



St. John's Seventh-Day Adventist Academy staff and students, early 1940s.

Photo courtesy of Trudy Morgan-Cole, from the

collection of Donald Morgan.

St. John's Seventh-Day Adventist Academy (Newfoundland)

TRUDY MORGAN-COLE

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St. John's Seventh-day Adventist Academy in Newfoundland was a coeducational day school situated in the city of St. John's, Newfoundland. It operated from 1905 to 2003.

Seventh-day Adventist education in Newfoundland began in 1905, 10 years after the arrival of the first Adventist missionaries in the colony. Mrs. Anna Pippy, the first Seventh-day Adventist convert in Newfoundland, opened an ungraded school in her home in collaboration with her sister, Elizabeth Milley, who had lost her teaching position in a school of another denomination after she had converted to Seventh-day Adventism.¹

Soon the school moved to the basement of the first Adventist church in St. John's on Cookstown Road, and in 1923 transferred to its final location on Freshwater Road. The school was altered and enlarged in 1931, 1938, 1944, and 1971.²

In 1931 it became an academy, which at that time in Newfoundland meant a school including all grades, 1-11. As Newfoundland Academy, the school came under government supervision and adopted the same curriculum taught in other institutions in what was then the Dominion of Newfoundland.³

Despite receiving funding and supervision from the government of Newfoundland, the Seventh-day Adventist school continued to operate its denominational program, teaching the Seventh-day Adventist Bible class curriculum and conducting extracurricular activities such as Weeks of Prayer and, at some points in its history, Pathfinder clubs. Such a practice was typical of the educational system in Newfoundland at the time, in which the government provided funding and set the curriculum, but various Christian churches ran the schools and school boards.

The unique arrangement enabled the Seventh-day Adventist church to operate schools not only in St. John's but across the island of Newfoundland without charging tuition fees, which attracted many non-Adventist students as well as the children of Seventh-day Adventist church members. While some Seventh-day Adventist members and teachers, particularly those from outside Newfoundland, found the system hard to reconcile with the traditional Adventist position on the separation of church and state, many felt that it gave the church a unique opportunity to influence the community in ways that a purely private school would not have permitted.

In 1965 board purchased land and built a new school for grades 3-6. A later addition made it possible to house kindergarten to grade 6, making room in the original academy building for an more extensive high school program. When the Newfoundland high school curriculum expanded to include grade 12 in 1984, the St. John's Adventist Academy also added Grade 12. At the peak of its operation in the 1990s, approximately 150 students attended the combined elementary and high school.⁴

In 1997 the Newfoundland government decided, in response to a referendum vote, to restructure the K-12 educational system and remove the churches from operating schools. Although the referendum narrowly passed, a strong feeling existed within the broader population that a truly public school system would operate more efficiently and minimize some of the duplication of services found in the denominational system.⁵ Some Seventh-day Adventists actively campaigned against the change, realizing that the likely outcome would be the loss of Adventist schooling, which by this time had spread beyond St. John's to include several smaller Adventist schools across the island. However, others felt that this would give the church an opportunity to open a truly

private, entirely church-run and church-supported school system more in keeping with Adventist education in the rest of North America.

With the withdrawal of government funding, all Seventh-day Adventist schools in Newfoundland ceased at the end of the 1996-1997 school year, except for the St. John's Academy. The Academy remained open for six more years, operating as a K-12 private school with a much smaller student body in the former elementary school building.⁶

Due to the high cost of running a tuition-based school, the constituent churches in St. John's and Conception Bay South voted to close the school in 2003, bringing to an end nearly 100 years of Adventist education in Newfoundland.⁷

Principals: John G. Combden, 1931-1936; George Russell, 1936-1937; John G. Combden, 1937-1941; Mrs. Hazel Avery Janes, 1941-1946; Martin Bordsen, 1946-1947; Alex Garland, 1947-1949; Emerson Hillock, 1949-1959; Floyd Penstock, 1959-1965; George Schafer, 1965-1972; Maynard Yearly, 1972-1974; Alex Garland, 1974-1980; Jahnn Reise, 1980-1987; Donald Hodder, 1987-1990; Ian Cheeseman, 1990-1993; Donald Hodder, 1993-1997; Marilyn Kelloway, 1997-1999; Kevin Honey, 1999-2001; Marilyn Kelloway, 2001-2003.⁸

SOURCES

Higgins, Jenny. "The Collapse of Denominational Education." *Heritage Newfoundland and Labrador*. Accessed April 1, 2020. <https://www.heritage.nf.ca/articles/society/collapse-denominational-education.php>

St. John's Seventh-day Adventist Academy (Newfoundland)." In *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*. Second rev. ed. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1996.

NOTES

1. "St. John's Seventh-day Adventist Academy (Newfoundland). *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*. Second rev. ed. (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1996).
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Jenny Higgins, "The Collapse of Denominational Education," *Heritage Newfoundland and Labrador*, accessed April 1, 2020, <https://www.heritage.nf.ca/articles/society/collapse-denominational-education.php>.

6. Donald Hodder, interview by the author, February 10, 2019.

7. Ibid.

8. "St. John's Seventh-day Adventist Academy," and Hodder interview by the author, February 10, 2019.

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