

Bahamas Academy

JOHN CAREY, SR.

John Carey, retired administrator in 2009, completed a doctoral degree at Andrews University in 1983 after which he joined the staff of the Bahamas Conference serving as director of various departments including education, health and temperance, Sabbath school, family life, publishing, field secretary, and district pastor. Previous denominational positions were principal of Bahamas Academy, chair of the secondary education department and also dean of students at West Indies College. Pastor Carey and his wife, Shezarah, have two adult sons and five grandchildren.

Background

The genesis of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the [Bahamas](#) can be credited to literature evangelists C. H. Richards and his wife. They arrived in the Bahamas from the United States on November 27, 1893, to introduce Adventism to the people through their literature ministry. At that time, the population of Nassau, the capital of the Bahamas, was approximately 10,000 with one-third being Caucasian and the remainder comprising individuals “of all shades from yellow to black.” The population of the entirety of the Bahamas was “estimated at from 40,000 to 50,000, not one of whom, so far as we know, fully understands and obeys the truth for this time.”

¹ Although they spent most of their time on New Providence Island, the Richards also visited several of the, as they are known today, Family Islands. They were so encouraged by the positive response from the people to their efforts that they requested additional assistance from the Foreign Mission Board, but their request was not granted.

Emphasis on Education

Early in its development, the Seventh-day Adventist Church emphasized the importance of Christian education to protect the Church’s children from worldly influences, most often establishing a school within newly established churches. Today, the doctrine of Seventh-day Adventist Christian education is espoused by every segment of the Church. For Seventh-day Adventists, the school is one of the primary institutions for Christian education. Therefore, knowing the value of proper Seventh-day Adventist education, the Adventist Church in the Bahamas established Bahamas Academy.

In 1912, Elder James H. Smith, his wife, and two children came to the Bahamas. Recognizing the significant need for Seventh-day Adventist Christian education, he established the first church school in a building that formerly housed the Odd Fellows Lodge, known as Aurora Hall. Professor G. G. Coffin was the principal, and Mrs. Coffin was the only teacher. This effort was encouraged and supported by the members. “A good report comes to the Mission Board office concerning the school opened at Nassau, Bahama Islands, last autumn. The citizens agreed to furnish place, tuition, and pupils if we would provide them teachers. Brother and Sister Coffin were sent to

them. The secretary of the school board speaks highly of the efficient service rendered the patrons of the school by the teachers. While on account of the war they did not have the patronage they expected, still the school has been self-supporting, and much of God's blessing has been experienced in the work."²

In 1914, 50 students were enrolled. A small tuition fee was charged, but the school mainly survived on generous community contributions. The curriculum consisted of five basic subjects: reading, writing, spelling, arithmetic, and the Bible.

Leadership and Site Changes

Throughout the years, the school operated at various locations under the leadership of different individuals. When the first Adventist Church in the Bahamas, now the Centerville Seventh-day Adventist Church, moved to a building located on Shirley Street, the basement of that building was used for classrooms. After an increased enrollment, the school relocated to Hawkins Hill in a building donated by William Fountain. The school remained there for several years before moving to Wulff Road in a building designed by Bahamas Mission President H. D. Colburn.

The Bahamas Mission "purchased four large buildings from the R.A.F. [Royal Air Force] out at Oakes Field which [were] to be used in the construction of the Bahamas Junior Academy building."³ With concrete block walls, the buildings had wood floors and windows. Dr. Clara McPhee, an academy student at that time, remembers the school on Hawkins Hill and was among the students who was transferred to the new campus on Wulff Road:⁴ On September 22, 1947, 134 students were transferred to Wulff Road.⁵

The school became a junior academy in 1948 and received senior academy status in 1955. One year later, three of the senior students took the Senior Cambridge Examination for the first time. One of these students, Leslie V. McMillan, passed the examination with credit. His winning essay for the examination was "More Haste, Less Speed."⁶

Curriculum and Academic Changes

In 1983, the Board of Regents of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists granted the academy initial accreditation. Full accreditation for three years was granted in 1985.⁷

To further expand the school's educational program, the Bahamas Conference Executive Committee voted in 1985 for the elementary section of the school to be established as a separate entity. In September 1985, the elementary school began operations from a campus on Penny Savings Bank Lane with eight teachers and 361 students. As the need for preschool instruction grew, the establishment of a second campus became a necessity. Therefore, in 1989, the Early Learning Centre (ELC) was established. This campus was first located in the Fellowship Hall of the New Providence Seventh-day Adventist Church on Soldier Road. The ELC at that time

housed K2-K4. Subsequently, it relocated to a new building on Old Trail Road in September 2003, where it housed the entire K2-K5 enrollment.⁸

Special attention was given to the preparation of the curriculum for this new unit of the school. Ann Albury and Madeline Hanna, teachers with appropriate credentials, were given the responsibility of developing the curriculum for the ELC. Hanna, the appointed coordinator, meant to provide daily supervision for this new entity. Dianne Jones and, later, Hermia Brown followed Hanna as coordinator of the ELC.

In January 2002, the Executive Committee of Bahamas Conference voted to bring the schools back together to facilitate smoother operation and implementation of the schools' programs. The change necessitated a new administrative structure. A principal would be responsible for the supervision and general administration of the elementary and secondary divisions. Two vice-principals would be responsible for the daily operations of the school, one for the elementary division and one for the secondary division. A business manager would be responsible for the coordination of the financial operations of both divisions. The programs offered in both divisions would continue to provide students with a strong spiritual, academic, moral, mental, and social foundation.

A New Campus

Over the years, the school saw much growth and expansion, the most significant being its relocation from Wulff Road to a new facility at 73 Marshall Road. The journey to the much-needed new school started on January 9, 2005, when the school broke ground for the new building. Construction began on April 26, 2005. In November 2010, the responsibility of completing the facility was passed on to Pastor Paul Scavella and his team, who worked with the school's administration to facilitate the transition to the new location. The move to the new location began in June 2011 and was completed in time for the opening of the new school year on September 9, 2011.

From the school's establishment in 1912 to the present, many dedicated teachers and administrators have served Bahamas Academy. Students and teachers engage with the local community through regular outreach programs to meet spiritual and physical needs. Additionally, the school awarded full scholarships to 32 students displaced by the devastating Hurricane Dorian which struck the islands of Abaco and Grand Bahama in 2019.

The worldwide pandemic COVID-19 had a significant impact on schools in the Bahamas. To minimize the spread of the virus, the government ordered the closing of all schools. Beginning in March 2020, students of Bahamas Academy were taught via Zoom. Despite the challenges of online instruction, teachers, students, and parents worked together to ensure the students' success. Teachers and students were able to return to school and resume regular classes in 2023.

List of Principals

G. G. Coffin (1912-1916); C. G. Howell (1916-1918); Mrs. Enid Wright (1923-1925); O. J. Lawrence (1926-1927); H. E. Beddoe (1927-1928); H. T. Saulter (1928-1929); Mrs. A. R. Haig (1930-1931); L. S. Crawford (1931-1933); D. B. Reid (1933-1938); E. Lawrence (1938-1952); W. W. Liske (1953-1957); Miss E. Mullings (1957-1959); Mrs. T. O. Shaw (1958-1959); H. A. Roach (1959-1968); John Carey (1968-1978); Ruth White (1978-1991); Althea McMillan (Elementary, 1985-1994); Estherlean Ash (Elementary, 1994-2002); Cheryl Rolle (1992-2002); Lynn Smith (2002-2005); Cheryl Rolle (2005-2006); Anthony Burrows (2006-2014); Allison Garcia (Acting, 2014-2015); Milton Lewis (2014-2018); Juliette Sands (2018-2024); LaVonda Smith (2024-).

SOURCES

"Adventist Accrediting Association Report." November 19-20, 2019. Principal's office archives, Nassau, The Bahamas.

"A good report comes to..." *ARH*, June 17, 1915.

Bahamas Academy Handbook. 2019. Principal's office archives, Nassau, The Bahamas.

"News from the Bahamas." *The British West Indies Visitor*, December 1947.

Richards, Mr. and Mrs. C. H. "West Indies: Bahama Group." *ARH*, May 8, 1894.

"The Bahamas Mission." *The British West Indies Visitor*, December 1946.

NOTES

1. Mr. and Mrs. C. H. Richards, "West Indies: Bahama Group," *ARH*, May 8, 1894, 293-294 (5-6).

2. "A good report comes to..." *ARH*, June 17, 1915, 24.

3. "The Bahamas Mission," *The British West Indies Visitor*, December 1946, 4.

4. Clara McPhee, telephone interview by the author, March 26, 2025.

5. "News from the Bahamas," *The British West Indies Visitor*, December 1947, 5.

6. Leslie V. McMillan, telephone interview by the author, March 25, 2025.

7. "Adventist Accrediting Association Report," November 19-20, 2019, principal's office archives.

8. Bahamas Academy Handbook, 2019, principal's office archives.

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