen and his family, who had been keeping the Sabbath since 1862, moved from Kansas and settled near Elm Springs in 1879. They began circulating literature and built up more interest in that area.⁹ In December 1881, the General Conference recommended “that the work in Arkansas be placed under the watchcare (sic) of the Kansas Conference.”¹⁰

J.G. Wood, who had been working in Kansas, was asked to labor in Arkansas. Wood went to Hindsville in December 1882 where he met with the McAlexander family and then began a series of meetings. The “nine persons” who “took their stand for the truth” by the end of the series then became, in 1883, the first group to be organized as a Seventh-day Adventist church in Arkansas.¹¹ The church met in homes until 1888 when the members found a new log house not being used, and arranged to hold their church services there.¹²

In response to the interest aroused by E. W. Crawford’s canvassing in Fayetteville and Springdale in 1883, D. A. Wellman and his wife arrived from Michigan in the spring of 1884. They held meetings in Argenta (now North Little Rock), where nearly all the men worked for the railroad. Three began keeping the Sabbath, with one man losing his job as a result.¹³ From Argenta, the Wellmans went to Springdale, a town of 500, where they were joined by J. W. Scoles, a very talented musician, and his wife, in holding meetings that began on June 10, 1884, with every seat full.¹⁴ Organization of the church in Springdale was delayed when Wellman contracted typhoid fever and died on September 2, 1884. J. G. Wood visited from Missouri and organized the Springdale church in January 1885 with 39 members. By January 14, 1885, a 26’ by 40’ church was erected – the first built by Seventh-day Adventists in Arkansas.¹⁵

To organize and unify work in the state, the 1884 General Conference recommended that Arkansas unite with the Missouri Conference.¹⁶ Accordingly, the Missouri Conference in session on October 4, 1885, welcomed Arkansas and its three churches, Cincinnati, Robinson, and Springdale into the Missouri Conference.¹⁷ At the recommendation of the General Conference, the Missouri Conference appointed J. P. Henderson to take charge of the work in Arkansas.¹⁸

In October 1885, five members of the Springdale church, including J. W. Scoles, Zachariah Swearingen, and one of Swearingen's sons, were prosecuted for working on Sunday. Scoles had agreed to paint the new Springdale church and was trying to finish the painting on Sunday, April 26, 1885. He was arrested for desecrating the "Christian Sabbath."¹⁹ Sunday-closing laws enacted in Arkansas in 1837 and still in effect, prohibited all sales, and all labor on Sunday except for "household duties of daily necessity, comfort, or charity." Section 1886 of this law stated that people who belonged to a religious society that worshiped on a day other than Sunday, would not suffer the penalties of the law if they observed one day in seven. However, on March 3, 1885, the Arkansas Legislature repealed Section 1886 under the guise of keeping saloons closed on Sundays.²⁰ This troubled Seventh-day Adventists who believed that the fourth commandment required them to work six days a week or at least be permitted to do so in order to support their families.²¹

At his trial, Scoles argued his own case, speaking with an open Bible for forty minutes, explaining his faith point-by-point. Nevertheless, he was convicted.²² In December 1886 the General Conference approved plans to appeal Scoles' case to the Supreme Court as a test case.²³ However, when the Arkansas State Senate convened in February 1887, Senator Robert H. Crockett, grandson of Davy Crockett, gave "an eloquent plea" on behalf of a bill he had introduced "granting immunity from the penalties of the Sunday law to those who observe the seventh day." Both legislative houses passed Crockett's bill by a large majority and it went into effect immediately.²⁴

Louisiana Origins

In 1866, Mary A. Nugent of New Orleans became the first known Seventh-day Adventist in Louisiana. She learned of the message from a friend who sent her the book *Prophecy of Daniel* and other publications.²⁵ In contrast to the rural beginnings in Arkansas, the first Adventist work in Louisiana was centered mainly in the thriving port city of New Orleans. When New Orleans began planning a World Exposition for December 1, 1884, to May 31, 1885, the International Tract and Missionary Society saw an opportunity to contact many, not only in the South but worldwide.

The Texas Conference president, R. M. Kilgore, was asked to go to New Orleans and establish a tract depository, ²⁶ open a city mission, and secure exhibit space for distributing books and literature.²⁷ H. W. Cottrell came from Ohio to help with the exhibit. Unlike most city missions, there was no conference to support the New Orleans mission, so calls were sent to all conferences not only for workers, but food for the workers.²⁸ Workers came to

visit ships, depots, and hotels, and help with the exhibit.

After the exposition, G. K. Owen baptized twelve new believers in Lake Pontchartrain and by August 1885, about 15 people were meeting for regular Sabbath services.²⁹ Later that year Owen organized the New Orleans church,³⁰ the first Seventh-day Adventist church in the state. December 24, 1885, T. H. Gibbs was called to oversee the New Orleans city mission, which also served as a Tract and Missionary Society.³¹

Meanwhile, George A. Winn of Marthaville in west central Louisiana became a Seventh-day Adventist at a camp meeting in Texas and returned home to tell his family and friends what he had learned. Hearing of this interest, Gibbs held six weeks of meetings in Marthaville during September and October 1886, and returned to organize the church on January 9, 1887.³² There were now two churches in Louisiana.

In 1889, churches were established at Hope Villa (now Gonzalez) and Galvez. Within a year the Hope Villa membership had tripled and Galvez membership had doubled. The Hope Villa church, completed in 1890 on land donated by the M. D. Broussard family, was the first Seventh-day Adventist house of worship built in Louisiana.³³ In 1891, a church was organized at Welsh after a group of Adventists moved there from South Dakota.³⁴

Charles M. Kinny, ordained in 1889³⁵ as the first black Seventh-day Adventist minister, came to New Orleans in October 1891, where he found six black Seventh-day Adventists who had learned of the Adventist message from a colporteur around a year before meeting together. Kinny held Bible readings, organized a Sabbath school, and on June 4, 1892, organized the first black Seventh-day Adventist church in Louisiana. It became the New Orleans Ephesus church in 1921.³⁶

Arkansas Conference (1888-1932)

The Arkansas Conference was organized at a meeting called by George I. Butler, president of the General Conference, and convened in Springdale, May 15-21, 1888.³⁷ The new conference had 226 members, 72 isolated Sabbath keepers, and 10 churches – Brentwood, Cincinnati, Hilltop (later Harrison), Hindsville, Little Rock, Malvern, Mount Pleasant, Siloam Springs, Springdale, and Star of the West. Tithe was reported in the amount of \$119.30 as of June 30, 1888. J. P. Henderson was voted as the president, with E. B. Young as secretary, and William Martin as treasurer. At this time a state Sabbath School Association and an Arkansas Health and Temperance Society were organized.³⁸

By 1890 annual tithe for the conference was just over \$800. In 1891, however, with the conference in debt more than \$600, newly-elected president Chester McReynolds announced to session delegates, “[W]hile many and most urgent calls are being received from every quarter of the State, asking for help, the financial condition of the Conference is such that ministerial labor must cease for the present, only such being done as the ministers might be able to do without charges to the Conference.” He recommended that “the ministers go into the

canvassing field for the remainder of the year, till by the payment of pledges and tithes, the debt is paid." The conference leaders fully endorsed this plan.³⁹ At the 1899 conference session the conference was once again financially stable.⁴⁰

The conference headquarters had been moved from Springdale to the more central location of Little Rock in 1888, but since the Adventist work remained strongest in northwest Arkansas, the headquarters returned to Springdale, where the Arkansas Conference Association was incorporated on March 23, 1902. Between 1888 and 1915, the office moved to various cities eight times, operating out of members' homes. It wasn't until 1909, that the conference rented its own building for the headquarters, located at the corner of Block and Meadow Streets in downtown Fayetteville.⁴¹ In 1913, a new building with four offices was built next to the Fayetteville church at 424 Walnut Street.⁴² In 1915 the headquarters moved back to Little Rock where changes in address remained frequent until the fall of 1921 when a house at 1215 Marshall Street was purchased.⁴³ This was remodeled and served as the conference headquarters for 38 years.

In 1902, when the Southwestern Union Conference was reorganized, Indian Territory (eastern Oklahoma) was transferred to the Arkansas Conference. Stretching 100 miles long and 50 miles wide north of the Arkansas River and east of the Missouri-Kansas-Texas railroad, this territory had one church with seven members at Miami and one company at Afton.⁴⁴ The Arkansas Conference organized three churches and four schools in Indian Territory over the next six years. At the request of the Oklahoma Conference, Indian Territory was returned to them on October 1, 1908. Although this removed a source of income for Arkansas, the territory was too large for the few Arkansas workers to effectively cover.⁴⁵

By 1908, twenty years after the Arkansas Conference was organized, the number of churches in Arkansas had increased from 10 to 21 and membership had grown from 226 to 553.⁴⁶ In addition, there were 120 isolated Sabbath keepers. By 1911, with more organized churches, the number of isolated members was reduced to 21, and a conference church was organized with conference officials keeping in touch with these members who were not able to attend a local church.⁴⁷

In the fall of 1901 two black ministers, Sidney Scott and S. S. Ryles, did Bible work in the black community near Van Buren. Scott reported that an entire congregation near Yellville had kept their first Sabbath.⁴⁸ Ryles raised a church at DeValls Bluff, the first officially recognized black Seventh-day Adventist church in Arkansas, accepted into the conference at the 1903 session held in Van Buren.⁴⁹ By 1910, there were three black churches in Arkansas. In his address at the annual conference session in October 1910, conference president J. W. Norwood reported that these churches had been entrusted earlier that year to the Afro-American Union Mission,⁵⁰ newly organized by the Southwestern Union Conference to administer the Adventist work among the black population throughout the union territory. The Southern and Southeastern Unions similarly operated a Negro Mission, as they were more commonly called, from 1910 to 1921.⁵¹

In the same address at the 1910 session, Norwood recommended that the conference do more “aggressive work” in the cities. No tent meetings had been held in Pine Bluff, no organized work existed in Texarkana, and while some work had been done in Little Rock the church was small. Meetings had been held for the first time in Fort Smith that summer and some work had been done in Hot Springs but it was not nearly enough to reach the “150,000 visitors every year representing the different nationalities of the world.”⁵² In the Arkansas report for the 1916 Southwestern Union Conference quadrennial session, W. E. Baxter, Arkansas Conference president, urged colporteurs and evangelists again to do more work in the cities.⁵³

Arkansas saw greater success with city evangelism in the 1920s. In the years following World War I, changes “taking place in society, business, and government accelerated” including “migration from the farm to the city, the growth of big business, and the development of the advertising profession.” Evangelistic meetings could now be easily advertised in newspapers and growth began to take place in the city churches.⁵⁴

Immediately after Texarkana, Texas, a city of 30,000, was transferred from the North Texas Conference to the Arkansas Conference in 1926 evangelistic meetings were begun, resulting in organization of a church on October 31.⁵⁵ In 1929, Elder and Mrs. E. G. Crosier and Mrs. Helen Maxwell, an evangelistic team from Missouri, came to Arkansas to begin city evangelism. From 1929 to January 1932, the Crosier team, with others helping, held meetings in Fort Smith, Van Buren, Fayetteville, Texarkana, Hot Springs, Little Rock, and Searcy. Nearly 500 members were added to the Arkansas conference. Much of the success of these meetings was attributed to Isaac Baker staying behind after each series to teach the new members.⁵⁶ By 1932, Arkansas had 22 churches, 1,244 members, and 10 schools.⁵⁷

Louisiana Conference (1901-1920)

The first annual camp meeting in Louisiana was held July 13-20, 1898, in Alexandria, a railroad town located in the central part of the state.⁵⁸ In 1899, camp meeting was held at Welsh, and in 1900 at Marthaville.

At the fourth annual camp meeting held July 12-22 at Crowley, delegates from Hope Villa, Lake Charles, Marthaville, Mansfield, New Orleans, Shreveport, and Welsh voted for Louisiana to organize as a conference within the Southern Union, effective August 1, 1901. The new Louisiana Conference had six churches, one company, 178 members, two ordained ministers, one church school and one teacher.⁵⁹ New Orleans was chosen as the headquarters and S.B. Horton elected president.⁶⁰

In 1905, recognizing the importance of New Orleans for travel, trade, and ethnic diversity, the General Conference, joined by the Southern Union Conference and the Louisiana Conference, created a stronger denominational presence. Together they purchased a two-story, twelve-room house at 810 Jackson Avenue to house the conference office, a book depository maintained by Southern Publishing Association, a Religious Liberty department, the General Conference Transportation department for departing and arriving missionaries from Central and South America, along with missionary training classes. The local church met there from 1907

to 1912.⁶¹

When the Southern Union set up the Southern Union Mission in 1909 to oversee the work for black members in the conferences, Louisiana turned over to it oversight of two churches and 35 members.⁶²

Louisiana-Mississippi Conference (1920-1932)

On November 21, 1920, the Louisiana and Mississippi conference committees, in a joint meeting held in Jackson, Mississippi, approved a recommendation by the Southern Union Conference Committee to unite their conferences in order to avoid duplicate administrative costs and allow more funds for workers in the field. Then, on December 8, 1920, delegates representing the constituencies of the two conferences voted in favor of the plan to unite the two fields as the Louisiana-Mississippi Conference, effective January 1, 1921, with the headquarters at Jackson, Mississippi. W. R. Elliott was elected president.⁶³

Jackson was a central location with railroads stretching extensively into both states, and the existing office in Jackson was large and well equipped. At the time of the conference merger, Louisiana had 13 churches with 673 members, four ordained ministers, two licensed ministers, and 16 canvassers; seven church schools, eight teachers, and 115 students. When combined with Mississippi's assets the new Louisiana-Mississippi Conference had 30 churches with 1,085 members, eight ordained ministers, five licensed ministers, and 34 canvassers; 16 church schools, 17 teachers, and 246 students.⁶⁴

Arkansas-Louisiana Conference (1932-)

The entire denomination experienced the intensifying economic stress of the Great Depression in the early 1930s. At the 1931 Fall Council in Omaha, Nebraska, a plan was formed to reduce the number of union conferences in the North American Division from 12 to 8, and the number of local conferences from 58 to 48.⁶⁵ Acting on this plan, the Southern and Southeastern union committees meeting in Macon, Georgia, on February 3, 1932, voted to unite the two unions and to release Louisiana to the Southwestern Union.⁶⁶ Accordingly, delegates representing the Louisiana Conference attended the fourth quadrennial session of the Southwestern Union held February 17-27, 1932, in Oklahoma City, at which Louisiana was transferred to the Southwestern Union and joined with the Arkansas Conference.⁶⁷

R. P. Montgomery, the Arkansas Conference president, was chosen as the president of the new Arkansas-Louisiana Conference. He reported that Louisiana brought 724 members and 11 churches to the new organization. Combined with 1,244 members and 22 churches from Arkansas, the conference formed by the merger had 1,968 members and 33 churches.⁶⁸ In June 1932 Montgomery was called to the Texico Conference and W. H. Heckman was asked to serve as president.⁶⁹ The first official Arkansas-Louisiana Conference session was held in Shreveport, in connection with the 1932 camp meeting.

The ensuing decade was characterized by anxiety over finances and concerns that another world war was approaching. Although the conference lost a number of members that moved out of its territory to find better employment opportunities, this period also led many to search their Bibles for answers, heightening evangelistic work.⁷⁰ I. C. Pound, conference president from 1937 to 1943, urged every church to hold evangelistic meetings every year. He himself held seven series of meetings in 1939. Church members distributed thousands of pieces of literature and gave countless Bible studies. In 1941, the conference prepared a four-fold program called "Message Advance," to be funded by donations from members. Message Advance ran through the end of 1943 and was the largest evangelistic outreach the conference had ever tried. A specially prepared pamphlet was published for free distribution; radio broadcasts offered Adventist literature for the cost of postage; *Liberty* magazine was sent to state representatives, public libraries, and educational leaders; and a series of 21 quarter-page sermons was published in as many newspapers as the conference could afford.⁷¹ By 1943 eight radio stations within the conference territory were carrying the Voice of Prophecy broadcasts, or promoting its Bible Correspondence course along with local Adventist programming. The Seventh-day Adventist message thus could be heard almost anywhere in the conference and the broadcast coverage reached parts of Texas and Mississippi as well.⁷²

World War II brought a new focus on work for the young people. In 1941, the Arkansas-Louisiana constituency voted for Ozark Academy, a 12-grade boarding school in Gentry, Arkansas, to become a conference-operated boarding academy. That year Ozark Academy started a Medical Cadet Corps for the boys and added one for the girls in 1942. This program trained young people to become medics if they were inducted into military service. The academy continued to operate this program through 1970.⁷³

The conference supplied about 500 copies of *Steps to Christ* to Adventists who were stationed in one of the army camps in Arkansas and Louisiana. By 1942 there were over 50 Seventh-day Adventist servicemen stationed at Camp Robinson near Little Rock, a main military Medical Corps training base. These young people were given Sabbath privileges and attended the Little Rock church, actively helping with the service. The church members opened their homes and their hearts, providing Sabbath dinner and afternoon activities for these servicemen during the war.⁷⁴

Many of the Adventist young men stationed at one of the military training camps near Alexandria, Louisiana, attended the church regularly, and in fact, made up the bulk of their Missionary Volunteer society. They spent Sabbath afternoons handing out literature, then began holding a children's story hour and a Sunday evening vespers in the U.S.O. building.⁷⁵ Churches throughout the conference were encouraged to show hospitality to any visiting servicemen who attended and to plan activities to keep them involved.

The predominantly black churches in the Arkansas-Louisiana Conference, effective January 1, 1947, became part of the newly-organized Southwest Mission.⁷⁶ Arkansas-Louisiana thus turned over 13 churches and 829 members (just over one-fourth of the conference total), \$25,000 in tithe, and three schools with 125 students,

making for the largest contribution in funds and members of any of the conferences in the Southwestern Union to the new Mission, which became the Southwest Region Conference in 1950.⁷⁷

With the conference-operated academy in northwest Arkansas and the conference office in central Arkansas, it seemed that Louisiana, especially the southern part, was far from the center of activity. In 1959, Shreveport, Louisiana, located 350 miles from Gentry, Arkansas to the north and 320 miles from New Orleans to the south, was chosen as a more central location for the conference headquarters. Property was purchased at 333 Southfield Road and plans approved in September 1959.⁷⁸ By January 22, 1960, a new 6,000 square-foot office building had been completed for the two conference officers and five departmental directors. In 1960 the conference had 21 schools with 572 students, 44 churches and four companies with a total of 3,400 members, and \$400,849 in tithe for the year.⁷⁹

The Arkansas-Louisiana Conference held its first summer camp in 1935 with one week for boys and one for girls.⁸⁰ As the conference continued to grow, it became increasingly difficult to find a campground with enough space that could be rented for two weeks. A permanent summer camp was established on September 15, 1965, when the Hot Springs Navy League transferred Camp Yorktown Bay to the Arkansas Conference Association of Seventh-day Adventists. The transfer included a sublet of 53 acres of waterfront property from the U.S. Corps of Engineers, and 60 acres donated by Dierks Forests Inc. Included were two small islands, several buildings, boats, and other equipment that altogether had an estimated value of \$250,000.⁸¹ The conference held its first summer camp at Camp Yorktown Bay in 1966.⁸²

P. I. Nosworthy, who became the conference secretary-treasurer in 1957, was "one of those most instrumental in having the camp transferred to the Arkansas-Louisiana Conference from the Navy League group in Hot Springs." One of the small islands at Camp Yorktown Bay was named P.I.N. Island and when he retired in 1974, a lodge built at the camp in 1968 was named Nosworthy Lodge in recognition of his 17 years of service.⁸³

The camp and buildings have been significantly expanded and upgraded over the years. In 2016 Camp Yorktown Bay received the North American Division Norm Middag Award as Camp of the Year for its commitment to excellence in safety, hospitality, and facilities.⁸⁴

In August 1970, the conference began its first continuous work among the Spanish-speaking population of Louisiana. At that time there were only 25 Seventh-day Adventists among an estimated 80,000 Spanish-speaking residents in the New Orleans area. Sergio Ortiz from Puerto Rico was hired as an associate pastor of the New Orleans church to work among the Spanish residents. Ortiz held meetings about home, health, and temperance to create an interest, followed by an eight-week evangelism series. By the end of the series, Sabbath attendance had increased to 65. The first Spanish-speaking church in the Arkansas-Louisiana Conference, New Orleans Spanish church was organized with 42 charter members on January 9, 1971. It included members from Cuba, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Puerto Rico, and Venezuela.⁸⁵ The Springdale First Spanish church was organized June 18, 1994, with 54 charter members, becoming the first Seventh-day Adventist Spanish

church in Arkansas.

By the late 1970s the conference office was outgrown. In addition to three conference officers, there were now eight departmental directors and three assistants. On June 10, 1979, the conference executive committee approved the purchase of 12 ½ acres of land on Interstate 20 as the site to build a new 15,000 square-foot conference office building.⁸⁶ The move into the new building took place in the fall of 1980, with an open house and dedication service held December 20, 1981.⁸⁷

1971 was a banner year as membership passed the 5,000 mark to 5,122 and tithe passed the one million mark at \$1,013,939.⁸⁷ Significant growth took place between 1971 and 1979, with baptisms peaking at 607 (9.13 percent of membership) in 1978.⁸⁸ Twenty-seven new churches and companies were organized; 28 new churches and 19 new school buildings were constructed, in addition to a new conference office, an Adventist Book Center, and an administration building at Ozark Academy.

However, the building program drained resources and by 1984 the conference and the conference association were \$1,089,163 behind in needed funds. In addition, an apple orchard near Ozark Adventist Academy accepted as a gift in 1980 ended up becoming a financial burden. The orchard was allegedly worth \$1.2 million, with an annuity of \$38,000 a year for the life of the original owners. The conference association assumed the debts on the orchard, hoping the potential income would eliminate the need for conference subsidies to the academy and would provide numerous student work opportunities. However, the new enterprise, Arlasda Farms, suffered huge operating losses. In 1984, parcels of the orchard were sold. When the last section was sold in 1987, the conference's operating losses and loss on the sales totaled \$884,852.

During the presidencies of Don C. Schneider and William Woodruff, measures were put in place for fundraising, donations, budget and personnel cuts, and a mortgage was taken on the Adventist Book Center. The "Freedom 92" program launched in 1989 to relieve the debt by 1992 proved successful. November 15, 1992, was declared Victory Day, with nearly one million dollars raised to relieve most of the debt.⁸⁹

In April 1998, a dream came true for the members in south Louisiana when they were able to attend camp meeting without driving ten or eleven hours to Gentry. Meetings were held for both English and Spanish speakers at the Yogi Bear Jellystone Park near Hammond, Louisiana.⁹⁰ Annual camp meetings continued at various rented facilities in the area. In 2000, when a 140-acre parcel of land became available in Hammond, the South Louisiana Property Committee was formed to decide how to develop the land. The committee proposed a multi-purpose building for camp meetings, church retreats and outings, Pathfinder camporees, and campsites for travelers and retirees. It took months to obtain the state documentation that cleared a wetlands issue, and then Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, hitting a month apart in 2005, delayed the building further.⁹¹ The first camp meeting and a dedication service were held in the new South Louisiana Convention Center May 11-12, 2007.⁹² This was also the 75th anniversary of Arkansas-Louisiana Conference organization in 1932.

May 17, 2001, Stephen Orian was asked to serve as conference president. At the time of his retirement March 31, 2018, he had served nearly 17 years, the longest of any conference president. Under his leadership the conference developed the strongest financial base since its organization. Emphasis on evangelism continued, with over 4,000 members added during this time. Also, a new focus was placed on mission. In 2003, the Arkansas-Louisiana Conference joined the North American Division and the Inter-American Division to help fund literacy programs for adults in Nicaragua and El Salvador through Hope for Humanity. The program is now known as Partners in Mission. Ozark Adventist Academy students conducted their first evangelistic meetings on a mission trip to the Philippines and young adults were given the opportunity to hold evangelistic meetings in Zimbabwe and Romania.⁹³

Membership in the Arkansas-Louisiana Conference passed 10,000 in 2006. Baptisms in 2009 and 2010 exceeded 500 each year, and in 2013, tithe income passed ten million dollars.⁹⁴ Evangelism continues to be a high priority for the conference. By the end of 2019 there were 13,475 members, 92 churches, 15 companies, five groups, and \$11,355,926 in tithe received for the year.

List of Presidents

Arkansas Conference (1888-1932): J. P. Henderson (1888-1889); J. G. Wood (1889-1891); C. McReynolds (1891-1893, 1899); J. M. Rees (1893-1894); J. B. Beckner (1894-1896); J. A. Holbrook (1896-1899); A. E. Field (1899-1903); J. A. Sommerville (1903-1904); Urbanus Bender (1904-1907); V. B. Watts (1907-1909); J. W. Norwood (1909-1913); W. E. Baxter (1913-1917); J. I. Taylor (1917-1922); H. M. J. Richards (1922-1926); R. P. Montgomery (1926-1932).

Louisiana Conference (1901-1921): S. B. Horton (1901-1908); E. L. Maxwell (1908-1912); R. W. Parmele (1912-1916); C. N. Sanders (1916-1920); D. P. Wood (1920).

Louisiana-Mississippi Conference (1921-1932): W. R. Elliott (1921-1926); F. H. DeVinney (1926-1932).

Arkansas-Louisiana Conference (1932-): R. P. Montgomery (1932); W. H. Heckman (1932-1933); H. C. Hartwell (1933-1937); I. C. Pound (1937-1943); F. D. Wells (1943-1948); F.O. Sanders (1948-1954); I. M. Evans (1954-1963); O. D. Wright (1963-1966); E. F. Sherrill (1966-1974); W. H. Elder (1974-1982); W. L. Woodruff (1985-1994); J. W. Gilley (1994-2001); Stephen Orian (2001-2018); Richard C. Dye, Sr. (2018-).

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