

Hoyt, Frederick G. (1920–2012)

ANDREW HOWE

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Frederick Gilman Hoyt was a historian and long-time member of the La Sierra community. He spent nearly 70 years on campus as a student and faculty member, experiencing the institution in nearly all of its phases: junior college, senior college, part of Loma Linda University, and La Sierra University. He is perhaps best known among historians studying Seventh-day Adventism for his discovery of an account of the Israel Dammon trial in the *Piscataquis Farmer*.

Early Life

Hoyt was born in Wasco, California, on June 11, 1920,¹ to a family that included father Joseph, mother Bertha, and older brother Frank. The family moved throughout the central California region, eventually settling in Mountain View. There, Hoyt discovered two lifelong passions. Dr. Alonzo Baker introduced him to tennis, a game he would play well into his 70s. He also fell in love with baseball, first as a fan and later as a scholar.²

The Hoyts weathered the Great Depression first in Mountain View and later in Riverside after their relocation to Southern California. The family lost three houses during this difficult time.³ Hoyt first set foot on the campus of what was then Southern California Junior College in 1935, to attend La Sierra Academy, at that time housed on the college campus. Aside from his military service, he would be associated with La Sierra in some fashion from that moment until the end of his life.

College Interrupted by War

After graduating from La Sierra Academy in 1938, Hoyt matriculated at the newly christened La Sierra College. He took pre-medicine courses initially before declaring a history major. He was active in the campus community, serving as president of the Radio Club⁴ and, during his junior year, as editor of the campus newspaper (the *College Criterion*).⁵ Hoyt's interest in global politics is evident in the numerous articles that appear in the *Criterion* about the War in Europe. In order to earn money for tuition, he worked in the campus broom factory, raised bees to sell honey, and shot vermin troubling the chicken farm.⁶ He also became a reservist for the U.S. Navy in 1939, and in late 1940 was called up to active duty, the first La Sierra student to serve in uniform leading up to World War II.⁷ Due to his experience with radio, Hoyt was trained as a radioman in the Signal Intelligence

Service. Prior to the war breaking out, due to his proficiency in languages, he was sent to the Puget Sound to learn Kanakata, a script used by the Japanese Imperial Navy.⁸

World War II

Hoyt spent much of the war patrolling a stretch of ocean between Hawaii and the United States, although with assignments throughout the Marshall Islands and as close to Japan as Okinawa. He served mostly on a “tin can” (destroyer), intercepting Japanese encoded transmissions and relaying them to naval intelligence. A born storyteller, nearly all of Hoyt’s stories about the war involved moments not really specific to the war. Below are a few he told with great relish:⁹

His temporary popularity whenever cigarettes and “beer chits” were handed out, as his crewmates knew him to be a non-smoker and teetotaler.

The prevalence of “red lead” (ketchup) in the U.S. Navy, which his fellow crewmates poured on anything and everything in order to disguise the terrible taste of the food.

Slogging through James Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake* while on midnight watch.

Discovering Ruskets—or perhaps Weet-Bix from Australia—in the mess while in the middle of the Pacific Ocean.

Unexpectedly running into his brother Frank, a Marine, on Kwajalein Atoll.

Testing a theory by placing a stamp on a coconut and sending it through the mail, from Hawaii, to a young neighborhood kid he knew back home in La Sierra (the coconut arrived safely).¹⁰

These stories and others like them were not really about the war. One emerged late in his life, however, spoken only to a few close friends and with details that emerged slowly over time. In 1945 he was transferred to the U.S.S. Missouri battleship—where he would have borne witness to the Japanese surrender—but these orders were rescinded, and he was sent to Okinawa instead. While there he witnessed the aftermath of an incident in which American GIs executed Japanese prisoners.¹¹ Despite this traumatic episode, Hoyt often spoke of his service with pride. Further, his time in Polynesia impacted his later interests. He and his wife visited the Hawaiian Islands over 40 times, many of these trips timed around an annual orchid show. Indeed, Fred and Vivian had a respectable personal collection of orchids.¹²

Transitions

Hoyt returned to La Sierra in 1946, completing Bachelor's in both history and religion. He married Vivian E. Golden in 1948 and a year later began teaching at the newly-opened San Pasqual Academy, also tasked with taking care of the institution's chickens.¹³ He then moved on to Pomona Junior Academy, where he served as principal and taught whatever subject was needed. During his six-year employment between these two institutions, he taught adjunct courses at La Sierra College and worked toward a Master's in history from Claremont College.¹⁴ In 1955 Hoyt completed his Master's thesis and was hired by his alma mater, although delayed a year when receiving news that his Fulbright application had been approved. The Hoyts spent the 1955-1956 school year in the Philippines, living simply in a bamboo hut.¹⁵ Hoyt used the Fulbright support to conduct research toward a doctorate at Claremont, completed in 1963.¹⁶ The year spent in the Philippines was transformative, opening a lifelong line of research inquiry into the Spanish-American War.

La Sierra Faculty

For the next 57 years, Hoyt was a member of the La Sierra faculty, including as an emeritus following his retirement in the mid-1990s. His daughter Corinne joined the family not long after he began on the faculty, and one of his greatest thrills was when his granddaughter came to La Sierra during the late 2000s and became a student in the department he helped build. Hoyt was known for his witty and erudite lectures, winning numerous faculty awards for teaching and also service. He was a longtime chair of the History department, growing its course offerings, bolstering the pre-law program through internships, adding a Master's program, and hiring and mentoring several generations of faculty. He also served as director of the humanities division and as an advisor for students planning to study abroad.¹⁷ At one point he found himself serving on 39 committees simultaneously!¹⁸ In his retirement he served on the *Adventist Heritage* board.

Hoyt cut his teeth at La Sierra during a time when research was considered a distraction to on-campus service. Nevertheless, he spent many a summer searching libraries and archives, exploring research lines involving Philippine history, the Civil War, naval history, and early Adventist history (although he also explored more esoteric avenues, such as the history of ketchup production and consumption in the U.S. military). Many of these projects did not reach fruition until after his retirement. Hoyt spoke at a number of national and international conferences, including for years at the Association for Asian Studies. He delivered papers at five San Diego Forum meetings and also at the Association of Seventh-day Adventist Historians, of which he served a stint as president.¹⁹

Hoyt published on naval history, including in the *Journal of San Diego History*, *Cryptolog*, *American Neptune*, *Naval History*, and the U.S. Naval Institute. Publications about Adventist history appeared in the *Maine Journal of History* and in Adventist periodicals including *Adventist Heritage*, *Adventist Today*, and *Spectrum*. Most of these articles were written after his retirement, and it is fair to say that Hoyt enjoyed the process of research even more than publication. At his passing, in addition to the dozens of projects in various states of development, he had five

largely completed books and 15 articles, all told over 1700 manuscript pages.²⁰

Dammon Trial

Hoyt's largest contribution to early Adventist history involved his discovery of a newspaper article involving a long-forgotten episode in Maine's history: the trial of Israel Dammon. While visiting Maine to read microfilm from 19th century newspapers hoping to gain insight into Millerite/early Adventist history, Hoyt came across an account of a trial in the *Piscataquis Farmer*, from March 7, 1845. The article included a partial transcript of the trial of Dammon, arrested for disturbing the peace during a charismatic worship service at a farmhouse.²¹ The report of a somewhat chaotic meeting implicated two prophetesses, Ellen Harmon and Dorinda Baker. The trial had been debated in the 19th century, but the newspaper account and testimony shed new light on a young Ellen G. White. Hoyt put the account in a file, uncertain how to proceed. Details from the article were eventually published, along with commentary from Hoyt and three other La Sierra historians, in a 1987 special issue of *Spectrum*.²² The Dammon discovery also had an impact upon his developing identity as a historian and a scholar, leading to greater skepticism when it came to historical narratives about early Adventism.

Retirement

Even in retirement Hoyt was known at La Sierra as a teacher, visiting campus several times a week to eat in the cafeteria, drop by the department, listen to a guest lecture, or musical performance. During these moments he would regale students and faculty alike with stories about the past. As he put it, he was a teacher who no longer carried the burden of having to grade papers. As one of his faculty colleagues noted in eulogizing him, Hoyt was an "irrepressible storyteller."²³ He continued to visit campus, and tell stories, throughout his retirement. Preceded in death by his wife, Hoyt passed away on June 27, 2012, at the age of 92.²⁴

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NOTES

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4. *College Criterion* (January 11, 1940), 2; <https://lasierra.edu/fileadmin/documents/library/criterion/Vol-11-1939-1940.pdf>.
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