

Roberts, Grant A.

(1877–1977)

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."

Grant Alonzo Roberts was a pioneering missionary, evangelist, pastor, church administrator, and the second president of the Inter-American Division of Seventh-day Adventists from 1936 to 1941. He began his long career as a nurse and then as business manager of multiple Adventist sanitariums in the United States.¹ In his final position, he served as the medical extension secretary of the General Conference from 1941 to 1955. He successfully pioneered numerous causes related to evangelism, healthcare, and Adventist Christian education, and he influenced church policy.

Grant Alonzo Roberts was born June 29, 1877 in Morley, Michigan, was baptized into the Adventist faith as a young person, and studied and completed the nursing course at the Battle Creek Sanitarium and Hospital. Soon afterwards he and his wife, Pauline, moved to Madison, Tennessee, and pioneered a self-supporting evangelistic outreach program that was very successful. He was called to be the business manager of the Arizona Sanitarium and later the Wabash Valley Sanitarium in Lafayette, Indiana.²

His very effective approach to evangelism caught the attention of General Conference president, Elder A. G. Daniells, who encouraged him to become a full-time minister. His first full time ministerial work was conducting a successful evangelistic series for the Arizona Conference in 1915.³ Within a year, Roberts was encouraged to serve as pastor of the main Kingston, Jamaica, SDA Church, and he thereby began his first missionary tenure that was very successful and equally stressful; yet he made very significant strides in advancing the cause of Adventism.



G.A. Roberts, IAD President 1936-1941

From *Changing Lives in Inter-America, 1922-1997, 75 Years of Miracles* (Miami, FL: IAD Publishing Association, 1997).

As pastor of Kingston SDA Church in 1916, Roberts conducted a successful evangelistic crusade that attracted hundreds to the meetings and resulted in nearly 100 joining the church. He was made president of the Jamaica Conference during 1917 and 1918⁴ and then president of the West Indies Union.

Roberts played a leading role in the reestablishment of the West Indies Training School which had been closed years before. He was the leading force behind the reopening of the school on January 15, 1919, with 15 students in rented quarters as well as the purchase of the 171-acre property in Mandeville in central Jamaica⁵ In late 1922, Elder Roberts returned to the U.S. and he served as president of both the Oregon and Northern California Conferences.

At the 1936 General Conference Session in San Francisco, California, he was voted to succeed Elder E. E. Andross as president of the Inter-American Division. This he did from 1936 to 1941. During this time, he faced several administrative challenges including continuing the established expansion policies in the face of the economic hardships from the lingering world economic depression, followed by the growing concern about the impact of the U.S. entering World War II. One of the most pressing issues that plagued his last years of leadership included the ongoing debate regarding moving the division headquarters from the Canal Zone to a more central location and the impact of America's possible war effort on that area. However, the division continued to grow and reach new areas across this vast multi-cultural, multi-linguistic, and multi-ethnic region. Over the four-year period of his leadership, the number of churches in the division increased to 650 and the church membership climbed to 36,687.

After the end of his term at the Inter-American Division, he served the General Conference as secretary of its medical extension program from 1941 to 1955. After his official retirement, Roberts continued to assist in various ministerial roles among the California congregations until he was laid to rest on November 18, 1977.

SOURCES

"Elder Grant A. Roberts." *Inter-American Division Messenger*, November 1967.

"Grant Alonzo Roberts." *ARH*, January 12, 1978.

Greenleaf, Floyd. *The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Latin America and the Caribbean* Vol. 1. Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1992.

Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook. Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1941.

NOTES

1. "Elder Grant A. Roberts," *Inter-American Division Messenger*, November 1967.

2. "Grant Alonzo Roberts," *ARH*, January 12, 1978, 12, 53.
 3. Floyd Greenleaf, *The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Latin America and the Caribbean* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1992), 1: 176-177.
 4. Ibid.
 5. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1941), 140.
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