

Anderson, Charles Landis (1914–2004)

ERIC ANDERSON

Eric Anderson is director of the Walter C. Utt Center for Adventist History at Pacific Union College (PUC) in Angwin, California. He taught at PUC for 30 years and stepped in as the college's president in 2017 during a time of transition. Previously, Anderson was president of Southwestern Adventist University in Keene, Texas (2005-2014). Anderson earned a Ph.D. in history from the University of Chicago and has written on Reconstruction in North Carolina, philanthropic support of black education, Progressive Era vice reform, and Adventist history.

Charles Landis Anderson played a significant role in promoting psychiatry in the Adventist medical system and in creating dialogue between physicians and clergy.



Charles L. Anderson

Photo courtesy of Bruce N. Anderson.

Early Life and Education

He was born in Tokyo, October 21, 1914, in “the third year of the Emperor Taisho,” as he later liked to say. The firstborn child of missionaries Alfonso Nils Anderson and Mayte Landis Anderson, he was for his entire life in love with things Japanese, especially Japanese food, Japanese words, and Japanese landscapes!¹

Charles Anderson learned to endure frequent separations and yet to relish long trips. Missionary life in those days involved long assignments and might even divide families for months at a time. By the time he had finished college, he had crossed the Pacific eight times, and for the rest of his life he could name every ship and some of their captains, too.

His education was somewhat irregular. While the Anderson family was in the United States on furlough, Charles attended first grade in Chico, California. He also attended the last half of seventh grade in Chico. His eighth-grade year he spent at what was then called Lodi Academy and Normal School in California's San Joaquin Valley. In between, while he was in Japan, he was educated at home with two other children, taught by their mothers.

For the first year of high school, he stayed home in Japan for one more year, studying Latin and other subjects. Then he got on yet another ship and sailed for China in order to attend Far Eastern Academy, a small Adventist boarding school in Shanghai, enrolling some 50 missionaries' children. His most vivid memory was the 1932 "Shanghai Incident," in which Japanese marines attacked a section of the city only two or three miles from the school. Safe behind the boundaries of Shanghai's International Settlement, he could hear gunfire, even battle cries, and after the fighting was over, he and his friends picked up souvenirs on the battlefield?

PUC: A Home Away From Home

From 1932 to 1936, Anderson attended Pacific Union College. A biology major with dreams of becoming a doctor, maybe even a missionary, he relished other subjects too, as well as a wide range of extracurricular activities. He served as editor of the *Campus Chronicle*, editor of *Green and Gold* (the College annual) and Student Association president.

The two teachers who had the most influence on him were Harold Clark of Biology, under whose aegis he wrote a "cat lab" manual, and Charles Weniger, the College's influential rhetoric professor. Dr. Weniger once took Anderson aside and told him that he would be "personally disappointed" if he chose medicine over a career as a writer and public speaker.

During his college years, Anderson spent many happy hours in the Angwin home of Leon and Agnes Caviness, the parents of one of his best friends, George Caviness. The Cavinesses—or the Cavini as he dubbed them—were both teachers and regularly opened their home to college students, especially those who were far away from their own homes. At some point, Charles started noticing George's younger sister, Elizabeth.

An Unconventional Specialty

They were engaged by May 1937 and married on June 2, 1938, midway through Anderson's medical education. They lived in Boyle Heights, Los Angeles, for the next three years, as he finished his medical degree at the College of Medical Evangelists, now Loma Linda University, and internship at White Memorial Hospital in Los Angeles. Encouraged by two of his professors, Harold Shryock and Cyril Courville, he became interested in psychiatry for his medical specialty. This was an unconventional, even daring choice for a young Seventh-day Adventist in 1940. Freud was a destructive figure in the minds of many church members and psychiatry was sometimes casually dismissed as "of the devil." An intensely idealistic young man, Charles ignored these assertions, certain that healing mental illness was as worthy a calling as healing physical ailments, and confident that he could study the mind and remain a committed Christian.

Charles and Elizabeth's first son, Bruce Nils, was born in Los Angeles in 1939. The next three children, Agnes Kirsten, Eric Douglas, and Craig Lewis were born in Worthington, Ohio, where their father was first a psychiatric

resident, then a staff physician at Harding Hospital, a psychiatric hospital created by an Adventist medical family. In 1946 he passed the national examination by which he became board certified in psychiatry.

Although his essential work at Harding Hospital excused him from military service, Anderson was deeply affected by World War II. His parents were living in the Philippines in 1941 and as a result spent the war as civilian prisoners of the Japanese. Both of his parents survived, experiencing a dramatic rescue from Manila's Santo Tomas Internment Camp when American tanks broke through the gates in February 1945³

Alaska Interlude

In 1952 he accepted appointment as the first chief of mental health for the territory of Alaska, a job he held for three years. This Alaska interlude had a disproportionate impact on the life of Charles Anderson. Three years on the "last frontier," traveling from one end to the other of the huge, empty, beautiful territory, marked him for the next half century. After he returned from Alaska, he kept showing people his photographs from the North, regaling them with stories of his adventures and filling his various homes with Alaska mementos. Every chance he had, he returned to Alaska, including at least twelve trips between 1957 and 2001.

He reluctantly left Alaska in 1955 for several reasons. He and his wife were determined that their children should attend Adventist schools and he was simply not making enough money on a civil servant's salary to pay for parochial schools. And these schools were also located distressingly far from Alaska. Besides, the denomination had given him a "call" to teach at its medical school and, in his mind, he was duty bound to accept invitations from this source.

Clergy-Physician Dialogue on Mental Health

After a little more than a year of teaching psychiatry at his alma mater in California, he accepted another pressing denominational invitation in 1956, this time to take charge of the mental health unit at Hinsdale Hospital in Chicago's western suburbs.⁴ He revitalized a faltering program, drawing capable new physicians to Hinsdale, and gaining the respect of local professionals.

With his friend Charles Wittschiebe of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological seminary, he saw an urgent need to better inform pastors of mental health issues. Sponsored by Harding Hospital, the two men led out in an annual meeting of ministers and physicians that lasted for more than three decades⁵

After his fiftieth birthday in 1964, Anderson was at the peak of his professional success and influence. Without pushing himself forward, he had become an elder of the tribe, the sort of man sought out for his judgments, trusted for his good sense. In 1966 he was elected to the board of trustees for Harding Hospital, and in the following year he joined Andrews University's board. The Du Page County board of health changed its regular Friday night meeting time, so that he could accept an appointment to that body in 1968. In 1974 he began nine

years' service on the Hinsdale Hospital board. He became a Distinguished Life Fellow of the American Psychiatric Association.⁶

He began thinking about retirement in the late 1970s, about the time he and his wife purchased property near Pacific Union College. Despite his one-time resolve to retire in Alaska, in sight of the Fuji-like Mt. Edgecumb, he knew that it made more sense to retire near his children. In 1982 he and his wife moved to Angwin and two years later took possession of a newly remodeled house next door to one son and three miles from another. Instead of giving up his medical career, he merely cut back to forty hours a week, working for four years for Lake County's health department and then taking various part-time assignments for several years after that. He was elected president of the PUC Alumni Association in 1985 and agreed in 1988 to serve as head elder of the College church.

A Final Climb

In 1988 he visited Japan for the last time and climbed Mt. Fuji with two sons. He showed them the journal he carried with him on his first climb, when he was 17 years old. He described climbing with chanting, white-clad pilgrims. Part way up the mountain, he said, they broke through the clouds and went on up in beautiful moonlight. He quoted the Japanese proverb: "There are two kinds of fools—those who never climb Fuji and those who climb Fuji twice." He wondered how the Japanese would describe a man who had climbed the mountain *three* times.

Charles Landis Anderson died on January 25, 2004 at age 89 and was memorialized on January 31, 2004 at the Pacific Union College church.⁷ Two years before his death, a book based on his recorded reminiscences was published under the title *Charles Anderson Remembers*.

SOURCES

"Charles Anderson obituary." *Napa Valley Register*, January 30, 2004.

Charles Landis Anderson Remembers. Angwin, CA: Bruce N. Anderson, 2002.

"Join Hinsdale San Staff." *Lake Union Herald*, May 28, 1957.

Unruh, T. E. "Annual Institute of Mental Hygiene." *ARH*, January 23, 1958.

NOTES

1. Except where otherwise noted, this article is based on the author's personal knowledge as son of Charles L. Anderson.

2. *Charles Landis Anderson Remembers* (Angwin, CA: Bruce N. Anderson, 2002), 48.
 3. *Ibid.*, 77-78.
 4. "Join Hinsdale San Staff," *Lake Union Herald*, May 28, 1957, 3.
 5. See for example T. E. Unruh, "Annual Institute of Mental Hygiene," *ARH*, January 23, 1958, 21; and "Group from Lake Union Attends Ohio Institute," *Lake Union Herald*, October 30, 1962, 1-2.
 6. "The Life Story of Charles Landis Anderson," in *Charles Landis Anderson Remembers*, 131-132. The change in the Du Page County board of health's meeting time is reported in "Lake Union," *ARH*, August 29, 1968, 19.
 7. "Charles Anderson obituary," *Napa Valley Register*, January 30, 2004, 7.
-

encyclopedia.adventist.org is an official website of the [Seventh-day Adventist World Church](#)

© 2020 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists 12501 Old Columbia Pike Silver Spring , MD 20904 USA 301-680-6000