



Grave of George True Simpson.

Photo courtesy of landjnero. Source: *Find a Grave*, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/3849257/george-true-simpson>

Simpson, George True (1907–1993)

ANDREW HOWE

Andrew Howe

George True Simpson was a faculty member at La Sierra University during the post-war period, creating the School of Education and helping to steer the institution through several key transitions.

Early Life and Denominational Service

Simpson was born in Lenz, Oregon, on August 23, 1907. After graduating from Laurelwood Academy and Walla Walla College in 1934, he taught at the Ridgefield Church School in the Oregon Conference, where he would begin a period of denominational service that would, interrupted only by World War II, extend to his retirement from the Riverside campus of Loma Linda University in 1977. During the 1930s and 1940s, he served as the principal of both Portland Union and Laurelwood Academies and residence hall deans at both Auburn Academy and Walla Walla College. He also worked as a pastor at the York Street Church and a chaplain at the Porter Sanitarium, both in Denver, Colorado, before joining La Sierra College in 1947,¹ where over the next 30 years he served in a number of capacities, including director and/or department chair of a number of different entities: the Summer Program, Graduate Council, and various positions in the School of Education. In 1973 he spent a semester on a teaching sabbatical at Middle East College.²

World War II

Simpson was drafted into the army on March 1, 1941, as a 32-year old, nine months prior to Pearl Harbor. He was assigned to the U.S. Army-Air Corps and sent to Officer Training School, subsequently involved in event planning and public relations. In 1945 he planned a reception for 25 generals, including the notoriously difficult to please George S. Patton, who afterward issued him a commendation letter. Simpson concluded his active service in May 1946 as a major but continued working for the Air Force as a public-relations officer in a reserve capacity, most notably planning and directing an airshow at Buckley Field in Denver that attracted 150,000 people, for which the governor of Colorado issued a letter of commendation.³

A Permanent Home

Simpson arrived at La Sierra College in 1947 after having completed a Master's degree at the University of Denver (He would go on to complete a Ph.D. at Columbia University in 1956.)⁴ He quickly became a thought leader in education, a principal figure in many developments that would unfold over the next 30 years: the acquisition of regional and state accreditation; forging relationships with local school districts for student teaching opportunities; merging the social sciences with education in the School Psychology program, fighting the prevailing attitude at the time that this was pastoral terrain; along with Janet Jacobs, Floyd Wood, and others; beginning certification programs in secondary teaching, school psychology, counseling, school psychometry, and pupil personnel services; championing the need for faculty with advanced degrees in education (at the time, faculty tended to be hired from constituent academies); the doctoral program in education; and, the design of the Child Study Center, which opened a year prior to his retirement.⁵ Simpson was also active in what was an ultimately unsuccessful fight to keep from merging with Loma Linda University in the 1960s, but the seeds of education being elevated from a department to its own school grew out of that campaign.⁶ He was the architect and first director of the School of Education, although not its first dean (that

honor would go to Willard Meier). As Maurice Hodgen notes, in considering Simpson's numerous contributions: "There was not another soul at La Sierra at that time with the combination of brains and brass to skillfully reach such goals after having caught the vision."⁷

Simpson was seen as being very student-centered, not just as a teacher but also as a counselor. He was also known for mentoring young faculty. Both Viktor Christensen and Frederick Hoyt lauded him for his work ethic. According to the latter: "No one works longer hours than Simpson."⁸ He had a reputation for being honest and forthright in his opinions, even when they weren't popular, but also for having a solid foundation for those views and for sticking to them when he felt he was right, but also diffusing any tension through spontaneous wit.⁹ Simpson was unapologetic in asserting the voice of faculty when it came to interactions with administration, one of the key figures in the development of a strong model of faculty governance that would come to fruition in the mid-1990s after the severance from Loma Linda.¹⁰

Simpson's skill in promoting Adventist education resulted in numerous calls to other Adventist institutions throughout his career. When asked why he didn't leave La Sierra to carry forth his mission elsewhere, he responded: "I just like it here. It has a good atmosphere that allows me to practice my brand of education." He retired in 1977, at the same time as Irene Ortner and Wilfred J. Airey. At his retirement Simpson gave a brief speech, the ending of which has gone down in institutional lore: "I have many wonderful memories which will go with me through life. It has been a good place to work and to live. Some people say they left their hearts in San Francisco, but mine will always be in La Sierra."¹¹

Interests

Simpson's interests went beyond the classroom. An adjective that many have used to describe him is "active." He was an athlete, playing semiprofessional baseball in his 20s and continuing his love of sports after he arrived at La Sierra, playing tennis against faculty and students over the course of several decades. In doubles, he was a long-time partner of Fred Hoyt.¹² Simpson cut quite a figure striding across campus: tall, straight-backed, and with a crew-cut he first sported in 1958 (and which, according to legend, nearly cost him his job).¹³ He also enjoyed playing chess, and was a huge fan of See's Candy.¹⁴

Legacy

Although he was born, raised, and educated in the Pacific Northwest, Simpson spent the last 45 years of his life in the Inland Empire, 41 of them living in Riverside, the final four in Loma Linda. He was honored in a number of different ways: La Sierra's Meritorious Service Award in 1976, the George T. Simpson scholarship endowment, status as a Professor Emeritus, a retired rank of Lt. Colonel in the U. S. Air Force, and recipient of the 1990 General Conference Medallion of Excellence for his lifetime of service to Adventist education.¹⁵ Simpson passed away on April 29, 1993, from kidney failure following a stroke. He was survived by his second wife, Cheryl

Erickson Simpson, two children--Michael and George T. II--and a number of grand and great-grandchildren!¹⁶

SOURCES

"George True Simpson." *The Sun*. May 5, 1993.

"Obituary." *Pacific Union Recorder*. January 3, 1994.

Personnel File of George True Simpson. La Sierra University archives. Riverside, California, U.S.A.

Simpson, Cheryl. Scrapbook of News Clippings. In the author's private collection.

NOTES

1. "Obituary," *Pacific Union Recorder*, January 3, 1994; "George True Simpson," *The Sun*, May 5, 1993, B4; and, C. Simpson, Scrapbook of News Clippings.
2. Personnel File, La Sierra University.
3. Simpson, Scrapbook.
4. Personnel File.
5. M. Hodgen, interview by the author, November 29, 2016.
6. V. Howe, interview by the author, July 15, 2018.
7. M. Hodgen, interview by the author, November 29, 2016.
8. Simpson, Scrapbook.
9. M. Hodgen, interview by the author, November 29, 2016.
10. V. Howe, interview by the author, July 15, 2018.
11. Simpson, Scrapbook.
12. Ibid.
13. M. Hodgen, interview by the author, November 29, 2016.
14. Simpson, "Scrapbook."

15. Ibid., and Personnel File.

16. "Obituary," *Pacific Union Recorder*, "George True Simpson," *The Sun*.

encyclopedia.adventist.org is an official website of the [Seventh-day Adventist World Church](#)

© 2020 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists 12501 Old Columbia Pike Silver Spring , MD 20904 USA 301-680-6000