

Strachan, Matthew Carpenter (1875–1951)

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Matthew C. Strachan, a prominent pastor-evangelist in the early development of Adventism among Black Americans, was both a vigorous promoter of denominational loyalty and an activist for racial progress in the church and in society.

Early Life

Born to Robert and Bettie Strachan on May 8, 1875, in Washington, D.C., Matthew was educated in the public school of the nation's capital. As a young man he found employment as a driver or coachman. He discovered Adventism through a Bible worker, a white woman, and in 1897 joined the church in Washington, D.C.¹ This congregation was remarkable for its interracial composition and commitment to equality at a time when segregation and racism were worsening in American society.²

In addition to a faith that summoned his supreme devotion, Matthew found a wife in the Adventist church, Maud Elizabeth Brown (1873-1936), whose origins were in the Lynchburg, Virginia area. They married on September 20, 1899, in Alexandria, Virginia. The couple then headed to Battle Creek, Michigan, for studies in preparation to enter gospel service. Matthew studied at Battle Creek College while Maud took nurses training and a special course in nutrition at the Health and Temperance Missionary School connected with Battle Creek Sanitarium.³



Matthew C. Strachan

From Oakwood University Archives.

Southern Missionary Society Service

The following year J. Edson White recruited the Strachans and another budding Black minister William H. Sebastian for service in the Southern Missionary Society (SMS), the agency that White with others had organized for evangelistic, educational, and medical missionary work to reach the Black population of the South. In September 1900, the new workers took up their assignment at the SMS school in Lintonia, a suburb of Yazoo City, Mississippi, replacing white teachers who had been forced out by violent intimidation from white supremacists.⁴

In 1901, the SMS sent the Strachans to Jackson where they raised up a church and started a school that made Mississippi's capital city into an "important center" of the Adventist mission in the state.⁵ During the summers Strachan and Sebastian conducted evangelistic efforts in nearby communities.⁶ Strachan was also the principal organizer of camp meetings for Black believers hosted in Jackson. Skillful and creative organization of these annual encampments would be a hallmark of his career.⁷

Called upon to help conduct an evangelistic tent effort in Nashville, Tennessee, during the summer of 1905, Strachan impressed church leaders with the intelligence and decorum he brought to the effort.⁸ In 1906 the Tennessee River Conference called him to full-time ministry and placed him in charge of the conference's "colored work."⁹ His first duty was to help organize a Black camp meeting held in Nashville that summer, at which he was ordained as a minister.¹⁰

One of Strachan's top priorities was outreach to the approximately 2,000 students in Nashville's Black educational institutions such as Fisk and Walden. As an early step in this initiative, Strachan took theological courses at Fisk.¹¹ Summons to a more urgent mission, however, soon forced him to abandon the campus evangelism project.

Crisis in Washington, D.C.

In late February 1907, the General Conference Committee called Strachan to his hometown, Washington, D.C., to meet a crisis that was bringing the denomination face-to-face with racial schism. Adventism's largest predominantly Black congregation, the 150-member People's Church, had just broken with the denomination over issues of exclusion from schools and health institutions and stark financial inequity. The charisma of the church's pastor, Lewis C. Sheafe, esteemed without dispute as Adventism's most successful Black evangelist, contributed to plausible concerns that the breakaway movement would gain momentum and lead to a separate Black Adventist denomination.¹²

Though they thought well of Strachan, church leaders in the Southern Union doubted that he, or any other Black Adventist for that matter, was up to the formidable challenge of countering Sheafe's influence. But Strachan would demonstrate keen leadership sensibilities and strategic persistence in rising to the occasion. He somehow

had to convince Black Washingtonians interested in the Adventist faith that they should forego Sheafe's preaching – still Adventist doctrinally – along with the comfortable facilities at the People's Church and instead worship in a rented room above a mortuary, with a group barely numbering in double digits that offered the sole advantage of recognition from the denomination's white governing body.¹³

In view of the obstacles, the fruit of Strachan's labor over a year's time seems impressive – a new church of 24 faithful members known as the Fifth Church. Notwithstanding the accusations that labeled him (in effect) a racial sellout for implementing the segregationist program of the General Conference,¹⁴ Strachan saw his church-planting endeavor as part of a strategy for achieving the same goal of racial equity that Sheafe and the People's Church sought.

As had the People's Church earlier, the Fifth Church now issued its appeal to the General Conference, drafted by Strachan and sent on February 26, 1908. However, while the People's Church had conditioned its loyalty on the performance of the General Conference in rectifying injustice, Strachan's Fifth Church prefaced their appeal with a declaration of "loyalty to the S.D.A. denomination" – a loyalty that would not be contingent upon the denomination meeting certain demands. To that they added a pledge "to discountenance every attempt made to tarnish [the denomination's] fair name."¹⁵ In other words, their loyalty would be both reliable and militant.

From that standpoint Strachan proceeded to shine an unsparing light on the "painful contrast" in allocation of resources along racial lines and how it served "to cripple [Adventism's] prospects for a bountiful harvest" of converts among Black Americans:

While money has been and is being raised to pay for schools, sanitariums and churches in other places and for other people, how shall we excuse ourselves from shouldering the responsibility of establishing the same for the Negro in Washington, the metropolitan and cosmopolitan NEGRO CITY of the United States?¹⁶

In asking, "How much longer shall the sin of 'neglect' rest upon our brethren[?]," Strachan boldly invoked the prophetic voice of Ellen G. White in calling the General Conference leadership to make a course correction.

God has charged you with being responsible for the present condition of the Negro, and you should not hesitate for fear of doing too much anywhere for the Negro, because you can never pay the debt you owe them. "You cannot be justified in expending money so lavishly in providing conveniences for yourselves and furnishing facilities for those who have been more fortunate" than we have been.¹⁷

For the remainder of his ministerial career, Strachan would follow the approach he formulated in Washington, D.C. for addressing racial injustice in the denomination: demonstration of unswerving, militant loyalty to church organization as the ground for forthright appeals to denominational leaders for removal of impediments to proclamation of the Adventist message as present truth for Black Americans.

After a year of coping with the multiple pressures of his assignment, Strachan experienced severe gastrointestinal illness and was granted a three-month leave. He and Maud ended up in Asheville, North Carolina, where he recovered with the help of an operation.¹⁸ Ellen White, after receiving word of Strachan's recovery from Daniel A. Parsons, pastor in Asheville, replied, "I praise the Lord that our brother is being blessed by the greatest of all physicians—the One who never lost a case. O what a helper we have in Jesus!"¹⁹ Six weeks later, while on her way from Nashville to the 1909 General Conference session in Washington, D.C., Ellen White stopped in Asheville and spoke both at Parsons' church and the small Black church that Strachan was pastoring by then.²⁰

Though it had no impact on conditions in Washington, D.C., the cogency of Strachan's 1908 appeal, reinforced by the qualities he demonstrated during his year in Washington, helped bring denominational leaders to a realization that something would have to change in order for the Black work to thrive and to avoid repetition of the Sheafe debacle. Moreover, Strachan appears to have been a principal drafter of "An Appeal in Behalf of the Work among the Colored People" that he along with eleven other leading black Adventist ministers put forward in hopes for change at the upcoming GC session. To avoid the kind of racial schism that had become common among America's leading Protestant denominations, they urged immediate action to "make for more systematic and diligent spread of the third Angel's Message among the ten million Negroes in this country."²¹

The 1909 session approved formation of the North American Negro Department as an attempt to rectify past shortcomings and make "a more concerted effort" to reach the nation's Black population.²² White ministers were placed in charge of the Negro Department for its first nine years, and the new entity did nothing to alter the administrative authority of conference leadership that was entirely in the hand of white men.²³ Nevertheless, the department did provide a mechanism through which Black ministers such as M. C. Strachan could use their limited agency to push for further progress.²⁴

The Southeastern Union Mission

In addition to creating a department in the General Conference, the plan adopted in 1909 called for "Negro Missions" to be organized in the Southeastern, Southern, and Southwestern Unions and in the conferences within those unions. Strachan was appointed field secretary for the Negro Mission in the Southeastern Union which covered North and South Carolina, eastern Tennessee, Georgia, and Florida.²⁵

This position, in effect, placed Strachan at the head of the Black Adventist work in those states, though it carried no executive authority. Nor was it conducted from a central office building. Asheville remained home base from which he itinerated, monitoring the progress of the churches and church schools scattered throughout the territory, troubleshooting, speaking at state camp meetings, and publishing reports in church periodicals, while also staying on the front lines as an evangelist.²⁶

For the year 1911, Strachan reported that 160 “new Sabbath keepers were developed in the Southeastern Union mission.”²⁷ It was a notable advance, given that the number of Black Adventists throughout the entire South was estimated at 700 at the end of 1909.²⁸

Because the Southeastern Union was the only one of the three southern unions that actually appointed a Black field secretary in accordance with the 1909 plan, Strachan turned out to be the first and only Black Adventist to hold the union mission “field secretary” title.²⁹ And that would last only three years. After Strachan was called to the Florida Conference in 1912, the Southeastern Union designated a white official – the union secretary-treasurer – as field secretary of the union Negro mission.³⁰

The Florida Mission

In his new position, Strachan was responsible for the Florida Conference Negro Mission (often shortened to Florida Mission) – that is, Black evangelism throughout the state. It was during these early Florida years that Strachan fully established his reputation as a stellar camp meeting organizer. “Elder Strachan has set the pace with helpful methods,” wrote Sydney Scott, another black Adventist leader, regarding the 1913 camp meeting held in Lakeland. “Deacons’ and elders’ counsels, mothers’ meeting, parents convention, Sabbath school convention and Y.P.M.V. (Young People’s Missionary Volunteer) annual gathering, were held” to give practical help to the churches, most of which were still in an early stage of development.³¹ During the following four summers new elements were introduced such as children’s and youth tents along with junior and senior choirs.³²

Features such as these that many Adventists of later generations might take for granted came neither easily nor automatically, especially given the meager resources. The methodical passion that Strachan devoted to developing camp meetings was driven by his determination to minimize disadvantage caused Black believers by their exclusion from the camp meetings open to white people only, typically represented as *the* conference camp meeting.³³ Strachan thought it would be madness to defy racial segregation in church gatherings in the South during the “Jim Crow” era, but separation did not legitimize inequality, and he was determined to do all in his power to see that Black believers could experience the full range of benefits that Adventism offered.³⁴

During his first three years in Florida Strachan evangelized, sometimes in tandem with John S. Green, the Florida Mission’s only other salaried minister, in Jacksonville, Ocala, and Miami, among other locales.³⁵ Then, shifting his focus to the western, Gulf Coast side of the state, Strachan placed strong emphasis on health and temperance in connection with a 1915 campaign in Tampa. A series of nine lectures on the evils of alcohol was followed by attention-grabbing visual displays in front of the tent during an extended run-up to the evangelistic meetings. When the nightly series began, Monday evenings were devoted to health education, with Maud Strachan giving demonstrations on hydrotherapy, nutrition, and the effects of alcohol.³⁶

The series ran an extraordinary 17 weeks and by its end 33 new members had been added.³⁷ The Tampa congregation met in the tent for Sabbath services, even as Strachan built it up with another major campaign in 1916 and mobilized it for holistic ministry to the city. In conjunction with these efforts, two of the most noteworthy features of Strachan's ministerial legacy began to emerge.

First, alongside preaching Christ, not human progress or politics, as the only hope for resolving the worsening evils afflicting humanity, Strachan emphasized the church's mandate to, in Christ's name, meet human need in the surrounding society. "The church should be the center of all beneficent and philanthropic effort" and should "be the instrument to inspire every effort that betters the condition of men," the evangelist proclaimed.³⁸

Second, alongside forthright preaching of the distinctive and sometimes confrontational claims of the Adventist message, Strachan not only engaged with other clergy in interdenominational social action but helped organize it. When Anna Knight, who directed the home missionary, Sabbath School, and young people's work in the Southeastern Union Mission, visited Tampa in April 1917, she was delighted by the opportunities Strachan arranged for her to speak in the public schools and at two of the city's largest churches. "Elder Strachan has won for himself and this denomination the respect and confidence of the people of Tampa," Knight reported.³⁹

At the same time, a new crisis in Black Adventism again prompted Strachan to aggressive action against disloyalty. Lewis C. Sheafe, whose reconciliation with the General Conference in 1913 turned out to be short lived, joined John W. Manns, with whom Strachan had worked closely since 1909, in forming a breakaway denomination of Free Seventh Day Adventists in 1916. When Sheafe arranged to buy land in Jacksonville in 1917 on which to establish a training school, Strachan convinced the seller to cancel the deal.⁴⁰

Baltimore

When he was called to Baltimore in 1918, Strachan's understanding was that countering disloyal tendencies was again an important part of his assigned mission. His predecessor, P. G. Rodgers (1885-1961), was a charismatic and somewhat confrontational figure who had a way of making some denominational administrators uneasy, despite the demonstrable loyalty of the large congregations he built up not only in Baltimore but subsequently in Washington, D.C., and Los Angeles.⁴¹ The Baltimore Third Church under Rodgers' leadership had grown from a handful in 1911 to more than 300 by the time Strachan arrived.

At the outset of his work in Baltimore, Strachan set up a "cavass pavilion" and announced the launch of "The Lyceum Tent and Bible Chautauqua" series of evening meetings that would continue throughout the summer. In so doing he issued a statement that revealed much regarding his style and methods of evangelism, not just in Baltimore but throughout his career. The meetings, he said, would not be at all like "the noisy sensational revivals of the day" nor would the preaching seek to stir the emotions of the listeners. "I want it distinctly understood that my camp is in no sense of the word a shout; on the contrary it is a veritable school where a bid is made for the thinking man or woman to come and study and learn," declared the newly-arrived evangelist.⁴²

Strachan conducted evangelistic campaigns along these lines every summer in Baltimore through 1923, and these helped keep the church dynamic and growing, if not with spectacular numbers.⁴³

Strachan also advanced development of the 10-grade school that Rodgers had initiated, later to take the name Baltimore Junior Academy. Like Rodgers, Strachan lobbied hard for even further development of the school into a college or post-secondary training school that would make it the “school in the North” (or “East”) for which Black Adventists had pled to no avail since 1905. Still, the school grew from approximately 80 students to around 200 when the schoolyear opened in 1921.⁴⁴

Baltimore Third’s acquisition of a more capacious house of worship in 1921 at the corner of Harlem Avenue and Dolphin Street sparked cries of a “Negro invasion” from a vocal minority of the Harlem Avenue Christian Church who opposed the sale along with white residents and business owners in the neighborhood. Despite threats of violence and a series of highly contentious meetings, Strachan did not back down nor did the white pastor of the Christian church.⁴⁵ The transaction at last finalized, the Baltimore Third congregation entered its new home on March 31, 1922, with a grand celebration featuring James K. Humphrey (1877-1952) of Harlem, New York City, as the guest speaker.⁴⁶ Less than two years later Strachan would himself be called to New York City, once again, as he saw it, to counteract stirrings of disloyalty, this time surrounding the same J. K. Humphrey.

New York City

Seventh-day Adventism thrived during the 1920s amidst the cultural ferment that became known as the Harlem Renaissance. With membership at Humphrey’s church nearing 700 in 1923, the Greater New York Conference could plausibly report that it was deemed “the better part of wisdom to divide the large interest in Harlem and call in another colored minister [Strachan] to take charge of a new church.”⁴⁷ Strachan’s perception that the conference desired to check the influence Humphrey wielded is also plausible. The membership of his large Harlem congregation combined with smaller churches he founded comprised well over a third of the entire conference, and the relationship between Humphrey and Carlyle B. Haynes, who became president of the conference in 1922, was particularly acrimonious.⁴⁸

Carlton Hall, formerly a Jewish recreation center located on 127th Street, was purchased to house Strachan’s congregation, known as Second Harlem, and Harlem Academy. Founded by Humphrey in 1920, the academy became a senior high school recognized by the city of New York in 1922, with strong enrollments in the range of 150-200 throughout the 1920s. Its faculty included Arna W. Bontemps (1902-1973), a Pacific Union College graduate who became an acclaimed author associated with the Harlem Renaissance. Strachan taught Bible courses at the school and took a prominent role in its management.⁴⁹

Starting at approximately 80 when organized in December 1923, Second Harlem’s membership grew to surpass 250 by 1930.⁵⁰ The most remarkable feature of Strachan’s ministry in New York City, however, was the wide range of his endeavors for social and political change on behalf of the poor and powerless. Strachan became

registered as a “social worker” in the municipal court system and served as a chaplain for the Black inmates of the Women’s Prison on Welfare Island (later called Roosevelt Island), so that he could be an advocate as well as a spiritual counselor to those caught in a cycle of poverty, crime, and incarceration. He joined and helped lead the work of public agencies dedicated to similar goals and also mobilized Second Harlem’s own initiative for social benevolence – the Girls and Boys Rescue League. Founded in 1929, the organization sought to work with the juvenile courts to “save girls and boys from sentences in the reformatory and workhouse” and also provide them with an alternative social environment more conducive to their thriving.⁵¹

Strachan’s participation – and leadership – in interdenominational endeavors may have been his most significant channel for benevolent social action. He enjoyed a particularly close working relationship with Harlem’s most influential clergyman, Adam Clayton Powell, Sr., pastor of Abyssinian Baptist Church, along with numerous others, ranging from Rev. Dr. William Lloyd Imes of St. James Presbyterian Church to the charismatic R. C. Lawson, pastor of the Apostolic Church of Christ.⁵²

The Interdenominational Ministers’ Meeting and Harlem League of the Greater New York Federation of Churches designated Strachan as acting chair of its executive committee in the summer of 1929, thereby thrusting him to the forefront of a complex and hard-fought struggle over the most effective plan to bring about fair political representation for Harlem’s Black residents.⁵³ Strachan’s duties that summer also included giving a speech on behalf of the ministerial alliance lauding Congressman and mayoral candidate Fiorello H. LaGuardia as “a champion of the rights of all the people.”⁵⁴

Strachan was also elected an associate secretary of the National Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance at its convention in Washington, D.C.⁵⁵ Yet, with all of these involvements, Strachan in no way pulled back from preaching the traditional Seventh-day Adventist message.⁵⁶ Nor could anyone question his rigor on matters of individual piety. With the advent of sound increasing the allure of motion pictures and the restraints that would be imposed by the Motion Picture Production Code (1934) still in the future, Strachan made front page news with a 1927 sermon denouncing the “moving picture houses as nurseries of crime, seminaries of vice” and announcing a congregational vote to expel members “found to be given to attending the movies.”⁵⁷

Strachan was at the height of his involvement in the public realm when, in the latter part of 1929, tensions between J. K. Humphrey and denominational authority exploded. Humphrey’s refusal to submit his plans for developing a health, educational, and recreational complex for Black people to conference administration led to his and First Harlem’s expulsion from the Greater New York Conference, and his formation of the United Sabbath Day Adventists as an alternative denomination.⁵⁸ In addressing the crisis, denominational leaders deemed it best to transfer Strachan back to the South, and to bring G. E. Peters (1883-1965) to New York to build up Second Harlem, renamed Ephesus, as a strong bulwark of Black Adventism loyal to Seventh-day Adventist church organization.

A front-page tribute to the departing Strachan in the *New York Age* newspaper noted that his “work in New York has covered a wide variety of community service” and reported Dr. A. Clayton Powell’s request that Strachan preach his final sermon in New York at Abyssinian Baptist on Sunday night, March 30.⁵⁹

Return to the South

Strachan was appointed Colored Department secretary for the Southern Union, headquartered in Nashville, as part of a new General Conference plan to strengthen the system implemented in 1909. But the arrangement turned out to be even more short-lived than his “field secretary” appointment in 1909. After barely a year and a half, consolidation of administrative entities under the financial pressure of the Great Depression led to the merger of the Southern and Southeastern Unions. Rather than continuing as Colored Department secretary of a greatly enlarged territory, Strachan was “let . . . out of the general work.”⁶⁰ The Southern Union reverted to the pre-1930 arrangement, no longer having a Black minister in the position of a department head (secretary).⁶¹

Again in 1932, as in 1912, Strachan was transferred to the Florida Conference after his union conference position was eliminated. He was assigned to the Jacksonville district that also included six smaller churches. He again plunged into evangelistic efforts and reprised his role as camp meeting organizer.⁶² Yet, along with the disappointment that he must have felt at the loss of his Southern Union position, Strachan had an even heavier burden to bear during these years. His wife, Maud, was no longer able to work beside and support him as she had for more than 30 years. Her health seriously declined in 1931, and the Strachans acquired a residence in Huntsville, Alabama, near Oakwood College, that would be conducive to her comfort and well-being. That is where she died on June 9, 1936.⁶³

Once again paralleling his earlier trajectory, Strachan moved from the east to the west coast of Florida in 1937 to pastor the church in Tampa that he organized in 1916, along with the four other churches in that district.⁶⁴ This turned out to be his final assignment in full-time denominational ministry. Feeling that his health and capacities remained strong, Strachan did not wish to retire. But both Southern Union president J. K. Jones and Florida Conference president L. E. Lenheim were eager to remove him from employment and insisted that he retire effective the day he reached 65 – May 8, 1940.

In his letter recommending that Strachan be placed on sustentation, Jones asserted that the veteran preacher “has almost been incompetent for several years.” In addition to having come “to practically a stop physically,” Strachan was “mentally very much impaired,” Jones declared, echoed by Lenheim.⁶⁵ These extreme claims seem puzzling at best in the light of evidence indicating the ongoing effectiveness of Strachan’s work, not least that he was quickly rehired later on an interim basis in 1940 for emergency service as pastor in Jacksonville.⁶⁶

A report in the March 10, 1940, issue of the *Atlanta Daily World* may help explain the rush to retire Strachan. The article identifies Strachan, two months before the (initial) cessation of his denominational employment, as a vice president of the Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance and as leader of a movement in Tampa to register

Black voters.⁶⁷ These achievements, only the prelude of much more to come, not only run counter to charges of incompetence and mental impairment, but may also have been part of the reason for them.

Strachan understood the need to make room for younger ministers, but his summary dismissal from the work made him feel underappreciated for four decades as not only a hard-working, effective minister but as a champion of Black denominational loyalty in repeated crises over manifest racial injustice. In a December 1943 letter to Arna Bontemps, Strachan wrote:

Never gave a local church or conference committee one moments trouble, any where or at any time. When Sheafe jumped the track in 1906, I went to the rescue. When Ro[d]gers balled up the Chesapeake Conference in 1917 I went to the rescue. When Humphrey went bad in 1923 I went to the rescue.⁶⁸

The NAACP and the March On Washington Movement

Nevertheless, Strachan's forced retirement did not leave him with time to "shoot marbles," he told Bontemps. Instead, he wrote, "I am tied up with a barrel of civic work." At the top of the "barrel," Strachan was president of the Tampa Colored Voters' League and, from 1940 to 1947, president of the Tampa Branch of the NAACP. His work with the NAACP involved voting rights, employment and housing discrimination, and police brutality, among other issues. In one particularly poignant case, described by historian Samuel London, the Tampa Branch was involved in the effort to save, from the electric chair, a young black man beaten by police into confessing the rape of a white woman.⁶⁹ The effort failed to stop the execution but exposed a tragic injustice.

The March On Washington Movement was an even more radical cause. In 1941, with another world war impending, labor organizer A. Philip Randolph, one of the nation's foremost Black leaders, warned President Franklin Delano Roosevelt that 100,000 representatives of the "black masses" were prepared to descend on the nation's capital to demand desegregation of the armed forces and equal employment opportunity for Blacks in defense industries. When the threat of the march induced Roosevelt to grant the latter demand by issuing Executive Order No. 8802, Randolph agreed to call off the protest, having already achieved one of the most significant advances toward racial justice in the nation's history.⁷⁰

Randolph continued the March On Washington Movement as a means to bring about further advances. The organization's aim was to mobilize "the Negro masses" to "march towards the total abolition of all social, economic, and political discrimination." This would involve use of "Non-Violent Direct Action" against discrimination at locales throughout the nation, with a view toward a march on the nation's capital if warranted.⁷¹

Strachan was a delegate to the movement's national policy conference held in Detroit in 1942.⁷² The following year, his name was the first in a list of "10 well known Negroes" named to the movement's temporary national executive committee.⁷³ In retrospect, it can be seen as a crowning tribute to the long-time Adventist minister's skill as an organizer for racial progress.

In August 1947, at the invitation of his former church in Baltimore, by then named Berea Temple, Strachan spoke for the 25th anniversary of the acquisition of the house of worship on Harlem Avenue that he had seen through under dramatic circumstances.⁷⁴ The following year, the 73-year-old preacher was finally slowed by illness, requiring admission to Riverside Sanitarium in Nashville. After recovering, Strachan married Dollie L. Potts at a ceremony in Atlanta on February 5, 1949. The couple lived in her hometown of Sanford, Florida, until Strachan passed away from heart disease on August 22, 1951, at the age of 76.⁷⁵

Legacy

Matthew C. Strachan entered the Adventist ministry when the church's mission to African Americans had just gotten underway. During the four decades that followed, he was in the top tier of leaders who shaped and built Black Adventism, both in the South and in the large cities of the mid-Atlantic coast. Soon after his death, the association of youth societies from Black Adventist churches in Florida was re-named the "M. C. Strachan Chapter of the Missionary Volunteers."⁷⁶ Though such entities are typically named for their location rather than an individual, the present-day "M. C. Strachan Youth Federation," despite other changes in nomenclature, continues to honor the memory of this "pioneer worker" who "worked arduously to make the annual Florida Camp Meetings . . . a great success."⁷⁷

In his approach to racial injustice in Adventism, Strachan, like the influential Black leader Booker T. Washington in American society, eschewed public protest, adhering to the principles of gradualism, institutional loyalty, and proving worth through disciplined achievement, while using private correspondence to confront church leaders with uncomfortable truths and the imperative of change. On the other hand, Strachan's "civic work" in New York City and Tampa aligned with movements far more insistent than Washington had been on immediate and thoroughgoing change.

Strait-laced in matters of church discipline and behavioral standards, Strachan associated far more freely than most other Adventist ministers with "worldly" people and agencies in activism for social justice and racial equality. Unabashed in preaching the "testing truths" of the Adventist message that critiqued the nation's dominant religious institutions, Strachan cultivated productive, working relationships with clergy of other denominations in the struggle for racial justice to a degree that was rare if not unique among Adventists.

An integrating theme for these apparent paradoxes might be found in what Strachan once called "apostolic patriotism." By this he meant a willingness, like that of the apostle Paul, to sacrifice everything for the salvation of his people.⁷⁸ That was the constant goal that drove his extraordinary perseverance using varied methods in diverse settings, and his willingness to risk misunderstanding and criticism. In doing so, the many-sided M. C. Strachan left subsequent generations of Adventists with much to ponder about how best to engage the issues of their times.

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8. "The Work in Nashville," *Gospel Herald*, September 1905, 40-41.
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11. J.S. Washburn to W.C. White, February 27, 1908, Ellen G. White Estate Incoming Correspondence.
12. Morgan, *Lewis C. Sheafe*, 291-309, 325-329.
13. M.C. Strachan to A.G. Daniells, August 20 and December 2, 1907; M.C. Strachan to General Conference, February 26, 1908, GCA.; Morgan, *Lewis C. Sheafe*, 335-338.
14. M.C. Strachan to W.C. White, June 25, 1908, Ellen G. White Estate Incoming Correspondence.

15. Fifth S.D.A. Church Appeal to General Conference, February 26, 1908, GCA.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid. See *The Southern Work* (1901), 15, 33, for the passages Strachan here utilized; Ellen G. White Writings, <https://m.egwwritings.org/en/book/139/info>.
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19. E.G. White to D.A. Parsons, March 28, 1909, Letter 62, 1909.
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21. "An Appeal in Behalf of the Work among the Colored People," May 1909, GCA.
22. "Conference Proceedings, Twenty-Seventh Meeting, May 28, 1909," *General Conference Bulletin*, May 30, 1909, 210.
23. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* for 1911, 11.
24. Calvin B. Rock, *Protest and Progress: Black Seventh-day Adventist Leadership and the Push for Parity* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2018), 23.
25. W.A. Westworth, "S.E. Union Conference Notes," *Field Tidings*, July 28, 1909, 2.
26. Sydney Scott, "Columbia, South Carolina," *Field Tidings*, February 15, 1911, 2-3; W.H. Branson, "South Carolina Colored Camp-meeting," *Field Tidings*, September 13, 1911, 3; M.C. Strachan, "Southeastern Union Mission News and Notes," *Gospel Herald*, November 1911, 77.
27. M.C. Strachan, "Southeastern Union Mission News and Notes," *Gospel Herald*, February 1912, 12.
28. W.H. Williams, "North American Negro Departmental Meeting," *ARH*, November 25, 1909, 13-14.
29. The Southern Union (covering Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Kentucky, and western Tennessee) established a Southern Union Mission "especially for the Negro population," but the field secretaries were white men; see *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* for 1911, 73-76. Southwestern Union did not implement at all for several years; see "Minutes of the Conference," *Southwestern Union Record*, April 25, 1916, 4-5.
30. See the *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* for the years 1913 through 1932, when the Southeastern Union was absorbed into the Southern Union.

31. Sydney Scott, "Florida Camp-meeting," *Gospel Herald*, January 1914, 3; see also J.W. Manns, "While the Florida conference . . .," *Gospel Herald*, December 1912, 92.
32. J.S. Green, "Florida Camp Meeting," *Gospel Herald*, December 1914, 92; G.E. Peters, "Florida Mission Camp Meeting," *Gospel Herald*, November 1917, 4-5.
33. A front-page graphic in the July 14, 1915 issue of *Field Tidings* highlighted the camp meeting dates and locations for each of conferences in the union that summer but made no mention of Negro Mission camp meetings.
34. M.C. Strachan to T.E. Bowen, September 6, 1917, GCA.
35. J.F. Pegues, "Florida," *ARH*, October 2, 1913, 18-19; W.H. Heckman, "President's Address to the Florida Conference," *Field Tidings*, December 3, 1913.
36. "Temperance Rally," *Tampa Sunday Tribune*, May 14, 1915, B15; M. May Clarke, "Florida," *Gospel Herald*, August 1915, 58; "Preaches on Hygiene," *Tampa Tribune*, June 8, 1915, 5; "Serves Vegetable Dinner, Negro Evangelist Does Not Believe in Meat-Eating," *Tampa Tribune*, August 5, 1915, 5.
37. "Strachan Closes His Meetings in This City," *Tampa Tribune*, September 6, 1915, 10; Leo Thiel, "Three Florida Conventions," *Field Tidings*, April 5, 1916, 4-5.
38. "Be Thy Brother's Keeper," *Tampa Tribune*, November 9, 1915, 5. See also "Will Aid the Poor, Negroes Collect Fruit for Inmates of County Farm," *Tampa Tribune*, November 25, 1915, 7.
39. Anna Knight, "Florida Mission," *Field Tidings*, April 25, 1917, 6. Strachan was part of a committee of the interdenominational Ministers Alliance that organized a tribute to Booker T. Washington on the one-year anniversary of his death that raised funds on behalf of Tuskegee Institute; "Honor Memory of Dr. Washington Tonight," *Tampa Morning Tribune*, July 3, 1916, 10.
40. Morgan, *Lewis C. Sheafe*, 392-395, 411.
41. Douglas Morgan, "Rodgers, Peter Gustavus (1885-1961)," *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists*, accessed May 3, 2021, <https://encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=ACFJ>.
42. "Lyceum Lecture Course Under Canvass Pavillion," *Baltimore Afro-American*, July 5, 1918, 3.
43. W.H. Green, "Colored Camp-meetings in Brief," *Gospel Herald*, November 1919, 8; "Adventist School Opened Monday," *Baltimore Afro-American*, September 10, 1920, 3.

44. "Adventist School Opened Monday"; "Wants Adventists' College Built Here," *Baltimore Afro-American*, October 29, 1920, 3; "Adventists School Opens Monday, 200 Pupils Expected to Enter New Quarters Soon," *Baltimore African American*, September 9, 1921, 3.
45. "Threats to Wreck This Church," *Baltimore Afro-American*, September 30, 1921, 1; "Between the Devil and the Deep Sea," *Baltimore Afro-American*, December 16, 1921, 12; "Larger Quarters For Adventists," *Baltimore Afro-American*, February 10, 1922, 2; "Christian Church Trustees Resign," *Baltimore Afro-American*, March 31, 1922, 12.
46. "Adventists to Enter Church on Saturday," *Baltimore Afro-American*, March 31, 1922, 6.
47. "Greater New York," *Atlantic Union Gleaner*, February 6, 1924, 12-13.
48. "Attitude of the Church," 5, pamphlet defending J.K. Humphrey's course of action leading up to his break with the denomination in 1929, GCA.
49. "7 Day Adventists Have School in Heart of Harlem," *Chicago Defender*, December 30, 1922, 9; "Graduates Receive Academy Diplomas," *Chicago Defender*, June 22, 1929, 11.
50. "Elder M.C. Strachan, 2nd Seventh Day Adventist Church, Promoted to General Office, Goes to Tennessee," *New York Age*, March 29, 1930, 1.
51. "Select Court Worker for Women and Girls," *New York Amsterdam News*, September 11, 1929, 11; "Clio Centre Notes," *New York Amsterdam News*, February 19, 1930, 6; "Churches of Harlem Form Organization to Aid Delinquent Youth," *New York Age*, August 10, 1929, 2.
52. See, for example, "News of the Churches—St. James' Church," *New York Amsterdam News*, July 24, 1929, 14; "Church Federation's Program for Harlem," *New York Age*, November 9, 1929, 7.
53. "Interdenominational Ministers in Strong Resolutions Condemn the Dual Leadership Proposition," *New York Age*, July 6, 1929, 1; "Harlem Voters Swamp Alien Republican Leadership," *New York Age*, September 21, 1929, 1.
54. "LaGuardia Talks to Bethel Lyceum," *New York Amsterdam News*, July 31, 1929, 2.
55. "Pastors Report Progress in Good Will Promotion," *Washington Tribune*, February 22, 1929, 4.
56. Summaries of Strachan's sermons regularly appeared in the *New York Age* and *New York Amsterdam News*, including a series of evangelistic sermons near the beginning of his tenure that presented Adventist understandings of apocalyptic prophecy in a straightforward manner. See, for example, the summary of his exposition of Revelation 12 and 13, in "Harlem 2nd S.D.A.," *New York Amsterdam News*, March 18, 1925, 10.
57. "Harlem Pastor Calls Theatre 'Vestibule of Hell,'" *New York Age*, February 19, 1927, 1.
58. R. Clifford Jones, "Utopia Park, Utopian Church: A Critical Examination of James K. Humphrey and the United Sabbath Day Adventists, 1930-2000," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 43, no. 1 (2005): 77-90; R. Clifford Jones, *James K. Humphrey and the Sabbath-Day Adventists*

(Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2006).

59. "Elder M.C. Strachan," *New York Age*, March 29, 1930, 1.
60. M.C. Strachan, "Our New Workers," *Southern Union Worker*, February 24, 1932, 6-7.
61. See *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* for 1933.
62. A.S. Booth, "Progress in Florida," *Southern Tidings*, July 13, 1932, 7; M.C. Strachan, "Florida Colored Camp Meeting," *Southern Tidings*, 3; "Florida News Notes," *Southern Tidings*, December 25, 1935, 4.
63. E. Wilkins, "Maud Elizabeth Brown Strachan obituary [1]," *ARH*, July 30, 1936, 22; E. Wilkins, "Maud Elizabeth Brown Strachan obituary [2]," *Southern Tidings*, August 5, 1936, 8. The *Southern Tidings* obituary refers to two surviving adopted daughters; one "foster-daughter" is referred to in "Matthew C. Strachan obituary [1]," *ARH*, November 29, 1951; the 1910 United States Census lists Lura Strachan (b. 1904) as a daughter; Asheville Ward 3, Buncombe, North Carolina; Roll: T624_1099; Page: 4B; Enumeration District: 0012; FHL microfilm: 1375112, accessed March 20, 2020, Ancestry.com.
64. Lewis E. Lenheim, "New Districts and Leaders For Colored Department," *Southern Tidings*, April 7, 1937, 4.
65. Sustentation Fund Application; J.K. Jones letter to unidentified recipient, May 8, 1940, Matthew Carpenter Strachan Sustentation File.
66. "Florida News Notes," *Southern Tidings*, October 16, 1940, 5.
67. "Dobbs Leaves For Speech in Tampa," *Atlanta Daily World*, March 10, 1940, 1. Strachan appears to have moved up the ranks in the National Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance, from associate secretary in 1929 as previously noted, to one of four secretaries in 1930 and again in 1934, to one of seven vice presidents by 1940; see also "Fourth Interdenominational Ministers Alliance Ends Meet," *Chicago Defender*, May 3, 1920, 4; Charles L. Russell, "Objections Raised to Bishop Ransom's Church Union," *Chicago Defender*, August 18, 1934, 5.
68. M.C. Strachan to Arna Bontemps, December 3, 1943, Arna Wendell Bontemps Papers, Syracuse University Library.
69. Samuel London, Jr. *Seventh-day Adventists and the Civil Rights Movement* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009), 102-104.
70. Paula F. Pfeffer, *A. Philip Randolph: Pioneer of the Civil Rights Movement* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 47-50.
71. "National Program of Action, August 1943 to July 31, 1944, March on Washington Movement," Papers of the NAACP, Part 13: NAACP and Labor, Series B: Cooperation with Organized Labor, 1940-1955. Group II, Series A, General Office File, March on Washington Committee. FOLDER: 001434-023-0250: March on Washington Committee, including employment discrimination and black nationalism. Manuscript Division, Library of Congress. Accessed August 6, 2016, <http://congressional.proquest.com/histvault?q=0014340230250>.

72. Delegates To The Policy Conference, March On Washington Movement, Detroit, Michigan, Sept. 26-27, 1942, March on Washington Committee folder, Papers of the NAACP, Part 13, Library of Congress.
73. "Ten On 'March' Executive Board," *Pittsburgh Courier*, May 1, 1943, 14.
74. Mary L. Burke, "Report of Berea Temple S.D.A. Church, Baltimore, Maryland," *North American Informant*, August 1947, 4.
75. "News Notes," *North American Informant*, May 1948, 6; "Noted Seventh Day Adventist Minister To Share Vows Here," *Atlanta Daily World*, February 5, 1949, 3; "Matthew C. Strachan obituary [2]," *North American Informant*, December 1951, 8; Matthew C. Strachan Certificate of Death, Bureau of Vital Statistics, State of Florida, copy issued August 18, 2016.
76. "Adventists Set Meeting Today And Tomorrow," *Tampa Bay Times*, May 10, 1952, 17.
77. "M.C. Strachan Youth Federation Serves Christ," *Southern Tidings*, accessed May 19, 2021, <https://www.southerntidings.com/news/m-c-strachan-youth-federation-serves-christ/>.
78. M.C. Strachan, "My Kinsmen," *ARH*, June 18, 1906, 9.

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