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BACKGROUNDS OF THE SCOPES TRIAL

AT DAYTON, TENNESSEE

In [“Evolution in the Back Seat,”](#) [5] I mentioned Warren Allem’s 1959 University of Tennessee, Knoxville master’s thesis, “Backgrounds of the Scopes Trial at Dayton, Tennessee.” Allem’s thesis is well worth a read, I think, if you’re interested in the Scopes trial, especially because it’s freely [available](#) [6] on-line. The main attraction is the interviews he conducted with various residents of Dayton who witnessed the events surrounding the trial. These interviews are frequently cited in the scholarly and popular literature—Edward J. Larson in “The Scopes Trial in History and Legend” (in David C. Lindberg and Ronald L. Numbers’s edited volume *When Science and Christianity Meet*, 2008), Michael Lienesch in *In the Beginning* (2007), and Randy Moore in *Evolution in the Courtroom* (2002), for example, all cite Allem’s thesis.

The first, shortest, chapter explains Allem’s goal: “to give a perception in depth to the scene of the famous trial,” rectifying the neglect in the previous literature on the Scopes trial of the local perspective

on the events. The second chapter sketches the history of Dayton, Tennessee, emphasizing, toward the end, the economic factors that prompted the city's boosters to concoct the Scopes trial as a way of attracting economic investment. In the third chapter, Allem attempts to identify the causes that led to the publicity extravaganza around the trial, suggesting that four were outstanding: "(1) the journalistic practices of the day; (2) the modernist-fundamentalist controversy; (3) the political implications of the anti-evolution movement; and (4) the collision of gigantic personalities"—especially those of William Jennings Bryan and Clarence Darrow.

It is in the fourth chapter, "The Town and the Trial," that the really interesting material occurs. The story that Allem tells is familiar, running from the composition of the Butler Act to the death of Bryan, but it is punctuated by the results of interviews Allem conducted with residents of Dayton, with details unavailable elsewhere. It seems likely, although I haven't systematically checked, that the bulk of the references to the thesis in the scholarly and popular literature on the Scopes trial are to "The Town and the Trial." The final chapter considers the short-term and long-term consequences, primarily economic, of the trial for Dayton. Throughout, Allem seems to be a neutral and judicious historian, although he occasionally betrays a sympathy for the townspeople of Dayton—understandably, since they were his informants.

After reading through the thesis, it occurred to me that I didn't know who—besides the author of "Backgrounds of the Scopes Trial"—Allem was. And Larson, Lienesch, and Moore didn't seem to provide any insight. After conducting a little research, I was surprised to discover from old yearbooks from Bryan College—praised in Allem's thesis as "doing such acceptable work that it recently was recognized by the State Department of Education for certification of teachers"—that Allem served as executive secretary of the college administration in 1955 and graduated from the college in 1957, a scant two years before he submitted his master's thesis at the University of Tennessee. The yearbooks identify him also as the pastor of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church—motto, "Dayton's Bible Church"—in Dayton, Tennessee!

I wasn't able to find a full biography or even a detailed obituary, so I don't know what Allem was doing before the mid-1950s or after he received his master's degree. In 1961, according to the website of Emmanuel Church in Egg Harbor, New Jersey—outside Atlantic City, if you want to visit—Allem was teaching at Atlantic City High School when he became the pastor of the church. "During the first two years of his ministry, Pastor Allem was involved in a doctoral program at Columbia University," the church [explains](#) [7]. There must have been a hiatus, though, since it was not until 1968 that he was awarded the degree of Ed.D. The title of his dissertation was "Devices that Business Corporations Have Used in Supporting Higher Education," which strongly suggests that there was no connection to the topic of his master's thesis.

Allem left Emmanuel Church to become the dean of The King's College, a Christian college then in Briarcliff Manor, New York, in 1963. (It later was taken over by Campus Crusade for Christ and moved to New York City; from 2010 to 2012 its president was the conservative pundit Dinesh D'Souza, who [resigned](#) [8] under a cloud surrounding his alleged marital infidelity.) According to the church's website, Allem left The King's College to serve as a school principal in Goshen, Virginia, and was then invited to return to Emmanuel Church in 1966. He founded the Pilgrim Academy, a private school associated with the church, in 1971, and served as the pastor at Emmanuel until 1980. He died in 2003 at the age of eighty-nine. If he published anything further on the Scopes trial or on the creationism/evolution controversy, I haven't been able to find it.

A final thought, courtesy of Randy Moore, whose *A Field Guide to the Scopes Trial* (2016), published by

the Rhea County Historical and Genealogical Society, just arrived at my office. A keen student of the history of the creationism/evolution controversy, Moore dedicated his book to the late Richard Cornelius (1934–2014), a professor of English at Bryan College who was a recognized authority on the Scopes trial. In his dedication, Moore writes that when Cornelius began his graduate studies at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, “[h]e often travelled to and from Knoxville with an older graduate student who had earned his Master’s degree in history, capped by a thesis about the Scopes Trial,” whose tales of the trial ignited his own lifelong interest. Yes, indeed: Warren Allem.

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