

A Brief History

Introduction

Who has despised the day of small things? Zech. 4:10. A history of the beginnings, growth and development of the Hamilton Seventh-day Adventist Church must, therefore, appropriately begin with its antecedents. The extant history of Adventism during its early stages is incidental and often oral at best. Research for the history tends to indicate some indifference to accuracy and detail. The vigilant eye may discover some even in this document.

The Beginnings

The first authenticated records indicate that as early as the 1880's there were individuals who arrived in Bermuda with the burning desire to spread the gospel in all the world; that included Bermuda.

During the last decade of the nineteenth century an adventurous couple, Marshall and Melinda Enoch sailed from Halifax, Nova Scotia, to take up residence in Bermuda. It was not long before they set up housekeeping, started a shop and began sharing their faith and spreading the Advent message. Almost simultaneously during the same year, the Poque Brothers, Franklin and Jasper, literature evangelists from Minnesota, U.S.A., arrived. They were intent on spreading the literature like leaves of autumn. They experienced great success as they canvassed and a lively interest was created. One of these interested individuals was R. T. Monroe. His curiosity was aroused and he plied them with many questions about Biblical topics that had previously disturbed him. He purchased the book "Bible Readings". As he studied its contents, he was convinced to accept the Sabbath truth. He is historically referred to as the "first Bermuda convert".

In recent years it has been discovered that there was a Bermudian, Francis Reid, who attended Battle Creek College in Battle Creek, Michigan; the 'mecca' of Adventism prior to this period and had accepted the message on his return home, he busied himself as a literature evangelist spreading the Advent message through book sales and distributing free literature. It has been stated that his efforts occurred before the arrival of the Enochs and the Pokes. Frances Reid's literature convinced Florence Paul, residing in Southampton West, to accept and keep the seventh-day Sabbath. She was totally unaware that the Monroe family in Spanish Point, Pembroke and the Enoch's in Hamilton, were also Sabbath keepers, until she contacted the Review and Herald to obtain literature. The startling discovery was made through this medium and it was not long before the Enoch's, Monroes and Florence Paul were worshipping together—a nucleus of what would later become the Hamilton Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Organization of the Hamilton Seventh-day Adventist Church

There was no time to delay! The gospel message must be sent speedily on its way. Sabbath keepers in Bermuda were few, but few is much in the Master's hand. Soon they went spreading the news. Marshall Enoch, an ordained minister of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Canada supervised the small group. As interest grew, Enoch often appealed to the Foreign Missionary Board) the body that was in charge of the "miscellaneous missions". He made several unsuccessful appeals for assistance. Eventually in 1900, they requested J. W. Bartlett who was on his way to General Conference (GC) from the West Indies, to pass by Bermuda to conduct a baptism and survey the work. He was impressed with the work the few had so nobly undertaken. On that long awaited day, November 10, 1900 six precious souls were baptized—the first recorded baptism in Bermuda. Documentation exists that indicate that there was a baptism in 1892 by Francis Reid. The candidate was Profirio Gomez, the father of the late Helen Kelly. The six individuals baptized were Owen Frith, Nancy Lambert, Henrietta Monroe, Richard Monroe, Martha Parker and Florence Paul. The baptism was held on South Shore, near to the Monroe's home.

Pastor Bartlett also performed another historic and significant act. The FMB voted for the Pastor to organize a church before he left. He could give nurture, support and guidance. The following year March 16, 1901, a constituency meeting was held for this purpose. Elder Bartlett presided over the meeting. Mrs. Enoch was the Secretary. The Enoch's who had letters of transfer from Halifax, and Elder Bartlett formed the nucleus by which to receive others who wished to unite with the church. Those present and desirous were Marshall Enoch, Richard Monroe, Henrietta Monroe, Owen Frith and Martha Carter. Florence Paul and Nancy Lambert were unable to attend due to illness. They were contacted, expressed their desire and were voted in

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'abstentia'. The Church Covenant was presented and signed by the Enoch's. The names were read separately and admitted by vote, and then each signed the covenant.

It was then moved and carried that the church be called the Hamilton Church of Seventh-day Adventists. There followed an election of officers: Marshall Enoch (Deacon), Owen Frith (Clerk) and Melinda Enoch (Treasurer).

The Spirit of the Lord filled that place, the Monroe home on Hill View, Southampton!

Here, in brief, is the story of the organization of the Hamilton Church, the first Seventh-day Adventist Church in Bermuda. Humbly and appreciatively must we walk in the footsteps of our antecedents, going on to higher heights as we ask Jesus to walk with us. What a privilege!

Forward March

It was a small beginning! Yet what a glorious and formidable group they were! They were embued with Holy Ghost power and went forth as vibrant witnesses for God.

The spirit of evangelism was burning. Marshall Enoch was a self-supporting Pastor. A full time Pastor would be able to bend his energies to the task more effectively. The person chosen to assume this responsibility was Pastor James Morrow of U.S.A. He arrived in Bermuda in 1904 as the first permanent Pastor of Hamilton Church. With unusual passion and fervor, he persuaded whomever he could: Portuguese, Boer War Prisoners on the island, British soldiers stationed here as well as Bermudians of both races to accept the truth. His nightly meetings and Sabbath meetings were well attended in the crude, make-shift for a hall. He also organized a Branch Sabbath School, which advanced up the organizational ladder to companies and eventually to churches, e.g. Crawl, Southampton area.

The Middletown Experience

A diverse group they certainly were! However, they were one in faith, in hope, in doctrine and, for a time, they were also one in love. Together, they had endured hardships and fierce opposition from other denominations. Halls were intentionally suddenly either unavailable or rented previously to other denominations. They certainly were not available to 'those other sheep-stealers'!

The Middletown Church is Built

Years of moving from one rental facility to another had taken its toll; some were becoming discouraged; others still maintained a spirit of courage and resoluteness. It was the general belief that the time to actively seek a permanent edifice had come. With much prayer and fasting, they launched out in faith. A search committee was formed. These individuals were Spirit-filled and Spirit-led. They visited potential sites- Finally the committee recommended a site at Middletown, Pembroke as the best possible location for a church. It was in Hamilton and centrally located for the convenience of Branch and Home Sabbath School members and companies who would regularly attend the quarterly meetings. The consensus was that the land be acquired. In 1908, construction began on a small, but beautiful edifice with a seating capacity of 100-125 adults at an estimated cost of \$2,071. The brethren labored long and hard. The following year, 1909, the building was dedicated debt-free.

Elder Morrow Arrives

The Adventists finally had a resting place. Stability fostered growth and the evangelistic fervor revived. During that same year Elder James Morrow, the first permanent Pastor arrived from U.S.A. He immediately set the evangelistic wheels in motion. He embarked on a strong and effective in-reach program to strengthen the brethren. His out-reach program included the sale of Adventist publications and distribution of literature. He started social and welfare work among the soldiers and other needy ones, supplying them with food and clothing. As they flocked to his make-shift or borrowed tents to receive physical benefit, he was ready and willing to fill their spiritual needs.

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His desire to evangelize Bermuda was so intense that he spread the good news as far as Somerset, the westernmost part of the Island, traveling on his favourite mode of transportation—a bicycle and many were thus led to accept the Advent message. In 1909, Elder Morrow's report indicated that the membership was 53 and the number of Sabbath keepers stood at 35, the Portuguese being the largest ethnic group. His influence on the growth of the work and his exploits in evangelism were considerable. Many tears were shed on that memorable Sabbath morning when Elder Morrow, in 1909, a giant evangelist for God, preached his farewell sermon in the new church—a church he loved, a church he had labored to build, more importantly, a church whose membership comprised of jewels who had been won to the Lord primarily through his instrumentality.

Division at Middletown

The work was developing in many areas; lives were being transformed; the group seemed united. By 1915, the Bermuda Mission had become a part of the Atlantic Union Conference in Massachusetts. The enemy typically did not stand idly by. Signs of discontent and disunity were becoming visibly apparent. There was racial discontent with its negative impact. The difference became so intense during Elder Capman's ministry in 1937 that, like Paul and Barnabas in New Testament times, the members "parted asunder one from the other". The majority of black members began to worship in a hall on Till's Hill, Pembroke; the other group, primarily the Caucasians, remained at Middletown. God intervened in the matter and both groups were reunited at Middletown, however at a high attrition rate.

Declining Hamilton Membership

For this reason and the spawning of Branch Sabbath Schools and companies, the Hamilton Church experienced minimal growth. Some of the new companies were Southampton (1928), the Crawl Hill and Bailey's Bay and Harrington Sound (1905) now known as the Midland Heights Church (1976), the St. George's company (1906) the St. David's group (1933) and the Wentworth Sabbath School in Somerset (1920).

The decline in membership in Hamilton created much concern. This decline was especially acute in the Portuguese membership. In their concern, the General Conference searched for a Pastor to reverse the trend. The choice fell on Pastor John Knipschild, St, who had successfully worked among the Portuguese in New Bedford, Massachusetts. During 1934- 1935 he zealously entered on the work of reclamation especially among the Portuguese. Many returned to church but that was short-lived, after his departure, the vast majority of Portuguese walked no more with the believers. The Pastor sadly declared that 1937-1938 was the worst period for membership loss in the history of the church in Bermuda.

Bermuda Mission's World Record

The social and economic development during the mid-1950's had a positive impact on Hamilton church's growth. Despite the Middletown conflict and the spawning of churches, Hamilton Church was experiencing growth.

Evangelism! Evangelism! Was the watchword of the new General Conference President, W. A. Branson. He challenged the world church in 1950 to double the church membership during the coming quinquennium. The Bermuda Mission holds the distinction of being the only one in the world to achieve this goal. The Mission had doubled its goal in less than two years. The total membership of the Mission was 288 in 1950; by 1952 it had sky-rocketed to 607, with Hamilton, the mother church, claiming the lion's share.

On The Steps of Doomsday

The Hamilton Church achieved this great feat during Elder Beaman Senecal's administration (1949 -1956). Intent on achieving the goal, he invited the Roland K. Cemer Evangelistic Team to the island. Nightly, the Evangelist Roland Cemer, beamed out arresting and challenging sermons on the theme "On the Doorsteps of Doomsday". Over two hundred (200) individuals expressed their determination by baptism to be safe and secure in Jesus on doomsday. Several others accepted the Sabbath, truth as a result of his labors and those of the team. His efforts were supplemented by such local talents as The Voice of Youth Crusades (Seventh-day Adventists) and other groups.

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Elder Toop's Ministry

It is worthy of note here that Elder Senecal's ministry and success were built on the foresight and zeal of his predecessor, Elder John Toop. He envisioned and worked towards an increasing membership.

The First King Street Church

It was Pastor John Toop's aspiration to build a more spacious edifice and attractive building. Built on a hill in the city of Hamilton, it had a commanding view as it shed its beams of light over the city and the passers-by. It was erected on land purchased by the Bourne family.

The facade resembled Romanesque architecture with its tall piers supporting the hollow exterior arches. The architect, Freddie Tucker, creatively designed the edifice to enhance its location.

The edifice was constructed in typical Adventist custom. The Pastor, members and friends volunteered 'sweat equity' for most of the construction, while skilled construction workers were employed to do the more technical aspects. This practice reduced the cost considerably.

What a day of rejoicing it was when in the spring of 1948, the members marched from the overcrowded Middletown Church to their more spacious, though unfinished, building to hold the first service there! They contentedly worshipped on the first floor while the second floor was completed and ready for worship during the following year (1949).

The space was utilized effectively. The first floor housed the Children and Youth Departments of the Sabbath School. There was a special room - the Book Depository - on the first floor also. On Saturday evenings after Vespers at sunset, the members wended their way to that favorite area to stock up on whatever supplies were available - religious books and periodicals, Sabbath School quarterlies and supplies, and of course, the delicious goodies and the vegetarian foods.

The upper floor, the sanctuary, was attractively and tastily decorated. With what reverence and awe the worshippers entered, prayed and sat quietly as they meditated on the scripture on the front wall. "Seek Ye First The Kingdom of God and His Righteousness". Matt 6:33 or some other meditative passage.

The weekly meetings of crusades were held in the Sanctuary. Sunday night meetings were also a welcome feature. Outdoor Sunday night meetings were held on the terrace of the back of the church.

The wide-spreading oak on the terrace offered its shade to members enjoying a communal Sabbath lunch together or engaging in the study of the Sabbath School lesson or discussing a religious topic and for other appropriate activities for the Sabbath. The activities of the children and youth were supervised and restructured to proper Sabbath keeping. It was an enriching experience - the King Street experience.

What a sad day it was when on November 18, 1989, forty years after it was built, bulldozers roared through the building, and in a short while, the demise of the first King Street church was a 'fait accompli'

Winds of Change

The Bermuda Mission was incorporated by an Act of Parliament (1960). By that time, the winds of change of the 60's had increased in strength and intensity. Its global impact was almost immediate, drastic and radical. In the Bermuda Mission, it resulted in a paradigm shift which has had lasting effects even in this new millennium.

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One of the earliest signs of the shift was seen in the assertive attitudes of black Adventism. For years, they had suffered the indignities and inequities of Caucasian domination. Black youth were not given equal or similar opportunities, as white S.D .A.'s who had the privilege of experiencing one year internship in Bermuda.

Asserting Black Rights

Gradually black S.D.A. youths had become apathetic and uninspired. They had few, if any black role models with whom they could identify. As the shift gained momentum, they were encouraged to go abroad, receive an education and return to their homeland to occupy positions of trust.

During this period, too, the Adventist population was made up of Caucasians, generally well-to-do, who were educated and favored upper middle class, Portuguese who made up, in many instances, the up-coming middle class and blacks at the bottom of the strata. But black youths were getting restive, and as they received encouragement especially from a group who called themselves "The Committee of Ten" they became more assertive, they began a trek to black institutions of learning overseas and prepared to be administrators in the church since by this time, the Caucasian and Portuguese populations were rapidly declining.

The Committee of Ten

One of the primary functions of this group, the Committee of Ten, was to try to achieve greater self-determination and a higher black profile. They set out to achieve their goal and received much encouragement and support from the Northeastern Conference, a black conference, with whom they had formed a strong alliance.

They persisted in making the paradigm shift, despite strong opposition from members and administration. They were requested to "cease their activities". Such a course would bring reproach on the cause, it was felt; however, they worked covertly and persistently.

The Pastor during this period, Elder Jenkins (though rather reluctantly) cooperated with them and thus a crisis was averted. It was not without a desperate struggle that the Committee succeeded in their quest to integrate the pulpit at Hamilton.

R. T. Hudson Preaches In Hamilton Church

Eventually the long hoped for day arrived. The Committee had invited Elder R. T. Hudson, one of the most dynamic and influential speakers in the Northeastern Conference to come to Bermuda on a visit. The group also requested and was granted permission for him to preach at Hamilton Church. It was a historic occasion when in 1958, Elder Hudson, the first black Pastor, addressed the congregation. This started a trend that Pastors of non-white descent could be welcomed in Hamilton Church. His sermon was well received by blacks and whites.

Charles B. Bradford

The symbolic ice being broken, black evangelists were available. On January 12, 1959, the Charles B. Bradford Evangelistic team, a black team, arrived in the Island to hold an evangelistic crusade. Hundreds packed the Hamilton Hall, Front Street, on Sunday nights to hear the word of God. Meetings were held in the Hamilton Church during nights of the week. The Spirit was felt in a great measure and at the end of his eight week crusade over ninety (90) precious souls initially responded to his preaching; others followed by baptism later. The majority became members of the Hamilton Church. The Lord was "adding to the church those that would be saved", most of whom were black.

The Caucasian Response

What could be done to increase the dwindling Caucasian and Portuguese membership? During the ministries of Pastors Neale and Faber such notable speakers as Mark Finley, the Voice of Prophecy Pastors and famous ones from "It is Written" cards. The response from Caucasians was negligible.

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The Paradigm Shift Continues

Non-white Pastors were gradually being accepted as a 'fait accompli' in the Adventist churches. It was, therefore, not unusual when Elder Robert Carter became the Pastor of the Hamilton Church in 1973. Then followed Ted Modell, Willie Lewis, Robert Carter and Jerry D. Lee. Each of these left indelible footprints on the Hamilton Church history.

Elder Willie Lewis' brain child and the aspect of the work for which he is popularly known, is the Hamilton Youth Centre. He labored arduously to make this a reality while not neglecting his evangelistic focus.

Pastor Jerry D. Lee and his impassioned and melodramatic sermons will always be indelibly fixed in the memories of his hearers. Blacks achieved their goal of integration to the highest executive position when in 1975 Elder Robert Carter became the first Mission President of color, shortly after his ministry as the Hamilton Church Pastor. It did not matter if they were Americans or Bermudians; the goal had been achieved.

Nationals

Black youths who had gone abroad as theology students were *returning* to their homeland and occupying positions as church Pastors. One of the first of these Pastors, if not the first was Pastor Mack Wilson. He served as Pastor from 1977-1983. His associate was Pastor Randolph Wilson who ministered from 1980-1983. An increasing membership and the desire to evangelism was the motive that prompted him to seek to embark on an expansion program. Excavation was begun; however, his tour of service ended before the building proper began the task fell on his successor, Pastor Carlyle Simmons.

Pastor Carlyle C. Simmons

This young, ambitious and progressive Pastor had studied at West Indies College (now Northern Caribbean University). His plans for being a medical student were soon changed by the Holy Spirit's guidance. He now embarked on completing his degree as a theology major. He returned to Bermuda and Pastored the Somerset S.D.A. Church, and was engaged in building and completing the church edifice there.

The knowledge he gained as a builder, he soon utilized in Hamilton. It was not long before he set the wheels in motion to transform "the hole" as it was referred to and the old Hamilton Church into the beautiful edifice in which we are seated today.

His task was not made easy by the strong resistance he had to endure. He was undeterred and by persistent efforts, his cause prevailed. The old King Street church was demolished as bulldozers roared through that Sunday morning on November 18, 1989. *Construction* of the new edifice had begun; there was no turning back.

Eventually resistance overcome, all hands went to the work as diligent servants of God. The Hamilton Adventist Centre served as the Church along with its multi-purposes. The members rallied with their sacrificial gifts, their sweat equity; the ladies prepared their delicious meals for the men. This method became a strong testimony to the miracle-working God we serve. It was especially evident when on one sunny Sunday morning over 100 men could be seen slating the roof while laborers below provided the necessary building material. Non-Adventist friends also contributed volunteer labor. It was a community wonder--a miracle! Some passersby even jokingly remarked, "You guys must have broken your Sabbath to complete this gigantic task." You could not have possibly completed it in one day".

Pastor Leroy L. Phillip

The year was 1996. The new edifice was nearing completion. The new Pastor, Pastor Leroy L. Phillips had taken up the mantle from Pastor Simmons and looked forward to completing the edifice. That was not to be. After a brief illness, to the dismay and grief of the members and the community, we learned of his passing in the U.S.A. where he had gone for a holiday. The Church obtained special permission from the Planning Department to conduct his funeral service in the nearly completed edifice. This was a fitting tribute to his short but effective ministry.

Pastor Simmons served as the interim Pastor and his primary task was to complete the building of the edifice.

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Pastor Famous Murray

Pastor Famous Murray was called to ministry in the Hamilton Church. He took up the post in 1997. During his five year term, he conducted seminars and tent efforts. With the assistance of a team from abroad, over 25 souls were won. He also conducted several Bible Studies, the outcome of which we may never know on this side of heaven. The Hamilton Church celebrated its 100th anniversary during his ministry. As a strong believer in "owe no man anything but love", he urged his membership to devise ways and means of reducing the debt on the building. This Debt Reduction Drive has helped us achieve our goal of being debt free today.

Pastor Kenneth Manders

On Pastor Murray's departure, Pastor Kenneth Manders assumed the responsibility as Pastor of Hamilton Church in 2002. He, like his predecessors, has evangelism as his focus. His Daniel and Revelation Seminars and his zeal for Bible Studies and other efforts have resulted in 60 accessions to Hamilton Church to date.

God is still leading; souls are still experiencing the new birth. From a small membership of 5 in 1901, we have come to realize, by God's grace, a membership of 693 after one hundred and two years. One hundred and two years—that's a long time! If diligently we strive to "Bring the one next to you, And I bring the one next to me, In no time at all, we'll have them all, So let's win them, win them, one by one". This is our challenge! It can be our reality!

It is an almost impossible task to pack 100+ years of history in these few pages. This history has been produced and could not have been possible without the invaluable assistance of those who are acknowledged below:

Nellie Musson: The Missing Mr. Read, Vol. 1, Bermuda 1984.

Bermuda Archives Articles on relevant information

Hill, Byron Henry: The Birth and Growth of Seventh-day Adventism in Bermuda

Monroe, Owen: Autobiography of His life and Times in Bermuda

Jean (Munroe) butcher

Oral and written documentation from General Conference and Atlantic Union Conference, Bermuda

Conference of Seventh-day Adventists and members of the Seventh-day Adventist churches in Bermuda.

To everyone, we owe a great debt of gratitude - we greatly acknowledge their contributions and to Pearl Brown.

Today we stand in this beautiful edifice--the creative work of the human and divine. We stand as an act of worship; an act of celebration with hearts overflowing with gratitude to God and we can only exclaim in humility "What has God wrought!"

Like King Solomon when he dedicated the magnificent temple, let us dedicate our lives to Him, that not only this temple but our body temples may ever be fit for "God to dwell among His people". Then "the earth will be filled with the true knowledge of God as the waters cover the sea".