

Landeen, William Martin (1891–1982)

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William Martin Landeen was a pastor, professor, European Division educational secretary, college president, and United States Army major, who played a prominent role in the denazification of German religion and education.



William M. Landeen.

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Early Life

William Martin Landeen was born May 7, 1891,¹ in Sundsvall, Sweden.² His parents were Otto and Hedda Landeen. He had three older sisters.³

Shortly after William⁴ was born, his father left for America, planning to send for the rest of his family as soon as he had saved up enough money for their tickets. As a new Seventh-day Adventist, he was leaving Sweden because he could not find a job that would let him have Sabbaths off. Unfortunately, his wife died before Otto had accumulated enough money for the tickets. His children were parceled out to several relatives. William, only 18 months old, went to live with his uncle Carl Hopkinson, a devout Lutheran, who was determined to eradicate the toddler's Adventist heritage. As it turned out, the boy had little interest in any religion⁵

Encountering Adventism

When William was 17, his father—who had moved to Canada by that time—sent for him. William arrived, knowing no English.⁶ After a disastrous attempt to attend public school, William reluctantly agreed to attend

Alberta Industrial Academy, a Seventh-day Adventist boarding school, forerunner of Burman University, so he could learn English. At first, he was unimpressed with the school's religious activities. But because the other boys were so kind to him, he reluctantly agreed to go with them to a prayer band and here, as his biographer puts it, Christ "captured his heart."⁷

While working on the Walla Walla College maintenance crew to earn his college tuition, William became acquainted with Eliza Lulu Jensen (1889-1967), a church school teacher who was attending summer school. A little over a year later they were married on September 9, 1917.⁸ They had six children, five girls and a boy.⁹ Dorothy, the oldest, was born about 1920; Wilma, the second child, born about 1924;¹⁰ Olga E. Landeen Klukas lived 1926-2015; and twins followed: Wileta (1930-1989) and William Junior, (1930-2011).¹¹

Pastoral Ministry

The Upper Columbia Conference employed William Landeen as a ministerial "licentiate"¹² and sent the newlyweds to St. Maries, Idaho, to pastor three little churches. A few months later they were sent to a small town named Cle Elum, Washington, where William held a successful series of evangelistic meetings entitled, "Why I am a Seventh-day Adventist."¹³

Encouraged by the conference president to finish his bachelor's degree, Landeen returned to Walla Walla and earned his expenses by teaching history and Bible Doctrines at the academy. During the summer of 1919 he was ordained to the gospel ministry and held evangelistic meetings in three different communities.¹⁴

Professor Landeen

Upon graduating as class president¹⁵ in 1921,¹⁶ Landeen was invited to join the Walla Walla College faculty as professor of Bible and history. He remained on the Walla Walla faculty until 1924,¹⁷ when he was chosen to be educational secretary for the European Division,¹⁸ a position that required extensive travel in various parts of the European continent and gave him the opportunity to revisit his home town in Sweden.¹⁹ During his five years in Europe²⁰ he made his home in Bern, Switzerland.²¹ When the European Division was divided into three parts, Landeen decided to return to the United States²² and pursue a doctorate.

He spent a year studying at the University of Pennsylvania and then transferred to the University of Michigan, where he spent another year and came close to finishing his doctorate. The Michigan climate was hard on his health, so he returned to Washington state, where he resumed teaching at Walla Walla.

An article in the Walla Walla College student newspaper called him "an outstanding and dynamic character" who "revel[ed] in history," and was "a real scholar." During his years of teaching at Walla Walla, he was personally responsible for the conversion of at least two of his nonbelieving students who later became professors at Adventist colleges.²³

President Landeen

Landeen became the president of Walla Walla College on June 7, 1933, in the midst of the Great Depression. As if the college did not have enough problems, the women's dormitory burned down the month after Landeen took office. His administration met the financial crisis resulting from the depression by temporarily reducing the business major and the home economics major to minors and adopting the quarter system so students could attend school for two thirds of the normal school year and work to meet expenses during the other third. Enrollment had declined the previous academic year, but under Landeen it slowly began to climb,²⁴ thanks largely to vigorous on-the-road summertime recruiting efforts by Landeen and his faculty.²⁵

Landeen was a farseeing leader who realized that the board was too pessimistic in insisting that the new women's dormitory be built to only accommodate 90 students. Despite their objections, he wisely and cleverly maneuvered the situation so that the new dormitory would actually accommodate 120 girls, and the following year it was expanded so that 150 young women could reside there.²⁶

With an eye toward public relations, Landeen joined the Walla Walla Rotary Club, a speakers' bureau, and an elite organization of local intellectuals. He was in great demand as a speaker throughout Washington state and other parts of the West because of his firsthand knowledge of European affairs, giving him insights on Hitler's rise to power. On March 26, 1936, he told the Rotary Club, "Hitler cannot be ousted without a war." His outreach activities not only made the community aware of Walla Walla College in a favorable way, but they also resulted in some substantial donations to the college.²⁷

Determined to secure regional accreditation, Landeen worked diligently to upgrade the faculty qualifications and the library, and he separated the academy from the college.²⁸ He hired several professors with doctoral degrees and encouraged other faculty members to earn Ph.Ds.²⁹ He solicited books for the library, secured from the board an unprecedented \$2,500 book budget, and also slipped to the librarian a \$1,500 check for book-buying that had been donated by one of his Rotary contacts. On April 3, 1935, Walla Walla College received accreditation from the Northwestern Association of Secondary and Higher Schools. Landeen's contacts with professors from the University of Washington and Washington State College had helped expedite the accreditation process.³⁰

During the years he was president, Landeen continued to serve as a member of the history faculty.³¹ Meanwhile, Walla Walla's enrollment continued to grow, and it became the largest Seventh-day Adventist college in North America.³²

Despite Landeen's successes, Walla Walla's board chairman disliked several things about him, especially the fact that Landeen "hobnobbed with... men not of our faith." Things came to a head after the chairman suspected that some of the theology professors had heretical beliefs. The president and the board chairman disagreed on how to handle this problem. When Landeen learned, before the board members knew, that one of the

professors had indeed developed unorthodox theological views, he privately suggested that the professor resign and receive several months' severance pay. The professor at first agreed, but changed his mind and decided he would fight the board over it, a decision which was disastrous for the professor.³³ According to his daughter Dorothy, Landeen said that he wished he had been allowed to take care of the problem quietly and "nobody would have gotten hurt."³⁴

But instead, the chair chose confrontation in a heated board meeting that pressured three professors into resigning. As for Landeen, the chair said, "I am ...inclined to advise caution, requiring him to drop his connection with the lecture bureau and a decided reform on some other points."³⁵ However, Landeen considered the board's actions a vote of no confidence in his administration, and thus thought it would have been unethical for him to remain in office, so he resigned.³⁶

Students responded with an outpouring of support for Landeen. The school paper editorialized, "For five years President Landeen has guided the destinies of this institution to a point where the school today ranks in the front line of private colleges.... The *Collegian* editors wish to state ... that all contacts we have had with the President's office have been of a most pleasant nature...." The senior class asked him to be their commencement speaker and dedicated the 1938 school annual to him.³⁷

Landeen refrained from showing a spirit of revenge. When his friends on the accrediting team learned that the college had violated what the team considered academic freedom and principles of tenure, they offered to revoke the school's accreditation. Landeen replied, "That would be utterly unfair."³⁸ Nor did he show animosity toward the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. He said, "My church has given me everything—a high concept of personal honor and personal values, a Christian calling to serve, high aims, a fine profession, and spiritual gifts."³⁹ During his many years of teaching at a secular university he taught the adult Sabbath School class in his home church and frequently preached at the 11 o'clock hour in that church or one of the other churches in his pastor's district.⁴⁰ The *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* included him in its ministerial directory for many of the years that he taught at Washington State.⁴¹

Washington State

Resigning from Walla Walla gave Landeen an opportunity to complete his doctoral dissertation. After he finished writing, he went on a speaking tour throughout the northwestern United States. He was then offered a position as assistant professor of history and political science at Washington State College in Pullman, Washington.⁴² With the exception of the three years he would spend in military service, Landeen would teach at Washington State until he reached the mandatory retirement age of 65. During all this time he continued to be actively involved in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

The students at Washington State knew that he was a Christian. Thus, one student felt comfortable in sharing with Landeen his fear that a certain professor would fail him because of the way that he reacted to his repeated denigration of Christianity (and especially Roman Catholicism). He had threatened, "If you say one more derogatory thing about my church, I'm going to punch you in the nose." Landeen correctly predicted, "He's not going to fail you. If he did, you could appeal to an oversight committee and the teacher will have to produce evidence that you deserved a failing grade. Instead, he'll give you a D."⁴³

U.S. Army Officer

Because of his knowledge of the German language, culture, and people, William Landeen was drafted into the United States Army in 1943, conscripted at the age of 53 because the Army needed his expertise.⁴⁴ He was assigned the rank of Captain; he would eventually be promoted to Major. On his first Sabbath at Fort Custer he took a bus to Battle Creek, Michigan, and attended Sabbath School, church, and the afternoon Missionary Volunteer meeting. After he returned to camp, his commanding officer reprimanded him for being off the base during basic training. Landeen explained that the seventh day was his day of rest, but he could have stayed on base if Adventist services were available there. When the officer replied, "The army recognizes no day of rest," Landeen pointed out that the recruits were allowed to attend church on Sunday and were not required to give an account of what they did on that day. When the officer threatened to court-martial Landeen, he replied, "If the Army wants to court-martial a 53-year-old university professor who is an ordained Seventh-day Adventist minister, I guess there is not much I can do about it. I have attended the Adventist Church since I was 18 years old, and I have never missed a service except when I was too ill to get out of bed. If the Army does not want me to attend church on Saturday, I have a very fine position in Pullman, Washington, and I would be most happy to go back to it." Eventually the commander said Landeen could have his Saturdays off.⁴⁵

After a month's basic training, Landeen was sent to Yale to intensively study French for two months. Then he was off to Camp Reynolds in Pennsylvania for more basic training. Eventually he was shipped to England and, after several months there, he finally learned what his specific assignment would be: he was to serve the occupation Army by being in charge of education and religious affairs in Bavaria.⁴⁶ His mission was the denazification⁴⁷ of the Bavarian churches and schools.

His first official act in this capacity was to grant Michael Cardinal Faulhaber permission to visit the sick and dying and bury the dead in his diocese. Then he issued a proclamation closing all government schools in Bavaria, expelling 17,000 teachers from their classrooms, and confiscating textbooks tainted with Nazi propaganda.⁴⁸

Landeen also participated in the process of choosing the leaders for the Bavarian government and the teachers for the public schools. The military government wanted to remove all active Nazis and Nazi party leaders from influential positions and find anti-Nazi replacements. Seeking help from the clergy in locating such individuals, they scheduled meetings with church officials and had Landeen act as interpreter. Landeen himself consulted

with Faulhaber and Dean Langenfass of the Lutheran Church about who could be trusted with government positions. He frequently went to personally interview the people who were suggested and gave them a detailed questionnaire to complete and sign. Providing false information would lead to prison. Hitler's government had closed down churches and parochial schools. Landeen issued a proclamation reopening all the churches. Ministers of all denominations came to Landeen with requests for travel passes, bicycles for transportation, and guards to protect their churches from burglary. They also wanted their confiscated properties back and wanted permission for their educational institutions to open soon. One of those who came requesting a travel pass was the president of the Bavarian Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.⁴⁹

A newspaper reporter asked Landeen to interpret as he interviewed the wife of Martin Niemoller. Noticing her dire poverty, Landeen provided food and clothing for her and her children. When Pastor Niemoller was able to return to his home, his wife brought him to Landeen's office, where he thanked him for the food and clothing. Although the Allies had liberated him from a German prison camp, they didn't really trust him and they imprisoned him in an Allied camp. Landeen considered him harmless and started the ball rolling so that he could become a free man.⁵⁰

Landeen's next assignment was to visit all 31 theological seminaries in the American Occupied Zone, screening faculties, purging their libraries of Nazi propaganda, and getting the schools in operation. He supervised the Lutheran and Catholic bishops as they selected presidents for their seminaries, prepared budgets, developed curricula, and screened teachers. Unfortunately, Landeen was not able to do this for the badly damaged Seventh-day Adventist seminary. The campus was occupied by 2,455 Polish people. The seminary president was dead, and Landeen could not locate any Seventh-day Adventists at all in the area.⁵¹

Ordered to destroy historical Nazi documents, Landeen refused, preserving them so that later scholars could develop insights into how that "insanity" came about.⁵²

On December 1, 1945, Landeen received a long overdue promotion to major. He continued supervising seminaries and universities during the remainder of his time in Germany.⁵³

Back in the United States

After he was released from the army, Landeen returned to Washington State University as professor of European History, a position that he retained until he reached the university's mandatory retirement age of 65. After that he spent nine months as a visiting professor at Antioch College, then he resumed researching and writing two books: *E. O. Holland and the State College* and *The Beginnings of the "Devotio Moderna" in Germany*.⁵⁴ He later wrote *Martin Luther's Religious Thought*.⁵⁵

La Sierra College

In the fall of 1958, Landeen began teaching at La Sierra College. The courses he taught there included History of Western Civilization, English Constitutional History, Reformation, and Counter-Reformation.⁵⁶ Two years later he was chosen to be the president of La Sierra College. He held that position until 1962.⁵⁷ He continued teaching while he was president.⁵⁸ He told his students, "Teaching is fun, but being your president is work."⁵⁹

Since 1960 was a presidential election year, with Senator John Kennedy running against Vice President Richard Nixon, Senator Thomas Kuchel addressed one college assembly program, promoting Nixon, and in a separate assembly program Senator Albert Gore, Senior, presented the case for Kennedy. The fact that the college had permitted Gore to speak caused an irate person to phone Landeen and tell him that he should be fired. Landeen shared this information with one of his classes. "Why?" a student asked. "Because the senator [Kennedy] is a Catholic," Landeen replied, adding that his understanding of prophecy indicated that the crisis of the last days will be initiated by (some) Protestants.⁶⁰

In 1962 Fabian Meier (1922-1963) replaced him as president.⁶¹ Landeen continued teaching and writing. The staff of the college yearbook dedicated the 1963 *Meteor* to him, saying they did so because of his love for La Sierra, its standards, and its students.⁶²

On December 30, 1963, Meier passed away⁶³ from a heart attack. Once again, Landeen was asked to be La Sierra's president. He served for another year and a half.⁶⁴ During that time he taught a special in-service class on The Reformation for Seventh-day Adventist ministers.⁶⁵

David Bieber replaced him as president during the summer of 1965.⁶⁶ Again, Landeen continued teaching and writing.⁶⁷

Eliza Landeen passed away on June 8, 1967, at the age of 77.⁶⁸ Her husband set up an endowment in her honor to assist elementary education students.⁶⁹ In 1968 he married Katja Catherine Louise Bildt (1914-1994).⁷⁰

From 1967 until 1990 La Sierra College was merged with Loma Linda University. Bieber moved from being just president of La Sierra to being president of Loma Linda University on two campuses.⁷¹ He proclaimed February 13, 1969, William M. Landeen Day. This proclamation was read at the regular assembly on the La Sierra campus. In it he said, "In his 11 years as professor and president of this institution, he has endeared himself to students and colleagues alike, not by bombast or force of will, but through patient, kindly dealings characterized by integrity and Christian forbearance. These are qualities too often missing on the educational scene today."⁷²

Landeen continued teaching on the La Sierra campus until 1972.⁷³ In 1971 his book on *Martin Luther's Religious Thought* was published.⁷⁴ In 1972 he moved from his home on Peacock Lane in La Sierra to Erwin Street in Woodland Hills, California.⁷⁵ In 1974, at the age of 83, he donated 1,600 volumes on the history of Christianity to the La Sierra campus library.⁷⁶ On December 27, 1982, William Landeen passed to his rest.⁷⁷

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2. "William Martin Landeen," https://prabook.com/web/william_martin.landeen/3619097. Accessed December 24, 2021. This source gives his birth date as March 7, 1891, but that date disagrees with every other source with which the author is familiar.
3. Doris Holt Haussler, *From Immigrant to Emissary* (Nashville: Southern Publishing Association, 1969), 8-9.
4. Actually, the boy's birth name was Martin William Landeen. He would later change the order of his names as a symbol of his new life when he finally accepted Seventh-day Adventism (*Ibid.*, 9, 25). This article will consistently refer to him as William in order to avoid confusion.
5. *Ibid.*, 8-9, 11.
6. *Ibid.*, 13-19.

7. Ibid., 20-25.
8. Ibid., 43-48; "Eliza Lulu Jensen," <https://ancestors.familysearch.org/en/9WLV-C1L/eliza-lulu-jensen-1889-1967>. Accessed December 24, 2021.
9. "Eliza Lulu Jensen" says they had "at least" five, "but we know the names of six."
10. Haussler, 57, 179.
11. "William M Landeen," <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/82516441/william-m-landeen>. Accessed December 24, 2021.
12. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1918), 69; (1919), 285.
13. Haussler, 49-51.
14. Ibid., 93.
15. Ibid.
16. Terrie Dopp Aamodt, *Bold Venture: A History of Walla Walla College* (College Place, Washington: Walla Walla College, 1992), 102.
17. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1921), 172; (1922), 153. Beginning in 1923, the *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* listed his teaching area as simply history, but resumed including him in the ministerial directory. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1923), 207, 227; (1924), 217, 292.
18. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1925), 91; (1926), 93; (1927), 97; (1928), 99.
19. Haussler, 59-78.
20. Ibid., 78.
21. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1925), 309; (1926), 334; (1927), 364; (1928), 373; (1929), 384.
22. Haussler, 78.
23. Ibid., 55-56; Aamodt, *Bold Venture*, 102.
24. Ibid., 68-69, 86-87.
25. Haussler, 93.
26. Ibid., 92-93.

27. Ibid., 96-97; Aamodt, *Bold Venture*, 96.
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30. Haussler, 97-99; Aamodt, *Bold Venture*, 69, 87, 102; Terrie Dopp Aamodt, "The Walla Walla Which Hunt of 1938," *Spectrum*, September 1997, 20.
31. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1934), 245; (1935), 252; (1936), 273; (1937), 262; (1938), 271.
32. Aamodt, *Bold Venture*, 96.
33. Aamodt, "The Walla Walla Which Hunt of 1938," 20, 25.
34. Aamodt, *Bold Venture*, 270, endnote 62.
35. Some of the General Conference personnel who attended the meeting thought the board had overreacted. Ibid., 20-22.
36. Aamodt, *Bold Venture* 270, endnote 62.
37. Aamodt, 105, 106.
38. Ibid., 107.
39. Ibid., 26.
40. Haussler, 101, 183.
41. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1939), 406; (1940), 415; (1941), 422; (1953), 406; (1954), 450; (1955), 370; 1958, 392.
42. Haussler, 100-101.
43. Author's recollection of remarks made by William Landeen at La Sierra College.
44. Haussler, 103-105.
45. Ibid., 107-109.
46. Ibid., 109, 115, 122.

47. Aamodt, *Bold Venture*, 102
48. Haussler, 134-135.
49. Ibid., 134, 136-138, 141-142, 151.
50. Ibid., 143-147.
51. Ibid., 162-163.
52. "Eliza Landeen Endowed Scholarship," <https://lasierra.edu/world-languages/scholarships/>. Accessed December 24, 2021.
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76. "Landeen Donates 1600 Volume Collection," *Pacific Union Recorder*, November 4, 1974, 7.
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