

# Linhares, Pedro

## (1886–1971)

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Pedro Cunha Linhares was an Adventist missionary, canvasser in the Amazon river, and evangelist in northern Brazil.<sup>1</sup>

### Early Years

Pedro Linhares was born in Barra de Piracuruca, Piauí, Brazil on November 7, 1886, third son of Jesuíno and Maria Inácia Linhares. He had a younger brother called João. He had received a large stay with many animals from his father-in-law, in Piracuruca,

north of the state of Piauí, in the northeast region of Brazil. Without any formal education, he became a hardworking, brave, dedicated, influential man, with business skills, but he was also dominating, rustic, and sometimes arrogant. He was engaged in commercial and political activities. He was not a disbeliever, although he showed no religious interest at the time and he had a tendency to drink and cause fights.

His social and family situation was very complex and turbulent. When he was 17 years old he married Tereza, who was 14. They had two children, João and Maria Cunha, but in a short time the marriage broke up and Tereza went to live with another man. Then Linhares began living with a young woman named Lídia and with her had two boys and one girl. At 22, Lídia became ill with tuberculosis and later died. At 30, Linhares established a new relationship with Eva Matos, the daughter of an influential landowner with whom he had rivalry and antipathy problems. Matos decided to take revenge on Linhares and Linhares had to escape on horseback to save his life. He lost his assets and contact with his children. The news he would soon receive (partially true) was tragic: his possessions had been ransacked and his children had died due to violence and



Pedro Linhares

Photo courtesy of Brazilian White Center - UNASP.

illness.

Linhares fled to Teresina, the capital of the State of Piauí, then to São Luis, Maranhão. From there he went to Belém, in the State of Pará, and later traveled to Manaus, capital of the state of Amazonas. From there he went to Boa Vista, capital of the state of Roraima, where he worked in latex extraction under slave conditions. Two years later he was able to escape the abuse and exploitation of Manaus in a stolen canoe. He traveled again, this time to Rio Branco, capital of Acre, to work in latex. There Linhares started a new relationship with a woman named Joana and had two girls: Odinéia and Alice. They set off to Belém, but on the trip Alice died. Linhares began selling lottery tickets, spending his money on alcohol, and live on the street.<sup>2</sup> His life had lost all meaning.

## Conversion and Canvassing Ministry

On an unoccupied Sunday in 1935, he was walking along Avenida Presidente Vargas in Belém when he was attracted to music coming from the Theater Éden. He was invited to enter, but he would not go in until the next day after buying some clothes. He was impressed by the singing, the cordiality of the people, and by the presence of the speaker, a white, robust man with thick hoop glasses and a white coat who spoke broken Portuguese. He was American missionary Leo B. Halliwell (1891-1967), who along with his wife Jessie Rowley (1894-1962) had been working in Amazonas for six years. Linhares continued going to the meetings, with an attitude of admiration and self-examination. He rented a room to live in and began to eat and dress better. With prayer and tears, he confessed his sins and asked for God's forgiveness. From his new Adventist friends, he learned about the Sabbath, the state of the dead, and other biblical doctrines. He stopped drinking and smoking. Upon receiving a gift Bible, he had to acknowledge that he could neither read nor write. Linhares made provision for the care of his daughter, Odinéia, and served as caretaker of the church in Belém, beginning on January 31, 1936. Linhares was 48 years old when pastor L. B. Halliwell baptized him.

Leo Halliwell invited Linhares to go canvassing in places where the missionaries had not yet been. He took a course with Pastor John L. Brown (1888-1972), pioneer evangelist in northern Brazil. The canvasser André Gedrath (1875-1963) presented a report of his work on the boat "O Mensageiro" (The Messenger). Linhares went canvassing the following week with the book *O Raiar de um Novo Dia* (The Dawn of a New Day). In addition, he was invited to speak in public and give his testimony.

Linhares met a new believer named Aurina da Costa, whom he married on March 25, 1937. Pedro and Aurina left on April 16, 1937 to go to Rio Branco, Acre territory, where he was a true pioneer.<sup>3</sup> Linhares began to read and began his mission by river in a canoe. Aurina taught literacy in Rio Branco. Linhares was 51 when Aurina had a daughter named Rute (Ruth). Then his son Zeca was born.<sup>4</sup>

A year later they moved to Manaus. In that new field Linhares ordered a canoe to be built that was 16 feet (almost five meters) long, equipped with kitchen items and clothing, and an awning, where he placed the publications. They traveled with an assistant. When traveling upriver they were sometimes towed by boats.

Linhares visited the homes of the people on the sides of the rivers, prayed with them, gave Bible studies, sold publications, and held evening meetings with neighbors. Sometimes he had to exchange books for eggs, chickens, fish, fruits, and anything he could sell again. In the houses he left publications and copies of the Bible.<sup>5</sup> Villagers used to provide food and lodging. The trips could last six months or a year. Sometimes Aurina and the children accompanied Linhares on his travels.

Pedro Linhares was champion of canvassing along the rivers for many years; he also prepared people for baptism. Once he visited the governor of the State of Amazonas and sold publications in all the interior municipalities. On one occasion Linhares threw a thousand bottles with missionary brochures into the river. Later, Pastor Walter Streithorst (1918-2007) baptized people who found those bottles. River trips involved various dangers: storms, whirlpools, fierce animals, disease, armed bandits, etc. Linhares also had health difficulties: he suffered a stroke and had heart problems.

## Last Years and Legacy

At 67, with shaky health, Linhares left his canoe ministry and formally retired. He had been canvassing in adverse conditions for almost 20 years. Pastor Walter Streithorst, first president of Central Amazonas Conference and later president of North Brazil Union Mission, replacing Leo Halliwell, recounted Linhare's travels. He said if they put together all his trips, it would be the equivalent of two laps around the earth. After retiring, Linhares began doing pastoral work and occasional canvassing. Aurina taught in several schools. The Linhares moved to Belém, Pará. In this city Aurina died. Linhares decided to continue working, now as a volunteer and itinerant worker in the States of Ceará, Maranhão, Piauí, Pará, and Amazonas. He said he wanted to die behind a pulpit. For over 70 years he worked in places where there were few Adventists. He traveled on a donkey, horse, mule, and on foot. Pastors like Walkírio Lima (president of North Coast Mission) accompanied him to organize groups and perform baptisms. Pastor Olival Costa once baptized 105 people prepared by Linhares. Sometimes Linhares suffered opposition, threats, and dangers.

In his old age, Linhares was reunited with his firstborn son João, whom he believed had died in Piauí. It was then that Linhares decided to return to Piauí with boxes of publications to share the message. He met his grandchildren and great-grandchildren whom he had never dreamed of meeting.<sup>6</sup>

The missionary service of Pedro Linhares was often recognized and valued. Pastor James J. Aitken, president of South American Division (1958-1966), presented a report of Linhares' work in northern Brazil at the General Conference Session in 1966. Linhares received the warm applause of thousands of participants. Odinéia and Rute, daughters of Linhares, were interviewed on the occasion of the 1995 General Conference meeting in Indianapolis, United States.

A new marriage joined Pedro Linhares to Inês Amaral on January 18, 1968. They lived for a time in Belém, from where Linhares continued to distribute publications on a nearby island. They later moved to Rio Branco, Acre,

where his daughter Rute and son-in-law, pastor Adamôr Pimenta, lived. At 84 he preached a sermon in the church at Xapuri, Acre. He suffered a cerebral thrombosis and died at age 85, on November 2, 1971.

The canvasser Pedro Cunha Linhares left a legacy of courage and dedication to Christ's mission and great effort toward evangelizing the immense north of Brazil, mainly among the inhabitants of the Amazon tributary rivers.

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## NOTES

1. See Pedro Cunha Linhares' biography: Melvin Northrup, *Pão sobre as Águas: a fantástica história de um missionário na Amazônia*, trad. Delmar Freire (Tatuí, SP: Brazil Publishing House, 2005), 240 pp. A translation of the original title: *Bread on the River*. Melvin Northrup and his wife Norma were missionaries in Brazil in the 1960s. They lived in Fortaleza, Ceará and in Belém, Pará, for eight years. They met Pedro Linhares

closely. See also: Daniel Oscar Plenc, "El canoero de Dios" [God's canoe man], *Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], years 115, nº 8, August 2015, 32, 33. Rubens Lessa, *Construtores de Esperança: na trilha dos Pioneiros Adventistas da Amazônia* [Builders of Hope: On the Trail of Adventist Pioneers of the Amazon], (Tatuí, SP: Brazil Publishing House, 2016), 197-199. See chapter "Missionário Pilotando uma Canoa" [Missionary riding a canoe] in the book of Adamôr Lopes Pimenta, *Norte do Brasil: memórias de um Líder* [North Brazil: Memories of a Leader], (Belém, Pará: Gráfica Alves, 2012), 67-76. Walter Jonathan Streithorst, *Minha Vida na Amazônia* [My life in the Amazon], 1st Ed. (Tatuí, São Paulo: Brazil Publishing House, 1993), 38, 67, 129, 130, 160, 164, 167. See the information, with some variants, offered by Adamôr Lopes Pimenta, in the Enciclopédia da Memória Adventista no Brasil [National Adventist Memory Encyclopedia in Brazil], [http://www.unasp-ec.com/memoriadventista/enciclopedia/8/0111\\_linhares\\_pedro.htm](http://www.unasp-ec.com/memoriadventista/enciclopedia/8/0111_linhares_pedro.htm)

2. Joana died in Belém, Pará, in 1985.

3. Olga C. Storch Streithorst, *Leo Halliwell na Amazônia* [Leo Halliwell in the Amazon], (Santo André, São Paulo: Brazil Publishing House, 1979), 114. Francisco Abdoval da Silva Cavalcanti, *Luzeiros, Esperança a Bordo* [Luzeiros, Hope on Board], 3rd ed. (Niterói, RJ: Editora Ados, 2012), 104. Jorge Pereira Lôbo, "União Norte-Brasileira" [North Brazil Union], *Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], vol. 32, nº 7, July 1937, 10.

4. His children Odinéia, Rute and Zeca studied at the Northeast Brazil Academy, in Pernambuco. Odinéia was an educator in the State of Pará. Rute married pastor Adamôr Lopes Pimenta, who retired as president of North Brazil Union Mission. Zeca accompanied his father many times as an assistant on his canoe trips. He studied medicine and worked in Rio de Janeiro.

5. Charlee, "Aboard the Luzeiro IV," *ARH*, March 19, 1959, 17.

6. He met, for example, Alaide, Pedro and Lídia's daughter. Ella was a teacher.

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