



Aerial view of Agro-Industrial Adventist Trans-Amazon Academy.

Photo courtesy of Agro-Industrial Adventist Trans-Amazon Academy Archives, accessed on April 15, 2020, <https://bit.ly/3cU232v>.

# Agro-Industrial Adventist Trans-Amazon Academy

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Agro-Industrial Adventist Trans-Amazon Academy (Instituto Adventista Transamazonico Agro-Industrial or IATAI) is an elementary and high school academy which offers both day school and boarding school. It belongs to the Seventh-day Adventist Church and is part of the Adventist worldwide educational network.<sup>1</sup>

IATAI operates in the mission field of the North Brazil Union Mission (União Norte Brasileira or UNB)<sup>2</sup> The academy is located on the Trans-Amazon Highway at kilometer 152 of the Altamira-Itaituba stretch at Zip Code 68140-000 in the city of Uruará in the state of Pará, Brazil.<sup>3</sup>

IATAI operates in a large farm of 2,807 hectares. The school has female and male dormitories, an administrative building, a multi-sport gymnasium, a semi-Olympic pool, a music school, and a restaurant where food that is grown on the campus is served. There is also a library and a study room that provides the necessary structure for the students.<sup>4</sup>

## Developments that Led to the School's Establishment

The Adventist message reached the state of Pará in the late 1920s. As far as it is known, the first Adventist missionaries to go to that region were Pastor John L. Brown and canvassers Hans Mayr and André Gedrath. The trio, sent by the East Brazil Union Mission (currently the Southeast Brazil Union Conference), arrived in Belém, the capital of the state, in 1927 to establish the Lower Amazonas Mission (Missão Brasil Amazonas or MBA, presently the North Pará Conference – Associação Norte do Pará or ANPa). The territory previously covered by the MBA corresponds today to the Brazilian states of Pará, Amapá, Maranhão, Ceará, Piauí, Amazonas, Acre, Rondônia, and Roraima<sup>5</sup>

With John Brown's call to serve in the South American Division office in 1928, Pastor Leo Halliwell and his wife Jessie were called to serve in the MBA. Upon their arrival in the region, the couple realized that the inhabitants biggest need was for social and health assistance. Thus, they decided to build a medical missionary launch, the *Lightbearer*, to sail the Amazon River, from Belém to Manaus, offering medical care. The launch was inaugurated in July 1931<sup>6</sup>

The *Lightbearer* work in the Amazon region took the Adventist message to many places. One of these places was the city of Santarém on the west of Pará, which was visited by Leo Halliwell in 1934 in one of the *Lightbearer* journeys from Belém to Manaus. There, Halliwell got in touch with the Jennings family, who later became the first Adventist family in the region.<sup>7</sup> With the expansion of the Adventist message to other places in the north of the country, the North Brazil Union Mission (União Norte Brasileira or UNB) was established in 1936 to serve Adventists from all over the territory that was previously part of the MBA.<sup>8</sup>

Santarém was the only main stronghold of Adventists in western Pará until the 1970s when the government of Brazil started construction on federal highway BR-230, also known as the Trans-Amazon highway. This highway would link the state of Rio Grande do Norte in the northeast of Brazil to the state of Acre in the extreme northwest of the country in the border with Bolivia. With the construction of the highway, many cities in the state of Pará were also built on the side of the road. This was the case of Altamira, a city that, in 1972, was the target of evangelization efforts by the Lower Amazonas Mission.<sup>9</sup>

Before the establishment of IATAI, Adventists in the state of Pará who wanted to provide an education with Christian standards for their children needed to send them to Adventist boarding schools located elsewhere in the country, away from their families. The closest boarding schools were the Adventist Agricultural-Industrial Academy in Amazonas and Northeast Brazil Junior College in Pernambuco. It was a period when Adventist boarding schools were growing and gaining distinction in education. Taking into account the distance and the effort of parents, UNB decided to establish a school in the state of Pará to offer Adventist families an education of quality and sound Christian principles that could also reach students and families who had not yet heard the Adventist message!<sup>10</sup>

In the early 1970s, UNB leadership sought the help of farmers and brothers Ervino and Lindolpho Gutzeit to find a place to build a boarding school in Pará. The Gutzeit brothers search for an appropriate location along the Trans-Amazon highway began in 1973. When they reached the stretch between the municipalities of Altamira and Rurópolis near a large sugar mill, they found an area of purple soil (a very fertile type of soil) with the potential to host the academy. They then sold their properties on the Belém-Brasília highway and bought some allotments in that new location. They hoped that, upon moving, they would find a suitable place within that large area for the construction of the new school.<sup>11</sup>

## School Founding

In the mid-1970s, the UNB leaders and Belém Adventist Hospital (Hospital Adventista de Belém or HAB) leaders gathered in Rurópolis to consider the establishment of the new boarding school. The group had found a piece of land in the rural area of the municipality of Uruará on the Trans-Amazonian Highway at kilometer 150. This place fit into the profile of the places sought by the Adventist Church for the construction of boarding schools. At the time, the National Institute of Colonization and Agrarian Reform (Instituto Nacional de Colonização e Reforma Agrária or INCRA) of Brazil was expropriating some land in the rural area of Uruará for colonization and giving away 500 hectares of land to interested parties precisely in the purple soil region that was found by the Gutzeit brothers to host the new boarding school. Without hesitation, the leadership of the Lower Amazonas Mission requested six allotments of land, and 2,807 hectares were given for the construction of the new school in that place.<sup>12</sup>

On July 5, 1977, in Brasília, the UNB received the documentation that gave them the right to occupy the land<sup>13</sup> As soon as the area was registered, that is, when the property became legally owned by the Church, the Gutzeit brothers began the construction of the school's first facilities. To do so, they used their own machines, provided the wood for the construction of the first buildings, and even paid for the employees' labor. Ervino and Lindolpho also donated around US\$ 267.53 to help the school's project, the amount that was the academy's initial funds. Some of the future students also helped with the construction, and people who lived nearby were also able to help through donations.<sup>14</sup>

The first facilities were built in 1977. Among them there were dormitories, classrooms, teachers' homes, and a cafeteria. To start the agricultural work, an area of 100 hectares was set aside where four sheds of 27 meters long and eight meters wide were built to be used in the process of planting and cultivating the soil. Rice, cassava, beans, and vegetables were the first crops.<sup>15</sup> Since the beginning of its history, IATAI's mission has always been in accordance with the mission of the Seventh-day Adventists: To take Christ's message to the whole world. Thus, the new boarding school was prepared to house its students from wherever they came to live a healthy lifestyle.<sup>16</sup>

On April 18, 1978, classes started although some buildings were still under construction.<sup>17</sup> Initially, the academy offered only the 5th and 6th grades in elementary school. The teaching staff consisted of three teachers. There were 60 students, 24 girls and 31 boys in the boarding school, and five students in the day school.<sup>18</sup> Students at the college paid for their studies and boarding through their labor in the school, and the work schedule was organized according to the number of hours that the student could work. These students were mostly children of settlers and farmers of the region. Teacher Elza Gutzeit, Ervino and Lindolpho's mother, taught for the first two years of the school's existence and was the conductor of the school's first choir.<sup>19</sup>

Shortly after the school's inauguration, Pastor Joel Fernandes and his family were called to serve in the academy. Fernandes became the school's first director, and he taught History, Geography, and Religion as well as serving as a dean and leader of all the work. His wife Juraci taught Mathematics, Health, and Science and acted as dean, head of work, and nurse. The couple's daughter, Ione Fernandes, after finishing her Education degree in Brazil College (presently the Brazil Adventist University – Centro Universitário Adventist de São Paulo or UNASP-SP), went to teach in IATAI. In 1978, she taught Portuguese Language classes and worked as the school's assistant dean and treasurer.<sup>20</sup>

## History of the School

The late 1970s and early 1980s were marked by many important events in the Academy. In 1979, the school already had its own sawmill set up. Due to the increase of services involving harvesting, the sawmill, and other activities, another couple was called to work at the institution: Dorival Pércio took over the management of the sawmill, and his wife Santana was responsible for the kitchen administration. In addition, three new teachers were called to the school's faculty and an employee was hired to be the head of the farm.<sup>21</sup> In the same year, the first Elementary School class graduation took place.<sup>22</sup> A year later (1980), the academy had approximately 200 students in the boarding school, and 50 of those got to know the Adventist message in the boarding school and were baptized there, influenced by the message and the Christian environment.<sup>23</sup>

Recalling the first steps of the academy's economic development event that happened in 1980 deserves mentioning. That year, IATAI administration purchased a Ford diesel truck and an atafona (a mill to grind grains put into motion by animals) to manufacture cassava flour and starch. The purchase was made possible thanks to resources from a collective donation from UNB, MBA, and the Golden Cross Company. Also, at that time, an American family donated a tractor to the institution. With the purchase of the atafona, a flour factory was created which produced around 500kg of the product a day. The year 1980 was remarkable as the harvest was so good that it was even possible to sell part of the production.<sup>24</sup>

In December 1981, the possibility of building more facilities at IATAI was discussed. On that occasion, the administrators contacted the Canadian International Development Agency that sent a group to IATAI to approve the elaboration of the pilot plan in March 1982. On June 10 of that same year, the preliminary project was already analyzed and adjusted. About three months later, some Adventist leaders in the region went to Toronto, Canada, to work out the final details of the project. On November 23 of the same year, a complete presentation of the project was made to the South American Division board members. At the time, the school had 232 enrolled students, and the plan was that the new facilities would enable 800 students to be enrolled, 520 of those being boarding students. The area to be built measured 16,942 m<sup>2</sup>.<sup>25</sup>

By then, IATAI had 12 houses for teachers and employees, a female dormitory, a cafeteria and a kitchen, the school building, a chapel, an administrative building (brickwork), a boiler, and a sawmill in addition to two large electric power generators. In the farm there was a small aviary to produce eggs, boxes of bees, and about 300 milk cattle. The school also had 40,000 cocoa trees, 500 mango trees, plants for the future production of natural juices, and almost 2,000 citrus trees. It also had papaya, guava, passion fruit, and star fruit trees. Vegetables, cereals, roots, and tubers were also grown at the institution.<sup>26</sup>

In 1984, the first agriculture and cattle raising class (high school level) graduated. At the time, the school offered elementary school and the technical course of Agriculture and cattle raising integrated into High School and had two agronomy specialists who gave support to the course and helped with rice, beans, cassava, corn, banana, papaya, and cocoa crops. In the following year, seven years after its inauguration, IATAI had 200 students in the boarding school, the maximum number of students the dormitories could accommodate, 14 teachers, and five employees.<sup>27</sup> In the 1980s, or 1987 to be more precise, the mid-year vacation had to be extended becoming a memorable time in the institutions' history. What happened was that with the torrential rain period in the region, the students' mobility was not viable. Therefore, in that particular year, the first semester started on January 19 and ended on May 29, and the second one occurred between August third and November 15, ending with graduation.<sup>28</sup>

With the winds blowing in its favor, in 1995, IATAI had already 387 students and a total of 19 teachers. Of these, six were certified and the other 13 were in the process of qualification. In addition, thanks to the school's evangelistic

workforce and divine blessings, 54 students were baptized that year. The campus structure was already more developed and had a carpentry, pottery, vehicles for transportation, garden, two dormitories of 5,100 m<sup>2</sup> with 30 rooms each, three bathrooms, two study rooms, guest apartments, a chapel with a capacity for 200 people, a prayer room, and other facilities. The financial resources for the restructuring of the boarding school came from individual donations and from entities such as the Adventist Development and Relief Agency of Sweden, the HAB, and the Golden Cross.<sup>29</sup>

There were some important events and administrative changes that could not be left out of the academy's history, and so it is mentioned for those who wish to learn more about its journey. In 2002, with the creation of the South Pará Mission (presently the South Pará Conference), the Academy began to be assisted by this mission field<sup>30</sup> In 2008, a new Adventist Church administrative unit was established in Pará: The West Pará Mission (Missão Oeste do Pará or MOPa). As it is in the territory assisted by the new Mission, IATAI started to be managed by MOPa.<sup>31</sup>

Since its foundation, the boarding school has been the place of numerous UNB events. In 2010 for example, between December 9 and 13, the boarding school hosted the first MOPa council of pastors and church elders, an event attended by approximately 300 people.<sup>32</sup> In the following year (2011), the school hosted a camp meeting that brought together an approximate number of 5,000 people on September 9 and 10. The then-mayor of Uruará was present at the event, and he praised the social projects developed by the SDA Church, especially in the areas of health and education.<sup>33</sup> Later, between June 13 and 15, 2014, the MOPa leadership held the first Adolecamp (educational, spiritual, and recreational programs for teenagers camp) in IATAI, and it was attended by approximately 900 participants.<sup>34</sup>

After many struggles and challenges, in 2015, the number of enrollments at IATAI increased by 17 percent compared to 2014, registering 328 new students enrolled. The achievement was considered a result of hard work from all the Academy's employees and God's mercies. Moreover, on September 28, 2015, the foundation stone of IATAI's temple was laid in a ceremony attended by administrators, pastors, students, and employees.<sup>35</sup>

Since the 1980s, always pursuing academic excellence and being a good influence in the formation of good citizens, the Agro-Industrial Adventist Trans-Amazon Academy began its activities by offering Elementary School and technical courses in Teaching and Agriculture and cattle raising, integrated into high school. With the closure of the technical courses around 1995, the High School was established following the Brazilian Ministry of Education standards.<sup>36</sup> Currently, in addition to offering basic education, IATAI is also a distance learning center (EaD) for Brazil Adventist University (UNASP). In this center, Higher Education courses and specializations *lato sensu* are offered.<sup>37</sup>

## Historical Role of the School

IATAI is recognized in the city where it is located not only for its infrastructure, but for its education and message and for the social and recreational activities it offers. This is an academy that seeks to promote a healthy lifestyle, which allows its students to grow in self-control and assimilate values of discipline, respect, responsibility, integrity, friendship, kindness, patience, and faith in God. Thus, the institution promotes the Seventh-day Adventist principles not only on a local level, but on a regional level. Since its inauguration, IATAI has become relevant to the Adventist Church in north of Brazil and in Pará, benefiting mainly the inhabitants of the region through its education of quality and social projects to the community in the west of the state located along the Trans-Amazonian Highway.<sup>38</sup>

In 2019, the Academy joined in a partnership with the Technical Assistance and Rural Extension Company of the State of Pará (Empresa de Assistência Técnica e Extensão Rural do Estado de Minas Gerais or EMATER) and the Pará Research Support and Development Foundation (Fundação de Amparo e Desenvolvimento da Pesquisa or FADESP) with the goal being to qualify and improve production among family farmers in the region. A 180-hour course was organized, covering topics such as soil treatment, fertilization, acidity correction, and nutrient levels with a certificate issued by FADESP. IATAI played an important role in this partnership by investing in the production of cocoa in its lands, which gives the specialists the perfect scenario for the explanation of theoretical and practical contents.<sup>39</sup>

The state of Pará is currently the largest cocoa producer in Brazil and has invested heavily in the job of assisting farmers for the maintenance of this important status. IATAI's leadership is aware of this and participates in this process directly and indirectly, collaborating with the production and growth in the region and the country's economy. It is a partnership initiative that has benefited family farming and made sure that the demands of the state are met not only in products, but also in qualified workforce for small- and large-scale production.<sup>40</sup>

Another important role of the academy that directly impacts the community and the region where it is located is the involvement in social actions linked to the Adventist Church annual calendar and promoted by the school itself. The school and its students promote campaigns of food gathering and distribute basic food baskets to the needy community and participate in the Hope Impact Project<sup>41</sup> of the South American Division. During this movement, missionary books are also distributed free of charge in the regions surrounding the academy. This initiative is a way of taking the word of God to the community as a strong ally to spiritually impact the region where it is developed.<sup>42</sup> The academy's actions are recognized by local authorities mainly in social and humanitarian projects.<sup>43</sup>

In addition to the Adventist youth, others may have access to the education offered at the institution and thus get to know the Advent message. During the school's history, many have made the decision to serve Jesus and have confirmed it through baptism.<sup>44</sup> The school's evangelistic legacy is always remembered during celebrations of the

Academy's history. In 2008, when IATAI celebrated its 30th anniversary, a week of prayer was held with the theme "Who Will I go to?" whose speaker was Pastor Aquino Gonçalves, a former student of the academy. At the end of this celebration, 15 people were baptized including students and employees.<sup>45</sup>

## What Remains to Be Done to Fulfill the School Mission

As an Adventist institution, IATAI remained focused on its mission to promote the holistic development of all its students within the sphere of the Christian educational process. In other words, the school intends to develop the physical, emotional, social, intellectual, and spiritual faculties of each student. Considering the school's journey, it is possible to see that this mission has been successfully accomplished so far. However, the academy's leadership recognizes that there is always room for improvement in methods as well as improvement of structure and training of employees. Thus, to better prepare students through an education of quality, IATAI has invested in training teachers and improving working conditions, all because at school the purpose is to continue to lead people to Christ. Leaders and servers believe that as they work towards that goal, God will continue to bless the institution and its students.<sup>46</sup>

## List of Directors<sup>47</sup>

Agro-Industrial Adventist Trans-Amazon Academy (1978-present)

Joel Fernandes (1978); Benedito Alves (1979-1983); Orlando Ferreira (1984-1986); Sálon Costa (1987); Manoel Ribeiro (1988-1989); Daniel Castro (1989); Esteban Gusman (1989); Waldemar Lauer (1990-1997); Paulo Penedo (1998); Edinelson Storch (1999); Josué Martins (2000-2003); Kleber Ubirajara Ramos Coelho (2004-2006); Rozivaldo Pacheco Neto (2007-2010); Antônio Edson da Silva Carvalho (2011-2012); Genilson Gomes de Moura (2013-2017); Vicente Luiz Tavares de Freitas (2017-2018); Enoque Gutzeit (2019-present).<sup>48</sup>

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  43. "Campal no IATAI" ["IATAI Camp Meeting"], *Revista Adventista* 106, no. 1242 (November 2011): 32.?
  44. Josafá da Silva Oliveira (FAAMA's Ellen G. White Study Center Director), email message to Carlos Flavio Teixeira (ESDA associate editor), August 23, 2019.?
  45. "IATAI: 30 anos no coração da selva amazônica" ["IATAI: 30 years in the heart of the Amazon jungle"] *Revista Adventista* 103, no. 1202 (July 2008): 25.?
  46. Josafá da Silva Oliveira (FAAMA's Ellen G. White Study Center Director), email message to Carlos Flavio Teixeira (ESDA associate editor), August 23, 2019.?
  47. "Agro-Industrial Adventist Trans-Amazon Academy," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1988), 380; "Agro-Industrial Adventist Trans-Amazon Academy," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press

Publishing Association, 2018), 486. For a complete list of all IATAI administrative officers, consult the *SDA Yearbooks* from 1988 to 2018.?

48. More information about the IATAI can be consulted on their website at: [iatai.educacaoadventista.org.br/](http://iatai.educacaoadventista.org.br/) or on social networks including Facebook: @educacaoadventista.iatai, Twitter: @IATAI, Instagram: iatai\_edu, and YouTube: IATAI Oficial.?

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