

Moran, James Lewis (1894–1972)

SAMUEL LONDON

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James Lewis Moran was a pioneer of black Seventh-day Adventist education who served as the founding principal of Harlem and Pine Forge academies, as well as the first African American president of Oakwood Junior College.

James Lewis Moran was born on June 15, 1894, in New York City.¹ At the age of seven he was orphaned and subsequently lived with Benjamin Green (1846–1918) and Lucette Alvina Stebbins (1852–1928), a white family living in Wirt, New York.²

James attended the local elementary school and was seasonally employed on the Greens' farm.³ In 1910 he completed his elementary education. That year he was introduced to Adventism, and was baptized in June 1911 in Richburg, New York.⁴ In the autumn of 1912 he enrolled in Fernwood Intermediate School in Tunesassa, New York. He graduated in 1914. That summer James worked as a colporteur, or literature evangelist, which enabled him to earn the funds needed to attend Atlantic Union College that fall.⁵ While there, he found employment as a farm laborer with C. B. Wiggins in South Lancaster, Massachusetts.⁶ This job gave him the means to support himself through school. In 1917 James received his diploma and was drafted into the United States Army, where he served with distinction in the French theater of the Western Front in World War I.⁷

After the war he taught reading and writing to enlisted men. As a commendation for his work on the battlefield and in the classroom, he attended the University of London on a British scholarship. In 1919 he returned to the United States and received an honorable discharge from the military.⁸ During the 1930s Moran attended



James Lewis Moran

Photo courtesy of Oakwood University Archives.

summer school sessions at New York University. In 1942 he earned a bachelor's degree from Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee.⁹ He also undertook studies for a master's degree at Howard University in Washington, D.C., and a law degree at LaSalle Extension University in Chicago, Illinois.¹⁰

In 1920 J. E. Jayne (president of the Greater New York Conference of Seventh-day Adventists) and James K. Humphrey (pastor of the First Harlem Seventh-day Adventist Church) persuaded Moran to establish Harlem Academy.¹¹ Moran served as the principal of this institution from 1920 to 1927 and 1930 to 1932.¹² On March 4, 1922, James Moran married Mercedes Aguirre (1905–1967), an immigrant from Havana, Cuba.¹³ The wedding took place in the borough of Manhattan in New York City. To this union were born four children: Hortense Irene (1922–2012), Mercedes Rebecca (1924–1995), James (1925–1984), and George (1933–1980).

In addition to being the founding principal of Harlem Academy, the forerunner of present-day Northeastern Academy, Moran has the distinction of serving as the first African American president of Oakwood Junior College.¹⁴ A student strike on the campus of Oakwood precipitated Moran's appointment. The students desired an end to discriminatory practices on campus, curriculum changes, and new leadership. The protest achieved its aims, and in 1932 Moran became president.¹⁵ During Moran's tenure he oversaw the institution's transition from junior to senior college status in 1945 the construction and completion of a new administration building (Moran Hall), the sustained growth of the student body and faculty, and the school's achievement of financial solvency.¹⁶ In 1945 Moran left Oakwood and accepted an invitation to become the secretary-treasurer of the newly formed Allegheny Conference of Seventh-day Adventists—comprising the black constituency of the states of Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, Ohio, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and the District of Columbia. That year he was officially registered as an ordained minister.¹⁷ Moran continued in the office of secretary-treasurer up to the year 1947, at which time he took the helm of the conference's Educational Department.¹⁸ In 1946 Moran became the founding principal of Pine Forge Academy.¹⁹ He held this position until the year 1949.²⁰ In 1948 and 1949 he was a member of the conference's executive committee.²¹ In 1950 Moran accepted an invitation from the Northeastern Conference of Seventh-day Adventists to become the principal of Northeastern Academy.²² He served in that capacity until 1952.²³ Following a brief retirement, Moran returned to work, in 1958, as the principal of the Dupont Park Adventist School in Washington, D.C. Following eight successful years of labor at that institution, he retired for the second time in 1966.²⁴

James Lewis Moran died on Saturday, March 25, 1972, in Washington, D.C. He was 77 years old.²⁵

Moran is remembered for his pioneering role as teacher, principal, president, founder, and organizer of well-known black schools in the Adventist education system. Moran's legacy as the founding principal of Harlem and Pine Forge academies, the first black president of Oakwood, and his years of leadership at Northeastern Academy and the Dupont Park Adventist School underscore his lifelong commitment to Adventist education. Moran's exceptional leadership and historic accomplishments as a pioneering black Adventist educator are commemorated at Oakwood University in two significant ways: The historic stone building constructed by

Oakwood students during his presidency bears his name; and the local chapter of the Oakwood Alumni Association is named in his honor. Consequently the entire Oakwood University community continue to celebrate and esteem the illustrious life and legacy of James Lewis Moran.

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NOTES

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5. Ibid.
6. 1917 United States draft registration card.
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16. "James L. Moran obituary."
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