

Hamilton, Harry H.

(1878–1965)

DENNIS PETTIBONE

Dennis Pettibone, Ph.D. (University of California, Riverside), is professor emeritus of history at Southern Adventist University. He and his first wife, Carol Jean Nelson Pettibone (now deceased) have two grown daughters. He is now married to the former Rebecca Aufderhar. His published writings include *A Century of Challenge: the Story of Southern College* and the second half of *His Story in Our Time*.

Harry Heber Hamilton was a professor, academy principal, and president of three colleges in the United States.

Early Life

Harry Heber Hamilton was born on February 28, 1878 in Glass, Tennessee. His parents were John Tweed Hamilton (1855-1943) and Anna Hadley Hamilton (1861-1909).¹

Before becoming an Adventist, Hamilton graduated from high school in Jonesboro, Arkansas and studied at the University of Arkansas. Then he spent several years in Memphis, Tennessee as a law reporter.² Later, after becoming an Adventist, he would attend and graduate from Walla Walla College.³

Hamilton married Mary Davis on September 8, 1902.⁴ He and Mary had two children, a daughter Evelyn (1906-1993) and a son that he named John Tweed Hamilton (1915-2000) after his father.⁵

Keene Industrial Academy

Hamilton entered denominational employment in 1906,⁶ joining the faculty of Keene Industrial School in Keene, Texas. During his initial dozen years on the Keene faculty, the school changed its name twice, becoming simply Keene Academy in 1916 and Southwestern Junior College in 1917. Every year that he taught at Keene he was listed as teaching “commercial subjects” or as teaching in the “Commercial Department.” However, most years



Harry H. Hamilton.

Photo courtesy of Joanie LL. Source: Find a Grave, <https://findagrave.com/memorial/154196383/harry-heber-hamilton>

he was also listed as teaching at least one other subject. At first it was art; later it was “manual arts,” sometimes spelled out as woodworking or “Sloyd.”⁷

Sloyd was a concept imported from Sweden, where it was “a system of general education with woodworking at its core.” Woodworking was seen as “conducive to the desired mental, physical and moral development in children.” Otto Solomon, the man who developed the system, believed that it had great educational value because “you naturally develop character as you learn with your hands in a comfortable, nurturing environment.” It was a student-centered type of instruction that included learning about “the use of traditional hand tools” and how to select appropriate wood in the forest.⁸

Walla Walla College

Hamilton taught a similar course load, “Commercial Subjects and Woodwork,” during his four years at Walla Walla College (1918-1922).⁹

Half a century later, Walter Raymond Beach, at that time a general field secretary of the General Conference,¹⁰ wrote glowingly of his memories of Harry Hamilton at Walla Walla. Hamilton was, Beach said, “gracious while firmly insisting on justice in the Christian context.” Remembering Professor Hamilton, Beach thought of “the Greek ideal, where harmony, balance, and radiance unite to produce the golden mean.”¹¹

Beach recalled that approval from Walla Walla College’s president was necessary before young men could escort young women to any particular off-campus program. When such permission was requested for students to attend a concert by violinist Jascha Haifetz, Hamilton was given the task of announcing the president’s decision to the student body. After stating that the president approved of the concert as a dating occasion, Hamilton added his own words of advice. Pointing out that the tickets would cost between five and seven dollars each, he told the engaged young ladies that once they were married they would realize that they really needed the money their husbands had spent on the concert. This persuaded many of the couples not to take advantage of that permission.¹²

Auburn Academy

From 1922 to 1925, Hamilton served as principal and business manager of Western Washington Academy, later known as Auburn Academy.¹³ The first year he was at Auburn, a new administration building was built to replace one that had been destroyed by fire the previous year, and a new girls’ dorm was constructed.¹⁴

Beach followed Hamilton to Auburn, serving as boys’ dean as well as Spanish and history teacher. Beach’s memory of Hamilton at Auburn was that of a master storyteller who “carried himself with the bearing of an aristocrat.” He said, “Never have I known anyone in a position of leadership to use more tact with young people, especially those who were recalcitrant or rebellious.” Beach said Hamilton had “innate faith in all his students”

and declared, "I never knew him to admit that a boy or girl was really bad." However, if a girl was seriously dating a boy who wasn't interested in religion, he would caution, "When a child of God marries a child of the devil, she will have plenty of trouble with her father-in-law."¹⁵

Southern Junior College

In 1925, Hamilton became president of Southern Junior College,¹⁶ now Southern Adventist University. A commercial bakery¹⁷ and a laundry¹⁸ were constructed during his administration. Another industry was threatened by the sexist attitudes of one of his board members. This minister complained about the expense of running the basket factory, a business that employed only young women, when the denomination's "great need" was "young men for the ministry." One board member moved that the factory be closed at the end of the school year and the motion was seconded, but before a vote could be taken, Hamilton pointed out that a generous donor was subsidizing the business; consequently the motion was withdrawn. The factory survived for several more years.¹⁹

Reminding his teachers that parents trusted them to be "true fathers and mothers to their children," Hamilton encouraged them to take their responsibilities as surrogate parents seriously.²⁰ Southern Junior College was developing a reputation as a school demanding high standards of personal behavior.

Called to assume the presidency of Washington Missionary College, Hamilton left Southern Junior College in the middle of the 1926-1927 school year.²¹ As a farewell gesture, the student body walked all the way to the Ooltewah train station. The school band performed at the station, and the crowd waved goodbye to Hamilton as he boarded the train.²²

Washington Missionary College

The Washington Missionary College board clearly chose Hamilton for his leadership skills and spiritual qualities rather than for having the highest academic credentials. With only a bachelors degree, he was presiding over a faculty that had a good number of Masters degrees and one doctoral degree.²³ Hamilton was president of Washington Missionary College for 8.5 years, between 1926 and 1935.²⁴

Looking toward junior college accreditation, the freshman and sophomore classes at WMC were organized into a separate school called Columbia Junior College. Its faculty members were chosen from the WMC faculty, and Hamilton was president of Columbia Junior College as well as the parent institution.²⁵

Southwestern Junior College

In 1935 Hamilton moved back to the Keene, Texas campus where he had started his educational career, this time as president of Southwestern Junior College. Here he administered a smaller faculty than the one at WMC,

but even at Southwestern a few teachers had higher degrees than him.

Hamilton was president of Southwestern for nine years. He worked there until he retired. As he approached his 66th birthday, in December 1943, he became severely ill. Age and illness combined persuaded him to retire as of the end of the academic employment year on June 1, 1944. By that time he was sick in bed once again. When submitting Hamilton's application to receive "sustentation" (retirement) funds, J.W. Turner, Southwestern Union Conference president, explained this illness as having been "a result of the strain caused by the closing exercises of the college."²⁶

Retirement

Harry and Mary Hamilton continued to live in Keene for another decade, although they did make at least two trips out West. The first was in September 1945, so that Mary could receive treatments at Boulder Sanitarium; the second was in September 1949,²⁷ so they could spend a week with their son, John T. Hamilton, a music professor at La Sierra College in Arlington, California.²⁸ Three years later they moved to California, and bought a house in Arlington. During their time in California, Mary was hospitalized at least three times.

Harry Hamilton died January 18, 1965. Mary Hamilton lived another five years, until late May 1970.²⁹

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2. Elva B. Gardner, *Southern Missionary College: A School of His Planning*, revised by J. Mabel Wood. (Collegedale Tennessee: Southern Missionary College Board of Trustees, 1975), 264.
3. "In Remembrance," *ARH*, April 1, 1965, 25. One author states that he attended and graduated from Walla Walla during the period 1917 to 1922. Gardner, loc.cit.
4. Hamilton, Sustentation File, GCA.
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9. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*, 1919, 211; 1920, 238; 1921, 172; 1922, 183; Hamilton, Sustentation File, GCA.
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21. Ibid.,66.
22. Ibid., 112.
23. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*, 1934, 250; 1935, 253-254.
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25. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*, 1935, 228.
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27. Ibid.
28. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*, 1949, 266.
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