

Rittenhouse, Floyd Oliver (1905–1993)

MILTON HOOK

Milton Hook, Ed.D. (Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, the United States). Hook retired in 1997 as a minister in the Greater Sydney Conference, Australia. An Australian by birth Hook has served the Church as a teacher at the elementary, academy and college levels, a missionary in Papua New Guinea, and as a local church pastor. In retirement he is a conjoint senior lecturer at Avondale College of Higher Education. He has authored *Flames Over Battle Creek*, *Avondale: Experiment on the Dora*, *Desmond Ford: Reformist Theologian, Gospel Revivalist* the *Seventh-day Adventist Heritage Series*, and many magazine articles. He is married to Noeleen and has two sons and three grandchildren.

Floyd Rittenhouse was a notable educator who served at various church academies and as president of Andrews University and Pacific Union College.

Early Years

Floyd Rittenhouse was born on March 10, 1905, in Bozeman, Montana, to Wilton and Huldah (LaFave) Rittenhouse. His father was a cattle farmer. He had six younger siblings: Ruth (b. 1906), Paul Roberts (b. 1908), Bryl Clifton (b. 1910), Helen Lorella (b. 1912), Evelyn Jane (b. 1919) and Stella Francis “Jean” (b. 1921).¹

Teaching in Academies and Colleges

As a young man in 1924, Rittenhouse taught grades 6 through 8 at Sutherlin Academy in Oregon.² The following year he served as preceptor at the same institution and taught mathematics and Spanish.³ He then moved to the east coast with his parents and attended Emmanuel Missionary College. He graduated in 1928 and was president of his class.⁴

From commencement, Floyd proceeded to his new appointment as preceptor at Mount Vernon Academy, Ohio. Almost every year he was assigned to teach different classes in Spanish, American history,⁵ mathematics, literature, and commercial law.⁶ He capitalized on his proximity to Ohio State University (OSU) and began further



Floyd O. Rittenhouse

Photo courtesy of Center for Adventist Research.

studies part-time, gaining a leave of absence during the academic year of 1931/1932 in order to complete a master's degree.⁷

In 1933 Floyd was appointed principal of Takoma Academy in Takoma Park, just outside of Washington, D.C. During his five-year experience, he also taught some classes in Bible, Spanish, history, and physical education.⁸ In the summer of 1937, he married Nellie Blair Hubbard, who had canvassed books in the Takoma Park area.⁹ Later in their married life, she qualified to serve as an elementary school teacher.¹⁰ In 1938, Floyd transferred for the academic year to Southern Junior College in Collegedale, Tennessee, to fill an urgent need as a history teacher¹¹ and then returned for a further term as principal of Takoma Academy.¹²

Rittenhouse was appointed in 1941 to be the junior dean and history professor at Washington Missionary College,¹³ a position from which he advanced to be academic dean the following year.¹⁴ He took leave during 1945¹⁵ to begin studies at OSU but returned in 1946 and was granted his Doctor of Philosophy in 1947. Both his master's and doctorate degrees from OSU were in the field of history.¹⁶

In 1948 he went to Southern Missionary College, once again to serve as dean and history professor. He spent four years in these roles at the institution.¹⁷

To Berrien Springs, Michigan

In July 1952, Rittenhouse began his new role as dean of Emmanuel Missionary College (EMC) in Berrien Springs, Michigan. The president of the college, Percy Christian, went on record saying, "Dean Rittenhouse brings with him a fine record as an able college administrator, a competent scholar in history, and a friendly counselor of students."¹⁸ For three years, Floyd served as dean and was then elected as president of the institution. Enrolment at the time, 1956, was reported to be 800 students.¹⁹

Historian Emmett Vande Vere later described Floyd's elevation to the presidency as a popular choice because "he was experienced, active, a Lincolnesque storyteller, an able speaker, and well-balanced in educational outlook."²⁰

As president, Rittenhouse was determined to upgrade the curriculum, increase faculty qualifications and improve prospects for full accreditation. Upgrading of the curriculum was immediately evident with, for example, the offering of a major in speech and the reintroduction of a minor in German. Encouragement continued to be given to faculty members to upgrade and accrue academic credits during the summers.²¹ The quest for accreditation lasted several years. Eventually, in March 1963, he had the satisfaction of announcing that the North Central Association's Commission on Colleges and Universities had granted preliminary accreditation for the master's degree in education, English, history, mathematics, religion, and music.²²

In 1958 the Adventist Church officials voted to relocate the Theological Seminary and the School of Graduate Studies from their Potomac University, Washington, D.C. Both units were transferred to the campus of EMC, the

first students beginning classes in September 1959.²³ Rittenhouse presided over the amalgamation, deliberately housing incoming faculty members amid the homes of existing professors so that all would merge into a single, happy family.²⁴ In April 1960, the three components were described for the first time as Andrews University, named after Elder John Nevins Andrews.²⁵ Centralization initiated an extensive building program to accommodate the additional students. In 1959, construction was already underway on a \$700,000 Campus Health Center and a \$600,000 building to house the Seminary. At the same time, Rittenhouse announced plans for a \$1,000,000 administration building and a \$750,000 library.²⁶ Seminary Hall, as it was called, was dedicated on Sabbath afternoon June 3, 1961, its revised cost mentioned as \$650,000.²⁷ The following day Commencement was held for 180 graduates who received their degrees or diplomas. Floyd had arranged for the ceremony to be preceded by a colourful procession of faculty in academic regalia, a notable first in the history of the institution.²⁸

The expanded program at EMC included in 1958/59 a fledgling Geo-Science Research Center on campus, one staffed by Drs. Siegfried Horn and Frank Marsh. Dr. Richard Ritland joined them soon after. The unit was affiliated with EMC so that Rittenhouse could facilitate the inclusion of the men as professors, but they were under the direction of the General Conference Department of Education.²⁹

The campus church was another major building to be erected, with the ground-breaking ceremony taking place on April 28, 1957. It was finally dedicated free of debt on May 21, 1960. Dressed in Indiana limestone, it was named Pioneer Memorial Church to honor a score of educational leaders whose names were featured on internal window plaques.³⁰

Despite his focus on multiple projects on campus, he did not lose his interest in temperance issues, topics which he passionately advocated. He was a regular lecturer at convocations conducted by the Washington Institute of Scientific Studies for the Prevention of Alcoholism.³¹

To the West Coast

In 1963, Rittenhouse was nominated to the presidency of Pacific Union College (PUC) in California. On May 7 and 8, he was introduced to the faculty and student body as the president-elect, a preliminary to beginning the 1963 academic year.³² At PUC, his administrative style remained the same as at Andrews University. One on-going feature was the encouragement he gave to faculty members to advance their education. When he arrived at PUC, there were 37 faculty members holding earned doctoral degrees. Nine years later the number had grown to 53.³³ In 1965, he had the satisfaction of announcing that, for the first time, PUC had received from the Western Association of Schools and Colleges a four-year accreditation for all its undergraduate and graduate programs.³⁴ Furthermore, his years were characterized as “the building years,” with seven major campus projects constructed,³⁵ including Dauphinee Hall, the chapel for women (1965),³⁶ and Paulin Music Hall (1967).³⁷ In 1969, plans were underway to build an observatory, six tennis courts, two volleyball courts, two football fields, two softball fields, a baseball diamond, and an indoor handball court. Another women’s dormitory to be named

Winning Hall and a dining commons were also heralded.³⁸ All these developments took place in the context of an annual enrolment that grew from 1,246 (1963) to 1,980 (1972)³⁹ and at a time when he guided the operating budget out of the red and into the black.⁴⁰

His years at PUC also witnessed a blossoming of academic successes. In 1971 there were 320 degrees conferred on members of the graduating class, a record number up to that time. The list included 23 Master of Arts, 133 Bachelor of Arts, 73 Bachelor of Science, 8 Bachelor of Music, and 83 associate degrees in the sciences and nursing.⁴¹

In the mid-1950s, PUC had forged an affiliation with Avondale College on the other side of the Pacific Ocean in Australia. It was not without its problems, however. In 1965, Rittenhouse flew to Australia to make an assessment of the bond and inspect the facilities at his sister institution. He made a round-the-world trip, visiting southern Asia and Europe *en route*. His tour had a frightening start when flying out of San Francisco, an engine and part of the right wing of his aircraft fell off. Miraculously, the pilot made an emergency landing at Travis Air Force Base.⁴²

Later years

Rittenhouse retired from PUC and active service at the close of the 1972 academic year.⁴³ In 1983, the Review and Herald Publishing Association issued his daily devotional volume titled *Show Me Thy Ways*.⁴⁴ On May 19, 1991, Nellie passed away and was laid to rest in a crypt at St. Helena Cemetery, Napa County, Floyd and their two daughters, Judy and Dana, surviving her.⁴⁵ After Nellie's death, Floyd married Ellen Louise (Gibson) Christian, the widow of the man he had worked with when dean at EMC.

Floyd passed away at Angwin, California, on January 12, 1993, and was laid to rest in the St. Helena Cemetery.⁴⁶ Ellen passed away on October 7, 2004, and was laid to rest alongside Floyd.⁴⁷

His academic career included several notable personal accomplishments. He was a member of the American Historical Association and Phi Alpha Theta, the national honorary history fraternity. He was also a member of the American Association of School Administrators and was listed in *Who's Who in America* in addition to *Who's Who in American Education*. In 1961, his Alma Mater, EMC, named him Alumnus of the Year. It was written of him: "His life has been a singular example of devotion to the cause of God and the service of the youth of the Seventh-day Adventist church."⁴⁸

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