

History of Concordia College



Conover, together with the rest of Catawba County, had long been heavily Lutheran. During the 1800s, the seed of schism resulted on a series of Synods appearing and disappearing.

At its convention in 1875, the Synod received the information, through a letter from the Rev. J. M. Smith, that the congregations of Catawba County, North Carolina, had decided to establish a high school of a strictly Lutheran character. Synod approved of the move and highly commended the enterprise. Considerable difference of opinion existed among the pastors and congregations who were interested in the proposals as to where the school should be located; but it was finally opened at Conover, N. C., in 1877, and in 1883, it was taken under the care of the Synod. This school was briefly called Conover High School, then Concordia High School and later Concordia College.

The question of location was again raised in 1890 and resulted in the establishment of a second school at Hickory, N. C., known as Lenoir College. That part of the Board of Trustees of Concordia College which favored the continuation of the school at Conover then entered into an agreement with the Mission Board of the English Synod of Missouri by which the school passed under the control of the Missouri, Synod. As a result, that Synod gained a foothold in the territory, and the Tennessee Synod ultimately lost some of its older congregations to it. Among them were St. John's, St. Peter's, Bethel, and Concordia.

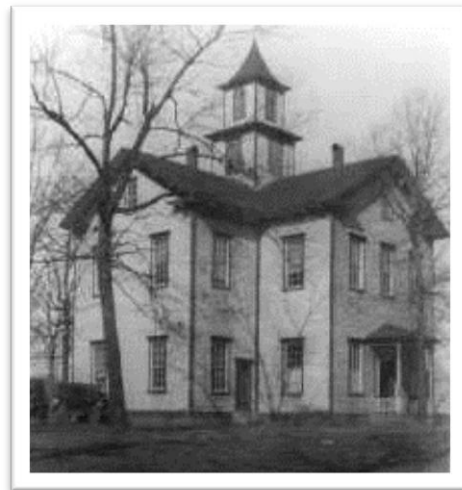
In 1877 Mr. R. A. Yoder, the Synod's first beneficiary student, was graduated from North Carolina College. His struggle for a college degree had been long and strenuous, having led him to Illinois where he had brothers, but had finally brought him back to Mt. Pleasant. The Rev. Dr. P. C. Henkel and the Rev. John M. Smith, serving pastorates in and near Conover,

N. C., had for some time desired a high school at Conover. Mr. Yoder went to Conover after graduation and taught a "subscription" school and then a term of public school. At the same time he began the study of theology under pastors Henkel and Smith.

In 1878 Conover High School was organized under direction of the local pastors and Mr. Yoder was elected principal. The Tennessee Synod appointed a committee to investigate the advisability of making this school a synodical enterprise. The committee made a favorable report and another committee was appointed to endeavor to reach an agreement with the local sponsors. There is no record of a report by this committee. R. A. Yoder was ordained in 1879 and in 1883 resigned as principal to attend the seminary in Philadelphia. Dr. P. C. Henkel succeeded him and the Rev. J. C. Moser succeeded him. The high school was chartered as a college in 1880. The Tennessee Synod received the college under its fostering care with the privilege of nominating trustees to fill any vacancies occurring on the Board. The college agreed to have the president and board of trustees make annual report to Synod. In 1888 the Rev. J. C. Moser returned to full time pastoral work in Hickory, N. C., and was succeeded by the Rev. R. A. Yoder.

A majority of the Board of Trustees of Concordia College invited the Missouri Synod to operate that school. They accepted the invitation and operated a school in Conover for some years.

In 1901 the Rev. R. L. Fritz, professor in Elizabeth College and formerly professor in Lenoir College, accepted a call to the presidency.



It was in education more than commerce that Conover rivaled its neighbor Newton. Where Newton was a center for the teachers of the Reformed faith, Conover became a postbellum center for Lutheran schooling. Leaders of the Tennessee Synod had long wished for a school that would rival North Carolina College, run by the North Carolina Synod at Mt. Pleasant in Cabarrus County. Integral to this effort was the venerated Henkel family, particularly Polycarp C. Henkel, who had been a resident of the "Wye" area since the 1850s. Henkel appears to have taught periodically in his home on the Oxford Ford Road, an occupation two

of his proteges, the Rev. Adolphus Yount and the Rev. J.M. Smith, continued in the late 1860s. The two ministers moved the school into Canova about the time the town was getting started. One of its key teachers was R.A. Yoder, who in 1877 "went to teach in that little burg," and was later a founder of Lenoir College in Hickory.

The matter of turning the school into something ambitious was raised in the Tennessee Synod meeting of 1875. Despite hard times, \$2,500 was raised by Conover residents for buildings. J.P. Cline and Alfred Huffman, Lutherans and contractors, built the school in 1877. A classroom building, with a library, and a dormitory were erected. Most of the original furniture was locally made. The school operated as an academy until 1881, when a charter for what was to be called Concordia College was received. The principal aim was to train ministers for the Synod. Although he was not well, the Rev. P.C. Henkel became president and taught theology. R.A. Yoder and J.C. Moser taught most of the other subjects. Henkel resigned in 1885. First J.C. Moser, then R.A. Yoder replaced him as president. The Rev. J.S. Koiner was professor of theology. Moser left in 1888 to move to Hickory to be pastor of Holy Trinity Church.

Concordia attracted about 100 students during the 1880s, peaking at 112 in 1887. It remained under the charge of the Tennessee Synod until 1891, when R.A. Yoder and several other professors left the school to go to Hickory to help turn Highland Academy into Lenoir College. The facility in Conover was almost closed, but interested parties of the Missouri Synod, which was just beginning to organize congregations on the eastern seaboard, took it over. The Rev. W.H.T. Dau of Memphis, Tennessee, became the fourth president. Dau broadened the curriculum and linked the school strongly to the same-named college in St. Louis. Dau was replaced as president by the Rev. George A. Romoser of Baltimore in the late 1890s. Enrollment once again reached about 100 in 1899.

Throughout its existence the school was devoutly Lutheran. Maude Yoder Robinson, daughter of R.A. and Rose Fisher Yoder, recalled that her father did not allow card playing among the students. (He would, however, play an occasional Old Maid with her.) Dancing was also frowned upon, although Yoder played a mean fiddle. Professor A.P. Whisenhunt was "a very strict old-fashioned teacher who believed in keeping your eyes on the book." As with Catawba College in Newton, Concordia became part of the rhythm of the local community. R.A. Yoder later remembered that an early organ recital at the college "almost carried off" the local people. "They had never heard the like in their lives," he noted. "Life was simple in the 1880s," Mrs. Robinson reminisced later, "and people took the time to enjoy it." An important day in Conover's calendar was commencement, when the lawn was lit by lanterns and the students performed cantatas.

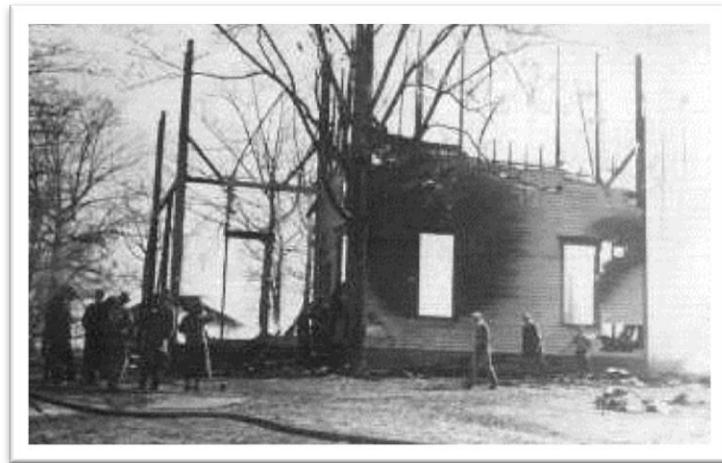
An offshoot of the college was Concordia Lutheran Church. The teachers at first held chapel in the classrooms but determined that the nearby Lutheran churches of St. John's and St. Timothy's were too far away for the students to walk to on Sundays. In addition, Conover had a sizeable population with Lutheran backgrounds by the 1890s. The chapel group became a congregation of the Missouri Synod, and in 1894 a church was built, being completed in 1896. Rev. W.H.T. Dau served as the first pastor.

Concordia and Lenoir Rhyne colleges are an outgrowth of the educational awakening that stirred the Lutherans of the Tennessee Synod and resulted in the establishment of Concordia High school at Conover in 1877. Concordia High school was converted into a college and chartered as Concordia college in 1881. Presidents who served Concordia college were Dr. P. C. Henkel, 1881-85; Rev. J. C. Moser, 1885-88; Dr. R. A. Yoder, 1888-91; no president, 1891-1892; W. H. T. Dau, 1892-99; G. A.

Romoser, 1899-1911; C. A. Weis and Ad. Haentzschel, acting presidents, 1911-13; H. B. Hemmeter, 1913-17; O. W. Kreinheder, 1917-28; C. O. Smith, acting president, 1928-30; and H. B. Hemmeter, 1930-35.

The school was sponsored by the Tennessee Synod in its early days, but, in 1892, it came into the possession of the Evangelical Lutheran Missouri Synod.

On April 15, 1933, a wind-whipped fire destroyed the school's administration building, at a time when the Missouri Synod of the Lutheran church was already producing more young men for the ministry than it could use. Consequently, the Synod meeting at Cleveland, Ohio, thought it unwise to rebuild the institution. The school was discontinued the same year.



[Sources: *The Lutheran Church in North Carolina*; *The Catawbans*; [The History of Catawba County](#)]

The Founders, the Pastors and the Professors



Paul Bischoff



W. O. Bishoff



E. T. Coyner



W. H. T. Dau



Rev. Doak



Fred Freed



H. B. Hemmeter



Oswel W.
Kreinheder



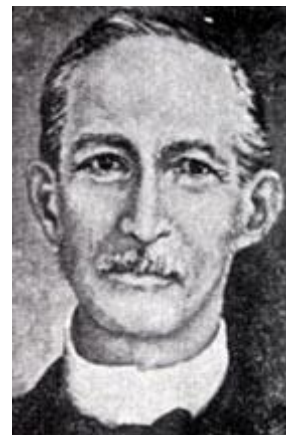
R. F. Lineberger



Rev. Lyndemyer



George E. Mennen



J. C. Moser



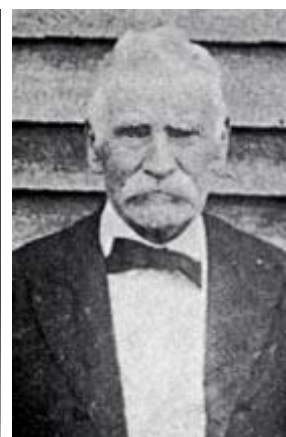
H. J. Patten



John Rockett



Carol O. Smith



John M. Smith



D. B. Summers



C. F. W. Walther



C. A. Weiss



R. A. Yoder