

Anguilla

MARIA WEBSTER

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Anguilla is a British overseas territory in the Caribbean. The first two Seventh-day Adventists in Anguilla were baptized in 1932.

Country Statistics

Anguilla has a population of 14,731. Its ethnic groups consist of 85.3 percent African or black, 4.9 percent Hispanic, 3.8 percent mixed race, 3.2 percent white, 1 percent Indian or East Indian, and 1.9 percent other. The religious demographics include but are not limited to: 22.7 percent Anglicans, 19.4 percent Methodists, 10.5 percent Pentecostal, 8.3 percent Seventh-day Adventists, 7.1 percent Baptists, and 6.8 percent Catholics. Other religious affiliations make up the remaining 25.2 percent.¹

Origins: First Adventist Family

The history of Adventism in Anguilla is intricately woven with its history and culture. The love for Truth and boat building – a craft for which Anguillans are renowned – combined to spread the everlasting gospel in Anguilla. As a girl, Octavia Hodge of Long Bay loved reading, and that love caused her to read her way into the Advent message.

Many Anguillans had traveled to Curaçao in the 1920s and 1930s in search of employment. On returning to Anguilla, Octavia's cousin brought back a book called "Bible Footlights."² Octavia had excellent reading skills and had been visiting her uncle, reading the Bible to him as he lay ill. It was then that her cousin presented her with the book he had brought back from Curaçao. Octavia read the entire book in a few days. One day, while her brother, Edmond "Eddy" Hodge, was nearby, a sudden shower caused him to run to his sister's home to shelter. She passed the book on to Eddy with the comment, "this book says Saturday is the Sabbath."³

This was not the first time they had heard about the Sabbath. Their parents were very religious. The family attended church services every Sunday at Bethel Methodist Church overlooking Road Bay. The Bible was read in the home, and they had family worship. When they returned from Sunday services, they always discussed what was preached at church. Octavia and Eddy were very interested in religious matters. Their mother had been the first to admit that Saturday, the seventh day, was the Sabbath. She had read it from the Bible but could not

defend it against the traditional religious beliefs of her day.

After reading the book, Eddy, convinced of the Holy Spirit and the Truth he found in the Bible, made the decision to be totally obedient to God and began to observe the Biblical Sabbath with his family. His older children were still sent to the Methodist church for a short time after he and his wife, Agatha, converted. Agatha did not like this and preferred that the family unit remain intact in one faith, which they fulfilled. Eddy and Agatha Hodge had a large family comprised of three boys, Edmead, Hubbell, and Bendel; and nine girls, Beryle, Leander, Olaga, Orlean, Valma, Edris, Violet, Ruby, and Varian. This was the first Adventist family in Anguilla⁴

Octavia, Eddy's sister, did not make the decision to accept the Truth immediately. She continued in the Methodist faith until one Sunday, when she heard other members ridiculing her brother for his stand for God and the Truth. She realized that she too needed to stand up for God. She was a devout lady who would read the entire Bible twice per year.

When Octavia approached her final days on this earth in 1970, she had to be hospitalized. Someone was asked to come read the Bible to her, but she had already begun to recite the Bible from memory, and the reader could not keep up. In a clear distinct voice, she recited what was in her heart up to the book of Revelation. The next day, Octavia Hodge died with Jesus's Second Coming on her mind.

Spread and Development of the Message

One Friday, an Anguillan sloop sailed into Road Bay. On it were two colporteurs from Barbados. They inquired if there were Seventh-day Adventists in Anguilla. The people they asked had never heard of Seventh-day Adventists, but they directed them to a man in Long Bay who was "keeping Saturday instead of Sunday." This man was Edmond "Eddy" Hodge.

Early the next morning, the colporteurs knocked on the man's door and greeted him as "Brother Edmond Hodge." Eddy and his family were gathered in their large living room for worship. Incidentally, Eddy had built his house with a large living room to hold dances. Little did he know that God had another use for that room. It would become the first meeting place for new believers. They spent time in fellowship and received instruction in Sabbath observance among other Bible truths. On leaving Anguilla, the colporteurs informed President L. H. Gardiner of Antigua Mission about the new believers they had found in Anguilla. The president visited Anguilla and studied with Eddy and his wife, Agatha. Eddy and Agatha were the first two Seventh-day Adventists baptized in Anguilla the Bible way on August 5, 1932.⁵

Eddy had left school after finishing the third standard. He grew up to be a humble and honest man who possessed an inner strength that could have only come from God, blazing a trail that is registered in the pages of Antigua's church history. It is said that, sometime in his preteen years, Eddy suffered an injury to one of his eyes when he fell from a horse on to a sisal plant and pricked his eye, becoming blinded in that eye. Eddy

regained some sight after his baptism. He learned and perfected several trades, including masonry, carpentry, ship-building, and joinery.

Edmond Hodge gained the burning desire to fulfill the Great Commission and share the gospel. He witnessed to the people in his village and assisted the young minister, Pastor Van Putten, who was sent to work on the island. Open-air services were held on August 5, 1933, where nine people demonstrated their newfound faith in God and were baptized. Octavia, a cousin, and Eddy's wife were among the baptized.⁶ The Adventist message spread to the nearby villages as well as to the west side of Anguilla; one person in Blowing Point and another in Sandy Ground accepted the Adventist message.

Brother Hodge understood the principle of helping his fellow men. If someone in his village died, he would be the one to provide material and labor and ensure that the family of the deceased would not have that burden when such a situation arose.

As the Truth marched on through the land, Edmond Hodge, who was a skilled boat builder, was approached in 1936 by Gabriel Webster and asked to build a boat for Gabriel's father, Jimmy Webster of Island Harbour. In those days, a bicycle was the fastest mode of transportation for those fortunate enough to own a bicycle. Gabriel gave Hodge a lift on his bicycle and brought him to Island Harbour, where he spent a week working on the ship. He then went home on Fridays to spend the Sabbath with his family. Hodge preached during his work. At night, under the light of a kerosene lamp, he held Bible studies in Jimmy and Melvena Webster's home. His efforts bore fruit; in 1937, several people in Island Harbour, including Matile Lake, Alfred Webster, Edison Webster, and Johnson Webster, accepted Christ as Savior and were baptized.⁷

The Adventist mission continued to progress in Mount Fortune, where the Fleming family and members of the Webster family were baptized between 1937-1939. The early church members from Island Harbour and Mount Fortune met for church services under the big tamarind tree that still stands near Charlie Fleming's property. One Sabbath, it rained, and the church members were forced to leave the outdoor church setting and run to the residence of Brother Jeffery Fleming, who would become the grandfather of former Chief Minister Hon. Osbourne Fleming. The members continued to meet in Jeffery Fleming's home. As the membership grew, it became clear that more space was needed for their meetings. Brother Wilfred Fleming donated land for the first Adventist church building in East End. This building was dedicated in 1939. The name "Mount Fortune Seventh-day Adventist Church" is still being used today – a firm reminder of the church's early beginnings.

The early church was not without its challenges. The faith, which was new to Anguilla, was not greeted with open arms, and neither were the new believers. One such testimony brings a myriad of emotions. Enacio Rogers accepted the Lord as his personal Savior and was baptized in 1941 at age 12 by Pastor O. C. Walker. Brother Wilfred Fleming had introduced Enacio and his mother to the Advent message. His father was, like so many Anguillans, in Curaçao working to make a better living. When Mr. Rogers returned from Curaçao, he

ordered his young son to return to the Anglican Church. He resisted, knowing that he had to obey God rather than man. His father put him out of the house for eight months. Elder Wilfred Fleming and others in the church looked after Enacio.

Early Church Leadership and Membership Growth

In those days, the pastor overseeing the Anguillian territory resided in St. Kitts and visited Anguilla once per year. Elder Wilfred Fleming would sail and leave the church without its usual leadership. Enacio Rogers was assigned to be the church elder at age 15.⁸

Enacio Rogers soaked up knowledge like a sponge while he listened to visiting pastors and read literature he bought from colporteurs who visited Anguilla. He held open-air meetings and distributed literature halfway across the island to Sandy Ground as he rode around on his bicycle. Many came to know Christ and were baptized through Enacio's ministry; these included the late Pastor Maxwell Webster.

Enacio Rogers recalled his Sabbath clothes being pulled off by his father when getting ready for church. He would get dressed again. One thing was certain. He would not turn back. "Life was hard, but I enjoyed being a Seventh-day Adventist," he stated firmly. He left Anguilla in 1958 to pursue further studies.

As his father aged, he became ill and went to St. Thomas to live at Enacio's home. One night very late, Enacio awoke to the sound of his father's cries. When Enacio went to him, his father told him something that surprised Enacio: "I want to become a Seventh-day Adventist." This was an answer to Enacio's prayer. God miraculously changed his father's heart.

Membership growth in the western part of the island was not as rapid as in Mount Fortune. On March 20, 1942, President E. G. Gackenheimer organized the church members meeting at Long Bay into a company, and Brother Edmond Hodge was elected elder. In 1952, a church building at Long Bay was erected to the glory of God.

On March 23, 1956, convinced of the Three Angels' Message, Samuel Fleming gave his life to Christ. In 1957, the Long Bay church leadership was passed on to Brother Fleming as First Elder – a position he held until 1992. He was known to be a man of principle. He loved the Lord and served Him faithfully.⁹

Through the evangelistic zeal of members and pastors who worked on the island, a company was formed in South Hill in the early 1950s. Having no church building, they met in the home of Sister Zada Carty in South Hill. Under Pastor B. N. Josiah's leadership, there was significant growth in membership. Here, too, the need for a church building became evident.

Adventist Church Growth: Churches and Companies

Following Hurricane Donna in 1960, the pioneer Edmond Hodge's son, Edmead Hodge, erected a church building to accommodate the expanding membership at South Hill on a portion of land donated by Hugh Riley Gumbs, grandfather of Oriel Fleming and Bertile Fleming. Gumbs was not a Seventh-day Adventist when he donated the land. He was a devout Methodist and was opposed to Oriel Fleming's baptism. One night, Gumbs had a dream. This dream convinced him to go to his minister and request to be baptized the Bible way. He was refused. He then went to the Adventist pastor, B. N. Josiah. After a series of Bible studies, his desire for baptism was granted. God always fulfills His plan.

The church grew with the help of the women on the island. Women demonstrated much zeal for the gospel and witnessed about the change that God had brought in their lives. Among the women worth mentioning who followed the Lord in this part of the island were Oniscia Carty, Anita Lake, and Clarinda (Clara) Richardson. They conducted church programs and events and kept the church moving in its mission.

Pastor Archer and some members of the Mount Fortune congregation who lived in that part of the island established another company in the area of Stoney Ground and The Quarter. Worship services were held in the late Brother Clifford Rogers's home and, later, Sister Edith Rogers-Brereton's home. Currently, the members from this company worship at the Jireh Tabernacle of Seventh-day Adventists in South Hill.

B. N. Josiah makes mention of this church in the Caribbean Gleanings:

In July 1986 the New Jireh Tabernacle on South Hill was dedicated. Dedication of the New Shimei Tabernacle at Long Bay followed one year later, on August 2, 1987.

The local pastor, Haldaine Davies II, worked untiringly with his loyal members to accomplish much for the work in Anguilla. Thanks to the Lay Advisory Council for Development for its detailed planning and support.¹⁰

The Caribbean Union Gleanings gave a concise report of this signature event:

On January 19, 1992, the Mount Fortune SDA Church of Anguilla broke ground for their new church home. Present for the ceremony were some government officials. Participating in the event were: Mr. Henry McCrory, Deputy Governor; Mr. Kenneth Harrigan, Minister of Communication; Pastor Henry Peters, District Pastor; and Evangelist Roosevelt Daniels who was the guest speaker for the occasion.

The new church building will seat about 700 persons and will include facilities for the Community Service department, sports, and other sections.¹¹

With the economic advantages presently available on Anguilla, several church members have arrived to its shores to live and work using their God-given gifts to enhance the work in the island. Some of these members include brothers Glen Boothe, James Willock, and Kenroy Rawlins. Church congregations on the island have become diversified and include a recently-established Spanish group.

In 2010 the Adventist church in Anguilla helped achieve the North Caribbean Conference's record in baptisms with 62 new converts and in the annual Harvest Ingathering campaign from January 23 to March 6, 2010. Anguilla secured the highest percentage in Ingathering with two of its members raising the highest individual amounts.¹²

In 2011 the first-ever Adventist laywoman's crusade in Anguilla conducted by Evangelist Mil Robinson at Airport Road from February 12 to March 26 met with unprecedented success. Through her, God touched the hearts of 122 people, who were baptized over five baptisms: 54 on March 12; 39 on March 19; four on March 24; 23 on March 26; and two on March 27. The baptisms were conducted by the resident Pastor Sams and the visiting Pastor Philbert from St Maarten. North Caribbean Conference's ministerial director, Charles Heskey, was present for the last Sabbath of the crusade.

Prominent Community Leader Joins the Adventist Church

Pastor James Harrigan of the No Walls Pentecostal Church, a church of some 48 members was baptized at the conclusion of the Hope for Today's Crisis Crusade held by Dr. Henry Peters on the Island of Anguilla. The Gleanings has learnt that he was convicted about the Sabbath and made a decision to be baptized but not before he had a chance to go to his congregation on Sunday March 12 and let them know of his decision.

After addressing his congregation, he left and was taken to the waters to be baptized. He was added to the 68 persons who were baptized at the end of a 5 week evangelistic campaign under the yellow and white tent in The Valley, Anguilla. Pastor Peters, a seasoned evangelist who has a DMin in Evangelism and Church Growth, echoed his voice like a trumpet and preached without fear or favour, warning the audience that the God of love is also a God of wrath. He has in his 32 years as an evangelist baptized over 5000 persons.¹³

Several pastors have worked in Anguilla since 1932, when the first members was baptized. Sometimes, the conditions pastors faced were difficult. Some of them suffered through personal tragedies, but they kept the torch of faith burning through courage, and their ministry flourished. These courageous pastors include: O. C. Walker; N. Bailey; E. G. Gackenheimer; Shillingford; Mills; Joseph; B. N. Josiah; Archer; C. Lashley; Premdas; Hamblin; G. King; R. Liburd; K. Vanterpool; H. Davies; H. Peters; G. Cross; O. Fleming; D. Phillip; Virgil Sams; Trent Berg; and Howard Simon.

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