



Georgia-Cumberland Academy

Credit: The school's website, <https://gcasda.org/who-we-are>.

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GREG HUDSON

Greg Hudson, D.Min. (Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan), is the senior pastor of the Georgia-Cumberland Academy church in Calhoun, Georgia. He has worked as a registered nurse, and served as a pastor and academy chaplain in Arkansas, Louisiana, and Georgia.

Georgia-Cumberland Academy (GCA) is a co-educational high school in Calhoun, Georgia. The campus consists of 510 acres that include an administration building, four classroom buildings, two dormitories, a gymnasium/cafeteria complex, numerous other buildings, and faculty housing.¹ John L. Coble Elementary School is located on GCA's campus. The high school has been owned and operated by the [Georgia-Cumberland Conference](#) (GCC) since it opened in 1965. GCA is accredited by Middle States Association (MSA), Georgia Private School Accreditation Council (GAPSAC), and Adventist Accrediting Association (AAA).²

Hurlbutt Farms and School

The Seventh-day Adventist message first reached the state of Georgia in the 1870s. The first Adventist educational institution in the general vicinity was [Graysville Academy](#) in Graysville, Tennessee, almost 80 miles to the north. Two separate church administrative entities, the Georgia Conference and the Cumberland Conference, both formed in 1901. They combined in 1932 to create the Georgia-Cumberland Conference.³

In 1908, Ellen White encouraged Emeline Hurlbutt (1843-1932) to begin a school. Emmeline lived in California with her rancher husband, Nathaniel Hurlbutt (1841-1912) where they hoped to begin a school, but White discouraged them from beginning a school on their ranch.⁴ After learning educational techniques from [E. A. Sutherland](#) (1865-1955) at the school in Madison, Tennessee, Emeline Hurlbutt purchased about 500 acres along the Oostanala River in the small community of Reeves, Georgia, near Calhoun, to start a school and medical facility, named the Hurlbutt Farm school, in order to reach people in the South. This acreage consisted of woods and farmland.⁵

William G. (1888-1915) & Edith Gladys (1884-1972) Wilson described their visit to the site:

The people here [in Georgia] are church members as a rule. They go to church at least once a year, sometimes oftener ... I wish you could accompany me to church and see all the men chewing tobacco, the minister not excepted. The women do not chew in church, but use snuff freely at home. There is a 'fine' school at this place where some of the more fortunate children attend. It usually runs nearly two months in the year. The lack of education is a hindrance to the progress of the gospel.⁶

Over 25 people traveled from California to help establish the Hurlbutt Farm and School. A church was established in 1914, the same year the school began.⁷ In 1915, [Arthur W. Spalding](#) (1877-1953) served as both principal and pastor in Reeves.⁸ The school continued sporadically.⁹

Scott School and Sanitarium

Shortly before Emmeline Hurlbutt's death in 1932, the property was given to the Laymen's Foundation, an organization that existed to aid self-supporting institutions across the south.¹⁰ The institution was renamed the Scott School and Sanitarium in 1944, for [Lida Funk Scott](#) (1868-1945) who was instrumental in funding the facility and who was heavily involved in the Laymen's Foundation. In 1948, the sanitarium had 30 beds, along with a ten-grade school and a dairy farm.¹¹ Two catastrophes following each other in quick succession led to the closure of Scott School and Sanitarium. First Aubrey L. Williams (1927-1958), the general manager of the institution, was electrocuted in a welding accident, and, shortly thereafter, in 1959, the farmhouse which contained the boy's dorm on the second floor burned to the ground.

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For several years, Georgia-Cumberland Conference planned on starting a new boarding academy. In 1958, a search was started for an appropriate property. In 1960, a Special Constituency session voted to purchase the former Scott School.¹² While several buildings were already on the property, many new buildings were needed, including a new administration building, dormitories, and cafeteria.¹³ The project was overseen by Horace Beckner (1911-2000), selected as director of church and institutional development for GCC. The construction was managed by George Pearman, who previously managed building projects at Southern Missionary College and Florida Hospital.¹⁴

The formation of this new educational institution received support from across the conference. A contest was held for young people to submit potential names for the new school, with the winner receiving a \$100 scholarship to GCA.¹⁵ On December 16, 1962, over 250 ministers and laymen planted over 200 dogwoods on the campus, many of which are still growing today.¹⁶ In 1964, church members saved and collected pennies to donate toward the construction of the new music building. The so-called "Penny Campaign" resulted in so many pennies donated that banks and financial institutions in Georgia reported a shortage of the copper coins. Over 3.3 million pennies, weighing approximately nine tons, were collected.¹⁷

GCA opened Monday, August 30, 1965, under the leadership of principal Edward Reifsnnyder, with 166 students. Several conference presidents were involved in the six-year process of creating this new school. The property was purchased under the administration of conference president Nathaniel C. Wilson (1897-1992). A. C. McKee and Leroy J. Leiske led the construction, and the school opened during the presidency of Desmond Cummings (d. 2004). The campus had seven newly constructed high school buildings, as well as an elementary school, farm buildings, and faculty homes at the time of its opening.¹⁸

GCA's instructional curriculum included a full range of educational opportunities, as well as industrial arts, a working farm, and a fire-fighting squad for the county.¹⁹ Over the years, students participated in a variety of industries in order to fund their education. In addition to on-campus jobs, students worked at Little Lake Industries making wooden furniture; Sample Barn producing carpet samples; Grafe Stained Glass making stained glass items, as well as many other places.²⁰ For a time, GCA's curriculum also included the possibility of flight training at the school's air strip.²¹

Music groups include a chorale, a select choir called Camerata, concert band, and an orchestra group called Sinfonietta.²² In the 2010s, the school began the Magnify Worship program, training young people at GCA and across the conference to lead praise and worship.²³

GCA has had many long-serving faculty, but the longest serving was Coach Wally Fox (1946-2021). He impacted the lives of young people as a teacher at GCA for 43 years. His wife Mary Ellen served at GCA for 34 years.²⁴ The longest serving principal was Greg Gerard, with a tenure running 20 years from 2002 to 2022, a time frame that saw great growth and renovation at the school.²⁵

A major addition to the campus took place in 2005 when a new church building was constructed. This church, with a 500-seat sanctuary, fellowship hall, and classrooms, was built as a place for the church family and the students to come together for worship but also was designed to train and equip GCA students to be leaders in church.²⁶ A major initiative to update the campus occurred fifty years after the school started. The “Continuing the Mission” project ran from 2015-2020 and resulted in major new additions, including a new administration building, classrooms, a student center, and a new cafeteria and athletic complex called the “Wally Fox Wellness Center.”²⁷

GCA has a current enrollment of about 300 students. Its motto is “To Know, To Love, To Serve,” while it continues to look to the future. In 2024, fundraising and groundbreaking took place for the “Forward Together” campaign, which will include renovations to the dorms, the music building and science labs, as well as campus health services.²⁸

Principals

Edward Reifsnnyder (1965-1968); W. A. Sowers (1968-1970); James Clizbe (1970-1973); L.C. Anderson (1973-1978); D. Wayne McNutt (1978-1982); Cyril Connelly (1982-1988); Victor Kostenko (1988-1989); John Thomas (1989-1998), Arnold Schnell (1998-1999), LaVona Gilham (Interim 1999), Fordyce Koenke (1999-2002); Greg Gerard (2002-2022); Serge Gariepy (2022-present)

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