

THE PREP SCHOOL THAT NEVER WAS:
A HISTORY OF NEBRASKA LUTHERAN ACADEMY

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ABSTRACT

For more than two decades, the Nebraska District pursued the establishment of Nebraska Lutheran Academy, a synodical preparatory school intended to train future pastors and teachers. From the initial memorial presented at the 1946 Nebraska District Pastoral Conference to the final rescinding of synod resolutions in 1969, the project was repeatedly brought before synod conventions. In 1953, the synod pledged to establish the academy “as soon as the Synod declares that monies for it are available,” authorized the purchase of thirty-three acres in Grand Island, Nebraska, for \$21,000, approved the name Nebraska Lutheran Academy, and elected a Board of Regents.

Yet no cornerstone was ever laid. A lack of financial resources, the pressing needs of Northwestern College and Dr. Martin Luther College, a shortage of called workers, and the 1962 educational consultant’s recommendation against additional marginal preparatory schools repeatedly postponed the work. By 1969, the synod gratefully accepted the Nebraska District’s request to dissolve the Board of Regents and rescind prior commitments while retaining only the 1953 conditional resolution. Though the dream of a synod-administered academy died, the Lord answered the district’s longing for Lutheran secondary education through the 1974 purchase and opening of Nebraska Evangelical Lutheran High School in Waco, Nebraska.

INTRODUCTION

For more than a decade, the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod owned thirty-three acres of land in Grand Island, Nebraska. It was purchased for \$21,000 with the intention of building a school that would help train a new generation of students who would become future pastors and teachers in Wisconsin Synod churches and schools. Architectural drawings were commissioned and completed. A board of regents was elected. The synod approved a name for this school: Nebraska Lutheran Academy. Members of the Nebraska District dedicated hours of their time and effort to making this school a reality, but the dream was never realized.

No cornerstone was ever laid. No dormitory was constructed. The sound of rowdy teenagers was never heard through the halls. Instead, this school became one of the Wisconsin Synod's most elaborate unbuilt buildings. This school exists in countless pages of memorials, convention proceedings, and official correspondence alone.

At first glance, this does not appear to be an inspiring story. It doesn't end with a triumphant dedication service, accompanied by the sound of trumpets or an organ playing the beloved hymn, "God's Word is Our Great Heritage." Instead, it is the story of a dream of God's faithful people that would run aground amidst the realities of poor timing, available funds, and competing needs of the Wisconsin Synod. It is a story of promises made and rescinded. It is a story of a shared desire that never became a reality.

As a graduate of Nebraska Evangelical Lutheran High School (NELHS), I was surprised and intrigued by this largely forgotten chapter in our synod's history. Even though I attended NELHS, I was previously unaware of the initiative and push for Nebraska Lutheran Academy that preceded my alma mater's founding. This sparked my desire to dig into the primary documents from this period of history to understand why this dream was never realized.

In 1977, Michael Traudt examined this story in his essay, "The Nebraska District's Long Struggle for an Academy Resulted from God-given Conditions."¹ Traudt offers a concise historical survey, beginning with early Lutheran settlements in Nebraska, the district's formation, and the efforts to establish a synodical academy. He ultimately believes that this failure can be attributed to divine conditions such as a lack of financial resources and competing synod priorities. The following pages build upon Traudt's foundational work by providing a more comprehensive account of nearly twenty-four years of synodical history, drawing extensively from primary source documents such as meeting minutes, memorials, proceedings, and correspondence. Throughout these years, a district memorial becomes a synodical commitment. A synodical commitment becomes a moral obligation. This moral obligation ultimately evolved into a request for release due to more pressing needs in other areas. All of this leads us to a single question: Why was Nebraska Lutheran Academy never built?

1. Michael Traudt, "The Nebraska District's Long Struggle for an Academy Resulted in God-given Conditions" (senior church-history paper, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, April 29, 1977), Essay File, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library, Mequon, WI, 9.

ORIGINS

In 1927, the Wisconsin Synod was facing a problem. The schools in Watertown and New Ulm had reached their enrollment capacity.² This brought up some questions. Should these schools be allowed to continue growing, and as the synod expands, would they be able to meet the needs of the entire synod? In answer to these questions, the committee charged with addressing this issue recommended that “The Synod should authorize and subsidize the establishment of preparatory schools, or academies, in many different parts of its territory, preferably according to conferences.”³

This report recommended that “The Academy to be established in the Dakota-Montana District is to be a synodical institution supported and supervised by Synod in every respect.”⁴ This was the founding of Northwestern Lutheran Academy in Mobridge, South Dakota. The establishment of this academy, based on the 1929 report, was the spark that would later ignite the desire for an academy in the Nebraska District.

2. Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States, *Proceedings of the Nineteenth Convention* (1927), 41.

3. Wisconsin Synod, *Proceedings* (1927), 41.

4. Wisconsin Synod, *Proceedings* (1927), 42. .

The first official discussion of establishing an academy within the Nebraska District took place at the Nebraska District Pastors' Conference, held in Lincoln, NE, on June 19–21, 1945. At this conference, those present decided that Tessmer, Fritze, H. Witt, and Gruendemann would be a committee “to consider the advisability of an Academy in our Nebraska District, report their findings to the Pastoral Conference in 1946.”⁵

At the 1946 conference, this committee recommended that the Nebraska District Convention adopt a resolution to establish an academy in the Nebraska District for five reasons: “In general, to further Christian education, in particular, to aid in preparing students for public work in the church as pastors and teachers, because other institutions are too far away from our District which serves as a handicap to enrollment from our District, to get students from our District to serve as future workers in our District, and to increase institution consciousness in our District.”⁶ Based on this report, the Pastors' Conference moved to memorialize the 1946 Nebraska District Convention with this recommendation.

The 1947 Synod Convention would be the first to pour water on the Nebraska District's spark for building an academy. It was determined that, “Although we recognize the establishment of additional academies is very desirable and should be included in the long-range educational program of the Synod, we recommend that the establishment of new academies be not undertaken at the present time.”⁷ The expansion of Northwestern College and Dr. Martin Luther College, as well as a low supply of church workers, were the two main reasons given to

5. D. Grummert, “The Beginning of the Nebraska Lutheran Academy” (typescript report to the Board of Regents, ca. 1957), Nebraska District Collection, Box 8, Folder 1 of 10, WELS Archives, Waukesha, WI, 1.

6. Grummert, “Beginning of the Nebraska Lutheran Academy,” 1.

7. Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States, *Proceedings of the Twenty-Ninth Convention* (1947), 78,

support this decision. At that time, Northwestern College and Dr. Martin Luther College were forced to turn students away because they had reached capacity.

The needs of the established schools of the synod played a significant role in this story. In 1945, the Wisconsin Synod Building Fund Committee convened to assess the cost of implementing building projects at these schools. They estimated that \$1 million would be sufficient to carry out these projects. By the 1947 Synod Convention, they had raised the million that they had asked for, but economic conditions had changed. In 1949, the Building Fund Committee recognized that they would need an additional \$600,000 to complete these projects.

This need for additional funding impacted the convention's decisions on the requests for new academies. "Desirable as these projects may be, we hold that the successful completion of the Wisconsin Synod Building Fund Collection and the erection of the contemplated buildings⁸ must at present engage our entire attention and energy."⁹ Once again, the Nebraska District's request for an academy would have to wait, as well as the requests from the Arizona and Pacific-Northwest Districts. However, the convention encouraged the synod to continue to study the relative needs of these areas.

8. The "contemplated buildings at present" were Centennial Hall at Dr. Martin Luther College and the Library/Science building at Northwestern College.

9. Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States, *Proceedings of the Thirtieth Convention* (1949), 86.

THE PROMISING YEARS: 1952-1957

The push for an academy in Nebraska remained stagnant until the Nebraska District convention in 1952. A report of the Wisconsin Synod Survey Committee was presented to the district for its consideration. It recommended that “the Synod immediately set the necessary machinery in motion for the establishment of new synodical academies at strategic points. The committee believed that the first of these new academies should be located in Milwaukee because it has a concentration of synod constituency and because schools were already in place that could serve as feeder schools. It presented a possibility of lower operating costs. Based on their current numbers, it would relieve the most pressure on Northwestern College and Dr. Martin Luther College.¹⁰

The report of the floor committee proposed, once again, to memorialize the synod for an academy in the Nebraska District. They believed that decentralizing the synod’s secondary school system could provide opportunities for more people to train for ministry. Along with the memorial came a resolution for the president of the Nebraska District to appoint a standing committee of four men (one to represent each conference) to gather information “regarding the availability of facilities and locations and formulate reasons why the academy should be located

10. Nebraska District of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States, *Proceedings of the Eighteenth Convention* (1952), 75.

in Nebraska.”¹¹ Although the Survey Committee recommended Milwaukee, the Nebraska District believed it could make a stronger case for Nebraska.

The four-person committee made up of H. Hoyer, Schulz, Molkentin, and Grummert met for the first time on October 22, 1952. They devised a plan to inform the members of the Nebraska District about the efforts to establish an academy in Nebraska. A film showing school life at Northwestern College was acquired and shown at congregational gatherings. They also distributed an informational sheet concerning synodical schools. This effort by the committee ultimately resulted in a memorial for the 1953 Joint Synod convention.¹²

This memorial based its claim on the 1927 Moussa Report, saying, “Whereas the Synod formulated and adopted plans some 25 years ago, eventually to provide each of the outlying Districts with its own Academy.”¹³ It also pointed out that Northwestern Lutheran Academy in South Dakota was a blessing to the synod and claimed that there was a “general synodical understanding” that the Nebraska District “had been promised the next synodical academy.”¹⁴

This memorial would mark a crucial event in the story. At the 1953 synod convention, the memorial was acted upon by the Institutional Survey Committee. This committee made the following recommendation: “To point B of the Survey Committee Report, we recommend that the Synod establish an academy in the Nebraska District as soon as the Synod declares that monies for it are available.”¹⁵ The Committee also decided that the Nebraska District would be

11. Nebraska District, *Proceedings* (1952), 133.

12. Grummert, “Beginning of the Nebraska Lutheran Academy,” 5.

13. Grummert, “Beginning of the Nebraska Lutheran Academy,” 5.

14. Grummert, “Beginning of the Nebraska Lutheran Academy,” 5.

15. Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States, *Proceedings of the Thirty-Second Convention* (1953), 85.

granted a maximum of \$500,000 for an academy. This was the response that the Nebraska District had been hoping for. The synod had officially decided to build an academy as soon as funds became available and promised to grant half a million dollars to support this project.

Now that the district had a promise of an eventual academy, the next step was to select a location. The two locations brought up at the 1954 Nebraska District Convention were Norfolk and Grand Island. No official decision was made. A potential opportunity arose for York College in York, NE, to be the location of this new academy. The entire institution was offered to the Synod for “\$100,000 in round figures.” This option was explored but deemed infeasible. It was impossible to obtain a title for the property or obtain “quiet and peaceable possession of this property.” Synod attorneys advised against accepting the York College offer.¹⁶

Things were trending positively for the academy effort in Nebraska. They had received a promise for an academy, a grant from the synod, and the “go-ahead” to select a location for this academy. With the permission to select a location, “a letter was sent to each congregation of the district, asking them to nominate cities and to give reasons for such nominations.”¹⁷ These nominations came in the form of letters, which were read and discussed at the January 30, 1956, Nebraska Lutheran Academy Committee meeting. Plans were made to enlarge this Academy Committee by adding lay delegates, who would be elected at the February Delegate Conference. This enlarged committee would then meet at the 1956 spring pastoral conference to further discuss the nominations for the academy's site.¹⁸

16. Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States, *Proceedings of the Thirty-Third Convention* (1955), 85.

17. Grummert, “Beginning of the Nebraska Lutheran Academy,” 6.

18. Grummert, “Beginning of the Nebraska Lutheran Academy,” 6.

“The Enlarged Committee met in Omaha on April 12, 1956. A report was submitted to this Committee regarding the nominated localities. After discussion, the committee received the counsel to make a thorough study of the following cities: Norfolk, Lincoln, Grand Island, and North Platte.”¹⁹ These cities were visited by the members of the Academy Committee and the lay delegates that had been added: W. Gutzmann of Norfolk, J. Freese of Plymouth, Mr. Robbins of Golden, Colorado, and Mr. Hasche representing the Rosebud Conference.²⁰ Information about these cities was compiled, mimeographed, and distributed to each pastor and congregation in the district. At the 1956 Nebraska District Convention, July 17–20, this site committee requested that the convention make the final decision on the location. “After five years, your committee is ready to rest from its labors. Now we must ask a favor of you. Tell us, as the Lord directs you, where the academy should be built.”²¹

The committee asked for a favor, and it was granted. The convention delegates took a vote to determine which of the four cities they would choose. On the sixth ballot, Grand Island was selected as the city for the proposed Nebraska Lutheran Academy. The Academy Committee then memorialized the Wisconsin Synod assembled at the recessed session, on August 21–23, 1956, to recognize the name Nebraska Lutheran Academy for the new synodical academy to be established in Grand Island, NE. They also asked that the synod elect a Board of Regents for this academy and empower them to call a director and subsequent professors.²² In this memorial, they

19. Grummert, “Beginning of the Nebraska Lutheran Academy,” 6.

20. Grummert, “Beginning of the Nebraska Lutheran Academy,” 6.

21. Nebraska District of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States, *Proceedings of the Twentieth Convention* (1956), 36.

22. Nebraska District, *Proceedings* (1956), 36–37.

recommended that the Board of Regents be comprised of the candidates nominated by the 1956 Nebraska District Convention.

The 1956 synod convention was held “to take final action on a resolution to terminate fellowship with The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod.”²³ This issue was the primary focus of this convention, and therefore, other issues were tabled until the 1957 synod convention. In the president’s report, it was recommended that the synod approve the name “Nebraska Lutheran Academy” for the academy, which was to be established in the Nebraska District. It was also recommended that the election of the Board of Regents for this academy be tabled until the 1957 synod convention.²⁴

The report of Floor Committee 11 at this 1956 synod convention, stated, “Your committee recognizes the assurances of the Board of Trustees that the early establishment of the Nebraska Lutheran Academy is a moral obligation which the Synod has assumed.”²⁵ This paints a picture of the sentiment around Nebraska Lutheran Academy. In 1956, establishing this academy was not viewed as a hypothetical endeavor. It wasn’t seen as something that was a possibility that the synod could potentially act on or not. It was considered “a moral obligation.” In 1956, the synod recognized its commitment to make this academy a reality.

On the other hand, this committee also acknowledged a complex reality for the Nebraska District. “WHEREAS, Your Committee takes cognizance of the fact that funds to implement the Saginaw Resolutions concerning the purchase of property are lacking, and WHEREAS, The Nebraska District has chosen Grand Island as the site for its academy, your committee concurs

23. Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States, *Proceedings of the Thirty-Third Convention Recessed Session* (1956), 1.

24. Wisconsin Synod, *Proceedings* (1956), 10.

25. Wisconsin Synod, *Proceedings* (1956), 20.

with the recommendation of the Board of Trustees, postponing the acquisition of land until the necessary moneys are on hand.”²⁶ The promise and commitment to establishing Nebraska Lutheran Academy were renewed at this 1956 synod convention, but the holdup was financial. At the time of this convention, Floor Committee 11 pointed to the crucial wording, “whenever the Board of Trustees indicates that the monies are available for such plans and specifications.”²⁷

At the 1957 synod convention, the Educational Survey Committee recommended that this synod convention should elect a Board of Regents for the Nebraska Lutheran Academy from the slate of candidates nominated by the 1956 district convention. It also recommended that the president of the synod decide the matter of authorizing this Board of Regents to call a director, and that if the synod were to authorize a major building fund collection, the Nebraska academy would be included in that collection. The convention delegates adopted these recommendations. The men elected to the Board of Regents included three pastors: Pastor D. Grummert from Grace in Sioux City, Iowa, as chairman, Pastor H. Kruschel from First in Aurora, Nebraska, and Pastor L. Gruendeman from Mt. Olive in Lincoln, Nebraska, as well as three laymen: Thomas Jones from Norfolk, Nebraska, as secretary, Leon Koenig from Christ Lutheran in Grand Island, Nebraska, Alton Workentine from Grafton, Nebraska, and one teacher, M. J. Ingebritson from Good Shepherd in Omaha, Nebraska.²⁸

At the first meeting of the newly founded Board of Regents on November 27, 1957, it was moved and seconded that the board meet with Hellberg & Hellberg Architectural Firm to discuss the matter of cost and construction for the academy. Mr. Hellberg was present to discuss

26. Wisconsin Synod, *Proceedings* (1956), 20.

27. Wisconsin Synod, *Proceedings* (1955), 73.

28. Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Regents of Nebraska Lutheran Academy, November 25, 1957, Nebraska District Collection, Box 8, Folder 2 of 10, WELS Archives, Waukesha, WI, 3.

architectural problems. “He showed drawings qualifying the firm of Hellberg & Hellberg as architects. He further recommended that the road on the south edge of the property be opened and that Howard Street be opened, giving two approaches to the property.”²⁹ It was later moved and seconded that the synod’s Board of Trustees “be urged to authorize the engagement of an architect so that plans, cost, and etc. can be established as per the resolution at Saginaw in 1955.”³⁰ Hellberg & Hellberg was the architect that the Board of Trustees was recommended to work with. In January of 1958, “The Synod’s Board of Trustees purchased 33 acres at Grand Island at the cost of \$21,000.”³¹

29. Nebraska Lutheran Academy Board of Regents Minutes, November 25, 1957, 4.

30. Nebraska Lutheran Academy Board of Regents Minutes, November 25, 1957, 4.

31. “The Nebraska Lutheran Academy”, Nebraska District Collection, Box 8, Folder 1 of 10, WELS Archives, Waukesha, WI, 3.

DIFFICULT REALITIES REVEALED: 1957-1959

As a result of this meeting on November 27, 1957, Pastor Grummert appealed to the synod's Board of Trustees on August 11, 1958, to proceed with architectural services. He wrote about their response in a letter to the Board of Regents, which stated that the Board of Trustees denied this request for five reasons.

1. Referring to the Synodical resolutions of New Ulm page 105–106, it was pointed out that the italicized “IF” makes it uncertain as to the Synod's future intentions of the academy.” 2. There was not at this time “successful Building Fund.” 3. There is a “mounting deficit in the Synod's treasury.” 4. “The Board of Trustees was of the opinion that it was not given the authority to make up a priority list of institutions which they felt they would be doing by giving us any further green lights. They maintained, in spite of my reference to the Saginaw resolutions, where authority is given to the B. of T. to proceed when the money is available, (cf. Saginaw resolutions, p. 73), that the New Ulm resolutions take precedence.” 5. The only thing that would change their mind “was a definite upswing in regard to synodical giving.”³²

Essentially, the decision of the Board of Trustees came down to the synod's lack of funds at the time. Pastor Grummert acknowledged this reality in his letter, “If you make a study of these figures, you will see, I'm certain, why the B. of T. is hesitant to proceed. If the financial condition does not improve, and that right soon, it will be necessary to make very definite cuts in the Synod's expenditures.”³³ Pastor Grummert then encouraged the Board of Regents to look

32. D. Grummert to Board of Regents, Nebraska Lutheran Academy, November 8, 1958, p. 1, Nebraska District Collection, Box 8, Folder 3 of 10, WELS Archives, Waukesha, WI.

33. Grummert to Board of Regents, November 8, 1958, p. 1.

ahead to the 1959 synod convention. At this time, Nebraska Lutheran Academy was part of the synod's Educational Survey Committee's "Ten Year Plan."³⁴ Grummert felt that now was the time to push for the academy because "the tremendous need for teachers is, however, having a tendency to elevate the needs of D.M.L.C. above that of the Academy. The Milwaukee area is also pushing for the Junior College."³⁵

Grummert believed that the lack of synod funds and the competing needs of other synod institutions necessitated urgency on behalf of the Board of Regents. "I do not think that we should rely on just one 'door' to the Synod's floor. Another access could be through the channel known as REQUESTS OF INSTITUTIONS. We have been given the status of institution to some extent. There may be other possibilities that need to be explored."³⁶ In addition to making sure that they explored every avenue in making their case to the synod, Grummert also believed they should come ready with a proposed budget for the synod's consideration at the 1959 synod convention, which would include a building schedule and the calling of a director who could begin to set up the curriculum.³⁷

In response to Grummert's letter, the Board of Regents met on January 5, 1959. Following the direction of that letter, the Board of Regents estimated the total cost of the academy's plant. "The motion was passed that we plead with the Ev. Luth. Joint Synod of Wis. and O.S. authorize the Board of Regents of the Nebraska Lutheran Academy at Grand Island, Nebraska, to proceed immediately with the plans, specifications, and the construction of the

34. Grummert to Board of Regents, November 8, 1958, p. 2.

35. Grummert to Board of Regents, November 8, 1958, p. 2.

36. Grummert to Board of Regents, November 8, 1958, p. 2.

37. Grummert to Board of Regents, November 8, 1958, p. 2.

complete Academy plant so that the Academy can be in operation by September of 1961. The cost of the project, exclusive of furnishings, is estimated to be approximately \$650,000.”³⁸ At this meeting, the Board of Regents also moved to request that the synod authorize the Board of Regents to call a president for the academy immediately.

The requests from this meeting were presented to the 1959 synod convention through the Report of the Nebraska Lutheran Academy and a separate memorial from the Nebraska District Pastoral Conference. They were treated in Resolution No. 6 of the synod convention proceedings, “WHEREAS, Our Synod at this time is burdened with the problem of relieving the acute shortage of workers and WHEREAS granting the requests of the Nebraska Board of Control³⁹ would do little to alleviate the immediate need for workers, and WHEREAS we question the long-range potential of workers to be provided by this area; therefore, be it *Resolved*, a) That the requests of the Board of Control of Nebraska Lutheran Academy be declined; and be it further *Resolved*, b) that the entire matter of the Nebraska Lutheran Academy be placed into the long-range program of the Synod for reevaluation.”⁴⁰

This action from the synod convention in 1959 would prove to be a turning point. Things had been trending positively. In 1953, a promise was made to establish an academy in the Nebraska District. In 1955, the district received permission to determine a site for this academy and prepare plans to purchase and build an academy at the discretion of the synod’s Board of

38. Minutes of the Board of Regents of the Nebraska Lutheran Academy, January 5, 1959, Nebraska District Collection, Box 8, Folder 2 of 10, WELS Archives, Waukesha, WI.

39. In Wisconsin Synod proceedings, the Board of Regents for Nebraska Lutheran Academy is referred to as the Board of Control for Nebraska Lutheran Academy. Throughout this paper, these two terms are synonymous. In the body of this paper, the author has chosen to use the term “Board of Regents” because that is the name used in the majority of the archived material relevant to this paper.

40. Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States, *Proceedings of the Thirty-Fifth Convention* (1959), 104.

Trustees. In 1956, the synod approved the name “Nebraska Lutheran Academy” and renewed its commitment to establishing said academy. In 1957, the synod elected a Board of Regents for Nebraska Lutheran Academy and committed to including the academy in the synod's building fund collections. In 1957, the Nebraska District was able to purchase thirty-three acres of land on which this academy was intended to be built. Since 1953, all signs pointed to the inevitable establishment of Nebraska Lutheran Academy. The action taken at this 1959 synod convention brought the academy's momentum to a screeching halt.

The broader context of the Wisconsin Synod at this time provides necessary insight into understanding the actions taken by this synod convention. A shortage of teachers had been a persistent problem for several years. The Wisconsin Synod Educational Survey Committee Report, states, “The 1957 Synod convention prayerfully wrestled with the urgent problem of our perennial teacher shortage.”⁴¹ The Educational Survey Committee Report in the Book of Reports and Memorials for 1957 presents the facts regarding the teacher shortage at that time. “Of the 120 teachers needed in 1956-1957 to staff our elementary Christian day schools, only 56 candidates were available from Dr. Martin Luther College and its Extension Course. (Seventeen came from the Winnebago Emergency Course.) Even among the 56 candidates only 27 were graduates. Likewise the 30 ministerial candidates for this present year will not fill all the vacancies.”⁴² In this report, the committee acknowledged Nebraska Lutheran Academy as an unfulfilled commitment of the synod.⁴³

41. Wisconsin Synod, *Proceedings* (1959), 91.

42. Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States, *Reports and Memorials of the Thirty-Fourth Convention* (1957), 60–61.

43. Wisconsin Synod, *Reports and Memorials* (1957), 61.

The academy was still on the mind of the synod, but the problem of the teacher shortage rose to the top of the synod's priority list. This provides context for the actions of the synod in 1959. In the convention resolutions, they justified their actions by pointing out that the synod was "burdened with the problem of relieving the acute shortage of workers," and they felt that "granting the requests of the Nebraska Board of Control would do little to alleviate the immediate need for workers."⁴⁴ Although the synod desired to establish an academy in the Nebraska District, due to the problems the synod was facing at the time, it was deemed an unwise decision.

Michael Traudt, in his 1977 essay on Nebraska Lutheran Academy, takes a strong stance against the actions of the 1959 synod convention. "In 1958 the Synod's Board of Trustees purchased 33 acres at Grand Island at the cost of \$21,000. Up to this point the Synod had gone along with the Nebraska District's hopes and plans. What happened at the next convention was a complete about face."⁴⁵ Traudt's position is understandable. As mentioned previously, for years, it felt like things were on track to establish Nebraska Lutheran Academy. The 1959 decision put an end to a streak of four synod conventions that had "ruled in favor" of the Academy. Without a doubt, this would've been deflating for the Nebraska District, but in the larger context of the Wisconsin Synod as a whole, the decision made sense. Nebraska Lutheran Academy was hoping to be operational by September 1961,⁴⁶ which would be four years after the synod was focused on the teacher shortage in 1957. Even if Nebraska Lutheran Academy had been established on that timetable, the synod would have to wait another seven years for the first potential group of

44. Wisconsin Synod, *Proceedings* (1959), 91.

45. Michael Traudt, "The Nebraska District's Long Struggle", 9.

46. Nebraska Lutheran Academy Board of Regents Minutes, January 5, 1959, 1.

pastors or teachers. It would've been a complete roll of the dice for the synod to commit the funds to establish Nebraska Lutheran Academy at this time, with no guarantee that it would aid in solving the teacher shortage.

A PROMISING OPPORTUNITY AND A PROFESSIONAL EVALUATION: 1959-1964

On November 23, 1959, the Board of Regents met in Grand Island, NE. This was the first meeting after the heavy news of the 1959 synod convention. “After much discussion about Synod’s action as to the matter of the Nebraska Lutheran Academy, it seemed to be the opinion that attention of the Academy should be brought to the congregations.”⁴⁷ With the synod not being able to approve the planting of the academy, the Board of Regents turned its attention to the congregations of the Nebraska District. There was hope that increased awareness about the academy in the Nebraska District would yield more support.

It had been suggested at this meeting that “Mass Reformation services in districts, conferences, or circuits; could be brought up at Pastoral Conferences.”⁴⁸ The next meeting of the Board of Regents, held on April 6, 1960, formally addressed this matter. “It was resolved to recommend to the Burke Conference having the 4th Sunday after Easter as the Academy Sunday. The theme for that Sunday would be Christian education on a secondary level, supplying workers for the church. Envelopes and inserts for the Sunday bulletin would be furnished. The

47. Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Regents for the Nebraska Lutheran Academy, November 23, 1959, 1, Nebraska District Collection, Box 8, Folder 2 of 10, WELS Archives, Waukesha, WI.

48. Nebraska Lutheran Academy Board of Regents Minutes, November 23, 1959, 1.

monies collected would be for the Academy Equipment Fund.”⁴⁹ This was acted upon at the 1960 Nebraska District Convention. “The Nebraska District Convention resolved that our congregations conduct a spring Academy Sunday and also area Reformation services. The monies collected should be designated for the Academy Fund.”⁵⁰

At the 1960 Nebraska District Convention, the Board of Regents for Nebraska Lutheran Academy took “steps to assure the Synod of the Nebraska District's continuing need of the Academy and of the full support of the membership of the District in this matter. These findings are being placed into the hands of the Synod's Planning Committee for the purpose of evaluation and consultation.”⁵¹ The Board of Regents was not content to leave the matter of the academy in the long-range plan for the synod. They continued to plead with the Wisconsin Synod's Planning Committee to reevaluate their decision. In the meantime, the Nebraska District proceeded with the suggested “Academy Sunday” to promote the academy and increase awareness throughout the district. “Mass Reformation Services, emphasizing the need and the purpose of the Academy, were held throughout the District. ‘Academy Sunday’ was observed on a district-wide basis on April 30, 1961 for the purpose of emphasizing the need of workers in the Church and the role the Synod's educational institutions play in the training of these workers.”⁵²

49. Minutes of the Nebraska Lutheran Academy Board of Regents Meeting (Norfolk, Nebraska, 5 April 1960), Nebraska District Collection, Box 8, Folder 2 of 10, Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Archives, Waukesha, WI.

50. “The Nebraska Lutheran Academy,” 3.

51. “Report of the Board of Control, Nebraska Lutheran Academy, to the Synodical Council,” May 24–25, 1961, Nebraska District Collection, Box 8, Nebraska Lutheran Academy Folder, WELS Archives, Waukesha, WI.

52. Nebraska Lutheran Academy Board of Control Report, May 24–25, 1961.

A New Opportunity: Luther College in Wahoo, NE

As the Board of Regents continued their efforts to garner support for the academy effort, an opportunity presented itself. Luther College, located in Wahoo, NE, appeared in newspaper headlines announcing its closure. This school was opened in 1883 by Swedish Lutheran immigrants and was operated by the Augustana Synod. In a letter from Hugo Fritze to President Naumann, he explained that “the building of Luther College at Wahoo, Nebr. will most likely be for sale. Definite decisions will be made in March of 1962. There has been quite a bit of information in the daily newspapers as of late.”⁵³ H. Fritze described the 19-acre campus, which included boys' and girls' dormitories, a music hall, a dining hall and kitchen, a gymnasium and science building, a football field, and a running track, with a capacity of 200 students.⁵⁴ At the time of this letter, the Board of Regents had not yet discussed this matter, and it wasn't entirely decided that the building would be for sale.

The following month, “The Nebraska Lutheran Academy Board, along with Pastor O. Naumann and Pastor H. Eckert, met with the Luther College Board at Wahoo, for an informal discussion of the possible purchase of the Luther College property.”⁵⁵ The members of the Academy Board, along with President Naumann and Pastor Eckert, held a brief meeting following these discussions. They decided to ask the Wisconsin Synod's Board of Trustees to appraise the Luther College property and negotiate with the Luther College board.⁵⁶

53. Hugo Fritze to Oscar Naumann, November 9, 1961, Nebraska District Collection, Box 8, Folder 7 of 10, WELS Archives, Waukesha, WI.

54. Fritze to Naumann, November 9, 1961.

55. Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Regents for Nebraska Lutheran Academy, December 21, 1961, Nebraska District Collection, Box 8, Folder 2 of 10, Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Archives, Waukesha, WI.

56. Nebraska Academy Board of Regents Minutes, December 21, 1961.

The next time that the Nebraska Lutheran Board of Regents met was March 26, 1962. At this meeting, Pastor Wietzke reported on Luther College in Wahoo. It was also announced that the educational consultant had been to Luther College in Wahoo and the property in Grand Island. Advantages and disadvantages of the Wahoo property and location were discussed.

A motion was made and seconded to send a request to the Board of Trustees. In the request we are to let them know that the school will close with the '61-'62 school term and that the property is up for disposition. The Trustees are also to be informed that there are two other interested parties. We request and urge that an appraisal and negotiations be made as soon as possible so that information from the Board may be available the last week in April, prior to the District Pastoral Conference.⁵⁷

This request from the Board of Regents that the synod's Board of Trustees appraise and negotiate for the Luther College campus in Wahoo marks a shift for the Board of Regents. Previously, efforts had been focused on establishing an academy in Grand Island, the location chosen by the Nebraska District, where the synod had purchased land. This shift goes back to the synod's 1959 action not to fund a school plant in Grand Island, as well as the sudden availability of the Wahoo campus. In just a few short years, it seems that the idea of a school at Grand Island had been abandoned.

After this March 26 meeting, Eldon Hirsch, secretary for the Board of Regents, wrote a letter on behalf of the Board to the synod's Board of Trustees. He wrote, "It was evident that all Board members are convinced that it would be a wise buy, but with one if, if the price is right."⁵⁸ Hirsch admitted that the Board of Regents didn't feel they had enough experience to determine a reasonable price. For that reason, they were "requesting that an appraisal be made as soon as

57. Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Regents for Nebraska Lutheran Academy, March 26, 1962, Nebraska District Collection, Box 8, Folder 2 of 10, Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Archives, Waukesha, WI.

58. Eldon Hirsch to Harold Eckert, April 1, 1962, Nebraska District Collection, Box 8, Folder 7 of 10, WELS Archives, Waukesha, WI.

possible.”⁵⁹ The urgency of this request was for two reasons. “It is felt that if we are really interested, that interest is going to have to be shown...Secondly, we would like to have something more definite to present to the Nebraska District Pastoral Conference in May.”⁶⁰ At the writing of this letter, the Nebraska District had not yet been informed about the potential option of purchasing Luther College at Wahoo. The Board of Regents wanted to have firm figures to bring before the district pastoral conference in May.

The urgency expressed by the Board of Regents is understandable, but the timetable of their request was unrealistic. By the time the Board of Trustees received this letter, they had less than a month to make an appraisal of the entire college campus and present a counteroffer. Unsurprisingly, the synod’s Board of Trustees was unable to grant this request before the May 1962 district pastoral conference. As a result, the Nebraska Academy Report, presented at this May 1962 conference, included general information about Luther College and reported that the Board of Regents had visited the campus. While it had seemed that the campus was going to be available after the 1962 school year, this report reads, “There is a divided opinion, however, in the Augustana Synod as to what shall be done with Luther College. Some favor selling the institution; others favor its continuance sponsored by the association, the city, or the county.”⁶¹ Due to the fact that there wasn’t an action item for this conference to consider in relation to Luther College at Wahoo, “The Board of Regents requests that you at this convention discuss the advisability of establishing an association of congregations in our District to raise the funds for

59. Hirsch to Eckert, April 1, 1962.

60. Hirsch to Eckert, April 1, 1962.

61. Nebraska Lutheran Academy Board of Regents Report to the Pastoral Conference, May 1–3, 1962, Nebraska District Collection, Box 8, Folder 7 of 10, Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Archives, Waukesha, WI, 2.

the erection of the Academy buildings and to ask the Wisconsin Synod to assume the operation of the institution.”⁶² The Board of Regents demonstrated that they would pursue multiple options in an effort to start Nebraska Lutheran Academy. Initially, they had worked to have the synod fund the building of an academy, were working with the synod’s Board of Trustees to investigate the possibility of purchasing an existing campus, and they were exploring the potential of the Nebraska District paying for the buildings of a school and the synod paying to operate the school.

The next meeting of the Board of Regents was held on August 20, 1962. At this meeting, the board further discussed the possibility of forming an association of congregations to raise sufficient funds to purchase or build an academy and explore the synod’s willingness to operate an academy purchased or built by the Nebraska District.⁶³ The discussion of forming an association never materialized before the special synod convention in November of 1962.

At the 1961 Wisconsin Synod Convention, the Planning Committee for the Educational Institutions for the Synod wrote, “Since a number of problems are raised by this report, the committee feels that it would be wise to employ an independent educational consultant to study our educational facilities, particularly since the cost involved, in any plan, will run into millions of dollars.”⁶⁴ In this same committee’s supplementary report, they gave this recommendation:

WHEREAS, the Educational Consultant, engaged upon the recommendation of the Synodical Council, is scheduled to complete a study of our Educational Facilities by February 1, 1962, and since no definite recommendations can be made before the report is completed and evaluated: we therefore recommend, that this convention: 1. Suspend work on all plans, contemplated and previously approved. 2. Refrain from authorizing new work. 3. Give the Synodical Council the authority to act on the recommendations of

62. Nebraska Lutheran Academy Board Report to Pastoral Conference, May 1–3, 1962, 2.

63. Eldon Hirsch to E. C. Birkholz, September 18, 1962, Nebraska District Collection, Box 8, Folder 3 of 10, WELS Archives, Waukesha, WI.

64. Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, *Proceedings of the Thirty-Sixth Convention* (1961), 85.

the Planning Committee following their evaluation of the Consultant's Report or call a Special Synodical Convention for this purpose.⁶⁵

This recommendation was adopted in Resolution No. 2 of the Report of Floor Committee No.

5.⁶⁶

Although an association wasn't formed before the 1962 convention, the Nebraska District still submitted a memorial regarding the purchase of Luther College in Wahoo, NE. These are the resolutions put forth by the memorial:

1. That the Synod authorize the Board of Trustees to appraise the Luther College at Wahoo, Nebraska, immediately. 2. That Synod authorize the Board of Trustees to enter negotiations for the purchase of Luther College, at Wahoo, Nebraska, as a Synodically owned Academy. 3. That Synod give approval that the Nebraska District be granted the opportunity to raise the necessary funds to purchase the school campus at Wahoo, Nebraska. 4. That the Synod make the purchase of Luther Junior college contingent upon the Nebraska District's ability to raise the necessary funds. 5. That if the purchase of Luther College is consummated, the Grand Island site be sold to supplement the funds raised by the District. 6. That Synod authorize its treasurer to apply the District's available funds toward the purchase price of the Wahoo School. 7. That the Synod express its willingness to assume the cost of the operation of this school. 8. That in the event the Wahoo negotiations prove fruitless, or the Luther Junior College becomes unavailable, that the Synod declare its willingness to authorize the erection of a new plant on the Grand Island site as soon as moneys raised by the Nebraska District are available or at such a time when the Synod can give priority to the erection of the Nebraska Lutheran Academy in its building projects.⁶⁷

In this memorial, the Nebraska District was taking responsibility for providing the funds for the purchase of Luther College to the point that they were willing to make the purchase "contingent upon the Nebraska District's ability to raise the necessary funds."⁶⁸ The Nebraska District was willing to gamble that it could come up with the necessary funding even before a committed

65. WELS Convention, *Proceedings* (1961), 94.

66. WELS Convention, *Proceedings* (1961), 95.

67. Memorial from the Nebraska Lutheran Academy Board of Regents to the Special Synod Convention, November 7–9 1962, Nebraska District Collection, Box 8, Folder 2 of 10, WELS Archives, Waukesha, WI.

68. Nebraska Lutheran Academy Board Memorial, November 1962.

association was formed within the district. If this plan were to be approved, the site in Grand Island would be sold to help supplement the funding. If the purchase of Luther College couldn't be negotiated, then the Nebraska District asked that the synod give authorization for the district to build an academy at the site in Grand Island.

A Professional Evaluation

Unfortunately for the Nebraska District, Nebraska Lutheran Academy was not a high priority of the 1962 special synod convention. This convention was called to evaluate the synod's current worker-training program and the professional educational consultant's findings. Dr. Robert J. Keller, a professor of education at the University of Minnesota, was hired by the synod as an educational consultant in late June 1961 through the Bureau of Field Studies and Surveys.⁶⁹ A condensed version of his report containing his major recommendations was presented to the 1962 special synod convention. His first three recommendations were: "1. That synod preparatory schools and synod colleges be separated. 2. That Dr. Martin Luther College become a specialized teacher's college for the preparation of elementary teachers for Wisconsin Synod elementary schools. 3. That Northwestern College be devoted exclusively to a pretheology program."⁷⁰ This small sample of the recommendations demonstrates why Nebraska Lutheran Academy wasn't a major item. In these first three recommendations, Keller proposed a major realignment of the Wisconsin Synod's educational institutions. These recommendations weren't minor adjustments. They would completely change the way that the synod educated its

69. Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, *Proceedings of the Special Synod Convention* (1962), 26.

70. WELS Convention, *Proceedings* (1962), 29.

workers. Before consideration could be given to starting a new institution, like Nebraska Lutheran Academy, this report from a professional consultant called for significant changes in the existing educational institutions of the synod.

While Nebraska Lutheran Academy wasn't a major item for the 1962 convention, it was treated in Keller's report under Recommendation Number 6:

That no further steps be taken to establish new synod preparatory schools in the Nebraska and Arizona-California Districts for a minimum period of five years. This recommendation is made chiefly on the basis of enrollment potential and costs in these two Districts when related to the overall education priorities which need to be established within the Wisconsin Synod. The continued existence of a marginal preparatory school at Mobridge, possibly more for extension than educational reasons, is insufficient grounds for establishing two more marginal facilities. Action on the Nebraska Academy and the proposed facility in Tucson should be tabled for at least five years when it should again be reconsidered.⁷¹

This recommendation exposed flaws in the initial arguments presented for the establishment of Nebraska Lutheran Academy. The Nebraska District had pushed for an academy based on the 1927 Moussa Report and the subsequent establishment of Northwestern Lutheran Academy in Mobridge. Without mincing words, Keller provided his belief that this was not "sufficient grounds for establishing two more marginal facilities."⁷² In recommendation 11 of Keller's report, it reads, "Reconsideration of the need for new Synod preparatory schools in the Arizona-California and Nebraska Districts with construction to start in 1968 if feasible."⁷³ As hard as it was for the Nebraska District to take the synod's action in 1959 to place Nebraska Lutheran Academy into the long-range plan of the synod, Keller's report agrees that the synod at this time should not build a new academy.

71. WELS Convention, *Proceedings* (1962), 30–31.

72. WELS Convention, *Proceedings* (1962), 30.

73. WELS Convention, *Proceedings* (1962), 33.

When the synod received Keller's report, three synod committees were assigned to make recommendations: the Planning Committee, the Board of Trustees, and the Advisory Committee on Education.⁷⁴ In their reaction to Recommendation Number 6 from Keller's report, which suggested that the synod should not build an academy in the Nebraska or Arizona-California-District, it reads, "Without additional comment we concur in this recommendation."⁷⁵ This group of three synod committees did not see a reason to disagree with the arguments raised by the professional educational consultant hired by the synod. The memorial that the Nebraska District had sent to the convention in relation to the purchase of Luther College at Wahoo, NE, "was tabled till the next regular convention of the Synod."⁷⁶

When this memorial came up at the 1963 synod convention, it "was favorably submitted by the Floor Committee to the Synod Convention at Milwaukee. The delegates, however, rejected the recommendation by the close vote of 77-64."⁷⁷ The Board of Regents met on August 26, 1963. Pastor Wichman reported that their memorial was defeated.⁷⁸ It was clear to the board members that the Wisconsin Synod would not be purchasing the Luther College campus at Wahoo, NE. That didn't mean, however, that the board was willing to give up on the possibility of this campus entirely. The board made two suggestions in relation to the Luther College campus: "1. We suggest to the District Praesidium considering the feasibility of forming an association of congregations to acquire the Luther College Campus at Wahoo, Nebraska. 2. We

74. WELS Convention, *Proceedings* (1962), 35.

75. WELS Convention, *Proceedings* (1962), 36.

76. WELS Convention, *Proceedings* (1962), 59.

77. "The Nebraska Lutheran Academy," 3.

78. Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Regents for Nebraska Lutheran Academy, August 26, 1963, Nebraska District Collection, Box 8, Folder 2 of 10, WELS Archives, Waukesha, WI.

advise the Nebraska District Praesidium to consider the feasibility of suggesting to the Wisconsin Synod Board of Trustees whether or not to acquire Luther College for the replacement of Bethesda, for an old people's home, or for some other use.”⁷⁹ A letter was sent to Paul W. Dieckman, the president of Midland College, who had served as the contact point for the Board of Regents in discussions regarding the purchase of Luther College, to inform him of their current stance on acquiring the campus.⁸⁰

Question Arise In House

While the Board of Regents as a group was willing to continue investigating options for the purchase of Luther College, one board member felt that it was time to call it quits. Pastor Harold Schulz from Golden, CO, wrote a letter excusing himself from the August 26, 1963, meeting. In this letter, he expressed that, “He felt as though the Board should be dissolved since Synod took the action that it did in its last convention.”⁸¹ In response, Pastor W. F. Wichmann responded, writing, “The Board, however, does not share your opinion that the existence and functions of the Board of Regents incurs a waste of the Synod's money, but serves in a very necessary capacity in preparation for the realization of an academy within the confines of the Nebraska District.”⁸²

79. Nebraska Lutheran Academy Board of Regents Minutes, August 26, 1963.

80. Eldon Hirsh to Paul W. Dieckmann, August 28, 1963, Nebraska District Collection, Box 8, Folder 3 of 10, WELS Archives, Waukesha, WI.

81. Nebraska Lutheran Academy Board of Regents Minutes, August 26, 1963.

82. W. F. Wichman to Harold Schulz, August 27, 1963, Nebraska District Collection, Box 8, Folder 3 of 10, WELS Archives, Waukesha WI.

Pastor Schulz may not have been able to convince the Board of Regents, but it seems that his sentiment was shared in Colorado. In February of 1964, a letter was sent to Pastor Wichmann containing a resolution from the Colorado Mission District, which, “unanimously passed the following resolution: RESOLVED a) that the Colo. MD go on record that it will not participate as a District in the purchase and operation of Luther Junior College for a Nebraska District Academy. b) that the Colo. MD go on record that it remain in favor of a Synod Academy in the Nebraska District.”⁸³ Reasoning for this resolution was also included in the letter:

1) The WELS has not abandoned the long-range plan of having an Academy in each of its Districts. 2) The purchase and operation of Luther Junior College would violate the intent of the Wisconsin Synod’s action in August 1963; furthermore such a school, supported by an Association of congregations and/or individuals would not be a District Academy of Synod, such as (Mobridge) Northwestern Lutheran Academy. 3) The costs involved are too great for the communicant membership of the Nebraska District, a District that is largely composed of mission congregations. Many of these congregations are already not meeting their fair share for the (mission) work of Synod or their repayments on CEF loans. 4) The distance Savings for the CMD between Wahoo and Mobridge is not sufficient to merit the expense in dollars and manpower to operate another Academy, especially since NWLA needs students. 5) The apparent lack of interest in having a Nebraska District Academy as evidenced by the amount of present funds raised over a period of years. (Approx. \$3.75 per com.)⁸⁴

The reasoning presented in this letter highlights two key points. First, since discussions about purchasing Luther College in Wahoo, NE, began, the Wisconsin Synod never guaranteed that it would operate an academy there if the campus were purchased. Therefore, the Nebraska District would be purchasing a campus that the synod never agreed to operate. Proceeding in this manner could result in a massive waste of district funds. Second, the money to purchase this campus

83. Reverend V. Bittorf to W. F. Wichmann, February 10, 1964, Nebraska District Collection, Box 8, Folder 8 of 10, WELS Archives, Waukesha, WI.

84. Bittorf to Wichmann, February 10, 1964.

didn't exist within the district. The men comprising the Wahoo College Committee for the Board of Regents would find this second point to be true very shortly.

No "Wahoo!" for Wahoo

In an update to the Nebraska District following the 1963 synod convention, the Wahoo College Committee reported that the most recent price they had received for the purchase of the campus at Wahoo was \$466,000.⁸⁵ A letter from President Hugo Fritze on March 19, 1964, to the Wahoo College Committee reported, "the congregations of our District offered \$21,822 immediately and \$43,419.50 during the next five years for the purchase and operation of Wahoo College, Wahoo, Nebraska. This response does not justify any further steps toward the purchase of Wahoo College."⁸⁶ A few days later, on March 24, 1964, President Fritze sent a letter notifying the congregations and pastors of the Nebraska District of this news.⁸⁷

The reality of the situation was setting in. The momentum for Nebraska Lutheran Academy had been a roller coaster. It was riding high from 1953 until it was brought to a halt by the 1959 synod convention. The possibility of purchasing Luther College at Wahoo renewed hope and optimism, only to be crushed once again by the facts of financials. The 1964 Nebraska District Convention "resolved to take the two yearly services in interest of the Academy out of the sphere of official District action. It is now left as a local preference. It was stated that this

85. Hugo Fritze, Leo Grundemann, and Hugo Schnitker to Pastors and Congregations of the Nebraska District, "Update on the August 1963 Synod Convention Regarding Nebraska Lutheran Academy," October 1963, Nebraska District Collection, Box 8, Nebraska Lutheran Academy Folder, WELS Archives, Waukesha, WI.

86. Hugo Fritze to the Committee on Information about Wahoo College, March 19, 1964, Nebraska District Collection, Box 8, Folder 8 of 10, WELS Archives, Waukesha, WI.

87. Nebraska District Praesidium to Congregations and Pastors of the Nebraska District, March 24, 1964, Nebraska District Collection, Box 8, Folder 8 of 10, WELS Archives, Waukesha, WI.

action of the District should not be considered as indicating a lack of interest in establishing our Academy.”⁸⁸ Despite the district's words concerning this action, in my opinion, this demonstrates that the Nebraska District was no longer taking a unified stance in favor of establishing Nebraska Lutheran Academy.

88. "The Nebraska Lutheran Academy," 3–4.

THE FINAL YEARS (1965-1969)

Other than discussions of tax payments on the Grand Island property, the Board of Regents did not appear to have a clear course of action.⁸⁹ In the report of Nebraska Lutheran Academy to the 1965 synod convention, “The Nebraska District asks the 1965 Convention at Watertown, Wisconsin, to place consideration of the authorization of the construction of the necessary buildings on its academy site in Grand Island on the agenda of the 1967 convention.”⁹⁰ Under the Report of the Committee on Teacher-Training Facilities, Resolution No. 18, it was resolved, “That this matter be placed on the agenda of the 1967 Convention.”⁹¹

The next meeting of the Board of Regents was held on April 20, 1966. At this meeting, a motion carried that the resolutions of the 1965 synod convention, which considered the authorization to construct buildings for Nebraska Lutheran Academy at Grand Island, be held in abeyance for two years.⁹² This meant that the matter of Nebraska Lutheran Academy would not be considered until the synod convention in 1969. Reasoning for this was given in the Report of the Board of Control of Nebraska Lutheran Academy, “At the present, however, Synod is

89. Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Regents for Nebraska Lutheran Academy, April 26, 1965, Nebraska District Collection, Box 8, Folder 2 of 10, WELS Archives, Waukesha, WI.

90. Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, *Proceedings of the Thirty-Eighth Convention* (1965), 102.

91. WELS Convention, *Proceedings* (1965), 160.

92. Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Regents for Nebraska Lutheran Academy, April 20, 1966, Nebraska District Collection, Box 8, Folder 2 of 10, WELS Archives, Waukesha, WI.

actively engaged in the Missio Dei Offering.⁹³ A successful completion of this two year program is indeed necessary. Therefore, since the pressing needs at our existing schools must be met first, our Board along with the Nebraska District asks the Synod to defer action on our request until the 1969 Convention.”⁹⁴

On October 3, 1966, Pastor Gerhardt Haag of Christ Lutheran Church in Grand Island sent a letter to the Board of Regents for Nebraska Lutheran Academy. He had received a letter from a local real estate agent representing a local firm that was interested in buying the plot that the synod had purchased for Nebraska Lutheran Academy. In his letter, he pointed out, “Our district has been held off from actually getting the Academy for more than 10 years. Interest and zeal are sadly lagging. At the recent District convention it was evident that many are no longer even convinced that our District should ask for it or expect to get it within the next few years.”⁹⁵ Despite this growing sentiment, Pastor Haag did not share this conviction. “My own conviction (arrived at recently as a newcomer to the District) is that the next new Academy of our Synod should be built in Grand Island, as soon as possible.”⁹⁶ He recommended that the Board of Control should “seriously consider recommending to the Synod the sale of this property.”⁹⁷ He believed that they could potentially receive in the area of \$100,000 which they could use to purchase “a new, cheaper piece of ground a little further away from the encroaching city.”⁹⁸

93. This was a special synod offering that was gathered from 1965-1967 for the purpose of providing funding for building projects at educational institutions.

94. Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, *Proceedings of the Thirty-Ninth Convention* (1967), 120.

95. Gerhardt Haag to the Board of Control for Nebraska Lutheran Academy, October 3, 1966, 1, Nebraska District Collection, Box 8, Folder 7 of 10, WELS Archives, Waukesha, WI.

96. Haag to Board of Control, October 3, 1966, 1.

97. Haag to Board of Control, 2.

98. Haag to Board of Control, 2.

This letter from Pastor Haag presented an interesting opportunity for the Board of Regents. At this time in October 1966, the matter of Nebraska Lutheran Academy would not be considered by the synod until the 1969 synod convention. There were no current efforts to purchase or build the necessary buildings for an academy. If they decided to take this offer and if Pastor Haag's figures were correct, they could potentially purchase a new location outside of Grand Island and come out with more money to put towards an eventual school plant there.

In response to this letter, the Board of Regents held a meeting on October 31, 1966. Pastor Haag was present as a visitor to read and comment on his letter to the Board. After he had done so, he "was thanked for his interest and concern for the future of the Nebraska Academy."⁹⁹ After Pastor Haag left, the Board discussed the matter, and "a motion prevailed that the Nebraska Academy Board of Regents go on record opposing the sale of the Academy property in Grand Island."¹⁰⁰

At the 1967 synod convention, the synod's Advisory Committee for Education included Nebraska Lutheran Academy in its report because of the 1965 synod convention resolution for Nebraska Lutheran Academy to be placed on the agenda for 1967. In this report, the Advisory Committee noted a recent and rapid expansion resulting from the mission program in the western districts. For this reason, they felt "the question arises whether these changing geographical circumstances do not dictate a thorough and ongoing study of the location of the first of any future western states academies and possible junior colleges."¹⁰¹ In addition, the report mentions that, "we must concern ourselves with maintaining a proper balance between all of the areas of

99. Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Regents for Nebraska Lutheran Academy, October 31, 1966, Nebraska District Collection, Box 8, Folder 2 of 10, WELS Archives, Waukesha, WI.

100. Nebraska Lutheran Academy Board of Regents Minutes, October 31, 1966.

101. Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, *Proceedings of the Thirty-Ninth Convention* (1967), 102.

work of the Synod, bearing in mind that budgetary projections indicate that we will be sorely pressed to maintain our expanded existing facilities and faculties.”¹⁰² For these reasons, the Advisory Committee went on to request this action: “Hence the Synod ought to have freedom of action as it endeavors to chart its course for the immediate future and it ought not be restrained as it does by resolutions which reach back almost 15 years. For these reasons, the Advisory Committee on Education urges the Synod to rescind its resolutions of 1953, 1955, and 1957 regarding the Nebraska Lutheran Academy. It also recommends that the disposal of the present property in Grand Island, Nebraska, be left to the discretion of the Board of Trustees.”¹⁰³

Release from Resolution

The Advisory Committee on Education wished to no longer be bound by past resolutions concerning Nebraska Lutheran Academy. Their reasoning is solid. As they pointed out, the synod had undergone significant changes since the first resolution in 1953, and, due to the growing scope of mission work, it continued to evolve. As the synod continued to expand, the Advisory Committee sought the freedom to strategically determine which location would best serve the synod for a new academy. This may not have been what the Nebraska District wanted to hear, but it sought to serve the needs of the synod as a whole. Because the Board of Regents of Nebraska Lutheran Academy had requested that the matter of the Academy be deferred to the 1969 synod convention, and to allow the Board of Regents and the Nebraska District to express themselves on these proposed changes from the Advisory Committee, it was resolved “That the

102. WELS Convention, *Proceedings* (1967), 102.

103. WELS Convention, *Proceedings* (1967), 102.

status quo with regard to Nebraska Lutheran Academy be maintained until the next convention of the Synod.”¹⁰⁴

The next meeting of the Board of Regents was held on June 24, 1968. The board discussed the proposed changes regarding Nebraska Lutheran Academy, as presented by the synod’s Advisory Committee on Education. The board thought that “valid reasons are still present for the need of an Academy in the Nebraska area.”¹⁰⁵ However, the board also recognized the pressing needs of the synod at this time. Therefore, it was decided that the 1955 and 1957 resolutions be rescinded. “The Board decided to retain the 1953 resolution of Synod ‘That the Synod establish an Academy in the Nebraska District as soon as the Synod declares that monies for it are available.’”¹⁰⁶

At the 1968 Nebraska district convention, a complete memorial from the Board of Regents was drafted expounding on the decisions they made at their June 24 meeting. It maintained the recommendations that the 1955 and 1957 synod resolutions be rescinded and the 1953 resolution be maintained. In relation to rescinding the 1955 resolution, it was recommended, “That the Academy property be sold by the Board of Trustees of the Synod.”¹⁰⁷ About the 1957 resolution, it was recommended, “That the Nebraska Lutheran Academy Board of Control be dissolved.”¹⁰⁸ In defense of retaining the 1953 resolution, it reads:

104. WELS Convention, *Proceedings* (1967), 154.

105. Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Regents for Nebraska Lutheran Academy, June 24, 1968, 1, Nebraska District Collection, Box 8, Folder 2 of 10, WELS Archives, Waukesha, WI.

106. Nebraska Lutheran Academy Board of Regents Minutes, June 24, 1968, 2.

107. Nebraska District of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, *Proceedings of the Twenty-Sixth Convention* (1968), 49.

108. Nebraska District, *Proceedings* (1968), 50.

WHEREAS We are of the opinion that the need for an academy still exists in the Nebraska District for the reasons cited in various memorials to the Synod, which reasons we believe are still valid, and We believe that a potential does exist in the Nebraska District and will continue to increase as the District expands, and We are of the opinion that an academy in this general area will prove a blessing to the Synod when such a step becomes financially feasible, and, We believe that under God academies in general have proved to be sources of blessings for our Synod in the furtherance of Christ's Kingdom, therefore we RECOMMEND: That the 1953 resolution of the Synod be retained.¹⁰⁹

This memorial was adopted by the convention and submitted in the 1969 Book of Reports and Memorials.¹¹⁰

At the 1969 synod convention, this memorial was addressed by Floor Committee No. 5 under resolution No. 9. It reads, “RESOLVED a) That we gratefully accept the recommendations of the Board of Control, and be it further RESOLVED b) That we retain the 1953 resolution (“that the Synod establish an academy in the Nebraska District as soon as the Synod declares that monies for it are available,” *Proceedings* 1953, p. 85).¹¹¹ With this action, a push for a synod-operated academy in Nebraska, which had begun in 1946, came to an end. After two decades of prayers and efforts, the Nebraska District and the Wisconsin Synod realized that, despite a desire on behalf of both parties, the dream of Nebraska Lutheran Academy couldn’t be realized at this time.

Despite the end of the effort for a synod-operated academy in Nebraska, the Nebraska District wasn’t done exploring options for secondary education within the Nebraska District. At the 1970 Nebraska district pastoral conference, a resolution was made “that the President of the District appoint a committee of twelve men, three from each Conference, to make a further study

109. Nebraska District of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, *Proceedings of the Twenty-Sixth Convention* (1968), 50.

110. WELS, *Reports and Memorials for the Fortieth Convention* (1969), 31-32.

111. WELS Convention, *Proceedings* (1969), 116.

of Pershing College.” This committee studied John J. Pershing College in Beatrice, NE. They found that the initial purchase price of the college was \$1–1.5 million, and immediate remodeling would require another \$250,000.¹¹² After the committee concluded its findings, it was moved that, “In view of financial circumstances as presented in subcommittee reports this committee recommends that the property of John J. Pershing College not be purchased.”¹¹³ Following this recommendation, the convention resolved not to continue pursuing the purchase of John J. Pershing College.¹¹⁴

112. Dennis Needham, “Committee to Study John J. Pershing College: Minutes, Reports, and Coorespondence, 1971–1972,” June 23, 1971–January 22, 1972, 1, Nebraska District Collection, Box 8, Folder 9 of 10, WELS Archives, Waukesha, WI.

113. Nebraska District of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, *Proceedings of the Twenty-Eighth Convention* (1972), 53.

114. Nebraska District, *Proceedings of the Twenty-Eighth Convention* (1972), 62.

CONCLUSION

After countless years of effort, the push for Nebraska Lutheran Academy came to an end without the establishment of a synod-operated high school in the Nebraska District. It came to rest not due to a lack of desire but due to the historical realities of the Wisconsin Synod at the time. From the time of the “first conversation” about the school in 1946 to the rescinding of synod convention resolutions in 1969, the academy's efforts came up against synod issues and repeatedly lost. In the late 1940s, the Wisconsin Synod’s Building Fund came up short, which forced the synod to postpone the building of any new academies. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, increased enrollment at Northwestern College and Dr. Martin Luther College necessitated massive building projects and renovations to both campuses. In the late 1950s, a teacher shortage prompted the synod to seek solutions that could provide faster relief to the problem, such as establishing Milwaukee Lutheran Teachers’ College. In 1962, the synod brought in a professional consultant to help determine the best course of action. This report determined that starting new academies would not be in the best interest of the synod. In the late 1960s, the Nebraska District deferred its request for the academy in favor of trying to help the synod complete its *Missio Dei* offering. Examining this time period in the synod’s history reveals that Nebraska Lutheran Academy could never compete with the needs that pressed the synod during that time.

One of the primary reasons that the synod repeatedly tabled the matter of Nebraska Lutheran Academy was due to financial shortages. In the 1940s, the synod fell short of its goal for the Synod Building Fund. In the late 1950s, a mounting deficit was accumulating in the synod treasury. This is something that D. Grummert pointed out to the Nebraska Lutheran Academy Board of Regents, saying that if they examined the numbers, they would draw the same conclusion. It wasn't as if the synod was being stingy or showing favoritism. The synod didn't have the luxury of pursuing every project, even if it wanted to, because there were limited financial resources. The Nebraska District tried on multiple occasions to produce funds for starting the academy themselves, but that didn't work either. Despite owning thirty-three acres of land for nearly a decade, the money to build an academy on that land didn't exist.

Another factor in this story was the changes that occurred within the synod during this time period. When the Nebraska District began to push for an academy in 1946, they appealed to the Moussa Report from 1927. They pointed to historical precedent. It was a fair basis for their proposal, but in 1946, it had been nearly two decades. By the time the Nebraska District had a promise for the academy, the Moussa Report was twenty-six years old. In that time, situations changed. The idea of operating a synod-prep school in every district proved not to be feasible. The school, which was established by the Mousa Report, Northwestern Lutheran Academy, became too expensive for the synod to operate and eventually closed in 1979. The professional educational consultant advised consolidating the synod's academic facilities. In the late 1960s, the synod had undergone significant expansion. This raised questions about whether Nebraska was the best location for the synod to establish another academy.

This combination of urgent synod needs, a lack of financial resources, and changes within the synod created a storm that eventually rained out the efforts to establish Nebraska

Lutheran Academy. However, the efforts of God's faithful people in the Nebraska District did yield results. In 1974, the Nebraska District was able to purchase a high school in Waco, NE, for \$58,000.¹¹⁵ This became Nebraska Evangelical Lutheran High School, which is still operated as an area Lutheran high school of the Wisconsin Synod to this day. No, this wasn't the synod-operated academy that the district had hoped for. Still, it is an answer to the prayer of the Nebraska District for a school of secondary education where the children of the Nebraska District can learn the blessed truth of God's Word every school day.

115. Traudt, "Long Struggle for an Academy," 14.

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Box 8, J.J. Pershing College Committee Folder 9 of 10.

Box 8, More Miscellaneous Files Folder 7 of 10.

Box 8, Nebraska Lutheran Academy Board of Regents Correspondence Folder 3 of 10.

Box 8, Nebraska Lutheran Academy Folder 2 of 10.

Box 8, Nebraska Lutheran Academy History Folder 1 of 10.

Box 8, Wahoo College NE Committee Folder 8 of 10.

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