

Arnold, William

(1854–1922)

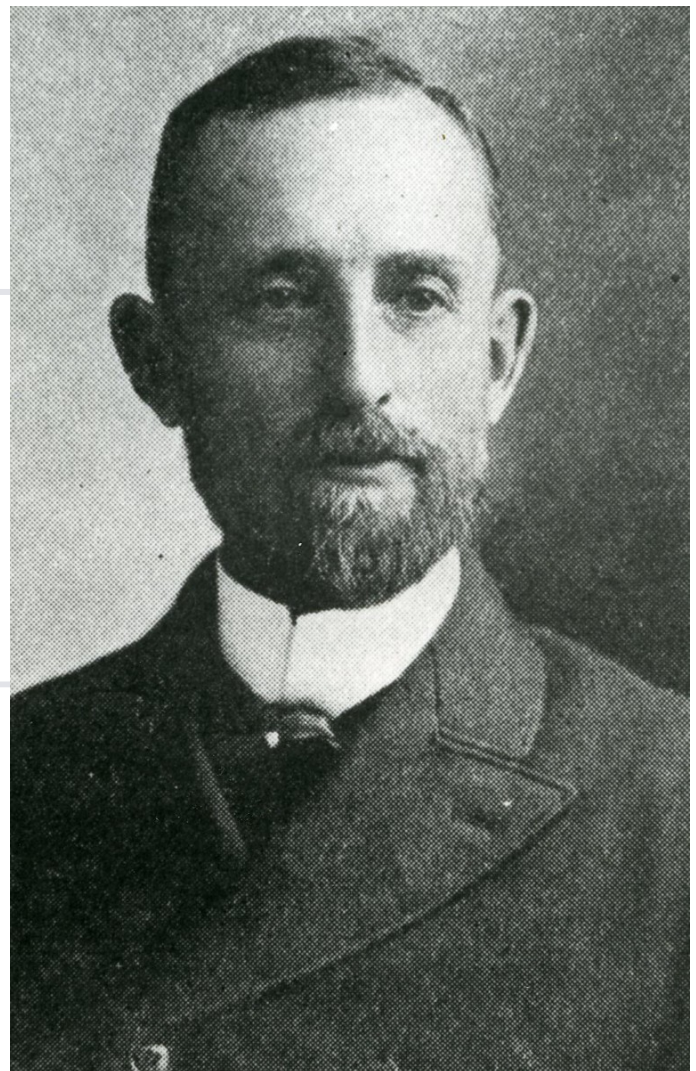
GLENN O. PHILLIPS

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."

William Arnold was a pioneering evangelist in the Lesser Antilles and other regions of the Caribbean.

From the winter of 1888 to 1896, literature evangelists traveled throughout most of the English-speaking islands in the Lesser Antilles. This was in response to numerous letters of invitation from residents in the Caribbean region. William Arnold was among the first of these pioneering literature evangelists to arrive in the Eastern Caribbean.¹ In fact, he was the first person sent by the International Tract Society, which was the Adventist Church's literature distribution service. He visited and spoke about the Seventh-day Adventist faith and sold hundreds of books and magazines to the people he met from the islands of St. Croix in the north, to Trinidad in the south, and in British Guiana on the South American continent.

William Arnold was born in Ellicottville, New York on January 16, 1854. When he was in his mid-twenties, in 1879, Adventist evangelist Elder D. T. Ferno conducted a campaign in Arnold's hometown and he and his wife, Grace F. Barlett-Arnold, joined the Adventist faith.² Three years later, when he attended the 1882 General Conference Session which was held in Rome, New York, he was immediately impressed by the presentation of veteran, pioneering literature evangelist, George A. King. His topic was "how to sell copies of the book, *Thoughts on Daniel and Revelation*." Arnold was so captivated by the presentation that he immediately pledged to become a literature evangelist.



William Arnold

Photo courtesy of Adventist Heritage Centre, Australia.

After beginning to sell Adventist literature across Western New York State, he moved to Battle Creek, Michigan so that his children could attend the Battle Creek Adventist schools.³ Arnold attended the 1884 General Conference session in Battle Creek, Michigan and volunteered to travel to Australia to work there as a self-supporting colporteur and worked closely with Elder S. N. Haskell, president of the International Tract Society. He left San Francisco, California with other workers in May of 1885.⁴

Arnold and the others in the Australian contingent were successful but faced difficulty in receiving an adequate amount of literature for distribution. He paid \$1,800.00 for a flat bed power press that with other donations, allowed for the increased availability of Adventist literature. He canvassed for three years in Australia, New Zealand and Tasmania. After this he left and arrived in England on June 12, 1888, where he was invited to continue his work. He canvassed there for six months. While there, he met Mrs. Anne Roskrige of Antigua, who soon returned to that Caribbean island to engage in critical, pioneering work.⁵

Arnold travelled on the Royal Mail Steam Packet ship. He stopped at all the seaports that the ship docked in and sold as many copies as he could of Uriah Smith's *Thoughts on Daniel and Revelation*. At some places along the island ports, he spent days and other places weeks, depending on the response of his listeners.⁶ He wrote and sent reports to the leaders at Battle Creek, Michigan about his experiences. These were published in the church's newspaper, the *Adventist Review and Sabbath Herald*. George F. Enoch, aptly summarized Arnold's outstanding activities and success in the eastern Caribbean this way,

He reports taking 30 orders a day and three hundred a month. He worked in almost every English-speaking colony in the West Indies. In 1896, he reported that he had placed five thousand books in the homes of the people in the Tropics. He also furnished the International Tract Society secretaries with more than a thousand names for missionary correspondence.⁷

After leaving the eastern Caribbean, Arnold continued his literature evangelistic work in parts of the province of Ontario, Canada. He returned to the U.S. and worked in two cities in the South -Mobile, Alabama and Memphis, Tennessee. Due to the illness of his mother, he stopped full time work to assist with her care, but continued selling Adventist magazines in his spare time. After resuming full time, he travelled to Denver, Colorado in 1914, and immersed himself in an intense program of magazine distribution for five years.⁸

During 1919, his health began to significantly decline, and he eventually retired to Los Angeles, California. He died on June 2, 1922. His obituary writer, Elder J. O. Corliss, who knew him for many years and wrote about his commitment to his decades of literature evangelism in the *Adventist Review* and *Sabbath Herald* stated, "Brother Arnold's trust in God was firmly fixed to the very last. He rests from his labor, but his works are sure to follow him, even into the great beyond. Would that his unselfish example might be emulated by the later-day workers in the message."⁹

SOURCES

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Phillips, Glenn O. *Seventh-day Adventists in Barbados: Over a Century of Adventism, 1884-1991*. Bridgetown, Barbados: Caribbean Graphics & Letchworth Ltd., 1991.

NOTES

1. John N. Loughborough, *The Great Second Advent Movement: Its Rise and Progress* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association), 431.
2. J. O. Corliss, "William Arnold," *ARH*, August 10, 1922, 22.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. G. W. Bailey, "The Beginning of the Canvassing Work in Great Britain," *The Missionary Worker*, 1924, 1.
6. George F. Enoch, *The Adventist Message in the Sunny Caribbean* (Port of Spain, Trinidad: The Watchman Press, 1907), 8.
7. Glenn O. Phillips, *Seventh-day Adventists in Barbados: Over a Century of Adventism, 1884-1991* (Bridgetown, Barbados: Caribbean Graphics & Letchworth Ltd., 1991), 8.
8. Enoch, 8.
9. Corliss, 22.

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