

# Bequia Seventh-day Adventist Secondary School

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DERMOTH BAPTISTE

Dermoth Baptiste

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## Early School Beginnings

The Bequia Seventh-day Adventist Secondary School has been a fixture in the Grenadine Island of Bequia, a three-square mile island in area, which forms part of the state of St. Vincent and the Grenadines and has a population of just over 4,000. The school started approximately 43 years after the Advent message first came to Bequia and two years after the embracing of Adventist education with the establishment of the primary Bequia Adventist School.

There was some contention concerning the actual start date of the secondary school. However, evidence states that the primary Bequia Adventist School was established in 1952.<sup>1</sup> The Bequia Seventh-day Adventist Secondary School began sometime around 1956.<sup>2</sup> The Adventist church is credited with introducing secondary school education on the island of Bequia. The first enrollment comprised seven students under Principal John R. Hill and begun operation in the existing church building at that time.<sup>3</sup>

## Construction of the School

The commencement of this educational institution was heartily embraced by the resident pastor of the St. Vincent and the Grenadines district, Aaron R. Hitlal, and welcomed by the Bequia community at large.<sup>4</sup> Most of the indigenous population, though ambitious, was poor and could not afford the expenses of educating their children on the mainland of St. Vincent nor send them to Barbados or Trinidad.

Mr. Cecil McIntosh, an estate proprietor and ranking elder of the Bequia Seventh-day Adventist Church, generously donated the necessary land, money, and materials for the construction of the first school building.<sup>5</sup> It was a 36'x24' structure with six-foot-high red brick walls with open space to the corrugated roof. The rafters were made from cinnamon trees grown on his estate. The building was nicknamed the "cow-shed."<sup>6</sup>

By 1967, the "cow-shed" was bulging at its corners with both elementary and secondary school students. Pastor George Riley, who administered the ministerial work in St. Vincent and the Grenadines at that time, supervised

the construction of a 60'x26' building near the first school building. The new building became the secondary school building. With only chalkboards to separate some of the classes, it was obvious from the start that this one-story open building was inadequate to operate a school, but necessity trumped reality.

## Growth of the School

Over the years, enrollment mushroomed. The peak enrollment of 187 students happened in the school year of 1972-1973 under Principal Westwick Williams. In that same year, a record number of 142 students took the entrance qualifying examination for admission to secondary school. Of these, only 58 could have been accommodated. A staggering 84 young people had to be turned away. The South Caribbean Conference was informed of the developing situation but could not afford any financial backing for much needed expansion to the building. Around that time an Anglican priest opened a second secondary school on the island, thus ending the 22 years of Adventist monopoly in secondary education on Bequia.<sup>7</sup>

Pastor Orville Sutton and Principal Dolwin Anderson motivated the church members to begin another building expansion. This time, it was to extend the existing building by another 80 feet. By 1981, the ground floor was completed. However, with a change of personnel in the school and church, it took another two years and the help of representatives of Maranatha Flights International (later Maranatha Volunteers International) to partly complete the upper floor.<sup>8</sup> This resulted in a two-story 26'x140' building. The new facilities provided space for six classrooms, a library, a laboratory, a home economics center, an industrial arts room, a staff room, and toilets with running water.

In 1984, Principal Morrie Hercules submitted a proposal to the government and secured all the materials needed to change the roof, providing a new ceiling and securing greater comfort for students and staff. Wendell Ollivierre, the local elder of the Adventist church and building contractor by profession, led the construction to completion in 1987. The East Caribbean Conference and the Caribbean Union Conference provided the needed financial backing for the construction. After the roof was changed by local workers, Maranatha Flight International returned to Bequia and completed the ceiling of the building.<sup>9</sup>

## Current Developments

Over the years, with better qualified local teachers, the curriculum evolved to better prepare students for “time and eternity.” The school curriculum focuses on business classes, and plans are on the way to broaden the curriculum to include sciences. The staff of nine is committed to the values of the Adventist philosophy of education. In 2020, the school achieved its best results in the Caribbean Examination Council’s External exams, achieving 94 percent overall passes and ranking third among the 26 secondary schools in the country!<sup>10</sup>

The school has its own corporate identity comprised of its mission, vision, values, and school song. It was first accredited by the Inter-American Division Accreditation Council in 1976 and has remained active ever since, contributing to the growth of the church in Bequia and the development of the local community.

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## SOURCES

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Kotter, Bonnie. "You, Too, Are a People Branch." *Lake Union Herald*, December 6, 1983.

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*Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*. Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1955; Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2021.

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## NOTES

1. "Bequia Seventh-day Adventist School," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1955), 198.
2. "Bequia Seventh-day Adventist Secondary School," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2021), 539.
3. Morrie Hercules, interview by Dermoth Baptiste, Kingstown, St. Vincent, March 13, 2021.
4. "Ordinations in Trinidad," *Inter-American Messenger*, February 1969, 10.
5. Roy L. Hoyte, "School Enrollment Up," *Inter-American News Flashes*, December 12, 1978, 1.
6. Cecil McIntosh, interview by Morrie Hercules, Port Elizabeth, Bequia, October 27, 2004.
7. Anita Ollivierre, interview by Paula Hercules, Port Elizabeth, Bequia, February 27, 2020.
8. Bonnie Kotter, "You, Too, Are a People Branch," *Lake Union Herald*, December 6, 1983, 2.
9. Mark Haynal, "From Cicero to Bequia," *Lake Union Herald*, March 27, 1984, 10-11.; and Morrie Hercules, interview by Dermoth Baptiste, Kingstown, St. Vincent, May 19, 2019.

10. Dermoth Baptiste, personal knowledge from being president and education director of the St. Vincent and the Grenadines Mission of Seventh-day Adventists from 2012-2021.

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