

Tobago Mission

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Tobago Mission was organized in 2004. It is a part of Caribbean Union Conference in the Inter-American Division of Seventh-day Adventists.

Territory: The island of Tobago.

Statistics (June 30, 2020): Churches, 31; membership, 8,499; population, 57,498.¹

Origins of the Adventist Work in Tobago

On November 11, 1884, at the eighth annual session of the International Tract and Missionary Society Proceedings, president of the society, S. N. Haskell, mentioned the island of Tobago as one of the territories to which publications such as the *Life of Christ*, other pamphlets, *Signs*, and old periodicals had been distributed.²

Traveling from Battle Creek, Michigan, W. Arnold reported in August 1892 that upon his arrival at the island the previous April he had received 160 orders for books. The Moravians made up the largest congregation in the island at that time and it was to the Moravians that Arnold sold his books. Writing on July 10, he stated:

In regard to my work thus far, I can report 2,000 books delivered in 18 ½ months from the time I left Battle Creek, and a surplus of about five hundred and fifty orders besides. I had hoped to deliver that number by May 1, 1893, but I shall probably deliver 3,000 by that time.³

By 1900, two Jamaican canvassers were engaged in selling their publications in Tobago. They were reported to have sold 150 copies of *Coming King*.⁴

The following was reported in the 1900 *Adventist Review and Sabbath Herald*.

Tobago, eighteen miles east of Trinidad, and a dependency, is being canvassed by two of our native brethren from Jamaica. The Lord has so blessed their work that hundreds of dollars' worth of our books has been placed in the hands of the people. Fruit is being borne already, and soon a minister must go there to develop the interest."⁵

Development of this “interest” began in 1902 when William Porter and C. N. B. Dunmetz joined in the pioneering efforts of the literature evangelists across the island.⁶ They arrived at Pembroke Bay aboard the S. S. *Spare* on August 1, 1902. Their work was supported by John Titson Grandison, a local tailor, who immediately accepted the Sabbath message and began keeping services under his house in the village of Glamorgan. Grandison was also “the Ruler Consulate of the village of African Slaves and the man whom every one turned to when there were issues to be dealt with in the village.”⁷

Grandison, his family, and Plummy Reid continued the weekly services as Porter and Dunmetz travelled through the village distributing E. G. White’s *Christ our Saviour*.⁸

In 1903, two American missionary ministers, Luther Crowther and Warren George Kneeland, also pioneered and attempted to establish a strong Adventist presence on the island.⁹

Elders Kneeland and Crowther went to Tobago “to look over the work there and get it started.”¹⁰ They were accompanied by A. J. Haysmer,¹¹ a colporteur who made “significant progress” in the Greater Antilles¹² and in 1909 was made secretary of the department in the General Conference, which oversaw “the colored work.”¹³

Between 1903 and 1904, Kneeland who was superintendent of the field and vice-president of the East Caribbean Conference based in Port of Spain,¹⁴ worked in a ministerial capacity in Tobago where he was assisted by James Matthews, a Barbadian minister whom he brought to the island. In September 1903, four persons were baptized. Unfortunately, after a short while, both Kneeland and Crowther contracted malaria, and Crowther died on August 25th. Charles D. Adamson, a colporteur from Trinidad, continued the work thereafter.¹⁵

In early 1904, when Kneeland moved to Grenada, James Matthews was then assisted by T. L. M. Spencer both of whom were former African Methodist Episcopal ministers.¹⁶

In 1906, believers began regular meetings in the homes of T. L. M. Spencer at Bacolet and the Braes’ home, a Scottish Adventist family in Scarborough. This continued until churches were organized. Soon thereafter, in October 1906, a church was organized in Scarborough with eight members. By then, the brethren who met at the Braes’ secured property in Mount Grace and built a church there.¹⁷ The property was acquired in 1908, and the Mount Grace church became the first Seventh-day Adventist church to be built in Tobago.¹⁸

When the South Caribbean Conference was organized in 1906, Tobago became part of it. Barbadian T. L. M. Spencer, Antiguan J. J. Smith, and Trinidadian T. T. Ramsey¹⁹ were among the first ministers who worked in Tobago during these early years. In 1908, J. B. Beckner, an ordained minister, baptized six people while visiting. During this time, construction began on the church at The Whim.²⁰

J. J. Smith, who succeeded T. L. M. Spencer, consolidated the groups and made the Mount Grace church the home of both of the groups that met at Spencer’s and Braes’ homes. There were also quarterly gatherings that included believers from Glamorgan and Mount. St. George. This group of early believers included the first Sabbath-keeping Adventist in the island, Cecilia Taylor of Moriah, who accepted the message after reading *The*

Coming King, which she bought from a colporteur in 1902.²¹ Other brethren included Charlie Brathwaite, Samuel Henry, Leopold Johnson, Frederick and Laura Lewis, Bosie McLeod, Cyril Mills, and Durinda Wilson.²²

As work continued in Glamorgan, J. J. Smith held evangelistic meetings on the property of John Roberts, Sr., and believers continued to meet at the home of John Grandison who had four sons: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.²³ Two of his sons, who had Cocrico birds as pets, decided to sell their pets and use the proceeds to purchase cement to begin construction of the Glamorgan church.²⁴

Shortly thereafter, the Glamorgan church was organized with fifteen members on August 16, 1913.²⁵ Three years later, in January 1916, John Roberts, a teacher, started the Glamorgan church school with forty-five students.

The literature evangelism work also moved forward on the island. In 1914, E. J. Mortley, leader of the Glamorgan church, was successful with the sale of seventy copies of the *Watchman* (a paper printed by the conference in early 1900s) in one day.²⁶

During this era, ministers from Trinidad visited the islands and held evangelistic meetings. In 1920, W. S. Holbrook, minister and president of the South Caribbean Conference²⁷ held one week of meetings and baptized eight people at Glamorgan, then went on to Roxborough and held meetings, which approximately 200 persons attended. He moved on to Mount Grace, held one week of meetings, and baptized another eight people there. This was followed by two nights of meetings at Mason Hall, which 200 people attended.²⁸

Other contributors to the progression of early church work in Tobago from 1914 through the 1930s were L. Rashford, a Jamaican who made frequent visits to the churches in Tobago, and T. J. Warner from Antigua, who was reported as giving "outstanding service in building up the work of the Church in Tobago." By this time, the church membership had increased to 146 in Tobago and new churches were organized in Moriah and Roxborough.²⁹

Between the 1930s and 1940s, the work escalated. During the 1930s, the laymen at work in Tobago were engaged in several cottage meetings. Frederick Lewis of Mason Hall, Cyril Mills of Bagatelle, and Irenius George of Bagatelle conducted Bible studies with individual and families which yielded good results.³⁰

Special mention must be made of Joel Titus, who was physically challenged. Titus had lost one of his legs and the other was crippled. Yet, around 1933 Titus was a significant contributor to the Harvest Ingathering.³¹

In 1937, W. R. Elliott reported his meeting with the brethren at Mount Pleasant who had been worshipping under a mango tree:

The believers there are of good courage and a good spirit prevails among them. For two years the believers gathered regularly for Sabbath school and church service under a mango tree. I went down to see the tree and stood under its shade. They told me that during the two years the rain never once broke up their meeting...³²

By 1937, there were nine churches organized on the island with 450 members.³³ A year later the membership had grown to 517 under the leadership of T. J. Warner. Elder and Mrs. M. B. Butterfield were also involved in the work by holding evangelistic meetings.³⁴ In 1939, significant contributions to the work were made by Henry Wiseman, who died of a fever after being on the island for only nine months;³⁵ and George W. Riley, a 1941 graduate of the Caribbean Training College who pastored several of the island's churches for five years.³⁶ After Wiseman's death in March 1940,³⁷ John Roberts, a teacher turned pastor, also took up the work in Tobago.³⁸

The 1960s witnessed other local pioneers who worked in the central district on the island. Pioneers Fred Wilson, local carpenter and musician; Lillian McCloud, teacher; and James Carwood worked along with others to establish the Mary's Hill church in the 1960s.³⁹ After Hurricane Flora in 1963, Augustus Quashie, a lay preacher, and J. M. Solomon were active local missionaries, and with the cooperation of Aaron Wilson at Mary's Hill held meetings under his house. Twenty-two people were soon added to the membership. With the growing membership, Brother Zechariah, a member, donated a piece of land for the erection of the Mary's Hill church. By early 1967, the church membership was thirty-five with a Sabbath School membership of sixty. Soon after, Brothers Quashie, Gerald, Elder, and Baker witnessed in Signal Hill, baptized thirteen members, and set up a company there.⁴⁰

A few miles away in the village of Les Coteaux, missionary work was being conducted by Brothers Daniel Wright, John Smith, and Phillip Cato from Moriah, in a nearby village. They engaged the villagers in Bible studies, which resulted in the baptisms of Josephine Kennedy, Joseph Craig, and Vandora John. By March 1978, the Les Coteaux Church was organized.⁴¹

In 1964, there were eighteen churches with 1,300 members on the island,⁴² and one in every twenty-five persons was an Adventist. By 1970, one in every twelve persons in Tobago was a Seventh-day Adventist.⁴³ By 1971, there were thirty-four churches with 1,700 Adventists as reported by Walter Raymond Beach, the field secretary for the General Conference on his visit to Tobago in the same year.⁴⁴ By 2018, church membership increased to 8,239 with thirty-one churches.⁴⁵

The 1980s saw several successful evangelistic crusades, such as Hamilton Williams's Health Evangelistic campaign which added 192 members to the church in Tobago.⁴⁶ Many other evangelistic crusades were held by local elders, and regional and international evangelists such as Don Crowder, Roosevelt Daniels, Claudius Morgan, Earl Baldwin, and Clive Dottin, among others across the island. During the decades leading up to 2020, church growth was exponential. The congregation at the Bethel church increased such that a new church was formed in the nearby village of Carnbee in 2002 with sixty-one members. At the time writing, the membership of the Carnbee church stands at 202.

By 2010, the membership of churches in Tobago increased from 7,129 in 2004 to 7,751 in 2010. Further increases occurred over time as the numbers grew to 8,017 by 2017. In Tobago, there are more than 8,500

Seventh-day Adventists on the island. Three pastors played a significant role in spreading the Adventist mission work in Tobago: T. J. Warner, Lionel D. Brathwaite, and John Roberts.

Pastor T. J. Warner

Pastor T. J. Warner was ordained as a minister on November 18, 1922.⁴⁷ Having a heart for education, he encouraged young Tobagonians to obtain a Christian education at Caribbean Training College (now University of the Southern Caribbean). In 1930, his first evangelistic effort at Rockley Vale yielded fifty-two souls, who became members of the Mount Grace church. Later, they moved into a new church building on Bacolet Street in Scarborough.⁴⁸

Warner continued his great evangelistic work and in May 1932, as reported by the president of the South Caribbean Conference, C. E. Andross, fifty people joined the church. On June 26, 1932, a church was organized in Charlotteville. Warner intensified his work and went on to raise up a company of believers in Mount Pleasant which became organized into a church in December that same year.⁴⁹

Pastor Warner's efforts continued in Moriah, Roxborough, Parlatuvier, and Black Rock and he was successful in increasing the church membership. On November 19, 1933, the L'Anse Fourmi Church was organized.⁵⁰ In 1937, Pastor Warner attracted a record 1,000 people on the opening night of evangelistic meetings in Bethel. Many of the attendees walked long distances to attend the meetings.⁵¹

Lionel D. Brathwaite

Lionel D. Brathwaite was a colporteur, church school teacher, pastor, and publishing director. He was ordained to the gospel ministry in 1945 and served as pastor of Tobago until 1950. He also worked to develop the Advent message in several villages across the island. He was a "vigorous promoter" of Christian education and started church schools in Tobago, Grenada, and the Virgin Islands during the 1960s.⁵²

Brathwaite served as the only Adventist minister in Tobago for six years. Along with his wife, he established the work at Goodwood, Zion Hill, Speyside, Canaan, Plymouth, Mason Hall, and a school in Parlatuvier.⁵³

John Roberts

John Roberts of Glamorgan, the man after whom the John Roberts Memorial School in Tobago was named, was the first teacher of the school, assisted by two others when the school opened in 1916. When Roberts was called to the ministry, the school had to be closed for a while but was reopened sometime later.

John Roberts, the first Tobagonian to be ordained as a Seventh-day Adventist minister, was ordained on September 9, 1939. The ordination service, which was held at Scarborough, was the first of such services held in Tobago.⁵⁴ Roberts' evangelistic work contributed significantly to church growth, some of which was recorded in

the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*:

John Roberts has an average Sunday night attendance of approximately four hundred. He recently baptized seventeen/ persons, and has another large class in preparation for church membership.⁵⁵

Roberts served until 1963.

Church Organization

The following are dates of church dedications as listed by E. J. Murray⁵⁶ and other contributors: Charlotteville, June 26, 1932 (organized); Speyside, June 26, 1983 (rededicated); Scarborough, June 5, 1938 (organized); Roxborough, October 8, 1938 (organized), August 14, 1986 (dedicated); Louis D'or, 2011 (organized); Delaford, 1968 (dedicated); Glamorgan, October 9, 1938 (organized), November 26, 1975 (dedicated); Mt. Pleasant, September 10, 1939 (dedicated); Black Rock, September 5, 1941⁵⁷ (organized), April 28, 1984 (dedicated); Mary's Hill, July 6, 1980 (dedicated); Bethel, September 7, 1980 (dedicated); Mt. Grace, December 18, 2011 (dedicated); Mt St. George, 1949 (organized), December 22, 1985 (dedicated); Zion Hill, January, 1963 (organized); Goodwood, July 26, 1970 (dedicated); McKay Hill, March 7, 2004 (dedicated); Signal Hill, May 2, 1993 (dedicated); Good News, June 26, 2008 (organized); Lambeau, September 27, 2003 (organized); Plymouth, March 21, 1965⁵⁸ (dedicated); Carnbee, January 5, 2002 (organized); Bon Accord, November 30, 2003 (dedicated); Canaan, March 5, 1972 (dedicated); Mason Hall, June 24, 1990 (rededicated); Sandy River, January 21, 1996 (dedicated); Golden Lane, May 4, 2003 (dedicated); Les Couteaux. March 4, 1978 (organized), September 30, 1990 (dedicated); Moriah, October 14, 1979 (rededicated); Castara, November 11, 1985 (dedicated); Lanse Fourmi, November 19, 1933 (organized); Paraltuvier, November 21, 1971 (dedicated).

Education

Between 1938 and 1942, three Adventist primary schools opened on the island at Glamorgan, L'Anse Fourmi, and Scarborough. By the end of 1950, this number increased as schools were established in Moriah, Parlatuvier, and later on, Charlotteville. In 1952, however, L'Anse Fourmi had to close its doors.⁵⁹

The John Roberts Memorial School at Glamorgan was started by Roberts himself, who was a teacher at the time. He was assisted by Olga Robinson and Levi Darlington. However, in 1925 the school was closed when Roberts was called to do ministerial work. The closure was due to the lack of qualified teachers.⁶⁰ The school was re-opened in 1935. One of the first students in 1916 was Dalton Andrews, after whom the present music and conference rooms are named. At the time of the dedication in November 2011, Andrews was 99 years old.⁶¹

The Scarborough Seventh-day Adventist Primary School located at Rockley Vale, Scarborough, was formed in 1942. As of 2020, the school had sixteen staff members and carries an average of 260 students.⁶²

A. A. La Touche who started the Maracas Seventh-day Adventist Primary School at the Caribbean Training College Campus (now University of the Southern Caribbean) served at the Scarborough Seventh-day Adventist Primary School for some time⁶³

In 1952, Merrill McKenie, a graduate of Caribbean Training College (now University of the Southern Caribbean), opened the only Adventist high school in Tobago: Harmon High School. The new school with fifteen students had McKenzie as the only teacher and occupied the annex of the Scarborough church, which was situated on Bacolet Street at that time. By 1955, McKenzie had grown the staff to four. By 1958, the enrollment grew to over 100 students.⁶⁴ The first batch of students was successful at the Senior Cambridge School Certificate. This group included Gordon Baird, Ernest Wright, and Peter Archer, who became principal of the high school from 1978 to 1988.⁶⁵ Some of the early teachers were Victor Carr, Boysie Cornwall, Joseph Graham, Ivor Joseph, Nathaniel Moore, Hollibert Phillips, Auldith Wood, Mrs. Hilbert Brice, and Cynthia Hinds.⁶⁶

The year after Harmon High School started, the Charlotteville Seventh-day Adventist Primary School opened its doors on January 19, 1953. Forty students with their two teachers, Lloyd Gittens and Agatha Bowlin gathered in the auditorium of the Charlotteville church. The main capital investment, the desks, were all made by the church members.⁶⁷

By 1958, there were "5 thriving elementary church schools, training nearly 400 children."⁶⁸ This was also a time when young Tobagonians sailed to Trinidad to attend Caribbean Union College (now University of the Southern Caribbean). Percy W. Manuel reports the following in the 1938 publication of the *Advent Review & Sabbath Herald*:

At the present time the college has a number of students from the island. Four brothers and a sister from one family are earning all their expenses either in the colporteur work or by work furnished by the college. In December, 1955, one of these brothers, Nathan Moore, received a government certificate, showing high achievement in the government examinations. In 1957 Nathan won the temperance oratorical contest for the union and was sent as a delegate to the Inter-American Youth's Congress held in Cuba. There he was also the winner for the division, and received a scholarship at Caribbean Union College for 1958.⁶⁹

In September 1981, the merging of Scarborough and Mason Hall schools at Scarborough took place. In that same year, the planning of a woodwork industry for Harmon High School began.⁷⁰

The work in education progressed as the University of the Southern Caribbean established an extension campus on the premises of the Harmon High School at Rockley Vale, Scarborough, in September 2006. Eighteen students were enrolled at inception, but by January the next year the enrollment increased to 103 students.⁷¹ The extension campus was a welcome initiative for Tobagonians seeking tertiary education. At the time of writing, the student population was an average of 155 students.

Tobago Mission

On April 29, 2001, a special constituency session was called at Caribbean Union College to deliberate on a proposal for mission status for Tobago. The Tobago brethren requested mission status and an agreement was reached to forward the request to the Inter-American Division. Delegates from all the churches, the church organizations of Trinidad and Tobago, and the administrative representatives of the Caribbean Union Conference were present. This special session followed a consultation held in Tobago on April 8, 2001, where the proposal for mission status was presented by Martin Cunningham, chairman of the Tobago Mission Committee. Mission status was approved by a majority vote by secret ballot.⁷²

In 2004, the Tobago Mission was organized with its office at Bad Hill in Plymouth. Clyde Thomas became the first president. Since 1969, Thomas had served at various levels with the South Caribbean Conference including district pastor and department director. He later became a department director with the Caribbean Union Conference, then president of the Tobago Mission.

The first officers of the Mission were as follows: Clyde Thomas, president; Clyde E. Lewis, secretary-treasurer.⁷³

At inception, the mission was comprised of thirty churches with a membership of 7,129.⁷⁴ At the time of writing, the mission had thirty-two churches with over 8,500 members.⁷⁵ Compared to E. J. Murray's analysis that by 1970 one in every twelve persons was a Seventh-day Adventist, at the time writing one in every eight persons is a member of the Adventist Church.

On October 13, 2008, the Tobago Mission launched its first radio program, entitled *Morning Edition* with Irwin Scott, on Radio Tambrin 92.9 F.M. Scott was personal ministries director of the mission at that time. The program was sponsored by Errol Kerr and his family.⁷⁶

List of Presidents

Clyde Thomas (2004-2011); Toney Mapp (2011-).

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