

Lawrence, Norris W. (1867–1954)

DENNIS PETTIBONE

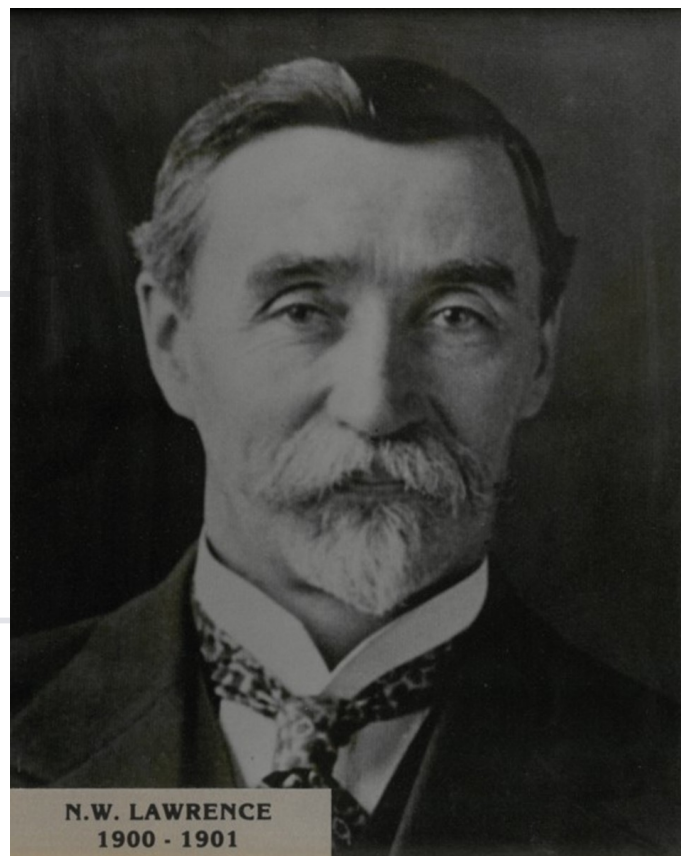
Dennis Pettibone, Ph.D. (University of California, Riverside), is professor emeritus of history at Southern Adventist University. He and his first wife, Carol Jean Nelson Pettibone (now deceased) have two grown daughters. He is now married to the former Rebecca Aufderhar. His published writings include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

Norris W. Lawrence, editor, teacher, academy principal, college president, conference educational superintendent, and Missionary Volunteer director, was born March 1, 1867, in Battle Creek Michigan.¹ His parents were Pastor Russell Johnson Lawrence and Lucinda Thompson Lawrence. The youngest of 11 children, Norris had four sisters and six brothers.²

Graduating from Battle Creek College in the spring of 1890, that same year he began editorial work at the *Review and Herald* under Uriah Smith. The following year he became the editor of the *Youth's Instructor*, a position he held for three years.³ Marrying Lila Ranson on November 17, 1892, in Chicago, he and his wife had at least three sons and four daughters: Meda (1894-1986), Linley (1898-1970), Leta (1899-1964), Veva (1902-1970), Norris Berwin (1904-1963), Wilmer (1906-1940), and Leila (1914-2002).⁴

Mount Vernon, Graysville, and Sheyenne River

His first teaching position was at Mount Vernon Academy in southern Ohio.⁵ From there he went to Graysville Academy in Tennessee, a forerunner of Southern Adventist University, where both he and his wife served on the faculty under principals William Thomas Bland and Charles Walter Irwin. The school changed its name twice while Lawrence was on the faculty, first to Southern Industrial School and then to Southern Training School. In the spring of 1901 Lawrence himself served as *de facto* principal.⁶ Later in 1901 he became the educational and Missionary Volunteer (young peoples') superintendent of the Southern Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, a position that he held for one year.⁷



N. W. Lawrence

Photo courtesy of Southern University archives.

On August 16, 1902, church leadership ordained him to the gospel ministry in the Ohio Conference⁸ after he returned to Mount Vernon Academy to serve as principal and Bible teacher.⁹ In 1905, Mount Vernon upgraded from an academy to a college, and Lawrence became the first president of Mount Vernon College.¹⁰

Leaving Ohio, he moved to North Dakota in 1906 when he became principal of Sheyenne River Academy. Again, in addition to his administrative responsibilities, he served as a Bible teacher and remained at Sheyenne River Academy for three years.¹¹

Washington

His next assignment was educational and Missionary Volunteer superintendent of the Western Washington Conference, headquartered in Seattle. He served in that position for one year;¹² after which he moved to College Place, Washington, where he assumed the same responsibilities for a year on the North Pacific Union Conference level.¹³

Next, he joined the faculty of Walla Walla College for the 1911-1912 and 1912-1913 school years.¹⁴ At Walla Walla, he taught English and Bible.¹⁵ Again remaining in College Place, he transferred to the Upper Columbia Conference headquarters, where he held three positions, heading the Sabbath School, educational, and Young People's departments.¹⁶

Returning to the North Pacific Union Conference office in 1914,¹⁷ he again headed the Sabbath School, educational, and Young People's departments¹⁸ for four years, resigning in 1918 "because of his family," according to I.H Evans, General Conference Vice President for the North American Division, who said Lawrence's children needed his "presence and help."¹⁹

Montana and Retirement

In consultation with Evans and with North Pacific Union Conference President C. W. Flaiz, Lawrence decided to work as a self-supporting minister in the "virgin territory" of Montana, supporting himself as a farmer while holding evangelistic meetings and giving Bible studies, thus leading several people to decide in favor of keeping the seventh-day Sabbath. Economically, that was a disaster for him. Montana was suffering from a five-year drought during the time Lawrence sought to wrestle a living from the soil.²⁰

In 1923, he gave up on farming in Montana and moved to the greener pastures of Oregon, where, in 1924, the conference assigned him a church to pastor without pay. In addition, he also taught in Oregon church schools. He began receiving sustentation (retirement benefits) in 1925. From 1925 to 1927 he served as an elder of the church in Vancouver, Washington, and from 1927 to 1933 he was a Bible teacher at Columbia Academy in Battle Ground, Washington.²¹

In 1944 or 1945 he moved to Los Angeles, California, where he lived until his death on July 3, 1954, at 87 years of age.²²

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3. GCA, Sustentation Files, RG 33, Record 0001557.
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5. Lawrence Sustentation File, GCA.
6. Dennis Pettibone, *A Century of Challenge: The Story of Southern College, 1892-1992* (Collegedale, TN: The College Press, 1992), 22, 23, 26.
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9. Lawrence Sustentation File, GCA.
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15. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1913), 168.
16. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1914), 60.
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22. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1945), 360; (1950), 431; (1954), 451; "Norris W Lawrence,"
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