

Van Deusen, Elam

(1833–1917)

GLENN O. PHILLIPS

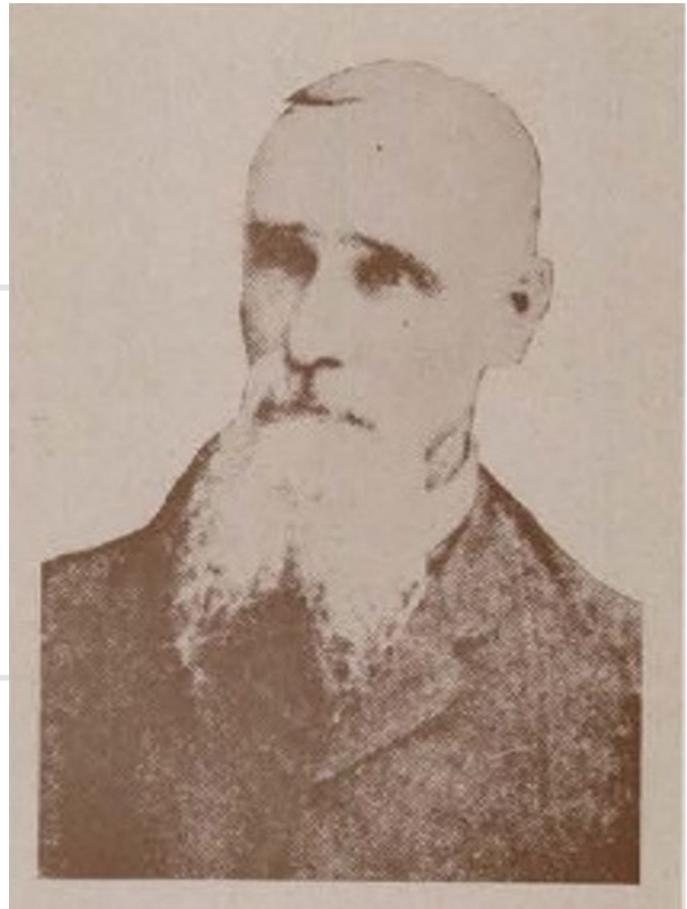
Glenn O. Phillips, Ph.D. (Howard University, Washington, D.C.), although retired, is actively writing, researching, lecturing, and publishing. He was a professor at Morgan State University, Howard University, and the University of the Southern Caribbean. He has authored and published numerous articles, book reviews, and books, including "The African Diaspora Experience," "Singing in a Strange Land: The History of the Hanson Place Church," "African American Leaders of Maryland," and "The Caribbean Basin Initiative."

Elam Van Deusen was a pioneering Adventist minister who, with his missionary wife, Mary, and young daughter, labored in the eastern Caribbean from the mid-1890s into the first two decades of the 20th century.

Elam Van Deusen was born on November 7, 1833, in Canada and became a Seventh-day Adventist in June of 1861. In his youth, he was very industrious and was a very successful farmer into his late 40s. Before his conversion to Adventism, he purchased and operated a farm in Michigan, United States of America. Less than a year after he was baptized, he married Mary E. Noyes on February 22, 1862, and to that union came a daughter.¹

Van Deusen's early commitment to Adventism led him to desire to be better trained to be an effective Adventist witness, so he studied at what later became Battle Creek College, preparing to be a minister for his new faith.² His early ministry was very successful as he reached out and started new congregations with diverse cultural backgrounds.

Prior to serving in the eastern Caribbean, Elder Van Deusen ministered to numerous churches across eastern Michigan. He was especially successful as an evangelist among the urban poor around Saginaw and in Detroit, converting many of his listeners, which resulted in his ordination into the church's ministry. Pastor G. A. Roberts, who became one of the early Adventist Church leaders in the Caribbean and the third president of the Inter-



Elam Van Deusen.

Photo courtesy of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Archives.

American Division of Seventh-day Adventists, wrote in Elder Van Deusen's obituary, "When the writer was but two years of age, Elder Van Deusen came to our home in Morley, Mecosta Co., Mich., and taught my mother the truth."³ His last pastorate in the United States was in Lowell, Michigan.

Elder Van Deusen was the first permanent minister assigned to the Leeward and Windward Islands, but he resided in Barbados for eight years.⁴ He arrived in 1896 after Dexter A. Ball had baptized the first converts into the Seventh-day Adventist church. Elder Van Deusen officially organized many of the first congregations. He was at the forefront of the purchase of land and the construction of the King Street Seventh-day Adventist Church in Bridgetown, Barbados. This mission-focused couple opened and operated the first Adventist church school. They encouraged some of the early young converts to continue their education at the Battle Creek Sanitarium nursing school and the Battle Creek College.

The Van Deusens were very responsive with their modest wealth. They allowed an Adventist church leader and his family to occupy their farm home for years without paying rent. When the Van Deusens finally sold the house and farm, they contributed most of the funds to promote the Church's evangelistic programs in the United States as well as in the Caribbean. This included the purchase of land and the building of many of the first churches in various eastern Caribbean countries. In a March 1911 report, A. J. Haysmer, his son-in-law, wrote of the Van Deusens, "While in the West Indies, they put hundreds of dollars into the work and several church buildings stand as monuments of their liberality."⁵

On his personal reflections of his very active and effective missionary service in the eastern Caribbean between 1896 and 1911, Pastor Van Deusen wrote that he viewed his missionary efforts "with some gladness, some sadness, some losses and some gains. I have never felt satisfied but hope to see the sure results in the Kingdom." He continued to labor for souls beyond his retirement, ably supporting Pastor A. J. Haysmer, who headed the church's work for the Caribbean and surrounding areas from Jamaica. Sister Mary Van Deusen passed to her rest on December 22, 1915, and a little over a year later, Elder Van Deusen died on January 29, 1917, and was placed beside his faithful wife in the Riversdale churchyard in Jamaica.⁶

SOURCES

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NOTES

1. G. A. Roberts, "Elder Elam Van Deusen," *ARH*, March 22, 1917, 20–21.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. George F. Enoch, *The Advent Message in the Sunny Caribbean* (Port-of-Spain, Trinidad: The Watchman Press, 1907), 18.
5. A. J. Haysmer to E. R. Palmer, March 21, 1911, Seventh-day Adventist Archives, Inter-American Correspondence Box.
6. G. A. Roberts, "Elder Van Deusen."

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