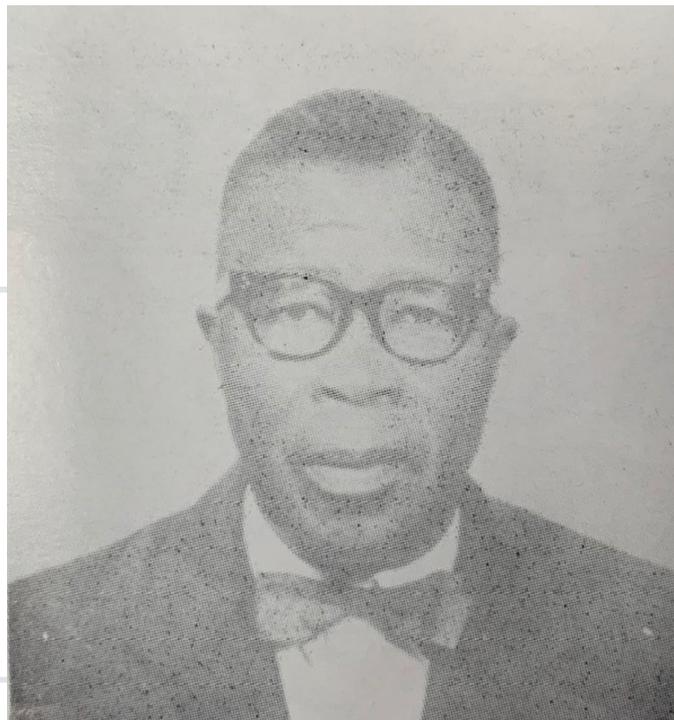


# Brathwaite, Lionel David (1909–1993)

GLENN O. PHILLIPS

Glenn O. Phillips, Ph.D. (Howard University, Washington, D.C.), although retired, is actively writing, researching, lecturing, and publishing. He was a professor at Morgan State University, Howard University, and the University of the Southern Caribbean. He has authored and published numerous articles, book reviews, and books, including "The African Diaspora Experience," "Singing in a Strange Land: The History of the Hanson Place Church," "African American Leaders of Maryland," and "The Caribbean Basin Initiative."



Lionel D. Brathwaite

From the *Caribbean Union Gleanings*, third Quarter 1993.

Lionel Brathwaite was a pioneering Trinbagonian educator, literature and public evangelist, pastor, church administrator, and church and school builder in the eastern Caribbean for 44 years.

Lionel David Brathwaite<sup>1</sup> was born on September 26, 1909, in the village of Whim, Tobago, located in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago in the West Indies. He was the fourth of seven children born to Charles and Henrietta Brathwaite.

Brathwaite attended the neighborhood Whim Anglican School and, on completion, began a brief career as a teacher's aid. He was baptized into the Adventist faith in August 1925 by Elder W. H. Lewis and soon felt that he should study further to be trained to serve his church. When he learned about the opening of the East Caribbean Training School in neighboring Trinidad in August 1927, he applied and was among the first 15 students, arriving on the campus on November 4, 1927.<sup>2</sup> He was the first student from Tobago to this new school. He was also among the early students who worked to construct the first administrative and classroom building on the Maracas Valley campus.

On completing his 10th-grade studies in July 1932, he began to work as a literature evangelist. He began to sell Adventist literature in Trinidad but was soon invited to help pioneer the Adventist message in outlying areas of half a dozen Caribbean islands. He began in Saint Vincent. After two years, he continued his work and efforts on the neighboring island of Grenada. He also worked in Saint Thomas and Saint John in the U.S. Virgin Islands and Virgin Gorda in the British Virgin Islands.

Brathwaite married Elmina Banfield on August 13, 1935, with Elder Nathaniel Payne officiating. From this union came two children: Cynthia, born in 1936, and Keith, born in 1940, both of whom predeceased their parents. Cynthia was afflicted with spinal meningitis and died in May 1944.<sup>3</sup> Keith was a student at Atlantic Union College in the early 1960s when he died in a car crash.

Elder Brathwaite's first church school-founding venture was the establishment of Mount Rose Adventist School in Grenada in the early 1940s, where he served as a teaching principal for three years before he was invited to serve as pastor in the neighboring island of Saint Vincent. His successes in attracting a growing number of youths to Adventism led to his ordination to the ministry on January 26, 1945.<sup>4</sup>

Elder Brathwaite was next assigned to his homeland of Tobago, where he shepherded nine churches and four companies from 1945 to 1950. Elder Brathwaite was afterward invited to be the pioneer of the Adventist faith in both the British and the U.S. Virgin Islands between 1951 and 1956, specifically in regions of these islands where there was hardly any Adventist presence. His pioneering work in this northern Caribbean region spanned over 40 years, with a 6-year break as a church administrator in Barbados.

In 1951, Elder Brathwaite completed the building of the Charlotte Amalie City Church in the U.S. Virgin Islands, and he repeated the feat the next year in Tortola, the British Virgin Islands, where he led out in the rebuilding of the Carrot Bay Church and in the construction of the Road Town Church. At Carrot Bay, he spearheaded the construction of the school building and parsonage before pioneering the Adventist faith among the British Virgin Islanders on the island of Virgin Gorda, where he organized the building of the first Seventh-day Adventist church on the island. Elder Brathwaite played a significant role in the development of the St. Thomas-St. John Seventh day-Adventist School and its relocation to the less crowded Estate Tutu property.<sup>5</sup>

His next assignment was a call to manage the colporteur work across a vast area of islands. From 1956 to 1961, he served as the publishing secretary for the Leeward Islands Mission headquartered in Barbados, which served the region from Grenada in the south to the British Virgin Islands in the north. At the end of this effort, Elder Brathwaite served for two years as pastor of the King Street Seventh-day Adventist Church in Bridgetown from 1961 to 1963.<sup>6</sup> He was next invited to return to support further church growth in the British and U.S. Virgin Islands. There he and his wife became outstanding examples of veteran church leaders becoming closely responsive to the needs and aspirations of a very active laity.

Elder Brathwaite's final pastoral assignment was his tenure in Saint John in the U.S. Virgin Islands from 1972 to 1976, where he led out in the construction of his last church edifice near Coral Bay.<sup>7</sup> He undertook an intense church fund-raising program that permitted the congregation to build what the conference president referred to as "a cathedral." This became one of the most imposing church buildings on this island.

Elder and Mrs. Brathwaite retired from active pastoral work in 1976. Even in retirement, they remained in the U.S. Virgin Islands, continuing to work to improve the lives of Adventists and contributing to the relocation and construction of the new edifice of the Philadelphia Seventh-day Adventist Church. Of course, it became the

largest and most spacious of Adventist churches in the U.S. Virgin Islands during his lifetime. He died at the age of 83 on April 16, 1993.<sup>8</sup>

The Brathwaites were early Adventist trailblazers who, on many occasions, were the first Adventists to enter Caribbean communities. They worked with their neighbors until they joined them in starting the first Seventh-day Adventist company in an area, which would later become a church.

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## NOTES

1. In the 1947 *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* he is listed as L. D. Brathwaite. His byline in some Adventist publications is Braithwaite (e.g., Lionel Braithwaite, "The Dawn of a New Day," *Inter-American Division Messenger*, April 1946, 7).
2. Glenn O. Phillips, *Over a Century of Adventism in Barbados: Seventh-day Adventists in Barbados, 1884–1991* (Bridgetown, Barbados: Letchworth, 1991); Lionel Brathwaite, "What Hath God Wrought: My Life Sketch in Brief" (unpublished autobiography of Elder L. D. Brathwaite, Estate Tutu, St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands. c. 1978) 4; University of the Southern Caribbean, The Forde Library holdings, unpublished manuscript of Caribbean Training College Enrollment Record, 1927–1947 (Maracas Valley, Trinidad 1947), 3.
3. "The sad news was. . . ." *Inter-American Division Messenger* 21, no. 8 (August 1944): 12.
4. Lionel Brathwaite, interview by Glenn O. Phillips, August 1978, Estate Tutu, Saint Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands.
5. Pastor Lionel David Brathwaite obituary. Prepared for funeral on April 22, 1993, at Philadelphia Seventh-day Adventist Church, Raphune Hill, Saint Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands.
6. Phillips. *Over a Century of Adventism in Barbados*.

7. Ibid.

8. W. W. Thomson, "Dedication of the St. John Virgin Islands Church," *Caribbean Union Gleanings* 49, no. 2 (1976): 1.

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