

Eugene C. Sanderson (1859-1940)

By Timothy Bergquist, PhD

Eugene Claremont Sanderson was a Christian minister and educator who founded Eugene Divinity School (now Northwest Christian University), where he was president for thirty-four years. He also was a founder of Pacific Christian Hospital (present-day Sacred Heart Medical Center) in Eugene and four Christian colleges in other states. Sanderson was passionate about training ministers for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the Pacific Northwest and believed that locating Bible colleges next to state universities provided the best benefit to the students. He established a rich legacy of Christian higher education institutions, many of which exist today.

Sanderson was born on March 24, 1859, in Greenville, Ohio. He earned bachelor of arts and master of arts degrees from Oskaloosa College in 1883 before spending a year at Yale Divinity School. He moved to Washington State in 1886, where he was a pastor for the Christian Churches in Palouse, Colfax, Ellensburg, Sumner, Vancouver, and Olympia. A highly sought-after minister, he founded several new churches and was named pastor of the First Christian Church in Portland in 1894.

In preparation for training ministers for the Christian Church in the Pacific Northwest, Sanderson returned to the Midwest, where he earned bachelor of divinity and doctorate of law degrees from Drake University in 1893 and a bachelor of sacred theology degree from the University of Chicago in 1894. Because of his belief that locating ministerial schools near public colleges and universities provided the best of both worlds, in 1894 he opened the Eugene Divinity School close to the University of Oregon, near East 11th Avenue and Alder Street. There, his students could take advantage of the university's liberal arts program while also focusing on courses in theology, the Bible, oratory, and music. The school opened with five students, with Sanderson the sole faculty member for several years.

During the 1920s, Eugene Bible University expanded to include the International Bible Mission. During the Depression, due to a lack of funding, the mission collapsed. In 1923, Sanderson founded Pacific Christian Hospital (present-day Sacred Heart Medical Center), across Alder Street from Eugene Bible University.

In 1924, while remaining president of Eugene Bible University, Sanderson left Eugene to be the second president of Minneapolis Bible College (now Crossroads College) in Rochester, Minnesota, where he remained until 1932. Working with his former students at Eugene Divinity School and Eugene Bible University, he founded Christian Workers University (now Manhattan Christian College) in Manhattan, Kansas, in 1927; Colorado Bible College in Fort Collins, Colorado, in 1927; Missouri Christian College in Camden Point, Missouri, in 1928; and Evangel Bible University (now William Jessup University in Rocklin, California), in San Jose in 1934. He asked William Jessup, a former student, to join him in 1939. He started a Home for Boys in Eugene in 1926 and another in El Monte, California, in 1927 and opened a Girl's College in Eugene, which operated from 1911 to 1929.

In 1909, to publicize the Eugene Bible University and the International Bible Mission, Sanderson began publishing a newspaper, *Church and School*. The publication became the *Christian Journal* in 1915 and the *World Evangel* in 1925; it ceased publication in 1934. His book, *Our English Bible*, was published in 1912.

Sanderson died on February 16, 1940, in Los Angeles, California. He and his wife Prudence are buried in the Masonic Cemetery in Eugene.

Sources

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