

Hudson, R. T.

(1912–1966)

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R. T. Hudson served the Seventh-day Adventist Church for 31 years as pastor, evangelist, and administrator.¹ He was a mission-focused community activist, purposeful in ministry and service that often brought the community into his church and took his church into the community. His ministry included enduring support to Adventist education at all levels, and as an avid reader he promoted lifelong learning in its various forms. He was recognized as well for his devotion to the musical arts with a special fondness for classic hymns?²



R.T. Hudson

From *Northeastern Academy Torch*, 1967.

Early Life (1912-1935)

R. T. Hudson was born on December 4, 1912 in Jackson, Mississippi to Joseph B. and Annie Lee Cotton Hudson. His father was a Baptist minister before joining the Seventh-day Adventist Church.³ The Hudsons had eight children, two of whom were stillborn and two of whom succumbed to the 1918 influenza pandemic. The three others who, along with R. T., survived to adulthood included Mary (Hicks) (1899-1976); A. V., known as Avis (Carothers) (1910-2005); and Omega (Grigsby) (1917-1967).⁴ According to Hudson family descendants, Joseph and Annie Hudson gave all except one of their children first and middle initials instead of contemporary names in protest of the lingering influences of slavery. The youngest was given a name signifying that she would be

their last child.⁵

Young R. T.'s early education took him through a mix of Adventist church schools and public schools in several parts of the United States. His higher education included studies at Oakwood College (now University) in Huntsville, Alabama and the Queens College in Flushing, New York.⁶

Pastoral Ministry and Family (1935-1962)

After brief service under the mentorship of Owen A. Troy, Sr., in Chicago, Hudson's 27 years of pastoral ministry began in 1935 in Des Moines, Iowa.⁷ There, along with regular pastoral duties he also had responsibilities for supervising evangelism in Sioux City, Iowa and neighboring sections of Nebraska.⁸ Following this first appointment he pastored in Dallas, Texas (1943-1945); Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (1946-1949); Washington, D. C. (1950-1952); Cleveland, Ohio (1953-1955); and then in New York City (1956-1962), his final pastoral assignment before moving to conference administration.⁹

On June 28, 1951 Hudson married Dorothy Mae Warren (born June 26, 1927) of Columbus, Ohio, the daughter of Emmett and Carrie Rome Warren, both from Georgia. Their family grew over the next several years to include three daughters, Ramona Estelle (Muzon) (from Hudson's previous marriage to Gladius Vivian Hackley), Sharon Rose (Bannon), and Robbin Denise (Daily); and one son, Ricardo Tilden (1956-1989).

Dorothy Hudson studied music at Ohio State University and became highly regarded as a talented vocal musician and inspirational speaker. She employed these talents along with her organizational skills in continued service to the community and the church in several capacities following her husband's death, including executive secretary for the director of the office of the Equal Opportunity Commission of Nassau County, New York, and dean of women in Carter Hall at Oakwood College (now University).¹⁰

Ephesus Church and New York City (1956-1962)

R. T. Hudson is remembered by colleagues and church members both as a remarkably resourceful and powerful preacher and as a compassionate and attentive pastor who had a great love for young people. Both church-sponsored and public periodicals chronicled his accomplishments and his constant readiness to help those in need.¹¹

Hudson's service during his last pastoral assignment at the Ephesus Church in Harlem, New York City, was characterized by his commitment to community outreach. During his years at Ephesus several community challenges arose in which Hudson saw spiritual connections, implications, and responsibilities. He did not shy away from social issues and problems, but rather found ways to address them through Biblical insights and injunctions and to use them to lend public relevance to his evangelistic efforts.

Hudson became especially well known for his series of Sunday night meetings that drew crowds by the thousands to hear influential guest speakers address a broad range of current topics, followed by Hudson's messages linking the issues to Biblical truths. For example, he brought to the church "some of the world's foremost diplomats in connection with his evangelistic series."¹² These meetings that featured speakers from Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East, as well as various regions of the United States, brought together Hudson's goals for community service and evangelism.¹³

In one such meeting the head of the Liberian delegation to the United Nations called for African Americans to take greater interest in "anything that affects Africa, their ancestral homeland." This speech was one of many addressing contemporary issues as part of a series of citywide evangelistic efforts for "health and happiness" that Hudson organized and led with support from local church leaders from a variety of other faith traditions.¹⁴ One of Hudson's most popular series featured the contributions of various denominations that grew out of the Protestant Reformation.¹⁵

Hudson's community involvement included his leadership, along with local pastors from several denominations, in the fight against a liquor establishment moving into Harlem and taking over the property of a local grocer.¹⁶ At another time he and an interdenominational coalition of local ministers led a successful struggle to improve access to quality health care in the notoriously under-served Harlem community. Hudson held large public meetings in support of that effort at the Ephesus church.¹⁷ In his farewell message to the church in 1962, he recalled leading a motorcade to pray on the steps of the Harlem Hospital in his quest for improved medical facilities for the community.¹⁸

While in New York Hudson became the first Seventh-day Adventist pastor to be invited to offer prayer for the state legislature in session.¹⁹ He often offered prayer in these and other governmental meetings, and through these contacts enhanced his influence and platform for advocacy on community issues. Due to his wide recognition as a community leader he was also called upon to appear before the New York State Legislature to speak on behalf of religious liberty. In 1960 he was one of only five ministers selected to represent the United States on the Queen's Broadcasting Station in London, England.²⁰

Hudson's Christian spirit for doing good served the needs of his worldwide church as well as his local community in that he consistently played an important role in the enhancement of race relations in the denomination. Although firmly faithful to the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Hudson in one sermon remarked: "Race prejudice and discrimination are in the Adventist movement.... But such prejudice is not the Spirit of the Adventist movement."²¹

On another occasion Hudson was eager to announce that "improvement in race relations" had been a prime objective of the 1961 Fall Council of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists and that a five-point program had been adopted: "(1) to employ people in all Adventist institutions on a merit basis without regard to race or color, (2) to send more colored workers overseas wherever acceptable, (3) to set up [an] interracial race

relations committee in all union conferences, (4) to appoint a race relations committee in the General Conference, and (5) to work out race relations problems through normal church channels.²²

Perhaps Hudson's consistent quest for unity in the church and beyond resulted from personal experiences and challenges. He remained faithful to his calling to ministry despite limitations on opportunities for advancement in leadership for members of racial minorities in both his nation and his church. For example, he faced labels such as that in a 1937 conference report of baptisms that identified Hudson as "our colored intern" while listing all others simply by name and official title without ethnic designation or caricature.²³ Through these challenges Hudson continued in his fervor for the mission of the church, as evidenced in other early reports such as one (1936) of his having sold 100 *Message* magazines in one day in the rain and several (1937, 1938) regarding his evangelistic efforts and baptisms they produced.²⁴

Northeastern Conference President (1962-1966)

R. T. Hudson was elected president of the Northeastern Conference of Seventh-day Adventists on August 30, 1962²⁵ and took office September 10, 1962. Stennett Brooks, the conference secretary-treasurer, recalled that after studying the conditions in the conference, Elder Hudson energetically and promptly began to map out plans for housing several congregations, paying off several large mortgages for existing church buildings, providing shelter for senior members, providing additional church schools, and increasing evangelistic goals.²⁶ As president, Hudson advised and guided 20 churches, the Northeastern Academy, and a home for the aged and oversaw the acquisition of new church properties in the acquisition of church property or resolution of debt on their existing properties. In 1966 he realized his dream of 1,000 baptisms in the Northeastern Conference in one year. With the addition of 1,074 new members that year the conference total exceeded 10,000 for the first time.²⁷

Hudson was an enthusiastic, tenacious, even driven leader who exhibited a sense of urgency about all that he did. His final staff meeting, according to colleagues, was a testament to this dedication and urgency for the cause of Christ. They recalled that their president "shared with [them] anew the theme and burden of the great evangelism thrust that the General Conference president, R.H. Pierson, presented at the Fall Council (1966).²⁸ In a follow-up letter to conference workers, Hudson sought to inspire his team to share in the burning zeal to see the work of God finished in the earth and commitment to expending every effort to bring about that goal that Elder Pierson manifested.²⁹

Another lasting tribute to Hudson's leadership is the R. T. Hudson School. The school originated in 1924 as the elementary division of Harlem Academy and in 1947 was, in a new location, renamed the Manhattan Elementary School. After two additional relocations, it came to rest in 1958 on its current site in the Bronx, New York City. In 1967 its name was changed to the R. T. Hudson School to honor Elder Hudson for his strong support of Adventist education in general and of this school specifically.³⁰

Other achievements of Hudson's presidency included expansion of the conference camp (Camp Victory Lake), the addition of workers to the conference's various ministries, and his response to the significant increases in the number of immigrants into the conference from the West Indies. To increase understanding and enhance working relationships between people groups in the Northeastern Conference, Hudson made personal visits overseas to locales from which many of his new members and potential members had migrated.³¹

Closing Act of Service (1966)

It has been said that Elder R. T. Hudson was a man who preached his own funeral. It happened Sabbath afternoon December 10, 1966 in Flint, Michigan, when he delivered the eulogy at the funeral of his former secretary, Mrs. Yvonne Miller. These words turned out to be his last sermon and the script of the eulogy that Elder E. E. Cleveland, then associate ministerial secretary of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, spoke over him the following Tuesday, December 13, at his own funeral.³² Elder Hudson declared that he wanted to be ready when his time to die came and ended by quoting 2 Timothy 4:7: "I have fought a good fight, finished my course, and kept the faith." Following these, his last words, he suffered a heart attack, collapsed and then died in route to the hospital.

Those who served with him described Elder R. T. Hudson as a man of staunch faith, unwavering integrity, inordinate zeal, and boundless energy who contributed significantly to the Seventh-day Adventist Church and the communities in which he lived and served.³³

Dorothy Mae Hudson (later, Smith) died November 7, 2020³⁴

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