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Harmon School of Seventh-day Adventists

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Harmon School of Seventh-day Adventists, situated in Rockly Vale, Scarborough, is the pinnacle of Seventh-day Adventist secondary education in Tobago.¹ With an annual average student population of approximately 300, the institution has undergone remarkable changes that have brought it local, regional, and international recognition.

The school, which began in 1952 with the motto “Nihil Sine Numine”, Latin for “Nothing Without Effort! Nothing

Without God!", was named after Ellen Gould White (*nee* Ellen Gould Harmon), pioneer of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In this regard, the school uniform for girls has been patterned after E. G. White's preferred style of dress – navy blue skirt and blouse with white puritan collar.

The school was first located in Gift Building at Bacolet in Scarborough, the capital, and shared the premises with the Scarborough Seventh-day Adventist Primary School.² When Harmon first opened, there were fifteen students and one staff member, Merrill McKenzie, who was thereafter fondly referred to as "The Father of Harmon."³ McKenzie, a 1948 graduate of Caribbean Training College (now the University of the Southern Caribbean), remained as principal until 1955. Classes were held in the annex of the primary school, and McKenzie received support from Mr. Lloyd Ashton Gittens, the principal of the primary school at that time, who also taught Spanish. With time, the staff increased to four, and the school experienced its first tremendous success with a 100 percent pass rate at the Senior Cambridge Examinations (from the University of Cambridge, UK).⁴ Among this group of young scholars was Peter Archer, who later became principal for ten years, from 1978 to 1988.

In 1963, the Gift Building, was damaged by Hurricane Flora. This event, along with increasing enrolment, created the need for a new site, and in the early 1970s, the school was relocated to Hamilton Valley, Rockly Vale, its present location.⁵ However, a commemorative plaque remains at the original site at Bacolet bearing the Harmon SDA name. The school was then officially opened in Rockly Vale in 1969 by Dr. Eric Williams, the prime minister of Trinidad and Tobago at that time.

Over time, the school's demography included students from the Seventh-day Adventists primary schools across the island of Tobago, and non-Seventh-day Adventists also sought enrolment in the institution, which had built a reputation for being one of the best private institutions in Tobago. There was a yearning for "the Harmon experience"⁶ – a term coined by Dr. Rupert Ryan, who was principal from 1974-1978. By this time, the school was one of three Christian high schools in Tobago. Shortly after, in the late 1970s, the school's science program began, and in the 1990s, the computer program was introduced. It wasn't long before the school developed and boasted a robust agricultural science program.

Up to this time, the institution was fully owned and operated by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. However, in recent times, the school sought assistance from the local government, the Tobago House of Assembly, through the Secondary Entrance Assessment (SEA), the main source of student intake. Subsequently, in 2012, the Harmon School of SDA became a government-assisted school.⁷

In 2005, the Harmon School of SDA became the site for the Tobago Extension Campus of the University of the Southern Caribbean (formerly Caribbean Union College). Throughout the decades, the institution went through other significant events, but it has maintained "Spartan" courage that accounts for much of its successes. Locally, "the Harmon experience" is still sought after. In 2014, Jevaughn Bruce, who topped the Secondary Entrance Assessment (SEA) in Tobago, opted to enrol at Harmon SDA *in lieu* of a traditional prestige school.

The register of Harmon's principals from 1952 to present can be seen in the table below:⁸

Years	Principals
1952 - 1956	Merril McKenzie
1957 - 1958	Hulibert Phillips
1959 - 1961	Merril McKenzie
1962 - 1963	John Ambrose
1963 - 1964	Nathaniel Moore (Acting)
1965 - 1968	John Ambrose
1968 - 1970	Ruthven Prime

1970 - 1971	Nathaniel Moore
1971 - 1972	Ruthven Prime
1972 - 1973	Hollis James (Acting)
1973 -1974	Philbert Hislop (Acting)
1974 - 1978	Rupert Ryan
1978 - 1988	Peter Archer
1988 - 1996	Philbert Hislop
1996 - 1998	Errol Phillip
1998 - 2001	Peter Archer
2001 - 2005	Jessica Cunningham
2005 - 2006	Alpheus Hislop (Acting)
2006 - 2007	Beverley Scott (Acting)
2007 - 2009	Pastor Hugo Murray
2009 - 2010	Beverley Scott (Acting)
2010 - 2016	Jamila Joseph-Nicholls
2016 - 2018	Ken Mapp (Acting)
2018 - 2020	Rose Lynn Forbes
2020 –	Present Shenell Ross Ottley

Harmon School of SDA will continue to be a beacon of Seventh-day Adventist education in the island of Tobago. It is committed to the mission of preparing youth to recognize God as Creator, Redeemer, and Lord; to developing expertise and skills necessary for further study at the tertiary level; and to demonstrating effective service and citizenship.⁹

Source

The Harmon SDA Saga Document. In author's private collection.

NOTES

1. The Harmon SDA Saga Document, in author's private collection.?
2. Wilfred Des Vignes, former education director, interview by the author.?
3. The Harmon Saga Document.?
4. Ibid.?
5. Ibid.?
6. The Harmon Saga Document.?
7. Wilfred Des Vignes, former education director, interview by the author.?
8. The Harmon Saga Document.?
9. Ibid.?

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