Honduras

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Honduras is located in the north-central part of Central America. Elizabeth Elwin de Gauterau was one of the first Adventist converts from Honduras in the late 1880s.

Honduras is located in the north-central part of Central America. Its official name is Republic of Honduras, and its capital is Central District, which is formed by the cities of Tegucigalpa and Comayagüela. Its government is a democratic constitutional republic. The country is divided into 18 departments and 298 municipalities. One of these departments has three main islands: Utila, Roatán, and Guanaja (formerly Bonacca). These islands were colonized for short periods of time by the English, Dutch, and Spanish. Just before being returned to Honduras, these islands were colonized by Great Britain. The official decree to return the islands to Honduras was passed in Comayagua on November 28, 1859, by Carlos Lenox Wyke, squire of Queen Victoria, and Francisco Cruz, president of the Republic of Honduras. Because English was spoken in the Bay Islands, the entry of Adventism into the country was facilitated.
Elizabeth Elwin de Gauterau

Studying the development of Adventism in Honduras reveals the important figure, Elizabeth Elwin de Gauterau, the daughter of the Roatán governor. She faced the tragedy of burying her son and husband simultaneously. After her second marriage, she moved to New York and, later, to San Francisco, California.

After Elizabeth converted to the Adventist faith in California, she began sending Adventist literature to her family in Roatán and planned to travel to her parents’ home. She kept a diary that documents her journey. On December 9, 1885, Elizabeth journeyed from San Francisco to Belize and the Bay Islands to share her newfound faith with friends and family. She passed through Belize to visit an aunt and share her faith but was unsuccessful. She arrived in Roatán on February 26, 1886. The day after was the Sabbath, and she was happy to discover her mother and some of her siblings already observing the Sabbath. Elizabeth wrote in her diary: “We all got up early, and, thanks to my Heavenly Father, I found everyone observing the Sabbath. My heart was filled with love and joy! Thanks to the Almighty God for all his blessings and for the light He has shown to my dear mother, brother, and sisters, who were trying to fulfill His precious will.”

Elizabeth felt a passion burning in her heart. During her stay in Roatán, she visited friends and family, sharing her hope and faith. She went to Uitla in May 1886 but, because she fell ill, did very little and returned to Roatán on June 11. She could not visit Guanaja, and, in August 1886, she returned to her home in San Francisco.

Roatán: 1891

Elizabeth returned to the United States, worried because she had raised interest in the Adventist faith in Honduras and did not want her efforts to go to waste. She tried to convince church leaders of the urgency to send missionaries to Honduras. In January 1887, Pastor T. H. Gibbs was commissioned to visit the Bay Islands, corroborate Elizabeth’s work, and distribute Adventist literature. By the time L. C. Chadwick, president of the International Literature Association, visited the islands in early 1891, about 20 people were ready to be baptized. In that same year, Pastor Frank J. Hutchins and his wife, Cora, arrived in Roatán and found eight people already faithfully keeping the Sabbath. In 1891, they dedicated themselves to strengthening the faith of the believers and looking for other interested people. They found other well-established Protestant religious denominations in Roatán, which raised great opposition. The members told Pastor Hutchins that there were two other major islands in the archipelago that would be good to visit.

Guanaja: 1892

In 1892, Pastor Hutchins visited the island of Guanaja for the first time. Soon, the community unanimously embraced the Three Angels’ Message presented by Pastor Hutchins in his presentations of Daniel and Revelation, resulting in many baptisms. Taylor wrote: “At one time Guanaja was like Pitcairn Island; nearly all its inhabitants were members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Even today almost everyone either is or has been an Adventist, but unfortunately the ‘has beens’ outnumber the members.”

The First Church. With the first baptisms, Pastor Hutchins proceeded to organize the first Seventh-day Adventist Church in Central America and Inter-America. It was organized in 1892 with 25 members, although about 60 people attended the Sabbath School programs.

The First Chapel. A chapel was being built when the Hutchinses arrived in Guanaja. The workforce was local, but their funds were provided by an international religious entity. When the community embraced the Adventist message, the chapel was sold and became a Seventh-day Adventist chapel. Taylor reported: “Seventh-day Adventist work in the Inter-American Division began in the Bay Islands, and one of the first church buildings owned by the denomination in division territory was purchased on Guanaja in 1893.”

The First School. Someone told Pastor Hutchins about the need for a school. He replied that “That will be our next project.” The need for a school was presented to the church board. Some objected, saying that they had no money to build a school; others noted that, although they had the money to build, they did not have teachers. However, the faith that moved them was greater than the obstacles. The school building was constructed, and it was painted red and brown. A girl embroidered a plaque that read: “God bless our school. Opened on July 4, 1894.” On its opening day, 29 students attended.

This was the beginning of a series of educational centers established throughout the Inter-American Division’s territory. Some of these schools were self-supporting, while the church operated others, and still others started as private centers that were turned over to the church later. Taylor comments: “Christian education in the division began with the church school established on Guanaja shortly after the church building was acquired.”

“The Herald.” “If we only had a boat” was a frequent comment among members in this coastal region. On February 11, 1895, Frank Hutchins was sent to the General Conference as the delegate of Central America. He was given an hour to speak about the development of the work in the region. He reported that the work on the islands would move faster if the missionary workers in Honduras had a 30-to-40-ton missionary ship to distribute books and transport missionaries from one place to another. When the General Conference learned of this need, the Sabbath Schools of the United States assigned some of their funds to this project. The plans approved by the General Conference
included a schooner with a lifeboat. Charlie Kirkornnel and the Haylock brothers led the construction, and other church members helped with their work. When the schooner was completed, it weighed 35 tons and was 15.5 meters long. In 1897, “The Herald” sailed. With this schooner, the gospel was quickly carried to areas along the Atlantic coast, including Belize, Panama, and San Andrés in Colombia.  

In 1899, the Hutchineses visited the General Conference offices in Battle Creek, Michigan, and Pastor Hutchins was allowed to present another need to the board. The vote drafted on October 29 said that “Brother F. J. Hutchins and his wife appeared before the committee to speak in reference to the Bay Islands missionary field. … They also made a strong appeal for more workers to be sent there, especially those who can serve in the school. Pastor Hutchins spoke of the great benefit of having ‘The Herald’ to carry out missionary work along the Central American coast and between the small adjacent islands.”

**Utila: 1894**

The people of Utila heard the Adventist message for the first time when Elizabeth Gauterau visited in 1886. She visited many homes and tried to lay the foundations of Adventism, but she had little success due to falling ill. When Pastor Hutchins arrived in the 1890s, he gained a few believers. Pastor Hutchins was friendly and charismatic, and he had a great talent for preaching, which strongly impressed and convinced many people. There was great opposition from the Protestant churches that had already been established. In March 1894, a five-week series of evangelistic meetings was conducted in Utila. Pastor Hutchins, Pastor Emmerson, and their wives held the series in a large tent in the town center. Night after night, the tent overflowed with people eager to hear the Gospel. This is how Adventism was established in Utila and, later, in its cays.

**La Ceiba: 1907**

The first missionary who arrived to evangelize La Ceiba was Brother A. N. Allen, who arrived to the Bay Islands at the end of 1901. He wanted to concentrate his work on the mainland of Honduras, arriving at the port of La Ceiba around 1903. By 1905, a school was established in that city with the intent of reaching the community, breaking down barriers, and eliminating prejudices against Adventism. According to Pastor Goodrich, “Mr. Allen writes from La Ceiba that some are accepting the Sabbath there. The have started a school, with a young Belize colored girl as teacher. A backslider has been reclaimed, a drunkard converted, and several Spaniards have accepted the truth.”

Brother Allen sent the following report: “Brother Moncada, a lawyer of this place, and his wife are both awaiting baptism. I believe they are the first-fruits of the message among the Spanish people of this country. Brother Moncada has a printing-press that he is very anxious should be used in spreading the message.”

In the same report, Allen asked the United States church to send a missionary doctor who would help spread the health message during his medical work.

Pastor Goodrich wrote again in November 1905, saying that “a Spanish lawyer of some note began to keep the Sabbath last October, through reading ‘Prophecies of Jesus.’ Although he could not understand all he read…he was convinced of the truth. One part of his experience was with spirits of devil, who, when they found him determined to accept the Sabbath and believe the Bible, turned right about and told him to keep the Sabbath and study the Bible, and follow Christ, only the spirits must always tell him what the Bible meant. Mr. Allen writes that he is advancing daily in the truth.”

In 1907, after much hard work in La Ceiba, Allen wrote about the first baptism: “Last Friday, February 8, Brother and Sister Moncada were buried in baptism by Elder H. C. Goodrich, in the beautiful Congrehy River, about two miles above its mouth, where nature speaks of the divine. The lofty mountains to the back, the beautiful blue sky overhead, the sparkling rock-bed river beneath, and the tropical verdure overhanging the banks, with the stillness of the morning, combined in forming one great mirror of divinity. God came very near; and as we saw these faithful believers, the first-fruits of the message among the Spanish people, rise from their watery grave to walk with God, we felt that a new era in our work here had been ushered in.”

In 1914, Dolores Galindo de Ferez, wife of Juan Ferez, a man who moved from Lebanon to La Ceiba, decided to be baptized in the Adventist Church. Lawyer Moncada and the Ferez family are among the forefathers of the Adventist church in Honduras. As of 2019, their descendants are still members of the Adventist Church.

**Siguatepeque and Tegucigalpa: 1913 and 1918**

The cities of Tegucigalpa and Comayagüela form the Central District. On June 22, 1849, Tegucigalpa was named as the state capital. On July 20, 1856, Comayagua’s government was moved to Tegucigalpa. On November 2, 1880, the city of Tegucigalpa was declared Honduras’s capital. On September 28, 1890, the cities of Tegucigalpa and Comayagüela were united in a single municipal term. When the Adventist message entered Honduras through the Bay Islands, reaching the capital was one of the Adventist goals. At this time, Honduras was mostly Catholic with Protestantism being almost nonexistent.
In 1899, Pastor Hutchins called for more workers to be sent to Honduras. After that, many self-supporting missionaries began to arrive. In early 1900, Brother Herbert A. Owen arrived in Guanaja, Honduras. He crossed the sea to Trujillo and then walked to Tegucigalpa, passing through Juticalpa.

In 1901, a private school was opened in the Spanish-speaking area of Honduras. Herbert A. Owen founded the school very close to Tegucigalpa and sent this report in early 1902.

Mt. Infiernitos, or Infernal Mountain, in its descent to El Chimbo pauses at one point, and spreads out into a beautiful savannah of rich, black soil. Mountain springs water this land, so that in the dry season, when all the country around is dry and brown, the Cieniga [sic], or place of springs, is fresh and green.

To this place of natural beauty Don Juan brought the woman of his choice. A home was built, and Don Juan daily went to his toil in the mine. …

After fifteen years…, he bethought himself of his old home in England, of the days of his childhood, and of his own six dusky children growing up in ignorance in this land so destitute of all human influences that are pure. He said, “What must I do to save my children?” This question, asked in sincerity, is akin to that other, “What must I do to be saved?”

While searching for a suitable location for our school, I learned of this man, and visited him at Mt. Infiernitos. With tears in his eyes, he repeated to me his story. He wished to give his home, farm, and cattle for the education of his children.

The farm was just such a place as we had been praying for as a school location, a good distance from the city (three leagues), high above the malarial levels, good, irrigable land. Our friends in Tegucigalpa rejoiced with us in what we all called a providential opening for our school.

In due time the transfer was made, and we came into possession of a fine piece of property for school purposes, but with only sufficient house room for six students.

This private school was the first major effort to evangelize Tegucigalpa. It operated for several years, but a church was not established in Tegucigalpa. Herbert Owen and his wife decided to move the school to Siguatepeque in hopes of better results. However, they returned to the United States frustrated at not achieving more than they did. This school was left under the direction of Brother Karl J. Snow.

Word had been received from Miss Ruby Owen, of the Seminary, through her parents in Tennessee, that Karl J. Snow and wife, of Siguatepeque, Honduras, had been thrown into perplexity regarding their work by the return of Herbert Owen, who had turned over the school to them, and they had made preparation to go forward operating it and endeavoring to retrieve the situation. H. A. Owen’s plans for other work, however, had fallen through, and he had returned to take the school. This made it impossible for Brother and Sister Snow to continue, and with a revolution threatening to tie up things generally, the young people felt it time to leave the field, if they could secure funds for this purpose.

Due to the school’s precarious situation, the school would be handed over to the General Conference, who financially supported the school’s efforts so that Karl Snow and his wife could keep it open. The evangelical work was centered in Siguatepeque, and a church was organized there.

In 1918, a Bible worker named Emanuel Álvarez was sent to work in Tegucigalpa. Pastor R. W. Parmele, union president, wrote:

Leaving Siguatepeque September 10, another three days’ mule ride brought us to Tegucigalpa. On this trip we had with us the family of our native worker at Tegucigalpa, and had not expected to make the trip in three days with our sister and her four small children. We were planning to camp the last night about fifteen miles from Tegucigalpa, but as we approached the place late in the afternoon, we met our brother from Tegucigalpa, with three other Sabbath keepers, two of whom were recent converts, coming to meet us. They told us that all the brethren wanted to come, but it was decided that the rest should prepare a dinner for us instead. Feeling that we could not disappoint these dear brethren, we continued our journey, though weary, and reached Tegucigalpa at 11 p.m., where, notwithstanding the lateness of the hour, a good repast was waiting.

Brethren Lanier and Snow were with me, and Brother Hardt joined us later. We have had an excellent meeting. Thirteen were baptized, and the church of seventeen was organized, with good prospects of growth. I understand that all of those baptized have begun the observance of the Sabbath during the past six months. Brother Emanuel Alvarez, the native laborer, is working alone in this important city, the capital of the republic.

The baptisms were held on September 14, the church was organized on September 21, and Pastor Parmele continued his journey to El Salvador on September 26. So, the first church was established in Tegucigalpa. Over time, a property in the Finlay community was bought, and a church building was built.

The church met in a house in Los Horcones, close to the city center. In 1920, since no Adventist pastor lived in Tegucigalpa, Francisco Sánchez Vallejos and Isabel Núñez Ponce took a long walk to Siguatepeque to marry and become baptized. With them, they brought their children, five-year-old Cristina and three-year-old Roman. Of the
Adventist pioneers in Tegucigalpa, the Sánchez family descendants have persevered in the faith to this day.

**San Pedro Sula: 1921**

Adventism in San Pedro Sula resulted from the church seeking a more central location for its headquarters. Between 1915-1918, two mission headquarters operated in Honduras: the Northern Mission based in Coxen Hole, Roatán, and the Southern Mission based in Tegucigalpa. At the Adventist World Congress of 1918 in San Francisco, California, it was decided that, starting in 1919, the two missions would be unified, leaving a single headquarters for the whole of Honduras, including Honduras and British Honduras (Belize). Pastor Parmele, union president, believed that this headquarters should be located in San Pedro Sula.

The report by C. E. Knight states: “Beginning with 1919 the two Honduras mission fields were united, in harmony with plans made a year ago. The field is large, considering the fact that the country must be crossed on horseback; and so the superintendent, being the only ordained minister, has a strenuous year’s work before him. … Our brethren in the Bay Islands are anxiously awaiting the arrival of the minister already promised. This will permit them to remove the office to San Pedro Sula on the mainland, nearer to the center of the field, and will allow more attention to be given the work in the interior. … After the Utila meeting I went to the island of Ruatán [sic], where the office is located, to finish auditing the accounts.”

In 1919, among his many other responsibilities, Pastor Lanier sought funds to remodel a house that served as the headquarters for the new offices. A 1920 report stated, “The brethren in Honduras are happily remodeling their new mission headquarters home at San Pedro Sula. Formerly the office was at Coxen Hole, Ruatan; but because of the development and growth of the work, it seemed wise to seek a better location.” A 1922 report stated, “In a recent letter from Brother W. E. Lanier, superintendent of the Honduras Mission, he tells of the work in progress, and incloses [sic] two photographs, one of their remodeled mission headquarters at San Pedro Sula, the other of the boys’ dormitory at the Siguatepeque school.”

In 1921, the first baptisms were performed, a church building was built, and the first church was organized in San Pedro Sula. Pastor Lanier’s recount follows.

We have really finished our church. We had our dedication on Dec. 23, 1921. We were very happy to be able to get into a neat, comfortable place of worship. Since coming here, we have been compelled to meet in a very poor place. While the new church is not so fine as some others, we think it is pretty. We are the more thankful, for having built it ourselves. Our benches are very ordinary. We had them on hand, and as we could not afford to make others, we are using them. They do very good service.

The building is made of cypress, trimmed with cedar and mahogany. We have a nice baptistry. The building measures about 24 [by] 40 feet. The ceiling is fourteen feet high.

Since finishing the church building, we have baptized ten. Others are ready, and I hope to baptize several in the near future. … Last Sunday I started an English service for the small American colony of this place. They are all businessmen and naturally, they have no other time that suits them, so we have these meetings on Sunday mornings. It does not interfere with the work done with Hispanics to perform the service at this time. The assistance is encouraging. The richest and most influential families in the city come. Some of these same families send their children to our Sabbath school. … We have not been able to do as much evangelistic work as we would like, due to the construction work in which we have been busy. Now that that is out of the way, we hope to do more to deliver the message.

**Trujillo: 1925**

The first concrete effort to establish Adventist work in Trujillo, Colón, was conducted by a judge who also worked as a lay lawyer. In January 1926, Pastor Lorntz, mission president, wrote: “About a year ago a native lawyer in La Ceiba accepted the truth. Last May [in 1925] he was appointed judge in the city of Trujillo; and being very devoted, he went immediately to work to get others interested in the truth. When I visited Trujillo lately, I was surprised to find a Sabbath school of about twenty members.” He later wrote: “…I was called up to Trujillo to dedicate the new church built by Brother Castillo, the lawyer. The building is free from debt. It is very encouraging to see the interest there, and we are arranging for Brother de la Cerda [from Guatemala] to go up there once every month. It is not far from La Ceiba. The enemies of the truth in Trujillo accused Brother Castillo to the government of being an Adventist priest, and claimed that he was baptizing and reading ‘mass’ in the church. As a matter of fact, Brother Castillo has no office in our field and is only a plain lay member of the church. I had to send a sworn statement to the supreme court of Honduras stating the facts and we are nowawaiting the outcome. We are, however, confident that the work of the Lord will not suffer. Sister Castillo sold all her jewels in order to buy an organ for the church.”

In 1930, the mission conducted a more direct and precise evangelistic effort. Pastor Lorntz reported:

The oldest city of the Americas has heard the last warning message. Trujillo, where Columbus for the first time set his foot on the American continent, and where he had the first mass read by the priests who accompanied him, was
visited this year by a band of workers. W. E. Baxter and the writer, with two native workers, pitched a large tent in the heart of the town, immediately in front of the stone that marks the place where the American filibuster, William Walker, was executed by the Hondurans in 1860. Through the generosity of the United Fruit Company we were supplied with free electric light. The town was stirred over the advent message, although our time was cut down to ten days by the authorities. L. H. Olson and A. de la Cerda followed up the work, and we are now glad to report the baptism of nine converts.

... A good Sabbath school has now been organized, and we hope soon to report the organization of a church.29

Tela and Puerto Cortes: 1926

The work in Tela and Puerto Cortes was started by F. E. Cary, who arrived in Tela at the end of 1925. Pastor Lorntz reported: “Brother Connolly is working in the Bay Islands, Elder Overstreet is in Belize and Brother Cary looks after the work in Tela and Puerto Cortez [sic]. We are of good courage and solicit the prayers of God’s people for the work and workers of Honduras.”30 That same month, Brother Cary reported:

It is nearly two months since my family and I were asked to locate in Tela to engage in evangelistic work.

With the blessing of God I can report progress. One home has been opened for us and there we are conducting meetings Sunday and Wednesday nights.

We have an English Sabbath school of between six and eleven members in the house where we live; and we also have started a Spanish Sabbath school that promises to be as large or larger than the English.

By getting acquainted with the people, by house to house visits, I have been able to sell over 100 books, papers, and Bibles; and I have sent in ten subscriptions to our truth-filled papers. Hundreds have received papers and tracts free, and thus the seed is sown.

Only a beginning has been made so far; and we solicit your prayers that a substantial; work may be built up here, and souls be won for the heavenly garner.41

El Ocote, Olanchito: 1935

In 1935, Brother Juan Lanza arrived in Ocote, a village in Olanchito, intending to evangelize there. He conducted house-to-house visits to invite people to Bible study groups. A Mr. Inés Sandoval saw him and asked his wife, Encarnación, who that man was, to which she responded: “He is a missionary who has invited people to meetings.” As an active Catholic who played the saxophone in church, Inés didn’t want to be involved. Instead of attending these meetings himself, he asked his wife to attend and then tell him what this man was teaching. Thus, the Sandovals became the first Adventists in that sector of Olanchito. Later on, some of his family members moved to Tocoa and brought the gospel with them.42

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42. Jairo Carcamo, interview by authors, El Ocote Olanchito, Yoro, September 8, 2018.