



Adelphian Academy, 1909.

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Adelphian Academy

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In 1904 delegates in the East Michigan Conference (EMC) voted to open what would become Adelphian Academy. At the time there were only five senior academies in the United States, and none of them were in Michigan. These were South Lancaster Academy, Mount Vernon Academy, Keene Academy, Southern Industrial School, and Oakwood Industrial School. There were twelve “intermediate” schools, which is how Adelphian began – as a ten grade school. Among these twelve intermediate schools was Cedar Lake Industrial Academy (1899), and Battle Creek Industrial School (1904).¹ The farthest distance between these three schools was

approximately 120 miles, between Cedar Lake and Adelpian.

Church prophet and founder Ellen G. White had begun writing about a philosophy of education as early as 1872. In her first essay about education she is clear about the need for teachers whose “principles and habits should be of greater importance than his literary qualifications,” and that the “system of education going generations back has been destructive,” then putting forth the concept of a more work-based and spiritually grounded curriculum.² Although White stops short of calling for the establishment of Adventist schools in this essay, her message is received as one of action. By the time White published her book *Education* in 1903 a handful of Adventist conferences had already opened schools. By 1882 there were 3,400 members in Michigan, more than twice the number of any other conference.³ By 1904 Michigan’s membership had more than doubled, to just over 7,000 and what had been a single Michigan Conference entity had split into three separate conferences in 1902: Northern Michigan, Eastern Michigan, and Western Michigan.⁴ It was within this context that the membership of the newly created Eastern Michigan Conference voted to open Adelpian, as their western conference counterpart had opened Cedar Lake in 1899, only five years before.

As Cedar Lake had done, the EMC turned to a Prof. J. Grant Lamson. On September 22, 1904 EMC delegates voted unanimously to “take immediate steps” to raise funds for the new academy and commissioned Lamson and Elder E.K. Slade to search for a suitable location. Slade and Lamson quickly settled on a seventy-seven acre farm in Holly, about fifty miles northwest of Detroit.⁵

Adelpian would begin as a ten grade intermediate school and, in the spirit of Ellen White’s philosophy of education, students would learn to work while at school. A 1905 advertisement in the *Advent Review & Sabbath Herald* told students,

If you seek an education, if you really mean to get training, if you are willing to work, and are willing to have your brain sweat, if you are willing to undergo discouragements and perplexities, if you are willing to endure some hardships for the sake of becoming a more competent man or woman, we know of no better place for you to come than to the Adelpian Academy.⁶

The farm was purchased and school began the following January, with Lamson and his wife as the principal and teacher. Classes for the six students who enrolled in January 1905 were held in the property’s farmhouse.⁷

Although the first printed announcement of the new Adelpian Academy was probably in EMC’s *East Michigan Banner*, that publication has not been preserved. Citing the *East Michigan Banner*, however, the *West Michigan Herald* announced the opening of Adelpian Academy in November 1904, reading, “We see... that a school is to be opened in Holly, Mich. It will be known as Adelpian Academy.”⁸ A month later the *Review and Herald* also announced Adelpian Academy as “the new academy to be established” in Holly.⁹

Plans were laid and funds were raised throughout 1905 yet buildings were not erected, and evidence suggests that construction of the school was behind schedule. Following the 1905 camp meeting it became evident that

Adelphian Academy's buildings would not be ready, and the fall term would not begin on time.¹⁰ Undeterred, on Sabbath, September 23, Prof. Lamson spoke on Nehemiah. He "dwelled especially on the verse which says 'the people had a mind to work.'"¹¹ Lamson proposed immediately constructing a temporary building so school could begin, and early the next morning the work began in earnest. When completed, the building was twenty feet by fifty-four feet, and was one and a half stories high. This new structure housed classrooms, the business office, beds for the boys, and living quarters for the Lamsons. The entire cost of erecting the new building, *The Advent Review and Herald*, reported, was "in the neighborhood of three hundred dollars."¹²

On Tuesday, October 3, just over a week after Mr. Lamson had given the people a "mind to work," twenty-two students began classes.¹³ Another nearby farmhouse was rented and used as a dormitory, but it burned in February 1906.¹⁴ Although Adelphian began as an intermediate school with nothing higher than grade ten it is not clear whether students populated all ten grades.¹⁵ But school enrollment did increase rapidly, as did the construction of permanent buildings. By 1907 the seventy-seven acre property housed forty-four students, seven teachers, and five buildings.¹⁶

After opening in 1905 Adelphian Academy initially grew steadily and in 1908 enrolled fifty-five students and had become a full senior academy, offering grades 7-12.¹⁷ Working on the academy farm was the primary industry, but in 1910 the school started the Adelphian Tent Company. Several schools manufactured tents, a popular item as families prepared for their annual camp meeting attendance. Striving to market to all the camp meeting goers needs, the Adelphian Tent Company also produced and sold folding cots.¹⁸

By 1913 the school property had grown to 117 acres and enrolled 130 students in all grades, 95 of whom were in grades 9-12.¹⁹ By 1917 enrollment in grades 9-12 had reached 101.²⁰ The year 1921 was the first time radios were brought to campus, and an advertisement in the *Lake Union Herald* encouraged students to come to Adelphian if they were interested in electronics. "Every boy," it read, "who is interested in electricity, wireless telegraphy, and telephony, should be in Adelphian this year. Several of the boys are bringing their wireless instruments with them. Teachers and students plant to erect a station which will enable them to pick up musical concerts given in Pittsburg and New York."²¹ As many boarding academy students from across the United States remember, by the late 1950s the experiment with radios in Adventist dorms was one that was deemed to have failed – they were no longer permitted.

In 1927 Adelphian opened a woodworking industry, under the direction of John Z. Hottel.²² Hottel, who also became Adelphian's principal that year, opened the shop in an unused chicken house.²³ Although industrial efforts diversified, after 1929 enrollment shrank, thanks largely to the depression. What had been an enrollment of more than one hundred in 1927 had dropped precipitously and in 1933 stood at seventy-six.²⁴ After some discussion of consolidating the academies in Michigan, and significant pushback from the constituents, it was determined to keep the academies separate, and open.²⁵

By 1934 enrollment had bounced back to pre-depression numbers and Principal E. P. Weaver began developing the school's woodworking mill, eventually stepping away from the principal position in 1938 to work with the mill full-time. Throughout the 1930s enrollment was steady at just over one hundred, but after World War II Adelphian began its golden years; by the early 1960s more than three hundred students came to Holly, Michigan each September to start classes at Adelphian. Responding to this growth new facilities began to spring up around campus. In 1953 a 35,000 sq. ft. addition was added to the woodworking mill and Adelphian claimed to have become the "largest manufacturer of garden goods" in Michigan.²⁶ Then in 1956 a 1,500-seat auditorium-gymnasium was completed and named after Mr. Weaver, who had continued to oversee the woodworking industry until his death in 1956.²⁷ In 1963 a new cafeteria was built and in 1966 a new administration building went up.²⁸ By the 1969-1970 school year Adelphian's campus encompassed 325 acres, had 24 staff members, and enrolled 311 students.²⁹ The mill also employed 24 people and a 50,000 sq. ft. expansion was under construction.³⁰

The 1950s and 1960s had been prosperous years for Adelphian, as they were for many Adventist academies. Enrollment in 1955 was 325, and after a sharp dip the next year, climbed in all but one year until 1970. Even Cedar Lake was at its highest enrollment in the history of the school at the start of the 1970 school year.³¹ Beginning with the 1970-1971 school year, however, Adelphian saw a decade long slide in enrollment, ultimately leaving Adelphian with unsustainably low enrollment. Meanwhile, enrollment of self-supporting sister school Grand Ledge Academy also slowly declined, until they had only twenty-five students in 1984, and closed in 1985.³² Andrews Academy continued to thrive while Battle Creek Academy began a long struggle to stabilize enrollment. Five Adventist academies in one state, and all of them in the southern half of the state, had proven too burdensome. The calls for faith that always accompany conferences that face school closure were likely heard in Holly, Michigan as well, but the writing was on the wall. In Adelphian's final year – 1986-1987 – enrollment stood at 165.³³ That number of students would be enough to balance a budget at most Adventist academies today.

Shortly after school started in the fall of 1986, on November 2, a special Michigan Conference constituency meeting was held at the Grand Ledge campground. On hand to decide the fate of Adelphian were 486 delegates representing 158 churches. The agenda primarily consisted of how to manage conference debt and a proposal to consolidate Cedar Lake and Adelphian. Four hours of discussion were had and the vote was 82% in favor of consolidation. 386 yay, to 86 nay, with 14 abstaining. Teachers from both schools would be invited to apply for positions at the new school, which would open on the Cedar Lake campus.³⁴ Exacerbating the financial crisis for both Cedar Lake and Adelphian was the closure of the Harris Pine Mills. Harris Pine had been operating in Michigan since 1939, and which, at the time of closure, provided approximately one hundred jobs to students at both Cedar Lake and Adelphian.³⁵ With this closure, even Adelphian had hoped it to remain open, the loss of so many student jobs may have been the *coup de grâce*.

For many it was a bitter final school year. Some felt the school had closed while others felt it had simply changed names and locations, and teachers. That it had consolidated. In one of the final *Shiawassian* newspapers – the Adelpian student paper – Dr. George Parry, the last Adelpian principal, made an argument that the school was not closing. “I was a delegate; I was there in person, and I heard the motion. It was not to close Adelpian Academy. The motion was to consolidate Adelpian Academy and Cedar Lake Academy.” Parry goes on to counter those who would say there was no difference, giving as examples the Brooklyn Dodgers moving to Los Angeles, or Southern Missionary College becoming Southern College. Instead, Parry argued, Adelpian is “only going through a great transition – probably the greatest transition of its history. But next year it will still be here, and in all the years to come. A different location, yes; a different name, yes; but still Adelpian Academy.”³⁶

It is clear that the students at Adelpian were not fully on board with the decision to consolidate. In the final issue of the *Shiawassian*, a student argued that it was not a decision that could be changed and that Adelpian students should look at the positive, not the negative. “The boys dorm,” she wrote, “is newer and has sinks in every room... The library at Cedar has at least three times as many books as does our library, and they also have a toboggan run.”³⁷ Most importantly, however, was the ability for Michigan Adventists to provide a sound education on a balanced budget.

On July 8, almost immediately after the school year was over the Lake Union Conference Executive Committee voted to give the new Great Lakes Adventist Academy denominational status, replacing both Cedar Lake and Adelpian.³⁸

The 1905 Adventist yearbook names twenty-two intermediate and secondary schools in the United States, several of which began in 1904, the same year Adelpian was commissioned. There were eleven additional schools at these levels outside the United States in this same year. Ten years later this number had grown to seventy, and by 1925 there were 133.³⁹ Just over a century after the Lamsons held the first classes with six students in a farmhouse in Holly, Michigan there are approximately 5,700 Adventist educational institutions worldwide serving approximately 1.89 million students.⁴⁰ With only a handful of other schools Adelpian led the way. Although there is no way to quantify the impact Adelpian has made, that Michigan Adventists led the way in both Protestant and Adventist education is also without question; no other state was operating two academies and a college by 1905. No other state had demonstrated this commitment to a uniquely Seventh-day Adventist education; with Cedar Lake Academy and Emmanuel Missionary College, Adelpian was there in the vanguard.

The founding principles of Adelpian Academy were to help students grow in mind, body, and soul. Today, Great Lakes Adventist Academy embraces the same philosophy. The school website outlines religious objectives, health objectives, social objectives, and physical achievements as “who we are.”⁴¹ The mission of Adelpian, Cedar Lake, and now, Great Lakes Adventist Academy, continues.

Principals

J. Grant Lamson, 1904-1907; Robert B. Thurber, 1907-1909; Eugene F. Dresser, 1909-1911; Clifton L. Taylor, 1911-1913; Thomas W. Steen, 1913-1918; Robert B. Thurber, 1918-1919; W.L. Avery, 1919-1922; W.C. Hannah, 1922-1927; John Z. Hottel, 1927-1931; G.H. Simpson, 1931-1934; E.P. Weaver, 1934-1938; M.S. Culver, 1938-1945; V.E. Garber, 1945-1953; R.W. Pratt, 1953-1968; Henry Wooten, 1968-1970; Stephen Young, 1970-1974; Joshua Swinyar, 1974-1975; Erich Bekowies, 1976-1977; Duane Barnett, 1977-1979; Jack Stiles, 1980-1984; Keith Dowell, 1984-1985; E. George Parry, 1986-1987.⁴²

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