

Stauffer, James Paul (1915–2020)

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James Paul Stauffer touched the lives of a multitude of students at Pacific Union College and La Sierra University and was considered by many to be the dean of Adventist English professors. He was also a successful academic administrator at Loma Linda University.

Family Origins and Early Life

Stauffer's research on his family origins traced the Stauffer name to Anabaptists in the canton of Berne, Switzerland. In 1681 his ancestors for religious reasons chose exile with a group of Mennonites in the German Palatinate. In 1718 Christian Stauffer, at the invitation of William Penn, emigrated to Pennsylvania, where for generations the Stauffers were Mennonite farmers in Montgomery County. Paul Stauffer's mother came from a family of Quakers, who because of persecution moved from England to Ireland, then to Pennsylvania in 1687. His research led Paul to wonder if his own pacifist leanings had somehow been influenced by genes from his dissenting ancestors.¹

James Paul Stauffer was born to George and Pearl Stauffer on September 9, 1915, in Ithan, Pennsylvania, near Philadelphia. When he was seven his family moved from Unionville to Reading, where they were active members of an evangelical congregation. At the initiative of his father, his family attended Bible studies led by an Adventist minister and ultimately joined the Reading Adventist church. For two years Paul attended a small church school,



James Paul Stauffer

Photo courtesy of Bruce Anderson.

then graduated from public high school in 1933.

Education and Early Career

The following fall he enrolled at Washington Missionary College (WMC) in Takoma Park, Maryland, but was forced to withdraw after a year for financial reasons. Paul's mother believed that one skilled in shorthand and typing could always get work and encouraged him to develop facility in these disciplines. After returning to WMC, Paul wrote to every Adventist college in the United States, offering his stenographic skills. He received a positive response from PUC president W.I. Smith, and thus moved to Angwin, California, where he became Smith's secretary.

The president's office was near the college chapel, and Paul enjoyed hearing the college organ played by Lois Mae Johnson, a skilled organist and organ teacher. Proximity obviated the social restraints of that day, making interaction convenient. They were married in August 1938 and then served for the next four years at Lodi Academy. Lois Mae taught piano; Paul was principal of the elementary school and taught grades 7 and 8 for two years and then English, shorthand and typing in the academy proper for the next two years. Paul also completed the final requirements for obtaining his B.A. from PUC in 1941.

In 1942 Stauffer returned to PUC to teach English and speech courses, and work toward a master's degree with the notable Charles Eliot Weniger as his mentor. Stauffer was then the youngest member of the faculty. Additionally, he again served as secretary to President Smith and then to H.J. Klooster, who succeeded Smith in 1943. After Stauffer completed the M.A. in 1944, President Klooster asked him to become the college registrar. He agreed, with the understanding this would not interfere with his pursuing additional graduate study. During a two-year tenure, Stauffer reorganized and modernized the registrar's office, replacing the previous handwritten records.

Memorable Professor and Dean

In 1946 the Stauffers moved to Massachusetts where Paul enrolled as a doctoral student at Harvard University. He was awarded the Ph.D. in 1952. He then taught in the PUC English department from 1952 to 1964. During these years Stauffer was deeply involved with other young colleagues in designing a new interdisciplinary general education program. A generation of students invariably remembered Stauffer's signature course, Introduction to Western Arts, as influential in their lives. A distinguished historian later stated that Paul Stauffer's Western Arts was simply the most outstanding course he had ever taken, including his graduate courses at Columbia University.² Another student recalled Stauffer's early morning chapel talks, and his memorable recitation of Francis Thompson's "The Hound of Heaven."⁸ During the years at PUC three children were born to Paul and Lois Mae had three children – James in 1942, Thomas in 1945 and Margaret in 1953.

In 1964, at the invitation of Loma Linda University (LLU), Stauffer became dean of the Graduate School, a position he held for eleven years. He worked closely with and admired LLU President Godfrey T. Anderson. He subsequently taught English for three years at what was then the La Sierra campus of LLU.

Later Years

Paul Stauffer's early retirement from Loma Linda in 1968 at age 62 and return to Angwin was largely based on concern for Lois Mae's health. Paul drew on his own skills to build a new home, which he and Lois Mae occupied in 1981. He spent a year as interim chair of the English Department, served a few years as associate dean of the college, and edited the college bulletin and the third edition of Walter Utt's history of Pacific Union College.⁴

In 1986 Lois Mae succumbed to breast cancer. Paul married Sandra Rice, manager of the College Bookstore and a devoted friend of Lois Mae, in 1987. Paul and Sandra enjoyed several trips to Europe and the Middle East prior to her death in 2014. In 1997 the building occupied by the English Department was rededicated and named Stauffer Hall in honor of Paul.

The long and productive life of this celebrated teacher, J. Paul Stauffer, was completed in Concord, California, on January 10, 2020, at the age of 104 years.

SOURCES

Stauffer, J. Paul. Autobiographical notes. Unpublished, in author's possession.

Utt, Walter C. *A Mountain, a Pickax, a College: Walter Utt's History of Pacific Union College*, 3rd ed. Pacific Union College, 1996.

NOTES

1. The family history and biographical information in this article is drawn from autobiographical notes by J. Paul Stauffer in the author's possession.
2. Stanley G. Payne, personal communication with author.
3. Bruce Anderson, personal observation as student.
4. Walter C. Utt, *A Mountain, a Pickax, a College: Walter Utt's History of Pacific Union College*, 3rd ed (Pacific Union College, 1996)

