

Ball, Dexter A.

(1850–1906)

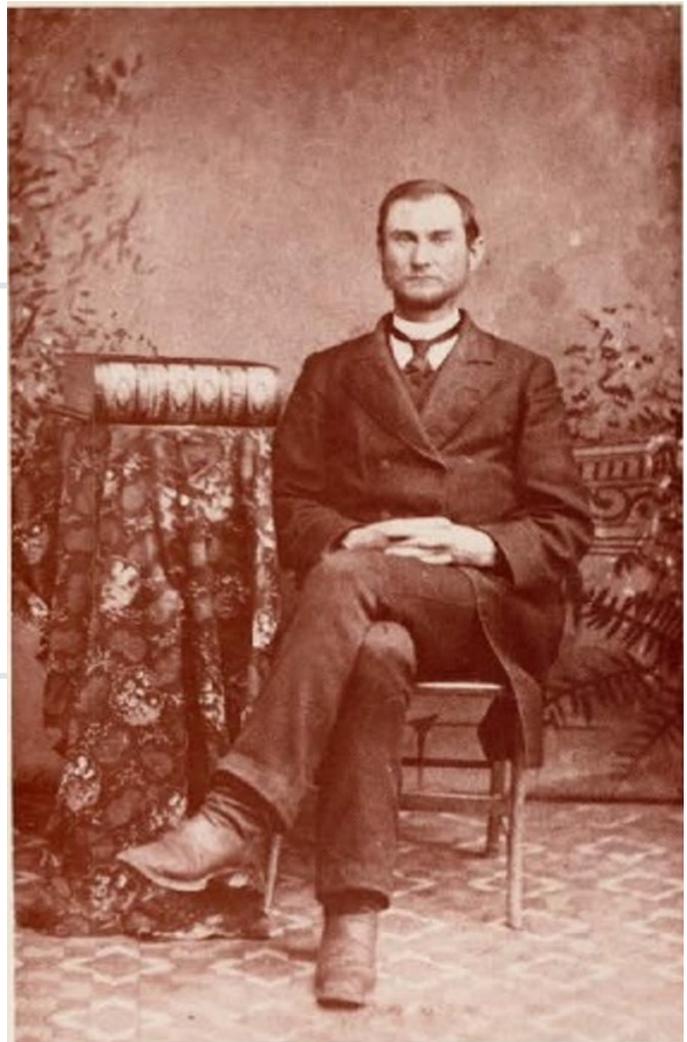
GLENN O. PHILLIPS

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."

Dexter A. Ball was a pioneering Seventh-day Adventist missionary who was sent to the eastern Caribbean by the Foreign Mission Board on recommendation of the International Tract Society in late 1890. He was the first Adventist minister to officially visit the Lesser Antilles. Elder Ball conducted the first evangelistic meetings, baptized the first converts, and formally established the first Seventh-day Adventist congregations within this region until illness forced him to leave in 1892. Prior to and after his term in the eastern Caribbean, Ball pastored and established churches in southern New York state and across Pennsylvania, becoming a very effective evangelist serving his church for more than 35 years.¹

He was born March 19, 1850, the seventh of 13 children, in Cattaraugus County, southwestern New York state to what his biographer declared were "poor parents." His father was from rural Vermont and emigrated as early as 1826 to Cattaraugus County where he cleared a large area of land and created a farm. From an early age, Dexter worked on the farm as well as on a nearby farm to help support his large family. He only attended formal school in the winters but studied on his own and enjoyed reading.²

In the summer of 1873, while working on a farm near Sugartown, New York, Ball joined the Baptist Church and began witnessing and preaching his new faith. Just over a year later he encountered Seventh-day Adventist



Dexter A. Ball

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

literature and immediately accepted the Adventist faith and quickly became involved in the colporteur ministry, as well as starting to hold evangelistic meetings.³ His evangelistic campaigns were conducted in southern New York and Pennsylvania, and resulted in the formation of a number of churches. Ball married Martha Clark in 1876, who at the time taught church school at Roulette, Pennsylvania. To this union a daughter was born who later became the wife of Elder R. F. Cottrell.

Ball's early ministry was under the sponsorship of the Pennsylvania Conference and was very successful for more than a decade. In March 1889, he conducted a very successful evangelistic crusade in Shonga, Allegheny County, New York, that he wrote about in the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*.⁴ Soon afterwards he received a call from the Foreign Mission Board to be a pioneering minister in the eastern Caribbean.

Ball and successful pioneering colporteur William Arnold left together for the Caribbean in late 1890, stopping at most of the ports on the way from St. Thomas in the Danish West Indies to Grenada in the British West Indies.⁵ In response to the numerous invitations the church leaders received from many interested persons in Barbados, Ball immediately conducted his first evangelistic effort in Bridgetown, Barbados, in late November 1890, at the Good Templar's Lodge Room on Green Park Lane.

Attendance at the meetings was very encouraging and included many of the leading merchants operating businesses in the British colony's major seaport and capital. Ball wrote back to the leaders at Battle Creek, Michigan, about those attending the meetings in January 1891.⁶ He said he anticipated that most of them would be among the first converts in the colony. However, some of the clergy from the colony's established churches began to openly ridicule Adventist teachings, labeling Adventism as a cult and not a denomination. While many remained and were baptized, the earlier wide-spread enthusiasm for the Adventist message abated.

On September 21, 1891, Ball baptized 17 converts and officially organized the first Adventist congregation that included nearly 100 attendees. Elder Ball baptized another group of believers in St. John's, Antigua, and continued to preach to congregations around the British Caribbean. He remained in the eastern Caribbean, preaching to interested groups in other islands and selling Adventist literature until illness forced him to return home in the spring of 1892.⁷

On his return to the United States, he slowly regained his health and began to reestablish his evangelistic work as pastor for the New York Conference. His wife, Martha, died in early 1901, and the following year he married Hattie M. Buckland of Newfane, New York, who, as his first wife had, also contributed to his many pastoral duties. He continued his ministry until December 1905 when he became ill. He died February 12, 1906, at Lockport, New York. He was buried in his family's burial ground the following day after the funeral at Eddyville, New York.⁸

SOURCES

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NOTES

1. S. H. Lane, "Death of Elder Dexter A. Ball," *ARH*, March 8, 1906, 19.
2. Ibid.
3. *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, second revised edition, (1996), s.v. "Dexter A. Ball."
4. D. A. Ball, "Shonga, Allegheny County, New York," *ARH*, March 19, 1889, 10.
5. George F. Enoch, *The Advent Message in the Sunny Caribbean* (Port-of-Spain, Trinidad: The Watchman Press, 1907), 8.
6. Wesley Amundsen, *The Advent Message in Inter-America* (Washington D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1947), 86.
7. Glenn O. Phillips, *Seventh-day Adventists in Barbados: Over a Century of Adventism 1884-1991* (Bridgetown, Barbados: Caribbean Graphics and Letchworth Ltd.), 11-15.
8. Ibid.

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