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Booth, Ernest Sheldon (1915–1984)

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James L. Hayward, Ph.D. (Washington State University), is a professor emeritus of biology at Andrews University where he taught for 30 years. He is widely published in literature dealing with ornithology, behavioral ecology, and paleontology, and has contributed numerous articles to Adventist publications. His book, *The Creation-Evolution Controversy: An Annotated Bibliography* (Scarecrow Press, 1998), won a *Choice* award from the American Library Association. He also edited *Creation Reconsidered* (Association of Adventist Forums, 2000).

Ernest Sheldon Booth played an important role in the establishment of biology as an academic discipline in Seventh-

day Adventist colleges and universities. He presided over the establishment of the first Adventist graduate program in biology and founded the Rosario Beach Marine Laboratory operated by Walla Walla University.

Early Life

Ernest Booth was born October 18, 1915 in Lehman, Pennsylvania.¹ He credited his interest in outdoor biology to his father, Sherman Booth, about whom he wrote: He "has been my inspiration in the study of outdoor biology since boyhood days, when he spent hundreds of hours walking with me over the hills of eastern Oregon and Nevada."² In 1933 Ernest graduated from high school at Walla Walla Academy, College Place, Washington, and in 1937 earned a Bachelor of Science in biology at Pacific Union College, Angwin, California.³ He then moved back to Washington where in 1940 he earned a master's degree in biology at the University of Washington, with a thesis on the birds of the Blue Mountains of eastern Oregon.⁴ He completed a PhD in zoology at Washington State University in 1947, with a dissertation that included a comprehensive taxonomy of mammals living in Washington State.⁵

Contributions to Adventist Education

Booth began teaching at Walla Walla College (now Walla Walla University) at Walla Walla, Washington in 1938, and in 1940 founded there the Department of Biological Sciences. In 1948, after completion of his own graduate degrees, his department initiated a master's program in biology.⁶ Given that one of America's richest temperate environments for marine life is located on Washington's Pacific Northwest coast, Booth decided to establish there a marine biology field station to provide Walla Walla students with knowledge and experience unavailable in the classroom. So in 1947, he founded the Walla Walla College Marine Station (now Rosario Beach Marine Laboratory) based on Fidalgo Island in Anacortes, Washington. For eight consecutive years Booth's summer sessions were held in an old fish cannery he rented for one dollar a year.⁷

In 1953 Booth came to know of a 40-acre property for sale along Rosario Beach on Fidalgo Island that had served for many years as a resort. The price was \$53,000. Fearing the property would be sold to another buyer, Booth emptied his personal savings account (\$15,000) to provide earnest money to hold the property, and then told the college administration what he had done. The college president, George Bowers, was alarmed by Booth's non-board-approved action and told him, "I've gotten you out of many problems, Ernest, but I don't know if I can get you out of this one. You may have just bought yourself a marine station." A reluctant board of trustees eventually approved the purchase, along with a unanimous counseling that Booth should never again make an unauthorized purchase. The first summer session was held at Rosario Beach in 1955. Since that time thousands of students from Walla Walla and other Adventist campuses have attended summer sessions at the Station, which was renamed the Rosario Beach Marine Laboratory.⁸

Booth was a fervent field trip organizer and leader. Between 1938 and 1963, for example, he conducted fourteen field expeditions with students to Mexico, Central America, Canada, and Alaska. In addition, he made trips to Hawaii, Midway Islands, the West Indies, continental South America, and the Galapagos Islands. On many of these trips he collected insects, birds, and mammals and made movies that were used as a basis for lectures he gave throughout the United States and Canada.⁹

Publications

While chairing the Department of Biology at Walla Walla, Booth edited a series of monographs known as Walla Walla College Publications of the Department of Biological Sciences and the Biological Station. These publications featured research on a variety of topics by Walla Walla biology faculty and graduate students. More than 30 of these monographs were published between 1951 and 1962. Booth himself authored or coauthored nine of these publications.¹⁰ From 1948 to 1967 he also edited a magazine called *The Naturalist* (early title, *Northwest Naturalist*) under the auspices of the Associated Nature Clubs of America, based at Walla Walla College.¹¹

In 1950, at the request of the Department of Education of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Booth wrote a secondary textbook, *Biology: The Story of Life*, published by Pacific Press Publishing Association. In addition to covering basic biological principles, the book made a strong case for the study of outdoor field biology, featured a young-earth creationist view of the history of life, and interpreted the existence of fossil humans as evidence of the degeneration of humans from the "image of God." Most fossils were considered the remains of organisms destroyed by the Genesis Flood.¹²

Booth's interest in birds and mammals led to many publications. He wrote four bird guides: *Birds of the West* (1948), *Birds of the East* (1962), the *Eastern Bird Guide for Youth* (1963), and *The Western Bird Guide for Youth* (1963). He was an avid birder and kept a list of all birds he saw each year.¹³ To help other birders do the same he published *A Life List of North American Birds* (1960). His book *How to Know the Mammals* (1961) became a popular key for beginning students of mammals, and in 1968 the University of California Press published his *Mammals of Southern California* as part of the California Natural history Guides Series. He and his students created a large mammal collection, now permanently housed at the Burke Museum, University of Washington.¹⁴ His *Laboratory Anatomy of the Cat* (1946) was one of his most successful publishing ventures, and was still in print (with coauthor Robert B. Chiasson) 43 years after its first appearance.¹⁵ He also published numerous articles on birds and mammals in the scientific literature.¹⁶

Outdoor Pictures and World Medics

In 1958, Booth left Walla Walla College for southern California where he taught part time at Loma Linda University.¹⁷ During this time he was involved in promoting his business, Outdoor Pictures, an educational resource which sold filmstrips on biological topics, educational movies, and museum specimens for schools.¹⁸ He also registered World Medics, Incorporated, in 1963, a philanthropic organization that raised funds for the support of Seventh-day Adventist mission projects around the world.¹⁹

Death and Legacy

Ernest S. Booth died on May 7, 1984 in Anacortes, Washington, having significantly impacted biological education and mission service within the Seventh-day Adventist denomination.²⁰

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NOTES

- ¹ "Booth." *North Pacific Union Gleaner*, June 4, 1984, 23.
- ² Ernest Sheldon Booth, *Birds of the West*, Third edition (Escondido, CA: Outdoor Pictures, 1960), dedication page.
- ³ Robert Jan van de Hoek, "Ernest Sheldon Booth: The Early Years from 1915 to 1947," Ballona Institute, December 20, 2010, accessed July 11, 2017, <http://www.naturespace.org/Ernest.S.Booth.EarlyYears1.htm>
- ⁴ Ernest S. Booth, "An Ecological Distribution of the Birds of the Blue Mountain Region of Southeastern Washington and Northeastern Oregon" (MS thesis, University of Washington, 1940).
- ⁵ Ernest S. Booth, "Systematic Review of the Land Mammals of Washington." (PhD diss., Washington State University, 1947).
- ⁶ Terrie Dopp Aamodt, *Bold Venture: A History of Walla Walla College* (College Place, WA: Walla Walla College, 1992), 134–135.
- ⁷ "Rosario Beach Marine Laboratory: History," accessed May 27, 2017, <https://wallawalla.edu/academics/areas-of-study/undergraduate-programs/biological-sciences/rosario-beach-marine-laboratory/history/>
- ⁸ Ibid. See also "Walla Walla University: Rosario Beach Marine Laboratory. Facilities and Location," accessed May 27, 2017, <https://wallawalla.edu/academics/areas-of-study/undergraduate-programs/biological-sciences/rosario-beach-marine-laboratory/facilities-and-location/>
- ⁹ Ernest S. Booth, *Western Bird Guide for Youth* (Escondido, CA: Outdoor Pictures, 1963), 2.
- ¹⁰ Online search for "Publications of the Walla Walla College Department of Biological Sciences and the Biology Station," Walla Walla University: Research Central, accessed May 27, 2017, http://alliance-primo.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/primo_library/libweb/action/dlSearch.do?institution=WALLA&vid=WALLA&onCampus=true&group
- ¹¹ Walla Walla University: Research Central, accessed May 27, 2017, http://alliance-primo.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/primo_library/libweb/action/display.do?tabs=detailsTab&ct=display&fn=search&doc=CP71997669
- ¹² Ernest S. Booth, *Biology, the Story of Life* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1950), 464–507.
- ¹³ Ernest S. Booth, *A Life List of North American Birds* (Escondido, CA: Outdoor Pictures, 1960), 4.
- ¹⁴ Mammalogy Collection Database," Burke Museum, accessed May 27, 2017, <http://www.burkemuseum.org/research-and-collections/mammalogy/collections/database/results.php?l=20&o=0&n=3062&m=2820&f=&g=&s=17h%7ElymyNd1yIp&w=Pf3NQ>. This database lists over 3,000 mammal specimens prepared by Booth and now housed at the Burke Museum.
- ¹⁵ "Laboratory Anatomy of the Cat," Worldcat, accessed on May 27, 2017, <https://www.worldcat.org/title/laboratory-anatomy-of-the-cat/oclc/263150415/editions?referer=di&editionsView=true>
- ¹⁶ Scientific papers by Ernest S. Booth are listed by Google Scholar, <https://scholar.google.com/>
- ¹⁷ van de Hoek, "Ernest Sheldon Booth: The Early Years from 1915 to 1947."
- ¹⁸ "Outdoor Pictures," Internet Archive, accessed May 27, 2017, https://openlibrary.org/publishers/Outdoor_Pictures#sort=date_published
- ¹⁹ "World Medics, Inc.: California Secretary of State Business Registration," Bizapedia, accessed January 11, 2017, <https://www.bizapedia.com/ca/world-medics-inc.html>. As of this writing (July 11, 2017), World Medics continues to raise funds for mission work: "World Medics, Inc.," accessed July 11, 2017, <http://www.worldmedics.org/>

²⁰ “Booth.” *North Pacific Union Gleaner*.

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