

Durrant, Adam Nicholas (1879–1967)

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.”



A. N. Durrant and family.

Photo courtesy of the General Conference of Seventh-day

Adventists Archives.

A. N. Durrant was an outstandingly energetic and pioneering Jamaican Seventh-day Adventist pastor-evangelist and one of the earliest Adventist converts in his country.

Early Life, Baptism and Work in the Caribbean

Adam Nicholas Durrant was born on May 23, 1879 in Prattville, a small village in the parish of Manchester, Jamaica, in the British West Indies.¹ He was the only one of his parents’ four children to live into adulthood. His father, Christopher Durrant, was a white American of French ancestry who immigrated to Jamaica at the end of the American Civil War; and his mother, Elizabeth, was a mixed-race Jamaican of African and European heritage—both prominent members of the Anglican faith. After completing nine years of public school training in early 1900, Adam Durrant was drawn to the preaching of W. J. Tanner in a series of meetings conducted in Manchester, Jamaica, in October of the same year. On hearing about the seventh-day Sabbath, he inquired of the bishop of the Church of England in the British colony regarding this teaching. Not receiving a satisfactory response, he was baptized into the Advent faith in January 1901 by W. W. Eastman. He immediately began to share his new faith and his first convert was his fiancé, Ethyl Amanda Gregory who was baptized in 1903 by J. B. Beckner.² Subsequently, they together won his parents to his new faith.

Within months of his baptism, Durrant was moved to spread the Word and one of his early sermons appeared in the church’s recently established regional magazine, the *Caribbean Watchman*,³ published in Trinidad. He

began conducting various successful evangelistic meetings in south central Jamaica. Adventist church leaders quickly appointed Durrant one of the first Caribbean-born, licensed Adventist ministers on January 14, 1904. Almost two years afterwards, on January 9, 1906, he married Ethyl A. Gregory—who worked closely with him in his long decades of church ministry—and together they had five children, sons Judson and Norman and daughters Rubina, Ruth, and Maude.

Durrant was ordained in during 1908 by I. H. Evans and within a year, in March 1909, he responded to a call to the eastern Caribbean where he continued his evangelistic activities until April 1912. He held several evangelistic efforts baptizing early converts and establishing companies in Trinidad and Grenada.⁴ His prolific pioneering work in the eastern Caribbean caught the attention of the leaders of the Foreign Mission Board which invited him to continue his ministry among the millions of African Americans.

In the United States

Durrant and his family arrived at Ellis Island, New York City from Kingston, Jamaica, sailing on the S.S. Orotava, on May 23, 1912.⁵ He was assigned by the Columbia Union Conference to lead the two small “colored” congregations in Pittsburgh that were previously the pastoral responsibilities of W.H. Green. The Durrants quickly adjusted to many of the new realities of living in the United States, including coping with the wintry weather and experiencing a very different racial environment.

In the summer of 1913 Durrant launched his first set of evangelistic tent meetings, assisted by Osman Phipps of South Lancaster Academy. Eight converts were baptized as a result of the effort. In the following years, he would hold larger evangelistic meetings in different parts of the city and dramatically increased the membership of African American Adventists in Pittsburgh. He also made a concerted effort to reach African Americans of the professional class resulting in a few joining his congregations. These included Dr. Stark O. Cherry, a physician who later advocated for equal human rights within the Adventist Church.⁶ One of Durrant’s peak pastoral achievements was the construction and completion of the Second Pittsburgh SDA Church, which was officially dedicated on January 16, 1916 by West Pennsylvania Conference and Columbia Union Conference leaders. A photo of the edifice was featured on the front page of the *Columbia Union Visitor*.⁷

Although Durrant’s career yielded many successes, it was not without contention. One of Pittsburgh’s leading clergymen began to publish negative views about Seventh-day Adventists in one of the city’s newspapers. However, Durrant’s response was to have the same newspaper carry his own weekly column that rebutted his opponent’s views leading to a wider circulation of Adventist beliefs.⁸ At the same time, he provided readers of the *Gospel Herald* and the *Columbia Union Visitor* with frequent articles detailing continued efforts and progress among the colored congregation in Pittsburgh. He also reached beyond Pittsburgh and conducted evangelistic meetings across the Columbia Union area. He was remembered for crossing the aisle and debating other clergy in their own churches when given the opportunity.

During his decades-long ministry, he did encounter personal hardship including the traumatic death of one of his daughters, Rubina, at the age of 10. Additionally, he endured personal illness in early 1924, requiring an operation for which he was admitted to the Washington Adventist Sanitarium in Takoma Park, Maryland (though the sanitarium in this era generally admitted only white patients, it accepted a few well-known African American Adventists for treatment, accommodating them in rooms separate from the white clientele)⁹

Subsequently, Durrant continued his ministry across the Columbia Union serving on several committees both at the conference and union levels. His ministry led him to serve primarily in three Conferences in the Columbia Union: West Pennsylvania, 1912-1920; New Jersey, 1920-1926 and Ohio, 1926-1933.¹⁰ He officially retired on September 1, 1933. One reason for his retirement were the ongoing illnesses of both he and his wife. Nevertheless, for the following 34 years, when well, he continued to preach, support, and advise younger ministers. He and his wife eventually moved to warmer weather in southern California.

Final Years and Contribution

On March 26, 1967, Durrant, now in his late 80s, passed to his rest after being admitted to the Paradise Valley Sanitarium in National City, California where both he and his wife were patients for a few weeks prior. Left to mourn him was Ethyl, his wife of almost 60 years, his remaining four children, eight grandchildren, and six great-grandchildren. His funeral service was held on Wednesday, March 29, 1967, at the Sierra Vista Chapel of La Sierra Seventh-day Adventist Church and he was buried in Crestlawn Memorial Park in Riverside, California.¹¹

Durrant became a minister in 1904 and quickly found success preaching around the Caribbean. Eventually he garnered the attention of the SDA Foreign Mission Board and in 1912 he was called to serve in the United States.¹² where he led hundreds to the Advent faith during more than 50 years of ministry. He was among the leading Seventh-day Adventist soul winners in the African American work from the early 1910s through the mid-1930s. Durrant served primarily across the Columbia Union, beginning in the city of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, but also in other regions of middle America, and as far south as Key West, Florida. Wherever he labored, Durrant encouraged his converts and congregations to own representative edifices. He loved to write, and his articles appeared in numerous Adventist church papers from the *Caribbean Watchman* to the *Review and Herald*. At one time he also had articles published weekly in a Pittsburgh city newspaper about Adventist beliefs. He also publicly and successfully debated several Sunday-keeping ministers on doctrinal themes—especially on Sabbath teachings. He rarely missed an opportunity to share his faith—evidenced by his last converts who were the two nurses who attended to him and his wife in a California hospital, days before his passing in 1967.¹³

SOURCES

"Adam N. Durrant obituary." *ARH*, July 6, 1967.

"The Dedication of the New Church Building at Pittsburgh, PA." *Columbia Union Visitor*, February 3, 1916.

Durrant, A. N. "A Word from Jamaica." *Caribbean Watchman*, May 1903.

"Durrant, Adam N." General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Secretariat. Record ID: 114890, Personal Information Forms and Biographical Material, Department of Archives, Statistics and Research, Silver Spring, MD.

Enoch, George F. *The Advent Message in the Sunny Caribbean*. Port-of-Spain, Trinidad: The Caribbean Watchman Press, 1907.

General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Secretariat. Record Series APPT-XPIF, Record ID: 114890, Box 7299. Department of Archives, Statistics and Research, Silver Spring, MD.

Greenleaf, Floyd. *The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Latin America and the Caribbean*, Vol. 1. Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press.

Morgan, Douglas and Emory Tolbert. "How Pioneering Black Adventists Helped Shape the Columbian Union." *Columbia Union Visitor*, February 2007.

"Necrology: Adam N. Durrant." *Inter-American Messenger*, May 1967.

"Our Work and Workers." *Caribbean Watchman*, October 1904.

Reynolds, Louis B. *We Have Tomorrow: The Story of American Seventh-day Adventists with African Heritage*. Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1984.

NOTES

1. "Adam N. Durrant obituary," *ARH*, July 6, 1967, 24.
2. "Durrant, Adam N.," GC Secretariat, Record ID: 114890; George F. Enoch, *The Advent Message in the Sunny Caribbean* (Port-of-Spain, Trinidad: The Caribbean Watchman Press, 1907), 48; Floyd Greenleaf, *The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Latin America and the Caribbean*, Vol. 1 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press), 152.
3. "Christopher Durrant obituary," *Gospel Herald*, November 1921, 8; A.N. Durrant, "A Word from Jamaica," *Caribbean Watchman*, May 1903, 12; "Our Work and Workers," *Caribbean Watchman*, October 1904, 10.
4. "The Employment Records of Adam N. Durrant," General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Secretariat, Record Series APPT-XPIF, Record ID: 114890, Box 7299, Department of Archives, Statistics and Research, Silver Spring, MD.

5. United States, New York, Index of Passengers Arriving at New York City, Compiled 1944-1948, Database, Family Search, NARA Microfilm Publication M 1417 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.), n.p.
6. Reynolds, *We Have Tomorrow*, 140-141; see Douglas Morgan and Emory Tolbert, "How Pioneering Black Adventists Helped Shape the Columbian Union," *Columbia Union Visitor*, February 2007, 8-13.
7. "The Dedication of the New Church Building at Pittsburgh, PA," *Columbia Union Visitor*, February 3, 1916, 1.
8. "The Employment Records of Adam N. Durrant," GC Secretariat.
9. "News Notes," *Columbia Union Visitor*, April 19, 1924, 6; Benjamin Baker, "Byard, Lucille (1877-1943)," *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists*, December 29, 2020, accessed July 06, 2022, <https://encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=9CEA>.
10. "Sustentation Fund Application of Durrant, A.N.," G.C. Secretariat.
11. Ibid.; "A.N. Durrant obituary."
12. "Necrology: Adam N. Durrant," *Inter-American Messenger*, May 1967, 12; "Durrant, Adam N.," General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Secretariat, Record ID: 114890, Personal Information Forms and Biographical Material, Department of Archives, Statistics and Research, Silver Spring, MD.
13. Louis B. Reynolds, *We Have Tomorrow: The Story of American Seventh-day Adventists with African Heritage*, (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1984), 274.

encyclopedia.adventist.org is an official website of the [Seventh-day Adventist World Church](#)

© 2020 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists 12501 Old Columbia Pike Silver Spring , MD 20904 USA 301-680-6000