

Bates Memorial High School

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Bates Memorial High School, named in honor of Adventist pioneer Joseph Bates, is a coeducational day school on the senior high school level, operated at Sangre Grande, Trinidad, West Indies. In 2020, the school had 17 personnel and staff and 111 students.¹

Vision and Mission

The school's vision is to maintain its status as a customer-friendly school and to continuously market itself so that it can always be seen as a supplier of quality education—a school that is flexible to an ever-changing society.

The school's mission is to be a Seventh-day Adventist institution that exists for the purpose of providing quality education that will help students realize their fullest potential spiritually, socially, mentally and physically. Its ultimate goal is the preparation of students for effective service in their community and to God, and the reward of citizenship in the earth made new.²

Events Which Led to the Founding of the School

In the 1930s, the Sangre Grande Seventh-day Adventist church acquired a parcel of land, located near the corner of Ojoe Road and Adventist Street, on which to construct a church building.³ At around the end of World War II, members of the Sangre Grande church decided that they wanted a school for their children. A little church school was established in 1945. The pastor of the church at the time was John Roberts. The school served both secondary and primary children with classes held in the Sangre Grande church. Desks and blackboards were moved every Friday afternoon to make accommodation for the church pews and put back on Mondays.

Founding of the School

The Sangre Grande Intermediate School was established in January 1948 with an enrollment of fourteen students taught by J. R. Hill and M. McKenzie. Meeting in a building constructed in 1947 at the back of the church, because its growth was slow, it was not until October 1952 that the secondary section was separated from the elementary grades and named Bates Memorial High School.⁴

In October 1952, the primary section of the school attained the status of a government-assisted school and became known as the Sangre Grande Seventh-day Adventist Primary School. Under this arrangement, Elias Toussaint assumed principalship of the primary school, which now enrolled seventy-five pupils. Two government-paid teachers, Harold Premdass and Marjorie Sealey assisted him.⁵ At this time the secondary grades became Bates Memorial High School.

At first the school was operated under the control of the local church, with the assistance of the conference. However, in March 1962, when its enrollment had reached 100, it came under direct conference control.

Evangelism at the School: Week Of Prayer

Students' spiritual growth was an important goal for the school from the very beginning. The first principal of the school, A. C. W. Haynes, published an account of devotional exercises at the school in 1953, which defined its unique philosophy:

We have just concluded such an inspiring High School Week of Prayer that I have felt deeply impressed to share the experience with the field. Indeed, God met with us during the special week just ended and now that as teachers and students we have returned to our regular round of activities, we have done so with the deepest convictions that all we teach and learn in the course of our daily programme must be evaluated in terms of eternity. Never before in my teaching experience have I seen such a heartening response during a Week of Prayer. We conducted three sessions a day.

I am sure that readers of the *Gleanings* would also be glad to learn that our enrolment for this year is the highest ever. We now have 80 pupils on roll. Before this article reaches you, three of them will have followed their Lord in the rite of baptism.⁶

Institutional Development

Meanwhile, the Sangre Grande church built a new church building on Upper Ojoe Road and moved there in 1966, leaving the original facility to the Sangre Grande school. The Sangre Grande Adventist Primary School population grew rapidly, and by the 1970s the enrollment had reached an all-time high of four hundred pupils. Some students had to be housed in the newly built Adventist church on Upper Ojoe Road. Therefore, construction began on a new school building at Upper Ojoe Road next to the new Adventist church.

In April 1974, with the new school building completed, the primary school was moved from the Adventist Street building to the present Sangre Grande Seventh-day Adventist School. This move made way for Bates Memorial High School to return to the Adventist Street location in the same month. Willie Joseph was the principal of Bates at that time.⁷

In 1992, Bates Memorial High School was accredited for three years by the Inter-American Division Commission on Accreditation and the General Conference Board of Regents.⁸ During the 1992-1993 academic year, the school had a staff of thirteen and an enrollment of 268 students. Instruction was offered in five-year secondary courses in preparation for the Caribbean Examination Council and approved by the Trinidad and Tobago government.

Between 1975 and 1981, the local Sangre Grande church board and the South Caribbean Conference developed a “bold plan” for the expansion of Bates Memorial High School to include vocational training.⁹ The local church decided to purchase the Ulrich Estate and paid down \$100,000. Without consulting the church, the South Caribbean Conference decided to purchase a massive 300-acre plot of land in the Fishing Pond area. As the local church was not consulted in this decision, church members, who had made significant personal sacrifices to raise the money for the down payment, were devastated. In addition, lay members were concerned about access to the Fishing Pond Estate. They also pointed out that the Ulrich Estate already included a structurally sound building that could be renovated for the school. With significant tension between the church board and the administration of the South Caribbean Conference, the plan to expand the school’s program with vocational and agricultural training was tabled.¹⁰

In 2005, the school finally relocated from Adventist Street to Foster Road, where it remained until 2011. One Adventist philanthropist, Zeta Lewis and her company, Eastern Emergency Response Services, made enormous sacrifices during that period, paying the monthly rent of \$30,000. Her noble contribution went even further. She played a major role in improving the school’s facilities. In 2011, the arrival of Pastor Lyndon Lewis provided transformational leadership that mobilized the membership to accelerate and participate in the completion of the New Bates project.¹¹

Academic Excellence

In 2009, the school demonstrated its dominance in an Environmental Awareness Competition when it beat Mayaro Composite by a single point in the finals held at the Mayaro Resource Centre. *The Newsday*, a daily newspaper in Trinidad, gave a very appropriate title as they described Bates’ success: “Bates Memorial Repeats as Environmental Debate Champs.”¹²

List of Principals

A. C. W. Haynes (1952-1954); Oliver Hosten (1954-1956); Eric George (1956-1958); Leslie Carrington (acting, 1958-1960); Claude Pierce (1960-1961); Merille McKenzie (1961-1967); John Thompson (1967-1969); Carlos Duncan (acting, 1969); E. Bernard (1970-1971); Robert Melville (acting, 1971); Willie Joseph (1971-1980); Althea Cordner (1980-1984); Hamil Tobias (1984-1989); Aaron Smith (1989-2002); Pamela John (2002-2005); Catherine Walcott-Babalola (2005-present).

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NOTES

1. Luenda Moore, administrative assistant, Bates Memorial High School, telephone interview by author, July 14, 2020.
2. "About Us," Bates Memorial High School, 2020, accessed March 6, 2022, <https://www.batesmemorialhigh.com/about>.
3. Athalia Dyett and Malika Quacoo, *History of My School: The Bates Memorial High School* (2019).
4. Eric John Murray, *A History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Trinidad and Tobago, 1891-1981* (Port of Spain: The College Press, 1982), 87.
5. Dyett and Quacoo, 1-2.
6. A. C. W. Haynes, "Week of Prayer at Bates Memorial," *Caribbean Union Gleanings*, August 1953, 4-5.
7. Ibid., 2-3.
8. *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, sec. rev. ed. (1996), s.v. "Bates Memorial High School."
9. Eric John Murray, *A History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Trinidad and Tobago, 1891-1981* (Port of Spain: The College Press, 1982), 160.
10. Kenneth Horrell, telephone interview by author, June 29, 2020.

11. Luenda Moor and Zeta Lewis, telephone interview by author, July 17, 2020.

12. "Bates Memorial Repeats as Environmental Debate Champs," *Newsday*, November 2009.

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