

Millet, Garland Jefferson (1913–2008)



Garland Jefferson Millet

Photo courtesy of Oakwood University Archives.

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Garland Jefferson Millet was a Seventh-day Adventist educator and ordained minister, who served as the fifth president of Oakwood College.

Garland was born on February 23, 1913, to Oliver Andrew Millet (1881–1960) and Cynthia Gertrude Johnson (1887–1972), in Pacific Grove, California. He grew up in northern California with his three siblings Oliver, Arthur, and Ann.¹ When Garland graduated from high school in Oakland, California, his teacher, who at the time was the first African American instructor in the Berkeley public school system, urged him to attend the University of California, Berkeley. His mother insisted, however, that he attend Pacific Union College (PUC) in Angwin, California.² Garland graduated with a bachelor's degree in history from PUC in 1934.³ In 1947 he earned a master's degree in English from PUC.⁴ On July 22, 1937, Garland married Ursula Bernice Berry (1916–2008) in Oakland, California. They had three children: Garland Francis, Carol, and Debra Lynn.⁵

From 1934 to 1936 Millet lived in Huntsville, Alabama, where he taught English and mathematics while serving as the men's dean at Oakwood Junior College.⁶ After his marriage to Ursula in 1937 the newlyweds moved to Washington, D.C., where Millet served as principal of Union Academy from 1937 to 1941.⁷ In 1942 he returned to Oakwood as a librarian and instructor of English.⁸ In 1944 Millet relocated to Los Angeles, California, where he taught at the Los Angeles Academy until 1949.⁹ During the next five years he pastored the Delaware Avenue and Berean Seventh-day Adventist churches in the Southern California Conference.¹⁰ In 1952, in Lynwood, California, he was ordained a minister in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.¹¹

Millet became the fifth president of Oakwood College in 1954, succeeding Frank Loris Peterson (1893–1969). During Millet's nine-year presidency student enrollment at the school doubled, and the number of faculty grew to 55.¹² While he was president the number of faculty with doctoral degrees increased from one to eight, and 13 buildings were constructed, including Peterson Hall, the Ashby Auditorium, the Anna Knight Education Building, the original market/bakery structure, and a number of faculty cottages.¹³

President Millet's enthusiasm was infectious. Under his leadership the annual Faculty Colloquium was introduced, along with the Student Honors Convocation.¹⁴ On December 4, 1958, Oakwood College received its initial accreditation from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.¹⁵

In 1962, when the city of Huntsville's public venues were closed to Martin Luther King, Jr., President Millet and the Oakwood College board of trustees made it possible for him to address the community in Oakwood's Ashby Auditorium.¹⁶ Upon leaving Oakwood in 1963, Millet served as an advisor for Brown Engineering, and started teaching classes at Alabama A&M University.¹⁷

From 1964 to 1966 he simultaneously served in three capacities: assistant to the president of Fisk University; associate professor at Fisk; and pastor of the Riverside Chapel Seventh-day Adventist Church. In 1965 Millet received his PhD in educational administration from Vanderbilt University's George Peabody College for Teachers. From 1967 to 1970 he served as the third African American editor of *Message* magazine.¹⁸

At the 1970 General Conference session in Atlantic City, New Jersey, Millet was elected to the denomination's Department of Education. Consequently, he became the first African American to serve in this capacity. During his eight years of service there, he was the associate director—coordinating overseas higher education evaluations and editing *The Journal of Adventist Education*. With the aid of a supportive team, he issued the following volumes: a review of SDA nursing education; *Seventh-day Adventist Concepts of Psychology*, and *Christian Education—Values Needed Now*. Moreover, for approximately twenty years he served as a member of the Oakwood College board of trustees. At the 1990 General Conference session in Indianapolis, Indiana, he was presented with the Department of Education's highest award—the Medallion of Distinction.¹⁹

Throughout 1978 until 1982, he served as a special assistant to the president of Loma Linda University in Loma Linda, California. One of the tasks he faced was encouraging more people of color to seek employment at Loma Linda University Medical Center. During this time 27 blacks were invited to teach at the institution, and approximately sixty other invitations were extended to other minorities.²⁰

After a brief "retirement" in 1982, Millet participated in the faculty exchange program in 1983 between Oakwood College and Bethel College in the Transkei, South Africa.

During the following years (1984–1990) he taught the occasional Principles of Christian Education and the Gift of Prophecy classes at Oakwood College. Later he was a founding member of The Committee of 100 for Oakwood College. His beloved wife, Ursula, died on January 13, 2008. On September 7 of that same year, Millet died at his

home in Huntsville, Alabama. He was 95 years old.²¹

Millet will be remembered as a skilled administrator and supporter of Christian education. His legacy is established in the fact that under his leadership Oakwood College attained regional accreditation status for the first time in 1958.

SOURCES

"Garland J. Millet obituary." Oakwood University church, September 21, 2008. Oakwood University Archives.

Millet, Garland. "Thanks for the Memories." *Southern Tidings*, August 1, 1962.

NOTES

1. "Garland J. Millet obituary," Oakwood University church, September 21, 2008, Oakwood University Archives.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Garland Millett, "Thanks for the Memories," *Southern Tidings*, August 1, 1962, 14.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.

15. Ibid.

16. "Garland J. Millet obituary."

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid.

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