



Professor and Mrs. G. W. Colcord founded Graysville Academy.

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Colcord, George W. (1843–1902)

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George Washington Colcord was a pastor, evangelist, conference president, and educator who founded two academies that were forerunners of universities (Walla Walla University and Southern Adventist University). He was born in Illinois on May 12, 1843¹ to Ivory Colcord and Elzina Smith Colcord and had 12 siblings.² He married Ada L. Linerode (1846-1922) in 1866.³ George and Ada operated an academy in Illinois before George entered the gospel ministry.⁴ The first time he was mentioned in an Adventist publication seems to have been in the

February 1871 issue of the *Review and Herald* that published his poem⁵ and a report about his preaching at the Woodburn, Illinois church and evangelistic meetings in Fosterburg, Illinois, which resulted in at least a dozen decisions to keep the seventh-day Sabbath.⁶

Colcord was the first president of the Upper Columbia Conference⁷ at a time when that conference had only two ordained ministers – himself and Alonzo T. Jones – and two licensed ministers.⁸ After two years as conference president, he served the same conference as executive secretary.⁹ The following year (1887) he founded Milton Academy in eastern Oregon, a forerunner of Walla Walla University.¹⁰ Milton Academy was the first Adventist school in the territory that later became the North Pacific Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.¹¹

Graysville Academy

In 1891 Robert Kilgore, leader of the Adventist church in the southeastern United States, invited Colcord to come to Graysville, Tennessee to start a school. Colcord both founded and funded what became known as Graysville Academy, a forerunner of Southern Adventist University. He rented the second storey of J. W. Clouse's General Store for a classroom. Before this room was ready for use, Colcord began holding classes in the spring of 1892 in the local Seventh-day Adventist church. Starting with 23 students, enrollment grew to 60 by January 1893, whereupon Colcord had a two storey school constructed on a nine-acre plot of land. By the end of 1893 Colcord's private academy had become a boarding school.¹²

Meanwhile, Colcord was "wearing four hats." In addition to being an administrator and teacher, he was acting as a pastor and evangelist.¹³

Arthur W. Spalding was one of his students. He remembered Colcord as a "grand old drillmaster" who was responsible for his "love of English grammar."¹⁴ Spalding said his teacher "set us to watching and correcting one another's speech (and incidentally getting our own corrected) and if I have ever been a critic, I learned it from good old Professor Colcord."¹⁵

Two of Graysville Academy's other faculty members were members of Colcord's family: his wife and his nephew. We are told that "every one of the Colcords worked for little or no money, prioritizing the success of the young school rather than personal gain."¹⁶

Colcord was determined to provide opportunities for students to earn a major portion of their expenses, and with classes running from Monday through Friday, and with Saturday considered to be a holy day "in which thou shall not do any work," Sunday was the day on which students, supervised by their teachers, engaged in manual labor. This caused the school to infringe on Tennessee's extremely strict Sunday law,¹⁷ which threatened to punish even parents who allowed their children to play on Sunday.¹⁸

Nine Graysville Adventists, including three of the five Graysville Academy faculty members, were arrested in March 1895 for Sunday law violations. Colcord was charged with "superintending carpentry work in his house."

Tried in Dayton's Circuit Court, the Adventist members chose to defend themselves without a lawyer. They were convicted. Although the judge suspended their fines, he ordered them to pay court costs. They refused to pay, believing that paying would be an acknowledgment that their conviction was just. Consequently, they were jailed.¹⁹

With most Graysville Academy's faculty members in jail, the school suspended operations until July 22, 1895. Apparently this caused the parents to lose confidence in the school; enrollment dropped from 125 to 75.

During the 1893-1894 school year, Colcord had unsuccessfully attempted to donate the school to the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. Perhaps believing that a change in personnel was necessary to save the school, the General Conference decided in 1895 to accept the earlier offer. They then installed a completely new faculty.²⁰

After Graysville

Colcord's health was apparently undermined by the ordeal he had experienced, so he moved to Colorado, reportedly for health reasons. He taught at a church school in Boulder for one year, and then established a school at Hygiene, Colorado which reached an enrollment of over 100 students.²¹ After teaching there for several years,²² he passed away on October 4, 1902.

Francis M. Wilcox, future editor of the *Review and Herald*, was the chaplain of Colorado Sanitarium in Boulder when Colcord died.²³ Wilcox wrote his obituary for the *Review*, evaluating his life and character in the following passage:

Elder Colcord was a man of faith and devotion to the cause of truth. He was pre-eminently [sic] a pioneer. Possessed of marked executive ability and organizing power, he was enabled to take new enterprises and bring out of them success where those less fortunate in possession of these faculties would have failed. He had a large faculty of inspiring his students with enthusiasm and earnestness in their work, and his loss will be keenly felt by the many in whose lives... he has been an inspiration to higher purpose and earnest endeavors.²⁴

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NOTES

1. Francis M. Wilcox, "Obituary of George W. Colcord," *ARH*, November 25, 1902, 23.
2. "George Colcord," accessed July 25, 2021, https://www.myheritage.com/names/george_colcord.
3. "Obituaries," *North Pacific Union Gleaner*, November 9, 1922, 7.
4. Ibid. Reports that he also served as president of the Illinois Conference (Wilcox, loc.cit.) seem to be unfounded. -*Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, 2nd rev. ed., s.v. "Illinois Conference."
5. G. W. Colcord, "Sowing and Reaping," *ARH*, February 7, 1871, 62.
6. G. W. Colcord, "Fosterburg, Ill," *ARH*, February 21, 1871, 78.
7. *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, 2nd rev. ed., s.v. "Upper Columbia Conference."
8. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1884), 21, 25.
9. Ibid., 1885, 12.
10. *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Colcord, George W."
11. Arthur Whitefield Spalding, *Origin and History of Seventh-day Adventists*, III (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1962), 308.

12. Dennis Pettibone, *A Century of Challenge: The Story of Southern College, 1892-1992* (Collegedale, TN: Board of Trustees, Southern College of Seventh-day Adventists, 1992), 15-17.
13. Ibid., 15, 17.
14. Elizabeth Spalding McFadden and Ronald W. Spalding, M. D., of Arthur *A Fire in My Bones: A Biography Whitefield Spalding*, (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1979), 24.
15. Quoted in Elva B. Gardner, *Southern Missionary College: A School of His Planning*, revised by J. Mabel Wood ([Collegedale, TN:] the Board of Trustees, 1975), 4.
16. "Built on a Legacy of Giving," accessed July 5, 2021, <https://www.southern.edu/advancement/>.
17. Pettibone, 17.
18. *Sunday Law, Code of Tennessee*, sec.2289 (1884).
19. Pettibone, 17-18.
20. Ibid., 19.
21. Wilcox, 23. According to Gardner, 260, the Hygiene school was an academy.
22. *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Colcord, George W."
23. *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Wilcox, Francis McLellan."
24. Wilcox, 23.

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